SoftGIS survey in Pacific Beach – Selected findings

This is a summary report of the Pacific Beach softGIS-survey undertaken in cooperation with Aalto University, Finland, and the Beautiful PB initiative in 2013. In addition to the authors of this report, the team of Aalto included Jonna Kangasoja and Marketta Kyttä.

Data collection

The data reported here was collected with the www.softgis.fi/pacificbeach -questionnaire. The responses given latest by November the 19th are included in the reported analysis. Possible later responses have also been stored.

There were altogether 287 respondents in the database as the data was retrieved from the Aalto server. This included nearly 80 people who had only gone through the survey without taking the time to respond. This excludes those who had entered the site via “Try without participating”.

Figure 1: A screenshot of the survey: using softGIS to collect place-based data from the residents

The respondents were recruited by sending e-mails to community groups and by spreading invitation cards on various occasions from early May onwards. The Beach & Bay Press published an article about the survey on the 23rd of May and spread the message in social media. Several community organisations also included the invitation in their newsletters. Beautiful PB had a link to the survey on their website until the 17th of November.

Figure 2: A handout with invitation to participate
Respondents

Approximately 185 respondents provided more or less full background information about themselves and responded to most parts of the questionnaire. The average age of the respondents was 46.4 years. 58% were women. Most of the people indicated that they were working or self-employed (130), and 37 were retired. Only 9 were students and 4 unemployed. About 10 respondents were housewives or parents staying at home with their kids. Of the respondents 30 had mainly grown up in Pacific Beach, 22 elsewhere in San Diego, 43 elsewhere in California, and 80 elsewhere in the US. Only 9 had grown up abroad. In terms of current residential status, nearly all respondents were permanent residents (134 owners, 33 renters). Part-time residents were 9 (renters 5, owners 4), non-residents (10). Respondents with children in their household numbered 75. The average amount of cars per household was 2.2.

Localisations

The respondents did altogether 1574 localizations to the map-based questions of the survey, which corresponds with 8–9 localisations per respondent. Most of the localisations were made during May and June. The highest peak (190 localisations) of the graph marks the time as the survey invitation was included in the newsletters sent to the parents of Pacific Beach school children. The earlier peak (140 localisations) was the 23rd of May, as the Beach & Bay Press hit the street with the survey invitation on its first page.

Perceived quality of the environment from four different perspectives

The perceived quality of PB as a living environment was considered to be fairly good. On the scale from very bad (=0) to very good (=100), the average of the responses was close to 70 in each perspective. However, it must be noted that only some 90 respondents took this part of the survey.
Of the open feedback given on this survey page, certain themes emerge:

* PB’s great potential which is not fully utilized

“The local natural environment has stellar possibilities. Even the rundown business district has possibilities if the perception of it being a place to overconsume alcohol could be changed.”

“The possibilities are great, but it feels like a huge swath of PB (Garnet, west of Fanuel) has been left to business owners and people who don’t care about PB or its potential.”

“The opportunities are great but they are underutilized.”

“This community is not living up to its quality of life potential because of the business district.”

* good residential quality contradicting with one-sided business mix

“As a small community, it is a nice place. However the large amount of tourists and the large bar scene can make it uncomfortable.”

“Neighborhoods with stable homeowners - good. The business district very bad, the rental areas mixed but rental areas nearer the business district - very bad.”

“Many neighborhood areas are very nice. Most of the business district is rundown, ugly, dirty, bad mix, too many tattoo parlors, sex shops, bars, bar-like restaurants.”

“Let’s face it. Commercial PB is a college aged town environment. We don’t have cute storefronts, we don’t have nice landscaping along the main roads, we don’t have nice restaurants, we don’t have convenient access to I-5 and we don’t have a department store like Target or Walmart. We are serverly under ratio to park and rec field space for youth sports leagues. We do have a lot of nightclubs and bars, a lot of traffic, a lot of ugly garrish storefronts, a lot of tattoo parlors, a lot of sub-par eateries and an over abundance of CVS’s. Can’t we attract any classier businesses?”

“Garnet Avenue used to be like a small town, but now the vendors are not community-based.”

* the attractivity of the beach and park areas; bike-friendliness

“I LOVE PB for it's proximity to the beach and walk/bike friendly set-up.”

“City meticulously maintains parks - very clean! Always people on bikes, jogging, walking from 6am-sunset”

“I live at the beach!”

“There are numerous wonderful things about living in Pacific Beach. I love that you can walk or ride your bike everywhere. No need to use the car.”
* contradicting interests of the families and the party-makers

"I know there is a large college population in PB, but there’s also quite a few post college folks, and not all of us want 2 for 1 shots, bumping music and cheap pizza."

"PB needs to emphasize the number of families that live here! Most people not from here think of it as a college town where everyone parties. With 3 elementary schools within a 2 mile radius the family aspects of PB should be highlighted more!"

"I have lived in PB for 25 years and the alcohol proliferation has created an unsafe, unpleasant community on the weekends and much of the summer."

"The Garnet business district has so many functional and social possibilities but the businesses there are extremely child unfriendly and unwelcoming."

Positive and negative aspects on maps

A series of thematic maps has been produced to identify the zones that seem to matter the most to the respondents. The overview map with selected comments (Fig. 5) has been prepared from the same dataset as the one with exact locations of the quality factors (Fig. 6).

Figure 5: An overview of the perceived environmental quality, with selected comments of the respondents
Based on the figures 5 and 6 one can conclude the following:

- Only or predominantly positive evaluations are characteristic to the beach and park areas.
- Only or predominantly negative areas are few (e.g. areas close to streets with heavy traffic).
- The zone that was given a lot of feedback on and was perceived rather negatively than positively is the corridor of Garnet Avenue. This is clearly the most important and most challenging area when improvement issues are being considered.
- Areas with smaller problems include the vicinity of the Interstate 5 (lack of greenery, non-attractive entrance to PB). However, the dataset being considerably small, it is possible that the voice of only a couple of respondents makes some zones (e.g. southern Crown Point) appear more problematic than the case would be with a more comprehensive coverage.

Figure 6: An overview of perceived quality with exact locations of positive and negative quality factors
Figure 7: Improvement proposals

When studied in parallel with the improvement proposals, the centrality of Garnet Avenue persists in the feedback: people really wish to see the business area improved. The party zone of the ocean front and the park areas along the Rose Creek and the Interstate join in as areas where people wish to see upgrading.

Everyday network in PB

Figure 8: Everyday places of all reported categories, both in terms of density and exact locations
The everyday network as reported by the residents (Fig. 8) further underlines the centrality of Garnet Avenue for the community. It is central for shopping, for running errands but also for leisure time (Fig 10 & 11). However, it is not often mentioned among the most important walking and cycling routes (Fig. 9), which tend to follow the shorelines instead.

Figure 9: Important walking and cycling routes: positive and negative evaluations often coinciding
Some clear hubs according to the type of activity are visible (Fig. 10 & 11); shopping hubs the most obvious.

**Figure 10:** Locations of different activity types: All activities (see also Figure 11); running errands, sports & outdoors; shopping; leisure; work.
Figure 11: Locations of different types of activities undertaken by the residents

Everyday network in relation to perceived quality

When relating the density of the PB everyday network and other feedback on PB (positive and negative aspects as well as improvement suggestions), it is interesting to see where frequented places and areas getting the most feedback (both positive and negative) overlap. It also tells something that there are large zones in PB that were hardly evaluated at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Thin Reported Everyday Network</th>
<th>Dense Everyday Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much Feedback</td>
<td>Negative dominating:</td>
<td>Both positive and negative: Garnet Avenue only negative: no areas only positive: most of the beaches &amp; parks; Turquoise Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the zone around Ingraham - Grand crossroads; Interstate entrance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Feedback</td>
<td>“Mere” residential areas</td>
<td>Cass Street</td>
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Explicit improvement proposals

The open feedback included several concrete improvement proposals:

“Various gateways into PB need to be made more attractive. Especially the Garnet and Mission Bay Drive NW corner is a major eyesore. The Pacific Beach Drive divider area North of Crownpoint School could be a functional school/community garden. The Mission Blvd Corridor (Beach to Bayard, between PB Drive and Garnet) could be a terrific pedestrian mall, restaurant, and shopping area.”

“Would love to see more neighbors getting rid of their front lawns and replacing with veggie gardens or low water use succulent gardens.”

“More bike lanes”

“The bar owners are monopolizing the BID and the BID needs to go and be replaced with an organization that includes resident representation.”

“Consider removing car traffic from parts of Garnet, get businesses/restaurants into the Marina Village/Quivera Basin area, allow restaurants to serve liquor but limit the late-night bar atmosphere.”

“The big improvement opportunities are paving the roads, reducing street parking at the curbs, eliminating the RV / boat street parking, change the street lights from crime orange to appealing white, transition Garnet from tattoos to nicer restaurants / stores and finally, eliminating the overhead power lines. Having trolley service from PB to downtown and LJ / UTC would be fantastic.”

“I hope future community plan will include new architectural review constraints that allow real and useful input by neighborhood residents. I would also advocate downzoning and tighter height restrictions as new development is really ruining the charm of the community.”

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“New nature walkway across Kendal Frost Marsh. Let the public enjoy this beauty instead of signs that say "keep out".”

“Bus route direct from mission blvd to sea world. Without having to walk, as there is no sidewalk from quivera to sea world even though the sdmtd route planner will tell you to walk.”
Resident clusters (based on the data collected until mid-June only)

The background data about the residents included a section on resident profiles. People were asked to evaluate themselves along ten dimensions. The respondents tended to be very homogeneous and statistically (also due to the small number of respondents) it was possible to tell only two resident clusters apart from each other. As a reference point from our earlier studies in Finland, we have usually been able to find at least three “urban tribes”: neighbourhood-minded (or “neighborers”), urban-minded (“busybodies”) and comfort-minded (or “homebodies”). The cluster 1 of Pacific Beach comes closest to the Finnish comfort-minded, but so did the cluster 2.

Summary

There is a clear tension between PB being both an ordinary town where people wake up early to go to work and school, and a beach community attracting party makers. In concrete physical settings these perspectives have to be reconciled both along the main service/business axis of Garnet Avenue and the ocean front walk. Areas with exclusively positive feedback include the majority of the beaches and all parks. All residential areas seem to be considered fairly unproblematic, too.

A particular challenge of the PB is that the most criticized areas within PB overlap with the most frequented ones. For those who appreciate Garnet corridor as it is, this for sure is no problem. For those who wish to see it developing to a true town center with services that please all resident and visitor groups at the same time, there is much to do still.