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# Post-Industrial Zoning Law and its Effect on Prevalence of Third Places in Seattle, WA

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## Introduction

- Zoning laws have existed long before third places and have historically restricted and influenced uses of land particularly in the post-industrial era, but relationships between third places and zoning have not been studied.
- This study attempts to measure third places and effects of zoning quantitatively so it can make large-scale conclusions about third places in Seattle.

## Research Question

- To what extent has the advent of post-industrial zoning aided the spatial and social characteristics required for the establishment of third places in the Seattle?

## Theory

### Ray Oldenburg – The Third Place

- Not home or work, a bookstore, café, park, etc. that fosters neighborly, informal ties between people.
- Characteristics of third places that are measured in the study: Accessibility and Accommodation, Neutral Ground, A Leveler, A Low Profile.

### Henri Lefebvre – Social Space

- Written in 1974 as a Marxist definition of space in cities.
- Capitalism shapes the uses and social qualities of spaces, including third places.

### Jane Jacobs – The Conditions for City Diversity

- Written in 1961, Jacobs proposes mixed primary uses, small blocks, aged buildings and concentration as building blocks of city diversity.
- Third places thrive in diverse environments.

## Methods

- ArcGIS Layers from City of Seattle provided spatial data and NHGIS census data provided other statistics.
- Descriptive statistics provided a baseline of understanding about third places. The area studied includes 536 census block groups.
- Linear, spatial, and geographically weighted regressions tested relationships between aspects of third places, the Seattle zoning ordinance, and physical and economic characteristics of Seattle.

## Selected Results

### Descriptive Statistics

- The map shows 644 third place locations in green, laid over zoning districts. Clusters appear in areas with multiple districts, especially commercial ones and downtown.
- Each explanatory variable exhibited spatial autocorrelation according to Global Moran's I Tests.

### Zoning Hypotheses

- Development limits and dwelling density limits correlated with current commercial development and population density (pseudo  $R^2$  0.19 and 0.61 respectively).

### Structural Hypotheses

- The length of blocks had little influence on commercial property size except in areas with long blocks (pseudo  $R^2$  0.02).
- Dwelling density and neutral ground performed unevenly (pseudo  $R^2$  0.05).

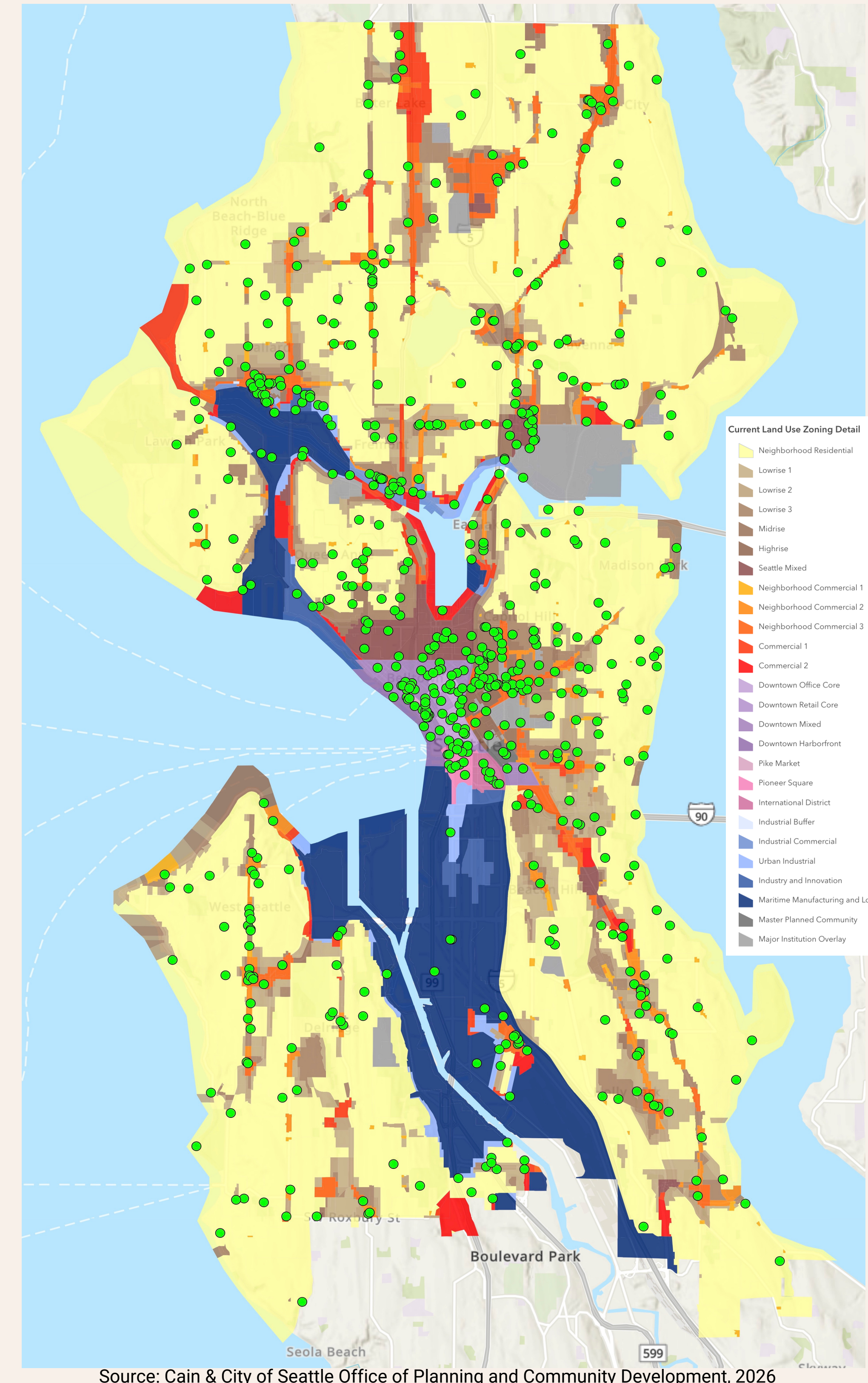
### Economic Hypotheses

- StDev of age of buildings inconsistently predicted the number of third places across Seattle well, but did well in Ballard, University, and downtown (pseudo  $R^2$  0.05).

### Final Hypothesis

- A stepwise regression of all variables found that neutral ground, StDev of age of buildings, commercial limits, and population density were the best predictors of third places (pseudo  $R^2$  0.13).

## Seattle Zoning & Third Places



## Conclusions

- The stepwise regression indicated that the theories gave a comprehensive view of third places, because it included variables describing zoning restrictions and physical and social characteristics of Seattle.
- Given that many hypotheses correlated well only in certain neighborhoods, Seattle's geography or culture could play a part in the difficulty of predicting third place locations.
- Capitalist influence on zoning, shown by Lefebvre, means most zoning would not encourage spontaneous natural social interaction common to third places.

## Limitations

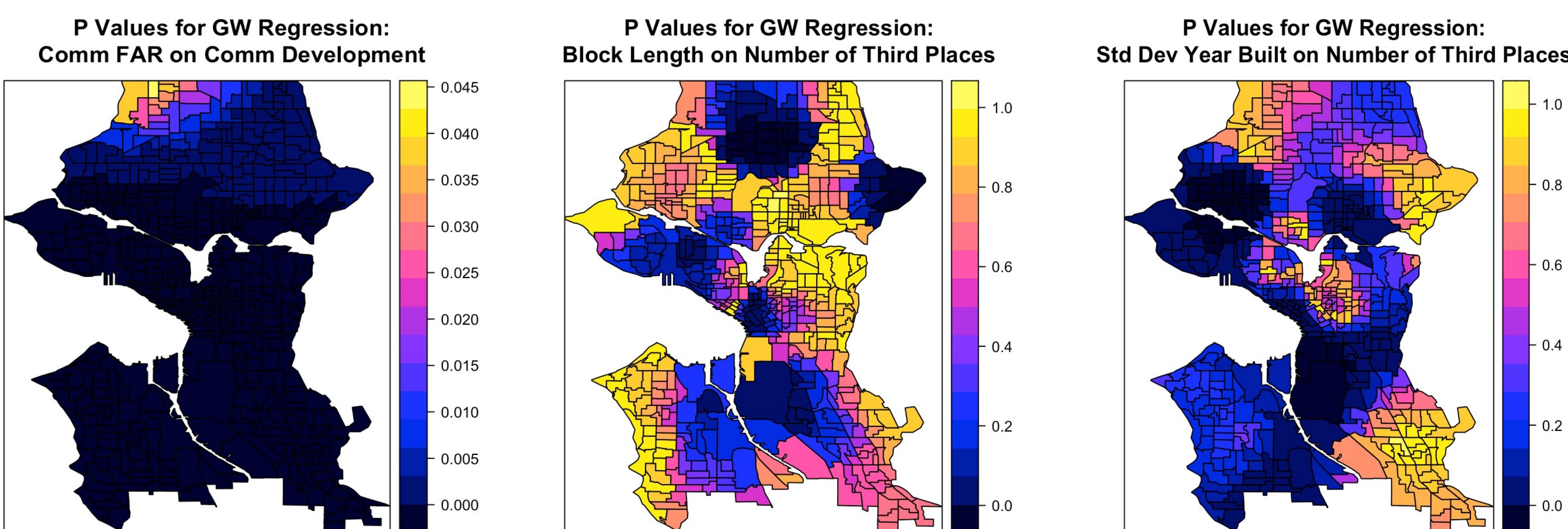
- The selection of third places results from this research and its operational definition, meaning it is not representative of all Seattleites' third places.
- Aspects of third places like 'a Home Away From Home' cannot be quantified, so some third places selected may not be 'true' third places.

## Future Directions

- Third places are typically studied ethnographically and on a small scale. This study's scale gives it an advantage in that an entire city's communities can be studied and conclusions or solutions could impact more people or be used for public policy.
- The quantitative nature of this project means its methodology can be reproduced, and other cities can be studied or compared. Then, other variables could explain differences between cities.

## Selected Results of Geographically Weighted Regressions

Each region in the graphs below are census block groups in Seattle. Individual regressions run only in that area, so the p values can be compared. Darker colors indicate higher significance. Note the color scales are different.



## Selected Literature Cited

- City of Seattle, Washington. Municipal Code, Title 23 (2025).
- Jacobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: 50th Anniversary Edition*. United Kingdom: Random House Publishing Group.
- Lefebvre, H. (1992). *Social space*. In *The Production of Space*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. United States: Hachette Books.

## Further information

See the GitHub repository linked in the QR code for data and R source code used for the spatial analysis.

