

## Contexts and clustering

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## Chapter Four

# *Contexts and clustering*

Quentin Stevens, Merrick Morley and Mohammad Mohammadi

Parklets are not wholly self-contained objects, and they are not only shaped by metropolitan-wide policies and regulations. They exist and operate in relation to urban spaces and systems across a range of scales (Sponza 2024). Parklets are adjuncts to specific businesses and existing sidewalks and pedestrian activity patterns in specific urban neighbourhoods. While parklets have thrived in many cities and neighbourhoods, different local contexts have framed different opportunities and challenges regarding their functions, forms, placements, management, benefits and longevity. Parklets tend to cluster in specific areas, and their clustering has aggregate impacts on the character of whole streets and neighbourhoods and on pedestrian, commercial and transport activity (Sponza 2024). But there is little data available about all these relationships. This chapter explores the clustering patterns of parklets across different cities and what kinds of urban contexts tend to support them.

In Chapter 3, we identified the spatial distribution of parklets in Melbourne and analysed their spatial contexts, with a focus on the character and networks of streets. We used the bounded areas that Google Maps defines as ‘Areas of Interest’ as a proxy for identifying contiguous clusters of commercial businesses. Almost all parklets in Melbourne are hosted by, and co-located with, hospitality businesses, including restaurants, cafes and licenced bars and pubs. We examined Melbourne’s second-largest cluster of parklets, which spreads across the inner-city suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood. We also used Space Syntax mapping to show how the clusters of commercial activity across Melbourne, and the clusters of parklets, align closely to the most integrated, walkable parts of the city’s street network. Our key finding was that commercial parklets appear to thrive in walkable commercial precincts with good transport connections.

In this chapter, we extend our exploration of the clustering of parklets, and the contexts of urban design characteristics that support and shape them, by comparatively analysing the spatial distributions of major clusters of commercial hospitality parklets and public parklets in three different urban settings. We knew from media coverage

and existing studies that Melbourne, San Francisco and Berlin all had many parklets. It is perhaps no coincidence that these three cities also all regularly rank among the world's most liveable. Their metropolitan areas all have populations of approximately 5 million people. All three cities grew quickly in the nineteenth century, and have mixed-use neighbourhoods, wide, straight, interconnected streets that provide walkable networks, and are well-served by trams, subways and other public transport. Our analysis of parklet clusters provides a new lens for further exploring the nature of this good city form and its impact on street activity or 'vitality' (Lynch 1981), and to identify how parklets might help to further enhance the quality of urban districts by converting street space for pedestrian activity and stationary uses. To map parklets across these three cities, we were able to draw on published reports, online aerial photography and Google Street View, online data about parklets, data provided by managers of the parklet programmes and our own fieldwork. The only previous mapping study of parklets (Stroman 2014), examining parklet locations in San Francisco prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, identified that they were rare on the many streets with gradients over 5%, but did not analyse other street design characteristics.

We then identified specific clusters to examine in each city that had many closely located parklets. These clusters are in Fitzroy in Melbourne (as we previously analysed; it also extends into adjacent Collingwood), the Mission District in San Francisco (hereafter 'Mission') and Boxhagenerkiez in Berlin (nicknamed 'Boxi'). We researched these cases sequentially. Our data for Fitzroy is from 2021, for Boxi from 2022 and for Mission from 2023. There are thus limitations in comparing how their parklets were distributed under different, localised public health and economic conditions at each timepoint. We were however able to re-survey and compare how parklet distributions had changed in Fitzroy (two years after our 2021 field survey) and in Mission (using government data from 2021, two years before our field survey).

We will here explore parklets' clustering in three different ways: comparing the distributions of clusters of parklets across the three metropolitan areas; comparing the scale and composition of the three specific large clusters of parklets; and analysing how the distribution of parklets within each cluster is affected by specific characteristics of the street and the urban context. Finally, we also map changes in these parklet clusters between 2021 and 2023, to draw further insights about which aspects of urban context have the strongest correlation with parklets' clustering, retention and elimination.

## Comparing parklet clusters across and between cities

### *Metropolitan clustering of commercial uses and parklets*

As we noted in Chapter 3, most of Melbourne’s retail areas, and most of its parklets, are strung along long radial arterial streets which carry large amounts of commuter traffic to and from the preeminent commercial core. There are only two ‘thicker’ suburban commercial clusters around major street junctions, 5km west and 7km east of the city centre, plus, further out beyond our 12km-radius focus area, several post-war, car-oriented indoor shopping malls surrounded by car-parking. We also noted that ten fairly large Melbourne commercial clusters had few or no parklets, as did many small ones. While that analysis suggested that parklets in those settings were inhibited by a range of streetscape parameters (street widths, speed limits, sidewalk widths, frontage characteristics and off-street parking), comparison of Melbourne with the two other cities highlights the key importance for parklets of having a sufficiently high density of buildings, and thus sufficient people. The hospitality precincts in Melbourne that lacked parklets were mostly those that were furthest from the city centre, and that were thus generally too low in density and in pedestrian traffic.

While the Melbourne metropolitan area’s average population density is about 450 people per square kilometre, within San Francisco’s city limits it is over 7,000 per square kilometre. San Francisco has a commercial downtown, but there are also numerous other large concentrations of commercial activity that each spread across several intersecting streets. These include Fisherman’s Wharf, North Beach, Japantown, the Mission District, and South Beach. Berlin’s population density is also high at around 4,000 people per square kilometre. It does not have one preeminent commercial centre. Its complex evolution and fragmented governance have produced several large commercial clusters within the historic centre, Mitte (Alexanderplatz, Freidrichstrasse and Potsdamer Platz), as well as large clusters around Kurfürstendamm and in the former inner-eastern districts of Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg and Neukölln, and along numerous other long commercial corridors.

Our city-wide mapping of all three cities (Figure 4.1) shows that most of San Francisco’s parklets cluster in commercial precincts, confirming Caramaschi’s

pre-pandemic findings (2020). But the city's high density and dispersed commercial clusters support a much wider distribution of parklets across the urban area than in Melbourne. The only San Francisco commercial precinct that completely lacks parklets is a large indoor mall. The city's parklets are particularly concentrated along major cross-city traffic routes. San Francisco's densely gridded street layout and inner-urban freeway links help to minimise through-traffic on any one street, freeing up the wide right-of-way widths for locally oriented kerbside parking and for its pedestrian-oriented re-use for parklets. San Francisco's dense mixed-use neighbourhoods also support a large number of parklets that are not even in concentrated commercial precincts; for example, to the southeast in South of Market, throughout Potrero Hill and along Third Street, and to the west along several arterials in the Sunset District.

Our mapping of Berlin's commercial hospitality parklets only covered one 20km<sup>2</sup> city district: Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, which amalgamated two former districts of West and East Berlin. This district shows an extremely broad and varied distribution of parklets, similar to that in San Francisco. Thirty-seven hospitality parklets are concentrated within one small 3.6-ha commercial precinct, Boxi. Two other smaller commercial precincts nearby, covering 2.1ha and 0.8ha, host 4 and 5 parklets, respectively. There are numerous hospitality parklets scattered elsewhere throughout Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, highlighting the near-ubiquity in Berlin of mixed-use, mid-rise apartment and office buildings with ground-floor hospitality tenants. Just north of Boxi, five parklets are scattered throughout the Samaritan Quarter. While a zoomed-out Google Map does not show this as an 'area of interest', that neighbourhood has many retail destinations, although much less contiguous commercial frontage than in Boxi. In Boxi, the relevant street blocks' ground-floor frontages are all between 50% and 100% commercial. Berlin's dense development and short blocks generate sufficient pedestrian footfall to support widely scattered commerce, and thus widely scattered parklets. This does not occur in San Francisco or Melbourne, where commercial business dispersal beyond the main shopping streets is very limited, mostly confined to corner sites at main-street intersections. In Berlin, we also mapped the distribution of 42 government-funded, community parklets across three districts: Mitte, Wedding and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg (outlined in Figure 4.1).

### *Number, density and distribution of parklets within individual commercial clusters*

We comparatively analysed three of the largest individual parklet clusters in the three different cities: Fitzroy in Melbourne, Mission in San Francisco and 'Boxi' in Berlin. Each set of parklets sits within and around a large 'area of interest': a contiguous hospitality and commercial precinct defined by Google Maps' algorithm. These precincts are all close to 'downtown', but they are not city-centre neighbourhoods. They all have predominantly low-rise buildings (1–6 storeys) and much on-street car-parking. Building on our Melbourne study in Chapter 3, we mapped a 1.5km × 1.5km area around each of these three parklet clusters, to show the locations of individual hospitality businesses (gleaned from Google's labelling of restaurants, cafes and bars, shown dark-shaded), other 'buildings of interest' (which are mostly commercial, shown lighter-shaded), and transport routes and stops for underground trains, trams and buses (Figure 4.2). We calculated the areas of each neighbourhood's main commercial 'area of interest'. We performed a Nearest Neighbour Analysis in QGIS to calculate and analyse the distances between all the pairs of parklets in each cluster. We also examined the size, density and spatial distribution of the parklet clusters and their commercial precincts, and changes in the number and distribution of their parklets over time. We examined in more detail the placement of 'community parklets' in Boxi. Table 4.1 summarises the metrics of these three precincts and their parklets. The numbers of parklets in each cluster and the sizes of the commercial clusters are roughly similar. Each full map area is 225 ha, and the combined dark and light shaded footprints of the hospitality and commercial 'areas of interest' occupy 40–52 ha. Within those commercial areas, parklet densities average from 1 to 1.8 per hectare, meaning that their parklets' *average* spacing is from 100m to 75m. Three-quarters of Boxi's parklets are tightly concentrated in the core of that cluster, within 200m of its central open space, Boxhagenerplatz. The right-most column of Table 4.1 provides separate statistics for that core area.

Melbourne



San Francisco

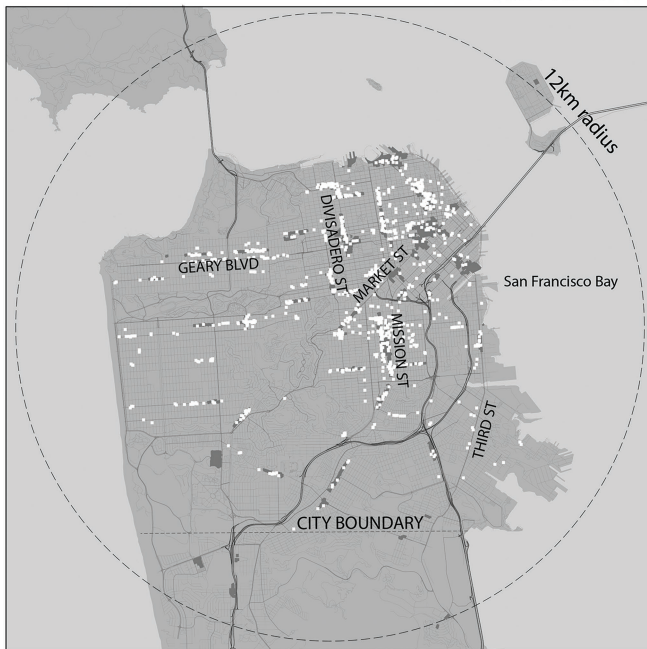


FIGURE 4.1 25km x 25km maps of parklet distribution in Melbourne, San Francisco and Berlin.

Berlin

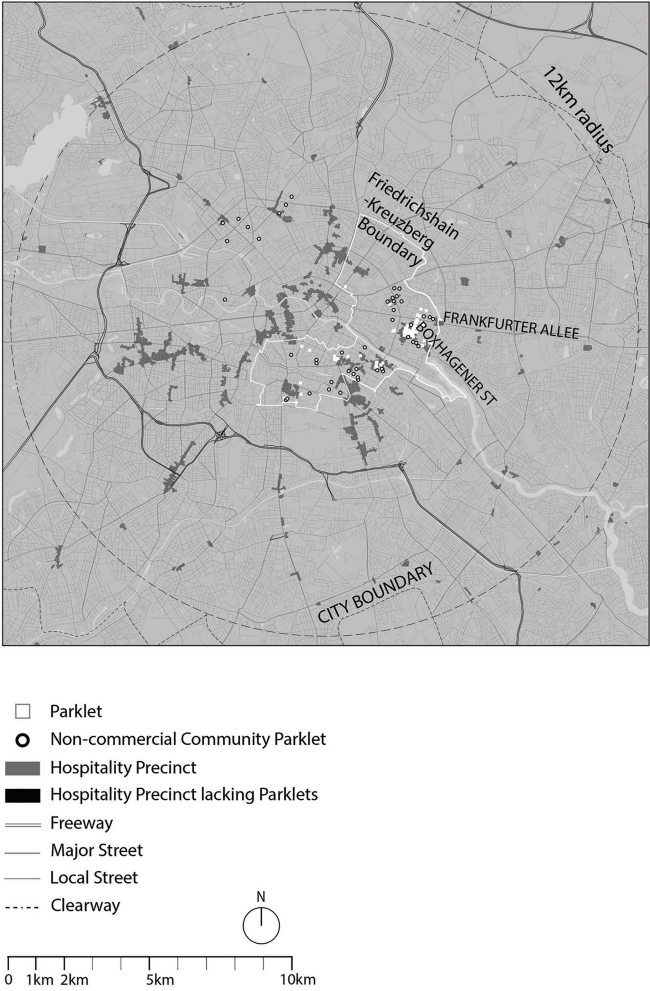


FIGURE 4.1 (Continued).

Source: (Google Maps; Melbourne field data from 2021; San Francisco data from 2022 from DataSF, San Francisco Department of Public Works, SF Shared Spaces dashboard: <https://sfgov.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/b1e37820230a4017ae53d645a96c774b>; Berlin field data from 2022, from Berlin Department of Environment, Mobility, Consumer and Climate Protection, Department of Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure, District Council of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, <https://fixmyberlin.de/friedrichshain-kreuzberg/terrassen>)

Fitzroy/Collingwood in Melbourne



Mission District in San Francisco



FIGURE 4.2 1.5km x 1.5km parklet cluster maps for Fitzroy, Mission and Boxi.



**FIGURE 4.2** (Continued).

Source: Google Maps; DataSF, San Francisco Department of Public Works, SF Shared Spacesdashboard: <https://sfgov.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/b1e37820230a4017ae53d645a96c774b>; Berlin Department of Environment, Mobility, Consumer and Climate Protection, Department of Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure, District Council of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, <https://fixmyberlin.de/friedrichshain-kreuzberg/terrassen>; Field data from 2021, 2023 and 2022 respectively.

**TABLE 4.1** Parklet cluster measurements for Fitzroy, Mission and Boxi

	<b>Fitzroy</b>	<b>Mission</b>	<b>Boxi</b>	<b>Boxi CORE</b>
<b>Number of parklets</b>	61	83	51	37
<b>Area of Google 'Area of Interest' (Hectares)</b>	40	47	52	36
<b>Average parklets per Hectare</b>	1.54	1.77	0.99	1.02
<b>Average separation among all parklet pairs (metres)</b>	855	689	349	196
<b>Number of parklet pairs less than 100m apart</b>	70	177	131	130
<b>Average number of parklets within 100m of each parklet</b>	1.1	2.1	2.6	3.5
<b>% of parklet pairs less than 100m apart</b>	3.8	5.2	10.3	19.5

### *Parklet clustering along major and minor streets*

Figure 4.2 illustrates the morphological similarities and differences between the three precincts and their clusters of parklets. While Fitzroy's parklets mostly line three major, tram-served commercial streets that loop around a single 500m × 830m 'superblock', Mission's parklets mostly cluster around two parallel north-south commercial corridors just 200m apart, and four intersecting streets that have bus service (16th, 18th, 22nd and 24th Streets). Most of Boxi's 51 parklets cluster tightly around five small urban blocks that are each less than 140m across.

Most of Boxi's dense, multistorey residential and commercial buildings have retail uses at ground level. There are many buildings with hospitality functions, and there are parklets on almost every street block frontage that has a concentration of hospitality frontages, except for the three east-west streets that have tram and bus routes. Boxi's parklets are much more tightly clustered than the other neighbourhoods. Even including the outlying parklets that stand well outside Boxi's core hospitality cluster, their average separation is 349m, only half of the median separation for Fitzroy and Mission. Among the 37 parklets in Boxi's core commercial cluster (within one block of the open space of Boxhagenerplatz), the median separation is just 196m – only one city block, about 2.5 minutes' walk. Twenty percent of the parklet-pair separations in that core are less than 130m. Each parklet in that core cluster has, on average, 3.5 other parklets that are within 100m of it, in different directions, easily visible and walkable. In San Francisco the average is 2.1 and in Melbourne only 1.1 parklets, because their clusters are strung out along major streets. We suggest this has an impact upon their long-term viability.

Outside Boxi's commercial core, its remaining 14 parklets are scattered at the map periphery, being located closer to other city arteries such as Frankfurter Allee, or other

commercial clusters that lie beyond the 1.5km extents of our map. In Berlin, people can easily walk or cycle between different, closely spaced clusters of hospitality and parklets. The dense row of parklets along Niederbarnimstrasse, north of Boxhagenerplatz, highlights how Berlin's density and shorter distances can support the spread of parklets along connecting streets that link between major commercial precincts.

Our data show few differences between Fitzroy and Mission, which is unsurprising given their similar patterns of urban development, transport and land use. Both precincts focus around wide, straight arterial streets leading into the nearby city centres. Compared to Fitzroy, the average separation between Mission's parklet pairs is 25% lower, it has 2.5 times as many parklet pairs that are less than 100m apart, and the next-nearest commercial precincts are significantly closer. In short, we might say Mission has more intensity, more potential for 'buzz'. Mission's and Fitzroy's commercial streets link end-to-end, and they have long, strung-out corridors of parklets, not tight clusters, making for longer walking. In Fitzroy, the main street pairs are 830m apart (Gertrude and Nicholson Streets) and 520m apart (Brunswick and Smith Streets). The full main commercial superblock loop is 2,700m, with 45 parklets directly connected to it. In the Mission District, 16th Street, Valencia and 24th Street form a single zig-zag corridor stretching 3km. The key difference is that Boxi's commercial streets are closely spaced and they intersect and connect, forming a much tighter, more 'ringy' precinct for leisurely walking (Dovey 1999). The 37 parklets in its core are on four intersecting street segments totalling 1,280m in length. Visitors can easily walk all those quiet, low-speed street segments.

Despite differences in urban morphology and street network hierarchies between the three precincts, the clustering of parklets along their individual commercial streets is broadly similar. As noted above, the block frontages at the core of Boxi's parklet cluster are almost 100% hospitality. At the other extreme, Fitzroy's main-street frontages vary between about 20% and 40% hospitality functions. Interestingly, Valencia Street, which alone hosts 37 parklets, has a lower percentage of hospitality businesses than the Mission District's other commercial streets, and about 25% non-commercial frontages. Five of Valencia Street's parklets stand in front of non-hospitality venues, including a school and a private house. But it is still a very vibrant street with a lot of pedestrians. Boxi has many commercial block frontages at its fringes that do not have any parklets. While both Mission St in San Francisco and Johnston St in Fitzroy also lack parklets, both have numerous parklets nearby, on adjoining street frontages. Most of the remaining frontage on the cross-streets in these two cities is non-commercial.

### *Kiezparklets*

San Francisco and Berlin differ from Melbourne because many of the former cities' parklets are entirely non-commercial. Officially, all of San Francisco's parklets provide access and some seating for the general public, and some of its parklets are funded and maintained by non-hospitality entities including retail stores, art galleries, public institutions such as museums and libraries, community organisations and individual residents. This includes six parklets in Mission. Several local governments in metropolitan Melbourne have also funded or facilitated parklets for public use. Within the Berlin district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, 35 of the 110 parklets are *Kiezparklets* (neighbourhood parklets) developed through a programme run by the Berlin Senate that provided materials and expertise for a public parklet to any local non-profit community organisation that was willing to construct and maintain one. We discuss this programme further in Chapter 8. Five of these *Kiezparklets* are close to Boxi.

The loosely commercial precinct around Petersburger Platz, 400m northwest of the Boxi cluster, hosts four *Kiezparklets* within it, as well as one commercial hospitality parklet. There are four more *Kiezparklets* nearby, outside non-commercial properties. All these parklets are on minor, short streets. Most of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg's *Kiezparklets* lie outside commercial clusters, as defined by Google Maps' algorithm, but seven other commercial clusters there have between one and five *Kiezparklets* located within 300m of them. The nearest *Kiezparklet* is on average less than 50m outside these clusters – often on the same street block. Broadly speaking, these community parklets draw on the pedestrian flows that those commercial precincts generate, and extend the social life of the street beyond them into more residential. Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg shows that non-commercial, publicly funded parklets and even hospitality parklets, can be developed and used beyond commercial precincts. But it also confirms that commercial clusters have a gravity that attracts public parklets into their orbit.

### Comparing parklet distributions in relation to street character

In all three cities, parklets were typically located in commercial precincts. Many of them were near major commercial streets, which tend to have high pedestrian traffic. But some such streets lacked parklets, and some minor streets hosted numerous parklets. We thus examined how parklets' spatial distributions related to street character.

## *A hierarchy of street types*

Streets with high speed limits (above 60km/h) are typically precluded from hosting parklets for safety reasons. Clearways in Melbourne, which prevent kerbside parking during peak times, preclude long-term appropriation of street spaces for parklets (see Chapter 3). Given the varying definitions and typologies of streets across different countries and municipalities, we have drawn on our comparative analysis of parklet clusters to identify a hierarchy of three distinct categories of street form and function that influence parklet placements. The three city cases vary significantly in terms of how many parklets are in various kinds of street locations.

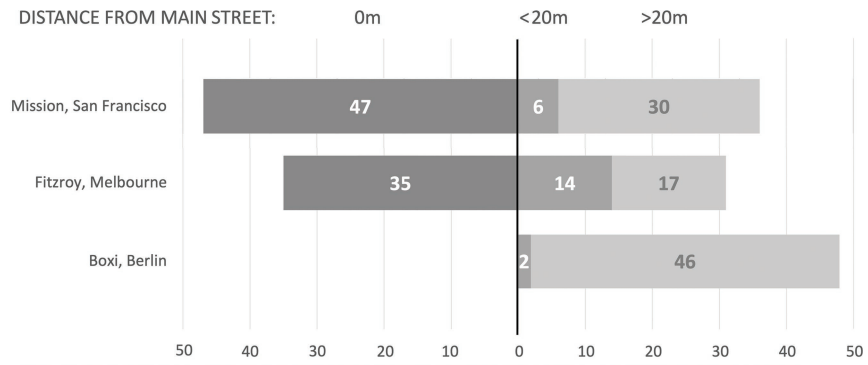
*Major Traffic Streets* have more than two lanes, which optimise vehicular through-flow, and typically have speed limits of 60 km/h. These include Melbourne's clearways. They rarely host parklets. San Francisco's Mission Street is not designated as a major traffic street, but it is a major bus corridor. Twelve parklets previously located there were removed in 2023. Among our three case study precincts, only the Mission District has parklets on Major Traffic Streets, eight in total. These include 17th St and Folsom St, which only have a few hospitality businesses on intersections, and 16th St and 24th St, which are also hospitality precincts. In the latter cases, parklets appear to cause traffic problems due to frequent double-parking adjacent to parklets. In Fitzroy and Boxi, major streets (Johnston Street, Frankfurter Allee and Warschauer Strasse) carry much vehicular traffic, trams and buses. Frankfurter Allee is lined by showpiece Soviet-era apartment buildings with ground-floor commercial uses, but these include few hospitality venues, and they face onto extremely wide sidewalks, precluding the need for parklets.

The second street type, *Main Hospitality Streets*, are commercial corridors with many hospitality venues and high pedestrian volumes. These are the predominant locations for parklets, and we shall later examine in detail their varied affordances and constraints for parklets.

*Side Streets* are narrower, slower and typically shorter. We have named them so because they intersect with major traffic streets and main hospitality streets that provide access for vehicles and generate pedestrian flows. Side streets serve as pedestrian and vehicular connectors to off-street parking lots located behind main-street commercial frontages, and into residential neighbourhoods. We noted in Chapter 3 that many of Melbourne's parklets are located on the minor-street side frontages of businesses that face onto major streets which prohibit parklets. We found that

in Fitzroy there are also many parklets located on side streets far away from main hospitality streets. In Mission, there are numerous parklets on side-street frontages of businesses located on or close to Mission St, as well as parklets on many minor-traffic, predominantly residential streets. Boxi has few parklets near major streets. There is one strip of parklets on Niederbarnimstrasse, adjoining Frankfurter Allee, but the main commercial precinct and its parklets centre on small streets inside the arterial superblock.

Figure 4.3 shows the distribution of parklets in relation to Main Streets (here encompassing both Major Traffic Streets and Main Hospitality Streets). Fitzroy and Mission both host over half their parklets on main streets. Fitzroy has the largest proportion of parklets (21%) situated on side streets within 20m of main street corners. We highlighted in Chapter 3 that several of these are publets: to minimise traffic impacts and risks to patrons, the parklet is placed on a pub’s long, minor-street side frontage. Fitzroy has the smallest proportion of its parklets (26%) located more than 20m away from main streets. Even though it is Melbourne’s most highly integrated, walkable neighbourhood, it has too low a resident density and too few attractors to support much expansion of street activity along minor streets. The 47% of Fitzroy parklets that are not on main streets are on average 3m (30%) longer. The businesses on minor streets have less competition, lower land prices and longer frontages. The lengths of 20% of Fitzroy’s main-street parklets are constrained by immediately adjoining parklets. Parklets on Fitzroy’s minor streets are also on average 10m<sup>2</sup> (40%) larger in area. The largest parklets are those located on side streets within 20m of a main street, with 14 of those parklets averaging 38m<sup>2</sup>. Nine of these are for street-corner businesses fronting



**FIGURE 4.3** Parklet counts in terms of distances from main streets in Mission, Fitzroy and Boxi.

the main street, and four are publets. These ‘sweet spot’ locations combine good visibility and walkability from a main street, having more space available, and less traffic conflicts. While Fitzroy and Mission have most of their hospitality businesses located on or near their major streets, Boxi’s hospitality businesses, and therefore its parklets, are almost all well-separated from Berlin’s wide, fast, loud traffic arteries.

### *Transit stops*

We examined whether parklet placements correlate closely with public transit stops. This relationship could be either positive, if transit enhanced a parklet’s visibility and access for users, or negative, if transit stops constrain opportunities to place parklets next to street kerbs, by prioritising vehicle and passenger movements. We examined the latter constraint by measuring a 30m radius around every transit stop, allowing for bus in-and-out movements, visibility and passenger safety when accessing mid-street trams. In Fitzroy, 14 parklets are within 30m of a tram stop and one near a bus stop; 25% of all its parklets. But only three parklets are within 20m of a tram stop on the same street side. Most of Melbourne’s tram stops are located at street intersections. Parklets cannot stand near those stops because of vehicle visibility and movement around intersections. Most tram-adjacent parklets are on the opposite street side or on side streets. In the Mission District, there are 13 parklets located within 30m of bus stops. Again, most of these are on the opposite street side or on side streets. Valencia Street is able to host 37 parklets within 8 blocks because it does not have any public transit service. It is, however, conveniently situated only 200m from Mission Street’s frequent buses. In Boxi, almost all parklets are on minor streets lacking public transit. Just two parklets are within 30m of a tram and a bus stop. Both parklets are on side streets. Importantly, in all three precincts, the bus, tram and underground routes run close together: about 300m apart in Boxi, 400m in Mission and 500m in Fitzroy. Our analysis highlights that parklets are often close to public transit stops, because walking access is important, but they are also located where they do not interfere with transit functions.

### *Kerbside parking layouts*

The presence and scale of parklets are clearly influenced by the width and orientation of kerbside parking spaces. In Fitzroy, street pavement widths are limited. Fitzroy’s three key commercial streets all have pairs of tram tracks running in the middle, so

to prevent traffic conflicts, kerbside parking spaces cannot have angled vehicular access. Sixty of Fitzroy's parklets (91%) therefore occupy parallel parking. Most have kerb-to-street widths of between 2.0m and 2.6m, with some ranging up to 3.5m. Wider parklets often result where parking spaces do not have painted boundaries. This is common on minor streets, where kerbed bulb-outs with garden beds and mature trees may be wider than 2.5m. Three Fitzroy parklets occupy 60° angled parking spaces and have kerb widths of 3.8–4.2m. Another three occupy 90° perpendicular spaces and have widths of 4.9–5.0m. Using the extra available width, those six parklets have on average 40% more area than the parallel-parking ones. Five of these wider parklets are on short, minor, local side streets that do not carry through-traffic. The very largest parklet, covering 64m<sup>2</sup>, accompanies a pub set well away from the main commercial street on an unusually wide dead-end street segment. Two other wide 'publets' in Fitzroy stand within 20m of a major street, both on the same long, intersecting through-street. In this special case (Figure 4.4), Napier Street, which has Melbourne's standard 20m right-of-way width, is a bicycle-priority route with reduced traffic speed (30km/h), two wide on-street bicycle lanes and a single central two-way lane that oncoming vehicles are forced to share. Napier Street's two wide parklets are protected from vehicles by the bicycle lane, its dedicated traffic island and wide kerb bulb-outs with mature trees. This case illustrates how careful management of a range of urban design relationships can enhance opportunities for introducing parklets to further improve the pedestrian environment. It also shows how a uniform, highly interconnected, fine-grain street grid can be designed, managed and transformed to allow great variation in the ways individual streets support movement, vegetation and social uses.

In Fitzroy, numerous parklets extend beyond the limits of standard on-street car-parking spaces. Three parklets extend into no-standing zones in front of the driveways of the businesses that host them. Five parklets partly or wholly occupy loading zones for delivery vehicles or no-standing areas. Three parklets occupy spaces specially designated for ride-share cars. These trade-offs highlight that during the COVID-19 pandemic, some businesses were willing to sacrifice vehicular access to gain additional outdoor space for patrons. In some cases, these adjustments were very successful and persisted beyond the pandemic. The trade-offs also illustrate local governments' ability and willingness to re-allocate street space according to dynamic shifts in needs. On-street disabled parking spaces are less readily supplanted. These are often located on side streets close to main shopping streets, which we found are also optimal locations for parklets. In cases where hospitality businesses desired the use of such

disabled spaces in front of their premises, local governments sometimes shifted the disabled parking signs to spaces further along the street.

San Francisco's Mission District does not have any angled parklets. Missions' inner-city streets carry significant car and bus traffic, and thus maximise pavement width for travel lanes. Our audit of 18 of San Francisco's largest parklet clusters identified only 10 parklets built on 60° parking and three on 90° parking. The dearth of angled parklets in San Francisco (under 4% in our audit) is not for lack of angled parking. San Francisco has 80km of it (Moran 2021; Mojada 2023). The nature of San Francisco's traffic network appears to play a significant role. In Fitzroy, five of its six angled parklets were on short, minor, local side-streets with little through-traffic. San Francisco's street grid is more uniform and continuous than Melbourne's, and it has fewer short (terminating) streets that host hospitality businesses. In San Francisco, only four lower-density outer neighbourhoods have angled parklets: Little Russia, Outer Sunset and Outer Richmond in the city's west, and Dogpatch in the southeast. These peripheral districts have much angled parking because their streets are wide relative to the traffic demand. Two of these wide, angled parklets have stood since 2012 and 2014, and are featured in full-page photographs in the city's parklet manual, which specifically



**FIGURE 4.4** 5m × 10m 'publet' on 90° parking spaces on Napier Street, Fitzroy, adjoining the side frontage of a hotel that faces a Clearway.

supports angled parklets. In Little Russia, two parklets on angled spaces are standard 2.5m-wide parallel parklet designs that do not even use the extra available width. Cars often double-park outside them. By 2023, Little Russia had lost 20 of its earlier 29 parklets. The other three peripheral precincts had always been small and lost 12 parklets between them. Forty percent of the remaining parklets in these four precincts are on angled spaces. San Francisco's Dogpatch is, like Melbourne's Fitzroy, a cul-de-sac neighbourhood with few through-routes, but standard street widths that easily accommodate 90° parking. One of its 90° parklets is for a games store to provide outdoor space for on-site game-playing (Figure 4.5), the other is on a short cul-de-sac block.

The loss of parklets over time in both central and more-peripheral districts of San Francisco highlights the ongoing competition among various possibilities for uses of street width. This includes not just competition between car-parking spaces and individual businesses' parklets, but also between both of those uses and travel lanes for through-traffic (de Gruyter et al., 2022). In late 2023, shortly after our fieldwork, San Francisco's transportation agency proposed to convert the angled parking on the key



**FIGURE 4.5** Parklet for a games store in Dogpatch, San Francisco.

western four-lane arterial route Geary Avenue back to parallel parking. The city wants to add a dedicated lane to enhance bus service, and this requires not just claiming a few discrete parking spaces, but continuous kilometres of street width. This would necessitate removing or rebuilding two angled parklets installed in 2021, one of which had hosted a press conference by San Francisco's Mayor London Breed and California's governor Gavin Newsom, expressing their ambition for making parklets permanent (Mojadad 2023). These shifts highlight that the parklet programme developed in San Francisco when Gavin Newsom was mayor intended them to be a flexible solution that could adjust to dynamic constraints and opportunities.

Berlin has many parklets on 90° car-parking spaces. The streets in Berlin's neighbourhood commercial precincts have relatively low traffic volumes and speeds (typically 30 km/h), and many are cobbled. More of the street right-of-way is given over to wide sidewalks, mature trees and angled parking spaces, to maximise on-street parking for residents who live in high-density apartments. This is particularly the case on streets that do not have tram or bus routes. In our survey of all the *Kiezparklets* in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, the average right-of-way width was 21m, with an average of 9m allocated for the sidewalks, 6m for on-street parking and 6m (29%) for the travel lanes. This compares with Melbourne, where the typically 20m-wide streets allocate on average just 6.3m for sidewalks, 4.5m for parking and 9.2m (46%) for travel lanes (De Gruyter et al., 2022). Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg's allocations for sidewalks and parking were as high as 14m and 11m. In Boxi, around 70% of the hospitality parklets occupy 60° or 90° parking spaces, which are mostly also on quieter streets (Figure 4.6). The greater parklet width, around 5m, allows much greater flexibility of furnishing and movement within each parklet; they often have double rows of four-seater tables. It also allows more parklets and more parklet area per metre of street length. The format of Berlin's hospitality parklets differs greatly from those in Melbourne and San Francisco. The low traffic speeds and volumes, further constrained in Boxi by parklets filling both sides of the street and sometimes allowing only single-lane traffic, means Berlin's hospitality parklets only require assembling a perimeter of prefabricated steel barrier sections, and placing tables and umbrellas directly on the cobblestone street. Unlike in San Francisco and Melbourne, no money or effort needs to be invested in fabricating a rigid parklet deck and barrier of fixed size and angle. These parklets can quickly and easily be redeployed if traffic or business requirements change, and to suit sites with different dimensions or angles.



**FIGURE 4.6** Wide parklets on Krossener Strasse, Boxhagenerkiez, Berlin.

### *Solar orientation*

We observed in Chapter 3 that Fitzroy's parklets are particularly concentrated along commercial streets that run roughly north-south. Metropolitan Melbourne's main street grid is actually rotated  $8^\circ$  east of true north. We hypothesised a potential performative connection between the orientation of streets and the distribution of parklets: north-south streets benefit from lunchtime sunshine on both kerbsides, which potentially attracts more pedestrians and maximises the number of hospitality businesses on a street block that can install parklets to benefit from that microclimatic advantage. We wanted to further test and develop the hypothesis that solar orientation might correlate with the existence of parklets. We did this by comparing Fitzroy to the parklet clusters in Mission and Boxi. The Mission District's grid is rotated  $7^\circ$  west of north. In Boxi, the gridded streets that host most parklets are oriented  $15^\circ$  east of north, but the streets vary in angle. We distinguished three categories of solar orientation for parklets (Table 4.2). Some parklets are *rarely shaded* because they occupy the sunlit southern kerb of east-west streets in Fitzroy (in the Southern Hemisphere) or comparable northern kerbs in Mission and Boxi. These accompany business frontages

**TABLE 4.2** Percentage distribution of parklets according to solar orientation in Fitzroy, Mission and Boxi

	<b>Fitzroy</b>	<b>Mission</b>	<b>Boxi</b>
Rarely shaded	25	31	8
Sometimes shaded (= north-south streets)	53	58	73
Often shaded	22	11	19

facing the sun. Those parklets that are *sometimes shaded* stand on north-south aligned streets with changing solar exposure through the day and maximum sun at lunchtime. This includes two parklets on angled streets in Boxi. Parklets that are *often shaded* are on the northern kerb of east-west streets in Fitzroy and the southern kerbs in Mission and Boxi. The extent of parklet overshadowing depends on the heights and distances of adjoining building facades, street trees and the varying sun angles at different latitudes throughout the year. Melbourne and San Francisco are both at latitude 37.8; Berlin is at latitude 52.5, with much lower sun and taller buildings in the studied district.

While 53% of Fitzroy's parklets are on north-south streets, over 80% of the district's commercial street length runs north-south. So there are actually more parklets *per kilometre* on its east-west commercial streets – specifically Gertrude Street (Figure 0.1). Only 25% of Fitzroy's parklets occupy the relatively sunny southern kerbs of those streets. This suggests solar orientation alone (which offers four main possibilities) has absolutely no impact on parklet numbers. There are almost as many parklets (22%) on Fitzroy's northern kerbs, which rarely get sun. In Mission, a slightly higher proportion of parklets (31%) are on the sunnier northern kerbs, and much fewer are in the shade. In Boxi, conversely, only three parklets (8%) face the sun, and seven (19%) are on shaded southern kerbs. The latter mostly face onto the neighbourhood's popular central park. Parklets are excluded from most of Boxi's east-west commercial frontages because of tram and bus routes, and so 73% of its parklets are located on north-south streets. Businesses can only erect parklets on the street frontages of the building they occupy. Some of the 30% of parklets in Fitzroy and Mission stand on minor east-west side streets where they adjoin the districts' north-south commercial corridors. These cases illustrate proprietors of street-corner buildings taking advantage of the superior solar orientation on that side street, as well as a longer frontage – like the case of the pub we illustrated in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.2). But overall, the three districts show no correlation between orientation and parklet numbers. In aggregate, solar orientation

does not appear to have influenced whether people are willing to install parklets or not. Parklet placement appears to be much more strongly influenced by the densities of businesses, pedestrians and traffic than by the streets' orientations.

### *Topography*

The parklet as a type was invented on a flat street in San Francisco's Mission District, and involved cheaply laying a new surface across the top of existing, level, asphalted car-parking spaces. Most of our three focused case study precincts are quite flat, as is all of Berlin and most of Melbourne. A majority of San Francisco's commercial areas are also on level ground, because major streets and large-footprint commercial buildings are easier to build and use on flat sites. There are, nevertheless, numerous commercial districts in San Francisco that occupy slopes, and we found 43 parklets on steep San Francisco streets, about 13% of all the parklets we surveyed. There are two terraced parklets in Mission, on the upslope just west of Valencia Street, at 21st and 24th Streets (Figure 4.7a). These illustrate the common situation where the commercial districts centre on relatively flat street sections that run across a slope, and where street-corner businesses are constrained from having parklets outside their main-street frontage, they place them along their side frontages on steeper, non-commercial side streets. We identified three other main areas in San Francisco with numerous parklets on inclined sections of commercial streets: surrounding Nob Hill, Pacific Heights and Columbus Avenue.

One key finding, then, is that although sloping streets may make parklets more expensive and complex to design and operate, they do not in fact prevent them from being built, or from clustering. A case in point is the blocks around San Francisco's famous City Lights Bookstore at the intersection of Columbus Avenue and Broadway. There are collectively eight terraced parklets nearby on Grant Avenue, Kearny Street (Figure 4.7b) and Columbus Avenue itself. San Francisco illustrates several solution types for adjusting parklets to sloping parking spaces. Flat decks may simply follow the slope, sometimes with custom built-in tables and chairs and perimeter walls angled to stand vertically. A long parklet may consist of several short terraces that each have their deck flush with the sidewalk at their higher end (Figure 4.7c). Amado's parklet on 21st St (Figure 4.7a) has five individual narrow terraced booths within its 7m length. If these terraces are long, they may rise quite high above the sidewalk at the downhill



**FIGURE 4.7** Parklets on slopes in San Francisco (top left to bottom right):

- a) Amado's, 21st St.
- b) Tommaso's, Kearny St.
- c) Wildseed, Union St.
- d) Hook Fish Co, Irving St.

end (Figure 4.7b). In a few cases, parklets also provide internal stairs or ramps between terraces (Figure 4.7d).

In downtown Melbourne, we identified 81 parklets, but only four (2%) are on significant slopes, and only one is terraced. We noted in Chapter 3 that two businesses in Fitzroy had terraced parklets on their steep side frontages east of Smith Street. The parklet at the Grace Darling Hotel was originally erected in 2020 with sloping street-facing barriers and astroturf laid on the street. It was later re-built as a 3-level terraced platform (Figure 3.5).

## Change in parklets over time

Parklets were originally designed to be very temporary. We examined how the number and distribution of parklets had changed over time in San Francisco, Melbourne and

Berlin between late 2021 (the height of the post-pandemic restarting of public life) and 2023/24 (Figure 4.8). By 2024, all 51 parklets in Boxhagenerkiez had been removed, as the district council no longer authorised them, although other Berlin districts still hosted some. Based on San Francisco government data and our own field-check of 18 major parklet clusters, more than 30% of that city's parklets had been removed after the pandemic. There are many factors that would influence parklet longevity, including increases in the city's parklet fees and design standards, reduced consumer spending due to post-pandemic inflation, and individual business circumstances. Nevertheless, several spatial factors also seem evident. The seven precincts in San Francisco that retained the smallest numbers of parklets were all more peripheral, in the city's west and southeast. Some western precincts (Little Russia, Outer Richmond, Inner Sunset) lost between 55% and 72% of their parklets. In contrast, the eleven precincts we audited closer to downtown retained, on average, 80% of their parklets. One even gained more parklets. This uneven distribution of change appears to correlate with variations in both population density and median household income. Less wealthy households living in less dense neighbourhoods seem to have supported parklets less well. Another relevant factor is centrality: the network effects of being closer to and more accessible from other commercial areas.

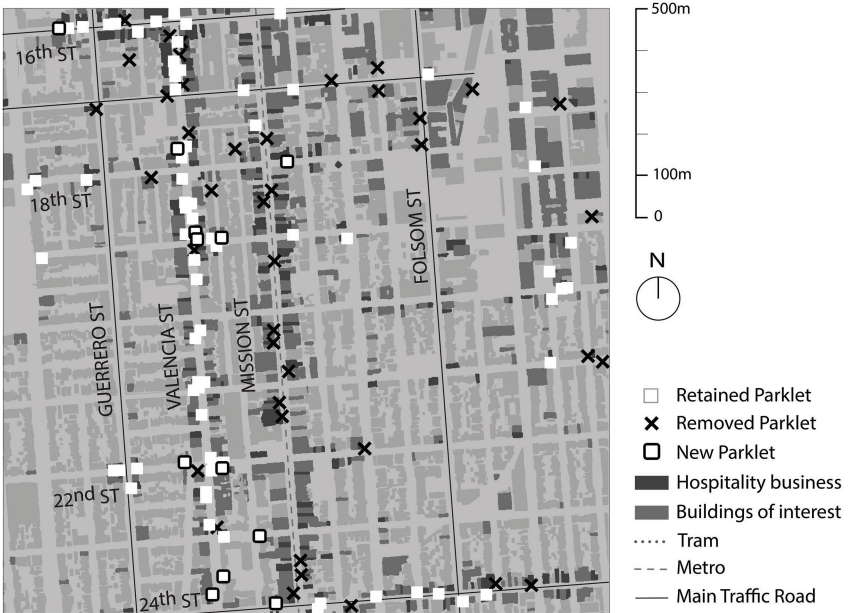
In Melbourne between 2021 and 2023, the Fitzroy neighbourhood lost 44% of its parklets. These losses were distributed throughout the district, but also varied according to context. Parklets on the main commercial streets were most in competition with the increasing number of car parkers after the end of pandemic restrictions, and the local government had accordingly increased permit fees for parklets in these locations by 60%–120% more than it did for parklets on secondary streets. These parklets declined by 43%. Parklets on side streets within 20m of their intersections with main streets declined by 61%. Parklet loss was lower (33%) in areas more than 20m from main streets, where there is accordingly less competition from non-resident parking. Nevertheless, the most parklet removals appeared to happen at the extremities of the Fitzroy cluster: three isolated parklets located 500m east of the cluster on minor streets (all 'publets', accompanying licensed hotels) and two parklets at Brunswick Street's northern end (Figure 4.8). These losses from the peripheries broadly parallel the widely observed end of the pandemic-era boom in local-neighbourhood walking and shopping.

The sub-areas in Fitzroy that retained the most parklets appear to have benefitted from localised agglomeration effects. Around the intersection of Gertrude and Smith Streets, 10 of 11 parklets remained and one was added. This is a concentrated sub-cluster of

Fitzroy/Collingwood in Melbourne



Mission District in San Francisco



**FIGURE 4.8** Retained and removed parklets in Fitzroy from May 2021 > April 2023 and Mission from October 2021 > May 2023.

Source: Field data, DataSF, San Francisco Department of Public Works, SF Shared Spaces dashboard.

successful hospitality businesses within Fitzroy's larger mixed-commercial precinct that includes much other retailing and services. Gertrude Street has a strong identity as a fashion clothing strip, and unlike Fitzroy's other commercial streets it is framed by large trees. It was rated the world's second coolest street by *Time Out* magazine in 2023. The local business organisation for this street also actively campaigned with local government and in the media to be able to retain their parklets.

Parklets' sizes, functions and formats appear to have also influenced their fates. Seven of Fitzroy's 10 largest parklets were removed, and six more parklets were reduced in size, losing one or two car-parking spaces. Only one existing parklet was expanded. Fitzroy lost 4 of its 12 'publets' and a fourth publet was reduced in size. The retained publets were on average 40% closer to the main streets. Three of the removed publets were in an easily demountable format, with freestanding modular barriers and no constructed deck. All of the retained publets had constructed decks. Those proprietors thus conserved their larger investments in rigid parklet construction. These changes highlight that parklets can be a flexible format, adjusting according to changing circumstances.

The Mission District's loss of parklets (37%) was similar in proportion to Fitzroy's (44%). The pattern of parklet removal in Mission is more distinct than in Fitzroy. All 12 parklets that formerly stood on Mission Street were removed as part of wider streetscaping and traffic management plans. In that case, other kinds of street improvements were replacing temporary parklets. Parklet numbers remained fairly stable on Valencia Street (7 removed, 5 added) and on the major east-west streets (which collectively lost 12 parklets but gained 7). The smaller commercial area around Alabama St (eastern edge of Figure 4.8) also retained all of its eight parklets. Twenty-two parklets were removed from streets other than the main corridors Mission St and Valencia St, many of them from non-commercial 'side' streets in the northwest, northeast and east peripheries of our 1.5km cluster map. While Fitzroy businesses only installed two new parklets between 2021 and 2023, the Mission District added 12, all of them within the core commercial cluster.

Parklets are temporary interventions into street space. Their retention or removal over time can be prompted by a range of non-spatial factors, including business conditions, changing regulations, construction quality, traffic needs, changing sentiments of consumers and neighbours and the changing politics of local government. But we can

summarise from our longitudinal analysis of two city neighbourhoods in Figure 4.8, and of parklet clusters across San Francisco, that parklets are less likely to endure over time if they are very large, distant from major commercial corridors and other parklets, and easily demountable. Parklets on and near major streets may also be threatened by the changing traffic needs of those streets.

## Conclusion

Our comparison of these three cities and parklet clusters shows that the spread of parklets strongly depends on adequate urban density, the spread of commercial frontages along streets and walkable distances between individual parklets. In terms of street character, parklets thrive on small, slow, low-traffic streets, as long as those streets have sufficient pedestrian numbers. Paradoxically, busy commercial streets often cannot host parklets, which would improve their pedestrian quality and capacity. However, around high-traffic commercial streets, there is an optimal 'sweet spot' at their intersections with minor side streets. These corner-adjacent, side-street frontages have the benefit of the main-street pedestrian flow and main-street visibility, but a parklet placed there does not inhibit the main-street vehicular flow. Similarly, parklets are often located close to transit stops, but usually on an adjacent side street or on the opposite street kerb. Public, community-managed parklets do not have to be placed in front of hospitality businesses, but in many cases, they are still located close to commercial precincts, because that is where the most pedestrians can benefit from them.

We found that parklets vary in width and length. They tend to be larger where they have less competition from car-parking, vehicular lanes and other parklets. Parking spaces angled at 60° and 90° can support more and wider parklets with more internal flexibility of use. But the San Francisco case shows that such extra width, if it exists along significant distances along major traffic routes, can also attract claims from other street uses, such as adding extra driving or transit lanes. Flexibility of allocation in street width can temporarily support parklets, but it can also lead to them being supplanted, particularly if customer demand for hospitality parklets also falls. Parklets tend to occupy more street width only where that width is surplus to requirements – where universal right-of-way widths exceed local traffic demand. Fitzroy's Napier Street (Figure 4.4) highlighted how the right-of-way on low-traffic streets can be adjusted to better accommodate both parklets and cycling.

Our comparison also highlighted several urban design factors that inhibit or even preclude parklets. These include high traffic speeds, mid-street tram tracks and safety setbacks around intersections and transit stops. Our longitudinal analysis of change after the pandemic showed that smaller, custom-built parklets – ones where people have invested in building a specific envelope – were more likely to remain, especially if they were in central locations. Our findings also suggest that other contextual factors including sunshine and street slope have little influence on parklet installation. But online user feedback from San Francisco suggests that contextual factors such as location noise, overshadowing, wind and disabled accessibility can affect the *success* of hospitality parklets, because these factors impact on user comfort (Yang 2024).

In our earlier research on Temporary and Tactical Urbanism (Stevens and Dovey 2022), Kim Dovey pointed to parklets as one of many current spatial practices that adapt within the complex, dynamic relationships of the city. He also showed how we can better understand the capacities of the street network, streetlife density and the visibility, vacancy and anonymity of building frontages, as well as ‘the ambiguous territories between categories’ (Dovey 2022:155). He then more broadly mapped ‘the actualities and capacities of t/t urbanism across... inner Melbourne’, centred on Fitzroy, the same area where we have subsequently mapped parklets, to identify ‘the various desires and forces at play and to debate the ways they are mediated’ (Dovey 2022:158–159).

In this chapter, we have shown that mapping the locations of parklets reveals varying latent capacities within the urban street network. We have also shown that parklets themselves adapt to local capacities and constraints, for example by becoming wider, introducing terracing, or shrinking over time to free up more car-parking spaces. Parklets are often placed on businesses’ minor street frontages to avoid traffic and transit stops or to gain better solar exposure. Our analysis of clustering highlighted that the placement of parklets is also dependent on, and constrained by, the locations of other parklets, and this is even true for public parklets. Capacities arise from relationships across many scales. In some cases, parklets transform the context itself, as when bicycle lanes or disabled parking spaces are moved within the street to accommodate them. San Francisco’s Mission Street illustrates how parklets demonstrated a capacity which was subsequently made more permanent through streetscaping transformations.

The existing order of the street is not necessarily fixed; sometimes it merely follows convention, and a capacity can be discovered and unlocked, as when angled parklets

occupy wide on-street parking that is surplus to needs, or once-vital loading and no standing zones yield to parklets. The parklet is an urban spatial format that temporarily and incrementally shifts the boundary between the sidewalk and the vehicular travel lanes. Mapping the clustering of parklets and their contextual factors shows that the existing territorialisations and qualities of street space are ambiguous and can be negotiated.

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