SUPPORTING STREET WORKERS:
Siting Sex Work Managed Zones in San Francisco, CA

INTRODUCTION

In April 2018, the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act (SESTA) were passed in the House and Senate with bipartisan support. This legislation, ostensibly created to prevent sex trafficking, rolls back protections included in the Communications Act that allowed online hosting sites from charges of unlawful solicitation of sexual services made by third party users. Sites such as Backpage.com and Craigslist - which were used widely by sex workers as way to advertise and to screen clients - promptly shut down. Sex worker advocate groups expressed profound concern as the impact such regulation would have on sex workers’ access to necessary tools for ensuring their safety. (Sex Workers Outreach Project 2018; Freedom Network USA 2018). Since FOSTA/SESTA’s passage, there has been a noted increase throughout the U.S. in the number of sex workers who have moved to street work, typically considered more dangerous than arranging work through online channels (Robinson 2018).

In several cities throughout the UK, the Netherlands, and Germany, Sex Work Managed Zones (MZs) were established as alternatives to punitive policing of sex work (Campbell et al. 2006). MZs are designated areas within a municipality where sex workers can work between certain hours without fear of legal prosecution. Sex workers and advocate groups widely promote decriminalization of sex work as a necessary step in securing the safety and welfare of sex workers (Amnesty International 2018). Until full decriminalization is realized, MZs might be a viable interim tool that municipalities can enact to help support sex workers, so long as a policy framework that centers the safety and rights of sex workers is used (Van Doorninck 2006). Criteria used in determining feasible locations for MZs include areas that are located away from residential areas and from nighttime businesses, away from pedestrians, accessible by car or public transportation, near health services and traffic routes, and located in light industrial areas (Bello 2007). In previous models, additional measures of good lighting, and monitored entry into the areas by security wardens or police are considered.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What areas in San Francisco would be most suitable for Manage Sex Work Zones? Is there clustering of where street sex work currently occurs in the city?

MANAGED ZONE SUITABILITY MAP:
SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY, CA

METHODS

To begin to understand where it would be appropriate to site sex work Managed Zones in San Francisco, I developed criteria based on models in use in the UK, Netherlands, and Germany. My suitability analysis is based on proximity to areas where sex work already happens, proximity to health services, a minimum of 1000 feet distance away from businesses in operation in the evening. In some managed zone models, police are active in supervising the zones. Their purported aim is to ensure the safety of sex workers during the zones’ hours of operation (typically from 7pm to 7am). That said, sex workers report frequent abuse and harassment at the hands of police, indicative of a long history of mistrust between police and sex workers. In San Francisco the recent creation of a Sex Work Abatement Task Force has created additional barriers and fear for sex workers who do street work. In a survey of sex workers on characteristics they would like to see in managed zones a majority of those surveyed did not want police presence. In my model, I chose to positively value distance away from police stations, increasing suitability as that distance increases. To do this, locations for health services, reported incidences of sex work, and police stations were first geocoded into vector point layers and later converted into raster layers Next, I used the Euclidean Distance tool to visualize different distances radiating out from those points. For the Health Services layer and the Reported Incidences layer I reclassified the resulting raster into 5 classes ranging by distance from each point. The values of each class range from 1 – 5 as pixels approach the original locations: 1 being least suitable and 5 being most suitable. For the Evening Businesses layer and the Police Stations layer, I sought sites farther away from each business, the inverse of the class values is used. The Raster Calculator has added up each of the layers, with higher scores indicating the most suitable sites and lower scores indicating the least suitable sites.

In the bottom-left map, the most suitable areas for siting Managed Zones in San Francisco are overlaid with a public transit route vector layer as a reference to transit access. Separately, I used a 0.5 mile buffer around routes to reflect walking distance from transit and found that all suitable areas were within the walking buffer.

The Local Moran’s I tool in the bottom-middle map to visualize clustering of census tracts in which incidences of sex work were reported and summed. The Global Moran’s I report, generated from this same census tract layer, indicates that the data is clustered with a 3% likelihood that clustering could be a result of random chance.

A notable limitation when considering this model is that any measurements of where sex work happens are solely based on where sex work has been reported to police. The visualization of sex work locations I have generated with this data is necessarily warped. Current policy and social attitudes towards sex work are hostile – sex workers are not at liberty to disclose information about where or how often they do their work and therefore representative data is difficult to acquire. That said, even with the limited data I used the Moran’s Index score suggests that clustering of areas where sex work happens is unlikely to be due to chance. More can be learned from these areas about why and how sex work is happening, and perhaps if there are site characteristics that can be preserved or adopted elsewhere that encourage safety and support.

This model identifies (in green on the center map) suitable areas to situate Managed Zones. Due to site MZs at least 1,000 ft. away from businesses in operation at night, many of the most suitable areas are further from more densely commercial districts. It will be important to ensure proper street lighting, spaces protected from dangerous uses, and transit/car accessibility. Despite incorporating distance away from police stations as a criterion for the model, further consideration weighing this criterion more heavily should be had. Upon further reflection, identifying public transit routes that run between Managed Zone operational hours will be necessary in evaluating MZ accessibility, and should incorporate main roads for sex workers with car access.

REFERENCES


Willan Publishing, 2006. 62


Amends Centrala

San Francisco County, CA

Access to Transit from Areas with Highest Suitability

DISCUSSION

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