

Are Public Spaces in Houston, Texas Accessible?



George Pusey, OTDs, MBA, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

- Individuals with mobility disabilities have a difficult time navigating public spaces because of inaccessibility (Clarke et al., 2011).
- Even with the addition of Title III to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which expands regulations for public spaces, and the creation of the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS), a lack of compliance continues to result in barriers to access for individuals with disabilities (Carlsson et al., 2022).
- In Harris County Texas, where the City of Houston is the county seat, the population is 4.37 million people, of which over 237 thousand (5.42%) have an ambulatory difficulty (Census Bureau, 2021).
- The purpose of the project was to explore the accessibility of public spaces in Houston, TX in an effort to increase the awareness of potential access barriers and aid in promoting improved quality and livability for all residents.

EVIDENCE-BASED QUESTION

What are the barriers faced by individuals with mobility disabilities when accessing public spaces in Houston, TX?

SIGNIFICANCE

- Occupational therapists utilize a holistic approach in addressing areas of concern. To explore the accessibility of public spaces, the project was aligned under the Person Environment Occupation model to ensure that considerations would be made not just to the physical environment, but also the to the individuals and their chosen occupations.
- The PEO model conceptualizes 3 dimensions including the person, the environment, and their chosen occupation, as factors that complement each other to have optimal occupational performance (Strong, 1999).
- By aligning the project with this model, the accessibility of the public spaces (environment), will be through the lens of individuals who are living with mobility disabilities (person), that visit the public spaces for their chosen purpose (occupation).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Everyone should have access to public spaces and amenities without difficulty but individuals with disabilities have a difficult time navigating public spaces because of inaccessibility (Carlsson et al., 2022).
 Despite the efforts of government agencies to enact laws and regulations to improve accessibility, with implementations like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Texas Accessibility Standards, several public buildings and facilities are still inaccessible to individuals who have mobility disabilities (Pike et al., 2008).
 In addition to individuals with disabilities having a challenging time accessing public spaces in the built environment, another prominent concern was that a high number of restrooms were not meeting ADA guidelines (Frost et al., 2015; Pike et al., 2008).

METHODS

Setting

- Community setting, Houston, Texas.

Population

- 7 adult participants (18 – 64) with a mobility disability
- All living in or visiting the Houston-Metro area
- 6 of the 7 participants reported using an assistive device for mobility.

Instrument

- Anonymous mixed methods survey experiences with access barriers when navigating public spaces in Houston, TX.
- 21 questions including: demographics, inclusion criteria (having a mobility disability and live in or visit the City), access barriers experienced, Likert questions to rate the accessibility of public spaces, questions on top 3 public spaces they have difficulty navigating and top 3 access barriers experienced.

Data Collection

- Collaborated with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) and the Houston Commission on Disabilities (HCOD) for survey distribution.
- The survey was hosted online with Qualtrics survey tool, and the invitation link was emailed to the MOPD and HCOD. The HCOD forwarded the link to their email blast lists participants.

Data analysis

- Data from the survey was analyzed with Qualtrics analysis tools and Microsoft excel.
- Descriptive statistics, graphs and tables are used to analyze the results and represent the findings.

RESULTS

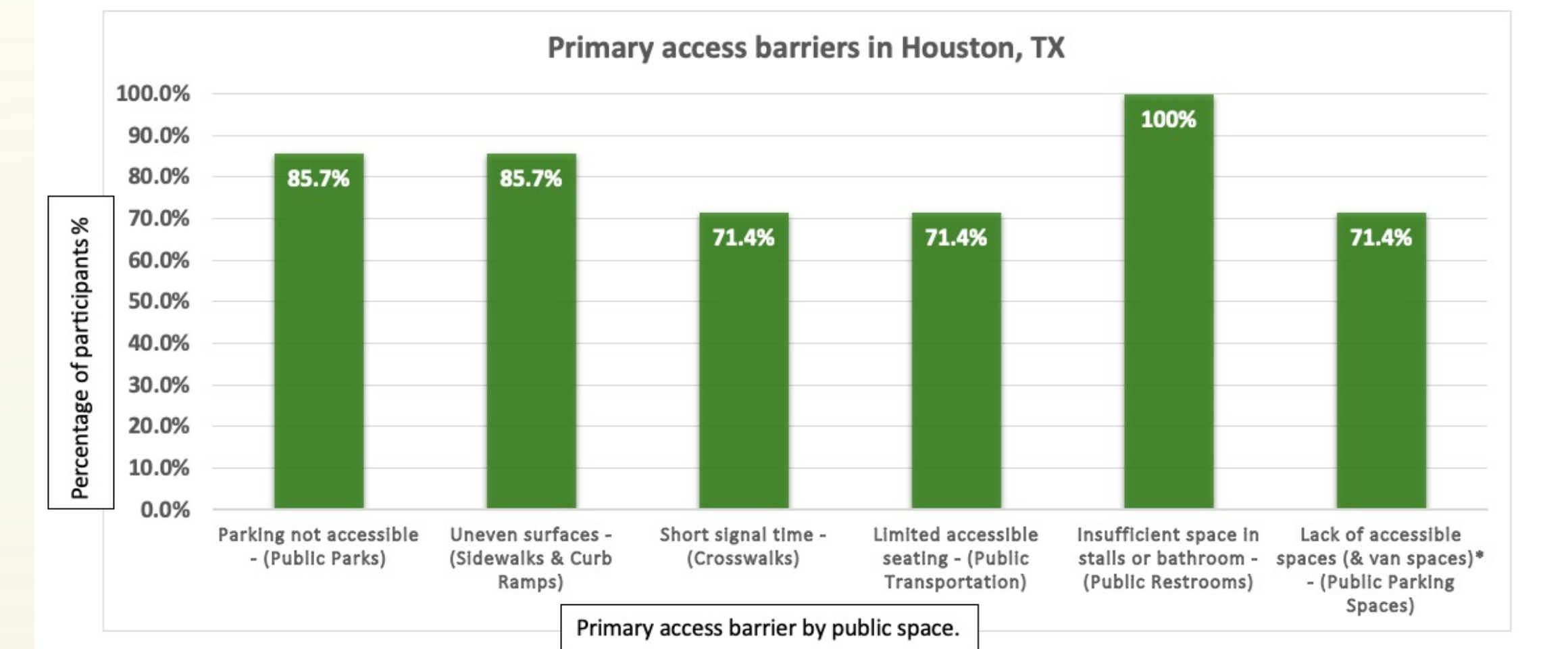


Figure A. The primary access barriers experienced at each public space, as reported by participants.

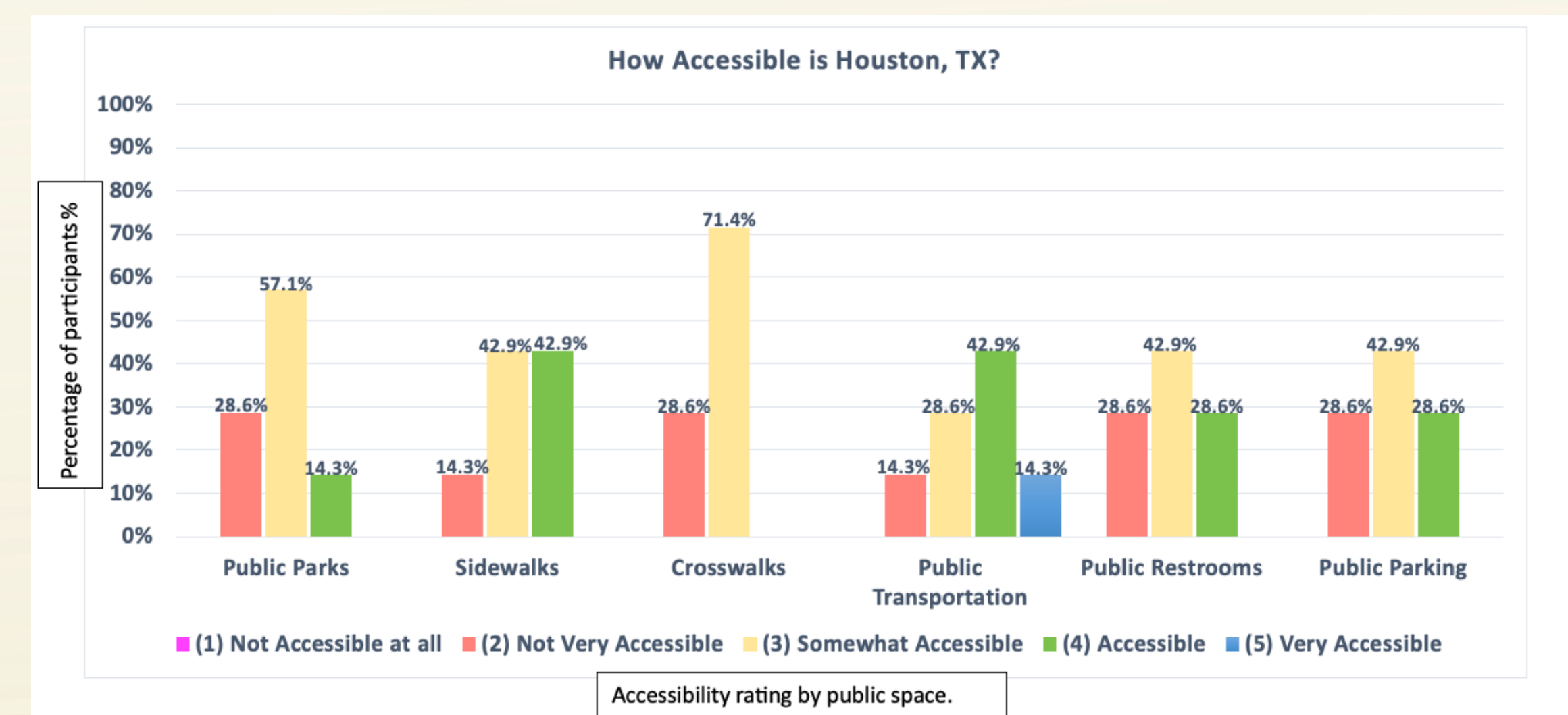


Figure B. Accessibility ratings of each public space, as reported by participants

Top 3 Public Spaces in Houston, TX where individuals have the most difficulty navigating access barriers.

Public Space	Rank	# of participants	Percentage %
Restaurants or dining spaces	1	6/7	85.7%
Stores or shopping malls	2	4/7	57.1%
Public Parks	3	3/7	42.9%

Top 3 access barriers experienced when navigating Public Spaces in Houston, TX.

Access Barrier	Rank	# of participants	Percentage %
Inaccessible Restrooms	1 (tie)	4/7	57.1%
Lack of Accessible Parking	1 (tie)	4/7	57.1%
Inaccessible sidewalks & curbs	2	3/7	42.9%

Figure C. Top 3 Public Spaces where participants experience difficulty and Top 3 access barriers experienced in the city.

SUMMARY

This project explored the access barriers faced by individuals with mobility disabilities when visiting public spaces in the city of Houston, TX. The results of the project showed mixed perceptions from participants about accessibility of the public spaces in the city which can support the recommendation for a deeper exploration into the barriers in these spaces. The findings will be presented to the MOPD and HCOD to raise awareness by highlighting the varied perception of access and provide recommendations for targeted approaches to improve the barriers.

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