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**Interpreting How We Value Parks Through Photographs from Social  
Media: A Case Study of Zilker Park in Austin, Texas**

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Media: A Case Study of Zilker Park in Austin, Texas**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my family: Rusty Osborne, Cecilia Green, and Robin Osborne. I would not be where I am today without their undying love and support. Dad, Mom, and Robin, you are three of the most intelligent, passionate, and inspiring people that I know, and I cannot thank you enough.

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## **Abstract**

### **Interpreting How We Value Parks Through Photographs from Social Media: A Case Study of Zilker Park in Austin, Texas**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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As social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have grown and evolved, users of these internet technologies have deposited a wealth of diverse data with the potential to inform research on a wide range of topics. In particular, the sharing of photographs of outdoor spaces through social media platforms provides important opportunities for analysis of meaning and significance, especially in terms of how planned landscapes such as public parks are perceived and socially produced. In this study, I chose to analyze photographs of Zilker Park posted on Instagram and Twitter in order to better understand how users value this important park in Austin, Texas. This report presents the content, quantitative, and qualitative analyses I conducted in order to develop a concise understanding of elements that people value most in Zilker Park. Through my research and methodological exploration, I seek to offer a new tool for public participation in park planning that can augment existing engagement methods.

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## INTRODUCTION

Photographs have the power to act as representations of their subjects (Nelson, 2005), but they also provide a means for visual interpretation of subject matter and the photographer's intention. Due to the potential of photographs as representational and intentional objects, in this Professional Report I decided to explore the use of photographs as analytical source material in order to better understand people's perceptions and emotional responses to urban parks. I suggest that parks and other public spaces have the power to elicit emotional responses in people, that it is this emotional response that prompts them to take photographs of the park, and that therefore the photographs can be analyzed to understand people's perceptions and the ways that they value parks and other green spaces.

That is to say, throughout this report I use the word value as a verb as opposed to a noun. According to Oxford Dictionaries, when used as a noun, the definition of value is "a person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life," making it related to "morals," while value when used as a verb means "consider (someone or something) to be important or beneficial; have a high opinion of." By purposefully only using value as a verb in reference to my study's goals, I make clear my intention to understand how people perceive the benefits of different park features through the ways in which they act on these perceptions by taking photographs. Such an analysis, in turn, can significantly inform park planning and design by illuminating not merely behaviors but also aspects and features of parks and green spaces that are particularly attractive to people and otherwise "valued."

As my case study, I have chosen to conduct an analysis of photographs taken of Zilker Park in Austin, Texas, gathered from social media sites, specifically Instagram and Twitter. At over 350 acres, Zilker Park is the best-known park in Austin and is considered the city's "crown jewel" park ("Zilker Metropolitan Park," n.d.). It has a relatively central location and is in very close proximity to important features in the city, including Lady Bird Lake and the downtown area. The park offers a variety of amenities, activities, events, and use choices, including leisure and recreation fields, Barton Springs Pool, Zilker Park Boat Rental, Zilker Botanical Gardens, Austin Nature and Science

Center, Zilker Hillside Theater, Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum, Austin Sunshine Camps, and the Zilker Zephyr (Zilker Park Visitors Guide, n.d.). It also hosts the Zilker Kite Festival, Austin City Limits Music Festival, Austin Nature and Science Center Events, Zilker Park Tree Lighting and Trail of Lights, Zilker Hillside Theater Events, and Blues on the Green (Zilker Park Visitors Guide, n.d.). Because of these amenities and its central place in Austin's history, and because of the wealth of social media postings of the park, Zilker provides an appropriate case study for such a social media analysis.

I aim to address one primary research question as well as several secondary questions through my research. The primary question is: What can an analysis of photographs published through social media reveal about the meanings and perceptions that people place on public parks, and the ways in which people value these spaces?

The secondary questions that I will answer through this study are as follows:

- What is the principal significance of Zilker Park in the historical 'imaginary' of Austin?
- What are the principal meanings of and ways that people value Zilker Park as reflected in current social media postings of photographs on Twitter and Instagram?
- What are the lessons from this social media research and analysis methodology that can serve to augment existing public participation tools for park planning?

My methodology began with my selection of the social media sites that I used to search for photographs, followed by the selection of search criteria and a time range for photo analysis based on the results of various test searches. Next, I performed the real study searches on both Instagram and Twitter, devised an organization system, and created my Excel analysis spreadsheets. I used these spreadsheets to code the photographs into categories and subcategories based on the Composition, Content, and Behavior that each photograph portrayed. After I finished coding the characteristics of each photograph, I performed a basic quantitative analysis to find the sums and percentages of photographs that were coded in each subcategory. I used the results of this analysis to create initial interpretations for my qualitative analysis, which I then built upon through identifying and interpreting patterns of characteristics and meanings.

Finally, I aggregated my interpretations to compile a final, concise list of the primary ways that people value Zilker Park.

Based on my findings—both in terms of representations of Zilker and in terms of my assessment of the methodology I used—I suggest, first, that such research makes it possible to analyze how people value different parks elements through the portrayals represented visually in their photographs. Furthermore, because my analysis helps me reveal people's perceptions of Zilker, my methodology allows me to understand why people choose Zilker as the location for particular activities. As Dorwart et al. point out, having an understanding of perception allows for better explanation of behavior:

Pigram (2003) argued that "perception is basic to an understanding of leisure BEHAVIOUR and recreation decision making, and why people select particular settings and activities" (p. 359). Further, to understand perception, a person needs to take into consideration his/her surroundings because these spaces will provide context for the things he or she sees in the environment (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982). (2009, p. 34)

Moreover, based on lessons learned in the process of completing this research, I will provide recommendations suggesting how this process could be adapted to different geographic contexts to augment the existing methods of planning processes for future park planning. I argue that my methodology, utilized as a public participation tool, could present an opportunity to reach segments of the population that are usually under-represented in planning and participation processes.

In the first chapter of this report, I provide background information on planning methods and public participation processes, as well as theoretical context for my research, showing how literature in public space research, photographic content analysis, and social media research serve to frame such analysis of photographs posted by park users on social media. In the second chapter, I present the history and significance of Zilker Park, discussing how it was established, the importance of the natural environment, and the facilities, amenities, and events that make the park iconic and hence an appropriate case study for such an exploratory analysis. In the third chapter, I explain my research process and methodology in detail, including the decisions I made and how I conducted my analysis. In the fourth chapter, I present my findings and analysis (both quantitative and qualitative), conduct an interpretation of principal ways that people value Zilker

Park, and present a concise list of categories that encompasses the ways that people value the park. Lastly, in the fifth chapter I assess my methodology, discuss the significance of inclusive public participation practices, and suggest how my process can be adopted or adapted to foster public participation in park planning.

## **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND THEORY**

Participatory planning methods, including those for park planning, typically fail to include large segments of the public. However, utilizing social media sourcing as a central element of the participation process, and photograph analysis as a means to discover what people value, could help address (at least in part) the challenge of inclusion in park planning. While social media sourcing as employed in this study is a form of passive capture of users' perspectives and does not allow for personal nor virtual communication between planners and the public, this methodology serves to capture representations by far more people than traditional public meetings. Also, such social media sourcing does not require active participation on the part of the public, making the method easier both for the public and for planners. In the sections below I present a brief overview of park planning methods and the types of public participation tools that are presently used. I also present theoretical background for how public spaces can elicit emotional responses in their users, how photography portrays significance, and the social media research principles and methods that are particularly relevant for participatory approaches to park planning.

### **PARK PLANNING PROCESSES AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS**

The urban planning processes employed by municipalities and government agencies throughout the United States are generally unique to each individual entity's needs and required duties. However, these processes tend to draw upon some of the same methods and steps. Issue and need identification, goal-making and visioning, and public participation are three of the most fundamental elements of planning processes. The public participation process in which these tools are put to use usually starts at the beginning of the entire planning process and lasts until the plan is ready to be sent to the decision makers for adoption. An example of the planning process is reflected in the following list of eleven steps to guide park planning issued by the Washington State Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development:

- Step 1: Consider Goals and Overall Planning Framework
  - Step 2: Initiate Community Visioning and Ongoing Citizen Participation
  - Step 3: Inventory Existing Conditions, Trends, and Resources/Identify Problems and Opportunities
  - Step 4: Develop Goals and Priorities to Guide Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Measures
  - Step 5: Enlist the Support of Other Local Groups, Jurisdictions, and Departments
  - Step 6: Assess Parks/Open Space/Recreation Needs and Demand
  - Step 7: Develop Site Selection Criteria and Priorities, Based on Community Goals
  - Step 8: Evaluate Plan Alternatives; Select and Adopt the Preferred Plan
  - Step 9: Prepare the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan Element
  - Step 10: Develop Tools to Implement Your Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Strategy
  - Step 11: Adopt and Transmit the Element.
- (Enger, 2005)

Another park planning guide from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources lists similar steps, also including issue and need identification, goal-making and visioning, and public participation:

- Step 1: Organize the Planning Team
  - Step 2: Agree on a Planning Process and Schedule
  - Step 3: Develop a Public Participation Strategy
  - Step 4: Collect and Display Basic Information
  - Step 5: Identify Needs and Issues
  - Step 6: Focus on the Highest Priority Needs and Issues
  - Step 7: Develop a Vision
  - Step 8: Formulate Goals and Objectives
  - Step 9: Identify Strategies
  - Step 10: Prioritize Strategies and Develop an Action Program.
- (Hoffman, 2001)

The City of Austin's Park and Recreation Department also devised a particular planning process, which it utilized to reach its current Long Range Plan for Land, Facilities, and Programs. Chapter 5 of the plan document discusses this process and what each step entails in some detail. The

process, like the two discussed above, includes issue and need identification, goal-making, and public participation elements. In this instance, the public participation is accomplished through various methods in the needs assessment step, including surveys and public meetings under the demand-based needs assessment process. I noticed that under the resource-based needs assessment process, the planners conducted a trends assessment, which is "a way of recognizing observed popular social and recreational activities" (City of Austin, 2011a, p. 156). This step is crucial because it shows that the City of Austin is already aware of the importance of understanding what people do and do not value in a recreational or park facility. It is in a planning process step like this where my methodology could add needed depth by incorporating passive public participation.

These elements of issue and need identification, goal-making and visioning, and public participation are aspects of planning that could potentially benefit from the incorporation of my social media photograph analysis. Public participation is especially significant because it is sometimes utilized to incorporate the issue and need identification and goal-making and visioning elements. Additionally, my methodology could function as a form of passive public participation to bolster other methods of community involvement that make up the public participation process. Evans-Cowley (2010) suggests that the level of intimacy made possible through social media has the potential to provide planners with a means to connect on a more personal level with members of the public, improving the quality of the public participation process. Although her conclusion calls for direct engagement of the public through social media, her research also suggests that simply the use of social media in gathering community input (even passive input) can add a significant layer to the public participation efforts included in a planning process. Recently, planners have been starting to adopt social media into their planning efforts based on the benefits it can provide for interaction between citizens and planners. Los Angeles and New York City are two major U.S. cities that have utilized social media in their planning departments; one planner from New York said "the whole idea is that social media is flexible. It's human. It's direct contact" (Hsu, 2013). Cities like Los Angeles and New York have been using major sites like Twitter and Facebook, as well as other online outreach tools, and use their accounts to interact with the public, share news, and keep people updated on the progress of various undertakings



(2013). However, these social media accounts are still used in addition to various traditional public participation tools. A report evaluating the park planning process in the City of Raleigh states, "rather than replacing existing face-to-face public involvement strategies, online processes should augment existing public participation activities" (Smutko et al., 2009, p. 17). On this basis, my methodology for online passive public participation, along with other Internet-based active public participation tools, should not be used as the primary form of community involvement but instead to enhance the process by complementing more common public participation tools such as surveys, public meetings and open houses, public comment periods at city meetings, workshops and charrettes, and stakeholder engagement.

Not only does my methodology have the potential to bolster the public participation process, it might also enable planners to involve people in the process who might not normally engage in planning efforts. Evans-Cowley (2010) provides a real-world example of why it is important to take into consideration the input of people from social media platforms. She discusses how in relation to a particular planning issue, positive online support was higher than the oppositional perspective, however this did not translate into the support needed to affect the actual planning decision. So, even though many people showed a positive interest in the planning issue online, they did not go as far as to contribute their opinions by methods that would influence the decision toward their desired outcome, while those with the oppositional view did participate in impactful ways. There will always be citizens who are too busy to get involved, who are unaware of opportunities for participation, and/or who simply choose not to participate. My methodology could allow the consideration of input from segments of this population. It is reasonable to assume that because there are so many users of social media sites with photo-sharing capabilities, a significant portion of these users may not engage in planning processes. Therefore my methodology can capture input from these social media users who may not have been included otherwise. It is also reasonable to assume that a significant portion of these social media users are young people, because Millennials, "the cohort of Americans born between 1980 and the mid-2000s, are the largest generation in the U.S., representing one-third of the total U.S. population in 2013" (The Council of Economic Advisors, 2014, p. 3). Within the Millennials cohort, young adults (people aged 18-29 years old) comprise the highest portion of social media users, with

about 90% of them using social media (Perrin, 2015). Young adults also may not be likely to participate in planning processes or may not be aware of the processes in the first place. Again, in this scenario my methodology provides the opportunity to take these people's input into account as a form of capturing their perspectives.

## **HOW PUBLIC SPACES ELICIT EMOTIONAL RESPONSES**

In this section I review three articles that explore public spaces theories and the relationships between public spaces and emotional reactions. These relationships are discussed through lenses of morality, the design and management of spaces for specific outcomes, and visceral geographies. These foci illustrate that parks and other public spaces are socially constructed and viewed, and that these kinds of spaces elicit emotional responses in their users.

As Catungal and McCann (2010) suggest, parks are socially produced through moral coding of space as well as through planning and governance. Although these authors focus on the mutually reinforcing relationship between public park space and heteronormative morality in Vancouver, morality also has a close tie to emotion since people defend their morals with a fierce passion grounded in the emotional register. This morals-emotions connection in the context of public parks, in turn, suggests that public spaces elicit emotions in people who see and use them. The following statement by Catungal and McCann supports this supposition: "transgression, sexual or otherwise, in iconic places of 'propriety' and visibility...frequently prompts particularly vociferous and sometimes violent reactions, since it is regarded by some to be an affront to 'common values'" (2010, p. 77). This connection between parks and values is especially true in "particularly iconic, visible" public parks (Catungal & McCann, 2010, p. 79). This makes the article even more relevant in terms of informing my research, since the authors confirm that iconic parks (like Zilker in Austin) have a particularly powerful ability to elicit emotional responses from park users and observers based on morality.

There are some particular emotions that both support morals and are also elicited by any disruptions of morals which will guide people's either positive or negative responses to parks, or

to any changes to parks. Contempt, anger, disgust, shame, embarrassment, guilt, compassion, gratitude, and elevation are the 'moral emotions' as specified by Jonathan Haidt (2003), but in addition to these I think it is also important to include fear. In the case of Catungal and McCann's (2010) work, fear includes fear *of* the 'Other' by those following heteronormative morals, or fear *by* the 'Other' of violence, hatred, and persecution committed by those who follow heteronormative morals. Below I review the two central events discussed by Catungal and McCann, both of which occurred in relation to Stanley Park, in order to further demonstrate how moral emotions are central to people's perceptions and hence behavior in public parks.

The AIDS memorial controversy discussed by Catungal and McCann began when a non-profit called AIDS Vancouver proposed the dedication of an AIDS memorial to be located in Stanley Park. The memorial was initially approved by the Vancouver Park Board; however, approval was quickly rescinded when a local TV station conducted a phone-in poll that found that "96 per cent of the almost 14,000 respondents opposed the project" (Catungal & McCann, 2010, p. 82). The reasons people opposed the memorial's location in Stanley Park varied from aesthetics, appropriateness, environmentalism, recreation, etc., to outright homophobia, but all of the claims in opposition to the memorial stemmed from a moral-emotional undertone. Many of the opponents shared the opinion that, if the memorial was going to be built, it should not be in Stanley Park. According to Catungal and McCann, the memorial's opponents viewed Stanley Park as an inappropriate location because the memorial "visibly identified the presence of the diseased sexualized Other, the immoral, and the anti-social in a space they saw in terms of wholesomeness" (2010, p. 83). Because of this, I argue that the visibility of anything to do with AIDS represented transgressive behaviors in the minds of the memorial's opponents because they associated AIDS with the gay community – an association that elicited moral emotions like contempt, anger, and disgust. To the opponents, this association between the memorial, AIDS, and homosexuality also threatened their perceptions of the park's wholesomeness, which in turn elicited moral emotions like pride (for the park's perceived wholesomeness) and fear (of losing said wholesomeness). Many opponents also argued that memorials are meant to commemorate 'heroes' who died for a cause on behalf of others and in the name of goodness, and that AIDS victims met none of those criteria. One local physician even questioned "'what cause have the AIDS victims died for? In what

way are they heroes?" (Catungal & McCann, 2010, p. 83). Views like this further reflect moral emotions like contempt and disgust, and reveal a complete lack of sympathy for the victims of AIDS.

The second incident discussed by Catungal and McCann was the killing of Aaron Webster in Stanley Park. Aaron Webster was a gay man who was killed in the park by a group of men, armed with objects to be used for beating, who claimed that they went to the park to go after 'peeping toms.' However, the area of the park that they ventured to was well known as an area frequented by gays looking to have sexual encounters (Catungal & McCann, 2010). Both 'peeping toms' and homosexuality can be considered socially/morally deviant from hegemonic and heteronormative ideals, and the moral emotional response of contempt to what was seen as a disruption of the morality of the park in turn led to violence: "Violence is one end of a range of actions intended to maintain the existing socio-spatial order in the face of difference in public space" (Catungal & McCann, 2010, p. 78). In other words, the emotional reactions to transgression against a perceived 'pure' mental image of Stanley Park can be understood as a threat to normative morality structures. Many of the responses to the killing from both the media and the Vancouver community not only blamed Webster for his own death based on his decisions in the park, they also conveyed a desire to protect the park from becoming primarily a destination for transgressive behaviors (Catungal & McCann, 2010). The media especially blamed the victim by questioning (and thereby practically implying) whether "public visibility of 'inappropriate' acts in gay cruising sites *provokes* violence" (Catungal & McCann, 2010, p. 87). Again, the homophobic reactions of the media and the community revealed underlying moral emotional responses of contempt and disgust for homosexuals and their behaviors, as well as fear of the loss of the park's wholesomeness and pride over the image that people feel the park should represent.

Similarly, van Melik et al. (2007) discuss how public space design can elicit emotional responses in users. They explore planning, design, and management methods that seek to either reduce or eliminate fear from space so that users feel safe, or create spaces of fantasy that attract more users, thereby creating a sense of safety; however, they also believe that fantasy is a factor in spaces managed and designed in relation to fear, and that fear is a factor in spaces managed and designed in relation to fantasy.

In European cities, renovations to public spaces by planning, designing, and management in response to safety concerns have translated into two types of outcomes: "either it created 'secured' space, taking steps to increase safety and reduce feelings of 'fear', or it induced 'themed' space, focusing on urban entertainment and 'fantasy'" (van Melik et al., 2007, p. 25). The fact that increasing safety became such a dominant approach on which to base planning, designing, and management of public spaces directly implies that users of spaces were experiencing emotional responses of fear while using or seeing the spaces. This fear is usually the fear of crime and bodily harm, which people may perceive as coming from the known/assumed likelihood of crime or assault in a particular space, or the presence of 'undesirables' (like the homeless, youth, minorities, etc.). Purposeful attempts to mitigate or expel fear from a space based on a security approach are easily seen in its design and management. van Melik et al. (2007) note strategies like varied forms of surveillance, lack of visibility for anyone not in the know, elements that discourage loitering or other transgressive activities, entrances/exits with barriers, and confusing accessibility. Conversely, creating a 'themed' space is supposed to also address safety issues by drawing more people to the space and creating a lively, active environment of visibility. This approach is reminiscent of Jane Jacobs' "eyes on the street" concept (1961).

While the 'secured' spaces approach discussed by van Melik et al. seems aimed at *removing or reducing* the emotional response of fear, the 'themed' spaces approach seems more intent on *replacing* fear with the alternate emotional responses of joy, happiness, and excitement. The idea that spaces can be programmed to *elicit* a positive instead of a negative emotional response, or alternately that spaces can be designed and monitored to *control or prevent* a negative emotional response supports my argument about the effect of public parks on their users. This article also shows how planners and designers may take advantage of this emotional response to space by provoking people's positive emotions and managing their negative emotions through purposeful designing and regulation of public places. 'Themed' spaces especially seem particularly successful at replacing fear with joy and excitement, while creating an aura of safety. On this subject, the authors cite Hannigan (1988), who described the term "riskless risk," originally coined by Russell Nye, meaning "being able to be adventurous without really taking chances" (van Melik et al., 2007, p. 29)

Not only does the regulation of public spaces through planning and design seek to control the emotional responses of users, it can also have the effect of determining the types of users that are acceptable in or allowed to use certain spaces based on the elicited emotional responses. I come to this conclusion based on van Melik et al. (citing Lofland [1988]), who described how different groups will "claim particular spaces as their own, where they go to meet the people they want to meet and avoid those they do not want to see" (2007, p. 31). These groups likely make their choices about which spaces they claim based on their emotional responses to those spaces; if a space elicits fear for a particular group of people, that group will probably not take ownership of it. But if a space elicits joy, happiness, and excitement, they will utilize and occupy that space much more frequently, thereby symbolically staking a claim over it. This avoidance of or claim over space applies to other emotional responses as well, such as contempt, disgust, and pride. Because of these emotions, people fitting the hegemonic and heteronormative definitions of 'the public' generally avoid places where social 'deviants' feel comfortable, or they seek to protect those spaces that they have already claimed from unwanted groups. This shows a clear linkage between planning and design and the moral coding of public spaces, since the emotional responses evoked by Stanley Park in Vancouver related to conflict over acceptable uses and users of a public space.

However, while public spaces can elicit emotional responses in users, researchers in visceral geographies suggest that the separation of public and private spaces into distinct categories is problematic. "Visceral" as defined by Merriam-Webster, means "coming from strong emotions and not from logic or reason," and writers in this field call for researchers to explore the human body as a site of research to better understand people's emotional experience in public spaces (Sweet & Escalante, 2014; Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Sweet and Escalante (2014) argue for the use of visceral geographies and methodologies in planning processes in order to better address the fear, violence, and gender inequalities experienced by women in urban settings. They confirm the powerful relationship between space and emotions (in this particular case, fear), when they state: "fear and perceptions of safety are elements that really limit the mobility of women and their use of the space" (2014, p. 1832).

Sweet and Escalante (2014) use people's bodies as the geographical scale at which fear, violence, and gender inequalities should be researched, rather than framing their article around physical spaces. However, the visceral experiences of bodies stem from interactions in physical spaces: "visceral geography sees the body as the geographical space of inquiry and pays particular attention to how bodies feel internally – sensations, moods, physical states of being – in relation with surrounding spaces and environments within communities" (Sweet & Escalante, 2014, p. 1827). Despite the article's focus on the human body rather than physical spaces as the geographical scale of analysis, this quote directly acknowledges the importance of "surrounding spaces and environments within communities" in evoking emotion within our bodies; in other words, our bodies experience emotional reactions to their physical surroundings and environments.

Sweet and Escalante describe two visceral methodologies that planners can employ to better understand fear, violence, and gender inequalities. One of these methodologies is bodymapping, and the other is shared sensory spatial experience (Sweet & Escalante, 2014). Both of these visceral approaches can reveal connections between physical space/environments and emotional responses, although not necessarily always. Bodymapping involves drawing and writing on a life-size trace of the person's body, and shared sensory spatial experiences aim to "enable planners and participants to share an activity that involves bodily sensations such as...practicing yoga or similar body movements in a diversity of spaces, from homes to public squares" (Sweet & Escalante, 2014, p.1828). Shared sensory spatial experiences appear to have a particularly relevant potential to illustrate connections between physical space and emotional responses, and Sweet and Escalante view the method as a way to "grasp through bodies how space is felt and used" (2014, p. 1828). Sweet and Allison Hayes-Conroy experienced the benefit of shared sensory spatial experiences first-hand in one of their studies with displaced women in Colombia. The researchers purposefully produced a shared sensory spatial experience situation with the women, which helped some women to feel comfortable enough to reveal personal and intense emotions, primarily anger and fear, through recounting difficult stories of experienced violence (Sweet & Escalante, 2014).

## HOW PHOTOGRAPHS CAN PORTRAY SIGNIFICANCE

In order to support my use of photographs for this study, it is important to establish how photographs can portray something of significance or value to the photographer. First, I want to understand what might prompt someone to take a photograph. An article by Dunkel discusses what factors influence the photographer, noting that taking a photograph constitutes an "active decision" (2015, p. 177). This understanding of photography emphasizes the importance of choice: simply the fact that a person chooses to take a photograph of something shows that the subject has significance to the photographer. Dunkel further explains the factors influencing the photographer, saying that "the action of taking a photo is recognized as not only being triggered by the immediate environment but by all aspects of cognition: personal preferences, memories, opinions, and more" (2015, p. 177). He then goes on to connect this idea of the influence of cognition with the significance of location, stating that people's perceptions of a place are embodied in the photographs that people take of that place, as well as in which photographs they choose to upload (and therefore share with others) (Dunkel, 2015). If I can link the idea of valued aspects (from my study) to aspects of cognition (as Dunkel discusses) by suggesting that the former are derived from the latter, then Dunkel's factors which prompt photography are particularly relevant for my study. He emphasizes that a place-based photograph can reveal a person's "perceptions of the place" (Dunkel, 2015, p. 177), which is crucial because my study focuses on a particular place, and also because I connect the perceptions that people's photographs portray with the ways in which people value what they photograph. Essentially, I could adapt his statement to say "the action of taking a photo is recognized as not only being triggered by the immediate environment but by [aspects people value as well]."

I also argue that emotional responses to parks can stimulate the action of taking a photograph. In a Huffington Post opinion-piece, the author, a photographer named Monica Shulman (2014), lists and explains four reasons that she is prompted to take photographs. The first on her list is "because it makes me feel something," after which she goes on to suggest that some moments "move" her to capture them, meaning that she feels an emotional response to certain moments (2014). Not only can emotional responses spur photography, but photographs can also portray emotions. In a study by Miller and Happell (2006), the researchers supplied study



participants with cameras and asked them to produce photographs that represented "hope" to them. Because hope is an emotion, the resulting photographs were both prompted by an emotional response, and representative of emotion. In another study, Kruse (2004) worked with participants who were dealing with the "letting go" process, in which one of their loved ones was in the process of dying or had already died. The "letting go" process is inherently emotional, and Kruse (2004) asked the participants to select and discuss a photograph that to them reflected the "letting go" process. Therefore, in this study as with the Miller and Happell study (2006), the photographs represented emotional triggers. Collier and Collier also found this to be true, stating "photographs are charged with psychological and highly emotional elements and symbols" (1986, p. 108). Finally, van Hoof et al. (2015) examined the degree to which elderly residents of a nursing home felt "at home" by having them take photographs of various aspects of their living environment that were meaningful, whether in a positive or negative way. In their results, the researchers discuss how feeling "at home" is created by a complex agglomeration of emotions, meaning that the photographs taken by the participants were elicited by emotional responses. Because photographs can be so tied to emotions, and because people decide what they do and do not value based partially on emotion and emotional responses, photographs provide a suitable medium for my analysis of what people value about Zilker Park.

Finally, photographs can portray significance in that they are a method for presentation of self. According to Van House et al. (2005), "self-presentation is about influencing others' view of oneself; for example, through self-portraits, pictures of one's friends, possessions, personal space, and so on" (p. 1855). Since photographs represent people's specific cognitive aspects and perceptions (Dunkel, 2015), presentation of self via photography is especially relevant in the context of social media.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AS A RESEARCH AND PLANNING TOOL**

"Social media are digital platforms that facilitate information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration across people" (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015, p. 1653). Many social media platforms are also social networks, which are:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211)

The first true social networking sites began appearing from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, and featured some of the basic functions still used by the sites that are popular today, including making social connections and creating a profile ("The History of Social Networking," 2014). The rise of these virtual platforms has led to major changes in how people communicate and connect (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015); today, social networking and social media have become a prominent part of many people's daily lives as they post and share content in text, photographic, and video formats with their social media connections and even with the public in general. Social media sites have become the predominant places to communicate and interact digitally with others; share ideas, opinions, and content; obtain news; and participate in the unique, viral, self-perpetuating, ever-evolving popular culture that has sprung from the Internet.

There are several different formats of data that researchers can source from social media for their study purposes, including photographs, text, videos, tags, locations, dates and times, underlying digital codes, and others. For my study in particular, I chose to use social media sourcing to gather photographic data only since social media has become a prominent stage for both presentation of self and identity performance (Hogan, 2010; Schwartz & Haleboua, 2014; boyd, 2007; Zhao et al., 2013) through photographs and other media types. Evans-Cowley discusses how online social platforms have affected the ways that people perform their identity:

While not all people participate in online social networks, Trogemann et al. (2008) argue that portals such as Facebook have begun to compete with the physical street as the preferred place to be seen. If the online world is the preferred place to be seen, then how you present yourself there is significant. (2010, p. 409)

Just like with other research methods, using social media to source data and information has both pros and cons. One benefit according to Lunnay et al. (2014) is that social media can enable researchers to build stronger, more personal connections with research participants, which can result in better information flow and a higher quality of analyses. Similarly, Altinay et al. note that various studies reveal that social media "fosters engagement" and "provides participation, learning and connection" (2016, p. 95). Another benefit of using social media is its

easy accessibility from almost any place on earth that has Internet access, which makes conducting research using social media easier because it can be done from many different locations. Also, social media research can provide researchers with access to multitudes of data, several different types of data, vast populations of possible research participants, and a virtually unlimited number of research topics. Depending on how social media is used, it presents some challenges as well. Some of the difficulties of using social media in research relate to "seeking to protect against unethical behavior" (Lunnay et al., 2014, p. 105). These include issues of privacy, full disclosure and informed consent, and data storage (2014). These types of ethical concerns are involved in studies deemed to be human subjects research, which an internal review board determined my research not to be. Other types of challenges that social media might present for researchers include uncertainties regarding the identity of online subjects or participants due to the ability to maintain false or misleading online identities. Also, many people's social media accounts contain personal information that might affect how others view them, and the visibility of this information may be upsetting for participants if it fails to reflect their desired self-image.

In the end, I chose to use social media to source photographs because social media platforms offer a wealth of easily and readily accessible user-generated photographic content, which was important given the purposes of my research and my time and resource limitations as a student. Also, the fact that social media sites contain photographs related to almost any topic imaginable make them ideal databases for photographs of a topic and location as specific as Zilker Park. Similarly, social media provides a suitable means of crowdsourcing data, and "the physical presence required for generating crowdsourced spatial content makes it especially suited to collect information on aspects of identification, perception, emotion, and social interaction with respect to the environment" (Dunkel, 2015, p. 184). Since social media has become a prominent space for the presentation of self, by interpreting photographs I would be able to identify the valued aspects of Zilker Park that are part of the "self" that people present in their photographs. Finally, as previously stated, social media allows me to tap into the perceptions and opinions of large segments of the population, many of which may not be represented in traditional public participation efforts in planning processes.

This review of planning processes and public participation methods, how public spaces can elicit emotional responses, how photographs portray significance, and how social media can be used to gather research data has provided the theoretical framework for my study. It was important to establish why photographs were a relevant medium through which I could interpret aspects of a park that people value. I did this by explaining how public spaces elicit emotional responses that prompt people to take photographs, and how these photographs in turn reveal emotional responses and significance the photographer attaches to certain places. Based on this theoretical foundation, in the next chapter I will present Zilker Park in greater depth before proceeding with my analysis of photographs.

## **CHAPTER 2: ZILKER PARK**

As a lifelong Austinite, I have my own reasons for believing that Zilker Park represents a significant piece of Austin's character and the 'imaginary' of the city held by its citizens. However, to assess whether Zilker Park would be an appropriate case study, I decided to develop a greater understanding of the history and importance of the park to the city of Austin. To accomplish this, I visited the Austin History Center in order to view archived newspaper articles, pamphlets and brochures, and official city documents (e.g., meeting minutes) related to Zilker Park's aggregation, development, and changes over time. These documents covered over 100 years of history, ranging from the early 1900s into the 2000s. I discuss my findings below, as well as explore how the park's unique environmental situation, features/amenities, and events also contribute to Zilker's place in the formation of the imaginary of Austin held by its citizens.

### **HISTORY OF THE AREA AND PARK**

The land that currently comprises Zilker Park has been a significant setting for various people and events involved in the settlement and development of the Austin area; from Native American and early European occupation, to Mexican and United States ownership and settlement, to young Austin and the city as we now know it.

As early as 1730, Franciscan Fathers built a mission temporarily located at Barton Springs, thought to constitute possibly the first church structures in Travis County. The Fathers eventually relocated to San Antonio. The land in the park area was frequently but not continuously used and occupied by Native Americans. On January 12th, 1826<sup>1</sup> (Austin Public Library, 2005) the Governor of Coahuila y Texas (the name of the territory during the Mexican reign) transferred the deed to a league of land that encompassed all of the present day park property to Henry P. Hill (Hendrix, 1965). In 1837, William "Billy" Barton and his family settled on the banks of the natural springs

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrix (1965) suggests a different date for the transfer of the deed.

that are named after him (Walsh, 2010) and are encompassed by the park. In 1855, Ashford B. McGill, who occupied the position of Travis County Clerk from 1846 to 1857, started purchasing the present day park land and other property in the area. He eventually sold the land encompassing the present day park to Phineas de Cordova in 1860, who sold it to William C. Walsh in 1867. In 1901, William C. Walsh's heirs sold the land to Col. Andrew Jackson (A. J.) Zilker, who was the last private owner of the land (Hendrix, 1965).

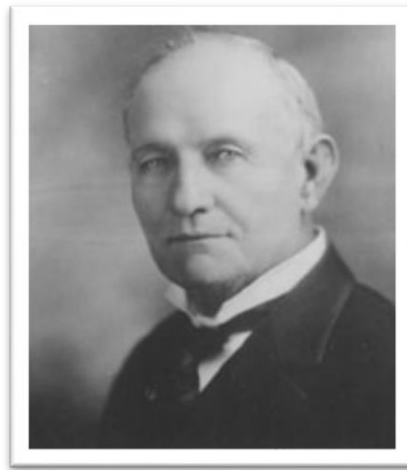


Image 2.1 – A portrait of Andrew Jackson Zilker.

At the age of 18, a poor A. J. Zilker arrived in central Texas, where he began working in an ice plant. He quickly went on to become the owner of the plant, eventually earning himself a fortune. Starting in late September of 1917, A. J. Zilker penned a proposition to transfer some of his land, including mostly Barton Springs but also parts of the present day park, to the City of Austin for a fee of \$100,000 paid out over 10 years, on the condition that the proceeds from this transaction would go to the Board of Trustees of the city's public schools to create a trust fund that would pay for "the equipment and maintenance and the promotion of the needs and best interests of the school for manual training and home economics for the instruction of white youths in the City of Austin, Texas, in the useful arts and sciences" (Austin City Council, 1917). The proposition also granted the City of Austin all water rights and water power privileges accessible from the transferred land, as well as the right to build an easement through the land on which to build water mains and conduits to carry water from the springs to the city's pumps. Also, the

proposition, once executed properly and legally, would give the "City of Austin full and complete control and possession of said premises," in other words, the land included in the transfer (Austin City Council, 1917). The City Council decided to adopt the proposal outright (Austin City Council, 1917), but first sent it to Austin's voters for approval, which was attained in October of 1917 (Murchison et al., 1931). This land transfer, comprising about 50 acres of land (Murchison et al., 1931), constituted the first of multiple land transfers from A. J. Zilker to the City of Austin, which eventually formed the present day Zilker Park.

The initiation of the second land transfer from A. J. Zilker to the City of Austin took place in May of 1931, when Zilker "submitted an additional proposition to the Board of Trustees, offering to convey to the Board between two hundred and fifty and three hundred acres adjoining Barton Springs, and facing the Colorado River from Deep Eddy to Barton Creek, provided the City of Austin will pay into the school treasury \$200,000" (Murchison et al., 1931). The \$200,000 was to be paid over a period of 20 years, with the proceeds again to be used for the "advancement of manual training and industrial education" in the city's schools, and the land to be used as a park space (Murchison et al., 1931).

Late spring/early summer of 1933 marked the beginning of the development of the Zilker land into a city park ("Page Describes Zilker," 1934; "Many Beautiful Features," 1934). Development of the park was undertaken by groups from at least four different federal and state government unemployment relief programs, including the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) ("Many Beautiful Features," 1934), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Texas Relief Commission (TRC) ("Relief Board and CCC," 1934). Much of the funding for the park development came from the federal government, which invested at least \$75,000 into the park. One article claims that the use of the relief employment groups to construct the various park projects gave work to somewhere from 400 to 500 previously unemployed men (Harwood, 1934). The third and final land gift from A. J. Zilker as an addition to Zilker Park occurred in early 1934. The extra 25 acres of land were located west of Barton Springs and were originally named Page Park after Charles H. Page, who was instrumental in the development of Zilker Park ("City to Improve," 1934).



Image 2.2 – An "Aerial view of Zilker Park looking west" in 1938.

In the many decades following the initial development of the park, facilities have been added, taken away, and altered, and major events have been born and become classics, in the process making Zilker Park prominent in the Austin 'imaginary.' One article from the June 28, 1936 Sunday American-Statesman issue even describes the park for its personal value rather than its monetary value: "Instead the two parks [Zilker and Barton Springs]...are valued in terms of human enjoyment, sunshine for youngsters, entertainment for the family. Certainly the two represent a sizeable investment but it is one better described in adjectives than in figures" ("City Proud," 1936). This statement relates closely to my objective of interpreting how people value the park, and supports the idea that the park is in fact valued for what it offers to the public. I also read one 1986 letter addressed to a man, thanking him for his interest in a time capsule that was to be buried in Zilker Park and opened in 2036 in celebration of Texas' 200<sup>th</sup> birthday (Inscore, 1986). The fact that Zilker was chosen as the location to bury a time capsule to be opened in relation to a celebration of the entire state suggests that Zilker holds an iconic place in the minds of the



people of Austin. On May 23, 1997 Zilker Park was included on the list of National Register of Historic Places as the Zilker Park Historic District ("National Register," n.d.), further cementing its status as an important piece of Austin's history. Overall, many of the historic documents bring up stories about park improvements over the years, and the efforts of various citizens, city employees, and park lovers to protect the natural environment and ensure that Austinites are happy with the park. Environmental concerns have been especially prominent over the years, particularly protests against over-development in the area of the park and the Barton Creek watershed. In the section below, I discuss one of the biggest movements that formed to protect the natural environment of the area.

### **SAVE OUR SPRINGS: BARTON SPRINGS, THE EDWARDS AQUIFER, AND A FRAGILE NATURAL SYSTEM**

One of the most unique aspects of the Zilker Park complex is the special natural environment in which it is situated. Barton Creek runs along one side of the park, and Barton Springs Pool is situated along the creek. The pool (and the creek in general) is an important environmental feature and is part of a very delicate natural system. The springs are part of a large freshwater aquifer, known as the Edwards Aquifer. The Edwards Aquifer, its recharge zone, and its contributing zone span several counties in central and south central Texas, and it is one of the primary sources of drinking water for many localities in the region, providing water to more than 1.5 million people ("About Save Our Springs," n.d.). As part of the Balcones Escarpment, the aquifer is formed by karst limestone, which creates a porous underground labyrinth characterized by holes and channels that hold and transport water ("Aquifer Education," n.d.). Because many of the open spaces in the aquifer's rock formation are rather large, the aquifer is quite susceptible to floods, and there is a high danger of surface pollutants draining into the aquifer and reemerging at the surface through springs. These are some of the factors that make the aquifer (and the water we get from it) sensitive to environmental degradation. The more development that occurs in the contributing and recharge zones (the zones where groundwater is collected and drained into the aquifer), the more likely pollutants are to make their way into the aquifer. Then, with the low level

of pollutant filtering done within the aquifer due to the highly-porous qualities of karst ("Aquifer Education," n.d.), the more pollution will remain in the water that resurfaces. At low spots in the ground's surface, Edwards Aquifer pushes up water from underground, forming springs like those at Barton Springs, and because Barton Springs is part of the aquifer, it is fragile too. Another reason Barton Springs is a significant and delicate piece of the natural environment is that it is the only place inhabited by the Barton Springs Salamander ("Barton Springs Salamander," n.d.), a federally listed endangered species.

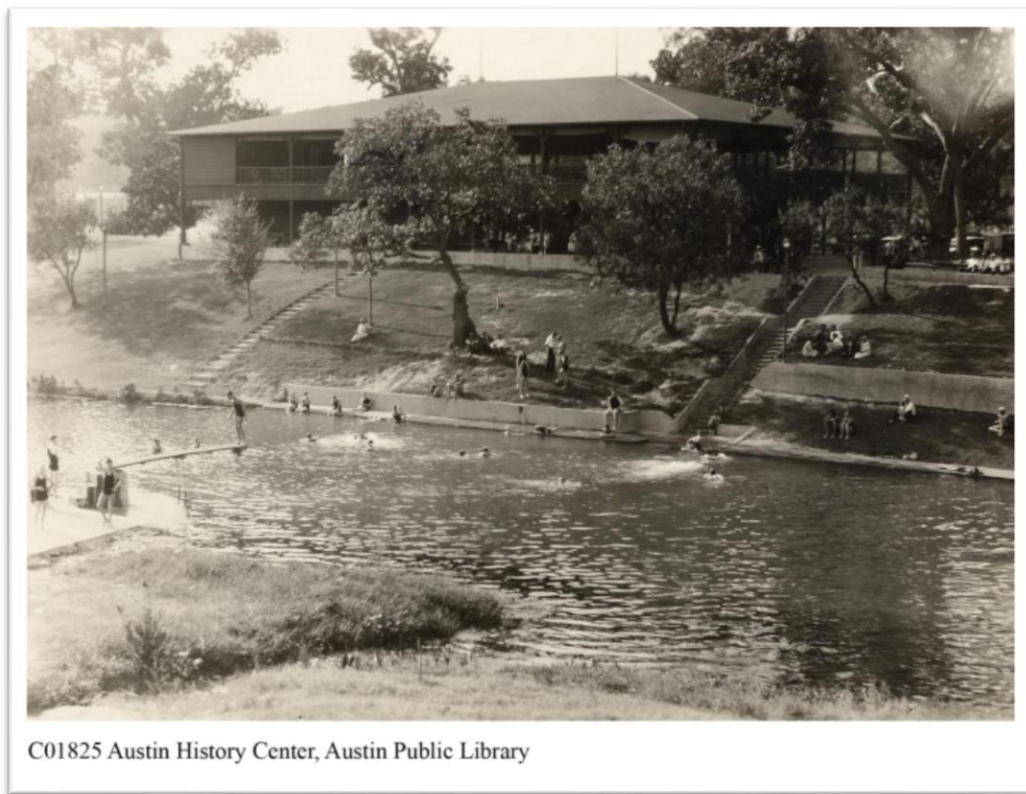


Image 2.3 – "Barton Springs Pool" in 1926.

Since 1990, the Save Our Springs Alliance has worked to "protect the Edwards Aquifer, its springs and contributing streams, and the natural and cultural heritage of the Hill Country region and its watersheds, with special emphasis on Barton Springs" ("About Save Our Springs," n.d.). Originally known as the Save Our Springs Coalition, the group initially formed in opposition to a major development proposed for the Barton Creek watershed. Due in part to the protests by

members of this group at a city council meeting, the council rejected the development unanimously. After that victory, the coalition instigated efforts to bolster the existing 1986 Comprehensive Watersheds Ordinance, which when finished was called the Save Our Springs (SOS) Ordinance. The ordinance was successfully adopted in 1992 as the result of a citizen-initiated petition and referendum process. The new ordinance aimed to "protect the quality of water coming off of development in the fragile Barton Springs watershed" ("About Save Our Springs," n.d.). Today, the SOS Alliance still works to protect Barton Springs and the Edwards Aquifer through outreach, education, legal advocacy, resource stewardship, preservation, and sustainability ("About Save Our Springs," n.d.).

## **PARK FACILITIES**

Zilker Park includes many important attractions for Austin's citizens and is known among tourists as a popular site to visit. The park maintains its cultural and historical relevance through its primary facilities and amenities, including large multipurpose and sport fields (primarily the Great Lawn), the Zilker Botanical Garden, the Austin Nature and Science Center, five sand volleyball courts, a nine-hole disc golf course, Barton Springs Pool, the Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater, the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum, the Austin Sunshine Camps, the Zilker Zephyr miniature train, kayak and canoe rentals, picnic tables, the Splash! Exhibit, the Zilker Clubhouse, and others. Below, I will describe some of the major facilities and discuss their history. To be clear, this description is not a comprehensive listing of Zilker facilities, but addresses the primary amenities of the park.

In 1955 (Zilker Botanical Garden, n.d.), several Austin gardening clubs joined forces to form the Austin Area Garden Center, Inc. (AAGC), with the intentions of promoting education and the joy of gardening, and finding a space to locate their meetings and plants (*Zilker Botanical Garden*, 2015). In 1963, after the City of Austin had allotted land in Zilker Park, work began on the Garden Center building, followed eventually by the initiation of the construction of the gardens. This complex formed the site of Austin Area Garden Center and, after the completion of construction, the Zilker Botanical Garden. In 1969, the Taniguchi Japanese Garden opened,

constituting the first major attraction in the Botanical Garden (*Zilker Botanical Garden*, 2015). The garden's creator, Isamu Taniguchi and his wife moved to Austin where their sons attended the University of Texas (Taniguchi, 1969). One of their sons, Alan, was the Dean of the School of Architecture in the 1960s (Elmore, n.d.). In his own words, Isamu Taniguchi described the Japanese Garden as "a symbol of universal peace" (Taniguchi, 1969). This was followed by the dedication of the Mabel Davis Rose Garden in 1973 and the Hartman Prehistoric Garden in 2002 after dinosaur tracks were discovered at this location. Currently, the Zilker Botanical Garden boasts "20 gardens and specialty beds along with a number of historic structures and relics of Austin's past" (*Zilker Botanical Garden*, 2015). The website for the Botanical Garden claims that the gardens are visited by "half a million people from around the world" each year (Zilker Botanical Garden, n.d.).

The Austin Nature & Science Center (ANSC) was first created in 1960, and was moved to its current location in Zilker Park in 1987 ("Austin Nature and Science Center," 2011). The center is "dedicated to the exploration of the natural world" ("Austin Nature & Science Center," n.d.), and offers a variety of facilities and resources that center on nature and natural sciences as well as related educational and fun experiences. ANSC houses many different rescued wild animals, as well as exhibits, classrooms, and habitats that visitors can view and interact with to learn about and enjoy nature. ANSC also holds annual summer camps for children, in which the campers participate in activities that promote nature-based recreation and education.

Barton Springs Pool is a swimming pool situated along Barton Creek in Zilker Park. The pool is about three acres and is fed by springs emerging from underground, which helps keep it at its year-round temperature of 68-70 degrees Fahrenheit. The pool is extremely popular among locals and tourists, and has recently seen record-high annual attendance levels of around 800,000 people ("Barton Springs Pool," n.d.). The pool is part of a sensitive natural environment; as discussed above, the four springs that make up Barton Springs are the only places inhabited by the endangered Barton Springs Salamander ("Barton Springs Salamander (*Eurycea sosorum*)," n.d.), and the springs are part of the larger Edwards Aquifer system. The Splash! Exhibit, which is housed in the Beverly S. Sheffield Education Center, attached to the Barton Springs Bathhouse, is a visual and interactive exhibit that educates viewers about the Edwards Aquifer, and includes

information about the salamanders ("Beverly S. Sheffield Education Center," n.d.). The pool and the springs themselves are so important to the city that a Barton Springs Pool Master Plan was adopted in 2009. The plan's intentions are to "propose appropriate additions and renovations to the swimming pool, its buildings and its grounds that respect the fragility of this unique natural and historical setting and also accommodate the significant user demands on Austin's most popular park amenity" ("About the Barton Springs," n.d.).

The Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater is an open-air theater located at the bottom of a hill across from Barton Springs Pool, with the grassy slope forming the audience seating. The theater has been around since at least 1937, when Beverly Sheffield, who in his career was both an employee and director of the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, started a "sing-song program" at the theater ("Beverly Sheffield," n.d.). These days, the Hillside Theater presents a number of different types of performances every year, including concerts, dance performances, musicals, and plays.



Image 2.4 – A "Performance at Zilker Theater" in 1963.

Austin Sunshine Camps first started their summer camps in 1928 (Austin Sunshine Camps, n.d.), and the camp at Zilker Park began in 1934 ("Wilderness Made into Playground," 1934). Since their inception, the camps have served to provide the children of low-income families in central Texas with week-long summer camp programs, free of charge. The camps were started by (and are still run by) the Young Men's Business League (YMBL) of Austin, with the mission of "engaging and empowering youth through education and outdoor experiences," and claim to foster "increased confidence and leadership abilities, better problem-solving skills, and friendships that last a lifetime" (Austin Sunshine Camps, n.d.). By the time the campers leave, they have learned "to resolve conflicts, value diversity, and to share in the success of the group," and that "fun becomes the foundation on which courage, self-respect, cooperation, and leadership are built" (Austin Sunshine Camps, n.d.). The Sunshine Camps have two locations, one at Zilker that serves kids aged 7-11 and one on Lake Travis that serves kids aged 12-15. The camps also provide an after school camp program for students from two Austin middle schools, operating with similar objectives to the summer camps (Austin Sunshine Camps, n.d.). The YMBL states that over 46,000 children have been part of the Austin Sunshine Camps since their inception ("About YMBL," n.d.).

There has been a playscape in the park since at least 1934 (Harwood, 1934), though the current playscape is not the original ("Best Playscape Renovation," 1995). The playscape is large and offers a variety of common equipment (e.g., slides, swings, climbing structures, and interactive toys). One of the most unique features of the playground is the antique fire engine that children can climb, sit in, and pretend to drive. Located near the playscape is the Zilker Zephyr, a small-scale working train that park visitors can ride around part of the periphery of the park, along the Barton Creek and Lady Bird Lake sides. The tracks run about three miles from the station and back, and the train, which was once called the Eagle, has been in use for over 50 years ("Barton Springs & Zilker Park," 2001, citing Beal, 1999).

The Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum is located directly across Robert E. Lee Road from Barton Springs Pool. It came about after Charles and Angeline Umlauf gave their land and sculptures (crafted by Charles) to the City of Austin in 1985 (Psencik, 2014). The garden opened to the public in 1991 and has since become a community space of sorts through its various public

programs, classes and workshops, events and parties (including weddings), education and outreach efforts, and summer camps for kids (Umlauf, n.d.).

The Zilker Clubhouse is the current name of what used to be a Boy Scout lodge in Zilker Park. The Boy Scout lodge was first opened in 1934 ("Wilderness Made into Playground," 1934) and is situated on a hill on the western edge of the park. Presently the Clubhouse is used for community events and can be rented for private functions. It has become an especially popular venue for weddings, likely due in part to the view of Austin's skyline from the Clubhouse's open-air patio.

The Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail is a recreation trail that forms a ten-mile loop around a large segment of Lady Bird Lake, and sees more than 1.5 million users annually ("About the Butler Trail," n.d.). One stretch of the trail lines the lake and Barton Creek sides of Zilker Park, giving the trail and the park a crossover in users and making this stretch of the trail one of Zilker's amenities. The trail came about in the 1970s, after the Town Lake Beautification Committee was created in 1971 with the purpose of creating a beautiful landscape around Town Lake (now known as Lady Bird Lake). Some of the prominent members of the committee included Lady Bird Johnson, wife of President Lyndon Baines Johnson, and Ann Butler, wife of the Austin mayor at the time, Roy Butler. The trail was originally named the Town Lake Hike and Bike Trail but was renamed in 2011 to honor Ann and Roy Butler ("About the Butler Trail," n.d.).

The diverse set of facilities offered by Zilker Park have been crucial in building the park's significance in the imaginary of Austin. The facilities discussed above create the primary spaces and activities within the park with which the visitors connect. They also, both individually and collectively, add to the formation of the unique sense of place associated with Zilker Park, based partially on their rich histories and partially on the array of recreational, leisurely, educational, and community-oriented opportunities they provide.

## **PARK EVENTS**

The park serves as a venue for several popular recurring events, including but not limited to the Austin City Limits Music Festival, Blues on the Green, the Zilker Kite Festival, the Zilker Holiday Tree and the Austin Trail of Lights, the Zilker Garden Festival, and concerts, dance performances, musicals, and plays at the Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater. Along with these annual events, the park also hosts smaller one-off events. The park's status as a setting for popular and influential events factors into its position as an important feature of Austin.

The Austin City Limits Music Festival has been held in Zilker Park (on the Great Lawn) since its debut in 2002. The annual festival currently brings in over 130 bands to eight stages (Austin City Limits Music Festival, n.d.), set up throughout the lawn, and attracts hundreds of thousands of people. The festival began as an offshoot of the iconic Austin City Limits, the longest-running musical television series ever, which has been on air since 1974 ("History of ACL," n.d.). In 2002, the festival was two days long and had an attendance of around 42,000 people on Saturday (higher than the expected 30,000) and an attendance of close to 33,000 on Sunday ("Michael Corcoran's ACL," 2013). By 2013, the festival's schedule spanned two consecutive three-day weekends (Dinges, 2013), and by 2014 the festival was accommodating an attendance of approximately 450,000 people per year (Florence, 2015). Currently, in addition to the live music, the festival offers amenities such as local Austin food vendors, an arts market, merchandise stores, water and drink stations, and a miniature festival for kids within the festival itself (Austin City Limits Music Festival, n.d.). Blues on the Green is another music event held in the park annually; for the past 25 years, this summer concert series has brought free live music to the people of Austin. Blues on the Green remains free to the public due to the sponsorship of businesses and Austin's Parks and Recreation Department ("Blues on the Green," n.d.).

The Zilker Kite Festival first debuted in 1929, but did not take up Zilker Park as its venue until 1936, when the park was still quite new. The Exchange Club of Austin (a group with a focus on preventing child abuse) began the event as a kite tournament with the purpose of promoting child creativity. By 1956, the event was opened for people of all ages to participate. The Exchange Club, which works in partnership with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, still runs the



festival today. With this free festival occurring annually on the first Sunday in March, it is the "longest continuously running kite festival in the United States" (Zilker Kite Festival, n.d.).

Zilker Park also houses the Austin Trail of Lights, an annual winter event that showcases displays of holiday lights and community attractions and performances along Lou Neff Road, which partially circles the Great Lawn. This event started in 1965 as the "Yule Fest," and a Yule log is still burned every year along the trail. In 2014, around 400,000 people attended the Trail of Lights, and it has become one of the top three largest events in Austin ("About 2015 Austin Trail," n.d.). In tandem with the Trail of Lights is the Zilker Holiday tree, a 155-foot tall moon tower standing in the park. Austin's moon towers are iconic themselves, since they were originally used to bring light to various areas throughout the city at night. Austin bought 31 of them in 1894 but about half of them have been taken down since, leaving 15 towers still standing throughout the city, all of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Hunt, 2011). Every winter, the moon tower in the park is strung with colorful lights and topped with a lighted star, and this 'tree' stays lit every night through the month of December (concurrent with the Trail of Lights' time span). The tradition of lighting the tree started in 1967, and has continued ever since, adding a major component to the park's holiday attractions ("Zilker Holiday Tree," n.d.).



Image 2.5 – The "Zilker Park Christmas Tree" in the 1970s.

The Zilker Garden Festival, held in the Zilker Botanical Garden, has been held in the spring annually for the past 50-plus years. The festival provides its attendees with the chance to buy plants and gardening equipment, and it features speakers, vendor and information booths, exhibits, contests, demonstrations, local food, a beer garden, live music, and activities for kids (Zilker Botanical Garden, n.d.).

As previously mentioned, the Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater hosts various events and dance, music, and theater performances. Many of these events do not repeat reliably year-to-year. However, two theater performance series maintain a regular annual schedule: the Summer Musical and Shakespeare in the Park. For the Summer Musical, a Broadway musical is selected every year and performed several times during the summer at the Hillside Theater. The Summer Musical program has been running since 1959, when it originated as a program for high school students set up by the Austin Parks and Recreation Department. However, the productions are now put on professionally ("Zilker Hillside Theater," n.d.). The series claims to bring in an annual audience of about 40,000 people, as well as being "the longest running, free, outdoor musical in the country" ("About ZTP," n.d.). Shakespeare in the Park is a series that selects one Shakespeare play per year to perform multiple times in late spring and early summer. The series has been put on by Austin Shakespeare and the Austin Parks and Recreation Department since 1985 ("About Austin Shakespeare," n.d.). All events and performances at the Hillside Theater are free and open to the public.

Based on the longevity and power of attraction of the park's main recurring events as I have discussed above, it is clear that the park holds a special place in the 'imaginary' of the people of Austin, and even beyond. These events bring distinct, positive experiences to the city, and help people create joyful and lasting memories associated with the park. For many locals, events like these become positive representations of Austin to the outside world, as well as activities that they attend and participate in yearly.

Through my review of Zilker Park's history and its facilities and events, I determined that this would be an appropriate case for my analysis of photographs posted on social media. It is clear from Zilker's historic stature that Austinites have formed deep personal connections with

the park, enabling them to feel like stakeholders in the decisions that have been made about the park over time. The review of historic documents revealed a common goal to ensure that the park remains an oasis in the urban environment and heightens the quality of life for the people of Austin. To review a map of the park, see Appendix A.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss my research process from first determining the preliminary elements of my research, to conducting my analyses, and finally to interpreting meanings from my results. I also draw connections between my research and methods used and discussed by scholars.

My research is based on 1) analysis of photographs taken by and gathered from people other than myself, and 2) using social media sites as a source of data. Both of these approaches - especially with the growth of social media - are utilized by other researchers for various purposes. One study by Keith Greenwood (2005) gathered photographs taken by professional photographers from an online archive to analyze them for patterns in framing. Greenwood's methods of creating categories and coding based on characteristics of the photographs, as well as his qualitative interpretations of the coding results, are similar to some of the methods I used in my own analysis. A study by Dorwart et al. (2009) took a similar approach, giving numerical IDs to photographs, creating categories, and coding the photographs based on the categories they fulfill. The photographs for this study were taken by selected participants and were meant to help the researchers understand the participants' perceptions of the environment of a nature trail (Dorwart et al., 2009). Still, their research shows that people's photographs of outdoor natural and recreational spaces can portray aspects of the study environment that the participants value. However, the Dorwart et al. study differs somewhat from mine in that their photographs are prompted for the purposes of the study, that they do not use social media as part of their process, and that written logs and in-person interviews greatly supplemented the information gathered through the photographs. Willemen et al. (2015) conducted a study that not only sources user photographs from social media, but also assesses the photographs by the number of occurrences of three major categories that reflect people's perceptions and the aspects of the study's subject (threatened species and wildlife tourism) that people value. The researchers performed test searches on Google, Bing, and Flickr, using a few different search criteria in order to see which site returned the highest number of accurate results. Based on these tests, they chose to use Flickr

for the analysis, and decided upon specific search terms. The researchers also set up conditions for exclusions of certain photographs based on what they portrayed, and then conducted basic quantitative analysis, partially based on the counts of occurrences of specific image content. The test searching of various media platforms and search terms and the choices made in relation to these tests, the determination of exclusion conditions, and the types of photographic analysis, are some of the ways in which this study exhibits similarities to my own.

My analysis also draws on previous research in content analysis. Content analysis originated as (and is usually referred to in relation to) the analysis of various forms of recorded words, whether in text, audio, or video/film. However, content analysis methods can be applied to media besides text, including photographs. The definition of content analysis from Merriam-Webster describes it as "analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through a classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect" ("Content Analysis," n.d.). It has been used for both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Although my coding and statistical calculations resemble quantitative content analysis, my methodology was principally aimed at qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) describe three main approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. In a conventional approach, a researcher tries to describe a phenomenon and creates categories for coding directly from the analysis medium. The directed approach involves performing analysis prompted by existing theory or findings in order to further knowledge. The summative approach draws on coding counts and comparisons of categories, leading to interpretation of underlying context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). My qualitative analysis is related at least slightly to aspects of all three of these approaches: it is conventional because I use my visual analysis of the photographs to derive categories, it is directed in that I operate under certain assumptions, and it is summative in that I aim to understand the underlying meanings of the photographs so that I can interpret the ways that people value the park.

## **PHASE 1**

### **CHOOSING THE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

When I began planning my methodology, I wanted to analyze photographs from Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. I chose these three social media sites because not only are they popular worldwide, they are platforms through which users share photographs (though Instagram is the only one with photo-sharing as its primary usage purpose). As of February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, the most recent numbers of monthly active users for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were listed on their websites as 1.59 billion, 400+ million, and 320 million, respectively. These high usage numbers coupled with relatively convenient options for photograph searches make these social media sites good options for data sourcing. Someone searching by hashtags on both of these sites can view many photo postings from people without even needing to "follow" their profiles, making the images publicly accessible.

Instagram allows for easy searches of hashtags and other criteria like key words, location, and profiles. However, Instagram does not provide a way to search by posting date and the photographs themselves do not display the exact posting date; instead, they simply show the number of weeks ago that they were posted. This presented a problem, because searching by a specific time range is an important parameter in my methodology, as discussed below. As I will explain further, I found a website called Gramfeed that alleviated the challenges of using Instagram as a data source. Out of my original three social media site choices, Twitter allows for the easiest and most convenient photograph searches. The site has a way to conduct advanced searches by various criteria, including hashtags, and by time ranges as well. An added bonus is that someone conducting a Twitter search does not need to be logged into an account, unlike with Facebook and Instagram.

Facebook, however, is less conducive to successful searches of hashtags, which was the search format that I planned to use. A test search of #zilkerpark on Facebook returned nothing under the "Photos" tab. Facebook also places more importance on users' own profiles and the profiles of their "friends," so finding results from the general public is not quite as easy as on Instagram and Twitter. Finally, Facebook does not provide an easy way to search by the date of a

photograph's posting, which would make finding photographs from my chosen time range difficult. I eventually decided to eliminate Facebook from my list of sites, decreasing the level of complexity and increasing the convenience of my methodology. I therefore ultimately decided to conduct my study with Instagram (through Gramfeed) and Twitter.

## **DETERMINING THE SEARCH TERMS AND TIME RANGE**

Initially, I decided to select photographs from the 2015 calendar year so that the data set would reflect all of the annual events that happen in the park, as well as the average daily park uses. I began testing separate searches with the hashtags #zilker and #zilkerpark, which I chose due to their simplicity and broad representation of the park. I quickly found the experience of using Instagram's web interface to be restrictive and cumbersome. Instagram does not allow searches by date, meaning that I would not be able to manage and control the time range of the study. However, a website called Gramfeed enables searches of Instagram posts through several criteria, including posting date time ranges, so I decided to use Gramfeed to complete my Instagram search. Once I began exploring different hashtags and the one-year time range, I realized that there were too many Instagram photographs to make the search feasible, and selecting a sample of the photographs would also be a tedious process. I decided to vastly reduce the search time range to include only the month of April 2015. I chose April because the weather is generally warm enough for people to be out in the park, and because it is one of the months with no major park events. I wanted to exclude months with major events because events prompt a spike in posts, and my results would be skewed.

I also chose to use #zilkerpark as my only hashtag search criteria, because it is broad enough to return results from all over the park complex (including Barton Springs, the Great Lawn and other leisure and recreation fields, and the Botanical Gardens) and specific enough to eliminate many of the real estate advertisement images returned by the #zilker search (Zilker is also the name of a nearby residential neighborhood). I decided to use only one hashtag search term because a search for April 2015 photographs with #zilkerpark alone returned 859 results on Gramfeed, so including a search with #zilker would include more photographs than I could

practically analyze for the purposes of this report. Also, selecting only one hashtag simplifies the process and provides greater consistency.

With the criteria and time range set, the finalized Gramfeed search returned 859 photographs and the Twitter search returned 17. All photographs were publicly visible and accessible to anyone with an Instagram account (the photographs from Twitter were visible even without an account). Also, because all of the resulting photographs were posted in April 2015, which was several months before I devised this study, all of them were posted of each user's own volition and were not prompted by me in any way, nor did any of the resulting photographs belong to any of my own personal Instagram and Twitter accounts. With the search results attained, I began a preliminary visual scan of the resulting images on both sites to confirm that they essentially met my study purposes.

## **PHASE 2**

### **DETERMINING THE RULES FOR PHOTOGRAPH INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION**

Before I began my visual analysis, I devised a set of rules stating under which circumstances I would exclude particular photographs/media that appear in the search results. I chose to create these rules because in my test searches, I had noticed many photographs that did not relate to the park, were advertisements or videos, or were taken in/of locations outside the park. The rules also served the purpose of creating defined boundaries and clarifying when a photograph should qualify for analysis. The rules were as follows:

- Exclude all videos
- Exclude all photographs that represent advertisements and informational/educational images
- Exclude photographs that are identifiably not related to the park or its facilities
- Photographs that are taken from inside the park or its facilities but that do not portray the park or its facilities may be included
- Photographs that are taken from outside the park or its facilities must portray the park or its facilities in order to be included
- Exclude photographs that are identifiably taken from or identifiably portray parts of the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail that are not adjacent to the park or its facilities



- Photographs will be included if it is unclear whether their location and/or subject portray or are taken within the park or its facilities

## DESIGNING THE ANALYSIS PROCESS AND CONDUCTING THE PHOTOGRAPH AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

Since Gramfeed returned far more images than Twitter, I chose to begin my visual analysis and develop my data record table based on Gramfeed. Initially, I had created accounts on both Instagram and Twitter to store the photographs I would choose to analyze. However, I eventually realized that for cataloguing and organization purposes, saving the images would facilitate the analysis. After deciding on the search criteria and time range, I began taking screenshots of the rows of photographs returned in the Gramfeed search. I named each screenshot file with a number, ascending from 1 to 72 (three rows of photographs per screenshot, except the last screenshot which had two rows). I then used these screenshots to devise a cataloguing system from which I assigned each picture a unique ID. These IDs are structured # - # - #, with the first number coming from the screenshot file name, the second from the number of the row in each screenshot in which the photographs are situated, and the third from the number each photo is within its row (from left to right, with each row having a maximum of four photographs). Image 3.1 below shows an example of these screenshots.

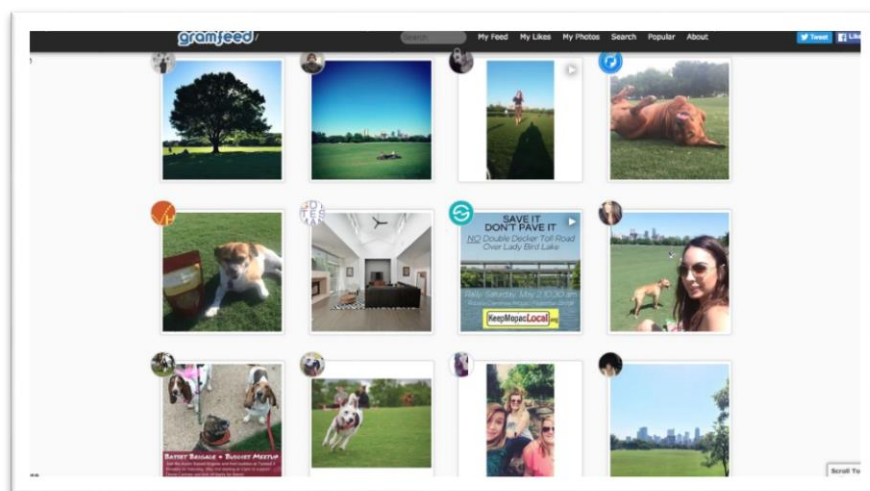


Image 3.1 – Screenshot of Instagram photographs used for cataloguing the study’s photographs.

Next, I created an Excel spreadsheet with these unique IDs forming the rows and the broad categories of Composition, Content, and Behavior forming the columns; these categories provided an overarching structure for my analysis. I also added columns to the table to record when a photograph/video was excluded and for what purpose, as well as columns to record the park locations of each photograph. Within the Composition, Content, and Behavior categories, I started adding subcategories to facilitate a more detailed analysis of each photograph, which would allow me to use simple quantitative analysis to reveal patterns. I created these subcategories based on characteristics of the pictures themselves, and I continued adding more subcategories as necessary until I finished my visual assessment of all of the Gramfeed photographs. To record the characteristics of the photographs, I typed the number 1 into the table's cells for each photograph's unique ID where I confirmed that particular characteristics were present after a visual examination of each individual photograph. The purpose of using the number 1 to fill each cell (rather than a checkmark symbol, for example) was to enable me to find the sum and percentage of photographs that portrayed each type of characteristic. As I coded the photograph characteristics into the table, I often coded more than one Content and Behavior characteristic per photograph, and sometimes coded in more than one type of Composition and more than one Park Location. I used the finished version of the Gramfeed Excel table categories to create the table for the Twitter analysis. For the Twitter table, I changed the unique IDs (using the same screenshot and number coding systems) to apply to the photographs from the Twitter search results. Image 3.2 below shows an example of the Twitter screenshots.

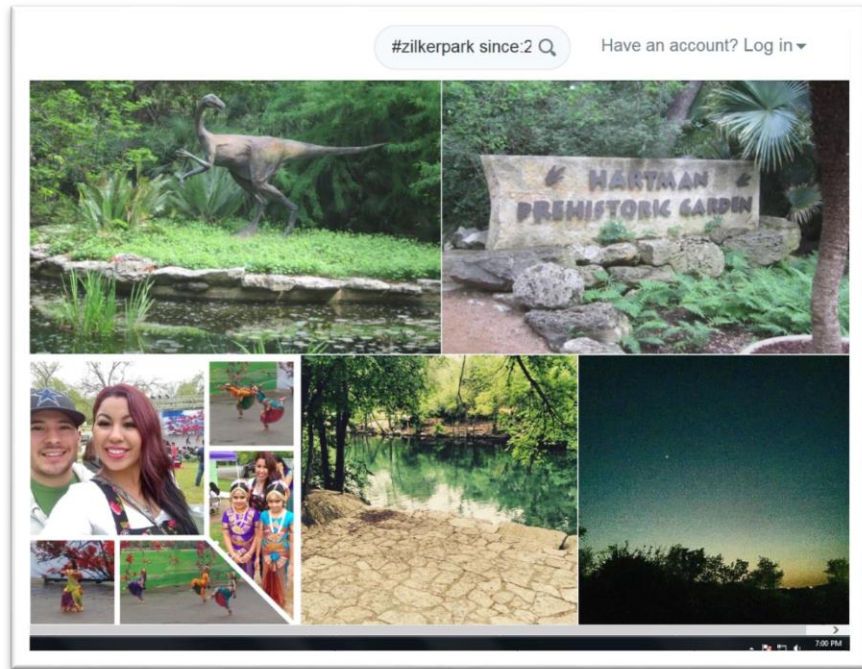


Image 3.2 – Screenshot of Twitter photographs used for cataloguing the study’s photographs.

When I finished conducting the analysis and recording the data for both sets of photographs, I created rows at the bottom of both Excel tables in which I calculated the sum and percentage of each category column. These basic quantitative results allowed me to identify patterns within the photograph sets. This process of coding characteristics of the data into categories and then calculating statistics based on the coding draws on established quantitative content analysis methods, as described in Hsieh and Shannon (2005). After reviewing the resulting characteristic frequency percentages, I consolidated and reorganized the two Excel tables by combining specific categories together when suitable to form broader subcategories. This allowed me to focus on significant categories and minimize distraction caused by specific categories with lower percentages. Grouping into broader categories also helped me to understand underlying themes in the photographs' characteristics, which was an important step for transitioning into my qualitative analysis to interpret the aspects of the park that people value. My final quantitative results for both social media photograph analyses are included in Appendix B.

## **DETERMINING CATEGORY DEFINITIONS AND RULES FOR RECORDING PHOTOGRAPH CHARACTERISTICS**

Throughout the process of my visual analysis of the photographs, I continually formulated definitions for the various categories in my Excel tables and the rules to determine when a photograph portrayed a particular characteristic. The definitions and rules were particularly useful for categories that needed further explanation. To review all definitions and rules produced for categories from the original Excel tables that were removed from the final tables, see Appendix C. The following list shows the definitions and rules from the final, consolidated tables:

### ***Composition***

- More than one composition category may be recorded for the same photo
- "Portrait" refers to human or animal (or sometimes inanimate) subjects as the primary focus of a photo, usually no more than approximately 15-20 feet from the camera
- "Selfie" refers to a photo clearly taken by a person who is also a subject of the photo
- "Close Up" refers to the subject (humans, animals, plants, etc.) of a photo being quite close to the camera
- "Landscape/Landscape and Sky" refers to photographs in which the landscape, the landscape and the sky, or the sky alone is the primary focus of a photo
- "Subject within Landscape" refers to when the subject of a photo is a human or animal, but the photo seems to purposefully portray the subject as being situated within a specific landscape
- "Semi-Selfie" refers to a style of composition in which the person taking a photo incorporates himself/herself into the photo indirectly by including his/her feet, legs, hands, or arms (though usually just feet/legs) in the photo rather than including his/her face or the majority of his/her body; this style may apply even when the photographer's shadow is the only way he/she is incorporated and is prominent in the photo
- "Aerial" refers to photographs taken by someone who is looking down from above and is in the air, not being supported by the earth's topography in any way (although a photo may constitute an aerial composition if the photographer was standing on a bridge or at the top of a tall building looking down, for example)

- "Collage" is included by the Composition section but is not considered a compositional style; attributes of photographs classified as "Collage" will be recorded for the same unique number as if they are part of one photo; attributes of photographs within a collage that qualify for exclusion will not be recorded

### **Content**

- "Landscape Features" are only accounted for if they are part of the main focus of a photo, or if they add to the assumed intended landscape focus of a photo
- In "Flowers/Other Plants" under "Landscape Features," other plants refer to plants such as bushes, shrubs, cacti, etc., and potted plants
- "Other Landscape Features" under "Landscape Features" represents the combination of "Rocks/Rock Features" and "Trails" from the original Excel table
- "Alone" under "People" refers to when a person is the sole subject focus of a photo, and is not recorded when "People with Dogs" under "People" is recorded
- "General" under "People" refers to when there are people in a photo but they are not necessarily the focus, or they are too far in the background to readily identify their behaviors, or there are too many people with varied behaviors to be able to account for all of them
- "Babies/Children" under "People" refers to humans who are clearly infants or very young children, or children who appear to be younger than teenage years
- "Human Relationships" under "People" refers to people portrayed as being couples, friends, or family within a photo, categories which were combined from the original Excel table
- "Other" under "Animals" refers to the combination of "Other Pets", "Stuffed", and "Other Wildlife Features" from the original Excel table
- "Park Features" can refer to built features found in the park, including gazebos, bridges, stone walkways, etc., as well as park landmarks such as statues or the moon tower that supports the Zilker Christmas Tree, and elements like benches and drinking fountains, and are recorded if they are the focus or are a primary aspect of a photo
- "Austin Skyline" refers to the visibility of the buildings of Downtown Austin, and does not include when the horizon is visible without being able to see Downtown

- "Sky/Clouds" refers to if the sky and/or clouds are the main focus of the photo, one of the main foci, or is a major aspect of the landscape composition of the photo regardless of whether it is a focus
- "Water Features/Pool" refers to any natural or manmade water feature, like a river, stream, fountain, Barton Springs Pool, etc., but excludes temporary features like puddles
- "Other Park Attractions" refers to the combination of "Playscape" and "Zilker Zephyr" from the original Excel table
- "Items for Recreation, Leisure, and Relaxation" refers to the combination of "Frisbees", "Kites", "Hammocks", "Boats", "Bicycles", "Blankets/Pillows", "Books/Notebooks", and "Food/Drink" from the original Excel table
- "Other" refers to the combination of "Shoes Separate From Feet" and "Art or Graffiti" from the original Excel table

### ***Behavior***

- "Sports" refers to the combination of "Soccer", "Frisbee", and "Volleyball" from the original Excel table
- "Other Physical Activities" refers to the combination of "Leisure Climbing", "Yoga/Gymnastics", "Swimming/Wading", "Running", "Walking", "Hiking", "Biking", and "Boating" from the original Excel table
- "Leisure Activities" refers to the combination of "Hula-Hooping", "Kite Flying", "Leisure Play", "Picnic", "Standing", "Reading/Studying", "Walking Dog/Pet", "Interacting with Nature", "Riding Train" and "Performance/Attending Performance or Event" from the original Excel Table
- "Undefined Recreational/Leisure Activity" is generally used when there are many people in the photo doing various, unidentified activities, and is often recorded in tandem with "General" under "People" under Content
- "Relaxing" refers to the combination of "Sitting" and "Laying" from the original Excel table
- "Posing" refers to purposeful posing for a picture in a way that goes beyond everyday body positioning, or that is clearly and purposefully orchestrated for the purposes of producing a certain type of more formalized photo outcome
- "Smiling" refers to humans visibly smiling, whether at the camera or not

- "Human Affection" refers to the combination of "Familial Affection" and "Romantic Affection" from the original Excel table

### ***Park Location***

- "Zilker Field" refers to any of the open leisure and recreation fields within the park, between Columbus Dr., Barton Creek, and Barton Springs Rd., and between Stratford Dr., Barton Springs Rd., Barton Creek, and Lady Bird Lake
- "Barton Springs" refers to both within the Barton Springs Pool area, and at the area just outside of the pool (where water from the creek bypass tunnel and the pool is released into Barton Creek), the stretch of Barton Creek between Barton Springs and where the creek releases into Lady Bird Lake, and the area of the park directly outside of the pool, between the Barton Springs Bathhouse and the café
- "Hike and Bike Trail" refers to any piece of the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail immediately adjacent to the park or its facilities
- "Unknown/Other" refers to photographs in which the location is either unidentifiable or does not fit well into any of the other "Park Location" subcategories

## **PHASE 3**

### **CONDUCTING THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

In Phase 3, I took multiple steps in order to interpret the significance and value that people place on Zilker Park. I started with a qualitative interpretation of the meaning behind the specific characteristic subcategories with the highest percentages derived from my quantitative analysis. Then I analyzed the photographs in order to identify patterns based on the presence of multiple subcategories within individual photographs, interpreted the qualitative meanings of these patterns, and selected photographs that exemplified these patterns. Finally, I extracted from these first two sets of interpretations a concise list of broad categories that characterize the principal ways in which these photographs reflect people's apparent valuation of Zilker Park. In her article about representation through images, Nelson (2005) draws on semiology, or the study of signs, and discusses using two steps in conducting her photograph analysis: an analysis of

images on an individual basis, and an analysis of groups of images that fall within an identified theme. These steps closely mirror the two qualitative analysis approaches I utilized before deriving my final concise list of factors that people value about Zilker Park. In semiotic analysis, the investigator examines "the content and composition of photographs and how these combine to communicate through signs and symbols various messages about the places they depict" (Jenkins, 2003, p. 314). In my case, I sought to interpret meanings through analysis of the symbols embedded in the photographs, and, in so doing, try to understand how users value Zilker Park through the features they chose to photograph, and how they took their photographs.

However, as discussed by Thomsen, there are "inherent uncertainties in the production and interpretation of photographs" (2015, p. 2), and qualitative interpretation of photographs will always be subjective to some extent. My initial step in my qualitative analysis was creating the specific subcategories in my Excel tables before and during my photograph analysis. This step was "qualitative" in that I subjectively identified aspects of photographs and grouped them into categories, and the result might have been different if someone else had done it. The rest of my qualitative analysis was shaped by my quantitative analysis, since I used the more frequently occurring characteristics and patterns within the photograph to determine in what ways the park is valued the most. Frequency of occurrence of characteristics is important because, as Dunkel concluded, "if multiple people take photographs at a location, the photographs might be linked to a specific visible or associated characteristic (or absence of characteristics)," triggering multiple people to make the decision of taking a photograph (2015, p. 177). Furthermore, an increased frequency of this pattern has a positive correlation with an increased significance of the characteristic that prompts the photographs (Dunkel, 2015). In other words, the more times people photograph a particular characteristic of Zilker Park, the more significant I can interpret that characteristic to be. In order to derive the factors of the park that people value, I regrouped (where necessary) the characteristics into broader categories that represent more generalized factors of the park; i.e. factors that could be interpreted as more or less appreciated by the park's visitors.

While this is a very simplified method for interpreting the photographs, it has been my intention from the start that my methodology could be utilized by planners, with simple or minor



adaptations, for future park planning methods. Most planners would likely not have the time to dedicate to attempting to understand and employ complex, theoretically- and ideologically-based methods of photograph interpretation, and I myself found the attempt impractical for my own purposes and time limitations. Therefore, I have used a set of uncomplicated steps that could be characterized as a basic form of photograph content analysis. The interpretations made from my identified multi-characteristic patterns were derived in the same way by linking the characteristics to broader categories that people value. I have also assumed that these broad categories do in fact represent aspects that people value, since in fact people take photographs of things that are significant to them. Finally, to end my analysis succinctly and clearly, I created a concise list of the six broad categories that resulted from my interpretations throughout my multi-step qualitative analysis.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY**

The limitations of this research and analysis vary depending on the element or step of the process. I faced limitations in handling the social media selection and deciding on the search criteria, in determining factors related to the scope of the study, and in conducting the analysis.

Some of the initial limitations stemmed from using Instagram as one of the social media sites from which to gather the photographs. Instagram is primarily meant to function as a mobile application for phones and tablets. Although it does have a web interface, I discovered that this interface is much more limited than the mobile application. The most problematic limitation of the web interface was that it does not allow a user to view an archive of all of the photograph posts that they have "liked." This was a major issue for me, because I had originally planned to store my selection of photographs by saving them to my Instagram account by "liking" them. My "liked" photographs were accessible from my account on the mobile application, but working from a small phone screen or tablet to analyze the photographs would have been cumbersome and inconvenient considering I intended to conduct my analysis on the computers I would use to write my report. Ultimately, the Instagram limitations show that social media sites are not typically set up to meet the purposes of a researcher.

The next limitations stemmed from the process of choosing my search criteria and time range. I decided to use only one hashtag to reduce the complexity of the search. I could have also conducted my search based on keywords, user profiles, and/or geotags, but again, using more than one type of search term would increase the complexity of the process. I chose to use hashtags since they have become a very popular way of tagging photographs (and social media posts in general), thereby adding user-determined information to them. I also preferred searching by hashtag over geotag because hashtags reveal more about a social media user's perception of the location and content of their photographs, whereas geotags may sometimes be included automatically on photographs, especially if the user is operating from his or her phone and the phone's location settings are turned on. However, because I am not utilizing other types of search terms, there are surely many relevant photographs that are not included in my study but could be available for a more comprehensive use of this methodology (e.g., for park planning purposes). My efforts to determine a time range for the photograph search also revealed limitations. As I discussed previously, I had originally intended to include all photographs posted within the 2015 calendar year in my search, but far too many photographs resulted from this search to practically analyze all of them. Even taking a sample from the search results would have required sifting through approximately 14,000 photographs from Instagram alone. As a result of this limitation, I narrowed my time range to encompass only the month of April 2015, to capture photographs from a month that represents average usage of the park during warm weather and does not include any major park events. However, excluding photographs from months with major events and during cooler temperatures means that my data set cannot hope to represent the park (and its significance to people) in its entirety.

Within the photographic posts themselves, there are a few different types of information that a researcher could gather, including aspects of the photograph, the accompanying captions and tags, and characteristics of the user who made the post. In the earliest phases of this study, I contemplated whether or not to consider these other types of information in addition to analyzing the photographs. I decided that it would be best to ignore everything not shown by the photographs. Captions might add clarity, but including them would also complicate the process. Also, not all photographs have captions, and of those that do, not all captions add meaningful

information to the analysis. I also refrained from attempting to discern information about the users, because again, this would complicate the process, and such information is not always useful or possible to obtain. However, ignoring this information means that my methodology will not benefit from an understanding of how often the same user's photographs appear in my study, and will lack any analysis of socio-demographic characteristic of persons posting the photographs. This, along with certain associations between Internet/social media usage and socio-economic demographics, means that the photographs may be posted by a specific subset of the population and may fail to capture diverse perceptions of the park.

Finally, my analysis also faced limitations. First, delineating meaningful subcategories within my three primary categories (Composition, Content, and Behavior) was difficult, as some photographs had characteristics that did not fit within any of the subcategories. Initially, I would add a new subcategory for such characteristics, only to often find that the new subcategory was never needed again. It was also sometimes difficult to decide whether or not the presence of a certain type of Content should imply a related Behavior, or whether it was necessary to record that a photograph contains certain Content if the presence of a related Behavior was also portrayed. Deciding on the rules of photograph exclusion and then following them was also challenging. Sometimes photographs that required inclusion (based on my set of rules) seemed like they were not actually in the park, but it was difficult to ascertain for sure.

These limitations reflect another set of challenges with such analyses: consistency and subjectivity. I sometimes found it challenging to code photographs consistently based on their characteristics despite devising rules and definitions. For example, I wrote this rule for coding "Landscape Features" under the Content category: "'Landscape Features' are only accounted for if they are part of the main focus of a photo, or if they add to the assumed intended landscape focus of a photo." But when I encountered photographs that contained trees in the background, sometimes it seemed that the trees were purposefully included to present the landscape – but other times it seemed that the trees were inconsequential. Ultimately, this methodology needs to be adjusted to the particular conditions of a given planning department or process, and these limitations and challenges need to be carefully considered in order to meet the needs of planning contexts. By drawing upon methods and insights from research in social media sourcing,

photographic analysis, quantitative content analysis, and qualitative content analysis, I have created a multi-phased approach to understand how photographs can reveal the aspects of Zilker Park that people value. This is based on the understanding that public spaces like Zilker can elicit emotional responses in people, and that these responses prompt people to take photographs. In the next chapter, I will describe the results of my quantitative and qualitative analyses, and in doing so, I will interpret the aspects of the park that people value.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND INTERPRETATIONS

In this chapter, I first discuss the results of my quantitative analysis, derived from the counts and percentages of coded characteristics from my photograph set. Secondly, I conduct my qualitative analysis by interpreting the values and meanings indicated by the prominence of certain subcategories stemming from my quantitative analysis. Finally, I interpret the meanings and significance of selected photographs which are representative of prominent categories and thematic patterns in order to determine the principal ways people value Zilker Park.

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

#### *Instagram*

The original photograph count of my Instagram search results set was 859. However, I excluded 22.58% of the photographs, leaving 665. The percentages for the subcategories were calculated using the 665 set size. All photographs that were not excluded were coded with at least one Composition subcategory, at least one Content subcategory, and at least one Park Location subcategory, but only 60.75% of the photographs were coded with one or more Behavior subcategory. Within the Composition category, the Portrait subcategory contained the highest percentage of photographs, making up 47.07% of the total 665 photographs. This is an unsurprising result, because portrait styles of composition are common in photographs. The second and third highest Composition subcategory percentages are Landscape/Landscape and Sky with 26.02%, and Subject within Landscape with 17.74% - both of which are also unsurprising. I expected a relatively high occurrence of these compositional styles because Zilker Park provides a special setting for captivating photographs, and the park itself is attributed significant weight in this study through use of the search term #zilkerpark. People taking photographs in a special setting will often focus on showcasing it, or showing a subject within it. I was surprised, however, at the relatively low percentage of Selfies, with only 10.08% of the total. I had expected this percentage to be higher because Selfies are a very prominent compositional style among

Millennials especially, and Millennials are a prominent age group on social media platforms. Within the Content category, several subcategories returned relatively significant percentages. Landscape Features occurred in 87.07% of the photographs, and subcategories under Landscape Features, such as Trees and Grass/Field, made up 53.68% and 49.92% of the total, respectively. Though the Water Features/Pool subcategory holds a lower percentage than many of the other subcategories at 18.20%, it's still a notable percentage. The subcategory People occurred in 57.29% of the photographs, and from the subcategories under People, Human Relationships made up 19.55% of the total. The subcategory Animals occurred in 33.08% of the photographs, and the subcategory Dogs under Animals occurred in 28.87% of all photographs – an unsurprising result, as the park has increasingly become a popular spot for owners to bring their dogs to play and interact with others. The Austin Skyline and Sky/Clouds subcategories were recorded in 22.71% and 21.35% of the photographs, respectively. Within the Behavior category, Smiling and Leisure Activities occurred the most frequently within the photographs, holding 21.20% and 19.70% respectively. Surprisingly, the Sports subcategory percentage was much lower, at 2.56%, and the Other Physical Activities subcategory was also lower than expected, at 13.23%. Out of the Park Location subcategories, Zilker Field racked up the highest count, occurring as the setting for 43.31% of the photographs, and Unknown/Other occurred the second most, in 33.38% of the photographs. I had expected Zilker Field to be the most prominent location, because the large field, called the Great Lawn, where most of the photographs in this subcategory were taken, occupies a large percentage of the park's land. However, I did not expect the Unknown/Other subcategory to make up a third of the settings since so much of the park has readily recognizable features. Even more surprising was that Zilker Botanical Gardens, the next most common park location in my analysis, came in at only 8.87%, with Barton Springs Pool coming in at only 7.07%. I had expected both of those locations to make up a larger percentage of the photographs; however, it should be noted that both of these facilities require an entrance fee. Overall, the quantitative results in the Composition and Content categories aligned fairly closely with what I had expected, while the results of the Behavior category were less in line with my assumptions, and the results of Park Location were a mixture.

## ***Twitter***

The results from the Twitter search included 17 photographs initially, and based on my rules of exclusion, I removed 4 of them from consideration, leaving 13 as the included total. Due to this, referring to my quantitative analysis results based on the percentages is slightly misleading, because even a difference of one photograph between two categories drastically alters the percentages. With that in mind, I will discuss the results based on number of photographs falling into each category, rather than the percentage of the total. However, it is interesting to note that a proportionally similar number of photographs was excluded from both sets. As with the Instagram coding, at least one of each of the Composition, Content, and Park Location subcategories was coded for each photograph, but only 4 of the 13 photographs were coded with a Behavior subcategory. Within the Composition category, the Landscape/Landscape and Sky subcategory applied to the highest number of photographs, characterizing 6 of the 13 photographs. The Portrait subcategory was close behind, characterizing 5 of the 13. Though the starting sample size for this search was small, these quantitative results for compositional styles are similar to those resulting from the Instagram search. Under the Content category, Landscape Features occurred in 11 photographs, People occurred in 2 photographs, and Animals occurred in 4 photographs. Trees under Landscape Features occurred the most of all the Content subcategories, appearing in 10 of the 13 photographs. No other Content subcategory comes close to this count, with Grass/Field and Park Features both occurring in 5 of the 13 photographs and all other categories falling below this. Again, the relative prominence of some of the Landscape Features subcategories, like Trees and Grass/Field, aligns with those same categories' prominence in the Instagram results. Leisure Activities and Smiling from the Behavior category also appeared the most within the included Twitter photographs, similar to the Instagram results. However, the counts in the Twitter results are slightly exaggerated because these two behavior subcategories were the only ones that were recorded, with Leisure Activities appearing in 4 of the 13 photographs and Smiling appearing in 2 of the 13. The Smiling count reflects the counts in the People subcategory under Content, in which 2 photographs contained Human Relationships, 2 contained Babies/Children, and no other subcategories under People were recorded. Dogs occurred in 3 of the 13 photographs, which, when compared proportionally to the occurrence of

Dogs in the Instagram results, is slightly less. The prominence of specific Park Locations is similar to that from the Instagram results in that Zilker Field and Unknown/Other occurred the most (both in 4 out of 13 photographs) and the Botanical Gardens came in third (in 3 out of 13 photographs). Though the Twitter results hold minimal significance based on the low sample size, they do help to reinforce patterns showing that certain characteristic categories tend to represent higher percentages of photographs within this study.

### **QUALITATIVE RESULTS: INTERPRETATION OF WHAT PEOPLE VALUE ABOUT ZILKER PARK**

The interpretations below constitute the results of my Qualitative Analysis and are based on the percentages derived from my Quantitative Analysis.

#### ***Instagram***

The prominence of Portrait, Landscape/Landscape and Sky, and Subject within Landscape compositional styles shows that visitors of the park value the opportunity to display natural settings and to frame important photographic subjects in locations that represent natural and environmental beauty. Photographs categorized as Portrait (based on the definition used in this study) and Subject in Landscape place importance on one or a few primary foci, and create a photograph that portrays the subject(s) having an experience, often with an emphasis on the experience taking place within a particular landscape. I interpret this to indicate that people value the uniqueness that special settings like Zilker Park add to their enjoyable and memorable experiences. With the Landscape/Landscape and Sky and Subject within Landscape compositional styles, the emphasis placed on the landscape reveals that people value the views and visible physical beauty provided by the landscape, which in turn reflects a broader appreciation for aesthetics, especially natural and environmental. This is supported by the prominent occurrences of Content subcategories such as Trees and Grass/Field within Landscape Features, which create and portray a green and natural environment; the prominence of the Austin Skyline, which provides a unique and iconic (at least for Austinites) view of Downtown; and Sky/Clouds, which



records when the sky and/or clouds are a major presence or focus of a photograph. This apparent aesthetic appreciation is particularly reflected in photographs that capture the view of the skyline in the background with the expanse of the Great Lawn in the foreground. Again, the presence of a clear blue sky, an amazing sunset or sunrise, or vivid clouds in many of the photographs indicates that people value the aesthetic appeal of such characteristics. Although the percentage of Water Features/Pool was lower than several of the other Content subcategories, it occurred frequently enough to be considered a notable indicator of the park's valued aesthetics. As previously mentioned, Zilker has become one of the most popular places for owners to take their dogs, as I have observed many times through my own visits to the park. The high occurrence of photographs with dogs in them confirms this, and reveals another major way in which people value the park. For people who love their dogs like family, Zilker's prominence as a dog-friendly park indicates that people value its sense of community (at least among dogs and dog owners), its spatial openness, and its provision of leisure space and opportunity for people to play with their dogs and allow their dogs to interact with others.

Within the People subcategory, Human Relationships returned the highest percentages. This indicates that people value the park as a space where they can spend time with friends and loved-ones and create memories together. Smiling is the most frequently occurring of the Behavior subcategories within the photographs. The Smiling occurrences came in two variations: the subject(s) purposefully smile for the camera, or the photograph catches the subject(s) smiling. I interpret the intentional smiling to mean that the subjects of the photographs want to convey that they are happy in that place and moment, and the photographs that appear to catch people smiling candidly are meant to show that the park is eliciting happiness among users. Leisure Activities is the second most common Behavior subcategory. As described in the rules and definitions section of Chapter 3, Leisure Activities refers to a combination of several of the original subcategories from the initial Excel analysis table. These subcategories include: Hula-Hooping, Kite Flying, Leisure Play, Picnic, Standing, Reading/Studying, Walking Dog/Pet, Interacting with Nature, Riding Train and Performance/Attending Performance or Event. I interpret the prominence of the occurrence of these types of leisure activities to indicate that people value the park for its provision of the opportunity (and the space) to participate in activities that they might

not undertake on a regular basis (such as picnicking or kite flying), or that the park provides a more enticing setting for day-to-day activities (such as walking the dog or reading and studying). The park might be enticing because visitors can spend time outdoors during good weather, they can enjoy the natural surroundings, and they can socialize with others. The park also provides a space for the creation and maintenance of a sense of community among visitors, because not only can they gather with family and friends for leisure, entertainment, and physical activities, but they can also enjoy people-watching and meeting new friends. The lack of sports-related behavior in the photographs was surprising, because I know from personal experience that Zilker Park is a popular place for organized, recreational, and leisure sport activities. However, I interpret the low percentage of these activities within the photographs to mean that the park is also popular for other types of behaviors, and that the people who are there to play sports are probably less likely to take the time to take photographs of their activities.

### ***Twitter***

As I mentioned previously, because the Twitter search returned far fewer photographs than the Instagram (Gramfeed) search, the difference between the addition or subtraction of any one photograph has a much more significant impact on the percentages that I calculated for each characteristic subcategory. As a result, any qualitative interpretations based on the most prominent categories would not be as telling as those derived from the Instagram photograph set. However, I believe the comparable lack of Twitter photographs is a finding in itself; the same search criteria and time range were used for the searches for both social media platforms, so I have interpreted the high turnout from Instagram and the low turnout from Twitter to indicate that Instagram is a much more popular means of posting and sharing photographic media. This might be due to the fact that Instagram's primary function is to do just that, while the low turnout from Twitter probably reflects the fact that short text-posts are its primary purpose and photo-sharing is only a secondary function available on the site. I also noticed that at least a couple of the photographs from Twitter were the same photographs I had already analyzed from Instagram, indicating that some people actually utilize multiple photo-sharing social media sites to share their

photographs. This likely has the effect of increasing viewership of their photographs. This, and the fact that people share their photographs on social media sites in the first place, supports the idea that people crave visibility and want their experiences to be seen by others.

### **MULTI-CHARACTERISTIC PATTERNS AND PHOTOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES**

Beyond simply identifying the most prominent individual characteristic subcategories, I also noticed patterns in many of the photographs constituted by a combination of multiple characteristics. Below I will display several example photographs and describe which patterns they reflect. I will also further my qualitative analysis by interpreting how they portray ways in which people value Zilker Park. All of the photographs below were pulled from the Instagram photograph set to show that my study captured these patterns. However, I also observed all of these prominent patterns in the photographs that I encountered in my preliminary test searches before I chose my search criteria and time range.



Image 4.1 – A photograph portraying the "Semi-Selfie" pattern.

### ***The Semi-Selfie***

The photograph above (Image 4.1), posted by username perl26 on April 27<sup>th</sup>, reflects a pattern of the Semi-Selfie compositional style. Though a relatively low percentage of the total photographs were Semi-Selfies, this is a very specific style and I interpret it to portray a few particular meanings. These photographs are usually taken from the photographer's point of view, rather than the reverse (as seen in a standard Selfie). Most photographs reflect the photographer's point of view even though the photographer is usually not included in the photograph. In a Semi-Selfie, however, the photographer wants to insert him or herself in some way while still maintaining a traditional point of view. Semi-Selfies remind viewers that the photographer is in fact present in the scene, and reflect a desire to portray "this is where I am, this is what I'm seeing, and *I'm part of this experience.*" The photograph reproduced here (Image 4.1) reflects these Semi-Selfie characteristics, as the photographer sits on a blanket under the shade of a tree in Zilker Park, looking out across the wide-open, green field and Rock Island (the park's popular, large rock outcropping). The presence of the book and blanket indicate that the photographer values the opportunity to relax and spend leisure time in the park. Likely, the photographer also values the chance to do these activities in the park because it provides a space to be outside in the natural environment during nice weather and offers aesthetically pleasing views. It's also important to note that the photographer's shoes are off, which is a classic indication of relaxation, especially while outdoors. The photograph below (Image 4.2), posted by username iamprincesskim on April 19<sup>th</sup>, also represents a slightly different version of a Semi-Selfie, in which the photographer has inserted him or herself not through any body part but through shadowing. The photograph shows the photographer's shadow while standing and taking a photograph of Zilker Park's Great Lawn, where many people and dogs are taking part in leisure activities, with the Downtown skyline in the background. Whether it was intentional or not, the inclusion of the photographer's shadow conveys the same meanings as do the Semi-Selfies that are clearly intentional. This photograph also displays one aspect of another pattern that I will discuss below.

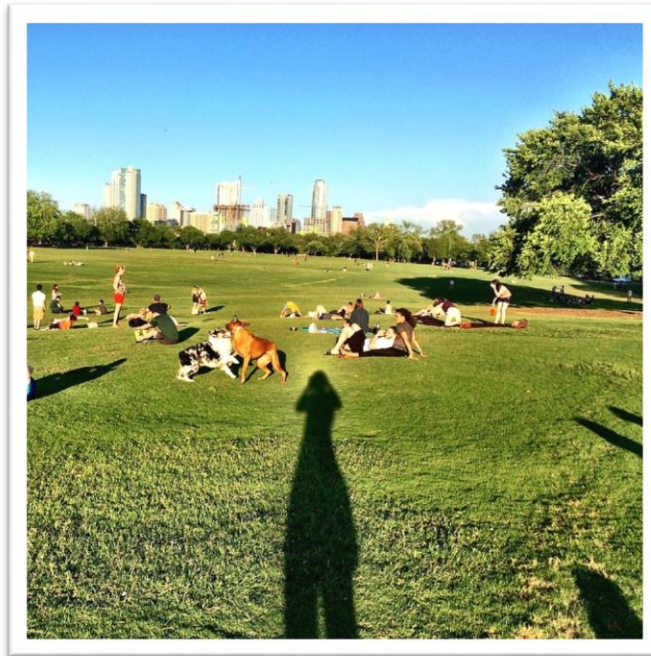


Image 4.2 – A photograph portraying the "Semi-Selfie" pattern.

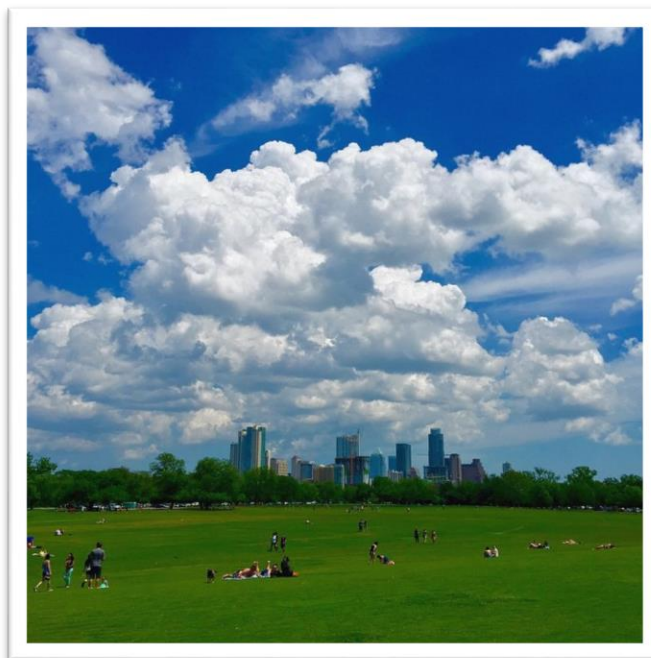


Image 4.3 – A photograph portraying the "Iconic View" pattern.

### ***The Iconic View***

The photograph above (Image 4.3), posted by username ethannation75 on April 19<sup>th</sup>, shows the vast expanse of the Zilker Great Lawn and the Downtown Austin skyline in the background. I saw many different versions of this pattern in my photograph set. The high frequency of photographs like these, in which the Great Lawn is portrayed in a way that shows its vastness, along with the view of the skyline in the background, and often a vivid sky scene, reflects that people likely value views, especially grand ones, and the aesthetic beauty that comes from these views. The vivid colors of the field, trees, and sky contribute to this aesthetic beauty, and the prominence of the skyline gives the view uniqueness and a sense of place. For the residents of Austin and its tourist population, the sense of place demonstrated by the Iconic View is likely to indicate that they value the opportunities to enjoy open space and natural beauty offered by parkland (in this case, Zilker Park) located so close to the city center. This may also be exemplified by renowned parks in major cities across the U.S. (e.g., Central Park in New York City, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, and Grant Park in Chicago), where major stretches of open space (and related amenities) are provided within the urban environment.

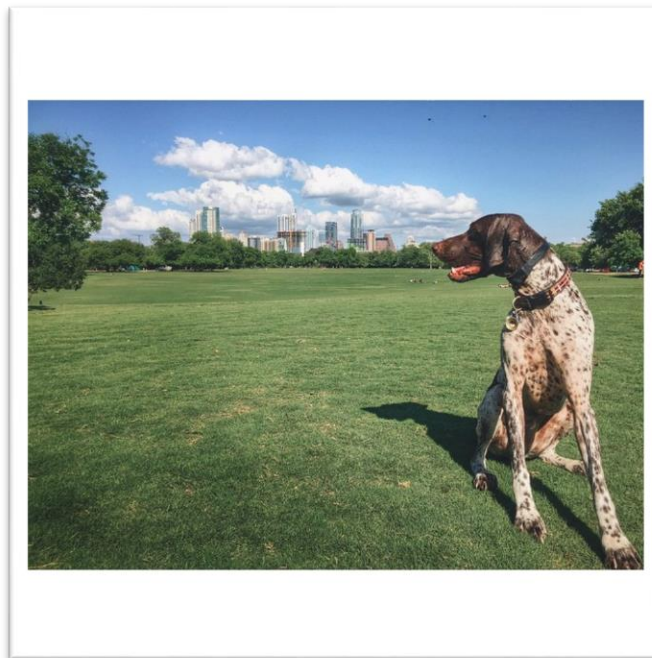


Image 4.4 – A photograph portraying the "Dog Portrait" pattern.

### ***The Dog Portrait***

Closely related to the Iconic View is the Dog Portrait, which consists of the posing of dogs in the foreground with these same view characteristics (field, skyline, sky) comprising the background. I interpret this photographic pattern to indicate that people view their dogs as friends/members of their family, and that capturing visually beautiful portraits of their dogs is as important as if the dogs were humans. Aside from aesthetic beauty, these photographs also show that people value the park as a "uniquely Austin" place that caters to canine play and relaxation. This is reflected through the framing of dogs in front of the iconic background, as reflected in the photograph (Image 4.4) posted by username paytontx12 on April 27<sup>th</sup>. As I discussed previously, Zilker Park has become a very popular outdoor space for people to bring their dogs, so the pattern that reflects the prominence of dogs in the park reveals one value that people place on the park. Similarly to the Iconic View discussed above, the Dog Portrait is likely indicative of the benefit to park visitors of having park space readily accessible from the city center.



Image 4.5 – A photograph portraying the "Leisure Hangout" pattern.

### ***The Leisure Hangout***

This pattern refers to photographs that show groups of people participating in leisure or relaxation activities together. The photograph above (Image 4.5), posted by username go\_dwells on April 19<sup>th</sup>, also represents the Leisure Hangout pattern. This photograph shows four hammocks hung up in the same tree, with two of the hammocks' occupants visible. The setup of the hammocks suggest that the people know each other and came to the park for the (at least partial) purpose of resting together in a tree. The photograph below (Image 4.6), posted by username soundslikeshay on April 19<sup>th</sup>, shows a group of women who have brought chairs, food, and drink into the park, representing the picnicking leisure activity. One of the women also has a hula-hoop around her shoulders, indicating that she plans to participate in that leisure activity as well. I interpret photographs that show such Leisure Hangout patterns to signify that people value the park as a place to take part in leisure and relaxation activities together as well as a place to spend quality time with friends or loved-ones, and in doing so have fun and create fond memories. Photographs like Image 4.5 also portray interactions with and enjoyment of the natural environment made accessible by the park.



Image 4.6 – A photograph portraying the "Leisure Hangout" pattern.





Image 4.7 – A photograph portraying the "Pose" pattern.

### ***The Pose***

The pattern that I call The Pose refers to photographs that portray human subjects who are posing purposefully for the photograph within an intentionally chosen setting and backdrop so that the resulting image will be interesting. The poses are often meant to showcase the subject's particular talents and/or portray the subject in a beautiful setting. These photographs may be the result of a relatively spontaneous idea or might emerge from a scheduled photo shoot. The many photographs I saw that fit this pattern portrayed people doing yoga, couples' portraits/nuptials, or people simply posing in front of attractive park features (often in the Botanical Gardens). The photograph above (Image 4.7), posted by username emmanoelle11 on April 25<sup>th</sup>, shows two women holding yoga-style poses over a blanket and drinks, with the Iconic View as their background. One of the photographs below (Image 4.8), posted by operasara on April 11<sup>th</sup>, shows a young girl holding a ballet pose on the bridge in the Japanese garden at the Botanical Gardens, and the other photograph below (Image 4.9), posted by username kenny\_kim

on April 6<sup>th</sup>, shows a bride and groom posing together in the Botanical Gardens. Photographs that fit this pattern seem to indicate that people value the park as a beautiful and unique setting to capture important events, talents, and/or striking images. Photographing these types of subjects constitutes a basic aspect of making and keeping record of significant and pleasant memories, meaning that the people who choose Zilker Park as the setting for the photographs value it as a place to make and capture memories and as a place that can provide aesthetic beauty for photographs.



Image 4.8 – A photograph portraying the "Pose" pattern.

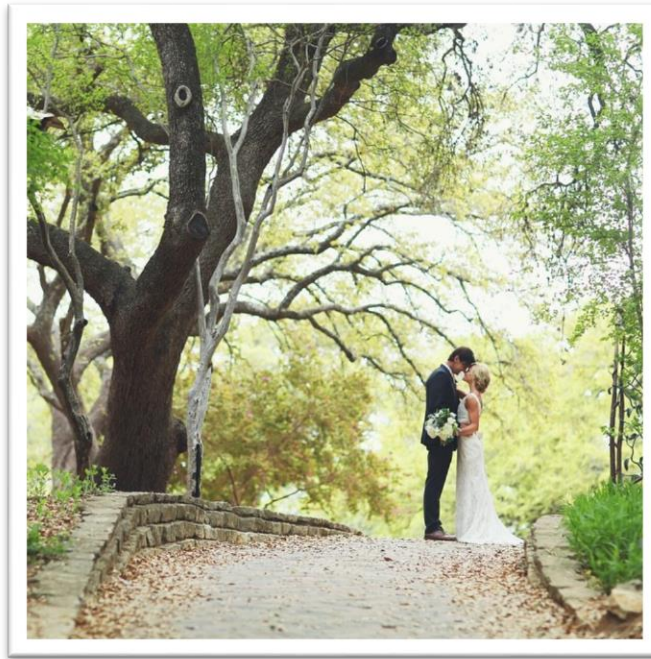


Image 4.9 – A photograph portraying the "Pose" pattern.

## **INTERPRETATION OF PRIMARY FACTORS OF THE PARK THAT PEOPLE VALUE**

Based on the specific interpretations in my qualitative analysis in the sections above, I now want to derive a more concise list of broader categories that represent ways in which people value Zilker Park. Below, I discuss these broad categories and how my interpretations led me to them. The categories are not mutually exclusive, and many are interrelated.

1. **Aesthetic Beauty:** Aesthetic beauty is a very clear characteristic of the park that people value. My interpretations related to frequently photographed landscape features and views, as well as the way that people use Zilker as a special backdrop and setting all point to an appreciation of the park's aesthetic beauty.
2. **Natural Environment:** My interpretations revealed the prominence of natural features like trees, grassy fields, flowers and other plants, rock features, and water features within

the photographs. This indicates that people value Zilker as a natural environment, probably because it sits within the city, acting as an island of relief from the developed urban form. Certain activities within the photographs (like swimming, sitting in hammocks tied up in trees, or climbing on the rock features) also indicate people's value of the natural environment.

3. **Provision of Opportunities:** This category is quite broad, but as I was performing my qualitative analysis and deriving my interpretations, I realized that many photographs reflect an appreciation for the provision of various opportunities. Whether it's participating in certain activities that are harder to undertake elsewhere, enjoying the outdoors, holding and attending events, or spending time with others, the park often acts as a setting that provides opportunities such as these to its visitors. The broad range of opportunities (e.g., physical, recreational, and leisure activities, events, and general enjoyment of the natural setting) offered within the expanse of the parklands in a location so close to the city center enhances the value of the park experience for residents and visitors.
4. **Fun and Quality Time with Friends, Loved-Ones, and Pets:** A significant portion of the photographs portrayed two or more people or people and their dogs spending time together in the park. Relationships between friends, couples, families, and owners and their pets are prominently portrayed in my photograph sets. This is demonstrated by the fact that one of my identified patterns from the section above is centered on groups of people having experiences together in the park. It is clear that people value the park as a place to have fun and spend time with their friends, loved-ones, and pets.
5. **Creating Memories:** With many people spending time together and participating in different activities throughout the park, and the park's provision of various opportunities, it is clear that to a certain extent people visit the park to make memories, and the

photographs that often result from this in part constitute a confirmation of this. People who hold important events, spend time with friends and loved-ones, and participate in special activities in the park do so because the park is a meaningful place to them and a place where they want to create positive and lasting memories.

6. Sense of Place: Finally, I suggest that one of the primary reasons that people value Zilker Park is because it emanates a distinct sense of place. Many people would most likely not choose to spend time in the park if they did not view it as unique and special. This also helps explain why people value the park for the previous five factors: there are many other places and spaces that would meet the same requirements to be valued in those ways, but they do not hold as strong a sense of place as Zilker. Zilker has reached an iconic status for Austinites and probably many tourists as well, and for people like me who have gone to Zilker throughout their lives, it also likely conjures special and unique feelings of familiarity, possibly even nostalgia. The pattern of taking photographs of the downtown skyline from the park provides an example of this iconic status and locational aspect of the sense of place created by the park (i.e., proximity to the city center). This sense of place helps explain in part why people choose to visit the park over other places that might be similar.

Through my analysis of photographs of Zilker Park from Instagram and Twitter, I have identified many of the dominant characteristics portrayed throughout the photograph sets. The prominence of these various characteristics has provided a better understanding of people's perceptions of the park, as well as the meanings behind the frequencies of particular characteristics. The meanings I interpreted from the frequencies of particular characteristics helped me derive the basic ways in which people value the park. In the next and final chapter, I present a concluding discussion of the methodology and the research as a whole, followed by my recommendations for planners who wish to adopt some version of my methodology for use as a public participation tool in future park planning processes.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE METHODOLOGY**

In this Professional Report, I have tested a technique meant to provide a deeper understanding of people's perceptions of Zilker Park. Understanding these perceptions then leads to an interpretation of ways that people value the park, which may be utilized by planners in their park planning processes.

Through conducting my study, I have learned that people choose Zilker as a location to experience a multitude of different enjoyable activities, behaviors, and interactions, as well as a place to escape the urban environment and immerse in nature. These concepts are reflected in my final list of primary ways in which people value the park, explained in Chapter 4. People also choose Zilker as a space to see and be seen; again, the final list of factors discussed in Chapter 4 combine to make Zilker an ideal and attractive location for visibility. This visibility allows opportunities for presentation of self and performance of identity through photographs and on social media – phenomena that I noted in Chapter 1.

Though my methodology had its limitations (as discussed in the previous chapter), it did in fact allow me to gain a basic understanding of how people value Zilker Park. It is possible that I could have come to conclusions similar to those that I developed in Chapter 4 without having conducted a photograph analysis; the conclusions seem to correlate with what common sense assumptions might indicate about how Austinites value Zilker Park. However, my analysis based on crowdsourced visual data was crucial for supporting my interpretations, and this report illustrates to others how I reached my conclusions. It also allows for the possible duplication of the process by other researchers or planners. One major benefit of my methodology is that it incorporates the perceptions of members of the public without requiring them to dedicate time or energy to a planning process. Instead, the only effort required is that which they already spend willingly to take their photographs and post them on social media. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this methodology also has the potential to capture the perceptions of segments of the population that are not involved in planning processes, especially Millennials. This is the case because I did not exclude photographs based on characteristics of the people who posted them, but rather

based on whether or not each individual photograph fit within my study parameters. There is also a certain level of honesty about the perceptions portrayed in these photographs, because they are not affected by the photographers' knowledge that researchers and planners are analyzing them. Along these lines, the captions and tags that accompany these photographs are also unaffected, and though I did not include those data types in my own methodology, future executions of this analysis could benefit from their incorporation. Again, it is important to remember that all photographs utilized in this study were publicly and readily accessible, and so should be any photographs analyzed in future studies or planning processes that adopt this methodology. Another benefit of my methodology is that it taps into the vast quantities of data now generated and made available through social media. These online platforms have reached a point where data on many different topics from many different places can be reached through simple or advanced searches. So, researchers or planners could replicate this same methodology for public parks or other spaces locally relevant to their own purposes. The primary challenges of the methodology are the time required to conduct the analysis, and the possibility of failing to adequately capture the perceptions of some vulnerable and marginalized populations, like low-income and minority groups, as well as groups that are unlikely to utilize social media. In the sections below I will address these concerns.

## **INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS**

Research has shown that marginalized populations, like minority, low-income, and low-educational-attainment groups, tend to experience underrepresentation and/or low levels of impact on decisions that result from public participation in various political processes (Koehler & Koontz, 2007; Beard & Sarmiento, 2014; Abel & Stephan, 2000). However, it is crucial to reach a diverse set of the population throughout the public participation process, because different people might (and often do) have different perceptions of public spaces and opinions and desires about what planning should achieve. One particularly relevant example of this discrepancy occurred recently in Houston, Texas. In 2014, the city administered a survey asking the citizens of Houston what they wanted to be included in the Bayou Greenways 2020 project and what

improvements they desired to parks across the city. One of the most desired actions was creating connectivity between parks, neighborhoods, and trails. However, about two-thirds of the respondents were wealthier Whites. Because of this, researchers from Rice University with support from the city conducted a second survey distributed specifically to Black and Latino communities to gain an understanding of their desires and to what degree the desires differed from those expressed in the results of the initial survey. Sure enough, the results illuminated different priorities: while the original survey showed a major desire for increased connectivity within the city's parks and open spaces system, the survey geared toward minority communities reflected priorities such as improved park amenities and safer park equipment and environments (Mock, 2016). This example illustrates the challenges in identifying disparities in views and desires between different groups of people.

In Austin's 2011 Long Range Plan for Land, Facilities, and Programs, I was unable to find a breakdown of the socio-demographic characteristics of the people that participated in the planning process. The plan does claim to have, in part, used demographic information in its development; however, while the plan briefly addresses Austin's growth and changes in ethnic mixture, it lists low-income, youth, elderly, and population density as priority demographic indicators without including race or ethnicity (City of Austin, 2011b). The city is currently in the process of gathering public input to aid the 2018 update to the Long Range Plan, and based on the lack of detail about the level of diversity of public participation from the existing plan, the process could benefit from extra attention to inclusive participation methods. Imagine Austin (the city's comprehensive plan), on the other hand, does provide limited socio-demographic information about public participation in the planning process. However, these statistics only describe part of the Community Forum Series, which does not constitute the entirety of the engagement process. The breakdown shows that overall, the shares of plan participation based on categories of race were lower than the shares of race in the whole city in every category except White and Other, where the share of plan participation exceeded the citywide share. The disparity was greatest in the Hispanic Latino category, where the plan participation share was under half of the citywide share. The statistics also show that generally, more highly educated people participated and participation increased with income (except for the highest level of \$150,000 or



more), though the disparities between participation in the income categories were less harsh than those for education and race. It is clear from these breakdowns that the city could take steps to improve inclusion of these generally underrepresented segments of the population. However, to its credit the plan acknowledges this underrepresentation and claims to have incorporated additional engagement and outreach whenever disparities were identified (City of Austin, 2012)

Although my methodology does not discriminate based on demographic characteristics when it comes to inclusion and exclusion of photographs, it also does not ensure inclusion of photographs taken and/or posted by specific groups. Whether or not my methodology captures an appropriate representation of a city's diversity could be assessed in terms of the overall socio-demographics of the city and socio-demographic data on Internet access. The 2013 American Community Survey estimated that 85.1% of Austin households had Internet (Maciag, 2014). A 2015 study conducted by the University of Texas on Internet and digital device usage in Austin showed that Blacks and Non-White Hispanics, as well as people with lower incomes and lower educational attainment, tended to have lower levels of Internet usage, access, and fluency. While the study actually showed that a lower percentage of Blacks were non-Internet users than Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Whites (Strover et al., 2015), this might be due to the overall lower share of Blacks in Austin compared to these other two groups. In Austin's profile report on demographics from the 2013 American Community Survey, people who are Black Alone make up only 7.2% of the city's total population, while Non-Hispanic Whites make up 49.7% and Hispanics/Latinos make up 34%. The same report shows that 31% of Austin households have an annual income of under \$35,000, and 17.8% of people are below the poverty line. Finally, 28.7% of people over the age of 25 in Austin have an educational attainment level of only a high school diploma (or an equivalent) or less (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Despite a notably low share of Black population, these indicators show that Austin has significant shares of marginalized groups, and that this has important implications for public participation processes and the use of Internet-based tools for planning. It is important for planners from other cities and entities around the United States to be aware of the socio-demographics and Internet access levels in their own localities, so that they may understand how these factors could impact the use of photographs for social media-based studies such as the one presented in this PR.

## **PROPOSING THE METHODOLOGY FOR USE BY PARK PLANNERS**

If planners can come to a better understanding of what people value about specific parks, then they can try to incorporate this data in their planning efforts. Analyses such as the one presented here are based on data generated by the public, as well as supported by the theoretical framework that I presented in Chapter 1. These factors make this methodology an acceptable approach that can therefore be used in other applications to significantly inform planning decisions. Additionally, adoption and modification of this method can provide planners with a form of passive public participation to complement traditional public engagement processes.

Because I have described my methodology in such detail, planners could duplicate my process for their own planning purposes. I present the following, basic steps for such a social media sourced analysis of photographs:

- Learn how to conduct searches on Instagram and Twitter
- Determine the public park, search criteria, and time range relevant to the study's needs
- Create a spreadsheet with broad categories of Composition, Content, and Behavior
- Create subcategories relevant to what is observed in the search results photographs
- Code the characteristics of the photographs into the spreadsheet
- Conduct a basic quantitative analysis to find sums and percentages
- Conduct a qualitative analysis to interpret meanings and draw conclusions

However, as I have noted previously, this process may become quite time-consuming, and may be overly structured for the purposes and limitations of practitioners. So, planners may also adapt the methodology in ways that will simplify it, reduce the necessary time dedication, utilize more available data, and/or create an active participatory process.

One possibility is to choose other social media sites or change the number of sites used. It is possible that Instagram and Twitter may not be the most appropriate sites for the needs of different planners and places, so selecting the right site(s) will determine the analysis outcomes. Another option is to take the photographs' accompanying captions and tags into consideration, because these often offer an even more complete reflection of people's perceptions in tandem

with what the photographs reveal. Planners could also make more or less strict rules about which photographs are included in the analysis based on the time the posts were made. This would allow for the inclusion of more photographs (with perhaps a slightly less complex analysis) or fewer photographs (with a slightly more complex analysis). Even a very casual analysis might be performed by looking through the search results, noting prominent patterns, and coding characteristics into a spreadsheet. However, the more casual the analysis is, the more important it is to only use the results as basic confirmation or augmentation of results from other participatory methods. Planners might also conduct a leaner version of the analysis by sticking to broader categories (like nature, people, physical activities, etc.) rather than creating many specific subcategories, by beginning the search with a particular hypothesis about what they expect to see in the photographs, or by looking for one or two particular characteristics based on specific questions (such as, "what importance do people place on trees in the park?").

Finally, one of the most significant ways that planners might adapt the methodology would be to convert it from a passive participation tool to an active one. To make this change, planners would need to implement the method in a way that elicits direct and solicited input from the public. This might be accomplished by using official city social media accounts to ask the public to post photographs of a specific public park. In this process, planners could simply ask people to post photographs of the specified place, or they could ask them to post photographs that represent an element of interest (e.g., asking people to post photographs that show their favorite aspect of a park). However, it is important to consider how this will impact the analysis effort and the results. Although active participation may make planners' conclusions more concrete, it would require the dedication of effort from the participants, which takes away part of the original appeal of the methodology. It would also only reach people who are connected to the city via social media accounts.

Ultimately, the methodology presented here (or an adaptation of it) can help augment existing public participation tools by facilitating a deeper understanding of people's perceptions about parks and by reaching segments of the population that might normally be under-represented in the planning process. Due to the fact that the methodology does not require any extra time or effort from the public (which is often a primary reason that people do not get

involved in planning processes), planners can adopt it as a form of passive public participation, making it unique compared to most other types of public participation tools. Despite the limitations of my analysis, I have demonstrated a creative option for planners and researchers to discover and interpret the perceptions that photographs convey, and through this gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which people value public parks and other spaces. Because of social media, large amounts of data (including photographs) are available to planners. The methodology I have described provides a way to utilize these publicly accessible photographs for future park planning purposes. This can be done by incorporating the consideration of emotional responses as prompted by the park and represented in the photographs posted by park users. These emotional responses and the conscious or subconscious depiction of particular aspects of the park may be interpreted by planners to understand the ways that people value the park.



## Appendix B: Quantitative Results from Photograph Coding

Instagram Photograph Coding: Quantitative Results						
Characteristic Categories		Individual Subcategory Sums	Individual Subcategory Percentages	Broad Subcategory Sums	Broad Subcategory Percentages	
<b>Composition</b>	Portrait	313	47.07%			
	Selfie	67	10.08%			
	Close Up	79	11.88%			
	Landscape/Landscape and Sky	173	26.02%			
	Subject within Landscape	118	17.74%			
	Semi-Selfie	21	3.16%			
	Aerial	3	0.45%			
<b>Collage</b>		23	3.46%			
<b>Content</b>	Landscape Features	Trees	357	53.68%	579	87.07%
		Grass/Field	332	49.92%		
		Flowers/Other Plants	115	17.29%		
		Other Landscape Features	94	14.14%		
	People	Alone	95	14.29%	381	57.29%
		General	108	16.24%		
		Babies/Children	93	13.98%		
		People with Dogs	64	9.62%		
	Animals	Human Relationships	130	19.55%	220	33.08%
		Dogs	192	28.87%		
		Non-Pets/Wildlife	23	3.46%		
		Other	6	0.90%		
		Park Features	105	15.79%		
		Austin Skyline	151	22.71%		
		Sky/Clouds	142	21.35%		
		Water Features/Pool	121	18.20%		
		Other Park Attractions	19	2.86%		
	Items for Recreation, Leisure, and Relaxation	108	16.24%			
	Other	9	1.35%			
<b>Behavior</b>	Sports	17	2.56%	404	60.75%	
	Other Physical Activities	88	13.23%			
	Leisure Activities	131	19.70%			
	Undefined Recreational/Leisure Activity	60	9.02%			
	Relaxing	75	11.28%			
	Posing	66	9.92%			
	Smiling	141	21.20%			
	Human Affection	29	4.36%			
<b>Photographs Excluded</b>		194	22.58%			
<b>Park Location</b>	Zilker Field	288	43.31%			
	Volleyball Courts	2	0.30%			
	Botanical Garden	59	8.87%			
	Barton Springs	47	7.07%			
	Zilker Playscape	7	1.05%			
	Zilker Clubhouse	2	0.30%			
	Zilker Zephyr	15	2.26%			
	Hike and Bike Trail	30	4.51%			
	Umlauf Sculpture Garden	1	0.15%			
	Splash! Exhibit	1	0.15%			
	Hillside Theater	3	0.45%			
	Unknown/Other	222	33.38%			

Twitter Photograph Coding: Quantitative Results						
Characteristic Categories		Individual Subcategory Sums	Individual Subcategory Percentages	Broad Subcategory Sums	Broad Subcategory Percentages	
Composition	Portrait		5	38.46%		
	Selfie		1	7.69%		
	Close Up		2	15.38%		
	Landscape/Landscape and Sky		6	46.15%		
	Subject within Landscape		2	15.38%		
	Semi-Selfie		1	7.69%		
	Aerial		0	0.00%		
Collage		1	7.69%			
Content	Landscape Features	Trees	10	76.92%	11	84.62%
		Grass/Field	5	38.46%		
		Flowers/Other Plants	4	30.77%		
		Other Landscape Features	2	15.38%		
	People	Alone	0	0.00%	2	15.38%
		General	0	0.00%		
		Babies/Children	2	15.38%		
		People with Dogs	0	0.00%		
		Human Relationships	2	15.38%		
	Animals	Dogs	3	23.08%	4	30.77%
		Non-Pets/Wildlife	1	7.69%		
		Other	0	0.00%		
	Park Features		5	38.46%		
	Austin Skyline		1	7.69%		
	Sky/Clouds		2	15.38%		
Water Features/Pool		3	23.08%			
Other Park Attractions		1	7.69%			
Items for Recreation, Leisure, and Relaxation		1	7.69%			
Other		0	0.00%			
Behavior	Sports		0	0.00%	4	30.77%
	Other Physical Activities		0	0.00%		
	Leisure Activities		4	30.77%		
	Undefined Recreational/Leisure Activity		0	0.00%		
	Relaxing		0	0.00%		
	Posing		0	0.00%		
	Smiling		2	15.38%		
Human Affection		0	0.00%			
Photographs Excluded		4	23.53%			
Park Location	Zilker Field		4	30.77%		
	Volleyball Courts		0	0.00%		
	Botanical Garden		3	23.08%		
	Barton Springs		0	0.00%		
	Zilker Playscape		1	7.69%		
	Zilker Clubhouse		0	0.00%		
	Zilker Zephyr		0	0.00%		
	Hike and Bike Trail		0	0.00%		
	Umlauf Sculpture Garden		0	0.00%		
	Splash! Exhibit		0	0.00%		
	Hillside Theater		1	7.69%		
	Unknown/Other		4	30.77%		

## Appendix C: Excluded Category Definitions

- "Rocks/Rock Features" under "Landscape Features" under Content refer to naturally-occurring rocks and rock features; any built rock features will be classified under "Park Features"
- "Trails" under "Landscape Features" under Content generally refer usually to unpaved pathways, official or not, but may include paved walkways or bridges that are part of a larger trail
- "Couples" under "People" under Content refers to people who appear to be in a romantic relationship, whether or not romantic affection is portrayed
- "Friends" under "People" under Content refers to human subjects who are friends, as well as when multiple human subjects are interacting but are not clearly a couple or a family
- "Other Wildlife Features" under "Animals" under Content refers to inanimate objects related to wild animals, for example, a wasp nest
- "Zilker Zephyr" under Content refers to when any part of the Zilker Zephyr train or its tracks are included in a photo
- "Frisbee" under "Sports" under Behavior refers to disc golf, ultimate Frisbee, leisure Frisbee, and/or playing Frisbee with a dog
- "Leisure Climbing" under Behavior refers to leisurely climbing requiring no specific equipment or skill, for example climbing the rock feature in the middle of the Zilker Field
- "Walking", "Standing", "Sitting", and "Laying" under Behavior will all be checked when these behaviors are the human subjects' prime activities, not in tandem with other physical activities, except posing, or unless it is in reference to the behavior of other human subjects within the same photo
- "Reading/Studying" under Behavior will be checked if "Books/Notebooks" is checked off under Content, whether or not there is a subject visibly reading or studying; this includes writing
- "Interacting with Nature" under Behavior refers to human subjects interacting with nature directly, for example, interacting with wildlife or flowers
- "Performance/Attending Performance or Event" under Behavior refers to giving any performance related to music, plays, dance, etc., or attending a performance or event



- "Picnic" under Behavior would be checked if people are visibly eating on a blanket or at a picnic table
- "Leisure Play" under Behavior usually indicates children playing, with no specified activity (including on a playground), but may be used for teens or adults when their activity appears playful but is also unspecified
- "Riding Train" under Behavior refers to subjects visibly riding the Zilker Zephyr
- "Romantic Affection" under Behavior refers to romantic affection between human subjects within a photo, including hugging, kissing, holding hands, etc.
- "Familial Affection" under Behavior refers to affection among family members, including kissing, hugging, and holding hands

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