

Origins of Informality: Examining the historical and spatial roots of informal day-labor hiring sites.

Informal day-labor hiring sites, public and semi-spaces where (mostly) men wait to be hired for short-term work, are found in cities throughout the United States. The daily-appropriation of space for labor-seeking is not a new phenomenon, however media and academic accounts of day-labor hiring sites almost exclusively focus on the contingent nature of laborers' employment to suggest that this use of space is socially unsustainable. Despite the fact that day-labor is a spatial means of employment-seeking, the process by which particular spaces are selected for day-labor hiring sites remains almost entirely unexamined. Drawing on more than five years of mixed-methods research in the San Diego Metropolitan Area, I examine the *places* where hiring sites operate to demonstrate the linkages between neighborhood characteristics and the establishment of day-labor hiring sites. Ethnographic data further supports an argument that hiring sites exhibit a high-degree of locational "stickiness," due to the historical, economic, and emotional content embedded in each site through the production of space. The paper concludes by examining the specific ways that laborers and other stakeholders interact to ensure that access to space is maintained and in so doing, foster relationships that produce socially-sustainable outcomes for day-laborers and their neighbors.

Keywords: Day Labor, Informal Economy, Historical GIS, social sustainability, Relational Theory

Dr. Sean M. Crotty
Texas Christian University

Introduction

Life as a day-laborer in the San Diego Metropolitan Area (SDMA) is not easy. Every morning day-laborers, also known as *jornaleros*, travel to particular public and semi-public spaces where they wait for mostly short-term jobs: providing manual labor or general handyman services for homeowners, construction and landscaping companies, and a variety of other low-to-medium skill jobs. According to Abel Valenzuela, the term day-labor is generally used to “convey a type of temporary employment that is distinguished by hazards in or undesirability of the work, the absence of fringe and other typical workplace benefits (i.e., breaks, safety equipment), and the daily search for employment” (2003, 308). This definition does a nice job of highlighting the challenging, and often exploitive, nature of day labor work (Melendez et al 2013). However, it fails to address a crucial element in the employment-search process. *Day labor is a form of employment seeking that depends on the temporary appropriation of public and semi-public spaces.*

The majority of laborers in the SDMA congregate at informally-designated hiring spaces on sidewalks and the edges of parking lots like the one shown in Figure 1. *Jornaleros* typically arrive at the day-labor space around 6:00am and will wait until 3:00-5:00pm in hopes of finding employment. Day-laborers do not own the spaces that they appropriate for their daily employment search, and yet, through a variety of individual and group actions, *jornaleros* maintain access to the spaces they believe provide their best chance for employment, safety, and survival. This is to say that day-labor spaces exhibit a high degree of locational stickiness. Once a hiring site is established, it tends to remain active in the same location over considerable periods of time – in San Diego many sites have been in consistent operation for 30 or more years.



Figure 1: Site 31 is a typical informal day-labor space in the SDMA (Photo by Author)

In this chapter I situate day labor within literature on temporary appropriation (TA) and sustainability by examining the life-cycle of day-labor spaces. The field of urban sustainability is of critical importance as more than half the world's population currently resides in urban environments, and the percentage of urban inhabitants is projected to increase to 68 percent by 2050 (UN-Population 2018). Informal economic activity is also an increasingly important element of global economic activity (Danesh 1991; Harding and Jenkins 1989; Ihrig and Moe 2004; Portes et al 1989). Neoliberal economic restructuring led to declines in formal-sector and organized labor arrangements while informal, contingent, and, most recently, “gig”-based economic arrangements became more prevalent (Aguilar and Herod 2006; Castree 2010; Hackworth and Moriah 2006; Theodore 2007). Many of these new arrangements depend on the temporary appropriation of urban space for success. Street vendors, unlicensed cabs and Uber drivers, and informal day-laborers all temporarily appropriate particular urban spaces as part of their income-generating strategies. Yet, the sustainability of these new urban economic arrangements remains relatively unstudied. Examining the processes through which particular spaces are appropriated for day labor activity, and examining the processes which lead laborers to abandon particular spaces, provides empirical context for improved understanding of the socio-spatial processes through which temporary appropriations of space occur. These processes speak directly to everyday power relations in the city and the sustainability of informal socio-economic activity in contemporary urban environments around the world. As such, this research contributes to work in urban planning and geography, landscape architecture, and other fields interested in TA and sustainability in the urban context.

Research Area and Methods

The analysis below draws on data collected from 2005 and 2012 as part of a mixed method research project in the San Diego Metropolitan Area (SDMA). The research included site-mapping, participant observation, and informal interview in or around day-labor hiring sites. Forty-five hiring sites were identified in total (See Figure 1). After a site was identified it was surveyed at least four times per year at which time the number of laborers using the site and the demographic characteristics of those laborers was recorded (race, gender, age). Informal interviews were also conducted approximately once per year at each site to improve place-based understanding of day labor activities and changes in those daily activities. Finally, six sites were selected for in-depth participant observation based on particular site-characteristics found to be common among many SDMA hiring sites. These periods of participant observation lasted between two and six weeks, during which time I visited the site every day for up to eight hours. This long-term qualitative engagement provides substantial data for situating day-laborer's appropriation of space in the context of social sustainability.

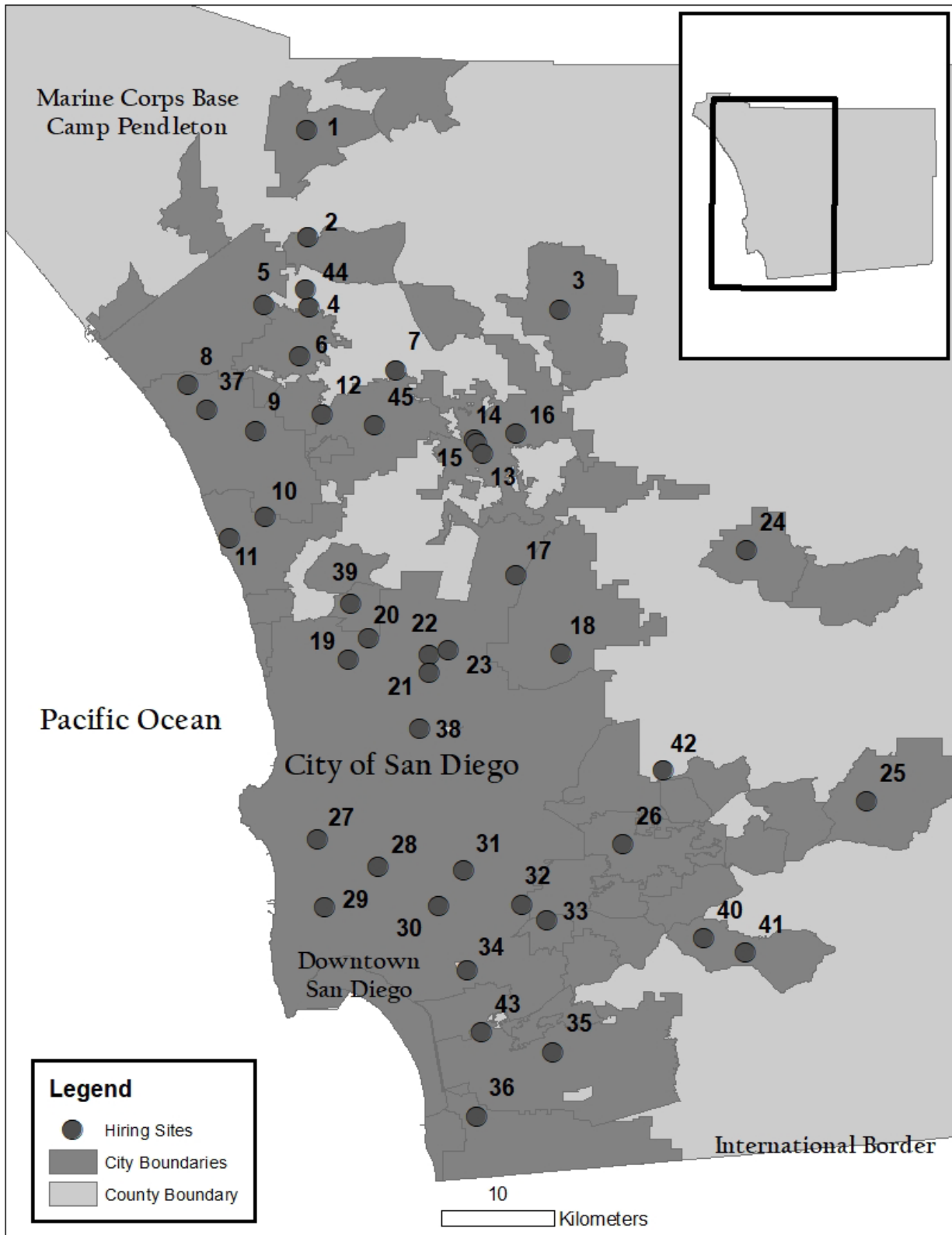


Figure 2: Day-labor hiring sites in the San Diego Metropolitan Area

Day Labor and Social sustainability

At first glance, day-labor may seem an unlikely candidate for inclusion in urban sustainability studies. Much of the existing research on the day-labor industry is focused on the challenging and often exploitive nature of the industry. Nonetheless, the long-term presence of day-labor hiring sites within the landscape of North American cities suggests that they are a quasi-permanent element of contemporary urban spaces and their sustainability should be evaluated in the same way that previous research has examined informal street markets (Yeo and Heng 2014), urban plazas (Harun et al 2014), gentrification processes (Lees 2008), or urban design more broadly (Jacobs 1961; UN-Habitat 2009).

Sustainability studies are centered on three topical pillars: environmental, economic, and social sustainability. In the urban context sustainability these pillars frame diverse research focused on correctives for existing environmental, economic, and social injustices and/or inequities. The role of geography is critical in all of these cases as inequity is often materialized spatially. That is to say, toxic industrial emissions do not affect all residents equivalently. Those who live (or work) in close proximity to the emission site (or downwind, downriver, as the case may be) are disproportionately burdened compared to residents whose daily activity path never enters areas where exposure is high (Harwood 2003; Openshaw 1982; Pulido 2000; Pulido et al. 2005). Economic and social inequities also manifest spatially. The physical disconnection of low-income residential zones and clusters of employment opportunity in cities today is perhaps the most common example of this phenomenon in contemporary urban geography (McLafferty and Preston 1992; Pastor and Marcelli 2000; Powell 2002). The solutions to these spatial inequities include increased residential and commercial density, improvements to mass transit systems, and new urbanist or green architectural design, just to name a few. The sub-field of urban social sustainability has emerged in response to “the underlying tension between the associated aspects of sustainability - environmental, social, economic - as well as the wide interpretation of the concept” (Dempsey et al. 2011, p. 289). Reviewing existing literature on urban social sustainability Dempsey et al. (2011) identify twenty non-physical factors related to social sustainability such as education and training, social capital, inclusion, social cohesion, and cultural traditions. By comparison, they identify eight factors that are predominantly physical in nature: urbanity, accessibility, pedestrian friendly-neighborhoods, and an attractive public realm, are a few examples. The public realm is particularly important in the context of temporary appropriation and day-labor studies. Who has access to public spaces and how those spaces can (or should) be used is both a question of physical design and norms of community behavior (Mitchell 2003; Staeheli and Mitchell 2008; Varsanyi 2008; Crotty 2018). Yeo and Heng’s definition of public space proves quite useful for merging existing research on public space and social sustainability. Their work “views public space as a resource with the potential to stimulate local economies, support household livelihoods, enhance civic engagement, promote community identity, and improve overall quality of life in communities” (Yeo and Heng 2014, 715).

Previous day-labor research often emphasized the role of laborers as members of the local community through markers of their individual and collective social capital. For example, Valenzuela et al. (2006) found that twenty-nine percent of *jornaleros* are raising children in the communities where they live and work. Many attend local churches while others are connected to community support organizations as well as organized labor groups (Fine 2005, 2006; Melendez et al 2015; Visser et al 2017). Taken together, these measures are evidence that laborers are not transient migrant laborers as anti-immigrant and anti-day-labor activists often suggest, but active members of the local community. This type of participation in community activities does more than just build social capital, it foments emotional connections to

place which make laborers less-likely to alter their labor-seeking methods, and contribute to the social sustainability of temporary appropriations of space for day-labor.

Temporary appropriation and day-labor spaces

Appropriation of space is the process by which a particular space is used for a purpose other than its designers originally, or primarily, intended. Much of the research within the discipline of geography that deals with appropriation of space draws on the work of Lefebvre (1991) who defines appropriated space in relation to dominated space. Dominated space is “a space transformed – and mediated – by technology, by practice.” (p. 164). For Lefebvre, examples of dominated space include highways, dams, military infrastructure, and any other built elements that force their form onto natural environments in unnatural ways. The rectilinear grid of roads that forms the foundation of many urban and suburban environments would absolutely be considered dominated space. He further argues that dominated spaces are usually “closed, sterile, emptied out” (p. 165). Appropriated spaces are by contrast, lived spaces, where the rhythms of everyday life play out in ways that “resembles a work of art” (p. 165). Crucial in this distinction is that appropriated spaces are used in ways that maximize their *use-value* for urban residents irrespective of the designer’s original intent. How, and by whom, spaces are appropriated “cannot be understood apart from the rhythms of time and life” (p. 166). In this way, Lefebvre’s definition of appropriated space is temporarily mediated, and by necessity, temporary in nature.

Any examination of temporary appropriation of space is by extension an examination of power relations through the control of space. As John Allen notes, “if power has any trace at all, it is found *in place*.” (Allen 2003, p. 11, emphasis in original). As such, the relative power of particular groups can be understood through the lens of temporary appropriation and control of space. And yet, not all spaces are equally important or useful to all individuals or groups. Therefore, a real understanding of power relations requires understanding the objectives of particular individual and/or groups engaged in temporary appropriation of space and evaluating how closely their desires match their use of particular urban spaces. For example, in an examination of migrant minority Filipinos’ religious processions in Padua, Italy, Chantal Saint Blancat and Adriano Cancellieri find that the Filipino migrants seek out high-traffic, highly-visible public spaces for their rituals. The religious processions accomplish two important objectives for the Filipino residents of Padua. First, it helps them maintain personal and group identity by continuing cultural practices while they are living abroad. The second objective is to improve acceptance and understanding of the Filipino community among the native Italian residents of Padua. That second objective establishes spatial requirements for the processions that would not otherwise exist. Improved understanding and acceptance require that as many Italians as possible are exposed to the Filipino cultural activities. Places with high pedestrian traffic and high visibility therefore have greater use-value than do more private, less-visible urban spaces (Saint-Blancat and Cancellieri 2014). Conversely, places with low-visibility and minimal pedestrian traffic would have higher use-value for homeless individuals seeking a place to rest undisturbed for the evening (Mitchell 2003). Staeheli and Mitchell’s examination of community gardens in New York City demonstrates the role of accessibility, as well as environmental factors such as hours of sunlight and south-facing orientation, in producing spatial variation of use-value for prospective garden locations (2008).

Temporary appropriation for more explicitly economic purposes can produce yet another topography of use-value. For informal street vendors in Peru, sidewalks and under-utilized public or semi-public spaces along heavily-used pedestrian travel routes are valuable during commuting hours in the morning and

afternoon, while similar spaces near central business districts or plazas have a higher use-value during working hours and weekends. These vendors, also known as *ambulantes*, negotiate access to their preferred spaces with other stakeholders, including formal-sector shopkeepers who establish relationships of mutual benefit with the *ambulantes* (Hays-Mitchell 1993, 1994, 1995). This strategic use of space can even be observed in seasonal fundraising cookies sales by members of the Girl Scouts of America. Girls Scouts set up tables to sell cookies outside of grocery stores, shopping malls, sporting events, and other high traffic areas (Goerisch and Swanson 2015; Goerisch 2018). The girl scouts also understand that particular groups of people are more likely to purchase cookies than others and have responded by establishing cookie sales outside of marijuana dispensaries in San Diego (Scott 2018), Los Angeles (Harris (2014), Colorado (Allen 2019), and Edmonton, Ontario (Ross 2018). Fewer total customers visit marijuana dispensaries than a shopping mall or grocery store, however the likelihood of dispensary customer purchasing cookies is apparently considerably higher than is the case for the general public, and as a result, the spaces outside of marijuana dispensaries have a high use value for Girl Scouts during cookie sales season.

Places are in a constant state of (re)production and are shaped by processes operating across multiple scales. This process of (re)production can change the nature of spaces and alter their “value” or “utility” for particular activities (Massey 1991; 2005). These changes can include anything from seasonal weather patterns, to improved or worsening access to the space (either through mobility expansion or constraints), or changes in state policy/policing regarding particular spaces or actors. This is certainly true in the above examples and for day labor spaces as well.

Day-labor spaces

Day-labor researchers use a variety of terms to refer to the locations where day-laborers congregate each morning in hopes of finding employment. Hiring sites, shape-up sites, *la esquina*, and *la parada* are all used somewhat interchangeably and this inconsistency in terminology can occasionally lead to confusion regarding the place being analyzed (Ordonez 2015; Turnovsky 2006; Valenzuela 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2006). To address this issue, I refer to these locations as day-labor spaces and follow the definition established in Crotty (2018).

“Day-labor spaces are activity areas where *jornaleros* wait for potential employers, negotiate the terms of each job, eat, drink, socialize, and otherwise spend the time in between each employment negotiation. To be clear, day-labor spaces are not the locations where *jornaleros* perform paid labor; day-labor spaces are the general areas where *jornaleros* wait to be hired. Various actors produce day-labor spaces through informal negotiations that define where, when, and how day-laborers solicit employment. As a result of the constant negotiation and renegotiation between actors, sociospatial relationships are coproduced, and the boundaries of day-labor spaces become flexible and fluid. In this way, day-labor spaces are permeable, adaptable, and can be noncontiguous in some cases.” (Crotty 2018, p. 598)

The process by which day-labor spaces are established remains unstudied despite passages like the one below from noted economic geographer Nik Theodore. “The location of these informal hiring sites (*the designation of which, in many instances, occurs mysteriously*) varies depending on local circumstances: In Los Angeles, day laborers from Mexico and Central America gather at home improvement and building supply stores; in the municipality of South Tucson, Mexican workers assemble in the parking lot of a church that was a stalwart of the sanctuary movement; in Miami, workers from Haiti and the Dominican

Republic congregate under highway overpasses; in Seattle, workers from Mexico and Central America take up positions on street corners just outside the central business district; In Chicago, workers from Eastern Europe gather at a Shell gas station; in Atlanta, workers from Mexico gather in the parking lot of an apartment complex; and in New York, Sikhs congregate near a burned-down mosque in Queens.” (Theodore 2007, p 257-258, emphasis added)

Theodore’s description of site designation as mysterious and dependent on local circumstances suggests a gap in existing day-labor research that is critical to understanding the processes by which urban space is appropriated for informal economic uses. In all day-labor research, including work done by Geographers, there is little attention to the spatiality of day-labor at the regional or neighborhood scale. This is fine in work like Theodore’s, which focuses on structural processes at the national and global scale that increase contingent and temporary work like day-labor, but is less acceptable for researchers concerned about the day-to-day operation of the informal economy, temporary appropriation of space, sustainability of day-labor, or the locational conflicts that sometimes occur around day-labor hiring sites. Despite the lack of attention to spatial organization in much of the existing day-labor research, existing literature often contains anecdotal reference to site-locations that help to understand the temporary appropriation process. For example, in the early 1900’s day-labor spaces existed in low-income “skid row” and dock-adjacent areas in US cities (Larrow 1955; Mohl 1971; Valenzuela 2003). In parts of the US where agriculture was the primary economic activity, workers congregated in town-centers to make themselves available to farmers who travelled into town from the periphery to hire short-term help (Mitchell 1996).

This all changes with the suburbanization of US cities, for which the San Diego Metropolitan Area is a prime example. Figure 3 illustrates the extent of (sub)urban growth in the SDMA from 1950 to 2010. The historic urban boundaries are represented by the US Census tracts for San Diego in 1950 while the contemporary boundaries are comprised of the municipal borders for the 19 cities that collectively make up the San Diego Metropolitan Area today. The SDMA today covers more than double the total land area than was the case in 1950. Much of the land converted to suburban residential and commercial land use today was formerly used for agriculture that depended on day-labor to meet seasonal labor needs. Day-labor hiring sites would have been established in agricultural town centers and other spaces that made laborers accessible to the farmers that were their primary employers. These hiring sites may not have operated year round as labor demand would fluctuate seasonally, even in San Diego’s relatively stable climate. In the contemporary day-labor market, sites in the SDMA operate year-round, with some seasonal variation in the number of laborers congregating at particular sites. Though it is impossible to say with certainty when the shift from seasonal appropriation of space to year-round appropriation of space for day-labor activities takes place, the change is almost certainly linked to the shift from agricultural land use to suburban developments and the year-round labor required to build, and then maintain, the new suburban landscape.

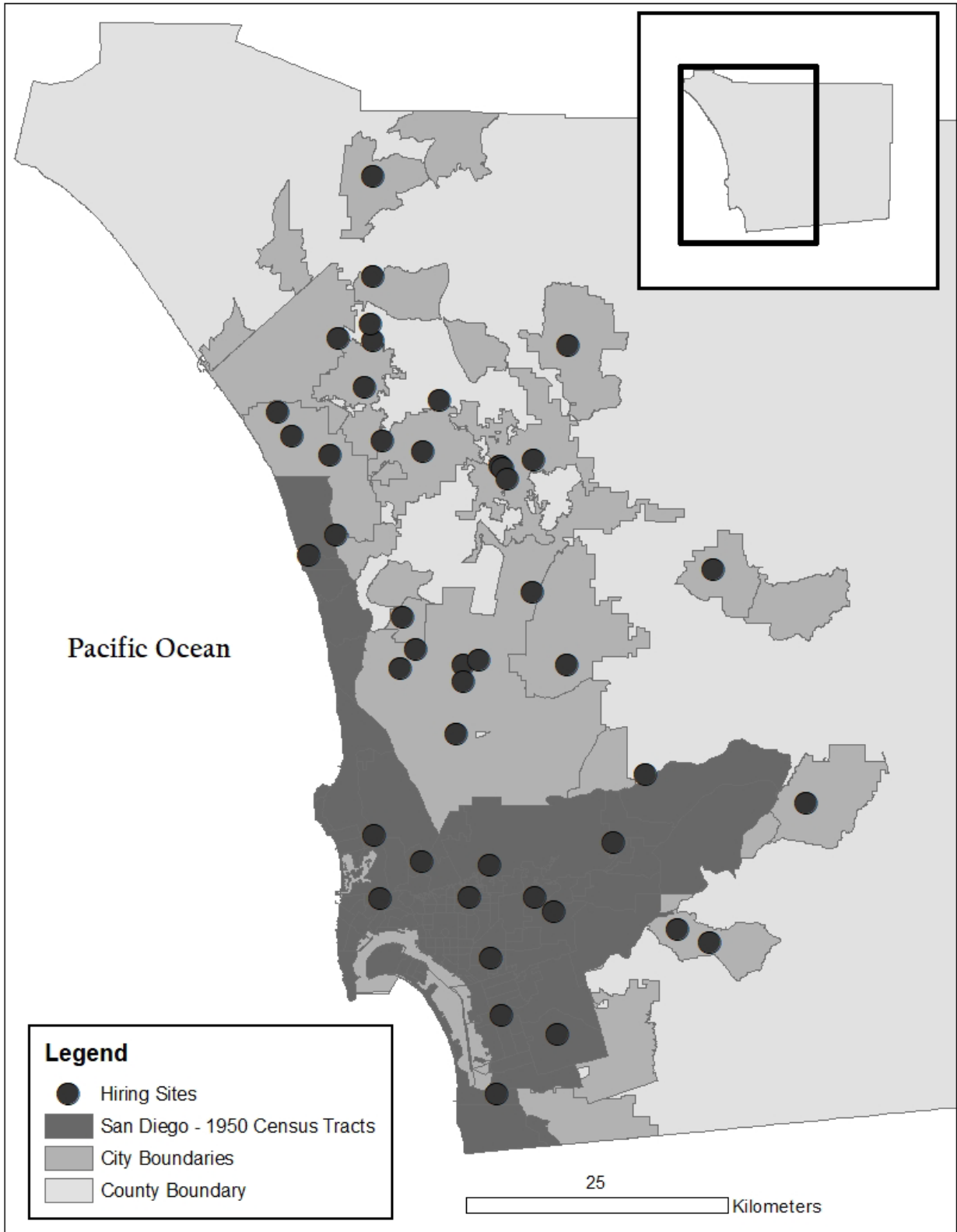


Figure 3: San Diego Metropolitan Area: Urban Boundaries in 1950 and 2010

The locations of day-labor hiring sites at the regional scale reflect the geography of employment demand. In an analysis of the demographic characteristics of day-labor neighborhoodsⁱ, Crotty (2015) found that day-labor neighborhoods have higher levels of formal-sector employment in the industries in which laborers are most commonly hired: construction and agriculture. Homeowners who need short-term help with home-improvement projects make up the other half of day-labor employment (Valenzuela et al 2006), and *jornaleros* clearly understand this as day-labor neighborhoods also have higher levels of owner occupied housing compared with regional averages (Crotty 2015). This clear regional strategy that targets areas of employment demand does not mean that the sites are homogeneous. Indeed a closer examination of the demographic characteristics of day-labor neighborhoods and geographic site and situational characteristics of hiring sites reveals “types” of sites in the SDMA. And yet, simply acknowledging current characteristics of sites does not explain how or why a particular space was initially appropriated for day-labor hiring.

Case Study I: Establishment of New Day-Labor Spaces

In the coastal municipality of Encinitas and Oceanside there are several day-labor hiring sites. According to local residents, the longest-operating site is site # 11, located near the intersection of an interstate highway and the largest east-west road in the area. Site 11 was established sometime in the late 1960s, after the highway construction was completed. Thanks to its location near the intersection of two major mobility corridors, this site was easily accessible to potential employers across a wide physical area. At the time, much of the land to the west of the site was already developed as urban beach communities, while the land east of I-5 was largely agricultural. Agricultural work was the primary type of employment at site 11 from the late 1960's until at least the late 1980s. Figure 3 shows the change in agricultural land use from 1986 to 2008. During that 22 year span the SDMA saw a 65 percent decrease in agricultural land use, much of which was transitioned from agriculture to suburban land use. That shift also opened the market for home improvement and construction supply stores like the Home Depot location that opened in 1993.

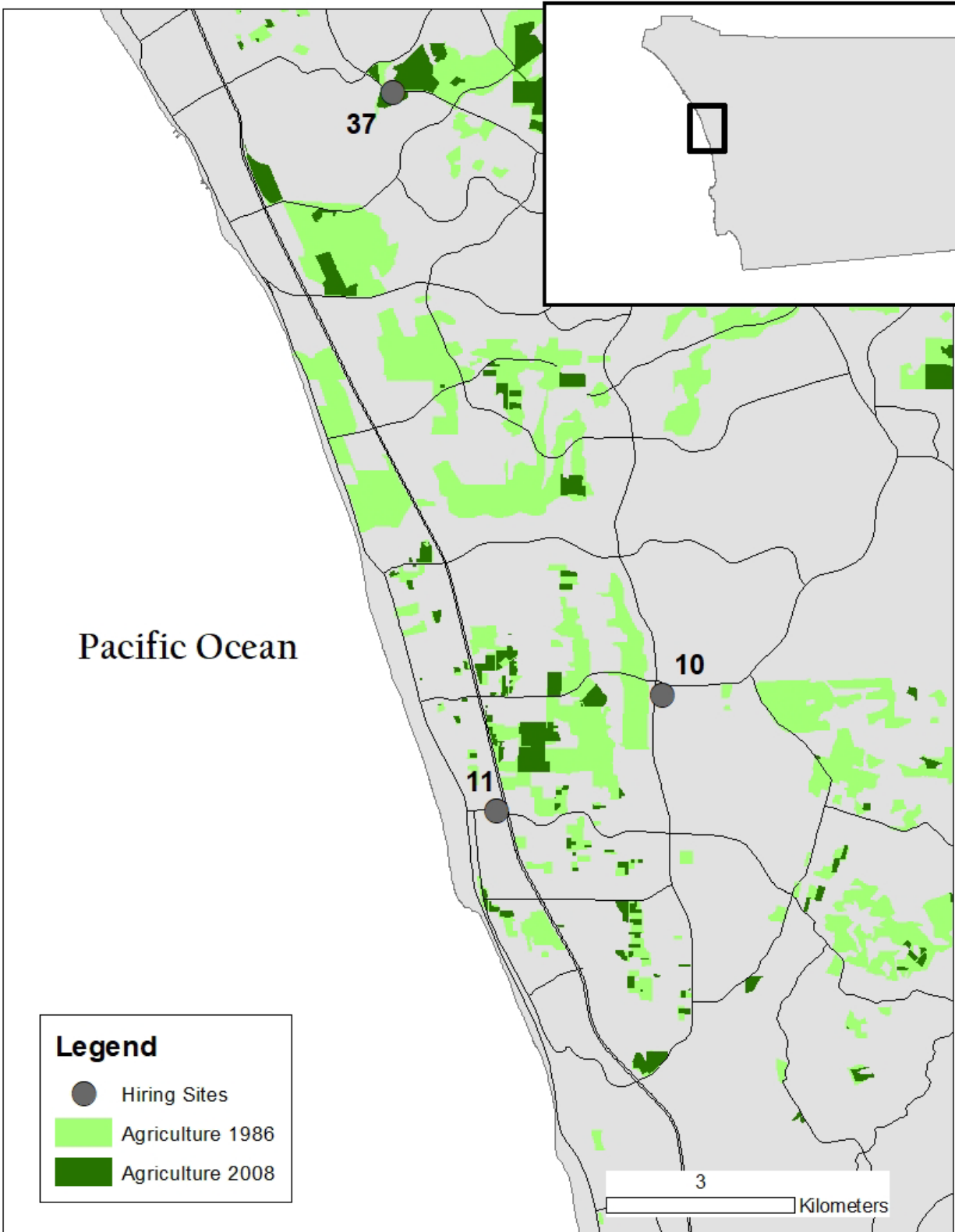


Figure 4: Change in Agricultural Land Use in Northwest San Diego County: 1986-2008

The new store is located roughly three kilometers northeast of site 11. Shortly after the store opened, day-laborers began congregating in adjacent public and semi-public spaces. The establishment of the new site (#10) suggests that some laborers recognized that the space outside of Home Depot had a use-value that was at least as good as site 11. The position adjacent to a home improvement store makes *jornaleros* easily accessible for potential employers who need assistance with construction and home improvement projects. Home Depot is also considerably more popular with formal-sector construction workers than its largest competitor Lowe's. Construction contractors are the main source of long-term employment for *jornaleros*, and because long-term employment is the goal for most laborers, they congregate in places where they believe their opportunity for long-term employment is greatest. Indeed, *jornaleros* seem to know at which particular Home Depot locations construction contractors comprise a larger percentage of the customer base, as day labor spaces are only active near 9 of the 21 Home Depot locations in the SDMA.

Despite the establishment of a new day-labor space just a few kilometers away, site 11 remains active today with roughly 20 *jornaleros* seeking work there daily. The laborers who seek work at site 11 are relatively diverse and even organize spatially along lines of nationality and legal status (Crotty 2018). These laborers continue to seek work at site 11 for a variety of reasons. Some prefer the less-competitive nature of the site, others suggest there is less daily complaints and hassles from nearby stakeholders, and some claim that the jobs hired from the site are of better quality than those hired from the Home Depot. For these men, site 11 provides enough work to survive which, in combination with their individual preferences for type of employment and site-specific behavioral norms, produces a higher use-value than the Home Depot adjacent location.

Sites 10 and 11 were both established long before this research project began. It is only through interviews with residents and archival research that it is possible to understand how and why these particular spaces were appropriated for day-labor activities. That is not the case for site 45, located adjacent to a Home Depot store in San Marcos, CA. Site 45 was established in 2008, when the local construction industry was decimated by the Great Recession. Initially site 45 was used almost exclusively by White and Black laborers for whom this HD was more easily accessible than others with established DL sites. Some of these new DLs also may not have wanted to compete with more-seasoned Hispanic *jornaleros* at other sites, but there is little question that residential segregation patterns made this site more easily accessible for non-Hispanic laborers. By 2010 the laborers most of the laborers using the site were Hispanic, which is more reflective of the demographic trends for the region, but also may reflect the recovery of formal-sector construction employment. Those waylaid formal sector construction workers who established the day-labor space as a means of generating income to survive the downturn likely returned to full time employment as industry conditions improved. The movement of Hispanic laborers to this site due in part to anti-day-labor actions taken at a site in the adjacent municipality of Vista (See Crotty 2016 for more details about that anti-day-labor action). And yet, more than 10 years later the day-labor space remains in use by Hispanic laborers also looking for full-time work in the construction industry.

In each of the above cases, space was appropriated that was accessible to both employers and laborers. The spaces appropriated were not necessarily the most visible, but provided a high degree of utility for the laborers. In both cases, we see large-scale processes changing the nature of day-labor places, and laborers themselves adapting spatially by establishing new day-labor spaces in Encinitas: to meet demand for new types labor and to maintain a lower use-density in area day-labor spaces, and in San

Marcos: initially, to provide newly unemployed laborers a place they felt safe seeking part-time work, and later, a space for more experienced laborers who did not want to be hassled by sheriffs and code-compliance officers in Vista. That all of these day-labor spaces remained active at the end of the research period, despite some private and state-sponsored efforts to relocate day-labor activity speaks to the power of everyday actions and temporary appropriation.

Laborers work hard to ensure continued access to the spaces they believe have the highest use-value for employment seeking. Crotty attributes *jornaleros* success in maintaining access to their preferred hiring sites and the resulting locational stickiness of day-labor spaces to “laborers collective employment of *strategic visibility* and the production of normalcy through sustained presence of day-labor hiring sites in particular locations” (2018, p 601). Strategic visibility is a set of informal spatial practices employed at the micro-geographic scale that reduce the potential for locational conflict while maintaining accessibility for potential employers. Laborers congregating on a low-traffic street near a major road, rather than on the major road itself would be an example of spatial practice common across day-labor spaces in the SDMA. From that position, laborers are conveniently accessible for potential employers, but reduce the potential for conflict because their hiring negotiations take place in a low-traffic space where their visibility and potential to create traffic hazards is minimized. The fact that *jornaleros* show up to the same places every day, in some cases for 30 years or more, produces a sense of normalcy within the rhythms of the city that further cements their claims to space (from 6am-3pm daily).

Case Study 2: End of Appropriation; Death of a Day-Labor Space

In the context of day-labor spaces that operate in the same locations for decades at a time, the death of a site, when laborers cease to use the space entirely, is extraordinarily rare. The single instance of this occurring in the SDMA during the research period occurred at site 32 (See Figure 4). Site 32 was never an especially large hiring site. In all of the field surveys of the site there were never more than 15 laborers there. It was notable within the research project because it was one of the first sites identified. Its early identification was due in part to proximity to my own residence, and proximity to a bar that fellow graduate students frequented. Day laborers used that particular space for quite different reason.

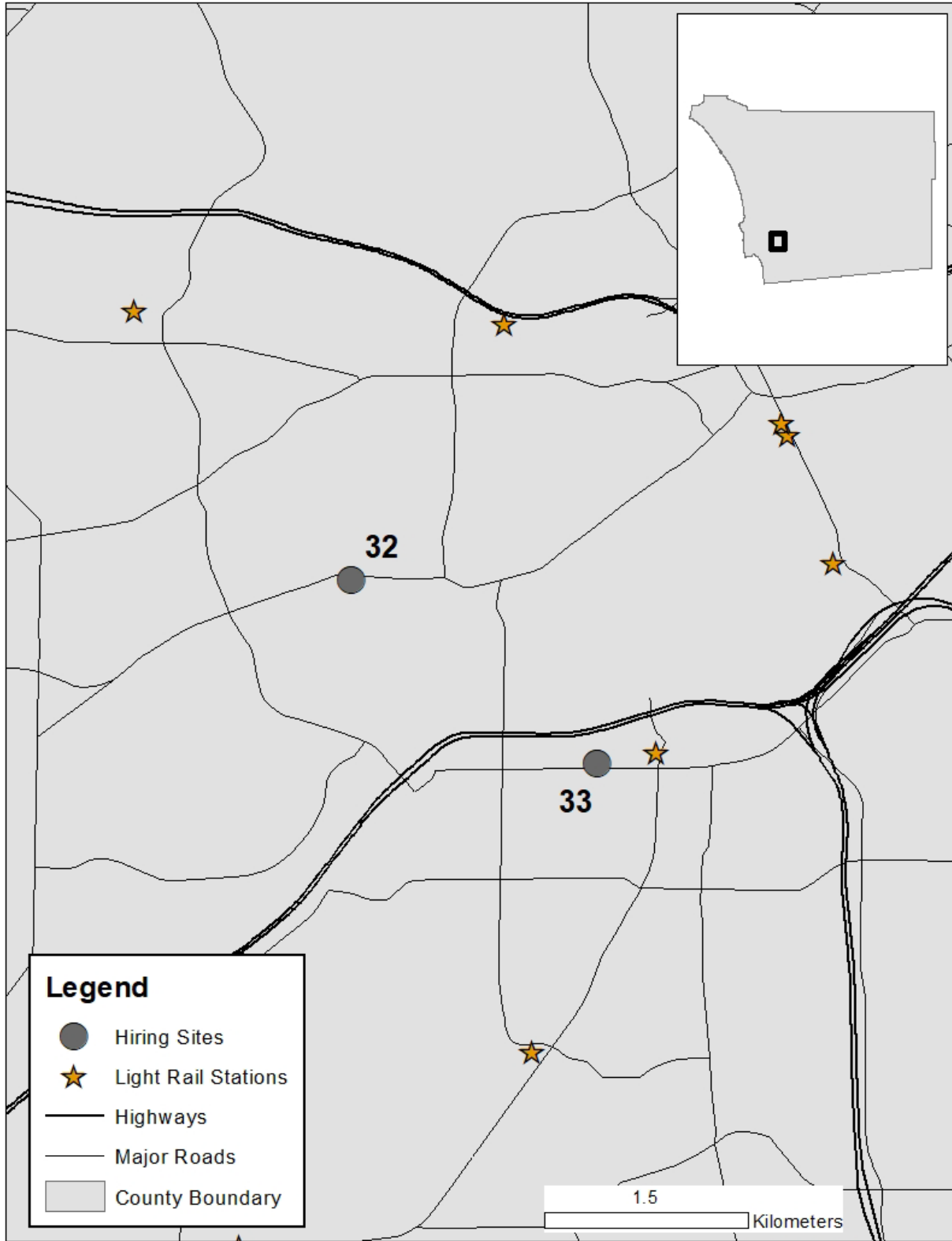


Figure 5: Hiring sites in east San Diego

In 2006 there were several construction supply and tool rental shops in operation along that block of University Drive. Over the course of the research project, they all closed or relocated so there are currently no nearby businesses that serve the industries for which laborers are typically hired. This reduction in employment opportunities was due, in part, to expanded tool-rental services available at the Lemon Grove Home Depot, located just two kilometers to the southwest. Hiring site 33 operates adjacent to the Lemon Grove Home Depot and, in much the same way that competition from Home Depot reduced the number of customers frequenting the building supply and tool rental businesses along University Ave, competition from site 33 reduced the number of potential employers visiting site 32. Clearly economic competition played a role in the death of site 32, but it is not the only relevant consideration. Geographic site and situational characteristics of both day-labor spaces played a role in the demise of site 32 as well. Site 33 enjoys a number of geographic advantages relative to site 32: it is located directly adjacent to a stop on the regional light-rail system, so it is accessible to laborers who depend on public transit to reach their preferred hiring site. Site 33 is also located less than 100 meters from the intersection of two major highways, making it highly accessible for potential employers. In the end, site 32's use-value fell far enough that laborers could not justify continuing to appropriate the space for their daily search for employment.

Concluding Discussion: Social sustainability of day-labor spaces

Understanding the life-cycle of day-labor spaces provides a useful window into the processes that impact the social sustainability of day-labor. Though day-labor spaces serve important non-economic purposes for *jornaleros*, the establishment of day-labor spaces is clearly driven by economic opportunity and the perceived/experienced use-value of particular places for day-labor employment-seeking. Similarly, the single example of a day-labor space ceasing operation occurred when the space ceased to provide sufficient economic benefit to laborers and/or their employers. It is clear that day-labor spaces may provide non-economic use-value, but those place-based benefits are rendered impotent if the space does not provide sufficient economic and earning opportunity for *jornaleros* and those they support to survive. Working within the framework established by Yeo and Heng (2014) that defines socially sustainable uses of public space as those that “stimulate local economies, support household livelihoods, enhance civic engagement, promote community identity, and improve the overall quality of life in communities”, day-labor can be considered somewhat socially sustainable. Day labor activities certainly meet some of the criteria.

Day-labor stimulates the local economy. Every morning roughly 1000 laborers congregate in day-labor spaces across the SDMA in hopes of finding work on home improvement projects as well as in construction, landscaping, and agricultural industries. These industries depend on flexible, skilled, workers to meet short and medium-term labor needs. Day-labor, as an industry, provides broad training in the specific needs of the local economy. As such, long-term presence of day-labor spaces, and the workers who congregate in those spaces, ensures a ready labor force with skills demanded within the local economy. In San Diego, day laborers help to construct, and then maintain, the suburban residential and commercial landscapes that dominate much of the metropolitan area. *Day labor supports household livelihoods.* Work as a day laborer provides income for the more than 1000 laborers and their families. In San Diego, this household support can be local, but can also include transnational remittances when laborers send earnings to family living abroad. In most cases however, day-labor work supports local households. Day-labor spaces also provide a precarious, but real, safety net for formal-sector employees in construction, agriculture, and service sector during economic downturns (Crotty 2014).

Beyond these two criteria, the social sustainability of day-labor spaces becomes less clear. *Day-labor spaces enhance civic engagement*. There is no question that the presence of day-labor spaces can increase civic engagement, but as the public-face of immigration-related conflicts in the United States, at least some of the ‘engagement’ day-labor spaces inspire is anti-social and may divide a geographically-defined community more than unite it (Esbenshade 2000). Conversely, neighborhood and/or municipal-level conflicts regarding the appropriation of space for day-labor can connect *jornaleros* to a community of support as well. Local faith-based organizations, immigrant-support organizations, and workers-rights advocates often mobilize to support day-laborers during periods of conflict. In this way, *day-labor conflict can promote community identity*. Conflicts about day-laborers appropriation of space are often more about racialized neighborhood identity than any real-world challenges posed by the activities which occur in day-labor spaces (Esbenshade 2000; Varsanyi 2008). In this way, members of a community reveal their imagined identity through their collective response to day-labor spaces and through the types of day-labor management policies they support. In such conflicts, the concept of “quality of life” is mobilized by groups both in support of, and opposed to, day-laborers appropriation of space for their livelihoods. That both sides of a conflict can use the same concept in support of their position speaks to the subjective and nebulous way that quality of life is defined. As such, it is impossible to say with certainty whether or not *day-labor spaces promote overall quality of life*. How day-labor spaces affect other residents quality of life is unclear. As the occasional locational-conflicts around day-labor spaces make clear, some residents feel threatened by groups of men congregating in public spaces and thereby experience a reduced quality of life. Conversely, some residents hire *jornaleros* to provide low-cost, high-quality work for home-maintenance projects, yard care, even specialized tasks like plumbing, roofing, or masonry. These residents quality of life is thereby improved. The third, and largest, group of residents are those who do not view day-labor spaces as threatening, but also do not directly hire *jornaleros* themselves. For this group, it is hard to argue that day-labor has any measureable impact on their quality of life. Thanks to *jornaleros* collective strategic visibility and the resulting locational stickiness of day-labor spaces, hiring site become just another element in the landscape for residents going about their daily routines. Whether day-labor spaces promote the quality of life for *jornaleros* is also somewhat unclear. Day-labor life is challenging. Workers-rights violations are common. Poverty is cyclical under the best circumstances and endemic to the industry in most circumstances (Crotty 2014; Valenzuela et al. 2006). Yet, *jornaleros* survive. They show up every morning in hopes of better employment. And collectively, they produce spaces that help sustain them socially, economically, and even spiritually (Crotty 2014, 2018; Sifuentes 2007). Day-laborers’ income and social outcomes compare favorably to jobs in grocery, restaurant, or janitorial services they might take instead (Doussard 2013). Day-labor work is generally inclusive. Despite the competitive nature of their contingent employment arrangements, place-based norms of behavior help new arrivals to each hiring site learn how to best find a job for the day. Over time social bonds between laborers, forged within day-labor spaces, lead to a host of actions that ensure group survival over individual financial success (Crotty 2014, 2018). And what is sustainability about if not group survival?

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ⁱ Crotty (2015) defines day-labor neighborhoods as all census tracts located within ½ mile of a day-labor hiring site.