



Parklet Impact Study

San Francisco Great Streets Project
San Francisco, CA 2011



Parklet Impact Study

The influence of parklets on pedestrian traffic, behavior, and perception in San Francisco, April – August, 2011.

A special thanks to our volunteers who contributed their time and energy to collect data for this study: Benjamin Alvers, Jessica Arnett, Craig Baerwald, Valerie Carrasco, Matthew Cunha-Rigby, Jeff Davis, Keeeth, Olga Khroustaleva, Summer Krounbi, Patrick Larvie, Celeste Le Compte, Aaron Sedley, Karen Siman-Tov, Emily Taylor, Stephanie Tholand, Anton Walker, and Chloe Weiller.

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Parklet hosted by Crepe House and Zaytoon Wraps at 1136 Valencia Street

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Executive Summary

Parklet Impact Study

Parklets repurpose two to three parking stalls along a block as a space for people to relax and enjoy the city around them. Since the first parklet was built in San Francisco in 2010, over 20 parklets have been built around the city. Because they are a new type of public space improvement, the San Francisco Great Streets Project conducted this study to measure the influence of parklets on pedestrian traffic, streetlife, and nearby businesses.

Pedestrian counts, stationary activity counts, pedestrian surveys, and business surveys were conducted at three locations where parklets were built – Valencia Street in the Mission, Stockton Street in North Beach, and Polk Street in Polk Gulch – before and after each parklet was installed.

Key findings

✓ Average foot traffic on Stockton Street increased 44% from 304 to 438 people per hour after the parklet was installed. However, there was no significant change in foot traffic at the Valencia Street and Polk Street locations.

✓ The number of people stopping to engage in stationary activities significantly increased at all three locations, especially on weekdays. The greatest increase was on Polk Street where the average nearly tripled from four to 11 people at any given time.

✓ There was also an incremental increase in the number of bikes parked in each location.

✓ The results of the pedestrian survey varied greatly by location. While perception of the area as a good place for socializing and fun increased on Valencia and Polk Streets increased, it decreased on Stockton Street. Perception of the area as a place that looks clean increased on Polk and Stockton Streets increased, but decreased on Valencia Street.

✓ Although only one of the seven businesses that replied to the business survey observed that customer levels had increased after a parklet was installed, none had observed a decrease in their customer levels.

✓ Five of the seven businesses observed that most of their customers are primarily from the surrounding neighborhood and arrive to their establishment by foot.

✓ None of the businesses reported significant concerns about the parklet regarding loss of nearby street parking or other impacts on their business.

Conclusions

The most tangible benefit of parklets this study identified is the creation of new public space for anyone to sit, relax, and enjoy the city around. The number of people stopping to socialize and engage in positive behavior increased significantly at all three locations. The influence of this increase in activity on people's perception of the area varied with other neighborhood conditions. Although the benefit to businesses is most clearly felt by the sponsoring business, no negative Impacts on nearby businesses were identified.

Introduction

What is a parklet?

Parklets repurpose two to three parking stalls along a block as a space for people to relax, drink a cup of coffee, and enjoy the city around them. Parklets do this by building out a platform into the parking lane so that the grade of the sidewalk gets carried out into the parking lane. On the platform, benches, planters, landscaping, bike parking, and café tables and chairs all come together to provide a welcoming new public space. A nearby business or organization pays for, builds, and maintains the parklet, but the space itself is public and open for anyone to use.

In San Francisco, streets and public rights-of-way make up fully one quarter of the city's land area – more space even than is found in



all of the city's parks. The first parklet in San Francisco was created as a trial by the City's Pavement to Parks program to demonstrate a relatively quick and inexpensive way to repurpose some of this space for people. Following the success of that first parklet, dozens of businesses have applied for parklet permits and over 20 have been built around the city.

Parklet Impact Study

The purpose of this study is to measure the influence of parklets on pedestrian traffic, streetlife, and nearby businesses.

While many businesses and neighborhoods are eager to add parklets to their streets, some are concerned that people won't use them, they'll attract negative behavior, and/or hurt local businesses. This study will help quantify the benefits of parklets and identify any adverse impacts that may need to be addressed.

The Great Streets Project conducted a similar study of the first parklet on Divisadero Street in 2010. That study found that after the parklet was installed pedestrian traffic on the block increased 13% and the number of people sitting or standing on the block 30%.

This study looks at three new parklets in three different neighborhoods:

- ✓Mission: parklet hosted by the Crepe House and Zaytoon Wraps at 1136 Valencia Street.
- ✓Polk Gulch: parklet hosted by Quetzal Café at 1234 Polk Street.
- ✓North Beach: parklet hosted by Tony's Pizza Napoletana at 1570 Stockton Street.

Methodology

The methodologies described below were developed in consultation with the San Francisco Planning Department, and data was collected by the San Francisco Great Streets Project staff and trained volunteers. Except for the business surveys, all data was collected at each location before and after the parklets were installed.

Pedestrian counts

Pedestrian counts measure the number of people walking along the block in the study area, and reflect both utilitarian trips and discretionary trips. Pedestrian flow was recorded in 15-minute intervals at three different hours of the day – 12:00 pm to represent the lunch crowd, 5:00 pm and 6:00 pm to represent the commuter and evening leisure crowd. Counts were collected on Wednesdays and Saturdays to capture both typical weekend and weekday patterns. Before data was collected in April 2011 and after data was collected in August 2011.

Stationary activities

Stationary pedestrian activities tell us how the study area is performing as a place. When a diverse mix of people stop to engage in stationary activities (such as talking, window-shopping, or eating at a café), they increase the perceived sociability of the area, enhancing its sense of place, and, thus commercial attractiveness. Stationary activity was recorded during the same hours as the pedestrian counts. The data collection was performed by taking a “snapshot” of the street segment; the surveyor walked each block segment and recorded the number of people engaged in each type of stationary activity.

Stationary Activity	Description
Standing	Smoking, talking on cell phone, socializing, window shopping, etc
Waiting for transport	Standing or sitting at a transit stop
Sitting on private seating	Sitting on moveable chairs outside of cafes
Sitting on public seating	Sitting on public furniture such as benches, specifically design for sitting
Sitting on public secondary or improvised seating	Sitting on street furniture not designed for sitting such as stairs and planters
Sitting on the ground	Sitting on the sidewalk or street
Lying down	Lying on the ground or on street furniture
Children playing	
Commercially active	Vendors selling from booths or carts and staff at active facades onto the street
Culturally active	Street performers, musicians, guided tours, etc
Physically active	Jogging, exercising, etc
Anti-Social Behavior	Panhandling, illicit drug use, and aggressive or belligerent behavior

Pedestrian perception surveys

Surveys of visitors' perception of the quality of the pedestrian environment help us understand to what extent and how current street conditions influence people's visits to the area. The survey was designed to identify specific elements of the pedestrian realm that matter enough to people who work, live, or do business in the area that it will determine whether they become repeat visitors.

Surveyors strove to seek a random but representative group of respondents, but the data is limited to English-speaking respondents who were willing to be interviewed.

Business perception surveys

Surveys of business owners' perception of how changes in street conditions impact their business helps us understand whether or not changes in pedestrian activity are translating into economic benefit for local businesses. The survey was designed to identify perceived changes in who customers are, how they are arriving at businesses, and the level of customers at businesses along the commercial corridor.



Valencia Street Parklet

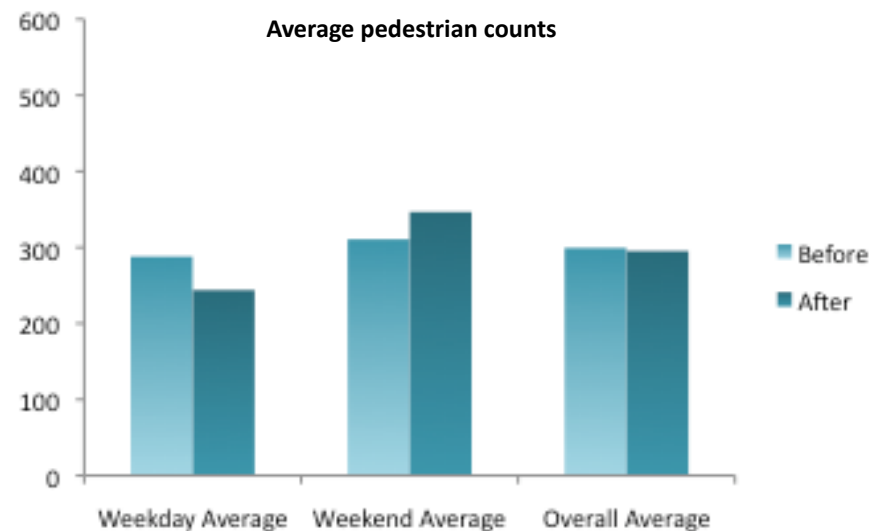


Study area: West side of Valencia Street between 22nd and 23rd Streets.

The parklet hosted by the Crepe House and Zaytoon Wraps has six café tables with chairs and is bordered by wooden planters. It is primarily used by people who order take out from nearby restaurants. There are a few restaurants and businesses on the block, but there is also a surface parking lot and a vacant gas station, and this stretch of Valencia Street is less active than other stretches of the popular commercial corridor. Before the parklet was built, there were four or five café tables with chairs on the sidewalk, but no public seating.

Foot traffic

- ✓ On average, foot traffic on this block of Valencia Street did not change significantly after the parklet was installed.
- ✓ Before the parklet was installed, peak hour pedestrian counts on this block of Valencia Street ranged between 264 and 396 people per hour. After the parklet was installed, they ranged from 208 to 384. The average weekend count did increase 12% to 347 people per hour; but the average weekday count decreased 15% to 244 people per hour.
- ✓ Average bike counts increased 20% to 147 per hour.

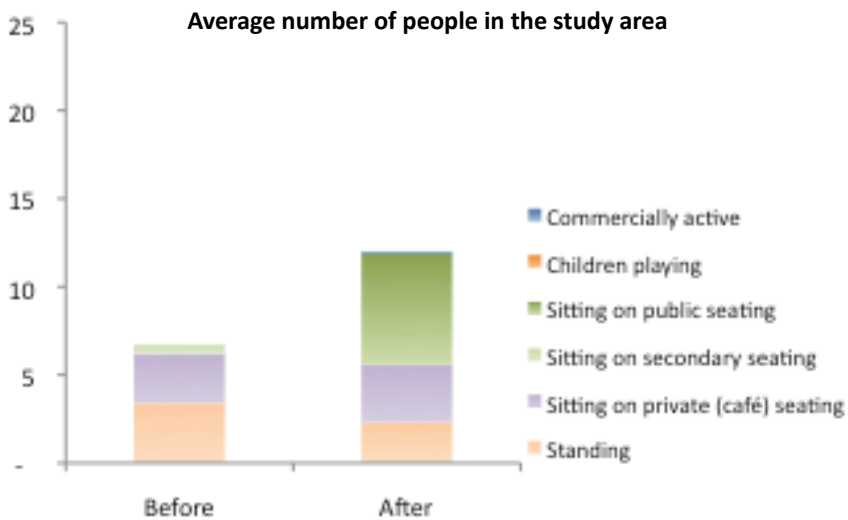


Stationary activities

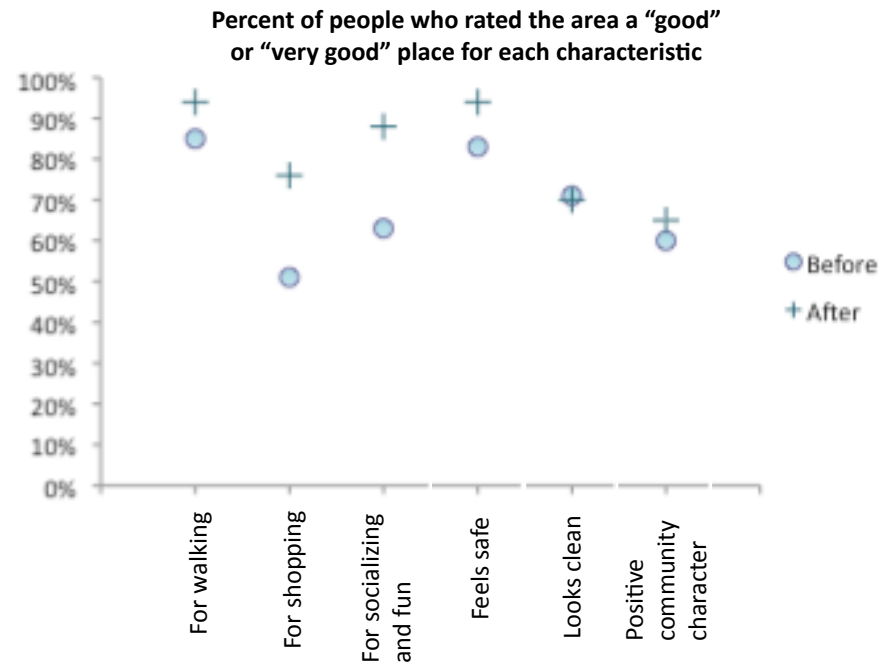
✓The average number of people recorded increased 71% from seven to 12 people at any given time.

✓Before the parklet was installed, the predominant activities were standing and sitting at private seating. After the parklet was installed, the number of people standing decreased, and the number sitting at public seating went from zero to six.

✓The greatest increase in activity was seen on the weekday, when average number of people in the area more than tripled.



Perception of the street



✓The percent of people who rated the area positively increased for all characteristics except for “as a place that looks clean,” and increased the most for “as a place to shop” an “as a place for socializing and fun.”

✓When asked what would make the area a better place, 24% of people said wider sidewalks or more public seating, and many said “more parklets” specifically.

Polk Street Parklet



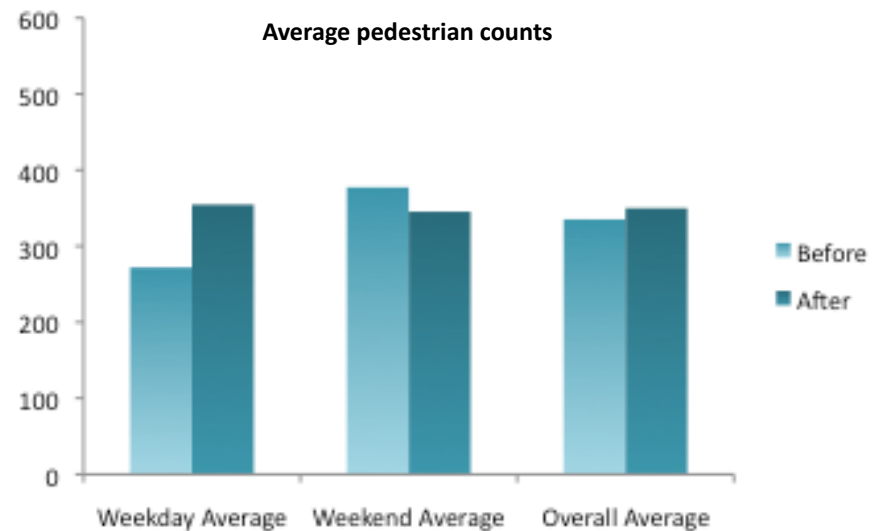
Image Source: TheTenderus

Study area: East side of Polk Street between Bush and Sutter Streets.

The parklet hosted by the Quetzal Café adds four tables with chairs, four benches, and three planters to this block of Polk Street. The café has several outdoor tables on the sidewalk, but before the parklet there was no public seating on the block except for two seats at the bus stop. The parklet has been popular among patrons of the café and residents who live nearby. Drugs, homelessness, and safety have historically been issues on this stretch of Polk Street and still linger as concerns for many people.

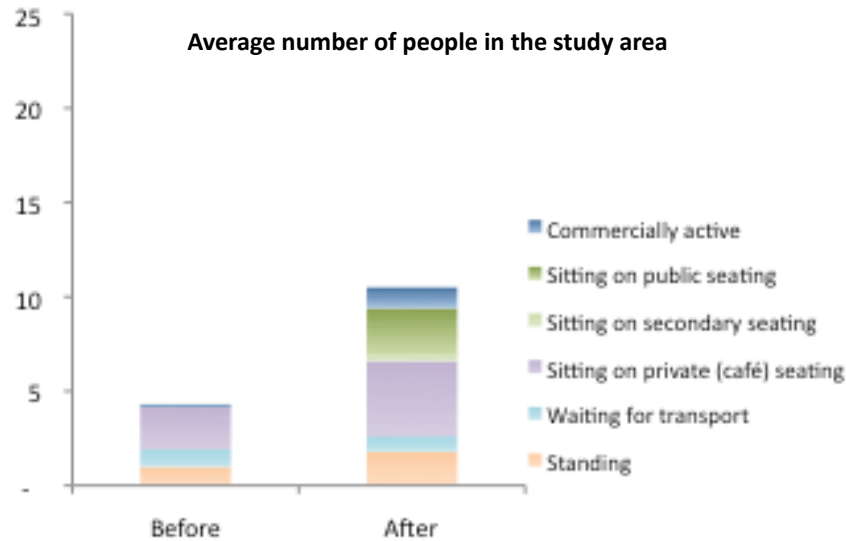
Foot traffic

- ✓ On average, foot traffic on this block of Polk Street increased only slightly after the parklet was installed.
- ✓ Before the parklet was installed, peak hour pedestrian counts ranged between 228 and 464 people per hour. After the parklet was installed, they ranged from 320 to 368.
- ✓ The average weekday count did increase 30% to 350 people per hour; but the average weekend declined slightly. count decreased 8% to 345 people per hour.
- ✓ While no strollers were counted before, an average of three were counted after.
- ✓ Average bike counts increased 65% from 35 to 58 per hour and the greatest increase was seen on the weekday.

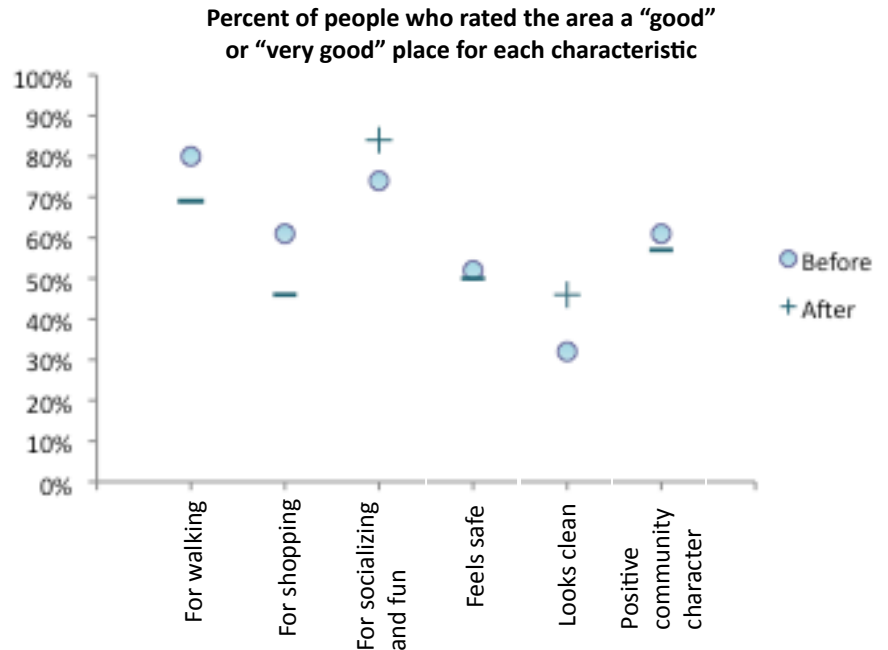


Stationary activities

- ✓The average number of people recorded in the area nearly tripled (increased 191%) from four to 11 at any given time.
- ✓The greatest increase was seen on weekdays when the average increased from one to 14.
- ✓Before the parklet was installed, the predominant activity was sitting at private seating. After the parklet was installed, there were also people sitting on public and secondary seating.
- ✓The average number of bikes parked in the area increased from zero to two after the parklet was installed, indicating some of that increased bike traffic may be stopping to spend time on the block.



Perception of the street



- ✓Overall Polk Street was rated lower by survey respondents than the other two study areas.
- ✓After the parklet was installed, the percent of people who rated the area as "good" or "very good" as a place for socializing and fun" increased from 74% to 84%.
- ✓The percent of people who rated it as "good" or "very good" as a place "that looks clean" increased from 32% to 46%.
- ✓When asked what would make the area a better place, addressing homelessness, drugs, and safety were the predominant themes both before and after the parklet was installed.

Stockton Street Parklet



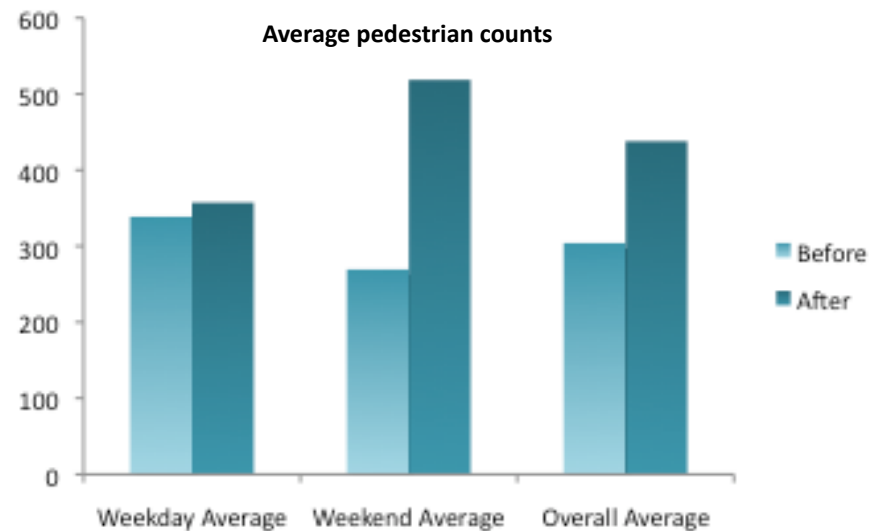
Image Source: ArchRecord.Construction.com

Study area: East side of Stockton Street between Columbus Avenue and Union Street.

The parklet hosted by the Tony's Pizza Napoletana on Stockton Street adds several café style tables and chairs, two informal seating spaces, and planters with aromatic herbs and other plants. This short stretch of Stockton Street connects Columbus Avenue to Washington Square Park and hosts a variety of uses, including a flower shop, yoga studio, medical services, bar and two restaurants. North Beach is known for its Italian heritage and sidewalk dining, but there are few outdoor places to sit that aren't private café seating.

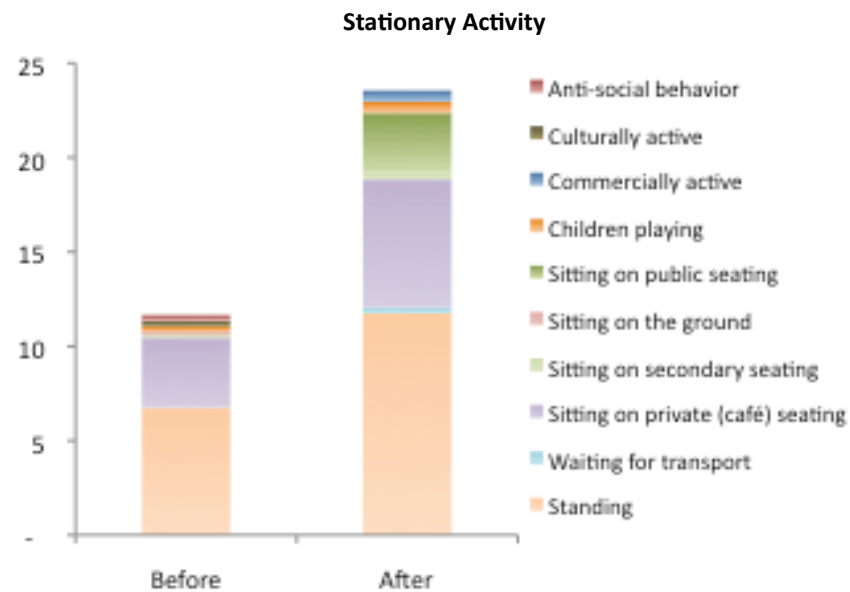
Foot traffic

- ✓ Average foot traffic on this block of Stockton Street increased 44% from 304 to 438 people per hour.
- ✓ Before the parklet was installed, peak hour pedestrian counts ranged between 232 and 396 people per hour. After the parklet was installed, they ranged from 276 to 588.
- ✓ The most significant increase was on weekend evenings, when foot traffic more than doubled to 588 people per hour.
- ✓ An average of seven bikes per hour were recorded both before and after the parklet was installed.
- ✓ While no strollers were counted before, an average of six were counted after.

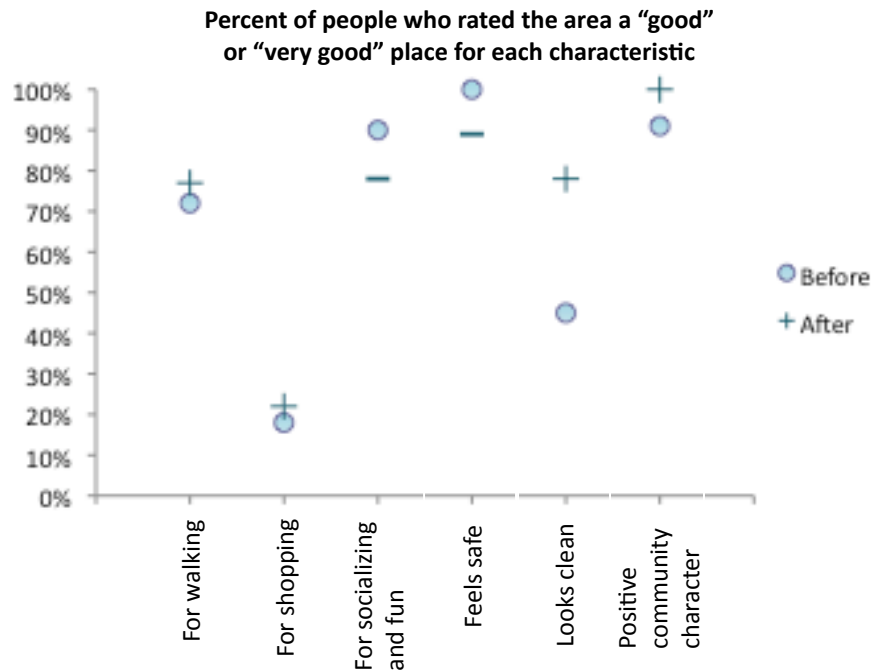


Stationary activities

- ✓The average number of people recorded in the area more than doubled from 11 to 24 at any given time.
- ✓The greatest increase was seen on weekday evenings when the average increased from eight to 23 people.
- ✓Before the parklet was installed, the predominant activities were standing and sitting at private seating. While both of those activities increased after the parklet was installed there were also more people sitting on public seating and fewer sitting on secondary seating or the ground.
- ✓The average number of bikes parked in the area increased from one to two after the parklet was installed.



Perception of the street



- ✓After the parklet was installed, the greatest change was seen in the percent of people who rated it “good” or “very good” for cleanliness, which increased from 45% to 78%.
- ✓The percent of people who rated it “good” or “very good” for positive community character increased from 91% to 100%.
- ✓The percent of people who rated “good” or “very good” as a place for socializing and fun” and “feels safe” decreased about 10%.
- ✓However, the small number of surveys collected at this collection made each response disproportionately significant.

Business Perspective

Business surveys

Surveys were distributed to every business on the block in each study area. Because only seven surveys were completed and returned there are too few to look at responses by study area. The seven businesses that replied included three retail stores, two restaurants, a beauty parlor and a bar.

- ✓ Five of the seven businesses said that most of their customers arrive by foot and are primarily from the neighborhood.
- ✓ Five said that business and customer levels have not changed since the installation of the parklet. Only one said business has been better and customer levels have been higher; none said business has been worse.
- ✓ Two businesses reported more customers arriving by foot and bike.
- ✓ No significant concerns were raised by the businesses regarding the parklet, loss of parking, or other impacts on their business.

Conclusion

The most significant tangible benefit of parklets is the creation of a public space for anyone to sit, relax, and enjoy the city around them. At all three locations in this study, public seating prior to the parklet was limited to a couple of seats at one bus stop. After the parklets were installed, the number of people stopping to spend time on the block increased as people were able to stop and sit, read a book, eat, or socialize where there previously wasn't space dedicated for that.

This increase in activity affects the overall feel of the street differently for each location, depending on other aspects of the overall environment. On Valencia and Polk Streets more people felt the area was good for socializing and fun, perhaps because they saw more people out and about, or because now there is a new space to meet and socialize. On Polk and Stockton Streets the aesthetic design, greenery, and maintenance of the parklet may have contributed to the increase in perception of cleanliness in those areas.

Parklets and the increase in activity they attract make nearby businesses more visible. The number of businesses applying for parklet permits clearly indicates that they see an economic benefit to investing in these new public spaces. Although the business surveys show this benefit may not be realized by businesses further from the parklet, they did not reveal any negative impacts businesses attributed to the parklets.

Appendix

Pedestrian Counts
Stationary Activity Counts
Pedestrian Surveys
Business Surveys