

DOWNTOWN PEDESTRIAN MALLS: THE EFFECTS OF
STREET CLOSINGS IN CENTRAL BUSINESS
DISTRICTS ON LAND USE; AN
INVESTIGATION OF THE
PHYSICAL CHARACTER
OF STREETS WHICH
BECOME MALLS

by

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Degree Date: June, 1979

A dissertation in the Department of Public Administration
submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and
Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy at New York University.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is concerned with central cities which have created pedestrian malls by the closing of streets to traffic, in attempts to revitalize their declining downtown areas. There were fifteen such closed-street malls in census-defined central business district cities in the United States as of 1974. Ten of these are studied in detail in this dissertation; the other five are eliminated for methodological reasons.

The ten cities are studied with respect to the hypothesis that there are consistent characteristics among them of pre- and post-mall conditions in their mall areas.

By "characteristics" is meant non-residential land use change, pre- to post-mall, and the physical characterization of the streets, in terms of dimensions and the bulk and distribution of structures. Typically these physical characteristics are the same pre- and post-mall, but their consistency among the malls is studied.

City directories are used for each city to tabulate numbers and types of businesses by street, pre- and post-mall. It is shown that a considerable majority of numbers of businesses in the mall vicinity is comprised of those located on the mall street, one street parallel to it, and one cross street linking the two. It is these three streets which are analyzed in detail. Businesses are categorized as to type according to the Standard Industrial Classification Manual.

Sanborn Atlas Maps are used to provide the raw data for physical characterization of the streets. Axonometric projections of the streets and their structures are presented, as well as tabulations of street dimensions and bulk (volume) and distribution of structures.

This information on each mall is placed in the context of the population and business trends in the surrounding city and Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area using data from the Census of Business and Census of Population.

Analysis of the tabulated data confirms the hypothesis with respect to numbers and types of businesses, but the hypothesis is rejected with respect to physical street

characteristics. Changes in types of businesses occurred against a background of continued overall decline, though there is evidence that the decline may have been slowed. A consistent reordering of types of business is found among the ten malls in terms of an increasingly retail-oriented business posture on the mall street, a departure of the large department stores for suburbia, increases in professional and government offices on the parallel street, and consistent large decline on the cross street with no compensating gain in any particular sector of business.

The tabulations show extreme contrasts among the malls in linear dimensions and other physical criteria, dictating rejection of the hypothesis as it pertains to physical street characteristics. It is shown, however, that there are observable consistencies in the relative bulk and distribution of structures in the malls.

The result of this study is an improved understanding of the role which a mall can play as a hoped-for cure to the economic and other ills of downtowns. The adjustments which the economy makes to shifts in population and falling income in the downtowns are ameliorated somewhat by the act of closing streets to traffic and transforming them into malls. Consistent changes in the business character of the mall area are to be expected; these are to a substantial degree independent of the physical character of the streets.