

Children and Families Q-Methodology

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Our research team spent two months traveling in the U.K., the Netherlands, and Denmark. In many of the cities our research team visited, we noted how many families were living in these dense urban areas with children of all ages. Our experiences inspired us to find out exactly what these families felt their city dwellings offered them, as well as what attracted them to continue living in those urban areas. We hope that our findings in Europe will be helpful for the City of Seattle to understand what needs to change to start to attract families to the South Lake Union area.

Studies have shown that younger generations of middle-class families are moving away from past trends of relocating to the suburbs once they have younger. Now, younger families are beginning to stay in urban areas due to a greater desire for a work-life balance.^{1,2,3} Whereas in the past, families saw high population densities as a drawback to urban areas, younger families are now starting to recognize that denser areas allow for benefits that suburban life does not always offer.⁴

The South Lake Union area of Seattle has recently undergone significant redevelopment in conjunction with City Council approval for zone changes allowing for higher density and building heights.⁵ Despite redevelopment, Seattle has not experienced a growth in the number of families living in the South Lake Union neighborhood. Our research attempts to draw conclusions on why South Lake Union is failing to attract families through answering the questions: “What do families look for when choosing a place to live? In what ways do families prioritize certain criteria when deciding where to live?”

According to the Q-Method.org, Q-methodology was developed by William Stephenson, and is a technique that combines social sciences and psychology to gauge people’s opinions of a certain topic. The methodology accounts for human subjectivity and acts as a method of gathering data without ignoring the nature of participants’ varying viewpoints. Researchers gather data by creating statements for participants to rate on a scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Using that data, researchers can pick out themes and sort correlating respondents into their respective opinion pools.



Figure 1: Model of participants using Q-methodology.
Source: http://betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/styles/feature_image/public/Qsorter.jpg?itok=zUF5ntlB

Researchers then strengthen their findings with extended interviews inquiring why participants chose to rank the statements in the order that they did.⁶

The Q-methodology is particularly useful in assessing how citizens interact with their surrounding urban environments. We chose to use this methodology because of its ability to create applicable data, as well as being a stepping stool for engaging in informative interviews with residents.

The research question we addressed was “What do families look for when choosing a place to live? In what ways do families prioritize certain criteria when deciding where to live?” Following the steps of the Q-methodology, we created 36 statements addressing the three components our team saw most fitting to our question; accessibility, safety, and amenities. Our statements were informed by several studies done into the benefits of city life and covered topics like housing, public parks, pedestrian safety, proximity to schools, and access to a wide range of transportation options.^{7,8} Without informing our participants of the divisions of topics, we assessed the data to see what category people generally prioritized when choosing housing.

1 Tim Butler and Gary Robson, “Social Capital gentrification and neighbourhood change in London: a comparison of three South London neighbourhoods,” *Urban Studies* 38(12): 2145-2162.

2 Lia Karsten, “Housing as a way of life,” *Housing Studies* 22(1): 83-98.

3 Lia Karsten, “Family gentrifiers: challenging the city as a place simultaneously to build a career and to raise children,” *Urban Studies* 40(12): 2573-2584.

4 Joanna Lilius, “Is There Room for Families in the Inner City? Life-Stage Blenders Challenge Planning,” *Housing Studies* 29(6): 843-861.

5 “South Lake Union,” City of Seattle, accessed August 19, 2016, <http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/cityplanning/completeprojectslist/southlakeunion/background/default.htm>

6 “Q-Method,” <https://qmethod.org/>.

7 Lilius, “Is There Room for Families in the Inner City? Life-Stage Blenders Challenge Planning,” 843-861.

8 Willem Boterman, Lia Karsten, and Sako Musterd. “Gentrifiers Settling Down? Patterns and Trends of Residential location of Middle-Class Families in Amsterdam,” *Housing Studies* 25(5): 693-714.

Our data was collected by approaching families in public areas, as well as setting up interviews with faculty and associates before arriving in our next destinations. Our interviews took place in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Aarhus. We interviewed 10 families, ranging from locals to tourists, about their experiences living in urban areas with children. They followed our instructions regarding the Q-methodology and then answered our questions about their backgrounds, daily commutes, and current housing situations.

As in any research process, our team encountered a multitude of limitations. As our trip in Europe was short, and our time was limited, we were only capable of gathering 10 interviews. The majority of our participants were approached in local parks, making it more likely that our data favored public green spaces over any alternatives.

Results & Solutions

After analyzing the results from our ten participants, we found several common themes that were important to the participants either through the surveys or the follow-up interviews. We will highlight each of these themes and provide recommendations for how to integrate these ideas within the South Lake Union neighborhood. Additionally, we will discuss our reflections on using the Q-methodology and how the City of Seattle might use this approach to further interact with families in the city and engage with the discourse around what they value in city-dwellings.

Theme 1: Proximity to places the families value

Our participants from Copenhagen discussed the importance of residing close to places of importance, and

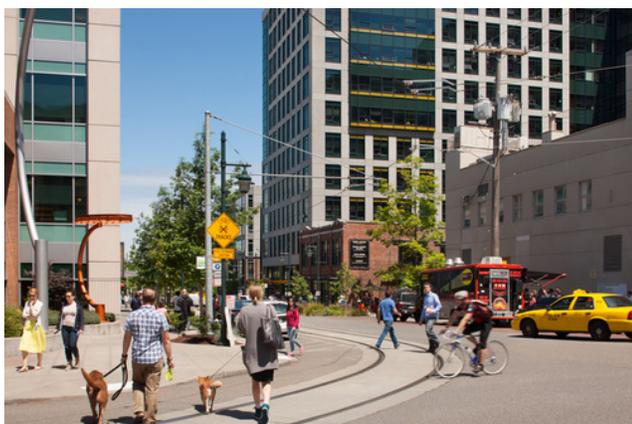


Figure 2: South Lake Union Neighborhood
<http://slucommunitycouncil.org/whats-new-in-slu/transit-improvements-coming-to-south-lake-union-march-2016>

while these places may vary from family to family, many participants cited parks and schools among the places of greatest importance. Our Australian and Aarhus participants mentioned that they choose housing based on its easy access to school and recreational spaces. The Canadian participants had similar priorities, stating that

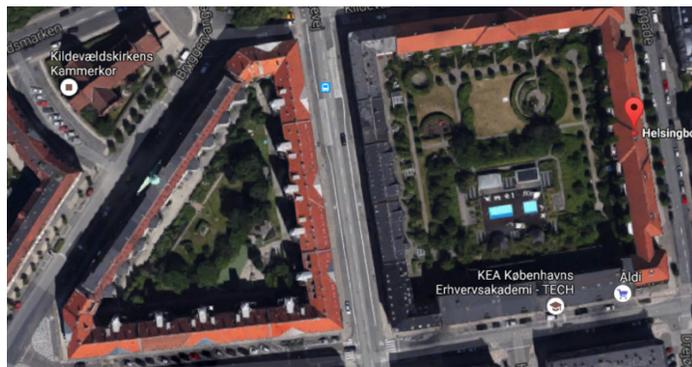


Figure 3. Picture showing a neighborhood's enclosed public recreation space in Copenhagen called Østerbro.

amenities were important to them, but their current city of residence does not allow them as good of access as they would like. Close proximity to schools and parks allows for convenient commutes, as well as the opportunity for children to bike or walk to these places unsupervised.

These priorities can be applied to South Lake Union, as families in Seattle battle the same issues of low density and lack of close access to places of interest. The City of Seattle can take this concept in stride by making a conscious effort to build a more liveable city where families can access the places they go to daily in a quick and convenient manner. As development continue, the City can work further with developers to ensure that more developments are mixed use and provide places that are appealing to diverse age demographics.

Theme 2: Value of Recreational Spaces

Another dominant theme we've gleaned from our research is our participants' relative disinterest in private green space, settling for public gardens or neighborhood parks instead. To many participants, simply having access to a shared green space or recreational area in their neighborhood was more attractive than having their own private backyard or gardens. These spaces give families the added benefit of socialization, as well as valuable access to green space for developing children. Most participants living in Copenhagen lived in apartments that were situated around a common courtyard shared with other families. While these courtyards were not exclusive to only the participant's family, they highly valued these spaces for their proximity to their homes, as well as their opportunities for socializing amongst neighbors.

In Figure 3, we have a picture showing a neighborhood's enclosed public recreation space in Copenhagen called Østerbro. This idea can be applied back to South Lake Union by being more mindful about the way private developers build residential developments that incorporate green spaces. An enclosed recreational area promotes a sense of community and security for all residents utilizing it. While not every development can include recreational space, proximity to green spaces in the form of local parks and gardens is a necessity for attracting families to dense urban areas like South Lake Union.

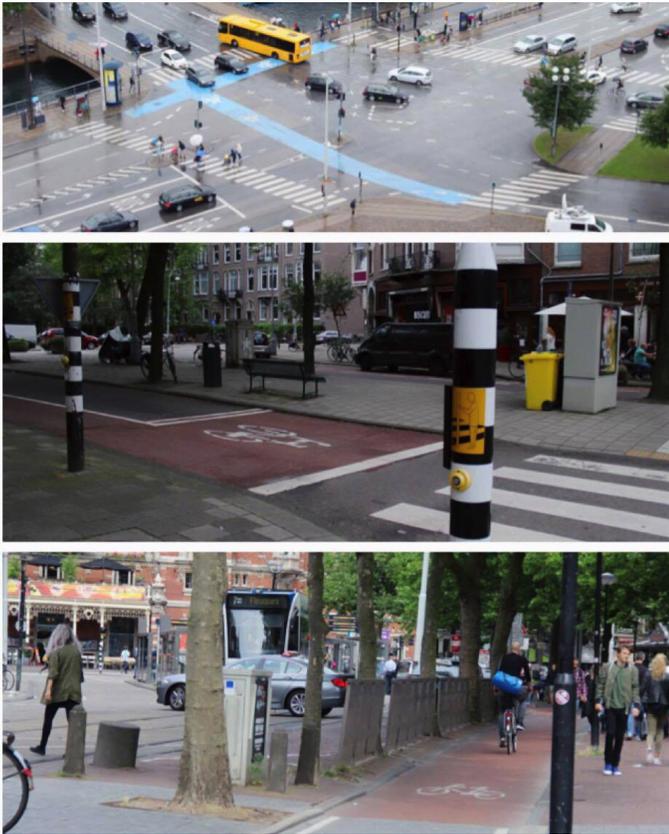


Figure 4. Pictures of bike infrastructure in Copenhagen that shows how biking is more convenient and safe.

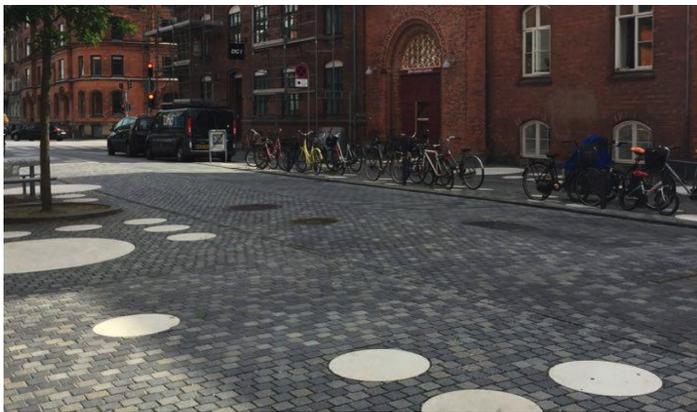


Figure 5. Picture of the creative way to integrate cobblestone and flat circle surface to increase the autonomy for children. preferred method of getting around.

Theme 3: Convenience is essential

The third theme we've highlighted from our research is the necessity for convenience in attracting families to reside in any neighborhood. We found that most of our participants from Copenhagen bike everywhere with their children. When asked why, the participant answers were simple "Because it is the fastest and most efficient way to get around the city." In places like Copenhagen and Amsterdam, biking is the most convenient option for travel, even with children. The infrastructure in the cities

streamlines travel through separated bike traffic signals, easily identifiable bike lanes, bridges for bikes over the canals (Figure 4).

For this reason, residents choose to bike, rather than drive. Despite the cities of Amsterdam and Copenhagen having a strong bike culture that plays a role in the overwhelming number of bicyclists, they still operate various modes of



Figure 6: Picture of Lake Union Park in Seattle.

Source: https://www.walkscore.com/WA/Seattle/South_Lake_Union

public transit. Both cities offer extensive bus routes along with an overground tram in Amsterdam and a metro in Copenhagen. When asked about Copenhagen public transportation, our participants agreed that it was still a viable option that they use as backup when the weather becomes too extreme. One Copenhagen mother who bikes daily with her children said, "our public transportation is very convenient and I know how to use it when I need it. It arrives very frequently and on time." The only reason people do not always use public transit in Copenhagen is because biking is often faster due to the supporting infrastructure.

Efficiency is an important concept for South Lake Union. When cars are prioritized through city infrastructure, they become the easiest way to get around, creating a further dependence on cars. As Seattle's population grows, the city is at a crucial point in its development. The increased population will inevitably put more cars on streets already facing major congestion issues. The support of intuitive and efficient public transportation modes is more important than ever to ensure that Seattle continues to be a leader in sustainability and livability. However, this will require continually striving to make public transportation a priority over cars within denser areas and create a city that is human scale. Increasing connectivity in the South Lake Union area will attract families to reside there, as well as increase liveliness of the neighborhood.



Figure 6: Jefferson Park in Seattle
Source: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/find/parks?id=114>

Theme 4: Neighborhoods supporting children's autonomy

The most common theme among our participants was highly valuing the autonomy of their children. They wanted their neighborhoods to have places for their children to go and things for them to do, as well as infrastructure that takes into account the safety of their children. Quality infrastructure that is simple and safe supports their children's ability to get around unsupervised and allows parents to send children off on their bikes or on foot without any hesitation. One of the many ways the cities in Denmark and the Netherlands account for such safety and autonomy is through small infrastructure changes to make biking and walking safer and make drivers more mindful. For instance, many roads approaching an important sidewalk crossing use cobblestones (Figure 5) to slow down the speed of cars passing through, making it safe for children to cross the road on bike or foot without worrying about serious accidents. When parents are comfortable allowing their children to freely travel on bike, foot, or public transit, children develop commuting habits that may last into adulthood. One participant who now lives in Australia, spent the majority of his early life living and biking in Amsterdam. He said, "our children's autonomy is important because children need their own space." Despite the fact that he lives in a car dominated city now, he still chooses to bike with his family because it has become his preferred method of getting around.

There are a variety of ways children's autonomy can be better integrated into the neighborhood of South Lake Union. One of the ways we touched on in theme one, is simply working with developers to ensure mixed-use residential spaces that provide family-friendly places of interest for the neighborhood. Another way to support children's autonomy ties into theme two, with creating accessible and quality recreational spaces for children. As of now, there are three public parks in South Lake Union. These parks are simple and lack of structures such as Lake Union Park shows in Figure 6. By revamping existing current recreational spaces such as Figure 5. shows a great example of Jefferson Park in Seattle that was redeveloped in 2010. Improving the quality of recreational space, the City can ensure that children will have safe places for

children to go and be unsupervised. These spaces can be easily improved with simple fixes like adding more trees, benches, interactive playgrounds, etc. Another way to facilitate the autonomy of children is through creative infrastructure that is both safe and dynamic such as incorporating wider sidewalks and bike lanes, playing with the materiality of the infrastructure, or allowing for forgiving curbs on bike lands to prevent injuries.

Q-Methodology as a tool

In conclusion, Q-methodology could be an essential device for the City of Seattle in gauging citizens' interest in future developments, especially in South Lake Union. It is a process that appeals to many demographics, as well as a process that picks up on the finer intricacies of public opinion that may not be caught in other forms of engagement.

Appendix

Here are the 36 statements we gave our participants in our research process.

Amenities

1. Living within 10 kilometers of my children's school is important to me.
2. I am willing to downsize my living space in order to be closer to the shops, restaurants, and bars the city has to offer.
3. I want to live in a neighborhood with a diverse population in age and culture.
4. Having access to a nearby park where kids can play is important to me.
5. I prefer to have my own private garden or yard rather than going to a park.
6. I enjoy socializing with other parents at nearby parks and other recreational facilities.
7. I would utilize public transportation more if I had accurate information on arrivals and delays.
8. I would utilize public transportation often if it arrived frequently.
9. I would choose public transit over driving if the stations were close to my home.
10. If public transportation were more efficient, I would sell my car.
11. I would incorporate public transportation into my daily routine if I am able to complete work on my commute.
12. If public transportation were more efficient, I would sell my car if I had one.
13. It is important to me that the schools in my neighborhood have distinguished academic standing.
14. I am willing to compromise on price in order to live closer to recreational activities.

Safety

1. It is important that my children can play unsupervised in my neighborhood.
2. I would feel comfortable sending my 10 year old child to buy milk from the corner store in the evening.
3. It is important to have safe public transportation that my children can utilize without adult supervision.
4. It is important that my child can bike safely to school.
5. I avoid walking on the busy sidewalk with my child, fearing that motor vehicles will put us in danger.
6. Driving my children to school feels safer than them commuting by public transportation.
7. I avoid commuting by public transit at night because empty stations and bus stops make me feel unsafe.
8. I feel uncomfortable allowing my children to play unsupervised at the park, because I don't trust strangers.
9. It is important to me that my child can walk to school on his or her own.
10. It is important to me that our neighborhood streets are well lit at night.
11. I drive most of the time because I feel public transportation areas are unfriendly to children's safety.

Accessibility

1. I need a car for my day-to-day life.
2. Access to parking is necessary for my neighborhood.
3. I prefer to have walking as an option to get me where I need to go.
4. I would utilize public transportation if it were easier for me to commute with my young children, and their gear (strollers, bags, etc).
5. Biking with children is easy when there are protected bike lanes.
6. Biking with children is easy when there are bike-only traffic signals.
7. Difficulty transporting my children's stroller discourages me from using public transportation.
8. Learning to use public transit is an important skill for my children to have.
9. I want to live in a place where I can walk to the grocery store.
10. I avoid businesses that do not provide parking.
11. I would take public transportation if it was more affordable.