

(Re)Creating the 'Heart' of Christchurch's Central City

“How can we (re)create a thriving 'heart' of Christchurch City to enhance liveability, sustainability and well-being?”

Taylah Babe, Nathan Balmer, Quinn Bungard, Kate Connell and Natalie O'Connell

Executive Summary

The research question is “how can we (re)create a thriving 'heart' of Christchurch City to enhance liveability, sustainability and well-being?”.

A mixed-method approach was used to achieve this involving in-person interviews, online surveys, pedestrian counts and observations.

New Regent Street was the most visited site, followed by Ōtakaro/Avon River, Cathedral Square and Te Ranga.

The most popular terms to describe the central city were positive, including

1. Introduction

A thriving 'heart' within a city is integral to establishing a well-connected and prosperous environment. This report concerns (re)creating the 'heart' of tautahi Christchurch. A Pulse of Christchurch 2022 survey conducted by Research First found that 74% of people thought that Christchurch had no 'heart'. Following the destructive 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes, the city has recovered slowly but remains a work in progress.

ChristchurchNZ is the sustainable economic development and city profile agency, who has the purpose of stimulating economic growth within the city. They aim to make Christchurch the number one urban destination in New Zealand. To achieve this, they are interested in how the 'heart' of Christchurch is currently used and the public perceptions of the space. The 'heart' in question lies within the boundaries of Cathedral Square, Durham Street North, Kilmore Street, and Manchester Street (Figure 1). Key locations within this area are highlighted in Figure 1.

This research aims to provide the data required by ChristchurchNZ to determine “How can we (re)create a thriving 'heart' of Christchurch City to enhance liveability, sustainability and well-being?”. To answer this, the following objectives were followed: to understand how people use the central city and why, what people like and do not

Figure 1

Study area of

Greenspaces are an aspect of a good city and promote positive wellbeing. Increased access and exposure to greenspaces reduce mental stress, leading to greater life satisfaction (Krekel et al., 2016; Leyden et al., 2011; White et al., 2013). Perceived safety also impacts well-being as feeling unsafe leads to increased anxiety and stress, negatively impacting well-being. Over 50% of participants in a Christchurch City Council (2020) study revealed that people felt unsafe in the central city at night. Furthermore, Mouratidis & Yiannakou (2022) identified a positive association between neighbourhood satisfaction, happiness and perceived safety in two urban centres. This leads to considering whether the values of Christchurch identified as factors of a 'good city' align with biculturalism in Aotearoa.

Partnership between M ori and Pakeha is at the very 'heart' of Aotearoa, as illustrated by the founding document, Te Tiriti O Waitangi. Recognising the bicultural nature of tautahi Christchurch and the impact this would have on the project was an important component of initial research. The literature highlighted concerns that postcolonial politics of city design and use are simply reproducing colonial ideologies through gentrification and developments that disrupt areas of significance and a sense of belonging, resulting in Indigenous communities feeling invisible in their cities (Nejad et al., 2020). This has led to the increased recognition of Indigenous knowledge when considering development and planning. The literature makes clear that when revitalising the 'heart' of Christchurch, a framework accounting for both Indigenous and Western knowledge will benefit all, bringing a

3. Methods

3.1 Overview of methods

The research question involved several objectives: understanding perceptions of the data, use/s of the area, connections to other parts of the Central city, and opportunities to help re-establish the 'heart' of Christchurch. Following academic trends explored in literature reviews, mixed-methods research was implemented, utilising quantitative and qualitative data collection to achieve the objectives. Historically, research has separated qualitative and quantitative data, which can overshadow their similarities and undermine certain benefits of each form (Lawson, 1995). The works of fundamental humanistic geographers William H. Whyte and Jane Jacobs encouraged this research style, influencing the selected methods of field observations, interviews, and online survey's (Elsheshtawy, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2016; Jacobs, 1993). Previous research by the Christchurch City Council (2022), Wylie (2001), Gehl Architects (2009), Pearse-Smith (2019), and Buick et al (2016) were also used to formulate the research methodology. The methods include quantitative and qualitative aspects that enhance the assessment of people, place, and perception data within the study area.

3.2 In-person interviews

To understand existing perceptions within the study areas, semi-structured interviews were completed. The software Qualtrics was used for the questionnaire design and execution as it provides for simple analyses. Following the mixed-methods approach, a range of quantitative and qualitative questions were asked during the interviews (Appendix A). The questions prompted closed or open responses, optimising the efficiency of collection and quality of data provided. The questions were piloted with peers to ensure they flowed and

were understandable and checked over by expert David Price. Display and skip logic were used for initial questions regarding where the interviewee lived and whether they had visited the central city before. The face-to-face interviews (n = 70) produced raw data csv data, extracted to Excel for analysis.

3.3 Online survey

The perceptions of those who may not currently be using the central city are also important when considering the research objectives. Conforming to the mixed-methods strategy, surveys were useful for gathering widespread opinions and data. The questionnaire was designed and distributed via Qualtrics and asked both qualitative and quantitative questions (Appendix B). The questions were similar, though they were catered for the online format, additionally assessing barriers and incentives that were not as applicable for interviews. The cross-referencing, checking, and pilot stages from interview formulation were identical in this process. Facebook was instrumental for distribution, sharing the survey within several community pages, the University's student noticeboard, and with friends and family. Over four days, 107 responses were received. Due to their reach, surveys can efficiently gather data from a large and diverse demographic (Braun et al, 2021). This supplemented and built on results from face-to-face interviews, strengthening collected data and analyses.

3.4 Observations

William H. Whyte constructed behavioural analyses from a distance, observing the interactions between people and place, and assessing the nature of interactions occurring (Elsheshtawy, 2015). Whyte encouraged observers to "look hard, with a clean, clear mind, and then look again, and believe what you see". Similarly, this study utilised observational

guidance. Through this process, advice was received concerning the definition of significant areas and the importance of education.

3.7 Ethics

This project met the Human Research Ethics Committee requirements for UC.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographics

The overall demographics for this report consisted of a diverse range of people. The interview received 54% female, 43% male and 3% gender-diverse respondents. The survey also had higher female participation with 66%, while 29% were males, 2% gender-diverse, and 3% preferred not to say. The most common occupation were full-time workers, making up 42% of the interview respondents and 40% of the online survey respondents. The predominant age range was 15-24, making up 25% of the interview respondents and 31% of the online respondents.

4.2 How often people use the central city

Both interviews and surveys found that most participants visit the central city 4-7 times a week. However, a stark difference in visiting frequency was found among online participants, with most respondents visiting either very often or 841.92 reW* nBT/F5 20.04 Tf1 0 0 1 72.024

Data from both the interviews and surveys support the conclusion that spaces with quality shopping and food options, convenient access, and modern facilities, such as New Regent Street, were more likely to be visited by the public. The most used spaces were New Regent Street (15%), Ōtakaro/Avon River (14%), Cathedral Square (14%), and Tūranga Library (13%) (Figure 3). The least used spaces were the Christchurch Tram (2%), The Piano (4%), and Te Pae Convention Centre (5%). These results were expected, as the spaces least visited are considered either a tourist attraction or often used for private events rather than spaces for public gatherings. Field observations support these results with particularly high counts in New Regent Street and Cathedral Square. Te Pae also had a high count during some observation periods, which is interesting considering that data from the surveys and interviews indicate that the space is not used often. However, this high count is likely the result of an event occurring in Te Pae at the same time the observation was taking place.

Figure 3

Online survey & Interview question #7 (interview) & #4 (survey) on places visited in the last 12 months.



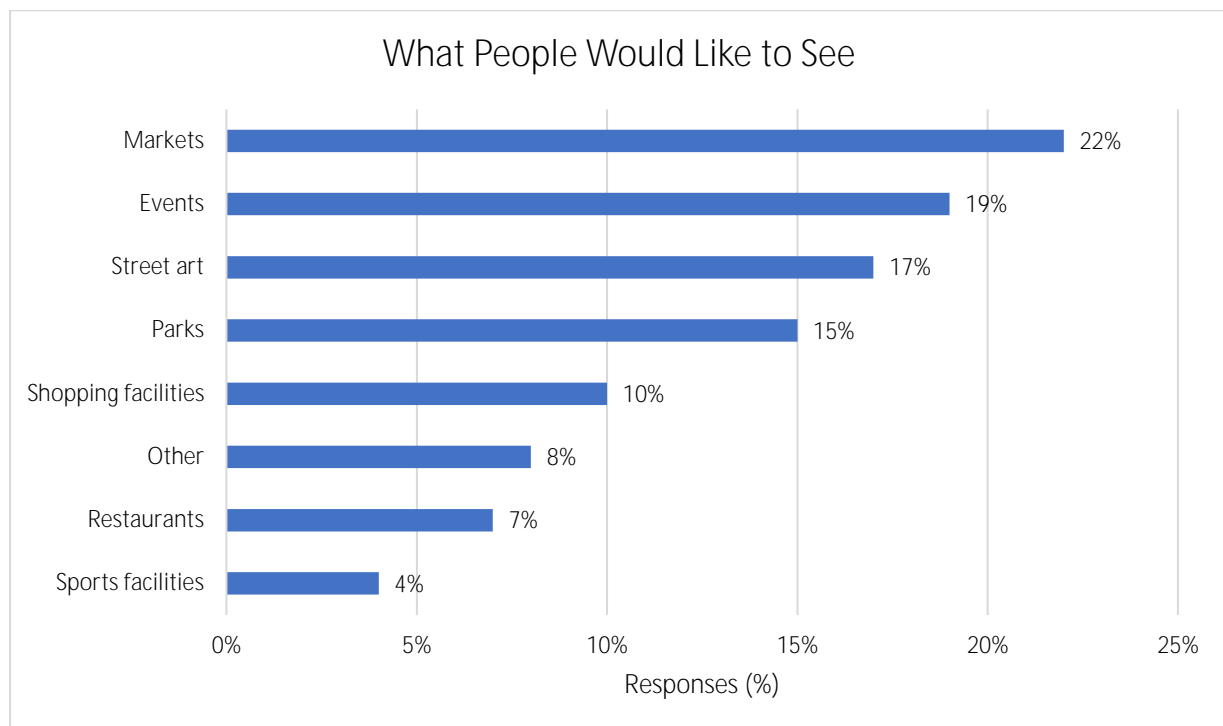
what they do not like. Respondents cited construction, lack of amenities in both areas, and surveys. These responses were prevalent, with 17% stating they disliked the amount of construction. Other words used to describe the city were 'noisy' and 'dirty' (figure 3). When asked what prevented the use of the center, 41% of respondents noted that the center was too expensive, 1



Figure 4

Online survey question #15.

When asked about what they would like to see in the central city, survey responses supported this assumption, asking for the large gaps in the city to be filled, with the aim of ins

Figure 5*Online survey question #17.*

An interesting insight into Christchurch's central city perceptions is analysing them across time. The 'Central City Pedestrian Activity Survey' (CCC, 2001) found that the most selected descriptors for the central city respondents were 'easy to get around', 'pleasant' and 'relaxed'. The top results from both methods in this project, described the central city as 'colourful', 'exciting' and 'vibrant', arguably more positive than responses from 2001. This result was unexpected as the Research First Survey (2022) mentioned in our brief shows that 74% of respondents believe Christchurch has no 'heart'. Such a result may reflect a change in perspective to a more optimistic outlook post-earthquake. In addition, the 'share an idea' conversation by the CCC post-earthquake gathered public opinion on ways to redevelop the city, finding out what people want in the central city, forming the basis for the Central City Recovery Plan (CCC, 2011). Greenspace, affordable businesses, and food options were asked for. The responses found here, a decade on, ask for similar things.

4.6 Transport modes, well-being and sustainability

Results from interviews showed that a clear majority of respondents from interviews accessing the central city by private vehicle (39%). This result may be a symptom of Christchurch's urban sprawl, and subsequent dependence on private vehicles for transport. Such dependence is closely link

4.7 Safety

Most respondents felt either 'fairly safe' (52% female and 47% male) or 'safe' (29% female and 33% male) in the central city (Figure 6). However, there were some differences in perceived safety between genders, with men feeling 'a bit unsafe' and 'very unsafe' more often than women (Figure 6). This was unexpected, with literature more often finding that men feel safer in cities than women (Navarrete-Hernandez et al, 2021; Loewen et al, 1993; Jiang et al, 2017; Condon et al, 2007; Office for National Statistics, 2021). Although men generally feel safer within city environments, they are also more likely to become a victim of violent crime compared to women, potentially influencing this lowered perceived sense of safety (Brå, 2014; Sarre et al, 2021). However, this discrepancy is more likely the result of study demographics, with men making up a significantly smaller proportion of survey respondents (29%) and interview respondents (43%) compared to women. If more men had participated in the research, this result might have better reflected wider literature.

Additional survey comments mentioned that there are pockets of unsafe areas in the central city. However, these areas are largely outside the study area, apart from Cathedral Square, where respondents mentioned that they felt unsafe due to homelessness and loitering.

Time of the day was also mentioned as a key factor in sense of safety, with many respondents pointing out that they felt less safe in the central city at night, mainly because of a lack of lighting and police presence. This highlights the potential for the time in which face-to-face interviews took place to have influenced perceived safety results.

Most of the interviews took place during daylight hours, where some literature suggests a diurnal shift in perceived safety can occur (Thomas & Bromley, 2000; Bromley et al, 2000). Since the safety question only asked about 'general' safety, some respondents may have been affected by the environment in which the interview took place, influencing results for this question.

Overall, these results are reflective of those found by Canterbury Wellbeing (2021), CCC (2009), and CCC (2022), who suggest that although people generally feel safe in the central city, gender, time of day, and location play a key role in sense of safety.

Figure 6

Online & Interview question #12, 20 (survey). #14, 24 (interview).

4.8 Activities that would help re-establish the 'heart' of Christchurch

The results have highlighted

were available (Figure 7). Rahman et al. (2015) in a study of 1000 users that encouraged centre use which align with these results, alongside Giles-Corti et al. (2016) who discuss how these uses, particularly accessibility and diverse destinations, positively promote well-being **by allowing for** walkability and interactions.

Field observations indicate how each space can provide future opportunity

Although there was a high response rate for both the interview and survey with a

6. Recommendations

6.1 Cheaper s

References

Abbasian, A. (2016). Im

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative

Christchurch City Council. (2017). *“Your Square, Your Place”*: Regenerate Christchurch’s
*Proposals for Cathedral Square and its
Surroundings*. [https://www.ccc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/The-Council/Request-
information/2017/Proposals-for-Cathedral-Square-and-its-](https://www.ccc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/The-Council/Request-information/2017/Proposals-for-Cathedral-Square-and-its-)

Fitzpatrick, M. (2016). Bridging theories, William H. Whyte and the sorcery of cities.

Architecture and Culture, 4(3), 381–393.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2016.1251214>

Gehl Architects. (2009). *Christchurch 2009 Public Space Public Life*.

[https://www.ccc.govt.nz/the-council/plans-strategies-policies-and-](https://www.ccc.govt.nz/the-council/plans-strategies-policies-and-bylaws/urbandesign/jan-gehl-public-life)

[bylaws/urbandesign/jan-gehl-public-life](https://www.ccc.govt.nz/the-council/plans-strategies-policies-and-bylaws/urbandesign/jan-gehl-public-life)

University. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-transport-problem-of-the-market-squares-regeneration-in-the-historic->

Pearse-Smith, C. (2019). Exploring the adequacy of central city public space in New Zealand: Establishing a simple evaluative tool to measure public space success (Doctoral dissertation, University of Otago).

Rahman, N. A., Shamsuddin, S., & Ghani, I. (2015, January). What Makes People

minutes to complete.

Are there any benefits from taking part in this research?

We will offer a chocolate fish as a reward for completion of this study. Though we do not expect any other direct benefits to you personally from participating in this interview. However, the information gathered will potentially benefit the development of a thriving central city that caters to your wants and needs.

What will happen to the information you provide?

We will submit your answers as you give them onto an online response form. This information will be stored in a password-protected file on the University of Canterbury network and deleted as soon as practical. We will store your responses and your signed consent form separately, enabling the data to be stored anonymously. This anonymous data will also be made available to other researchers from ChristchurchNZ, who are our partners in this study.

What if you change your mind during the study?

You are free to withdraw at any time. To do this you can let us know that you do not wish to finish and if you would like your answers removed from the database. After the interview has been completed and we have submitted the data, we are unable to remove this, as there is no way to identify the response as your individual interview.

Will the results of the study be published?

The results of this study will not be published

- 14. Motorcycle (3)
- 15. Bus (4)
- 16. Taxi (5)
- 17. Bicycle/E-Bike (6)
- 18. Walk (7)
- 19. E-Scooter (8)
- 20. Other (Specify) (9)

Q10 Please specify the mode of transport

Q11 Why did you choose this mode?

- Fastest (1)
- Most aesthetically pleasing/attractive (2)
- Safest (3)
- Accessible (4)
- Other (Specify) (5)

Q12 Please specify why this mode was chosen:

Q14 How safe do you generally feel in the Central city?

21.

Q18 Are you going anywhere within the Central city after?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe (2)
- No (3)

Q19 Where and why?

Q20 What do you like about this space?

Q21 What do you dislike about this space?

Q22 What would you like to see in this space?

Q23 Which of these age groups do you fall into?

- 15-24 (1)
- 25-34 (2)
- 35-44 (3)
- 45-54 (4)
- 55-64 (5)
- 65-74 (6)
- 75-84 (7)
- 85+ (8)
- Prefer not to say (9)

Q24 Gender

- 33. Female (1)
- 34. Male (2)
- 35. Gender diverse (3)
- 36. Prefer not to say (4)

Q25 Occupation

- 37. Full-time worker (1)
- 38. Part-time worker (2)
- 39. Casual worker (3)
- 40. Student (4)
- 41. Retiree (5)
- 42. Not currently working (6)

ChristchurchNZ, or any member of the research team.

Are there any benefits from taking part in this research?

The information gathered will potentially benefit the development of a thriving central city that caters to your wants and needs.

What will happen to the information you provide?

We will submit your answers as you give them onto an online response form. This information will be stored in a password-protected file on the University of Canterbury network and deleted as soon as practical. We will store your responses and your signed consent form separately, enabling the data to be stored anonymously. This anonymous data will also be made available to other researchers from ChristchurchNZ, who are our partners in this study.

Will the results of the study be published?

The results of this study will not be published, though will be shared with ChristchurchNZ, our project partners, who will utilise this information in their development plans. A summary of results may be sent to participants if they request a copy.

Who can you contact if you have any questions or concerns?

This study meets the requirements of the University of Canterbury Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any questions about the research, please contact: Simon Kingham, simon.kingham@canterbury.ac.nz.

Q4 Which of these spaces have you visited within the Central city within the past 12 months?

1. Te Pae Convention Centre (1)

17.

Q13 What would incentivise you to visit the Central city more often? (e.g. accessibility, attractiveness).

Q15 What barriers prevent you from visiting the Central city? (e.g. too expensive, no time, too far away, not interesting)

Q10 What three terms best describe the Central city?

- o 3 - Nor agree/disagree (3)
- o 4 - Agree (4)
- o 5 - Strongly agree (5)
- o Don't know/not applicable (6)

Q16 Is there anything in the central city that you would like to see improved? (e.g. less litter, gap fillers)

Q17 What would you like to see added in the Central city?

- 22. Markets (1)
- 23. Events (2)
- 24. Street art (3)
- 25. Shopping facilities (4)
- 26. Restaurants (5)
- 27. Parks (6)
- 28. Sports facilities (7)
- 29. Other (8) _____

Q20 Gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Appendix C:

Observation format

Table 1. Total Activity Observed in Each SurveyeyOl

Site 4. T ranga					
Site 5. Te Pae					

*include eating, talking, walking, cycling, shopping etc.

Appendix D:

Counts of People at Specific Sites

Table 2. Total Observed People in Each

Survey Site