

Designing Equity

CAN THE DESIGN OF DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE
ADVANCE EQUITY IN A CITY?

A case study of Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles

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URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY SENIOR COMPREHENSIVE PROJECT
OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE SPRING 2017

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AGKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Matsuoka and Professor Cha for their guidance, support, and mentorship during this research and writing process.

Additionally I would like to thank all interview participants for this project for their wisdom, willingness to share their experience, and enthusiasm for this research.

Lastly, I would like to thank my endlessly encouraging friends and family for providing a strong foundation of love and support towards attaining my degree and completing this project with integrity and gusto.

ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the past and present revitalization of Pershing Square through equitable urban design strategies and community outreach tactics. Through comprehensive interviews and contextualization of census data to further support findings, this paper makes concise policy recommendations to further the process of curating equitable public spaces in cities.

INTRODUCTION

Design of our built environment shapes our lives in both conscious and unconscious dimensions. Our memories and experiences are based in places and spaces, once configured and imagined by someone else. Through various historical stages of design theories, approaches to design, as well as aesthetic and technological developments; our current world has been shaped by these amendments to design thinking and is reflected in our built environment. And yet a facet so crucial to our mindset and perspective is often neglected at a human-scale. Visions of grandeur and vastly prodigious places define and often sever natural organic urban flow of space. Places built for people, for usage beyond an architectural rendering, have been lost to statement pieces of splendor and experimental prowess. Not until recently has it become trendy and seen as economically favorable to create places for people; people who work and play and rest and lounge—who want a space for leisure just as much as they want a place for protest.

The field and various theories of urban design came about as an attempt to develop systemized order within an urban setting. Early cities originated from conglomerations of human activity, developing in piecemeal layers of housing and dwellings circulating central market space or designated trading space. What began as a structural and infrastructural approach to organizing cities has evolved into a complex academic ideology and profession. Often seen as “the institutionalization of our search for good urban form¹,” urban design has the ability to

¹ Hossein Bahrainy and Ameneh Bakhtiar, *Toward an Integrative Theory of Urban Design*, illustrated (Springer, 2016, 2016).

pervade and exist in every minute of daily life without one's awareness or consciousness. Our built environment can shape our mood, decisions, sense of safety or acceptance in a place, determine the success and dynamics of political protest, and define unspoken stigmas of space^{2 3}. Combine those physical and psychological factors with social and political conditions, and urban public park space becomes a platform for cities to exemplify its true priorities to its people. With any design or planning project, there are opportunities to embrace the past histories of place with new ideas, or break away and create new connotations of space with a 'clean' slate. Through the approach of design, city governments have the opportunity to give back to its people through public amenities and the luxury of simple, open space. In their book, *Urban Design for an Urban Century*, Brown and Dixon comment on the current pivotal moment of planning and city development. "Today's planners and policymakers operate in a different world that requires a fresh approach that both addresses the problems and celebrates the opportunities of America's cities⁴". As cities, as societies, we have reached a potential turning point in our public realm, with new movements towards embracing public spaces and resources.

However, through the attempts to create livable, safe, and aesthetically pleasing spaces, the equity of such spaces is often left behind in the discussion. Whether through gentrification and/or resulting displacement or projects further perpetuating existing systematic urban

² Ariane L. Bedimo-Rung, Andrew J. Mowen, and Deborah A. Cohen, "The Significance of Parks to Physical Activity and Public Health: A Conceptual Model," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Active Living Research, 28, no. 2, Supplement 2 (February 2005): 159–68, doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2004.10.024.

³ Lance Jay Brown and David Dixon, *Urban Design for an Urban Century: Shaping More Livable, Equitable, and Resilient Cities*, n.d.

⁴ Ibid.

segregation and inequities; shiny brand-new spaces often become a luxury of a wealthier, white population. Yet, is it possible to have equity as an anchor of design, especially in a densely urban context like Downtown? As mentioned previously, public space and parks offer an opportunity for cities to give back and show pride and affection for residents. Parks and public space have benefits short-term and long-term at every dimension—environmentally, socially, aesthetically, etc. They are an investment for the city’s success as much as they are an investment in its people. So, when poised with an opportunity to revive the core of a city, why not start with its parks and public space? How can design of downtown urban parks advance equity? By examining past and present design decisions and outreach strategies, this paper evaluates historic and current efforts to revitalize Pershing Square; a critical space at the heart of Downtown Los Angeles that could set the tone for the direction of equity in the city and Los Angeles development into the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINING EQUITY IN PARK DESIGN

How does a planner, an architect, a designer, go about creating equitable space in a city when history has created such disparities between the quality and distribution of spaces created for different demographics of people? Urban design often provides an opportunity to reform a space in a city; to create a new mental-map and association for those who come across it.

According to Bahrainy and Bakhtiar, planner’s must consider not just the ecology or economy of a space, but also the equity—the planner’s triangle as they call it. This anchor in equity is clear from the literature about parks and public space and from given principles of urban design and related theories in several books detailing mindsets behind current and forward-thinking design methods. As Bahrainy and Bakhtiar note in their book *Toward an Integrative Theory of Urban Design*, "Urban design... 'is a way of thinking'. It is not about separation and simplification but

rather about synthesis. It attempts to deal with the full reality of the urban situation, not the narrow slices seen through disciplinary lenses⁵". This focus on the 'full reality of the urban situation' must inherently be inclusive of existing inequities usually present in most of our urban centers. Urban design is seen as a multi-modal, interwoven mindset, combining theory and reality. Brown and Dixon highlight the unique perspective urban design brings to our built environment and the role designers play in our urban form: "Urban design challenges practitioners because it's neither completely abstract nor completely data-driven--a quality many architects feel sets it apart from architectural and landscape design. Urban design begins and ends with facts on the ground⁶". However, regardless of the intentionality of equity and varied perspectives in design, critics of historic urban design themes and trends have been forthright in recognizing the ingrained bias of what makes up the majority of our built environment. In their article "Nature, Race, and Parks: Past Research and Future Directions for Geographic Research" Byrne and Wolch discuss design analyses of common American park forms and their ties to existing and ongoing racial bias in the public realm. Specifically, they note the significant presence of Anglo-Celtic landscape aesthetics, which is inclusive of: signage language, layout of

⁵ Bahrainy and Bakhtiar, *Toward an Integrative Theory of Urban Design*.

⁶ Brown and Dixon, *Urban Design for an Urban Century: Shaping More Livable, Equitable, and Resilient Cities*.

the park, and types of landscaping and vegetation; their conclusion being that design features will mirror the expected culture or desired population of users intended for the space⁷.

Design theories, ideologies, and their definitions reflect principles and goals for urban designers that include necessary holistic approaches required to form equitable space in an urban context. Brown and Dixon provide guidelines listed below that encompass New Urbanist ideologies⁸:

1. Build community in an increasingly diverse society--create places that draw people together; support social equity; emphasize the public realm; forge strongest connections.
2. Advance sustainability at every level--foster smarter growth; address the economic, social, and cultural underpinnings of sustainability.
3. Expand individual choice; build densities that support greater choice; build interconnected transportation networks; provide choices that enhance quality of life.
4. Enhance personal health--promote public health; increase personal safety.
5. Make places for people; respond to the human sense; integrate history, nature, and innovation; emphasize identity; celebrate history; respect and engage nature; introduce innovation

On paper, these goals sparkle with promise of utopia; supportive communities with space for all, cities that value the environment and sustainable futures through smart economy, public health, and transport—harmony of public and private sectors. However, with increasing privatization of what is meant to be public space, this holistic, visionary approach becomes less feasible to

⁷ Jason Byrne and Jennifer Wolch, "Nature, Race, and Parks: Past Research and Future Directions for Geographic Research," *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 6 (December 2009): 743–65, doi:<http://0-dx.doi.org.oasys.lib.oxy.edu/10.1177/0309132509103156>.

⁸ Brown and Dixon, *Urban Design for an Urban Century: Shaping More Livable, Equitable, and Resilient Cities*.

achieve in the current reality of American cities—with private interests holding power over goals of equity, inclusion, and true transparency in the public realm.

The increasing occurrence of the privatization of public space has formed a fissure between the primary goals of urban designers and the results their projects can achieve in the context of creating approachable and equitable public spaces. In attempts to offset economic burdens and lack of sufficient funds for public amenities and services, many American cities have turned to private interests for design and implementation, often relinquishing primary control. As explained by Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris in her article, “Privatization of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience,” “Some people have hailed privatization as an efficient process where the public and private sectors are equal collaborators and partners. The empirical research shows that this is not exactly the case⁹”. Unsurprisingly, the balance of power is disproportionately shifted towards private interests; more money, more control, more power. When a space is privatized either through ownership, funds, or management, this ultimately shifts the emphasis and control to the private sector. The literature is mixed on whether a space can operate inclusively and act as a neutral and equitable place if it’s privately managed and funded. Kim Dovey explains the process of privatization as such, in her book *Urban Design Thinking: A Conceptual Toolkit*, “Privatization is a subtle and incremental process through which the private market appropriates everyday urban life¹⁰”. Dovey sees much of what is considered

⁹ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, “Privatisation of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience,” *The Town Planning Review* 64, no. 2 (1993): 139–67.

¹⁰ Kim Dovey, *Urban Design Thinking: A Conceptual Toolkit (1)*. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

‘public open-space’ as private enclaves of the elite. However, in “The Culture and Economics of Urban Design”, Lee Pugalis theorizes that “Privatization is less important when social and cultural life is thriving¹¹”. This flips the responsibility back to city officials and local government to create activities and programs in privatized space. For most, privatization of public space is inherently problematic with the latter being the antithesis of the former. Public space should be just that, public, in order to be truly equitable within an urban framework.

In “Privatization of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience” Loukaitou-Sideris examines three public plazas in downtown Los Angeles to understand the usage of the space through the context of privatization and design. Her study gave light to the motivations and consequences of a privatized space in a densely urban setting, especially in Los Angeles. The plazas were primarily built with the intention of being an enclave from chaotic city life; to provide a space of serenity and a space for escape. However, by creating a space where a user must feel comfortable to step within in the first place, the space has unintentionally (or intentionally in some cases) kept out certain demographics of potential users. This unspoken theme and trend among designers creates a group of what urbanist William Whyte calls, “the undesirables¹²”:

The undesirable population includes not only criminal elements, or dangerous individuals but also harmless bag-ladies, the homeless, street vendors, musicians

¹¹ Lee Pugalis, “The Culture and Economics of Urban Public Space Design: Public and Professional Perceptions,” *Urban Design International* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 215–30, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.oasys.lib.oxy.edu/10.1057/udi.2009.23>.

¹² William Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Washington D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1980).

and public performers, noisy teenagers and children, and in general everyone who does not conform with the management's standards of appropriateness, or whose presence might damage the image of a clean, proper, and safe environment¹³

Privatized urban spaces create a place of orderliness without spontaneity. The intrinsic feeling of affluence combined with a closed-off physical layout, in many and most cases, creates intangible barriers and a fundamentally unequal space. At the heart of equity is accessibility. By creating spaces with incorporeal hindrances, private investment in 'public' space produces disproportionate access, and by definition, unequal places. In order to assure equity, a designer must apply the goals and objectives of urban design beyond the idealistic paper description presented by a majority of the literature.

PARKS: FROM THE BENEFITS TO INHERENT INEQUITIES

When looking to the literature to determine the importance of public and private investment in public space and green space, there is concordant conclusion that such places are an asset to any city or community¹⁴. Open public space, specifically parks and green space, have been shown to reduce levels of sadness and anxiety, lower stress and levels of aggression, and enhance an overall sense of wellness¹⁵. Access to parks and open space provides opportunities for recreation and physical activity, which can improve overall health and combat illness such as heart disease and diabetes¹⁶. In addition to the physical and psychological benefits, parks can

¹³ Loukaitou-Sideris, "Privatisation of Public Open Space."

¹⁴ Bedimo-Rung, Mowen, and Cohen, "The Significance of Parks to Physical Activity and Public Health."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

provide ample space for social interaction and community building; forming trust among neighbors and citizens alike. While there is little dispute as to the benefits of urban green space, (although the extent to which and strength of benefit is up to interpretation¹⁷), many studies focusing on the positive impacts of urban green space fail to recognize the inequity of these spaces in an urban context. As discussed by Byrne and Wolch in their study “Nature, Race, and Parks”:

Leisure scholars tend to treat parks as homogeneous entities--vessels for human interaction, providing few insights into why for example, some parks attract certain people and repel others, or why some park users perceive certain park spaces as the territory of particular ethno-racial group(s), thus constraining their use choices¹⁸.

This scholarly approach of objectivity in the literature surrounding the health and community benefits of parks, plays as harsh disconnect to the plethora of literature citing the inequity of placement of parks, the differences in per capita of greenspace between neighborhoods, and the variety of average amounts of park maintenance seen across different socio-economically segregated areas¹⁹. In many ways, the disparity of park amenities and facilitates between neighborhoods is a reflection of and a form of continued segregation; the core of inequity in many cities. By eliminating the gap between park access and quality of these places, public parks could be an avenue to advance equity in a city.

¹⁷A. C. K. Lee and R. Maheswaran, “The Health Benefits of Urban Green Spaces: A Review of the Evidence,” *Journal of Public Health* 33, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 212–22, doi:10.1093/pubmed/fdq068.

¹⁸ Byrne and Wolch, “Nature, Race, and Parks.”

¹⁹ Ibid.

Urban parks have a complicated history of segregation and often show clear disparities in the quality and maintenance of the parks serving different demographics²⁰. As discussed by Byrne and Wolch in the article “Nature, race, and parks”, parks are not intrinsically neutral spaces; they exist for specific social, ecological, political and economic reasons²¹. These motivations define and inform the way people perceive and use the space²². It is crucial to consider the ways in which parks have acted as places to exert power and social control—especially over marginalized communities and groups²³. With any public space, there is history and motive that shape associations and usage of the space. The tangled history of racism, marginalization, and separation in the United States pervades each aspect of the built environment with parks being at the forefront of research on such disparities; however, not within the context of benefits of such spaces. As concisely stated by Byrne and Wolch, “The racial politics of park development reflects ideologies of land use, histories of property development, planning philosophy, and the spatial expression of racial discrimination²⁴”. With the built environment and the disparity of public amenities defined by past histories, the equity of a newly formed place or a revitalized space should be the keystone and anchor of a successful urban park project.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Brown and Dixon, *Urban Design for an Urban Century: Shaping More Livable, Equitable, and Resilient Cities*.

²⁴ Ibid.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO AND THEORIES OF URBAN DESIGN

Urban design has been through several major iterations and shifts in ideology and practice even in the past several decades. Although stemming from the desire to create order amidst chaos, urban designers, design theorists, and urbanists often disagree and conflict on the specifics of design implantation and the formation of spaces. “Contemporary urban design emerged sometime in the 1960s and was born out of a search for quality of urban form. It constitutes the interface of architecture, urban planning, landscape architecture, surveying, property development, environmental management and protection, and a host of other disciplines²⁵”. However, previous and subsequent to ‘contemporary urban design’, there are several iterations of design thinking and perspective that have shaped the world around us and the motives behind designer’s choices. There is an intensive and interwoven history of different schools of thought on urbanism, city-life, and city-health through the lens of design and formation of space summarized below:

Table 1: Urbanism Schools of Thought and Movements

School of Thought	Ideology/Era	Involves Equity?
Park Movement	A movement at the end of the 19th century that focused on reconnecting people with nature and the environment.	No
City Beautiful	A movement that grew during the 1890’s through the early 1900’s that aimed to reform parks and public space through projects of grandeur and fundamental beautification.	No

²⁵(Burayidi 2001)

Landscape Urbanism	Theory of urbanism that focuses around a city's landscape as the driving force of planning and organization rather than the buildings. This theory first appeared in the early 1990s	No
Green Urbanism	A type of urbanism that surrounds ideals of sustainability, clean energy, local materials, and other pillars of the environmental movement within the context of city planning and development. Fully developed by 1990.	Yes
Tactical Urbanism	An approach to planning, design, and urbanism that involves small-scale, low-cost, often short-term projects to improve the built environment within a specific neighborhood or community. Also known as 'D.I.Y. Urbanism' or 'Guerilla Urbanism'. Term developed in 2010.	Yes
Grassroots Urbanism	An urbanism approach focused on building projects from the bottom up; going to a group or community first and seeing what they want before beginning a project. Different from participatory design or democratic design strategies. Mid 2000's.	Yes

Equity in design and built environment intervention don't truly enter the design theory conversation until the 1990's, when Green Urbanism introduces the principles of "Livability, Healthy Communities and Mixed-Use Programs (inclusive of affordable housing and mixed-use development), and Cultural Heritage, Identity, and Sense of Place²⁶". Tactical Urbanism and Grassroots Urbanism continue this move toward equity with both small-scale and bottom-up approaches, aiming to create thriving communities anywhere with small changes and community input and participation.

²⁶ Steffen Lehmann, "Green Urbanism: Formulating a Series of Holistic Principles," *S.A.P.I.EN.S. Surveys and Perspectives Integrating Environment and Society*, no. 3.2 (September 9, 2010), <https://sapiens.revues.org/1057>.

However, important to this paper are two distinct ideologies: New Urbanism and Syncretic Urbanism. Within the literature, New Urbanism is a pragmatic and comprehensive approach to widespread urban issues and common plagues of many cities' current built environment. As further explained by Bahrainy and Bakhtiar:

New Urbanism is a philosophical and practical way to recreate the best traditional urban form for today, such as court yard and mixed use streets. It is a neo traditional movement...which focuses on public realm, relation between work and living, environmental sustainability, product (rather than process, which is contrary to communicative planning) and quality of life. Some regard New Urbanism more as an ideology rather than theory²⁷.

It is a theory free of grandeur and obscure rationales commonly found in most theories of urban design. Instead it is clear and 'refreshingly simple'²⁸. Its focus on community building as a keystone of design motives and creating equitable places is what allows it to be infused with the core values of many designers, architects, planners; ultimately reflected in our built environment.

The Congress (previously Charter) for New Urbanism (CNU) was founded in 1993 by a group of designers, architects, and planners who were discouraged and frustrated with the current trajectory of development and patterns expanding among design tendencies including privatization and design that contributes little to the beauty and unique idiosyncrasies of a place. The movement is formed around the ideology that the built environment is intimately linked to our opportunity for thriving, happy, and successful lives; well-designed places whether at the

²⁷ (Bahrainy and Bakhtiar, n.d.)

²⁸ Ibid.

small scale of a park or as large scale as a city allow for healthy communities²⁹. The principles of New Urbanism are as follows:

1. Metropolitan regions that are composed of well-structured cities, towns, and neighborhoods with identifiable centers and edges
2. Compact development that preserves farmland and environmentally sensitive areas; infill development to revitalize city centers
3. Interconnected streets, friendly to pedestrians and cyclists, often in modified grid or web-like patterns
4. Mixed land uses rather than single-use pods
5. Discreet placement of garages and parking spaces to avoid auto-dominated landscapes
6. Transit-oriented development (TOD)
7. Well-designed and sited civic building typologies to create coherent urban form
8. High-quality parks and conservation lands used to define and connect neighborhoods and district
9. Architectural design that shows respect for local history and regional character³⁰

Though this form of urbanism has grown in popularity, recognition, and support from various facets of the design and planning realm, there is still substantial incredulity surrounding New Urbanist ideologies, application, and aesthetic performance of projects following such principles in reality. As discussed by Cliff Ellis in his article, “The New Urbanism: Critiques and Rebuttals”, many see New Urbanism as aesthetically pleasing but contrived places; places that lack the organic integrity of spaces embraced and shaped by those who use it. “Instead of

²⁹ bsummers, “The Movement,” Text, *CNU*, (April 20, 2015), <https://www.cnu.org/who-we-are/movement>.

³⁰ Cliff Ellis, “The New Urbanism: Critiques and Rebuttals,” *Journal of Urban Design* 7, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 261–91, doi:10.1080/1357480022000039330.

actually being successful urban neighborhoods, New Urbanist developments simply look like urban neighborhoods. New Urbanist developments may be aesthetically pleasing, but aesthetics alone do not create community or urbanity³¹”.

Additionally, there is a variety of critique regarding the innate segregational tendencies of New Urbanist values—by separating places by use—and the way they present themselves in the built urban form. The literature discusses the implications of creating such nuclear zones subscribing to new urbanist values as a hindrance of potential equity throughout cities: “New Urbanist towns too often commit the most heinous of urban sins: they segregate zones... This zone segregation keeps New Urbanist communities from resembling the small towns and urban neighborhoods they strive to become. They lack the organic growth and fluid blend of multiple uses that make urban neighborhoods so successful³²”. Chris Wolf of *Planetizen* sees the result of New Urbanist plans as disconnected and built without contextual awareness of their surrounding development. While a harsh critique, there is validity in this perceived reality. Without honoring, acknowledging, or recognizing the history of a place and the communities and groups it has served, it is questioned whether this place can be considered an authentic contribution to the urban fabric. However, New Urbanist strategies present themselves differently depending on context and space at work. There is definitive difference in New Urbanist projects and ‘third-place’ plans, newly defined and theorized in recent literature to encompass specific, niche

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

‘placemaking’ strategies, which have ideological anchors in equity and empowerment through place models.

The idea of ‘third-place’ was originated by Ray Oldenburg in the late 1980’s within the urbanist and planning realm to indicate a place between two usual environments: home and one’s workplace. These places and spaces act as neutral ground for social interaction and community building, with neutrality as a keystone in the development of equitable places³³. However, a recent thread of urbanist literature has broken away from this definition and established the association of ‘third-place’ as inordinately designed urban spaces; closely tied to the associations of New Urbanism presented by both Wolf and Ellis. A ‘third-place’ is planned as an idealized space in an otherwise chaotic urban fabric. Much of the literature points to examples such as Las Vegas and its faux facades, “The Truman Show” as an example of an idealized and overtly planned place, or places such as The Grove in the La Brea area of Los Angeles whose charming winding paths, extravagant fountains, trolley system and enclosed shopping space create the illusion of idealized urban space. This association of faux space or imitation aides the connotation of New Urbanism navigating urban space by echoing romanticized versions of urban places. However, when looking exclusively at or isolating the principles of New Urbanist thought, the framework provides excellent anchors for healthy city development and planning. The specific goals of New Urbanist ideology are not inherently inequitable or unjust, but rather the avenues through which these goals and principles are realized, where the harshest critiques lie.

³³ (Spaces 2016)

DOWNTOWN RENEWAL AND 'PLACE-MAKING' IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

The movement to revitalize downtowns across the nation in the 1990s has continued to this day, and has had a resurgence in recent years with updated branding through the idea of 'placemaking'.

Within the discourse of urban design professionals and academics, there is a popular phrasing of 'placemaking' as a means of renewal and revitalization. While this buzzword and trend has reinvigorated the push towards creating livable spaces for all, it builds upon the assumption that a space is not a place until it is best fit for its desired users or possible inhabitants. While there is merit in this focus on 'place' and 'placemaking' as a strategy towards shaping accessible, interactive, safe, and enjoyable spaces for all people, it is crucial to recognize the process of 'placemaking' relies on the assumptions of an undesired space; in some cases making current users or uses the antithesis of design goals.

The ideology of place stems from two opposing views of the ways in which a place is perceived by its users. As discussed by John Montgomery in his 1998 article "Making a City: Urbanity, Vitality and Urban Design" in the *Journal of Urban Design*, there are those who see place based in the physical layout, design, and orientation of the space while others bind the importance of place to the psychological connections one has with the space; either the mental mapping and association within the greater city fabric, or the implicit perception and feeling of a space. Montgomery refers to the latter as "the romantic subjective view of urban design³⁴".

³⁴ John Montgomery, "Making a City: Urbanity, Vitality and Urban Design," *Journal of Urban Design* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 1998): 93–116, doi:10.1080/13574809808724418.

Regardless of the motivation behind forming a ‘place’, there are benefits to examining both interpretations.

There is currently a lack of literature critiquing what is seen by few as an oversight in the ‘place-making’ trend.

PUBLIC SPACE AND PROTEST: FROM EXCLUSION TO DEMOCRATIC DESIGN

The design of a public space has a major influence on the ways individuals use it, the degree to which they embrace it, and the extent to which they’ll gather and feel comfortable to express their ideas; religious, social, and political.

There is a multitude of literature on the ways specific design tactics can either hinder or encourage public gathering—from barriers to sight-lines, there are many strategies designers can employ to create welcoming or unwelcoming places. However, although discussed or mentioned briefly in many texts examining public space and the public realm in conjunction with city equity, there seems to be a gap or lack of conclusion when deciding the best approach of public space management. The article “Domestication by Cappuccino or a Revenge on Urban Space? Control and Empowerment in the Management of Public Spaces”, by Rowland Atkinson highlights the inherent struggle and contention a public space faces when striving for equity and security: “The role of urban design and management in securing public spaces and reducing social exclusion is an explicit part of the government’s urban agenda³⁵”. This push and pull and

³⁵ Rowland Atkinson, “Domestication by Cappuccino or a Revenge on Urban Space? Control and Empowerment in the Management of Public Spaces,” *Urban Studies* 40, no. 9 (August 1, 2003): 1829–43, doi:10.1080/0042098032000106627.

shared responsibility between a design and the management of the space allows blame for exclusivity, unwelcoming tendencies, and lack of transparency to fall between the two; with neither side able to take responsibility for the fault of the other.

When issues of equity are discussed on a city-wide level, they often focus on place-based policy related to housing, social services, and concerns of food deserts³⁶. However, as noted by Atkinson, “While issues of justice and exclusion have been characterized treatments of the wider city realm, the role of the spaces in between, a city’s public spaces, has not been considered in detail³⁷”. This potential gap in the literature leaves a distinctly grey area when cities and private companies look for open space management solutions. The role of the private sector in public space management (which has increased due to lacking resources in the public sector³⁸), has fundamentally altered the authentic integrity of city’s public spaces. In her book *The Culture of Cities*, Sharon Zukin further discusses the intrinsic conflict of private resources in public space and the processes that have brought this crossover forward through development trends:

A fusion of consumption, entertainment and popular culture have promoted a privatized sense of city living which appears to look like the traditional street but is devoid of the diversity that it used to support...consider the role of culture in the economic base of cities and how this may spill over into the privatization and militarization of public space³⁹.

³⁶ Brown and Dixon, *Urban Design for an Urban Century: Shaping More Livable, Equitable, and Resilient Cities*.

³⁷ Atkinson, “Domestication by Cappuccino or a Revenge on Urban Space?”

³⁸ Loukaitou-Sideris, “Privatisation of Public Open Space.”

³⁹ Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities*, 1995.

This drive for security in public space has led to an increase in policed space—with resulting discriminatory scrutiny and exclusivity masked as surveillance needs⁴⁰.

As cities grapple with omnipresent poverty, inequality, and crime, the literature surrounding public space management provides little crossover or connection with theories and principles that act as the basis for new development. New movements in democratic and participatory design methodology are striving to make this connection between actualized urban experience and the projects that form our built environment. The question of whether these processes can overcome ongoing trends of problematic public space management is still up for debate.

Democratic and participatory design strategies come from an overwhelming push for cities and private interests to more intimately involve community members in development and design processes. In “Making a Case for Evidence-informed Decision Making for Participatory Urban Design” by Nelson and Nisha, a key framework is presented that best articulates the steps towards an inclusive design and engagement process:

- **Diagnose**—An exploratory search into the context, and interventional intensions to enable understanding of the cause and effect relationship in the given context.
- **Define**—to identify, clarify and articulate purpose of intervention and its desirable outcomes.
- **Data**—Generation of evidence for purposive sample and appraisal of the same.
- **Design**—In light of ‘confirmatory’ or ‘contradictory’ evidence the context produces, appraised evidence will inform the design generating its probable outcomes.
- **Decide**—The evaluative stage of drawing a decision after careful consideration of possibilities. These establish hierarchy in a systematic progress through the notions of ideas, theories, research, and practice. The objective progression can then inform the process represented by the stages—exploratory, generative, and evaluative⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Loukaitou-Sideris, “Privatisation of Public Open Space.”

⁴¹ Bobby Nisha and Margaret Nelson, “Making a Case for Evidence-Informed Decision Making for Participatory Urban Design,” *Urban Design International* 17, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 336–48, doi:<http://0-dx.doi.org.oasys.lib.oxy.edu/10.1057/udi.2012.16>.

By following these five key processes and including community participation each step of the way, a design process and outcome can ensure a democratic action through a new project.

With private interest and funds supporting public space, there is question to whether a place can be truly democratic and act as a successful equitable platform within the public realm. A truly democratic space manifests itself as welcoming in times of political and social turbulence just as much as in times of leisure and calm⁴².

METHODOLOGY

In order to fully evaluate and synthesize equity in the context of urban design and community outreach, I conducted mixed-methods research through structured interviews and comparative census data, in order to contextualize and further explore the comparison of past and present revitalization processes. The methods and process used are detailed in the following sections.

By compiling a complete list of academics, professionals, and people involved with both the past and current revitalization plan, I was able to contact these individuals via e-mail and set up an interview time with them. I conducted all interviews in person and recorded them for note-taking and quoting purposes; with the individual's informed consent. I was able to conduct a total of six comprehensive interviews, with most conversations totaling 45 minutes to one hour.

The individuals I interviewed fell under various different perspectives and approaches in their understanding and involvement with both past and ongoing efforts to revitalize Pershing

⁴² Don Mitchell, "The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85, no. 1 (1995): 108–33.

Square. Two of the six individuals interviewed, Eduardo Santana and Eve Critton, represent the non-profit Pershing Square Renew, the organization spear-heading and continuing ongoing activation plans and design implementation for Pershing Square. Brian Glodney, a Design Director and Senior Associate at Gensler Los Angeles, is involved as a design advisor to Pershing Square Renew and was involved with the plans to renew Pershing Square previous to the introduction of the non-profit organization. To involve and further understand the past revitalization attempts for Pershing Square, I had the opportunity to interview Janet Marie Smith who acted as the President of the Pershing Square Management Association during renewal efforts in the 1980's. She is currently the Senior Vice President of Planning and Development for the Dodgers. For a more empirical design perspective, I spoke with Christopher Hawthorne, a professor at Occidental College in addition to being the architecture critique for the Los Angeles Times who has focused extensive work on Pershing Square and renewal projects in Los Angeles. Additionally, I spoke with Eric Ares from Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) in order to incorporate the perspective and experience of community groups in regards to large-scale public space projects.

These individuals fall under three primary research tiers: past revitalization attempts, current renewal efforts, and urban design perspectives. Although all three tiers of individuals have differing perspective, I asked a baseline of at least five equivalent questions in order to have greater basis for comparison and analysis. All interviews were transcribed directly and coded by correlating findings. Direct quotes and paraphrasing is used to contextualize the information as related to the core research question. A complete list of guiding interview questions can be found in Appendix A, and complete list of their names and corresponding job titles can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to structured interviews, I have a subset of my research and resulting analysis connected with participant observation in ongoing meetings and involvement with the current renewal process as an intern for Pershing Square Renew for four months. This experience though not cited explicitly, has guided and informed analysis and recommendations for this project.

A quantitative research approach was used to contextualize and compare census information across the discussed renewal decades. Racial demographics, Population Density, and Number of Occupied Housing Units were evaluated and compared using Excel graphing mechanisms to further basis for resulting findings.

BACKGROUND

HISTORY OF PERSHING SQUARE

Since its establishment in 1866, Pershing Square has been a historically significant public space and place for the city of Los Angeles. Utilized by citizens for public gatherings, leisure, recreation, and activism, Pershing Square's history is intertwined with the evolving identity of the City of Los Angeles.

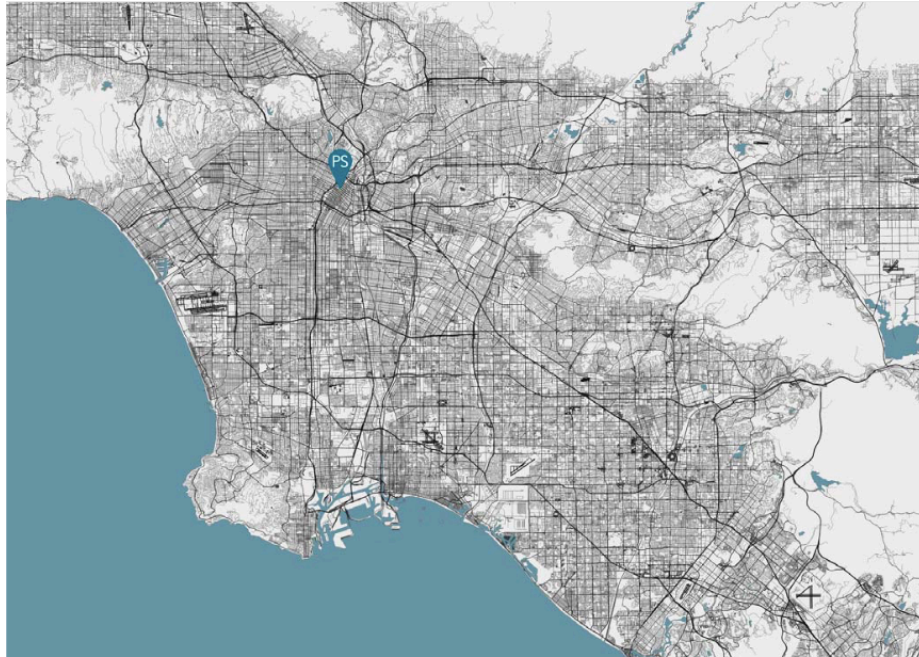


Image 1: Pershing Square in Los Angeles⁴³

The same designated square space in the heart of Downtown Los Angeles that exists to this day, was first and foremost a campground used by travelers from the pueblo—the Pueblo of Los Ángeles being the second of civil pueblos established as part of the Spanish colonization of California⁴⁴. The rectangle ‘Block 15’ was part of original cartographic sketches by surveyor E.O. Ord that delineated an initial street grid in what is now the southwest section of Downtown Los Angeles⁴⁵. The open space functioned as pastoral land until formally established as a public square in 1866 by Mayor Cristobal Aguilar and named La Plaza Abaja (or “lower plaza”)⁴⁶ as ““a

⁴³ Agence Ter and Team, “Pershing Square Renew: The Dynamic Heart of Los Angeles,” April 2016.

⁴⁴ (“The Settlement of Los Angeles” 2016)

⁴⁵ (“From Plaza Abaja to Pershing Square: L.A.’s Oldest Park Through the Decades” 2012)

⁴⁶ (Roseman et al. 2004)

public square or plaza for the use and benefit of the citizens in common of [Los Angeles]⁴⁷” within relatively the same dimensions as the space exists today. Most importantly to note, however, is that Pershing Square is designated in the city deed to remain as public space forever; a rare case for a historically development focused city.

However, although the City Council of the time had approved the formalization of park space, they set aside no budget or funds for space improvement. As a result, the space continued to serve as grounds for livestock and the symbolic plaza boundaries were ignored by locals who would ride their wagons directly through the square⁴⁸. The lack of clearly defined boundaries of the space with little beautification or effort from the city drew criticism from residents. By 1870, ‘La Plaza Abaja’ transitioned to ‘Los Angeles Park’ and due to copious complaints from citizens regarding deterioration of the space, the city of Los Angeles approved a group of wealthy landowners to transition the space from eyesore to prized parkland. The appointed members had significant stake in the area, as most were owners of nearby property that would benefit from a successful public open space close by. The council raised \$600 (approximately \$10,500 in today’s dollars)⁴⁹, which was supplemented by a grant from the city of \$1,000 (approximately \$17,500). The square was cleared of roaming livestock and trees and fencing were placed along the perimeter in order to visually distinguish the space as pedestrian, leisure space—a new-found

⁴⁷ (“From Plaza Abaja to Pershing Square: L.A.’s Oldest Park Through the Decades” 2012)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ (“\$600 in 1870 - Inflation Calculator” 2016)

luxury at the end of the industrial revolution era in the United States⁵⁰. This would be the first of several iterations and re-designs of the square space in Downtown Los Angeles.

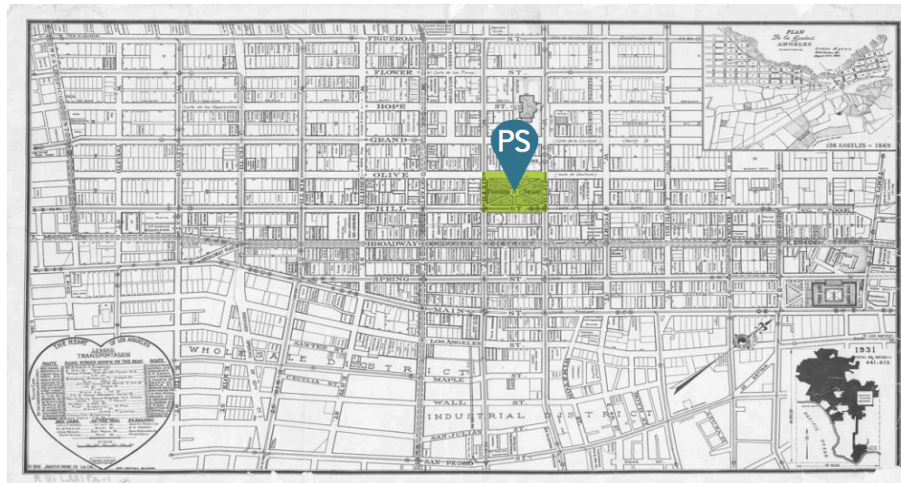


Image 2: Pershing Square on Historic Map of Downtown Los Angeles, 1933⁵¹

In 1886, the city engineer Fred Eaton re-conceptualized the square by adding a bandstand, which reshaped the demographic use of the square; drawing crowds as a meeting space and a cultural hub for the growing Anglo population of the city⁵². It is unclear whether there was a designated space for the non-Anglo population, confirming historical segregations and variability in park access. Although the council of landowners in 1870 had established the space under the name ‘Los Angeles Park’, residents of the area and citizens alike used a variety of names (Plaza Abaja, Sixth Street Park, St. Vincent Park), until re-established as ‘Central Park’

⁵⁰ (“The Industrial Revolution in the United States - Primary Source Set | Teacher Resources - Library of Congress” 2016)

⁵¹ Agence Ter and Team, “Pershing Square Renew: The Dynamic Heart of Los Angeles.”

⁵² (“From Plaza Abaja to Pershing Square: L.A.’s Oldest Park Through the Decades” 2012)

when re-designed in 1910 by John Parkinson, a prominent architect of the time who went on to design Union Station, Los Angeles City Hall, and Grand Central Market—all iconic symbols of the city⁵³.



Image 3: John Parkinson Pershing Square Design 1920⁵⁴

With an \$80,000 budget, Parkinson created a symmetrical park plan using intertwining paths leading to a central three-tiered fountain, replacing the bandstand from the previous design. Italian cypresses, bamboo, and palm trees framed the pathways along the perimeter and interior of the park space, creating generously shaded areas in addition to copious benches and seating

⁵³ (“John Parkinson | Los Angeles Conservancy” 2016)

⁵⁴ Eve Bachrach, “38 Photos of Pershing Square From 1866 to Today,” *Curbed LA*, August 29, 2013, <http://la.curbed.com/2013/8/28/10203644/38-photos-of-pershing-square-from-1866-to-today>.

along the paths. This design is often seen as one of the most favorable and best uses of the space by historians and contemporary urban designers alike⁵⁵.



Image 4: Pershing Square 1935⁵⁶

With the end of World War I in 1918, the square was renamed for a prominent commander of U.S. forces in the war, General John Pershing; the park's sixth and final name, at least for the foreseeable future⁵⁷. The Parkinson design remained throughout the 20s, 30s, and

⁵⁵ "Explore John Parkinson's 1910 Pershing Square, Rendered in 3D by His Great-Great Grandson," *Change.org*, accessed November 12, 2016, <https://www.change.org/p/mayor-garcetti-la-city-council-recreation-and-parks-don-t-re-envision-pershing-square-restore-pershing-square/u/14946982>.

⁵⁶ Los Angeles Public Library Archive

⁵⁷ (Roseman et al. 2004)

40s and was reconstructed in the early 1950's to accommodate three-story parking beneath the square, further lending to the trend and overwhelming power of the automobile. However, leading up to the inclusion of the parking garage, the square had begun to serve as a space for public preaching, 'soap box speeches', and "outspoken oratory"⁵⁸. Religion, radicalism, and political thought, are just some of the various topics discussed at any given corner of the square.



Image 5 and Image 6: Debaters in Pershing Square 1939⁵⁹

Pershing Square also became a space for the congregating of marginalized populations and communities during this period; the unemployed gathered during the Great Depression, the poor and jobless after World War II (later this would include civil rights protests, Anti-Vietnam War protests, justice for janitors, and the 2017 Women's March; See Appendix C for Pershing Square Protest Photos). Additionally, Pershing Square became the core of a grouping of gay-friendly businesses and organizations throughout the 1920s and continuing into the 1960s called "The

⁵⁸ ("From Plaza Abaja to Pershing Square: L.A.'s Oldest Park Through the Decades" 2012)

⁵⁹ Los Angeles Public Library Archive

Run”. The Central Library, the bar at the Biltmore Hotel, and the Subway Terminal bathrooms were all included in this circuit⁶⁰. Referred to as “the premier homosexual spot”, Pershing Square became a gathering place for the significant gay community in Los Angeles during these decades, where elsewhere they would have faced outright discrimination and intolerance.

However, local businesses saw these populations as ‘destitute’ (radicals, socialists, street vendors, ‘homosexuals’, the poor, the marginalized, labor organizers, socialists, non-whites, etc.)⁶¹ as harmful to their offices and shops and pushed for the city to redevelop the square. This adjustment resulted in the three-stories of underground parking with entrance and exit ramps on each side of the square as well as a lawn area fenced in with narrow paths around the perimeter—a tactic to directly deter public gatherings and potential protest, with the removal of trees and vegetation giving clearer visibility to law enforcement⁶². This decisive grovel to the automobile and resulting sprawl turned the once thriving garden enclave in the heart of Downtown to a flat, empty, and controlled lawn; consistent with Cold War era architecture of sparse and desolate places. When business hours ended, the square would fall plague to drug dealers and the growing homeless population of downtown Los Angeles, creating a stigma and connotation of an ‘undesired’, dangerous space⁶³.

⁶⁰ (Barragan 2014)

⁶¹(“Concrete Dreams: Restoring Pershing Square” 2015)

⁶² (“From Paradise to Parking Lot” 2016)

⁶³ Margaret Crawford, “Contesting the Public Realm: Struggles over Public Space in Los Angeles,” *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-) 49, no. 1 (1995): 4–9, doi:10.2307/1425371.



Image 6: Pershing Square Parking Construction 1952, and Pershing Square 1968 Aerial⁶⁴

Pershing Square has continually struggled with being both everybody's park and nobody's park. During the early processes of redesigning the square in 1986, the downtown districts are shown drawn around the Pershing Square area, and even in 2016, Pershing Square is still not included in the Historic Core Business Improvement District (BID) mapping, which is surprising given its extensive history and early establishment in the development of Los Angeles:

⁶⁴ Los Angeles Public Library Archive

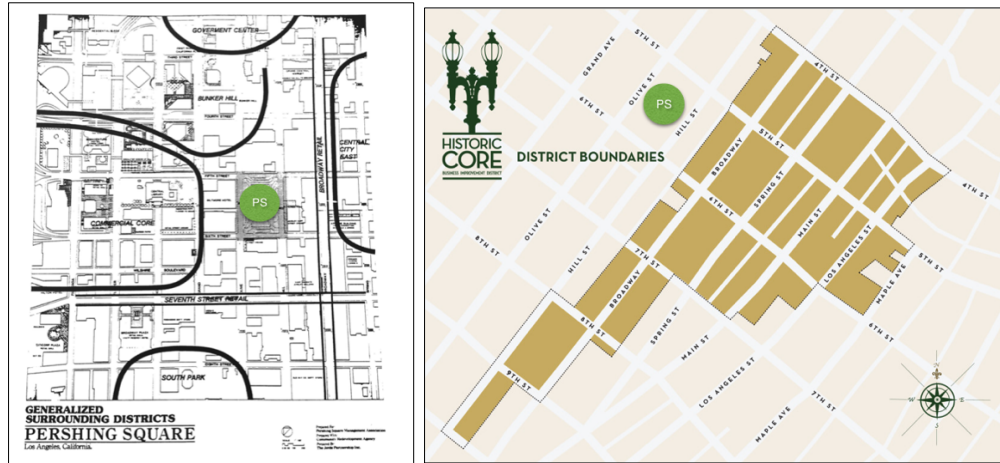


Image 7: Pershing Square Excluded from Districting 1986 and 2017

Although Pershing Square is now within the purview of the Downtown Center BID, the square has continued to struggle to find its true identity within Downtown Los Angeles; with exception of the common thread of protest throughout its over 150-year history as a public space (See Appendix C).

To further contextualize the square’s history with significant events in Los Angeles, the following table outlines the cycles of redesign Pershing Square has seen over the past 150 years.

Year	Event	Description	Los Angeles Historical Events
1866	‘La Plaza Abaja’ naming	Established by Mayor Cristobal Aguilar	14 th Amendment passes
1870	‘Los Angeles Park’ naming	Changes in landscaping and first name change	15 th Amendment passes
1886	Bandstand installed	City engineer Fred Eaton added bandstand and reconfigured park use	Pasadena and Santa Monica Established into L.A. County

1910	John Parkinson Design	Completely redesigned and renovated park space	First known female cop appointed in United States (by the LAPD)
1918	'Pershing Square' naming	Name change to honor General John Pershing at the end of WWI	Warner Bros. begins operations in L.A.
1952	Redesign to accommodate Parking Garage	Square completely redesigned and excavated to allow for three-levels of parking	L.A. Metro established
1984	1984 Olympics \$1 million renovation	Hosting the Olympic Games prompts L.A. to give Pershing Square a facelift to foster city pride	Summer Olympics Hosted in Los Angeles
1986	Design Competition for Pershing Square	Competition led by the Pershing Square Management Association	Proposition U passes—an initiative aimed to slow development
1992	Legoretta and Ollin Design	Maguire Thomas company funds a complete redesign of Pershing Square	Rodney King Riots
2013	Pershing Square Task Force created	Task force established by Councilmember Huizar of the 14 th district, to begin a new vision for Pershing Square	Eric Garcetti elected Mayor of Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES OF THE 1980'S AND 1990'S

Social and political landscape of a city—and even a nation—can directly affect and inform the configuration of new urban projects and design of public spaces for the public. To

understand the factors that influenced the design of public space in Los Angeles and across cities in America, one must contextualize the social and political conditions of the design timeline.

When the square was poised to go through renovations once again in the late 1980's, the Pershing Square Management Association, a non-profit developed after the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, led an international design competition to reimagine and redesign the square. They led outreach efforts in and around downtown and the entire city of Los Angeles; engaging relevant stakeholders and community organizations when possible. The design competition was won by the New York based architecture firm SITE Projects Inc. and architect James Wines; featuring an undulating park edge (reminiscent of a 'magic carpet'), plentiful plantings and garden space with a covered trellis, performance space, public art, and fountains to reduce traffic induced noise pollution. The design also featured an organized grid throughout the plaza hardscape that would be lit at night to reflect the grid of Los Angeles' illuminated corridors.



Image 8: Pershing Square Design Competition Winner 1986⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Los Angeles Public Library Archive

However, due multiple factors (discussed later in this paper), the winning design was not built. Instead, a private company hired modernists architect Ricardo Legorreta as well as landscape architect Laurie Olin and artists Barbara McCarren to conceive a design that would incorporate elements of California and Los Angeles history: “They decided on the symbolism of the region's old citrus empire: oversized orange spheres and a little Bosque of actual orange trees, a stylized earthquake fault, and the oversized tower, meant to symbolize the San Gabriel Mountains from whence water flows to the city⁶⁶”. Finished and opened to the public in early 1994, the reaction from the public came with mixed reviews. The abstraction of the symbols curated by the architects and designers made it difficult to connect history and regional context at first glance; many visitors to the park do not know what each detail represents to this day⁶⁷.

In addition to the new design, there was an emphasis on security and safety when evaluating the newly opened public space. The design was developed with clear undesired populations in mind as well as a particular image for the desired user. The square was well-lit, off-limits from 10:30pm to 5:00am, and was planned to be patrolled by park rangers, transit police, LAPD, and security from the Biltmore hotel. “To further discourage overnight camping, the park has no public bathroom and its grounds are mainly concrete and crushed granite, with only a modest lawn⁶⁸”. The priority and urgency of security informed the current design and

⁶⁶ (Graham 2015)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ (Gordon 1994)

restricted the demographic of a desired user so much, that the intended population of “lively and well-behaved mix of Downtown shoppers, workers and tourists⁶⁹” had no space for spontaneity or unplanned behavior; a keystone of equitable, comfortable public open space.

The current design of Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles came at a pivotal moment of intensive social and political turbulence. The proposed plan for a new square was part of a national movement to reclaim public space taken by the pitfalls of post suburban sprawl, urban blight. When describing the newest iteration of Pershing Square in article in the Los Angeles Times in 1994, Larry Gordon discussed the national context for the project: “From San Diego to New York, cities [are] struggling to restore the common grounds that once symbolized civic pride but too often have become examples of metropolitan shame. Unlike previous [design] campaigns, these projects try [tried] to tackle tough social problems while still planting trees⁷⁰”. Other projects of this time include the renewal of Bryant Park in New York City and Horton Plaza in San Diego, both of which presented comparable ailments to those of Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles such as issues of drug dealing, prostitution hubs, and high crime.

Shortly before construction of the renewed Pershing Square went underway in 1992, South Central Los Angeles erupted in riots in reaction to the acquittal of police officers who went to trial for the brutal beating of Rodney King. However, the culmination of riots was not in response to one isolated incidence of police brutality and injustice; for years the communities of

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ (Gordon 1994)

South central Los Angeles had been ready to boil over with frustrations of neglect and empty promises: the trial was simply the tipping point⁷¹. The police chief at the time, Daryl Gates, was incredibly unpopular in the eye of the public and he and the mayor at that time, Thomas Bradley, had a very strained relationship⁷². Before the riots, the two had not spoken directly in over a year; making the response to riots from a police, government and policy standpoint even more difficult and tense. The security implications and police presence throughout Los Angeles following the riots impacted the thinking surrounding safety in public space and furthered the justification for increased surveillance in Pershing Square⁷³.

Bradley was serving his fifth term as mayor of Los Angeles with the year of the riots (1992) marking his penultimate year in this office; he served from 1978 to 1993. Bradley had been praised for his work branding Los Angeles as an example of successful metropolitan region by winning a bid for the 1984 Olympics as well as bringing greater cohesion to a diversifying city government and coalition of leaders⁷⁴. However, this enhanced unity among government did not transcend throughout the city, especially near the end of his incumbency. Bradley was critiqued for directing focus and funds to Downtown Los Angeles and in turn, neglecting

⁷¹ Ginia Bellafante, "So Many Protests, So Little Space," *The New York Times*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/nyregion/anti-trump-protests-nyc.html>.

⁷² Jean Merl, "From the Archives: Mayor Who Reshaped L.A. Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1998, <http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/archives/la-me-tom-bradley-19980930-story.html>.

⁷³ Larry Gordon, "Pershing Square's 1994 Redesign Concept Was Aiming for 'Humane' and 'Romantic,'" *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1994, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-from-the-archives-pershing-square-20160512-snap-story.html>.

⁷⁴ (Merl 1998)

communities in need; such as South Central Los Angeles and other low-income communities comprised primarily of people of color. As a result, urban issues such as crime, poverty, gang violence, and drug use rose significantly during this time, and peaked dramatically in 1992, specifically⁷⁵.

During Mayor Bradley's time in office, a detrimental legislation was passed in California that has continued to affect the quality and inequality of education, housing, and the built environment up to this day. Proposition 13, passed by voters in 1978, drastically lowered the percent taxed on properties and as a result created incredible disparity in the proportions of funds available in any given neighborhood or city within California. For many major cities where inequalities between proximate communities could already differ remarkably, this law forged even greater disparity and imbalance of wealth and funds specifically within education and infrastructure. This became another source of further frustration and growing tensions among certain communities in Los Angeles. When the design competition led by the Pershing Square Management Association occurred between 1986 and 1990, property values were much lower in Downtown Los Angeles, decreasing the influence of public dollars to any new redesign process.

Prop 13 forced a change in the mindset of local governments when deciding land use and allocating funds due to the shifted consequences of such decisions: land uses that would generate higher revenue were favored long-term due to the net-loss of property taxes for any given space⁷⁶. This legislation fueled the trend of privatization of public space which has led to much of recent developments and aspects of the current built environment.

⁷⁵ (Hubler 1993)

⁷⁶ (Chapman 1998)

With so much strain on politics and social dynamics, it is no surprise that the most recent iteration of Pershing Square exemplifies such sentiment. With emphasis on security and invulnerability, the current design lacks inclusivity and accessibility through its eagerness to keep some groups out. If built under different time and circumstance, can Pershing Square demonstrate prowess as an equitable, accessible, and thriving public space?

CURRENT LOS ANGELES AND PERSHING SQUARE RENEW

The Los Angeles of today is focused on creating and investing in a sustainable future, ‘going back to the basics’, and creating places for everyday Angelenos⁷⁷. Current Mayor, Eric Garcetti, began his time in office with a great street initiatives, sustainable city plan, as well as many other progressive agendas; setting a tone for the city and facing extreme problems with proposed action in most cases. Although there are still significant issues of inequality across the city, the current administration is not turning a blind-eye, which most see as a step in the right direction and towards progress. The current Los Angeles is facing extreme issues regarding homelessness, lack of affordable housing, education disparities, and environmental challenges. With a city so swamped with intersectional issues around poverty and inequity, a successful downtown park project could be a way to address a multitude of ongoing problems, as long as it doesn’t slip between the cracks.

In 2013, the city’s redistricting put 14th District Council Member José Huizar in charge of the historic core and financial district of downtown, where previously he had only been responsible for more northern sections of Downtown Los Angeles. Early on in that process

⁷⁷ (Garcetti 2016)

Councilmember Huizar got several complaints and comments from residents and business owners within his jurisdiction regarding the eyesore of Pershing Square and decided to take action through a specified task force. At the same time, design firm Gensler Los Angeles, had begun an independent research project focused on metrics and exemplifications of great public space. They decided to approach the city regarding the potential of Pershing Square, specifically and created a team of 21 downtown leaders⁷⁸, in conjunction with Councilmember Huizar, to begin a citizen task force to discuss the renewal of Pershing Square and the opportunities for the entire downtown district that could result with a successful project. The initial meeting acted as a kick-off for both short-term and long-term ideas and projects surrounding the vital location in Downtown Los Angeles that Pershing Square inhabits. To continue the planning process and act as a liaison between various stakeholders as well as spearhead the community engagement and outreach process, the public-private partnership, Pershing Square Renew, was born. In late 2013, MacFarlane Partners, a national-wide investment management firm, committed \$1 million to kickstart the nonprofit, allowing the project to grow and move forward with planning the project as appose to committing extensive time on fundraising for hopeful progress. Overtime, Pershing Square Renew has been able to broaden their volunteer base beyond the original task force to

⁷⁸ List of downtown leaders: Kevin Regan, Recreation and Parks; Mathew Rudnick, Department of Cultural Affairs; Nick Maricich, Planning Department; Captain Horace Frank, LAPD; Mike Arnold, Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority; Amy Yeager, Pershing Square Advisory Board; Dawn Eastin, Downtown News; Blair Besten, Historic Downtown BID; Sean Krajewski, Blue Cow Restaurant GM; Carol Schatz, CCA, Downtown BID; Peklar Pilavjian, St. Vincent's Jewelry Center; Karen Hathaway, LA Athletic Club; Siobhan Talbot, Brookfield; Jeffery Fish, Pershing Square Building; Chris Rising, Rising Realty; Robert Hanasab, City National Building; Brian Glodney, Gensler; Rick Poulos, NBBJ; Katherine Perez-Estolano, USC; Melani Smith, Melendrez Design Partners; Gail Goldberg, ULI.

include other downtown residents, advocacy groups, and business leaders; through recruiting some and proactive initiative taken by others curious and wanting to get involved with the project. A complete list of stakeholders, partnerships, and consultants can be found below:

1. Founding Benefactor:

- MacFarlane Partners—an investment management firm focused on projects and investments that “promote smart growth, urban revitalization and sustainability in urban and high-density suburban submarkets of select Gateway Cities⁷⁹ within the United States.⁸⁰

2. Major Sponsors:

- Loeb & Loeb LLP—Law firm focused on key industries across the world.
- Greenland USA—Development and Commercial properties firm focused on ‘modern living’ and creating communities that promote economic growth.⁸¹

3. LA City:

- District 14 Council member José Huizar
- City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks
- Los Angeles Department of Transportation
- City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs

4. Partners:

- Downtown Center Business Improvement District
- Historic Core: Business Improvement District
- Central City Association of Los Angeles
- Brookfield, Millennium Biltmore Hotel
- Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council
- Joe’s Auto Parks
- Pershing Square Park Advisory Board
- The Trust for Public Land
- Public Decibel
- Consensus Inc.

⁷⁹ For MacFarlane Partners, these ‘Gateway Cities’ are inclusive of: Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D.C.

⁸⁰ (“About > MacFarlane Partners” 2016)

⁸¹ (“Greenland” 2016)

- Urban Land Institute Los Angeles.

5. Consultants:

- Project for Public Spaces
- Walker Parking Consultants
- Gensler
- Moonburn Creative
- Bread Truck Films
- Cumming

As apparent from the extensive list of partners and collaborators, this project and organization has had a lot of perspectives, opinions, and interests to juggle, while still balancing the overall goals brought forth by users of the space through extensive and continuing community outreach endeavors.

Pershing Square Renew launched an international design competition in the Summer of 2015 using guidelines developed through extensive community outreach and engagement during the early stages of the task force set forth by Councilmember Huizar. The space needed to encompass and be: adaptable, mobile, open, vibrant, inclusive, accessible, representative, energizing, diverse, green, unifying, engaging, and programmable: an urban oasis connected with the streetscape and downtown Los Angeles. From those guidelines, “Design teams [were] invited to a ‘vision’ competition...It is not a final design for how the square should necessarily look, but a comprehensive strategy for how the square should perform⁸²”. Learning from past histories with public space in Los Angeles as well as working with consultants such as internationally renowned group, Project for Public Spaces, it was clear that the design must be driven by programmable efforts and vision for the space. The square must be aesthetically beautiful and

⁸² (“About Us” 2016)

welcoming, but ultimately serve primarily to aide and accommodate a range of activities and events everyone desired for the space. Four finalists were chosen in December of 2015 and the groups presented their proposals publicly in late April of 2016 through comprehensive presentations held at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown, directly across from Pershing Square. After a week of public outreach, the board of directors of Pershing Square Renew came to the unanimous conclusion, along with the competition jury, and picked the project design from Agence Ter and Team—a Paris-based design firm opting to collaborate with several Los Angeles design partners and associates. The project is currently in the planning stage concerning funds from both public and private investments, and organizing constructional action and city contracts as needed. Additionally, the non-profit is working with the same public entities to build momentum for the project through activation projects and events in the existing space. This focus on placemaking in addition to pushing forward the proposed design puts the organization in a unique position—having to both stand behind ideology of placemaking in current conditions and convincing key stakeholders of the importance and potential of the proposed design and revitalization. As the project progresses, it will become more clear whether the project can live up to its commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility for all Angelenos and visitors to the space. The following images are renderings from the Agence Ter and Team Design Proposal submitted April 2016.





Renderings courtesy of Agence Ter and Team Pershing Square Design Proposal

SHIFTING CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS

To understand how a design and implementation process can potentially advance equity in downtown urban parks, data was collected through a primarily qualitative approach, using comprehensive interviews with design professionals, stakeholders, and various perspectives of the project to contextualize the current revitalization with past efforts. Additionally, design competition brochures and programs from the two compared time periods were evaluated in addition to curation of visual aids to understand trends in downtown overtime using publically accessible census data. Six key findings emerge:

1. Drastic shifts in racial demographics and changes in residential density, and the number of occupied housing units occur between the two primary time periods (1980, 1990 and 2015), which might inform the success of the project.
2. Funding for the current project is comparable to funding sources of the 1990 redesign (coming from private interests), but there is different control and transparency found between the time periods with the role of the public sector being different and more influential in certain respects.
3. The current design is being driven by programmatic considerations, rather than a focus for a symbolic Downtown Los Angeles space, which considers the varying needs of Angelenos met with a public space.
4. A higher number of residents and stakeholders has resulted in more comprehensive community outreach and participation in the current process—but certain voices are still louder than others.

5. The model for the public-private partnership, Pershing Square Renew has significant parallels to the Pershing Square Management Association of the late 1980's, with outcome of the current process being the remaining question mark.
6. Pershing Square continues to be used and embraced as a political space.

With each of these findings, there is some uncertainty in the full legitimacy of their implications, given that the new revitalization process is still very much underway. However, they offer a great opportunity for a follow-up study, or second wave of research when the project reaches full completion.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND RESIDENTIAL SHIFTS TO DOWNTOWN

Changing demographics among race, amount of occupied housing units, and relative population density has altered the chances of success of a new iteration of Pershing Square through the non-profit Pershing Square Renew. However, such trends also link to the increasing unaffordability of Downtown Los Angeles; with new developments primarily focused on a desired cliental that does not necessarily encompass all Angelenos. Due to an abundance of foreign investments, Downtown Los Angeles is experiencing the most massive construction boom in contemporary times⁸³. The ripple effect of these investments has fueled a continuous stream of new restaurants, galleries, and shops. “To find a time of greater construction one would have to go back to the Roaring ’20s, when many of downtown’s most famous historic buildings

⁸³ Andrew Khouri, “Downtown Los Angeles Hasn’t Seen This Much Construction since the 1920s,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-downtown-boom-20161130-story.html>.

were erected, including majestic movie palaces, the Biltmore Hotel and City Hall⁸⁴”, explains Andrew Khouri, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times. Khouri describes the shift in the downtown character as such: “People moved into neighborhoods considered rundown, and bars and restaurants sprung up to serve those residents. No longer was investment largely limited to office towers on Bunker Hill, which left downtown a ghost town after 5 p.m.⁸⁵”. However, by investing heavily in ritzy residential units, upscale restaurants, and high-end local amenities, developing an equitable place has been disregarded and ignored. This narrative mirrors the data described below, detailing specific changes in the census tracts directly encompassing and surrounding Pershing Square.

CONTEXTUALIZING CENSUS DATA OVER TIME

For each of the census tracts directly surrounding Pershing Square and the primary Downtown, ‘historic core’ district, the following shows the changes over time (from 1970 to 2015). The information is organized by a corresponding census variable: racial demographic changes, population density per square mile, and the number of occupied housing units.

The graphs and maps are displayed in chronological order with corresponding data tables, when applicable. The area outlined in red corresponds with the geographic confines of the Skid Row district of Los Angeles.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Population Density by Year (1980, 1990, 2015)

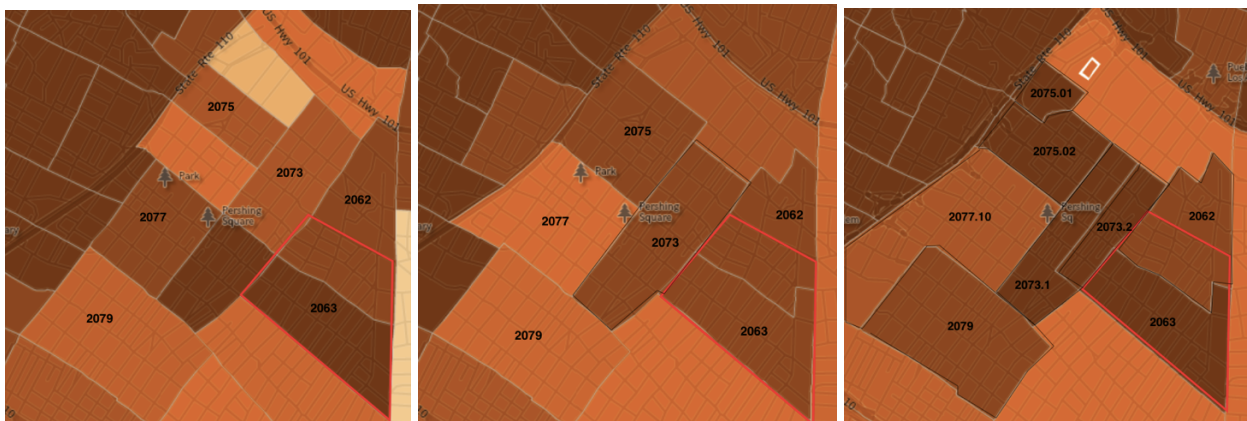
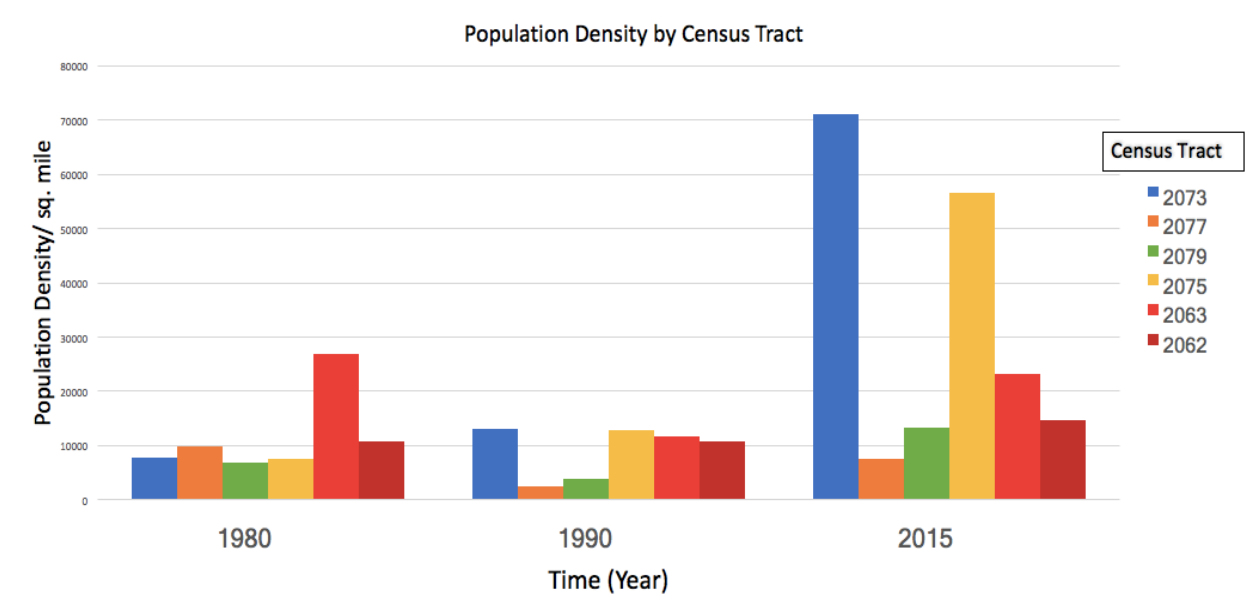
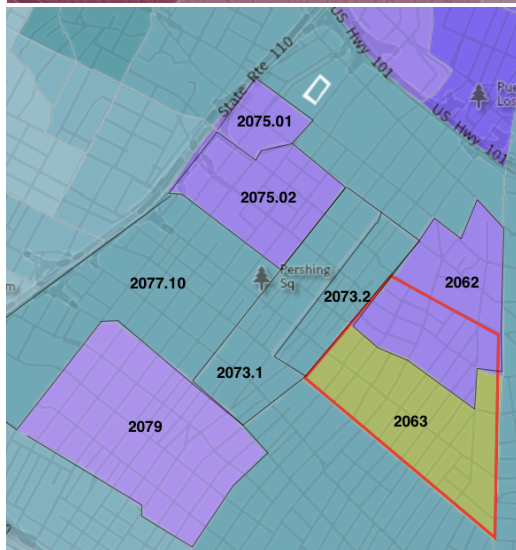
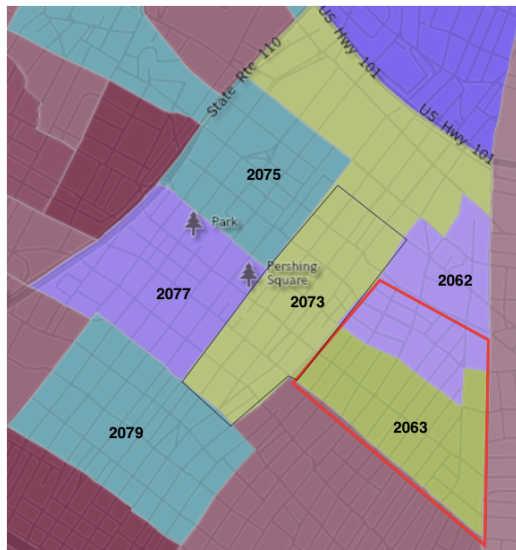
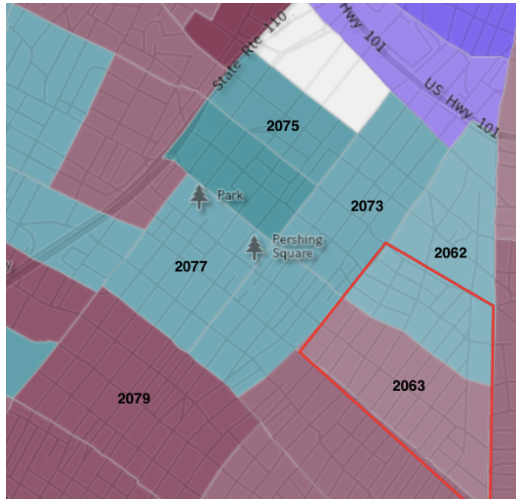


Figure 1: Population Density Census Maps (1980, 1990, 2015)

The population density of the area surrounding Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles has increased significantly over the past several decades, with particularly drastic growth in the area directly Southeast of the square (census tract 2073), which was divided into two tracts for the 2010 Census. This major increase in population has further characterized the potential of success for a renewal project given a greater breadth of individuals to capture during community outreach and engagement processes, in addition to more potential users—but who those users are have also shifted with an influx of new Downtown residents.

Racial Demographics by Year (1980, 1990, 2015)



1980	% White	% Black	% Asian
2075	73%	8%	N/A
2077	60%	14%	N/A
2073	56%	15%	N/A
2079	23%	7%	N/A
2062	24%	23%	N/A
2063	32%	31%	N/A
1990	% White	% Black	% Asian
2075	57%	11%	28%
2077	37%	13%	47%
2073	37%	39%	9%
2079	43%	15%	12%
2062	22%	33%	33%
2063	27%	46%	3%
2015	% White	% Black	% Asian
2075.01	43%	0.3%	48%
2075.02	26%	3.4%	60%
2077.10	50%	7%	29%
2073.1	54%	18%	14%
2073.2	45%	22%	10%
2079	36%	12%	40%
2062	22%	19%	43%
2063	30%	52%	2%

The racial and demographics of Downtown Los Angeles have shifted in significant and symbolic ways over the past several decades, with the constant trend being much of the population of people of color residing within the geographic confines of the Skid Row district. The last map shown above (2015), shows a striking increase of the population of white individuals in Downtown Los Angeles, informing trends of higher-income individuals coming into new luxury housing and altering the amenities provided.

Occupied Housing Units by Year (1980, 1990, 2015)



Figure 2: Occupied Housing Units by Year (1980, 1990, 2015)

The number of occupied housing units in the census tracts surrounding Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles align with the increase in population density of the area. Most notably is

the more than doubling of the two census tracts within the confines of the Skid Row district of Los Angeles. Census Tract 2063 in particular, has actually decreased in relative population density, but still more than doubled its occupied housing units. However, there is speculation on whether this increase in housing is helping issues of homelessness and whether the units are going towards those who need it most⁸⁶. Los Angeles is near the very top of the list of cities most in need of housing (only behind housing-short cities in the Bay Area including San Francisco and Oakland), making it even more difficult to create truly affordable housing rates; with market prices driving increasingly unaffordable units in historically affordable areas. Although few have speculated of the real potential of gentrification and major displacement in Skid Row, the conditions and projections would align with what has become a common trend in neighborhoods across Los Angeles County⁸⁷. With this data showing just occupied housing units (with the two color of dots representing owner versus renter occupied housing), it still does not begin to fully encompass the density expected in downtown—considering projected and ongoing housing development in the areas directly surrounding Pershing Square. However, these current conditions support the discussions had with individuals involved with the project; with downtown occupancy projections providing a key tool and grounds for a major renewal project.

⁸⁶ “Gentrification on Skid Row? We Should Be so Lucky,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/livable-city/la-ol-skid-row-homeless-gentrification-housing-20160825-snap-story.html>.

⁸⁷ “Is the Shift to Permanent Housing Making L.A.’s Homelessness Problem Even Worse?,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-transitional-housing-cutbacks-20160815-snap-story.html>.

CONNECTING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: PERSPECTIVES FROM PROFESSIONALS

When evaluating the past redesign and revitalization of Pershing Square in the context of current conditions, the primary areas of discussion were the contrast in political, social, and demographic context of the time periods. In many ways, the over-arching reasons for redesigning Pershing Square are comparable across each decade; with an overwhelming focus on ‘bringing back downtown⁸⁸⁸⁹’, and seeing this development as a catalyst for further revitalization in Downtown Los Angeles⁹⁰⁹¹. “I think Downtown LA has an amazing upwards trend. We’ve seen it over the past 10 or 15 years or so”, said Eve Critton, the Development and External Relations Coordinator at Pershing Square Renew. “If you look at the number of residents in downtown back then, compared to now and then compare it to what’s projected? It’s a very different type of neighborhood now, and it will be even more different in a couple years then it was back then”, said Eduardo Santana, Executive Director of Pershing Square Renew. Both see the change in population growth in downtown as a catalyst of positive change. The commentary and recollection of individuals both indirectly and directly involved with the Pershing Square project

⁸⁸ ELAINE WOO, “A New Chance for Pershing Square to Get a Fresh Start,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1990, http://articles.latimes.com/1990-12-02/local/me-7984_1_pershing-square.

⁸⁹ City Councilmember José Huizar, “At Pershing Square, a Legacy of Renewal,” *Los Angeles Downtown News - For Everything Downtown L.A.!*, accessed November 12, 2016, http://www.ladowntownnews.com/opinion/at-pershing-square-a-legacy-of-renewal/article_19adaa3e-42c2-11e5-ad58-af037f896189.html.

⁹⁰ WOO, “A New Chance for Pershing Square to Get a Fresh Start.”

⁹¹ Los Angeles Times, “Pershing Square’s New Design Is Flat and Simple – and That’s a Good Thing,” *Latimes.com*, accessed September 17, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/livable-city/la-oe-graham-pershing-square-redesign-20160515-story.html>.

during the two different time frames reaffirm the drastic differences in the culture, character, and occupants of downtown between each redesign period.

“Downtown, was—I don’t want to call it a wasteland, because obviously, there were a lot of people who believed in it and the community redevelopment agency, which was the public entity charged with stimulating development in downtown, was very strong, very powerful and had a lot of money at the time. So, there was a lot going on, but it was still mostly office centric. And this being L.A., people would live somewhere else, come into downtown and leave again, and so there was very little use for the open space in downtown,” said Janet Marie Smith, past director of the Pershing Square Management Association and current Senior Vice President of Planning and Development for the Dodgers. “There were not many residents, and certainly not close enough to where they would have used Pershing Square as their, ‘here’s where I’m going to go for a stroll’. The residents of downtown that were there were largely moving into Bunker Hill or moving into little Tokyo,” She explained, “I mean I’m just so hopeful, I mean downtown is so different than it was then”.

The more specific spikes and nuances of the census trends are further explained by policies, programs, and initiatives associated with each time frame. The clear spike in population density of census tract 2063 in 1980 (a census tract that has consistently been within the confines of Los Angeles’ Skid Row district), comes following an economic and political shift in the United States that caused a decrease in personal incomes, decline in affordable housing as well

as significant reductions in welfare programs⁹². These factors as well as more specific, personal situations, were the primary indicators of the increase of homeless individuals in Los Angeles⁹³. “In the 80’s you had this massive explosion in homelessness, through the 90’s,” explained Eric Ares, Deputy Director of Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN). “You see...the redevelopment of downtown because you see the story of public space in downtown change with places like Pershing Square being catalyzed by redevelopment and gentrification,” says Ares in the context of today’s redesign and revitalization. Examples of gentrification are ample around Los Angeles, however, there is rarely discussion of whether this increasingly common urban phenomenon of inequality could impact Downtown. In so many ways, a city’s downtown is thought to act as an objective vision of the city it represents⁹⁴. For this reason, a candid discussion and evaluation of possible gentrification in Downtown Los Angeles, or any downtown for that matter, is often tossed aside. The exhibited increase occupied housing units in the areas directly surrounding Pershing Square (specifically census tract 2073 and 2075, see occupied housing units above), have allowed for an increasing ‘boom’ in downtown development, with a 223.65% increase in overall property values since 1997⁹⁵, as well as new

⁹² Jennifer Wolch et al., “Ending Homelessness in Los Angeles,” accessed March 12, 2017, http://www.ced.berkeley.edu/downloads/pubs/faculty/wolch_2007_ending-homelessness-los-angeles.pdf.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Tridib Banerjee, *Urban Design Downtown: Poetics and Politics of Form*, n.d.

⁹⁵ “Downtown LA - Annual Reports & Quarterly Newsletters,” accessed April 10, 2017, <https://www.downtownla.com/about-us/publications/annual-reports-quarterly-newsletters>.

vendors such as Whole Foods, artisanal coffee providers, and farm to table restaurants that seem to cater to a niche, and desired demographic for downtown.

The leverage of more residents, businesses, investors, and civic energy have sparked momentum in other revitalization initiatives in and around Downtown Los Angeles such as the LA Streetcar Project, the Bringing Back Broadway campaign, the LA River Revitalization Corps, and the DTLA forward movement; with all initiatives focused on the partnership of civic entities and residents. “I think the downtown renaissance is real after many false starts; I think it’s actually happening this time” said Christopher Hawthorne, architecture critic of the Los Angeles Times.

There is no doubt that Downtown Los Angeles is going through a major development shift—however—can a project like the Pershing Square renewal motivate an equitable transition and outcome?

FUNDING AND BALANCING STAKEHOLDER INTEREST

Due to limited funding in the public sector, and the unfortunate bureaucratic systems of tangled red tape that often encircle city officials and their corresponding departments, major public investments such as quality public space and parks often fall out of focus before being fully realized. As a result, private dollars that enter the proposal often have substantial influence because without their financial support, the project wouldn’t necessarily happen with the same success or within the same vision or time frame. However, as previously discussed, this private grasp on public space can complicate the true equity, accessibility, and democratic nature of a space; with privatized interests often shifting management dynamics and the extent to which

certain individuals and groups feel truly welcome in the space⁹⁶. The late 1980's revitalization proved complicated when it came down to the financing and monetary support of very influential business interests and stakeholders surrounding the square—particularly wealthy real estate executives who had a separate agenda and vision for downtown Los Angeles as they saw fit for the time. Janet Marie Smith described the non-profit process in 1986 as a complicated balancing act between stakeholders, their resources, the overall goals for the space:

“[There was] some concern about privatizing a public park with too much—you know what's too much? What's the balance between saying, we're going find a way to populate it with musicians and food and cafes and all of that, and then saying, wait a minute, now we've gone too far, now it's a shopping mall. So, there was a lot of debate around that. Just as there was a lot of debate around the appropriateness of the dollars. Was this a public park and how did the city justify putting parks and recreation dollars in an overly intense way into this particular park over you know, any other. There was also the community redevelopment authority which was also a little bit of a benevolent dictator, you know, and they had all the money, parks and rec didn't have any money, *they* had all the money”.

This imbalance in power and financial influence is what ultimately led to the takeover of the project by a significant downtown business interest. “You need to have the funding. Because they brought the funding, they were able to just kind of scoop,” explained Santana.

Learning from mistakes of the past, the public sector of the current revitalization initiative set forth greater guidelines to be followed to ensure transparency and clarity for all parties involved. Eduardo Santana, Executive director of Pershing Square Renew explained the initial process of establishing power dynamics:

“The fear was, because this was being funded by a private developer, that all of our decisions—that worst case scenario—that all of our decisions were based on maximizing the benefit to that developer. So that was their fear, and one way to kind of mitigate that was to say, was to require that we do an extensive amount of

⁹⁶ Loukaitou-Sideris, “Privatisation of Public Open Space.”

outreach. Part of it was to kind of, for us to receive input beyond what we otherwise would have gotten, but also to send the right message to the public and to the city that this is something that is intended to satisfy the needs of a broad range of constituents”.

The approach to fundraising, and generating financial support during the current redesign process is part of a greater model that’s being developed as a potential best practice for revitalizing public space in Los Angeles. “Part of the model is to kind of create a non-profit vehicle to have private resources and a funnel tube,” Santana indicated as a crucial keystone in the success of the project. However, this similarity has drawn criticism and concern from various perspectives: “I’m uncomfortable with the fact that the process in many ways is being driven by the large property owners around the square” said Christopher Hawthorne. Although public-private partnerships are common in development, they are new to Los Angeles when public space is the area of interest. In both cases (the 1980’s model and the current model), a design competition was used to encompass all potential ideas and visions for a space and allow public input. “I think money’s everything, you know, one thing that I enjoy about design competitions is they allow ideas to emerge that might not come from a traditional client, architect relationship and they allow you to find talent that you might not consider for that particular job” said Janet Marie Smith of the 1986 Design Competition. And although the design competition and allowance for public input creates significant momentum for any project, “You can get people all riled up and excited about it, but it’s hard to keep the accent on that syllable for a sustained period and even harder to have people put money behind that,” explained Janet Marie Smith:

“We had gone to the CRA, they had put in an initial gift of a million or two, or a commitment. We had looked at doing a business improvements district, which had been very successful in New York around Bryant Park. We had looked at a number of federally funded and state funded programs for parks. We had looked at trying to revamp how the garage moneys could be used to go back into Pershing Square. We had looked at Jim Rouse model of how you could do retail and allocate enough money to carry more than itself.”

The current revitalization project and non-profit are approaching funding from a similar avenue, with downtown business interests and stakeholders being the primary source of potential financial backing. However, with increased private dollars comes increased weariness from the public sector. The possibility of a pay-to-play scenario depletes the legitimacy of an equitable process, with money speaking louder than words. However, given the lack of public funds and resources, an egalitarian approach to funding a public project may not be possible within current Los Angeles context, leaving other facets of project process and development to hold more weight and consequence in the conversation of equity in public space.

PROGRAMMABLE DESIGN MOTIVATIONS—

Since 1954, the State of California has allotted grants for planning-based assistance to improve technique and coordination among transportation systems and place-based amenities⁹⁷. This legislation was amended in 1974 to streamline the process further, allowing cities to invest and be more intimately involved in organizing and programming events in city space; public space. The utilization of urban and rural public space for cultural events, recreational programs, food and nightlife, and various other forms of public gathering (often under the branding of place-making) has allowed people around the world to reimagine their own community's public spaces. The ideology around place making emphasizes the importance of creating a great place, not just producing great design. The focus on placemaking in the current revitalization of Pershing Square has created a decisive shift in design-thinking and renewal process. By working

⁹⁷ Tridib Banerjee, "The Future of Public Space: Beyond Invented Streets and Reinvented Places," *American Planning Association. Journal of the American Planning Association* 67, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 9–24.

with Project for Public Spaces, a New York based non-profit, Pershing Square Renew has been able to brand and base the redesign process in creating a great place, with a platform of activation and programming. Project for Public Spaces does consultation, design, and planning work around the world under key beliefs that Placemaking should be: community-driven, visionary, function before form, adaptable, inclusive, focused on creating destinations, context-specific, dynamic, trans-disciplinary, transformative, flexible, collaborative, and sociable⁹⁸. The focus on inclusivity and adaptability of uses creates an excellent objective for the discussion of equity in public space and creating places that are truly and authentically meant for all people.

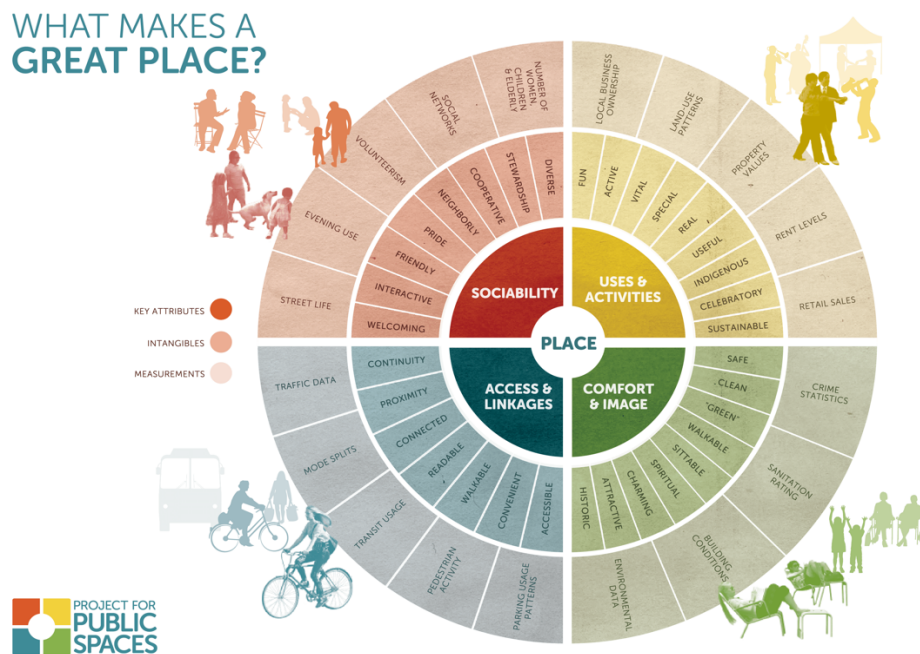


Figure 3: Measuring a Great Place⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Project for Public Spaces, "What Makes a Successful Place?," *Project for Public Spaces*, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.pps.org/reference/grplacefeat/>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

The basis in programming specifically, comes from the measurement metric developed by Project for Public Spaces which uses in sociability, uses and activities, and access, as the bases and core of creating a great place; with comfort and image being the fourth quarter of this measurement.

With the advisory and consultation of Project for Public Spaces, Pershing Square Renew and the Pershing Square Task Force developed design competition guidelines that required applicants prioritize the usage of the space in their design—a contrast with the conditions and description of the 1986 Design Competition. Program was the primary consideration when evaluating proposed designs, however, the winning design brought a crucial detail to the table that has long been rejected in the Pershing Square; a flat space without barriers, with a truly open space can be a welcoming space. But can the design be welcoming to all Angelenos, all visitors to Downtown?

One of the most crucial differences between the 1986 redesign attempt, the resulting 1990 design, and current project conditions are the motivations and intentions of the design. Learning from many decades of design-driven blunders, the current proposed design roots its layout, structure, and concept in programmable, flexible space. Brian Glodney, a Design Director and Senior Associate at Gensler Los Angeles as well as a design advisor to Pershing Square Renew reflected on the chosen design: “I think that’s one of ultimately the successes of radical flatness; is flat is inherently adaptable. If it were undulating or compartmentalized, it would just be less flexible by definition. So, I think having a platform of space that is flexible, and allows for different things to occur, at different scales, at different times, in different ways”. The proposed design came with ideas tailored to a 24-7 community, for residents and tourists alike with scheduled yoga classes in the morning, book clubs during the lunch hour, pop-up markets in the evening, and movie nights and dog park meet-ups at night:

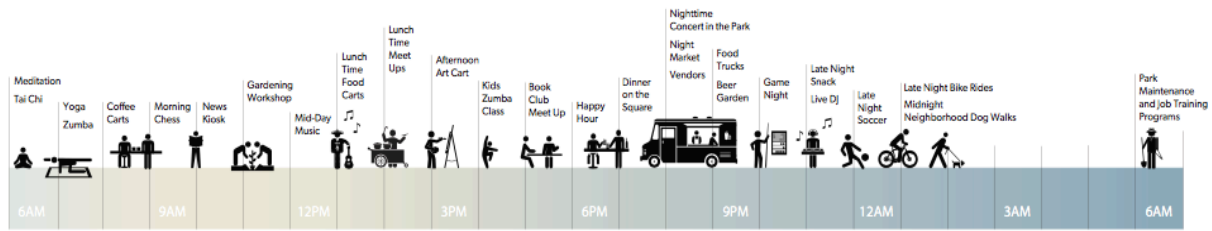


Image 9: Programmed Timeline of Pershing Square¹⁰⁰

The idea behind these programmable motivations come from the idea that this revitalization must reclaim Pershing Square as a true public space that's welcoming, thriving, and vibrant, with that crucial energy coming from a motivation to be in the space and engage with others. "I think if you take all of that out, then it just becomes another redesign, another reconstruction and that's what we're trying to avoid, you know a lot of the mistakes that happened in previous redesigns specifically the 92' redesign, where there wasn't a greater goal other than reconstruction," said Eve Critton, "it must be a process of creating a great place". This idea of placemaking, as previously discussed, has plentiful positive results in communities across the globe, however, programming focused exclusively on creating an ambient and joyous environment must be intertwined with practical programs for every facet of a community or neighborhood. "Whatever the design is, it's the policies of inclusion, it's the policies of programming. I mean I get it, everybody likes the movie nights, everyone likes the farmer's market even though that doesn't cater necessarily" as explained by Eric Ares at LA CAN:

I think now it's a matter of programming. So how are we creating programs—obviously like I said before, there's going to be movie nights and the farmer's markets, and ice skating. But there are poor folks there so job fairs and resource fairs for poor folks, again, not every day, I know

¹⁰⁰ Image courtesy of Agence Ter and Team

they're going to say there's enough homeless services in skid row, we don't have to replicate it, but parks and public space are places where that kind of thing is valuable and it might not be necessary for people who have jobs or that live downtown, but it is a public park and so if there is going to be an effort on rec and parks and other programming entities put in projects that speak to the residents here, you know? Because the whole idea is to create a park that people can come to through different projects like that, right? Well then let's invite everybody to that.

Ares's point is crucial in thinking about a new Pershing Square and allowing for and planning for more comprehensive and all-encompassing programming. The intent of an inclusive, accessible, and well-programmed space exists in current plans and in the project proposal, but there are ways for that objective to be stretched a bit farther in the realm of equity and authentic inclusion.

When comparing the programmable design motivations of the current project with the results of the 1990 redesign and reconstruction, significant variance surfaces. The design curated by Legoretta and Ollin with the advisory of MacGuire and partners, as well as the City of Los Angeles was focused on creating a space symbolic of the long history of Pershing Square as a cornerstone of Los Angeles development. Aside from the physical symbolic elements such as the fault line, orange grove, and water tower, the choice of Legoretta as the architect and the resulting design inspirations was significant for the city during that time as well. “ [I think] That there was also something significant about the Legoretta redesign as a meaningful recognition of the fact that the city and the region were becoming Latino and needed to look as a result to design cues that didn't always come from New York City or Europe and that it could look to South or Latin America or to Asia and the 90's was one of the first moments when public spaces were starting to be redesigned in that image, sort of anticipating or heralding the arrival of a post-Anglo City. Of a Latino city. So I was interested in not writing off the redesign too quickly, recognizing its flaws but I think also recognizing some of its cultural importance and I suppose that's how most major public projects are” said Christopher Hawthorne, who has not been shy in

critiquing the existing site's shortcomings. However, his insight on the symbolism and recognition of the 1990's design as a crucial moment in history is important when considering what it means to wipe the slate clean for a new design: "Legoretta was chosen by a group, let's say by a group of power brokers who were acting outside of that competition, so it's interesting that that group—it's interesting to me—that that group would turn to a Mexican architect at that moment in the city's evolution".

The scheme itself carries fundamental design techniques of cultural significance and importance: "So, it specifically, in terms of that design in terms of its color palette and its use of the walls, which are part of redoubling the sense of separation, come directly from kind of a Mexican idea of courtyard. And then of course, indirectly from the Spanish idea of courtyard architecture and an idea about the relationship between those kinds of walls and landscape that reflects Southern California or Mexican climate. So, yeah, I would say the combination of the color palette—the very bright color palette—the kind of pastel palette and the spaces that are walled off as spaces that are kind of in open-air rooms inside the square" Hawthorne describes as the primary Mexican and Spanish inspired design and architectural elements. However, Hawthorne admits that the combination of the decision to put parking beneath the square and the Legoretta design and layout have caused Pershing Square to be cut off from the life of the street and have 'produced a sense of estrangement from the city'. When evaluating the newly proposed design, Hawthorne finds the scheme, "neutral enough, let's say in sort of cultural personality to be a real gathering place". So, despite the historical, cultural and social significance of the 1990 design, a more neutral space allows for a more inclusive place. "I think that creating a space that can invite everybody is really, a difficult thing to do, you know, you have to have things available at different price points, and you have to have a space that people can really make their

own” Eve Critton commented. A more ‘neutral’ design, a flat space, a ‘blank canvas’, is hopefully the tool in allowing people to make the space their own; but not without a program to bring them there first.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: ENGAGING USERS ACROSS THE DECADES

In addition to a shift in design motivations, the extent of community outreach and engagement from the public during the two time periods have led to varying design outcomes as well as programming considerations, changing the overall approach to the public space and how it fits into the growing downtown community as well as serve as a world-class park space for the city of Los Angeles.

The approach of the 1986 Pershing Square Management Association was to reach out to specific interest groups and individuals involved in the various facets that make up public open space. By ensuring advisory and perspective from critical interest groups encompassing the various facets that intersect with public space, the Pershing Square Management Association took an expert-based input approach in addition to more broad-based community outreach events and strategy. Janet Marie Smith explained the process and reasoning for this approach:

We kind of tried to look at all the things that it [the park] might be and reach out to the various constituencies that would care. So, if you cared about parks that would involve one group that would range from those people who are members of the Sierra Club to any green advocate. So let’s reach out to those people. It’s an urban center, so where are our planners, urban designers, city activists that care about civic space, communal space, where’s that group, and it’s often found in the design and planning community. It’s preservation. It’s got a long important history. Both the physical sculptures in the park as well as its history of a place of activism. Where are the preservationists? So we tried to think of it as what is it? And where are the people who would advocate for what it is?”

Because the residential presence in downtown was not as robust as current conditions, substantial resident and community based outreach and engagement was harder to achieve; furthering the

power structures and control of the Downtown Business BID and the Community Development Authority, as well as other varied private business interests.

The proposed project process is and continues to be rooted in community outreach efforts, where applicable. Brian Glodney, one of the first members of the Pershing Square Revitalization Task Force, appointed and created by Councilmember Huizar, explained the outreach process in the context of the project timeline:

“There were two main stages of outreach. One was during the task force period, which was [a year] before the competition, where there were a series of outreach and engagement events led by us as well as a series of outreach and engagement event that Project for Public Spaces (PPS) did at the beginning of the design competition which led to the programmatic vision...Between those two components, some of it fed into the design competition language and aspirations itself, some of it fed into the programmatic vision that PPS helped develop”

While the process of engagement is crucial, the development of the kind and extent of outreach is arguably more crucial to the success of an equitable and inclusive process. Brian Glodney discussed the biggest lessons learned when creating an outreach strategy:

Engage early, before you start designing anything before you start coming up with any answers or solutions, you know ask a lot of questions and engage really early. Be really broad in the individuals and groups that you talk to—it’s not just the client you know, it’s community, it’s non profit, it’s civic, I mean depending on the project. And then the other big lesson for us, is that whatever you ask, make sure that you come back and share the results of. Maybe it is just sharing the results of what an answer might have been but also showing how those answers may have impacted design decisions.

As the design advisor for Pershing Square Renew, and someone intricately involved in the project from the start, Brian Glodney also explained specific strategies they used to capture all outlooks and overcome the obstacle of losing certain voices in the process:

We really try and tailor it to each specific project, to each specific community, to stakeholders we are going to speak with. But we have a pretty broad toolkit of things to choose from...There’s one on one meetings, there’s group meetings, there’s community workshops, there’s community presentations, there’s in-person, there’s digital. It’s multi-lingual depending on the communities you’re in, so it’s really trying to be as broad in your coverage as you can be and providing

people opportunities to be active in person if they wanted to be or if they want to be a little more passive and behind the scenes, they can do it kind of digitally, but they're not left out of the process.

Eve Critton's experience with outreach this fall echoed this sentiment: "When we had giant poster boards up in the square, for the design competition, I think we got a wider range of people because I think more people were willing to come up and talk to us because we were kind of standing there, there wasn't much they had to do, there were a lot of visual aids that they could kind of look over and give us their thoughts on and could just sort of talk to us". In addition to posters in the square, all design finalists' proposals were available online with links for public comment, allowing the more passive passers-by to participate. This kind of outreach requires numerous resources, as well as lots of time and energy devoted to ensuring a holistic overview; something a non-profit structure or public-private structure does not always allow for.

The push and pull between immediate users, program, and allowing a space for all Angelenos is at the heart of the issue of equity in the space. "I think the outreach has to be beyond the immediate community as much as possible," explained Christopher Hawthorne, "I think it involves a huge number of community meetings, well-designed process; in general I think this competition has been effective in that sense, given and compared to other ones that I've read about and see, but there's always more to be done and I think particularly there's more to be done in terms of getting the input of people who don't live in the immediate vicinity whether those are business owners, employees, or residents and trying to figure out how the open space kind of fits into kind of a larger conversation about public space and the city". While it's crucial for any space to consider its users and surrounding constituents, one could see the rapidly changing face of downtown as an opportunity to cater a new space to a desired population; to bolster a new trendy neighborhood in a city whose character arguably lies within its pockets.

However, due to initial outreach prior to the design competition, there was incentive to apply strategies that would try to pull as diverse group of individuals as possible to the project for input. “I was out in the square once a week during the farmer’s market with a few other Pershing Square Renew staff members and volunteers, and we were inviting people to sit down with us and talk with us about what they thought their ideal day in Pershing square would be,” explained Eve Critton. Outreach was focused on understanding people’s use of the Square in its current conditions as well as asking about what they aspire for in a public space like Pershing square—what programs and events they’d want to see or take part in. “So we were asking for a lot of programmatic input rather than design input and asking what they do in the square now, what they think they want to be able to do in the square in the future, whether that is with or without the redesign.” When asked about the range of individuals approached and encountered, it seems there was wide-ranging engagement: “We actually saw a different sect of the community come out and talk to us... We had a lot of the homeless population just came over and talk to us, which was really interesting, I met some really amazing people who actually came back later on in the fall which was cool, we sort of developed a relationship with some of them... It was a lot of design people, architecture people, landscape people, architects, planners, developers, things like that. But we did capture, I mean I’m still proud of us, we did capture a lot of people who just didn’t really know what we were doing and were just walking through”.

An important consideration, as mentioned previously, is not only the scope and stretch of outreach, but the amount to which each perspective is taken into consideration. During the 1986 design competition, the Pershing Square Management Association and furthermore, the city of Los Angeles, was grappling with a huge homeless population in downtown’s Skid Row district. Janet Marie Smith explained how the context of homelessness informed outreach and decision-

making processes. “Skid Row was still kind of getting its thing together and there were lots of organized efforts to improve Skid Row. You know, who are those people, how do we—this isn’t about getting rid of homelessness—this is about fueling the park with other uses, making it comfortable for everyone to be there. Serving the homeless community”. As seen previously in regard to current conditions, the community outreach for the current project took a similar approach to the issue of homelessness in Los Angeles, and specifically in the area of Pershing Square; with Skid Row mere blocks away from the space. However, although the homeless were included in the strata of individuals whose input was heard from in outreach events, and their concerns were taken in, when advocacy groups and homeless individuals looked for a greater role, their perspective was not quite as desired compared with other area interests. Eric Ares explains the obstacles Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) faced when they tried to get further involved beyond surface-level initial outreach:

“We tried to, for example when they created these, I don’t know those various tiers of advisory board, community advisory boards, you know, ‘help us redesign Pershing Square. So, at different times we tried to insert ourselves... We tried both the very broad ways like community meetings where they are very welcome to poor and homeless folks, to [trying] to get on those stakeholder or community or advisory boards that require a pretty small application and we ran people, individuals with a history of the area... They just weren’t very receptive because they had who they wanted to give input, which aren’t people who are poor and homeless”.

When asked about involving homeless advocacy groups or community groups, Pershing Square Renew placed the concerns of homeless groups and individuals with future management decisions, explaining that their concerns during outreach didn’t address physical design concerns as much as they did maintenance and management, and security policies looking forward, which were too early to be discussed given the design contract and plans were still being finalized. However, Executive director Eduardo Santana mentioned many concerns that surfaced from

homeless individuals during initial outreach were regarding the management of the park and the treatment they've received from security guards. Although it might be too early to iron out specific logistical details regarding management (given the project proposal is not completely finalized) the effect of current privatized management and subsequent policing of the space is a major contribution to the unwelcoming and ostracizing environment of the square to certain groups; in particular, homeless individuals. To fully unite the goals of equity and inclusion in a new iteration of Pershing Square, the perspectives, concerns, and ideas from all perspectives must be considered equally.

The process and curation of successful community outreach strategies is difficult to achieve and although the process from current revitalization efforts have improved upon past limitations, the true equitability of the process still could improve to ensure certain voices are heard just as much as others.

ANALYSIS BETWEEN DECADES: *PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PARALLELS AND DIFFERENCES*

When evaluating the time periods, and looking at each aspect of the revitalization project—from funds to design to political approach to people involved—it is striking to see clear parallels between both public-private partnership and non-profit structures. The key parallels lie within these factors:

Key Parallels	Key Differences
Initial funds stemming from Downtown Business interest	Stronger fundraising tactics and leverage based on changes in downtown growth trends.
Early outreach focused on guiding design competition criterion	Design competition guidelines were much more specific and limiting during the 1986 process.

<p>Primary challenges produced by mediating concerns and control between public and private sectors</p>	<p>Current project has a more intricately involved and powerful public sector representation in City Councilmember’s office and Recreation and Parks.</p>
<p>Design competition used as a means to foster public and political excitement and momentum</p>	<p>PSRenew has explicitly used inclusivity and accessibility as a project goal as well as in social media and organization branding</p>
<p>Part of a campaign focused on the renewal and revitalization of all of Downtown Los Angeles</p>	<p style="background-color: #cccccc;"></p>

The key parallels and differences each have a significant impact on the overall success of the project and the resulting reverberations in downtown. If successful, the proposed Pershing Square has the potential to completely redefine the historic core of downtown Los Angeles and the region as a whole—but will the ripple effect be based in the same goals of inclusivity, accessibility, and equity?

SIGNIFICANT PARALLELS:

For each revitalization process, in 1986 and in 2013, the non-profit vehicle was jump-started by downtown business interest funds. “We had gone to the CRA [Community Redevelopment Agency], they had put in an initial gift of a million or two, or a commitment”, explained Janet Marie Smith. Brian Glodney explained the process from 2013: “Seed money from MacFarlane partner’s project at 5th and Olive was used to then kick start the nonprofit Pershing Square Renew. Once that was kick started, some of the task force was rolled into Pershing Square Renew as the non-profit”.

Each group used early outreach as a means to understand what people wanted from a new Pershing Square. The 1986 group using broad ideas and symbolic photos to gather input on what

the design competitors should address. Janet Marie Smith explained the specifics of the outreach performed in focus groups: “We had a series of questions that were boosted by a slide presentation...that was sort of like, here are some other parks. Do you imagine Pershing square as this botanical garden? Do you imagine Pershing square as this—we had a series of recreational park images, we had a series of, as an iconic thing, a monument. So we tried to look at other urban parks and say, what are they and to present images so that we would say to people, where in the continuum do you see this. And often people saw a little bit of everything, right? So, I want it to be green, but I want it to be active”. Although executed with even more broad questions, and by asking participants to draw and ‘imagine’ their ideal Pershing Square, the key takeaways from each outreach process was the same; people wanted shade, greenery, and seating. That’s what people wanted in 1986, that’s what people want in 2016.

A similarity across each nonprofit structure is the challenge of balancing public sector demands and control with the necessary funding and expertise of private sector advisors and contributors. Both Janet Marie Smith and Eduardo Santana spoke to the crucial foundation of fundraising and appealing to stakeholders contrasted with the often stringent expectations and direction from the public side. The balance required runs a fine line between the unfortunate trend of pay-to-play development processes and loss of privately sourced creative industry and innovative design approaches. And although complicated in any development process in conjunction with a city planning process, the fact that Pershing Square is a public-space creates even more potential for a gray area in the trend of privatized public-space. As discussed by Brian Glodney when asked to give his definition of democratic space, “Public space is about social equity. Physical equity—I mean equity in all means, it means that you have the equal right as anyone else to be there. So I think that’s step number one. There’s a lot of privately owned,

public space in LA, you see a lot of brass plaques and brass lines that say, you know if you cross this line all of a sudden, you're subject to the codes, regulations, laws, rules, or whoever that building property may be and while that's a great kind of amenity, it's not true public space. So, understanding that there are a limited number of spaces that are truly public, is also really important". Finding the process to remain equilateral in the triangle between the public and private side continues to be the primary challenge of the organization.

The Design Competition: Purpose and Guidelines

For both groups, the design competition was not only a determinant in design, but also served as a significant indicator of the process and organization of resources, as well as a tactic to increase public awareness and political motivation.

"During that time, we decided to do a design competition as a way of creating excitement as well as finding kind of a diamond in ruff and find a different way of thinking about Pershing Square, while we were looking to raise money and we had hoped the visibility of the competition would help with all of that," explained Janet Marie Smith while discussing the process of the 1986 organization. Eduardo Santana explained the crucial role the city had, both Department of Recreation and Parks and Councilmember Jose Huizar's office, in garnering support and attention from the public. Articles in almost every major Los Angeles news outlet as well as other design and urbanism publications highlighted the design competition with optimism and excitement (true of the 1986 Design competition as well). Pershing Square Renew has also heavily utilized social media platforms to further outreach efforts and awareness of competition related events. For each, the competition provided a major peak in attention and momentum.

When evaluating the design competition booklet from 1986 with the program provided during the 2016 competition, there are clear similarities across the overall goals of the

competition and revitalization. The primary differences fall in specific design guidelines and criterion. The table below compares the language of the two documents for greater comparison and clarity. The underlined sections indicate key differences, *the italicized pieces point to analogous ideas*, and **the bold sections indicate the goals related to creating equitable space**.

	Pershing Square Management Association (1986)	Pershing Square Renew (2016)
Purpose	<p><i>“The design competition, for which this program is written, challenges artists and designers to propose a new central square for downtown Los Angeles; to create a major symbol in the middle of a city notorious for not having a center; to reflect the international flavor of the city; and to celebrate Los Angeles’ heritage as well as the promise of its future”</i></p>	<p><i>“This document sets forth a vision, both inspirational and grounded in the reality and understanding of what does and does not work at Pershing Square. The following project aspirations will serve as important guidelines throughout the Competition Process, but also for the long-term viability and success of Pershing Square”.</i></p>
Problem	<p>Pershing Square, as it exists today, <i>lacks a strong identifiable character</i>. It has minimal park amenities such as seating, shade, and lighting. Programmed events such as concerts and increased maintenance and security have not substantially changed the park’s image. In evaluating redevelopment issues of the park today, it is clear that these issues <i>cannot be solved by a simple face list.</i></p> <p>“Some of the redevelopment issues involve social and economic questions, <u>but many are fundamentally physical problems</u>”.</p>	<p>“To provide a sustainable platform for Pershing Square for another 150 years, <i>a reinvestment, both financially and emotionally</i>, in conjunction with a <i>redesign of the space</i>, are critical components to the success of this iconic, uniquely-Los Angeles space”</p> <p>“The vision is about a change in approach, attitude, and aesthetic. Analogous to the rapid evolution of Downtown Los Angeles, <u>it is intended to address the overall character and performance of Pershing Square rather than its specific, physical parts</u>”.</p>
Competition and Long Term Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>To establish Pershing Square as an important symbol of the center of Los Angeles</u>, while maintaining and improving its character as a park To establish Pershing Square as a social and cultural activity center for Los Angeles 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Design aspiration—<u>Promote an adaptable, flexible design that can accommodate change over time</u> Program Aspiration—Provide appropriate mix of program opportunities

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. To create an urban park that is regularly used by all groups and individuals in Los Angeles 4. To relate Pershing Square to other downtown activities in a mutually reinforcing manner 5. <i>Provide for efficient revitalization, operation, management, maintenance and security.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Brand Aspiration—Reinforce and strengthen a unique identity for Pershing Square 4. Walkability Aspiration—Bolster pedestrian access and establish the primacy of pedestrian circulation 5. Complete Streets Aspiration—integrate surrounding streets and sidewalks as compliments to Pershing Square 6. Safety Aspirations—Alleviate conflicts with vehicular access and circulation 7. Landscape Aspiration—incorporate an appropriate and sustainable blend of landscape solutions 8. <i>Operational Aspirations—support the financial and operational sustainability of Pershing Square</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Design Guidelines</p>	<p>Design Guidelines:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Image—need for physical and visual relief within the hardscape of downtown. 2. Character—should be that of a historic park. Highlight the pride of Los Angelenos in the city’s heritage and increase the visitors awareness of the city’s evolution 3. Name—competitors may make recommendations for new name 4. Major Features must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance area • Greenhouse/ Crystal palace—structure to house a restaurant/kitchen and siplay exotic plants and flowers 5. Additional features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water features • Newsstands, flower stalls, refreshment stands • Metro rail Entrance Portal • Bus Shelters • Park lighting • State of the art decorative and artistic lighting 6. Important Considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seating • Pedestrian Circulation 	<p>No specific design guidelines given in order to encompass all potential interpretations of the space from various design teams, however, much of what is indicated as guidelines for the 1986 Design Competition is included in the proposed design of 2016.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security • Vehicular Access • Transit Shelters 	
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When comparing each design competition program, it is incredible to think that such similar sentiment, wording and goals for the same space could be presented three decades apart.

PERSHING SQUARE; A POLITICAL SPACE —

As discussed in the history of Pershing Square presented in the background of this paper, Pershing Square has an extensive past (and present) of acting as a central gathering space in Los Angeles for discussion, protest, demonstration, and political movements. Every interviewee that participated in this study mentioned and discussed the physical placement of Pershing Square as significant for Los Angeles in addition to recent exemplifications of Pershing Square acting as a democratic space and living up to its tradition as a central gathering space. Christopher Hawthorne, who wrote an article following the historic Women’s March the day after the inauguration of President Trump, detailed the ways in which Pershing Square’s current scheme was insufficient in facilitating successful protest: “The march might have marked a return to form for Pershing Square, for many decades L.A.’s most important political space. Instead it revealed the limitations of the square’s unpopular 1994 makeover by the late Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta. Instead of being able to see from Olive into the center of Pershing Square,

our view was blocked by the purple and yellow walls Legorreta added along its edges¹⁰¹”. He elaborated on his thoughts regarding the proposed design, explaining that he believes that taking out the walls, flattening the space, and reconnecting the square with the street would absolutely make it more effective as a political space. Brian Glodney echoed this sentiment when asked about the design perspective of political space:

“Design is really important in that you can very easily design a space not to accommodate for it [public demonstration, protest]. You know, make it too small, put up too many walls, put too much topography in it, put too many bolted benches in, put a basketball court in the middle, put a parking ramp on the side, I mean whatever it might be, there are lots of ways where you can actually design for public gathering not to happen, but there’s also very easy ways where you can say let’s design a space that is flexible and adaptable, so as uses and intensity of uses, and intensities of gatherings grow and contract, the space can actually handle that. And I think that’s one of ultimately the successes of radical flatness is flat is inherently adaptable”.

When asked if this redesign could have the capacity to bring a center of gravity to a city so scattered and devoted to its neighborhood culture, Brian Glodney was hopeful and connected his reasoning to the women’s march as well:

“Absolutely. I think the clearest definition of that and the role of Pershing Square plays is the women’s march that happened a couple weeks ago. It is at times a neighborhood asset, it is at times just sort of a contextual neighborhood thing, it is at times a district amenity, and then at other times it’s an asset to the city. It became the point of civic engagement for the women’s march that you know, I don’t even know the numbers that ended up, but tens or hundreds of thousands of people ended up at Pershing Square. And it became the epicenter of a civic demonstration that the whole city embraced. So, I think it’s all based on time and at times it can be the place where the city as a whole of Los Angeles can come together”.

¹⁰¹ Christopher Hawthorne, “In L.A. March, Grand Park Performs Well with Huge Crowds; Metro and Pershing Square, Not so Much,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-womens-march-los-angeles-pershing-square-20170121-story.html>.

Janet Marie Smith offered her perspective on Pershing Square's political and activist rich history in the context of our current, 2017 times: "I went to Washington D.C. for the women's march right after the inauguration. And I guess I was so focused on D.C. because that's where I was that it wasn't until the end of the day that I realized that Los Angeles had had 750,000 people and I thought; WOW. That's amazing. And I was thrilled to hear that Pershing Square was at the heart of that. And I thought, that tells me something that it has not lost its relevance as a place of congregation for the voices that matter in our times".

Pershing Square has continually struggled to establish a distinct identity within Downtown Los Angeles, however, the common thread among its 150-year history is its tradition as a political space (See Appendix C).

EQUITY AS AN ANCHOR FOR DEVELOPMENT

Public space is inherently meant to be accessed, used by, and embraced by the public; whoever that label includes. The complicated systems—political, social, institutional, structural, historical—have convoluted that inherent truth and forced a necessary reclamation and re-understanding of what public space must look and operate like in our current times.

So, is intention enough to activate and curate an equitable space, an equitable city? Each person I talked to was able to define equity in public space and relate the goals of the project to such intentions for the space:

"To ensure that this isn't just a park, but that it's a space for everyone."

"We want the space to accessible to all and used by all and all includes everyone".

"I think large-scale open space is open space for the whole city and it has to be for region, and it has to be designed with all of those possible users in mind".

“Because the whole idea is to create a park that people can come to through different projects like that, let’s invite everybody to that”.

“What it comes down to is the freedom for thoughts and expressions to be exchanged”.

But, can these intentions, these understandings of equity, these ideals of design, be translated through the current process and proposed project? Looking back at the New Urbanist criteria presented, the Pershing Square renewal process can be evaluated from a theory perspective:

New Urbanist Equity-Based Guidelines and Interpretation for Pershing Square:

1. Build community in an increasingly diverse society--create places that draw people together; support social equity; emphasize the public realm; forge strongest connections.

The project outlines comprehensive goals of inclusion and attracting a diverse range of individuals to participate in the Square. Eve Critton elaborated this goal by explaining their description of diversity: “You really want to see this gender, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity in the space.”—this aligns with the New Urbanist requirement of a diverse society and drawing people together. The public-private aspect of this project is a step towards emphasizing the public realm and creating a place for people to embrace a space and make it their own—an important power and capacity of a legitimate public space. From a design standpoint, the proposed scheme promotes social equity, with ‘radical flatness’ giving physical cues of welcoming, inclusion, and accessibility. The details of management and programming to come, will determine if this aspect of New Urbanist criteria will be met.

2. Advance sustainability at every level--foster smarter growth; address the economic, social, and cultural underpinnings of sustainability.

By incorporating copious green space areas and a variety of vegetation and species, the proposed scheme for Pershing Square creates a potential framework for an environmental education

platform; something that was laid out clearly in design competition instruction and described by Brian Glodney as such:

One of the key things that we asked the teams to look at was how to make Pershing Square a model of sustainability that could be prototypical for all of L.A. especially for Rec and Park open spaces, or private open spaces, up to your individual front yard or back yard. How do you actually learn from the space from a sustainability standpoint, from a resiliency standpoint? How do you imbed those things into the project so that they're not just buried beneath the surface, but so there are actually things as a user, as an individual you can engage with and learn with.

In addition to this focus on greening and environmental sustainability, the proposed scheme incorporates plans for a street diet along one side of the square to include protected bike lanes, an updated metro portal on one corner, and potential stop for the proposed Downtown Streetcar project. This emphasis on public transit connectivity and sustainable transit options furthers the integration with varying components of sustainability. By connecting Pershing Square with public transit and enhancing the network of public amenities in Downtown Los Angeles, the area furthers its accessibility to all Angelenos, creating more equitable attainability.

3. Expand individual choice; build densities that support greater choice; build interconnected transportation networks; provide choices that enhance quality of life.

The proposed design scheme was developed to act as a canvas for activity; to be interpreted, used, and employed in as many ways as possible. The basis of equity in public space is held within the extent to which an individual feels they can express their thoughts and beliefs openly and freely. By expanding the possibilities of the space, Pershing Square can strive to meet this complex metric.

4. Enhance personal health--promote public health; increase personal safety.

Green space in densely urban contexts can improve health outcomes and provide ample benefits for furthering physical and mental health¹⁰². By creating more public green space, Pershing Square provides an opportunity to distribute health benefits to more Angelenos, particularly to those that may not have such access in their home or immediate neighborhood vicinity. The safety and security of the space will only come from progressive and holistic and security management and training policies to ensure the space is not only accessible for all people, but welcoming to all people. Any space that participates in discriminatory practices, whether intentional or not, cannot be considered an equitable space under this principle.

5. Make places for people; respond to the human sense; integrate history, nature, and innovation; emphasize identity; celebrate history; respect and engage nature; introduce innovation

The core of the current renewal project is based in place-making, a process focused, designed, and oriented towards the happiness of people that participate in a community space. Place-making is a process that responds to people—incorporating and honoring existing uses and space identities while reforming a space to its greatest people-pleasing capacity. Of all the New Urbanist principles, it cannot be denied that the redesign of Pershing Square is wholly focused on people; residents of Downtown, visitors from far and wide—all with equal right to enjoy and engage with an equitable public space.

To achieve this goal, there might not be a perfect solution, however, there are multiple avenues in political configuration and public policy that can address and carve a pathway for ongoing and future public space projects based in equitable outcomes.

¹⁰² Lee and Maheswaran, “The Health Benefits of Urban Green Spaces.”

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations are broken into three levels of implementation: public-space design best practices, public-space management and maintenance policies, and public space programming best practices.

PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN BEST PRACTICES: EQUITY AS AN ANCHOR

In order to be more wholly applicable across varying public space contexts, the following best practice guidelines for design are somewhat general, however, pin-point crucial aspects of an equitable public space; from the design perspective.

1. Must include active connection with surrounding streetscape—through sightlines, pedestrian access and open edges, the public space must be able to be seen into and out of from all street vantage points.

The importance of active edges on a public streetscape can determine the economic and social vitality of a place as well as act as a catalyst for public gathering and discussion; a cornerstone of successful public space curation¹⁰³.

2. Must incorporate a substantial element of greenspace if environmentally feasible.

The copious physical and health benefits of public park space disproportionately benefit higher-income white neighborhoods¹⁰⁴, therefore, extending a requirement of at least one-third of a public-park space to be dedicated to green space is crucial in ensuring health benefits are

¹⁰³ Jon Lang and Nancy Marshall, *Urban Squares as Places, Links and Displays: Successes and Failures*, n.d.

¹⁰⁴ Byrne and Wolch, "Nature, Race, and Parks."

accessible to all communities. However, given varying environmental conditions of space in the context of climate and sustainability considerations, this proportion of green space can be negotiated only under evidence of environmental degradation and unsustainable practice. Additionally, climate-tolerant plantings must be evaluated before presenting evidence of unreasonable environmental hardship.

3. The design must include an element of transit connectivity. This is inclusive of but is not limited to:

- Bus stop within a two-block radius
- Metro/Subway/rail stop within a three-block radius
- Connected/Protected bike lane within a one-block radius
- Parking requirement met within a four-block radius

To increase the measure of equity in the park and draw more users, the primary modes of transit used to arrive at a park destination should be public and/or sustainable modes of transit (i.e. bus, metro, rail, bike, streetcar, etc.). Despite its widespread use and acceptance as the dominating form of transit in our society, cars encompass a specific user that is not inclusive of all residents of an area. In Los Angeles, specifically, low-income individuals of color are less likely to have reliable access to a car, making them more reliant on the bus and metro. By ensuring that public parks are most accessible through these systems, cities can create a more equitable access framework while incentivizing public transit systems; which are more sustainable anyway. Los Angeles Metro has already taken strides toward the sustainable aspect of transit by attempting to incentivize this connectivity through higher parking charges at metro stations¹⁰⁵. However, from

¹⁰⁵ "Some Thoughts On Metro's Modest New Parking Policy Proposal," *Streetsblog Los Angeles*, July 21, 2015, <http://la.streetsblog.org/2015/07/21/some-thoughts-on-metros-modest-new-parking-policy-proposal/>.

an equity standpoint this does not create better structures for those who need this connectivity and reliability most. Public space is a treasure of the city and connecting park amenities with other public services will further strengthen the public realm and reclaim the authenticity of public space in an urban framework.

PUBLIC SPACE ELEMENTS, MANAGEMENT, AND MAINTENANCE

To ensure equal treatment and true non-discriminatory security policy, major reform must occur in public space amenities, management, and maintenance. The following policy frameworks outline the necessary changes that must be adopted and adapted in public space leadership.

1. All public space must have easily accessible water fountain and bathroom facilities.

“Easily Accessible” is defined as: an unobstructed location, accessible for any individual regardless of physical ability or potential physical limitations, accessible without requiring the inquiry of security or park staff personnel, and any other instance that would prohibit an individual from accessing facilities. Public restrooms are a key indicator of the true equity of a public space. The need to use a bathroom at any point during the day or night cannot be reserved for the privileged who can find bathroom access in stores, restaurants, and other facilities that often require a paying customer. It becomes inherently problematic when access and usage of restrooms in a public space is at the discretion of a private security guard or park staff member unlocking the facilities. Public restrooms must be fully accessible during operating hours.

2. All park staff, security, and management must go through sensitivity, crisis management, and conflict resolution training to ensure non-discriminatory policies are being actualized.

As related to the discretion taken by certain security officers in regards to bathroom access and usage, any security staff or city staff working in the park must go through comprehensive sensitivity and crisis management training. Due to the current reality of privatized security presence in publically managed and owned parks, consistency and objectivity must be established between different sector roles. Park security staff must be equipped with the skills to remain composed and calm during any potential conflict or disturbance in the space. The militarized and policed association with public space¹⁰⁶ will not disappear overnight, however, there are steps to be taken to create places that feel safe and welcoming to everyone.

3. Social service and public amenity programs should have resources available in the park space.

City social services including but not limited to:

- mental health counselors
- crisis management specialists
- social service professionals
- community advocacy groups
- public education and library information

Programs can provide resources including but not limited to: brochures, flyers, business cards, and advertisements for specific events. Connecting individuals using public space with other public programs and facilities is another step to strengthen the public realm in a city and ensure access to need-based programs are being fully realized.

¹⁰⁶ A. Madanipour, "Why Are the Design and Development of Public Spaces Significant for Cities?," *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 26, no. 6 (December 1, 1999): 879–91, doi:10.1068/b260879.

PUBLIC SPACE PROGRAMMING GUIDELINES

Public space in a city as diverse as Los Angeles must be programmed with all needs in mind. Depending on the physical limitations of the space, public space programming should include but is not limited to the following types of event:

1. Concerts and musical performances
2. Art installations, art walks, art fairs
3. Job fairs
4. Community resource information sessions
5. Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, physical fitness courses, etc.
6. Book clubs, book exchanges, pop-up libraries
7. Farmer's Markets*
8. Sport-bracket competition programs
9. Community empowerment workshops**
10. Youth specific programs
11. Teen specific programs
12. Adult specific programs

*Must contract and program with merchants that accept EBT, WIC, and other forms of food stamps or food subsidy programs. See below.

**Case by case basis regarding specific programmable elements and approach to work-shops. See Below.

The events suggested above come from examples of successful community activation and place-making projects around the world curated by Project for Public Spaces. However, specific to these suggestions, are crucial considerations raised by various interviewees that target equity in programming more specifically.

In Los Angeles County, there are approximately 53 farmer's market vendors that accept WIC (specialized nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children). Although the City of Los Angeles City Council unanimously approved legislation that requires farmer's markets to accept

food stamps¹⁰⁷, the need-specific program of WIC should also be considered when choosing vendors for a farmer's market program. It is suggested that a 15% proportion of vendors should accept WIC, at *the very least*.

Community Empowerment Programs can cover a huge range of systemic, institutionalized issues, such as health, education, food justice, and environmental problems. Models of successful programs range from large-scale events with speaker series and panels, to smaller hands-on learning seminars and workshops¹⁰⁸. By providing such programs in public space, parks can allow for greater access to crucial community resources and programs that develop more equitable structures in our cities and communities.

CONCLUSIONS

It is crucial to ensure that the public spaces that exist and continue to develop are not limiting in their design and are able to welcome and accommodate the needs and desires of all who might seek it. When looking at Pershing Square as a case study, this idea can be seen quite clearly.

As the city of Los Angeles' oldest public space, the five-acres that make up Pershing Square have been dug up, twisted, carved, and paved over in its nearly 150 years. In fact, if one looks back at the trends of renewal, Pershing Square has been reimagined, redesigned, or

¹⁰⁷ Garrett Snyder, "Every Farmers Market in L.A. Will Now Accept Food Stamps," *L.A. Weekly*, May 16, 2016, <http://www.laweekly.com/restaurants/every-farmers-market-in-la-will-now-accept-food-stamps-6927575>.

¹⁰⁸ N. Wallerstein and E. Bernstein, "Introduction to Community Empowerment, Participatory Education, and Health," *Health Education Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1994): 141–48.

reconstructed every 20-30 years, with this new revitalization initiative following that pattern closely. Is it possible to find a timeless design of the space; a design that will endure turbulent political times, rapidly changing skylines, and influxes of a shifting population.

Although not all funding is currently in place for the redesign of Pershing Square, Pershing Square Renew is poised for greater success in interesting and drawing contribution from downtown business owners, property owners, and significant stakeholders than the Pershing Square Management Association in the mid 1980's. Having a thorough community outreach process drive the design process as well as overall vision for a new Pershing Square has allowed for a more comprehensive user-perspective of the space. The importance of including and evaluating the opinions and attitudes of specialty interests such as green advocates, historians, and city activists should not be over-looked as a key strategy in any renewal project for a city like Los Angeles. However, to create "a space for all", one must hear from the users of the space, the non-users of the space, the tourists and the locals, and all who lie in between; from every walk of life. While community engagement and outreach strategies in the current iteration have gotten stronger at encompassing a larger group and explicit goals to be inclusive of all relevant perspectives, it is still difficult to fully capture all points of view and even harder to incorporate and consider each when handling a fragile non-profit structure and continuing to balance public and private wishes and wants.

Inclusive public space has the potential to build community, to foster discussion among differently minded individuals, to allow space for leisure or protest. As much as Pershing Square has been the heart of Downtown, the heart of Los Angeles; public space is at the heart of our public realm and our public power. By creating spaces that are designed for all, built for all,

managed for all, and used by all, our civic centers can extend their intentions of equity into reality.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Not all interview questions were used for each interview, as the clarifying questions and follow-up questions were dependent on the context and role of each individual. However, the following are questions that drove the main structure of each interview.

For individuals involved with the past revitalization:

- What was your role in the revitalization of Pershing Square?
- How did your work present itself for the final product?
- How were you involved with community outreach?
- What did that outreach look like?
- How is/was equity considered in the renewal of the space?
- What design elements were successful?
- What would you change?
- Is there a target audience or population considered in the design?
- Do you think the revitalization changed the neighborhood of DTLA?
- Were any design elements controversial or unpopular?
- What feedback did you receive regarding the revitalization?

Current Renewal Project:

- In what ways do you think the new design will affect the use of Pershing Square?
- What was your role in the revitalization of Pershing Square?
- How did your work present itself for the final product?
- How were you involved with community outreach?
- What did that outreach look like?
- How is/was equity considered in the renewal of the space?
- What design elements were successful?
- What would you change?
- Is there a target audience or population considered in the design?
- Do you think the revitalization will change the neighborhood of DTLA?
- Were any design elements controversial or unpopular?
- What feedback did you receive regarding the revitalization?

Urban Design Professionals:

- How do you think equity presents itself in a space?
- What design tactics and strategies are currently most popular? Trending?
- How design theory taken equity of space into account?
- How can urban design theory be applied in real-world spaces?
- What are the most important factors of a successful public space?
- What were the prominent design goals and intentions for this space? Were they clear from the very beginning?
- Who was responsible for the development of these goals (yourself, the developer, city?)
- Did you have some intentions that were not realized?
- What types of users did your design target? Who suggested them?
- What uses and activities did your design want to a) encourage b) discourage? Who determined them?
- Were you targeting for a plaza environment which is a continuation of the street, or an environment that is more secluded and inward-oriented?
- Were there any problems or conflicts of interest through the process?
- What was your primary contribution?
- Is there anything you would change if you were to design this space again?

APPENDIX B: COMPLETE LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

The following individuals participated in formal interviews conducted for this study:

- **Eve Critton**—Development and External Relations Coordinator, Pershing Square Renew
- **Eduardo Santana**—Executive Director, Pershing Square Renew
- **Brian Glodney**—Design Director and Senior Associate at Gensler Los Angeles, Urban Design Advisor to Pershing Square Renew
- **Christopher Hawthorne**—Architecture critic for the Los Angeles Times, Professor of Urban and Environmental Policy at Occidental College
- **Eric Ares**—Deputy Director of Finance and Communication at Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN)
- **Janet Marie Smith**—Senior Vice President of Planning and Development at Los Angeles Dodgers, former President of the Pershing Square Management Association

APPENDIX B: PERSHING SQUARE HISTORICAL PROTEST PHOTOS



Pershing Square
Debaters 1939



Pershing Square
Debaters 1949



Pershing Square
Hanging of Hitler 1941



Park Protestors
1948

Parking
protest
1949



Protestors 1963



Selma protestors
1965--filling up as
much accessible
space in the square
as possible



Protestors of the Vietnam War 1966



Protestors in 1981



Protestors in 1982



Protestors in 1982



Protestors in 1983



Protestors in 1985



Protestors in 1985



Protestors in 1985



Protestors in 1985



Protestors in 1988



Protestors in 1988



Justice for Janitor Protestors 1989



Protestors in 2000



Occupy Wallstreet Protestors 2011



No Dakota Access Pipeline Protestors
2016



Protestors Women's March 2017