EXAMINING NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE THROUGH THE LENS OF PLACE-KEEPING: A PARALLEL CASE STUDY OF THREE INNER CITY COMMUNITIES IN LOS ANGELES

A Research Paper

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Regional Planning

by

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May 2024
CORNELL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE, ART, AND PLANNING
DEPARTMENT OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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Degree: MASTER OF REGIONAL PLANNING (M.R.P.)

Title: Examining Neighborhood Change through the Lens of Place-Keeping: A Parallel Case Study of Three Inner City Communities in Los Angeles

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ABSTRACT

This research paper contributes to the field of place-keeping literature, offering insights for understanding the preservation of physical settings and culture within marginalized communities amidst the prevailing focus on place-making in planning. Through a case study of three neighborhoods - Echo Park, Chinatown, and Westlake in Los Angeles - this research delves into the dynamics of gentrification, particularly focusing on Westlake. As new development plans coincide with mega-event planning and other city planning initiatives, predominantly minority communities face increased vulnerability. While gentrification in Westlake has received less attention, it appears to mirror patterns observed in similar minority neighborhoods like Echo Park and Chinatown. Across these communities, historic struggles for place-keeping highlight the importance of resistance and resilience against the pace of change through community engagement and space (re)activation by adding utility to ordinary, neglected, or underutilized spaces. These strategies offer valuable lessons for urban planners and other local government officials seeking to provide support and a safety net for vulnerable communities to create models for sustainable and equitable development.
Maritza Vasquez is a native Angeleno raised in the community of Westlake, which holds a special place in her life. Growing up in Westlake allowed her to gain deeper insights into the life of a marginalized community subject to increasing urban challenges, particularly environmental justice.

In 2022 she earned her Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies and Bachelor of Arts in History of Art and Architecture from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Maritza is finishing her Master’s in City and Regional Planning at Cornell University. Post-graduation she aspires to move back to Los Angeles in hopes of being an environmental and community advocate in planning.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my advisors, Dr. Jenni Minner and Dr. Stephan Schmidt, for their support and guidance throughout the development of my project. Their invaluable advice allowed me to approach my project in a more challenging and inspiring way.

I would also like to thank my parents for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. Their constant motivation and belief in me have been instrumental in my success, and I am forever grateful for their love and support.

Above all, I would like to thank my fellow neighbors from the community of Westlake, for being a great source of inspiration for me. The passion for this community and the commitment to its vitality have been a driving force behind my project. Their stories and experiences have enriched my understanding of the cultural and social fabric of my beloved hometown.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

USDAC: U.S. Department of Arts and Culture
GRAPI: Gross Rent as a Percent of Housing Income
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary urban planning has heavily emphasized place-making, as opposed to place-keeping. In doing so, I argue that planning risks neglecting the unique identity and character of communities that have already cultivated a strong sense of place. Place-keeping is a strategy to retain claims to a community’s particular historical place; it critiques and counters creative place-making policies that can negatively impact existing communities (Crisman & Kim, 2019). Development pressures in Los Angeles threaten the neighborhoods where people lack socio-political power. While this pressure was initiated by the need to address the current housing crisis, it has been further amplified by preparation for mega-events which include the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Summer Olympics. The construction inherent to the preparation of mega events and other urban renewal projects has significant indirect impacts on the built environment, such as infrastructure and transportation which can have disproportionate impacts on the communities experiencing redevelopment pressure. The effects of urban planning decisions and their long-standing outcomes concentrate in historically marginalized communities near Los Angeles’ urban core. The impacts are particularly notable in areas with limited socio-political power, emphasizing the role of place-keeping strategies in preserving the identity and resilience of these neighborhoods, as exemplified in the case of Westlake, Los Angeles.

In the Westlake neighborhood of Los Angeles, a predominantly Latino neighborhood 1.5 miles west of Downtown Los Angeles, active engagement and public interventions with the community and the built environment has served as an effective practice for preserving identity and community assets, and creating spaces that counteract displacement. The distinction between passive acceptance of gentrification and redevelopment, characterized
by a place-making approach will be examined alongside an active place-keeping approach focused on identifying practices that support community residents to shield them from displacement. This paper will delve into the relationship of people relative to themes of change in three different inner city communities to examine how these changes can inform Westlake's continuity by extracting safeguarding strategies as well as planning initiatives that increase vulnerability from development pressures. Overall, the study aims to inform planning practices to promote the creation of a sustainable, mixed-income, and culturally rich neighborhood that is inclusive.

By employing a parallel case study approach, Westlake, Chinatown, and Echo Park were examined for their historical and contemporary patterns of gentrification as inner cities. Inner cities, characterized by inter-generational poverty, limited educational opportunities, poor health, and high levels of segregation (Egede et al., 2021). When these neighborhoods attract attention and investment after a period of neglect, residents often confront challenges associated with these changes. This relationship allows for the impacts of gentrification to be cross-examined with the impacts on community place-keeping endeavors which often also manifest as economic opportunities. Despite their geographical proximity, these neighborhoods have evolved into distinct ethnic enclaves, each facing vulnerability to gentrification due to relevant themes such as location, housing, transportation, and green space. These themes focus on the influence of the changing built environment in the social context of the study sites and were identified by the author using urban planning concepts and knowledge of the community. Furthermore, the author acknowledges the privilege of education and the opportunity to conduct research in their hometown of Westlake, recognizing potential biases and demonstrating appreciation for the cultural facets present in
Los Angeles as a whole.

The subsequent sections include a literature review discussing place-keeping and critiques of place-making, followed by a methodology detailing case studies for each community, supplemented by interviews assessing values and concerns in Westlake. The analysis section delves into the histories of each community, highlighting gentrification triggers and community resistance strategies. Finally, the conclusion has recommendations for place-keeping in these communities, with an emphasis on Westlake, to offer broader suggestions for urban planning practices in new developments.

Figure 1. Neighborhood Boundaries used in this Study

Neighborhood boundaries were determined using the following sources: Westlake (Westlake Community Plan | Los Angeles City Planning, 2024), Echo Park (Echo Park, 2019; Kamin, 2019), Chinatown (LA Chinatown Community Land Trust, 2024)
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing existing planning literature, there is a noticeable gap in the inclusion of place-keeping within the field of urban planning, particularly concerning its relationship with the evolving built environment as a consequence of evolving interests from top-down planning practices. Coined by Wilde in 2008, place-keeping refers to the effective management of quality places once established (Dempsey & Burton, 2012). Existing literature emphasizes the role planning legislation and practices have had in fostering social exclusion through real-estate development interests with mechanisms like racial covenants and zoning codes. However, there is often limited attention given on the effects of physical changes in the built environment on social health and community continuity in particular, contrasting the concepts of place-keeping versus place-making (Schindler, 2015). While scholars and practitioners have been successful in reimagining and enhancing aesthetics of a place for improved public space quality, there still exist limitations in ensuring that these environments are inclusive and available to diverse socioeconomic groups (Keidar et al., 2024).

This research aims to address this gap by exploring both physical and social variables to identify place-keeping strategies associated with managing tangible changes in the built environment. Critiques of the place-making concept include those by cultural activist and USDAC National Cabinet, Minister of Belonging Roberto Bedoya, who highlights the importance of fostering human relationships rooted in place rather than merely creating physical spaces (Bedoya, 2021). Additionally, community activist, Jenny Lee further emphasizes the multifaceted nature of place-keeping, stressing the preservation of cultural memories, community stories, and the social fabric of neighborhoods. Jenny Lee
and Roberto Bedoya counter the idea that development is more than creating anew (Bedoya et al., 2014). They argue that, “It [development] is not simply about preserving and renovating old buildings – with the possibility of uncontrolled gentrification – but it is also about keeping the cultural memories attached (Roche, 2016).” By integrating ideas from scholars and practitioners like Bedoya and Lee, a better understanding of place-keeping that incorporates both physical and social dimensions, can contribute to a better theoretical framework in urban planning that prioritizes community well-being and cultural preservation alongside physical development.

Individuals who live in marginalized communities exert significant influence on the built environment through various means, such as resistance, adaptation, or assimilation. This interaction often gives rise to urban "informalities," which are manifestations of unmet needs in the face of top-down planning. The historical narrative of urban planning is far from straightforward, as evidenced by the nuanced role of segregation and racial discrimination, central themes in gentrification literature, and critical theories of urban change (Davis, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; 1997; Smith, 1996; 1997). Understanding this complex history is relevant in the context of neighborhoods studied, marked by the enduring impact of historic redlining practices and current development pressures (City of Los Angeles Hub, n.d.).

**Space (Re)Activation and Place-keeping**

Urban renewal practices are not an unknown phenomenon in Los Angeles. Referred to as, “a set of plans and activities to upgrade neighborhoods and suburbs that are in a state of distress or decay,” several factors signal for urban renewal, especially in light of incoming mega events and the city’s initiatives to accelerate housing development as a
response to the homelessness issue (Richards 2014, p. 6867). However, urban renewal practices in Los Angeles contributed to the rising appeal of “edgy” city life and an emerging art scene coupled with low rents for commercial opportunity and low property values. This appeal has targeted East Side communities like Echo Park and Chinatown (Lin, 2008). However, urban renewal often encounters criticism due to the disconnect generated from the original context of the site while new development aims to adhere with the changing environment. This challenge becomes more pronounced with housing and large-scale projects (Chan 2008). Revitalization is also critiqued, raising concerns about potential displacement resulting from improvements, including the risk of pricing out existing residents (Vigdor 2007). In contrast, (re)activation takes a different approach where redevelopment efforts aim to restore vitality to a space while harmonizing with what is already on the ground. In this case I present how community stakeholders, also known as “place-keepers” actively engage with the environment to restore vitality to spaces (Kimball & Thomas, 2012). Rather than seeking to directly counteract gentrification, these place-keepers aim to sustain the essence of their community by enduring physical changes and upholding its unique cultural fabric. In the context of Los Angeles and the communities studied in this research, place-keepers include street vendors, community organizations, and small businesses. By actively engaging in (re)activation efforts, these stakeholders not only contribute to the restoration of vitality but also advocate for inclusive and sustainable urban development practices that prioritize the needs and well-being of existing residents.

Place-keepers also endure physical changes by remaining rooted in the community and preserving its local identity through diverse activities. This entails not only revitalizing the physical environment but also safeguarding the cultural heritage and social fabric of the
area. By maintaining a balance between revitalization efforts and the preservation of community character, place-keepers play a crucial role in shaping sustainable and inclusive urban development trajectories. These place-keepers employ strategies aimed at preserving the physical character and local identity of the community, thereby resisting displacement and maintaining the authentic essence of the neighborhood. Through their actions, place-keepers serve as stewards of community continuity, ensuring that redevelopment efforts contribute do not get in the way of diminishing the community’s cultural heritage and social fabric.

**Place-making as a Challenge to Place-keeping**

While planning trends have favored the more popular term, “place-making”, this approach may not entirely align with communities that have an established locality conglomerated with activities, experience, and ambiance. Navigating the complex interplay between the introduction of creative development and the pre-existing tapestry of established communities requires recognizing this nuance. To ensure the success of new developments, planners must help communities navigate the intricate relationship between the old and the new as a means to correct historic and current socially exclusive practices to create sites of endurance and belonging in both the physical realm (Young, 2023).

The difference between place-keeping and place-making presents a relevant distinction in the field of urban planning because it highlights two approaches for shaping and maintaining urban spaces, each with its own set of objectives and implications. While place-making often involves the creative activation of public spaces through artistic interventions, recognizing that this term, particularly in its common usage as "creative place-making," does not necessarily prioritize or fully address the needs of communities. As
highlighted by Bedoya, place-making initiatives can sometimes inadvertently contribute to community erasure or neglect. This critique not only challenges conventional standards of new development but also prompts a closer examination of the limitations and potential pitfalls associated with certain place-making practices.

Place-keeping focuses on the preservation and enhancement of existing community identity, culture, and heritage within a neighborhood or urban area. It is tied to everyday urbanism which aims to “facilitate daily practices and meet people’s social and cultural needs, which are usually neglected by policymakers and urban planners (Adebara et al., 2023, p.14; Amin Chase, 2008; Chase et al., 1999). Therefore, in the context of these communities highlighting the unique character and social fabric of a place, often through the protection of historic landmarks, support for local businesses, and community engagement, contributes gives meaning to places. In contrast, place-making involves the intentional creation or revitalization of public spaces to enhance their functionality, attractiveness, and utility. While place-making aims to improve the physical environment and stimulate economic development, it may sometimes overlook or overshadow the existing social and cultural assets of a community. Place-making, if not approached thoughtfully, may contribute to cultural erasure by imposing generic or homogenized outcomes that do not resonate with the local context. By recognizing the distinction between place-keeping and place-making, urban planners can adopt more holistic and inclusive approaches to urban development that prioritize the needs, aspirations, and identities of local communities.

In inner city neighborhoods, people's historical relationships with the built environment, coupled with their efforts to adapt and resist, highlight the inadequacies of conventional planning. By examining how residents navigate and shape their surroundings
to meet their needs, researchers can gain valuable insights into the dynamics of urban change. Therefore, this research will highlight the importance of incorporating grassroots perspectives and understanding local histories to develop more responsive and sustainable urban planning interventions.

**Themes of Neighborhood Change**

The themes of neighborhood change were selected based on historical research and firsthand observations relevant to the studied communities, functioning as drivers of both physical and social change. Shifts in these factors often act as precursors to gentrification or displacement. Gentrification is spurred by a combination of individual and public investments, with public initiatives such as transit, housing, and green space developments playing significant roles (Miller, 2019). Moreover, location plays a critical role in gentrification as it determines accessibility to economic opportunities and amenities.

**Location**

Location plays a key role in contributing to gentrification, especially when places are in proximity to the urban core. When neighborhoods are in proximity to urban cores and undergo urban decay, they become economically attractive. Urban decay results in lower property values, creating an incentive for investment in revitalization as a means to “restore” quality of life (Vigdor, 2007). However, this economic advantage can have adverse effects on long-time residents who may face displacement due to the escalating costs of living. In the context of planning, preserving the identity and social fabric of these neighborhoods through effective place-keeping measures becomes significant. The strategic management of space (re)activation over time is essential to safeguard the interests of those who have been instrumental in sustaining the community for generations. Furthermore, as urban sprawl and
expansion transform city edges into new development hotspots, the pressure on existing communities intensifies. While urban revitalization may bring potential benefits, assessing the impact on current residents is essential to implementing strategies to mitigate displacement, ensuring the preservation of community cohesion.

**Housing**

Housing plays a crucial role in place-keeping as it does to gentrification, as there is an essential relationship between housing in its built form that influences place-keeping pertaining to identity. Recognizing this connection can inform urban planning practice, especially when built form contributes to community identity, assessing composition and proposed amenities can be important for place-keeping, or retaining “claims to a community’s particular historical place” when interventions are insufficient (Kim & Kang, 2023, p.9). The introduction of new development may also raise conflict with pre-existing dynamics. As Billig observes, the construction of new housing developments within or near established neighborhoods creates a distinct sense of place in, “both the new development and the adjacent old environment, with mutual effects between the two” (Billig, 2005, p.117).

New housing development projects, driven by new ordinances and policies aimed at streamlining affordable housing initiatives poses both opportunities and challenges (Draft Affordable Housing Streamlining Ordinance, 2023). Firstly, such initiatives aim to expedite the construction of affordable housing units, potentially alleviating the housing shortage in Los Angeles. Additionally, streamlining processes reduces project oversight, facilitating approvals and implementation. However, the accelerated pace of these developments may sacrifice quality and community engagement, resulting in generic outcomes that lack a sense
of place and identity (Search, 2019).

**Green Spaces**

The presence of sought-after amenities, particularly green spaces, can cause susceptibility to the phenomenon of green gentrification, thereby posing a threat to the preservation of local identity. While all communities are deserving of access to safe and high-quality recreational areas, strategic approaches of healthy cities value universal access to green spaces (Urban Green Spaces and Health, 2016). However, access to green spaces is increasingly recognized as a valuable asset, yet it also poses challenges, particularly in historically disinvested communities. Research indicates a correlation between the intensity of gentrification and the function and location of parks, which can contribute to escalating property values and subsequent displacement (Rigolon & Németh, 2019). Despite the presence of green assets in these communities, homelessness remains a prominent issue in the green spaces in the studied communities, particularly Westlake and Echo Park. This challenges the assumption that greening public spaces universally benefits all urban inhabitants, as homeless individuals often appropriate these spaces for their private needs, highlighting the complexity of addressing both green space access and homelessness in the context of gentrification (Dooling, 2009).

**Transit**

Transit is often acknowledged as a potential catalyst for gentrification, particularly in urban areas where enhanced accessibility correlates with rising property values (Padeiro et al., 2019). This term is often called transit-induced gentrification (Florida, 2015). However, in the context of Los Angeles, simply building transit infrastructure does not guarantee gentrification (Brown, 2015). The process is influenced by a combination of factors,
including the overall built environment, community demographics, and planning policies. The role of federal and state commitment then becomes critical as it can either safeguard or establish affordable housing in proximity to transit hubs, acting as a preventative measure against displacement risks and address the root causes of poverty (Chapple 2009; Pollack et al. 2010; Florida, 2015). Therefore, while transportation can pose a risk to place-keeping, Los Angeles' experience highlights a case where transportation, though seen as an asset, can serve all types of communities and help maintain the socioeconomic diversity of neighborhoods.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This research paper incorporates a mixed-method approach using qualitative and quantitative data to analyze community change. When collecting historical data and extracting information from these communities, learning about perceptions of neighborhood boundaries was critical to selecting census tracts to use in the analysis. Both official planning and neighborhood resource maps were utilized to identify neighborhood boundaries.

To gain insight into the current state and historical evolution of each community, literature review was conducted using research article databases. This involved independent searches for the histories of each community, which occasionally expanded on broader periods of Los Angeles history that pertained to multiple communities. Through this comprehensive review, explanations for demographic shifts and physical transformations within these neighborhoods were gathered.

To identify demographic patterns over time in these communities, census tract data from the U.S. Census Bureau was utilized to cross compare Westlake, Echo Park, and Chinatown. Analyzing racial demographic patterns and other social variables can help determine impacts of gentrification (Kirkland, 2008). Datasets beginning with the 2000 Census were selected as this is when signs of gentrification had become more prominent and provide a more than 20-year window for analysis of trends. While extracting data from the U.S. Census Bureau, it should be noted that in some instances census tracts had no available data. Despite this, given the community boundaries, the data used still provided a representative picture of the neighborhoods. Based on Kirkland’s recommendations on measures of change, Lewis’ 2008 study analyzed gentrification trends across Manhattan,
New York City, and Central Harlem by utilizing sociodemographic data to trace changes in the black community and highlight displacement patterns as a result of increasing rent and migration correlated white population into these neighborhoods (Lewis, 2018). The author utilized procedure Considering that the communities in this study are close to the urban core, have a history of disinvestment, have large green spaces, transportation amenities, and a high population of low-income residents make these communities good candidates for distinction between one another.

The study was further supplemented with semi-structured interviews conducted in public spaces in Westlake to provide insights into local perspectives and to identify community assets and issues in the neighborhood. Main locations included MacArthur Park, LaFayette Park, and Alvarado Street, strategically chosen due to their significance as focal points within the neighborhood. Sixteen subjects were selected via random intercept survey of passersby. Each research subject was asked eight questions about their experiences living or visiting the community. Interviews lasted from 3-5 minutes each depending on the subject’s knowledge and personal experiences. This analysis was undertaken to inform the development of evidence-based recommendations for planning practices that promote inclusive development and safeguard the cultural richness and socioeconomic well-being of Westlake residents.
CHAPTER 4. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THREE COMMUNITIES

Important dates in the history of Los Angeles and impact on the neighborhoods

Certain events and eras in the history of Los Angeles had a large impact on the individual histories of these neighborhoods. These periods will be referred to continuously in each of these communities. These periods are as follows:

1920s - 1940s: Los Angeles underwent a population boom that resulted in a population increase from 500,000 people to 1.5 million as a result of real estate and entertainment boom (Ward, 2013).

1950s: Suburbanization causes central city residents to move to the suburbs. This is related to the construction of new highway systems and the destruction of many central city neighborhoods resulted from the isolation caused by these new highways. Notable is the Hollywood I-101 highway (Ward, 2013). The population post-1950s for Echo Park and Westlake declined as depicted in Appendix A, Figure 2.

1960s: A wave of immigration of people from Latin America and Asia generate a period of labor and cultural revival and influx into these neighborhoods as there was vacancy from suburbanization (Ward, 2013).

1980s - 1990s: The Greater Downtown Los Angeles region underwent a significant transformation as the area was reinvented as a central hub for capitalist activity. The construction of skyscrapers spurred growth in commercial, residential, and industrial sectors, leading to a surge in evictions due to conflicts between property owns and tenants (Sims, 2016).
Westlake

Located 1.5 miles west of downtown Los Angeles, Westlake was established in the 1800s as an edge neighborhood with a park as a fine asset (O’Neill, 2008). In its early years, the community thrived, adorned with Victorian homes and spacious lawns that reflected its affluent status until the 1960s when people fled to the suburbs (Garner, 2016). The magnitude of change is depicted in Appendix A Figure 2 where there was a significant decline in population from 1950 to 1960 by over 10,000. The population increased in the 1960s with immigration. The increasing costs of living starting in the 1930s prompted an influx from downtown to the outskirts of the city, which included Westlake. Starting in the late 1970s a stream of immigrant refugees from Central America transformed Westlake into a transitional neighborhood (Sandoval 2010). Yet, by the late 20th Century, escalating crime rates prompted an exodus of long-time residents relocating to safer neighborhoods like Bunker Hill. In response, local authorities implemented crime prevention methods in the early 2000s, bringing a period of revitalization marked by policing and safety implementation efforts. Particularly noteworthy was the arrival of individuals from Latin America, seeking refuge from Civil Wars, alongside others in pursuit of the American Dream and an improved quality of life. The limited economic opportunities available for these new migrants catalyzed the emergence of what is now a prominent informal economy, exemplified by street vending activities along Alvarado Street. Over time, Westlake has cultivated a more robust niche economy, characterized by a diverse array of informal and small businesses catering to the varied needs of its residents (Sandoval 2010).

Westlake now exists as a predominantly high-density buildings that exhibits diversity in its built environment in terms of buildings, uses, and people. People in Westlake
often do not refer to the community by its name, but rather by its notable asset, MacArthur Park.

**Echo Park**

Echo Park is situated 2.7 miles northwest of Downtown Los Angeles and is known for being a gentrifying or gentrified neighborhood as a result of its rehabilitation over time. Primarily a Hispanic or Latino neighborhood, it also shows presence of a significant Asian population as well.

Echo Park has undergone various transformations throughout its history. In the beginning, Echo Park existed as a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood, home to World War I veterans and Hollywood business figures. The post-World War II era saw a significant demographic shift as Latinos moved into the area amidst the construction of the Hollywood Freeway (I-101), which led to white flight and suburbanization (Castro, n.d.; Soriano, 2019). The gap left by departing residents began to be filled by working-class Latinos from Mexico and Central America, drawn by a favorable housing and environment. This shift reshaped the social fabric, but also gave an emergence to a new vibrant cultural scene with new businesses catering to the needs of its new population. It was not until the 1990s that the community ties weakened due to an influx of white middle-class families moving back into Echo Park, a trend that has persisted and intensified over the years.

The most recent upheaval in the community occurred in 2021 with the displacement of homeless individuals in Echo Park Lake, resulting in encampments being disbanded and residents compelled to relocate. Echo Park witnessed a notable surge in its homeless population in September 2019, alongside the lake right before the pandemic. While the neighborhood had previously accommodated only a small number of unhoused individuals,
the proliferation of tents within the park emerged over time. Faced with limited access to shelters due to capacity constraints, residents began advocating for their right to remain in the park. Following the March 2021 sweep by police and city authorities, individuals inhabiting these tents were dispersed to shelters, streets, and occasionally permanent housing (Roy et al., 2022). These tensions in public urban green spaces, stemming from homeless encampments, demonstrate the collective action that exists between housed and unhoused community members when the struggle for housing is a shared challenge.

**Chinatown**

Chinatown is two miles from Downtown Los Angeles and possesses a notable complex history of transformation throughout its history, calling for a more in-depth analysis of the neighborhood to understand the intricacies that have shaped its current state and heightened awareness of change. Originally composed of three distinct enclaves within downtown Los Angeles, Chinatown’s central locus dates back to the 1880s. In the 1930s, the neighborhood faced demolition activity to make way for the construction of Union Station (Lin, 2008). The influence of Union Station on the neighborhood was so significant that the Los Angeles Chinatown Community Land Trust does not acknowledge Echo Park as part of the neighborhood boundaries (Figure 1). Following the inauguration of Union station, the entire neighborhood underwent its largest transformation, leading to the emergence of a new Chinatown characterized by redesigned architectural aesthetics and urban form aimed to cater to American cultural interest and commercial appeal (Lin, 2008; Ward, 2013). By 1949 the last remnants of the Old Chinatown had been demolished just as heritage tourism gained popularity.
The influx of immigrants in the 1960s brought a new period of revitalization to the area, bringing increased labor, capital, and burgeoning businesses linked to development, including the establishment of branch offices by banks. However, economic decline hit local businesses in the 1970s, as a result of competition from emerging shopping plazas. Gentrification gained momentum in the 1990s, with increased development and new competition from bohemian arts and entertainment, contributing to a shift in the area's character.

In 2003 the Metro Gold line opened in Chinatown, demarcating another instance of transit development in the neighborhood. The introduction of new transit infrastructure amplified cultural tourism and investment, benefiting the local economy. However, this increased attention gradually sparked unintended consequences as in this instance it exacerbated patterns of gentrification, prompting local residents to seek more affordable options in neighboring Echo Park. However, this affordability in Echo Park was temporary, as it, too, was subject to gentrification over time. A surge in mixed-use development tailored to luxury residences and non-local businesses has attracted wealthier residents and clientele, generating a class polarization within the community. Despite efforts by the Chinatown Business Improvement District to oversee security and streetscape maintenance, questions about community identity and cultural ownership have emerged, highlighting the complexities inherent in the ongoing gentrification patterns shaping the future of Chinatown.
CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

The following are results of an analysis of socio-demographic composition of neighborhoods including percent of income spent of housing, profile of each neighborhood’s building stock, and resident-driven responses to gentrification from urban renewal across these communities can potentially inform an understanding of Westlake’s evolving social and spatial landscape towards place-keeping. This section will outline measures neighborhood change across the three communities examined in this study. It will analyze shifts in sociodemographics, changes in the built environment, housing affordability, and resident-reported changes.

Sociodemographic Changes

Table 1 and Appendix A Figure 1 depict a consistent decline in the Hispanic or Latino population across all communities. The most pronounced decrease was observed in Chinatown Los Angeles, with a notable decline of 25.1%. This decline may be attributed to its proximity to Downtown Los Angeles and recent urban development initiatives such as housing projects and infrastructure improvements. Following this trend, Westlake experienced a decrease of 12.8% in its Hispanic population, while Echo Park saw a decline of 9.2% since 2000. Interestingly, while Westlake's gentrification has received minimal media attention, it experienced a significant demographic shift. Although Chinatown and Echo Park are more commonly associated with discussions of gentrification in Los Angeles, it is essential to note the demographic changes occurring in Westlake. While Chinatown is typically associated with a predominantly Chinese and Chinese-American demographic, the use of census tracts from the Chinatown Land Trust source may have influenced the reported percentages through the exclusion of parcels around Union Station and Elysian
Park. However, it is noteworthy that the Asian community is increasing in both Chinatown and Westlake but declining in Echo Park. Since part of the Chinatown community extends into the boundaries of Echo Park, the decline in the Asian population in Echo Park, by 6%, may offer a more accurate reflection of changes in Chinatown. Overall, the percent of the Hispanic or Latino population is on a decline in all the communities whereas the percent of non-Hispanic residents are on the rise, most notably white across all the communities. These demographics provide some evidence of different magnitudes of gentrification. It is possible that white-collar workers value ethnic neighborhoods for their cultural richness and vibrancy, as well as the unique amenities and opportunities they offer. Additionally, these neighborhoods may be perceived as more affordable or accessible, providing an entry point for upwardly mobile workers seeking to establish themselves in the city (Scott, 2019).

Table 1. Change in Hispanic or Latino Population (2000-2020)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Westlake</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>-7.4%</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>-8.4%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>-12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo Park</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>-1.2%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>-8.6%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>-9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>-21.6%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>-25.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

H007: HISPANIC OR LATINO ... - Census Bureau Table, 2000, 2010, 2020 & Population and Race of Neighborhoods of the City of Los Angeles, California, 2000

Changes in the Built Environment

Table 2 illustrates the average year of construction of structures across the examined
communities' census tracts. In 2020, 25% of proposed units within the City of Los Angeles were restricted to affordable in 2020 (Quarterly Housing Trends | Los Angeles City Planning, n.d.). Appendix A Figure 3 highlights the percent of approved housing units with density bonus incentives between 2015 and 2020 that were designated affordable. Within this timeframe, only 8% of housing developments in Westlake were designated as affordable, compared to 10% in Silverlake, Echo Park, and Elysian Valley, which includes certain parts of Chinatown. Additionally, in the portion of Chinatown falling under Central City, 39% of housing was classified as affordable during this same period (Housing Progress Reports | Los Angeles City Planning, n.d.). The patterns may demonstrate how market-rate housing dominates higher-density housing development in Westlake and Echo Park in comparison to Chinatown.

Echo Park emerges as a community characterized by aging structures. It is also well-known for its affordability challenges amidst limited housing development in recent years. In 2010, approximately 50% of housing units in Echo Park were identified as constructed before 1939, with this proportion decreasing slightly to 46% by 2020. Only about 4% of housing units were built in the last decade, highlighting minimal new construction activity in an area with rising affordability challenges.

Similarly, Westlake exhibits minimal attention to its building infrastructure, with 28.76% of housing units dating to before 1939 in 2010, and a decrease of just 0.3% observed by 2020. Notably, approximately 8.5% of housing units in Westlake have been constructed in the past decade, indicating some degree of change in the built environment.

In contrast, Chinatown displays a distinct pattern, with most housing units constructed after the 1930s due to historic events such as relocation. Development in
Chinatown has been gradual and consistent across decades. However, with 15% of housing units built in the last decade, this signals a significant influx of new residents (Table 1) and shows the area's evolving physical landscape and risk of gentrification. This can be met in line with the City’s 25% of proposed units restricted to affordable in 2020. From 2015-2022, 8% of all housing development in Westlake was labeled as affordable, whereas it is 10% for Silverlake – Echo Park – Elysian Valley which includes some parts of Chinatown. And for the other portion of Chinatown under Central City 39% of it has been affordable.

Table 2: Average year of construction of housing units in community census tracts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Structure Built</th>
<th>Westlake 2010</th>
<th>Westlake 2020</th>
<th>Chinatown 2010</th>
<th>Chinatown 2020</th>
<th>Echo Park 2010</th>
<th>Echo Park 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total housing units</td>
<td>34,956</td>
<td>40,745</td>
<td>6,311</td>
<td>8,511</td>
<td>14,424</td>
<td>15,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 2020 or later</td>
<td>0.47%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.06%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 2010 to 2019</td>
<td>8.09%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 2000 to 2009</td>
<td>9.82%</td>
<td>9.85%</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
<td>14.30%</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
<td>4.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1990 to 1999</td>
<td>8.54%</td>
<td>8.95%</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
<td>3.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1980 to 1989</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>9.86%</td>
<td>11.80%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>8.07%</td>
<td>6.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1970 to 1979</td>
<td>12.22%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>8.44%</td>
<td>11.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1960 to 1969</td>
<td>9.61%</td>
<td>8.99%</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>7.83%</td>
<td>8.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1950 to 1959</td>
<td>12.79%</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>10.60%</td>
<td>7.11%</td>
<td>7.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1940 to 1949</td>
<td>10.57%</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>10.01%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built 1939 or earlier</td>
<td>28.76%</td>
<td>28.46%</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>17.40%</td>
<td>51.57%</td>
<td>46.31%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

DP04: SELECTED HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS - Census Bureau Table, 2010 & 2022.

Chinatown's change is primarily driven by the construction of new housing developments, whereas in Echo Park, changes are more closely linked to affordability. While there has been some new housing construction in Echo Park in recent years, older units are being redeveloped, leading to the displacement of long-time residents, as evidenced by demographic changes outlined in Table 1. Approximately 9% of the housing stock in
Westlake has been constructed since 2010, while nearly a third dates back to before 1939. This juxtaposition of old and new creates a distinct dynamic in the built environment, shaping the neighborhood's character and sociodemographic landscape. As the neighborhood witnesses a surge in housing units alongside a decline in its Hispanic population, it navigates a period of transformation. Despite these changes, Westlake's gentrification narrative remains largely overlooked by the media.

**Neighborhood Affordability**

Overall, across all three communities, the decline of Gross Rent as a Percent of Housing Income (GRAPI) can be attributed to demographic changes, specifically a decline in Hispanic or Latino population and minority groups and a rise in white residents who have more established wealth. In 2010, about 61.5% of the renting population in Westlake spent over 30% of their income on housing, as reflected on Figure 2. As of 2022, this percentage declined by 2%. In Echo Park, between 2022 and 2010, there was a 3.8% decline of renters spending over 30% of their income on housing, possibly suggesting that wealthier residents are moving in and spending less on housing proportionally to their income (Figure 3).

Chinatown has the most notable statistics. In 2010, 59.5% of renters spent over 30% of their income on housing, which went down by 12.7% in 2022 to 46.8% of renters spending just as much on housing (Figure 4). This decline represents higher affordability but may not indicate that residents are suddenly earning more. This may mean a changing residential population that is able to afford to live in these neighborhoods more when moving in.
Figure 2: Westlake Gross Rent as a Percent of Housing Income (GRAPI)

DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics - Census Bureau Table, 2010 & 2022.

Figure 3: Echo Park Gross Rent as a Percent of Housing Income (GRAPI)

DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics - Census Bureau Table, 2010 & 2022.
Another metric of change involves comparing the median household income to the change in median rent over time. Across all three communities, the rate of rent has consistently increased at a faster rate than income, specifically between 2010 and 2020. In Westlake, between 2000 and 2010, income increased by 22% while rent surged by 72%. This pattern intensified between 2000 to 2020, with income rising by 89% and rent skyrocketing by 157%. In Echo Park from 2000 to 2010 median income and rent increased by 50.68% respectively. From 2000 to 2020 income went up by 140% and rent went up by 157%. Lastly, in Chinatown increased by 52% from 2000 to 2010 and 116% by 2020, while median income increased by 62% and 214% in 2020. These increases in rent demonstrate the disparity between rent and income growth rates. Analysis of Figures 5-7 reveal that median rents in Westlake and Chinatown now account for about 30% of median income, a significant amount and an increase from previous years. In contrast, Echo Park demonstrates a different trend with a smaller percentage of median rent comprising housing costs.
Figure 5: Westlake Percent Change of Median Income and Rent since 2000

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$23,856</td>
<td>$29,152</td>
<td>$45,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Rent</td>
<td>$480</td>
<td>$827</td>
<td>$1,235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 6: Echo Park Percent Change of Median Income and Rent since 2000

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<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$28,353</td>
<td>$42,721</td>
<td>$68,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Rent</td>
<td>$588</td>
<td>$1,004</td>
<td>$1,534</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Figure 7: Chinatown Percent Change of Median Income and Rent since 2000

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<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$22,589</td>
<td>$34,349</td>
<td>$48,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Rent</td>
<td>$646</td>
<td>$906</td>
<td>$1,711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in active public spaces within Westlake, including Lafayette Park, MacArthur Park, and Alvarado Street. Passersby were approached and invited to participate as interviewees in the study. Responses were categorized based on the duration of the respondents' time living or engaging in the community, yielding three distinct groups: "Visitors," "Short-Term Residents," and "Long-Term Residents." The "Visitors" group comprised individuals who were present in the area for various purposes such as recreational activities or accessing public services. "Short-Term Residents" comprised those who had resided in the community for less than ten years. Lastly, "Long-Term Residents" consisted of individuals who had lived in the community for over a decade. Each group possesses unique perspectives on the community’s development and social patterns.

**Visitors**

Visitors, consisting of three respondents, were in the area for different purposes such as recreation in the park or accessing services from the Mexican Consulate. Despite recognizing the potential of the parks as assets, visitors expressed concerns about their current state of neglect. One respondent, representing a religious organization, highlighted the strong sense of community by driving from the neighboring City of Downey to provide assistance during the holiday season. This may indicate a local service gap, but also a commitment on the part of the respondent or religious organization of community support from a distance. The interviewee was present to advertise an event that they would be hosting on the weekend to provide breakfast and toys for children during the holiday season.

**Short-Term Residents**
Four interviewees fell into the category of short-term residents. These interviewees mentioned enjoying the park and programs for their children, as well as after-school programs available in the area. These residents did not provide extensive information on positive or negative changes in the community, aside from concerns about homelessness and security.

**Long-Term Residents**

Long-term residents, totaling 10 respondents, provided deeper insights into the community’s history of change and tended to have stronger feelings about the declining trajectory of change in terms of homelessness, safety, closing businesses, and park maintenance. These respondents also tended to have more positive things to say about things that they valued in the neighborhood and were more observant about particular changes.

- Four major themes emerged from their responses:
  - **Safety:** Residents who have lived in the neighborhood for over 20 years mentioned how it used to be extremely unsafe initially, but improvements were observed over time. However, crime has worsened in recent years, despite the mentioned improvements.
  - **Gentrification:** Three students born and raised in the neighborhood expressed concerns about the threat to the community's culture due to gentrification. They noticed small neighborhood shops closing and being replaced with larger chain stores. One interviewee commented: “Many small businesses are shutting down; I feel like small businesses are what keep culture alive and then because of gentrification you see more corporate businesses around.”
○ **Culture and Community:** The majority of respondents expressed a deep appreciation for the culture and sense of community in their neighborhood. They emphasized the friendliness of the area and how people contribute to making it a pleasant place to live, despite facing common hardships. Furthermore, they noted how the community's culture influences the services available, particularly through the presence of small businesses that align with the neighborhood's character.

○ **Public Resources:** Some long-term residents appreciated the variety of public services offered, such as immigration services, food banks, and after-school or summer programs for their children.
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

Community Strategies for Space (Re)Activation and Place-keeping

This section analyzes the observed strategies employed by place-keepers in Westlake and their role in fostering community resilience in the face of challenges related to safety, changes in the built environment, and affordability. While demographic changes are evident across all communities, recognizing the strategies that have helped Westlake maintain its identity over time can shed light on continuity. Furthermore, this analysis will briefly compare these strategies with those observed in Echo Park and Chinatown, highlighting the evolving trends in these neighborhoods over the years.

Street Vending

Street vending stands as a significant community asset, deeply entrenched in the fabric of Hispanic and Latino culture while also serving as an extra stream of income for many individuals. Distinguishing itself from ambulant vending, where vendors relocate to reach customers, street vending involves vendors stationed in fixed locations (Recio & Abaya Gomez Jr., 2013). This form of vending, especially along sidewalks, has seen a rise over the years, and is an occurrence widely observed in Latin American countries which follows this context (Kettles, 2006).

While regarded as informal in many places, it has become normalized in Los Angeles due to its substantial economic contribution to these communities. By occupying public spaces and maintaining a presence in the community, street vendors are revealed to thrive in difficult conditions and resist new trends of development that “marginalize them based on ethnicity and class (Caramaschi, 2024; Munoz, 2016).” Their informal presence can help preserve the authenticity and character of the neighborhood, serving to counter the
forces of gentrification that often seek to erase the cultural heritage of marginalized communities.

Figure 8. Street Vending

Top left: Street vendors outside Grande Mall at the intersection of Alvarado Street and 6th, Top Right: Street vendors along Alvarado Street, Bottom Right: Street vendors outside Westlake Theater and along Wilshire Boulevard, Bottom Right: Residential street vending. (Photos by Maritza Vasquez)

Although all three communities practice vending, it is not as widespread in some areas compared to others such as Echo Park or Chinatown. Chinatown's advantage is the Chinatown Central Plaza where vendors can sell their goods, which makes selling on the streets less necessary. However, the challenge faced by vendors in Chinatown is the cost of commercial rent. On the other hand, Echo Park lacks adequate spaces for street vending due to the high and unaffordable commercial rent prices. Therefore, any street vending done in these communities is mainly found in parks.

Street vending is a prevalent sight across the community, spanning from inner
residential areas to main streets like Alvarado Street (Figure 5). However, this was not always the case—until 2018, street vending was illegal. As a personal anecdote, I recall from my own childhood experiences in the early 2000s, the sight of vendors packing up the items they were selling upon seeing police, highlighting the forbidden nature of the activity at the time. Once street vending received legal legitimacy, the landscape evolved, and its prevalence increased, leading to the establishment of more formalized setups, particularly around the Metro Station area, where vendors now operate beneath sturdy tents.

Past restrictions surrounding street vending in American cities has catalyzed innovative social arrangements and forms of resistance, sparking conversations and advocacy for alternative “place-making strategies” (Caramaschi, 2024). This attention shows the role of government agencies in supporting marginalized communities against the pressures of gentrification, highlighting its significance in preserving cultural heritage and fostering community resilience. When there fails to be intervention in planning, place-makers partake in “quiet encroachment” by occupying public spaces to fulfill their needs (Bayat, 2004).

However, the future of street vending in the area is at risk as there are new projects along Alvarado Street and Macarthur Park, such as Centro Westlake above the Westlake/MacArthur Park station and MacArthur Park’s renovation of half a million dollars (Centro Westlake Project - Walter J Company and LA Metro at Westlake/MacArthur Park B Line Station, 2024; SCAG Awards More Than $12 Million For Innovative Approaches To Housing And Climate Adaptation - Southern California Association of Governments, 2023). While the Centro Westlake project promises to, “reserve 20% of commercial/retail space for minority-owned businesses and/or businesses that are owned by Westlake/MacArthur Park
area residents” it is uncertain whether this 20% will guarantee a place to current sellers established and whether they will be allowed to return at all (Centro Westlake Project - Walter J Company and LA Metro at Westlake/MacArthur Park B Line Station, 2024). The MacArthur Park renovation project will link both sides of the park into one, getting rid of the current tunnels that have encouraged unsafety. Such renovations could signal green gentrification that could affect both residents and street vendors.

Community Organizations and Public Services

Community organizations have emerged as actors in the ongoing effort of place-keeping, offering resources to sustain the community's well-being. In response to the challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the city implemented various measures to support residents, including financial assistance and eviction protections such as the COVID-19 Tenant Protections Resolution (About L.A. County’s COVID-19 Tenant Protections Resolution, 2023). Programs like these aid in addressing food insecurity, which also highlights the community's dependence on additional public services for sustenance. For instance, Figure 6 illustrates individuals queuing at the Department of Public Services (top left) and gathering around a food truck that supplies free meals for those in need (bottom left). Food trucks and food banks are common in the area and supply additional assistance other than the public services individuals have. Additionally, notable services in the area encompass the provision of free phones with service subsidized by public funding, as evidenced by the tarps depicting individuals assisting others in applying for free phones. Once again the use of spaces like sidewalks for provision of services highlights the role of space activation through community use. Though not identified from this interview, it would not be uncommon to find people from other neighborhoods traveling to Westlake for these
services.

**Figure 9: Community Organizations and Public Services**

Top: People waiting in front of the public services building and tarp for free phone sign-ups. Bottom left: People in line for free prepared meals along Wilshire Blvd. Bottom Right: Flyer of an organized event hosted by an interviewee from Downey. (Photo by Maritza Vasquez & Graphic by @blancamagallon on Instagram)

The prevalence of poverty in these neighborhoods demonstrates the need for supportive interventions. With approximately 30% of residents living below the poverty level in Westlake, 41% in Chinatown, and 12.7% in Echo Park, these communities face considerable socioeconomic challenges (Chen & Mai, 2013; SILVER LAKE - ECHO PARK - ELYSIAN VALLEY CHANGE DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE, 2021, WESTLAKE CHANGE DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE, 2020). In such contexts, public services play an important role in place-keeping efforts by providing a safety net for vulnerable residents. Accessible resources such as financial assistance, eviction protections, and programs addressing food insecurity ensure the basic needs of community members are met. By addressing these fundamental challenges, public services contribute to maintaining community stability and resilience, thereby supporting the continuity of local culture and
social vitality.

**Adaptive Reuse**

The need for necessary social and commercial infrastructure shifts in accordance with evolving demographic change, and market and social trends. This case in Westlake demonstrates a proactive response to the changing urban landscape and showcases the community's resilience and creativity in the face of challenges. The need for adaptive reuse is often a result of changing demographics, market, and social needs (Faria, 2011). A prime example of this practice is the historic Westlake Theater, which has a history of underutilization after its closure in 1991. Purchased by the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles in 2008, the theater functioned as a swap meet until 2011 and remained vacant for several years until 2023 when an individual second-hand seller began occupying the space for business ([Westlake Theatre in Los Angeles, CA - Cinema Treasures](https://www.cinematreasures.org/theater/2939), 2024). By reactivating underutilized spaces like the theater, Westlake demonstrates the importance of preserving its unique character and heritage amidst ongoing gentrification pressures and demographic shifts.
Adaptive reuse projects are less common in Chinatown and Echo Park, especially at the scale of Westlake Theater. The development dynamics in these neighborhoods differ significantly, with a more formalized approach to redevelopment and (re)activation that prioritizes the preservation of original uses. Unlike Westlake, where adaptive reuse strategies have been employed to repurpose underutilized spaces like the theater into vibrant community hubs, Chinatown and Echo Park’s development does not feature any similar practice within its confines. Acknowledging the absence of a cultural connection between the current community and the original Westlake Theater, coupled with its outdated functionality, justifies its repurposing for an alternative use. Unlike Chinatown and Echo Park, where original structures retain significant cultural significance, Westlake may opt for adaptive reuse to meet current demands and reflect the evolving character of the
neighborhood. This approach acknowledges the changing demographics and cultural
dynamics of Westlake, demonstrating the community's flexibility and openness to change
while still finding ways to honor its heritage through alternative means. Adaptive reuse thus
emerges as a sustainable and inclusive strategy for promoting community well-being and
preserving the essence of Westlake.

**Resilience and Adaptability to Change**

The built environment has undergone significant changes over time, often resulting
in unwelcome disruptions to neighborhoods. Despite the introduction of the metro station in
1993, the community did not passively accept displacement. Instead, it actively embraced
the station as part of its environment, demonstrating resilience (Sotero, 2023). This
resilience was manifested through various means, including the presence of both legal and
illegal vendors utilizing public spaces as platforms of common spaces, actively embracing
aspects of new urbanism (Kettles, 2009). However, this response has not always been
consistent as Westlake has experienced adaptive shifts in response to evolving economic
conditions and rising living costs (Sandoval, 2010). Moreover, this resilience serves as a
form of place-keeping, anchoring the community to a place and preserving its culture even
through external changes happening.

**Other Forms of Place-keeping**

Other forms of place-keeping exist within Westlake that bring liveliness to the
streets, while also helping people stay by making extra means of income. Examples include
ambulant vending where sellers are mobile and canning or scavenging for cans to collect an
extra means of income through recycling. Through observation, the community does not
have an effective curbside recycling method in multi-story residential homes and only has a
single stream for waste. Canners have been contributing to diverting waste from dumpsters in addition to cleaning up litter from the streets. The practice is legal in Los Angeles unless it is performed in private property, so there may be incidents where this distinction may be nebulous.

**Figure 11: Other Methods of Meeting Financial Needs**

Left: Individual seen collecting bottles for recycling (canning). Right: Ambulant ice cream vendor in MacArthur Park. (Photo by Maritza Vasquez)

In Chinatown and Echo Park ambulant vending and canning may be found, but is not as common as Westlake. Ambulant vending in these neighborhoods often occurs in public spaces like parks. The less intensity of canning can be in large part due to more recycling centers being available. Though Chinatown and Echo Park have these services as well. It is known that in Hispanic/Latin American and Chinese cultures, canning is a common practice for generating extra streams of income and all three communities have a significant demographic of these populations, so likewise canning can be found. The observation of canning practices within neighborhoods like Chinatown, Echo Park, and Westlake not only
reflects cultural traditions but also serves as a form of place-keeping. Place-keeping involves the active engagement of communities in preserving the cultural identity, traditions, and social fabric of their neighborhoods amidst ongoing changes and challenges such as gentrification and urban development.

**Top-Down Planning Strategies for Space (Re)Activation and Place-keeping**

This study has unveiled place-keeping practices in response to the constraints imposed by top-down planning legislation. It demonstrates the community's ability to leverage available resources and devise innovative strategies to address challenges. Hence, the significance of top-down planning strategies in the context of Westlake, as depicted in the narratives presented is imperative. Therefore, the following strategies are recommended based on comprehensive observations, data gathered, and a compilation literature.

**Mixed-Use Development**

Mixed-use development is a multifaceted tool in the realm of place-keeping, offering solutions to various urban challenges while also presenting potential threats as it can unintentionally target low-income or marginalized communities, it can pose a threat to place-keeping as long-term residents may be affected by the influx of new residents and businesses. To combat displacement and ensure a diverse socioeconomic mix, implementing mixed-use projects with a focus on creating or preserving permanent affordable housing is a prominent strategy, particularly around transit hubs (Chapple 2009; Levy, Comey, and Padilla 2006; PolicyLink 2014). However, in inner-city neighborhoods like Echo Park, Chinatown, and Westlake, which are in proximity to downtown areas, mixed-use development can be subject to intensifying gentrification pressures.

While these initiatives may attract investment, they also risk eroding the cultural
fabric of the community if not executed with sensitivity. Cultural competency and grassroots can help economic development planning in ethnically diverse and changing neighborhoods without the risk of commodification and displacement (Gandhi & Minner, 2017). Despite the potential benefits of mixed-use development, the case of Chinatown serves as a cautionary case, where the influx of luxury buildings and non-local businesses led to backlash and threatened the neighborhood's identity and cohesion. Therefore, while mixed-use development offers promise for urban renewal, it is recommended it be approached in conjunction with community-driven initiatives to ensure its positive impact on place-keeping.

**People-based Planning**

People-based planning offers an approach to site-specific urban strategies, particularly in addressing the needs of low-income households vulnerable to displacement. By implementing community-building initiatives aimed at empowering residents to build assets and increase income, cities can help buffer families against the rising costs associated with gentrification (Levy et al. 2006). This approach recognizes that low-income households, often reliant on public transit, are disproportionately affected by neighborhood changes induced by transit-oriented development highlighting the irony that such development, while aiming to promote transit ridership, may inadvertently displace the very populations it seeks to serve (Pollack et al. 2010). Therefore, this approach emphasizes the importance of preserving the socioeconomic diversity of neighborhoods and ensuring that urban development initiatives are inclusive and equitable, with a focus on supporting the needs and aspirations of existing residents.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This research provided a multifaceted analysis of place-keeping strategies within the communities of Westlake, Chinatown, and Echo Park, shedding light on the various strategies employed by residents and stakeholders to preserve the cultural identity and social fabric of these neighborhoods amidst urban transformation. Through a comprehensive analysis of demographic shifts, built environment changes, and community initiatives, it becomes evident that place-keeping is an active and adaptive process driven by community leadership and resilience. From street vending to canning, from adaptive reuse to people-based planning, each community has showcased unique approaches to confront the challenges of gentrification and displacement while safeguarding their heritage and livelihoods. As these neighborhoods navigate the complexities of urban renewal and economic development, the importance of cultural continuity remains. Through continued collaboration and advocacy, these communities remain grounded to ensure their future and emerge as models of sustainable and equitable urban living, embodying the essence of place-keeping in a changing environment.
Appendix A

Figure 1. Community Demographic Profiles (2000-2020)

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<td>Westlake</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
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<td>-7.4%</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>25.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>White alone</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black or African American alone</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian alone</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>-1.5%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>-0.2%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.1%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>3.4%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7.6%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Black or African American alone</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Asian alone</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
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H007: HISPANIC OR LATINO ... - Census Bureau Table, 2000, 2010, 2020 & Population and Race of Neighborhoods of the City of Los Angeles, California, 2000

Figure 2. Los Angeles Community Areas Population & Density: 1950-2010. (2010).

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<td>Northeast Los Angeles</td>
<td>23.9</td>
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<td>159,545</td>
<td>158,852</td>
<td>198,229</td>
<td>237,315</td>
<td>241,403</td>
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<td>90,850</td>
<td>84,733</td>
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<td>81,279</td>
<td>94,558</td>
<td>86,735</td>
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<td>Southeast Los Angeles</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>241,163</td>
<td>181,673</td>
<td>185,788</td>
<td>186,562</td>
<td>230,961</td>
<td>254,976</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert Park</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<td>139,090</td>
<td>151,528</td>
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<td>202,025</td>
<td>214,358</td>
<td>219,951</td>
<td>220,971</td>
<td>257,469</td>
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<td>Wilshire</td>
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<td>162,830</td>
<td>166,105</td>
<td>174,596</td>
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<td>237,620</td>
<td>252,101</td>
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<td>160,363</td>
<td>156,335</td>
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<td>213,858</td>
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<td>Silverlake-Echo Park</td>
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<td>65,155</td>
<td>64,557</td>
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<td>73,177</td>
<td>56,600</td>
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<td>43,863</td>
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<td>22,374</td>
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<td>Central City North</td>
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<td>8,532</td>
<td>13,447</td>
<td>19,318</td>
<td>24,071</td>
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SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

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<td>Sherman Oaks-Studio City-Toluca Lake</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>54,021</td>
<td>58,660</td>
<td>64,302</td>
<td>68,219</td>
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<td>10.5</td>
<td>80,444</td>
<td>97,965</td>
<td>90,068</td>
<td>95,763</td>
<td>123,412</td>
<td>136,882</td>
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<td>63,875</td>
<td>60,345</td>
<td>91,367</td>
<td>98,072</td>
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<td>11,538</td>
<td>32,466</td>
<td>71,496</td>
<td>78,800</td>
<td>103,072</td>
<td>134,960</td>
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<td>59,479</td>
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<td>80,599</td>
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<td>134,844</td>
<td>150,560</td>
<td>156,299</td>
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<td>4,771</td>
<td>21,837</td>
<td>46,817</td>
<td>67,869</td>
<td>75,784</td>
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44
Figure 3. Discretionary Housing Units Approved with Density Bonus Initiatives

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<th>Plan Area</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Affordable</th>
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<td>West Adams - Baldwin Hills - Lenhart</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>1,497</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westchester - Playa del Rey</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Pedro</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission Hills - Panorama City - North Hills</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Nuys - North Sherman Oasis</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>1,128</td>
<td>1,413</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun Valley - La Tuna Canyon</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>282</td>
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<td>Hollywood</td>
<td>1,476</td>
<td>5,157</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westlake</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>2,024</td>
<td>2,587</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Hollywood - Valley Village</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>1,485</td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reseda - West Van Nuys</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palms - Mar Vista - Oil Ray</td>
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<td>1,912</td>
<td>2,215</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westlake</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>2,024</td>
<td>2,587</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>Northridge</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>129</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Los Angeles - 15th Street</td>
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<td>842</td>
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<tr>
<td>Envision - Tarzana</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>428</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silver Lake - Echo Park</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>874</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>39,479</td>
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