



# Downtown revitalization and urban space: A case study in downtown Bryan, Texas



Cecilia Giusti<sup>a</sup>, Clarice Maraschin<sup>b,\*</sup>,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, Texas A&M University, Langford Architecture Center, A-344, 3137 TAMU, College Station, TX, USA

<sup>b</sup> Department of Urbanism, School of Architecture, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Sarmiento Leite St. 320, Suite 520, Porto Alegre, Brazil

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 27 February 2016

Received in revised form 12 June 2016

Accepted 23 June 2016

Available online xxxx

### Keywords:

Downtown

Revitalization

Impacts

Urban spatial structure

Small-city

## ABSTRACT

Many cities worldwide are making efforts to revitalize their downtowns. However, limited attention seems to be given to the evaluation of these redevelopment processes. The objective of this paper is to analyze the main impacts of downtown revitalization on urban spatial structure. Our case study is Bryan and College Station, two small-cities comprising a continuous urban area in central-east Texas, and we focus on downtown Bryan revitalization process. The evaluation is addressed from socio-economic and spatial perspectives, and the methodology is based on a comparative analysis of some key indicators. The performance of the indicators is compared in time (before and after the beginning of revitalization efforts) and also in different spatial scales. The results show an increase in land values, reversing the depreciation of downtown properties; however the effects on population and local economic activity indicators showed mixed results. After 15 years of efforts, downtown Bryan is undergoing a process of recovering its centrality but the resulting development pattern is spatially uneven until now. The paper ends with some recommendations regarding the evaluation of the revitalization efforts.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Several researchers are now discussing the process of recovering downtown areas; while this may appear to be only a U.S. phenomenon, it has proved to be an international concern (see for example Bagnera, 2009; Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012; Botelho, 2005; Gatica, 2011; Gharib, 2014). In U.S. cities the “suburban fever” of the 1950s, boosted by the construction of highways and increasing use of the automobile, made the centrality of functions offered by business centers less important. A vicious cycle ensued, wherein remaining businesses were forced to close or relocate as the number of downtown visitors declined (Robertson, 1999). Further, public policies governing banking regulations were often biased toward new construction and single-family suburban housing, and federal funding of the Interstate Highway System over urban public transportation had the effect of promoting suburban growth (Duany, Speck, & Lydon, 2010). As suburbs blossomed, older neighborhoods around cities began a long period of decline, losing residential population and also retail and commercial activities, leading to high levels of vacancies and abandonment in traditional downtown areas.

By the late 1970s and 1980s, many cities realized proactive measures were needed to counteract the deterioration, and communities began to

organize with the goal of revitalizing downtown areas (Faulk, 2006). The decay of downtowns has impacted to some extent both large and small cities; however, large cities' downtowns have attracted more attention in the literature (Faulk, 2006; Robertson, 1999). Large and small city downtowns have many differences: small-city downtowns are more human in scale, not plagued with traffic congestion and fear of crime, not typically dominated by large multinational corporate interests, lacking large signature projects, featuring different retail structures, not divided up into districts, closely linked to nearby residential neighborhoods, and more likely to still possess a higher percentage of historic buildings than large cities (Robertson, 1999). This author also identifies the five major problems confronting the downtown areas of small cities: attracting new development, attracting people on evenings and weekends, competition from discount stores and suburban malls, vacant/underused retail space, and parking. Traffic circulation and crime are not main challenges.

Assessment of the impact of downtown revitalization efforts is important to maintaining political support of the community and taxpayers for continuing such efforts (Burayidi, 2001). Such evaluation also enables programs and policies to be periodically updated in order to reflect continuous change occurring in historic centers with cyclic feedback from the end user (Gharib, 2014). Cities do not seem to be giving enough attention to evaluating the impact of downtown redevelopment programs (Burayidi, 2001:293).

The objective of this paper is to analyze the main impacts of downtown revitalization processes. We must consider that revitalization includes many different initiatives (programs, policies, actions), both public and private, and that impacts generally result from the synergy

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [cgiusti@arch.tamu.edu](mailto:cgiusti@arch.tamu.edu) (C. Giusti), [clarice.maraschin@ufrgs.br](mailto:clarice.maraschin@ufrgs.br) (C. Maraschin).

<sup>1</sup> Research done while Dr. Maraschin was a Visiting Scholar at Texas A&M University, TX, USA. (September 2015 – February 2016).

of such actions, rather than one specific initiative. In this sense, our focus is not evaluating the effectiveness of specific initiatives but assessing their combined impact on downtown spatial structure. We will focus on Bryan, a city in Texas with 77,139 residents whose downtown had experienced decline for about four decades and is in the process of recovering. This city is next to another small city, College Station, with a population of 96,000 and no downtown, which has grown almost as a suburb of Bryan. Together they compose the core of U.S. Census-defined Bryan-College Station Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). We ask what are the features and the main impacts of the downtown Bryan revitalization process so far. This paper analyzes this issue from socioeconomic and spatial perspectives. The methodological approach proposed in this study may be applicable to other cities, contributing to a systematic evaluation of downtown revitalization efforts.

The article is organized as follows. The next section presents a brief review of literature on evaluation of the impacts of downtown revitalization. The following section presents the case of Bryan and the process of downtown revitalization. The fourth section discusses the scope, methodology, and sources of data used in the study. The fifth section presents the results of the analysis, and the last section concludes with final considerations and a few recommendations.

## 2. Impacts of downtown revitalization

In the urban planning literature on the evaluation of downtown revitalization, we find some methodologies focusing on policymakers' perceptions of what is critical for the viability of their downtowns. Walzer and Kline (2001) focus on the economic viability of downtowns, examining the perceptions of policymakers in a sample of U.S. cities smaller than 250,000 residents. The results show that the overall condition of downtown business is regarded as stable but not expanding, and the competition from large retail centers is seen as an important factor affecting downtown prosperity. Farst (2003) surveyed city managers in a sample of 157 small cities (5 to 50,000 residents) in Texas about the components and main challenges of downtown revitalization. The results pointed to the importance of sound infrastructure and the availability of revenue to finance redevelopment projects. The evidence suggests that master planning and encouraging private development as a future contributor to the tax base are the most important tools for downtown revitalization. The main challenges are finding and keeping effective leaders committed to the downtown program and creating and maintaining a multi-functional downtown (Farst, 2003:65).

Bias, Leyden, and Zimmerman (2015) explore the perceptions of policymakers regarding the viability of their downtowns in a large sample of 263 small cities (between 25,000 and 100,000 residents). The results show that policymakers appear willing and able to tackle the provision of public services within their control but are struggling with ways to keep the local private-sector economy viable. Policymakers perceive that suburban sprawl (or more simply competition from businesses outside the downtown) is affecting the viability of their downtowns. With businesses not performing at optimum levels, quality employment is hard to find, and the idea of attracting people to live downtown is more difficult because potential residents do not perceive the downtown area to be economically (and perhaps socially) viable. These studies rely mostly on subjective perceptions and highly important aspects to be considered in the evaluation.

Researchers in urban economic development focus upon more objective measures of downtown revitalization's effectiveness, closer to our approach. Faulk (2006: 629) considers that the literature evaluating downtown development strategies is primarily descriptive, detailing such facts as the number of people attending a festival, the spending generated, the number of buildings rehabilitated, and the number of jobs created. According to the author, few attempts have been made to compare jobs, businesses, and housing growth between downtown and other local areas (Faulk, 2006:630). In her work, Faulk explores the evaluation of downtown revitalization in two cities, Jeffersonville

and New Albany, Indiana. Changes in population, housing, business activity, and property values are considered by the author as good indicators of the health of a downtown area. The relative changes in these indicators are accounted for in three separate components - the downtown, the city excluding the downtown, and the remainder of the county - in two moments in time (1990 and 2000). Although Jeffersonville and New Albany have many of the same policies and programs in their downtown areas, the results of the study revealed considerable differences in the indicators, suggesting that Jeffersonville is further along the downtown development process than New Albany. The author concludes that downtown development is an incremental process, different for each city, and the organization, development, and implementation of small and large projects are key to the successful revitalization of downtown areas.

Some research explores which indicators are relevant to measuring downtown revitalization efforts. Burayidi (2001) studies five small communities (40,000 to 100,000 residents) in Wisconsin through seven indicators: changes in tax base, real property investment, office space occupancy, number of businesses, population density, residential population by income, and employment by industry classification. Burayidi (2013) also discusses some qualities of resilient downtowns: retail development, residential population, presence of immigrants, civic and cultural facilities, designated historic and heritage property, design guidelines (pedestrian friendliness and downtown gathering place), civic leadership, and downtown development authority (Burayidi, 2013:196). Our study adds to the literature on downtown revitalization evaluation, bringing together social, economic, and spatial dimensions in this analysis.

## 3. Case study: downtown Bryan

### 3.1. General characteristics

Bryan and College Station are located in Brazos County, Texas, in the center of the region known as the Texas Triangle, anchored by the metropolitan areas of Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Austin-San Antonio (Fig. 1). The two cities together have 173,139 inhabitants. College Station is home to the main campus of Texas A&M University, the fourth-largest university in the United States and the largest in Texas, with over 59,000 students.

In 1859 Bryan was established on 640 acres in Brazos County with a grid pattern of north/south avenues aligned parallel to the railroad, with east/west cross streets. In 1860 the Houston and Texas Central Railroad came to Bryan, and rapid growth occurred as a result. Bryan was transformed in 30 years from a rough-and-tumble temporary railroad boomtown into a permanent trade and population center, and by 1870 Bryan was a bustling center of commerce (Burris, 2009:1). In 1876 the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (later to become Texas A&M University) was established just 4 mi south of Bryan. The city continued to grow over decades with an economy initially connected to farming and later to the oil and petrochemical industry (City of Bryan, 2006:4).

In the annexation history (Fig. 2) we observe that, prior to 1940, the city's expansion was primarily southward along the railroad and Texas and College Avenues, which connected Bryan with the campus of Texas A&M. The most significant boundary expansions occurred during the 1950s, extending the city south to a contiguous boundary with College Station. The construction of the Texas Highway 6 bypass in the late '60s influenced the migration of many businesses on Texas and South College Avenues, namely large-scale retailers and car dealerships, from these central locations to the bypass, a trend that continues today (City of Bryan, 2006). Since 1970, the majority of new development was toward the largest economic generator in the region, Texas A&M University.

The demise of downtown accompanied the 1960s' demographic shift, characterized by the coming of suburbs and malls. "With modernization the center of retail and commercial activity moved ever further away from old Downtown until nothing was left but vacant old

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1008155>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1008155>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)