How to Measure the Livability of an Urban Center? An Exploratory Study of Key Performance Indicators

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Abstract
Urban centers are important places in cities. They can be old historic districts or newer centralities, and they are characterized by a diversity of uses, such as retailing, housing, entertainment, and a mix of civic, administrative and professional services, among others. Very often, some centers experience boom and boost cycles, which negatively affects the livability of adjacent and older urban areas. These cycles are directly related not only to the economy but also to the region’s social, cultural, historical and political trends. In the urban regeneration literature livability has come to mean the ability of a center to maintain and improve its vitality and viability. Although, livability is a difficult concept to define and measure, its objective and rigorous quantification through a set of widely accepted key performance indicators is of critical relevance to those involved in the planning, programming and management of urban centers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the concept of livability and how it can be measured. Emphasis is given to a set of north-American and European key performance indicators, such as population demographics; employment; retail vacancy, performance and sales; car parking; footfall; crime safety; cleanliness, tourism and evening economy. Their relevance and appropriateness is discussed with reference to the Portuguese Commercial Urbanism projects currently being implemented by public authorities in the country. This paper should be of interest not only to statisticians but also to city and regional planners, city center managers, researchers, and all those involved in urban regeneration activities.