

Public Space Survey Summary

The online public space survey by OBSID and OCA was closed on 14 August 2020 and received 347 responses. Unsurprisingly, the perception and real examples of decreased safety in the neighbourhood came up consistently throughout the entire survey. The increase of people living on the street, a direct result of Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdown, has created a real conundrum. While some respondents proposed things like ‘removing’ people and doing away with ‘charity’ initiatives, it was clear in many of the responses, that people are aware of the complexity of this situation. On one hand, Obs is known as a neighborhood where solidarity and compassion are commonplace. On the other, there has been a real change in public space characterised by growing harassment which creates discomfort in the best of cases and sentiments of fear and animosity in the worst.

There were some ‘typical’ responses about OBSID needing to rather focus on safety and urban management as its core mandate but this was surprisingly very low (less than 5 respondents). This indicates that people either appreciate the role OBSID can play in this arena, or feel that in the absence of anyone else doing anything, OBSID is the only entity that can do anything about it. Either way, this provides the impetus required to take some action on the ground as part of this strategy. This also coincides with people’s ranking of OBSIDs’ functions. While the majority pointed to public safety and urban management as most important, it was interesting to see business development to come in third place. This is certainly likely to be the result of the extraordinary pressure on businesses as a result of Covid-19 and lockdown. Be that as it may, this strategy is responding to current needs on the ground and it must be guided by this in the short term while keeping in mind longer term objectives.

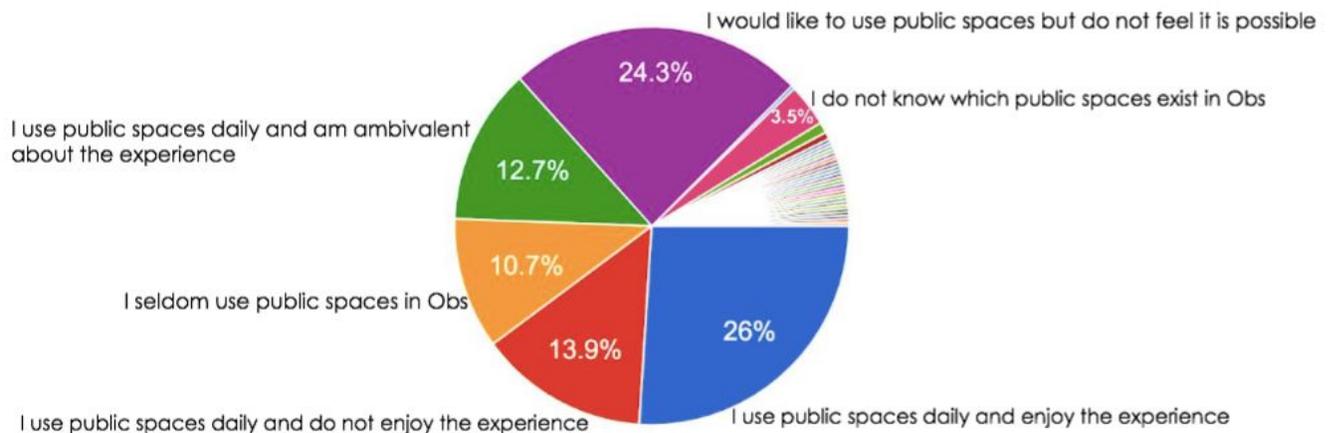
In that vein, there is a strong appetite for urban gardens and recycling, as well as cleaning campaigns. This points to a real interest around ecological activities which could be carried out as short term interventions with longer-term objectives in mind around sustainability as well as resident ownership and participation.

In terms of specific public spaces, this survey shows Obs residents have a particular interest in and desire to use Liesbeek Parkway. This will be an important consideration for OBSID’s Board given that it lies outside the official boundaries of Obs. At the same time, this could be a conducive opportunity to liaise with surrounding neighbourhoods and CIDs to engage in a broader conversation about public space in Cape Town more broadly.

Finally, this survey, while relatively comprehensive in terms of the geographic areas and activities, did not include specific feedback from homeless residents or business owners. This information was collected through a different tool that enabled face to face interaction and findings will be incorporated into the strategy.

Survey responses

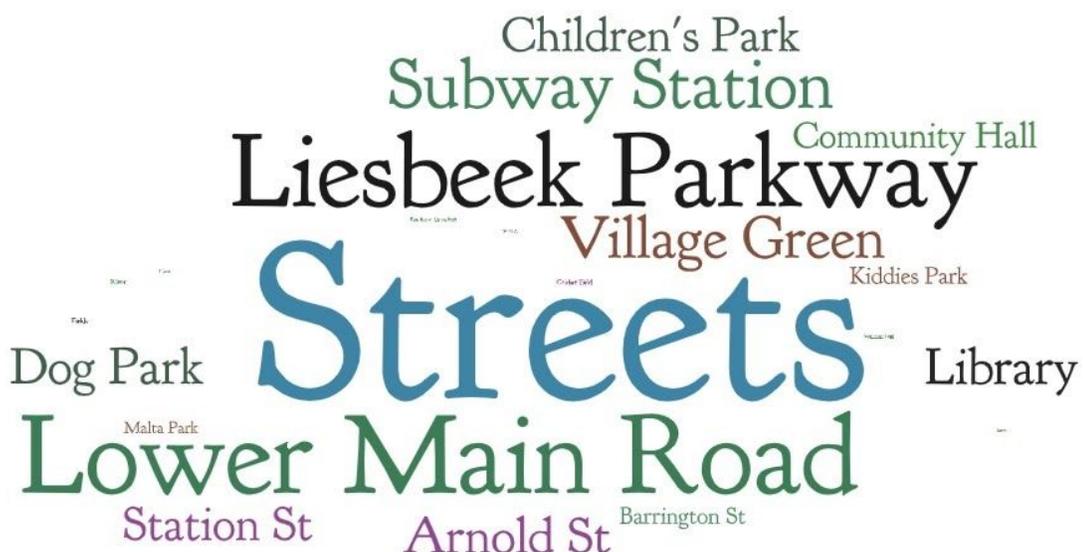
1. What best describes your relationship to public space in Obs? (346 responses)



Observations:

A significant portion of the respondents say they enjoy the experience of public space currently and the comments highlight a desire to use them more often. However, safety is a big concern. It could be assumed that most of that 23% who do not feel it's possible to use public space say so for safety reasons. Most of those who responded 'other' pointed specifically to issues such as crime and harassment.

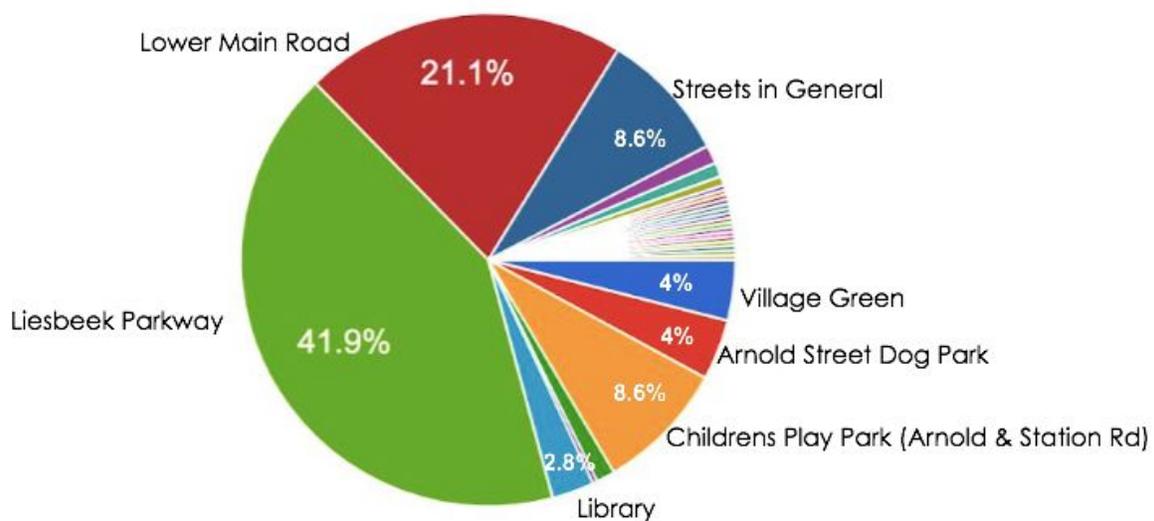
2. What public space/s do you use in Obs? (338 responses)



Observations

There is a clear inclination to use streets in Obs. Lower Main Road in particular attracted a large number of respondents. There were comments about issues that prevented people from using LMR beyond safety (e.g. curb use, bins, parking, etc). This detailed feedback can be useful if an intervention is planned in that space. There is also a strong pattern in the use of Liesbeek Parkway. Even if it is not within the boundaries of Obs, residents are using that space and comments point to a desire to use it more often. In the final section of the survey someone even suggests orchestrating the use of the space deliberately (on a particular time of the day) to ensure there are enough “eyes on the street” to provide safety.

3. What is your favourite public space in Obs? (327 responses)



Other: Malta Park, Two Rivers Urban Park, open air cafes, the old circus

Observations

Liesbeek parkway comes up as a popular place for people wanting to exercise, walk their dogs, and as a potential place for greater socialisation (e.g. picnics). This could perhaps be a place where an intervention in partnership with neighbouring CIDs or institutions would make sense as it benefits people beyond Obs. Again interesting to see Lower Main road come second in this question. There is a real opportunity to build on the energy that Open Streets and Streetopia have brought to the street in recent years and to perhaps use it as an example of how the community can reclaim it in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, safe and supportive of local businesses.

Observations

There is no doubt safety is the key factor here. There are many reflections about people no longer using public space as a result of the perceived (or real) increase in crime. The challenge here will be to find ways of creating a sense of safety whilst acknowledging the increased needs of destitute populations. In other words, how to bring energy to the space while keeping it genuinely public? Beyond safety, there were a couple of interesting points regarding the built environment. One of them referred to parking on Lower Main Road making "the pedestrian experience unpleasant."

6. Which of the following makes you feel most unsafe in public spaces? (344 responses)



Observations

The main theme here is that people living on the streets have changed the environment to such an extent that have made some people who reside in Obs (including homeless people who have lived in the neighbourhood for years) feel displaced from public spaces. Indeed, there is a common perception that many people from outside Obs have moved as a result of the crisis. Linked to this there seems to be an acknowledgement that services such as public toilets must be provided as issues around human feces on the street have also become a problem. Moreover, some respondents differentiated between homelessness and the increased level of harassment (noted several times in relation to car guards) which is what ultimately prevents residents from using public space. Suggestions for CCTV were made a couple of times and there was also recognition that "one can't expect security everywhere all the time."

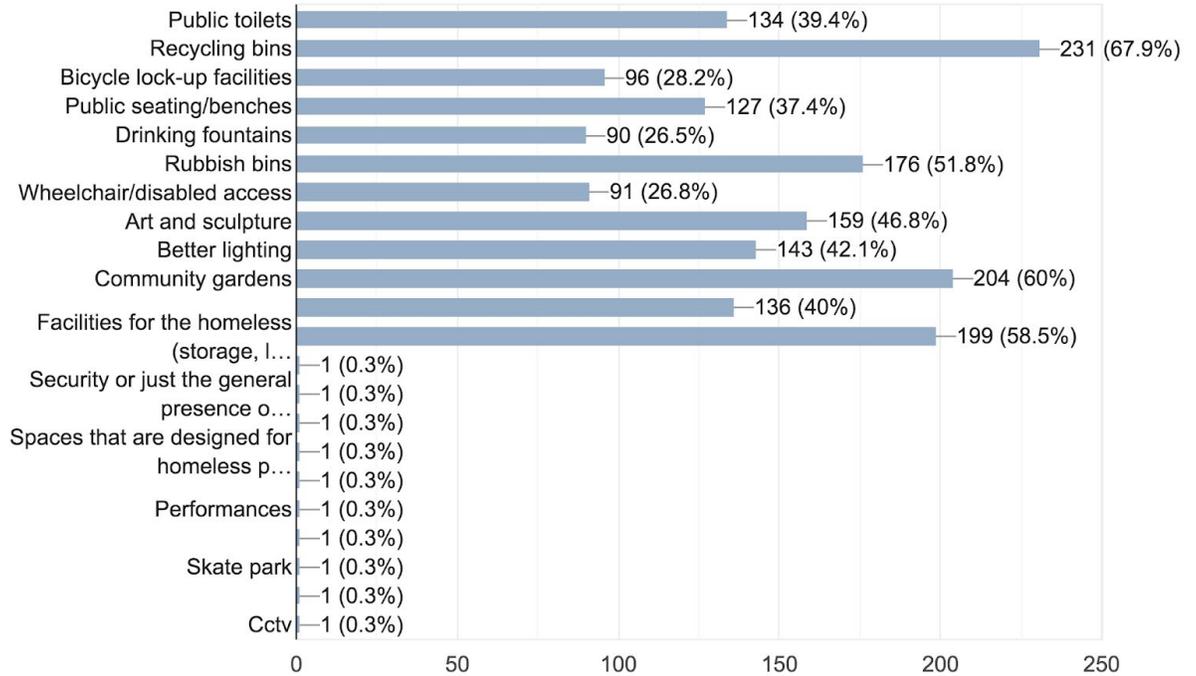
7. **Would you be interested in taking part in any of the following activities?**
(312 responses)



Observations

This question seems to reflect the energy on the ground to grow food and urban gardens. It also highlights a strong interest for recycling which has been surfaced by previous surveys and conversations. Both activities are long-term commitments which might not be suitable to the pilot idea for this project but could certainly be incorporated and be made part of the long-term programme of the selected short-term intervention. It is also interesting to see that despite people's negative reaction and at times fear of people living on the street, there is a significant desire (87 respondents) to build a 'safe place' for those residents.

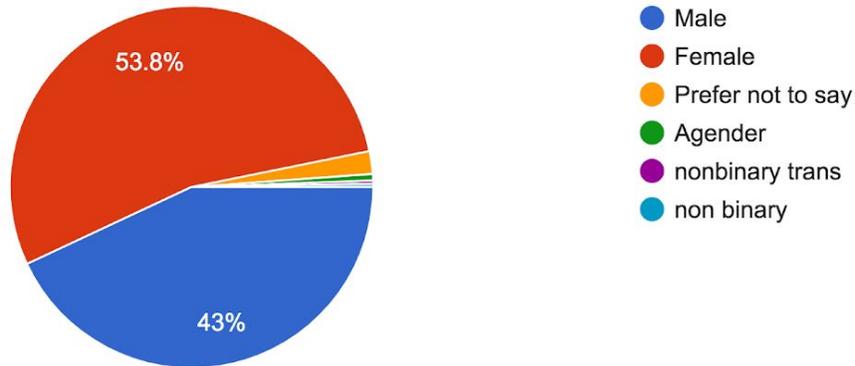
8. Which of these facilities would you like to see more of in our parks and public spaces? (340 responses)



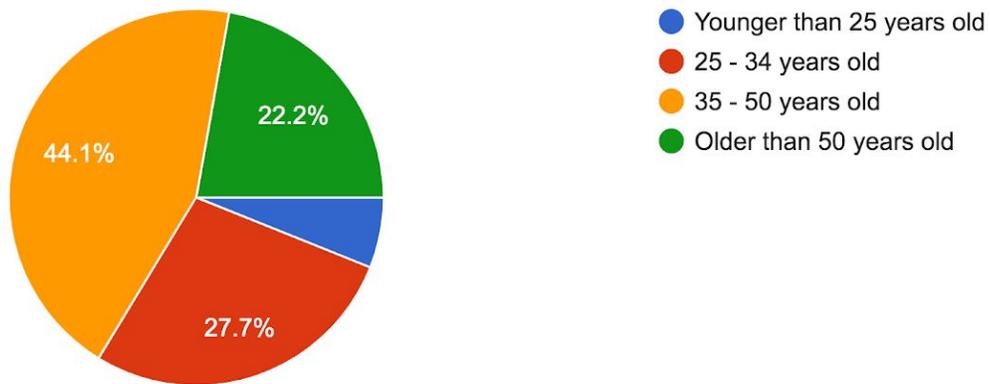
9. Which of these events would you like to see taking place in our parks post Covid-19, or in Obs in general? (332 responses)



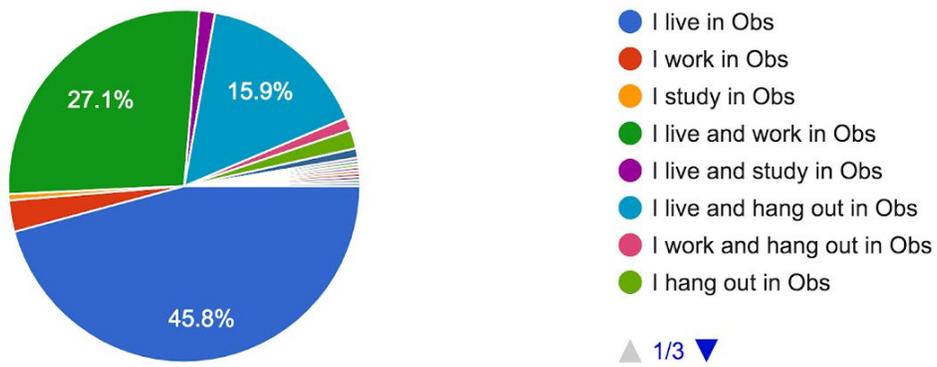
10. How do you describe yourself? (344 responses)



11. What is your age? (347 responses)



12. Which best describes your relationship to Obs? (347 responses)



13. If you don't live in Obs, what neighbourhood do you live in? (40 responses)



14. Other comments

General concerns

- Concern about impact of squatter camps, crime, people living in the Village Green
- Many comments about the increase of 'vagrants' as well as levels of begging and harassment
- Significant increase in crime, particularly along Lower Main Road and places like the Circus
- Feeding schemes have resulted in unintended consequences (influx of people from other parts of CT). A few comments about "too much charity" happening in Obs and the perception that OBSID is not focusing enough on property owners
- General concern about people living on the streets and the need to provide toilets and general care to protect them and also to prevent crime
- A few comments supporting the engagement of homeless residents in this process and to help them more broadly
- OBSID should focus on safety "all those other things will naturally follow."
- Concern about aggressive behaviour by car guards
- General concern about drug use in public space
- Concern about developers having too much influence and damaging the character and heritage of Obs
- Great concern about the area around Spar