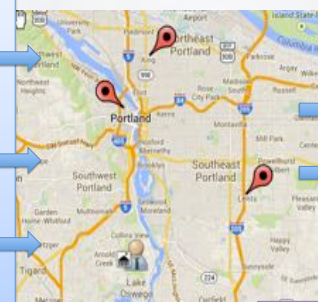


Urban Renewal For Whom? The Distribution of Environmental Amenities in 3 Portland Neighborhoods

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Background

This thesis is about urban renewal in Portland and the distribution of “environmental amenities” in 3 selected neighborhoods. Urban renewal in Portland is a process of neighborhood change that is mediated by the private sector and the Portland Development Commission which represents the public sector. Environmental amenities can be defined as physical features of a neighborhood that prove beneficial to residents. Environmental justice literature¹ shows that poor communities and communities of color are disproportionately burdened with negative environmental conditions. What about the inverse, or positive environmental conditions? My thesis asks: **How evenly distributed are environmental amenities in Portland?**

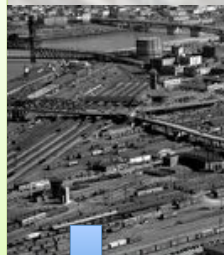


Methods

I selected the neighborhoods of Lents, Albina, and the Pearl as the three vary significantly in size, demographics, and affluence. Data on PDC urban renewal efforts was compared to data I compiled from sources that highlighted resident’s preferences for amenities in their neighborhood.

The Pearl

- Historically industrial area 1860s-1980s
- Portland’s transition into post-industrial economy left many empty warehouses, industrial sites, and forgotten blue-collar cafes by the 1980s
- Considerable public and private investment from 1990s onward
- Enjoys an astounding amount of environmental amenities.
- Less than 1% of Portland’s population



Albina

- Historic center of Portland’s black community following the collapse of Vanport in 1948
- Displacement of residents and businesses due to large PDC-sponsored projects 1960-80 (Emmanuel Hospital, what is now the Moda Center)²
- Disinvestment in environmental amenities during that period as well
- Rapid shifts in demographics began in the 1990s. (Alberta Arts District)
- With environmental amenities on the increase, equity remains the main concern due to long history of institutionalized racism
- Present-day “Trader Joe’s” controversy



Lents

- Self sufficient suburb/small town 1892-1912
- Repeatedly neglected by city government due to its distance from downtown and lower income class
- Post-WWII freeway development bisected the town center and the box-store boom that began in the 1960s crushed many local businesses.³
- While a few success stories, the neighborhood severely lacks many key environmental amenities, and the area struggles to attract private investment.
- Close to \$100 million has been spent by the PDC in attempts to revitalize the neighborhood⁴
- Part of East Portland, the most diverse area of Portland⁵



Racial Differences by Neighborhood (%)⁶
 2010 census

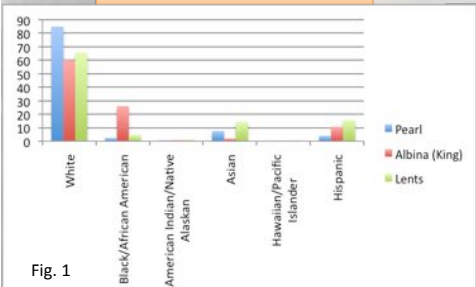


Fig. 1

Preferences for Development of PDC-owned land on NE Alberta & MLK (originally planned to be Trader Joe’s)-community meeting responses

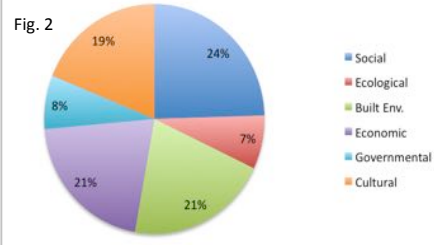


Fig. 2

Conclusions

Put simply, environmental amenities are not equitably distributed throughout Portland. More important is why they aren’t and have not been, as well as what can be done to create a more even distribution. My results demonstrate that the (less than) 1% of Portland that lives in the Pearl enjoys a disproportionate amount of public investment on their behalf. Albina has seen public investment, but only since neighborhood demographic change has occurred. One conclusion is that the PDC has a goal for the neighborhood in mind that doesn’t necessarily involve the goals of lower income or non-white current residents. In Lents, there is a lack of general development success to speak of, even with considerable public investment. It is clear that while urban renewal has the capacity to create neighborhoods that enjoy a high concentration of environmental amenities such as the Pearl, poor communities and communities of color have not historically been served by this process and are currently far from equally served by it.

References: ¹Robert D. Bullard. 2011. *Environmental Health and Racial Equity in the United States Building Environmentally Just, Sustainable, and Livable Communities*. Washington: APHA Press.
²Gibson, Karen. “Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Displacement, 1940-2000.” <http://www.kingneighborhood.org/history/Bleeding%20Albina-%20A%20History%20of%20Community%20Disinvestment.%201940-2000.pdf>
³Grava, Corinne P. 2004. *The Portland Edge: Challenges and Successes in Growing Communities*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
⁴Mein, Aaron. 2014. “Razed & Confused: \$95 Million Spent to Revive East Portland’s Lents. Whence the Rebirth?” Accessed January 28. http://www.week.com/portland/article-21792-razed_confused.html
⁵Mein, Corey. 2014. “The Other Portland.” Accessed February 27. http://www.week.com/portland/article-18071-the_other_portland.html
⁶<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/article/376008>

Fig. 1: While the Pearl District enjoys a considerable amount of environmental amenities, it is the least racially diverse neighborhood in this study. While still maintaining significant Black/African American populations, Albina neighborhoods have seen losses in those populations since the 1960s-70s.² Note: King neighborhood chosen for this chart due to location of Trader Joe’s plot (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: While the PDC was pushing the development of a Trader Joe’s, it is clear the community surrounding the site had much more they were interested than a grocery store. Note the high value places on social and cultural developments.