

A NEW WAY TO PARK ON THE STREET

Evaluating the Spring Street Parklets in Downtown Los Angeles

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RESEARCH TOPIC

Parklets are small public spaces created by converting car-parking spots into attractive areas for people to gather, recreate, or relax. First conceived in San Francisco in 2010, these spaces often feature benches, tables, chairs, and plants, but they can also have game tables, exercise equipment, and other innovative street furniture. The creation of these spaces provides an opportunity for residents and local businesses to build community and enhance the charm of the street, all at low cost to cities or public agencies. The city of Los Angeles installed its first parklets in early 2013, and this study seeks to examine the effect of these two parklets on their adjacent downtown community.



STUDY

For comparative purposes, researchers collected data before and after the installation of two parklets on the same block of Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles. The study examined behavior inside the parklets as well as on the entire block, and used a combination of approaches to assess the influence of the two parklets: counting pedestrians and cyclists, observing behavior within the parklets, surveys of pedestrians and parklet users, and interviews with business operators.

MAIN FINDINGS

- **Surveys showed parklets are- first and foremost- a neighborhood amenity.** The majority of the people in the parklets and on the street live in the area and walk to the parklets. (Figure 1) The highest rates of parklet use and pedestrian volumes occurred on weekends.
- **Pedestrian volumes generally increased on Spring Street after the parklets were installed.** The greatest increase in foot traffic was recorded during the evenings, when the amount of pedestrians increased by 74%. Additionally, 63% of people arrived on Spring Street and in the parklet by foot in 2013– an increase of 50% from the previous year. (Figure 1)
- **Positive perceptions of personal safety increased substantially from 2012 to 2013.** These results were statistically significant, and may reflect a relationship between the overall improvements on Spring Street and people’s impressions of the parklets. (Figure 2)
- **There were very few incidents of public drunkenness or panhandling, and pet waste.** Smoking was the most commonly observed nuisance element, and one that may require more strict enforcement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand parklet projects into other neighborhoods that want them.
- Tailor parklet design to the needs and tastes of their surrounding neighborhood.
- Select locations for parklets that complement parklet functions and vice versa.
- Ensure consistent stewardship and maintenance, and enforce guidelines for use.
- Intersperse opportunities for physical activity at the parklets, and include motivational signage in exercise areas.
- Continue to monitor and evaluate the parklets over time, identifying their positive as well as negative impacts.

Figure 1

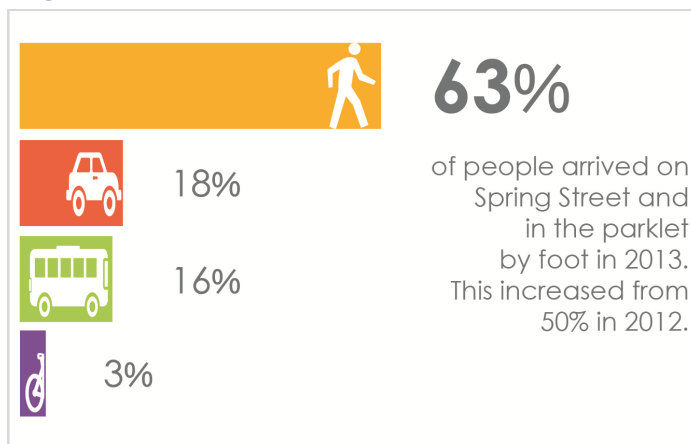


Figure 2

The parklet ranked significantly higher in terms of **maintenance, safety, and cleanliness** compared to the street.

