

Places of Common as Social Incubators of Public Space



De-constructing **Systems of Neglect** and
Fostering **Networks of Growth**

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Abstract

Within the framework of this paper, spatial practices between the built and the un-built in the context of urban regeneration of neighbourhoods at city fringes are explored. The proposed spatial practice, called *spatial nuancing* refers to the reconsideration and redefinition of public space. *Spatial nuancing* is applied in the context of existing spatial and social dynamics as a means for initiating regeneration through new approaches. It can be applied at various scales and contexts. In this work, the focus

lies in the context of post-war modernist developments, that are widely characterized by large-scale and under-managed public spaces. This work challenges the perception and considerations of those kinds of under-managed public spaces and follows along the main research question: What if under-management is considered as a quality in public space? By proposing a strategy that includes the punctual implementation of *places of common* the public space can be reactivated, not by increasing



Fig. 1: Places of common as punctual intervention in public space

management but by connecting the main actors of the public space: the people. This essay argues that *spatial nuancing* with the example of the creation of *places of common* binds together and reinforces social and spatial qualities. This has a catalysing effect on the development and quality of life in a neighbourhood.

Keywords

public space | *spatial nuancing* | post-war modernist neighbourhoods | under-management | *places of common*



Fig. 2: Groups of people gathering on the public space in front of the church "La Ermita de San Isidro", Madrid 1961

(1) Introduction

Uneven Urban Development in Theory and Practice

The discourse surrounding public space in urban settings has become more relevant in the context of future densification and processes of urban sprawl. The past's inefficient use of land has shifted today's focus of interventions in urban public space on the optimization of the available space.¹ In addition to that, literature about public space has mostly portrayed and described the possibilities of intervening in public space through a one-sided lens. In short, many scholars seem to have the aim of creating certain pre-defined qualities that then should help to generate the desired liveliness of the public space.

(1) European Union, *The Future of Cities: Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward* (n.p.: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019) 93-98.

The starting point of my Thesis was the research about public space and what it offers to the users. Whilst I was looking into different definitions, I've was trying to wrap my head around what Jan Gehl, Jane Jacobs and Co. said about the creation and design of public spaces. However, I wasn't convinced by the generic characteristics of their approaches. After my seemingly endless research, I realised that I still knew so little.

In contrary, I perceived uniqueness as one of the main characteristics of public space. The composition of shape, size, livelihood, rhythm of functions and more, embedded in different settings all constitute the characteristics of a specific public space. Therefore, for my understanding, a generic portrayal of public space would lead to flat and inconsiderate design approaches; whereas in reality every single public space has its own story, its own biography.

In addition, the application of their theories only relates to the most common urban settings. So, just as much as the most popular areas of the city are being considered for regeneration and investment, it seems the same happens in the realms of urban design theory, where no light is shed on the trials and difficulties of economically weaker neighbourhoods. It is as if neoliberal policies found their way into the great minds of



Fig. 3: The replacement of public space with other urban functions (e.g. street infrastructure) leads to scarcity of public space in today's urban environments

urban designers (this indeed may contain some truth).

Nevertheless, the need for the availability of the physical and social functions of public spaces is emerging. This applies in particular to urban settings, where the living conditions have gradually become more challenging. The two main root causes for this condition are the ongoing growth of urban areas and climate change.² Not only do public spaces provide an essential balance to problems like poor housing conditions, but they can also alleviate socio-economic friction within neighbourhoods; by people from different backgrounds meeting, they get to learn about their differences and similarities.

The specific focus of this Thesis is on modernist neighbourhood developments in city fringes and the characteristics of their embedded public space. The phenomenon that can be observed, dates to the post-war modernist approach to slum clearance by the development of social housing in many European cities. Mostly from scratch, on open land and as an ideal solution to urban growth these neighbourhood developments came to life.³

Today, many of those neighbourhoods are subject to poverty, poor housing conditions and unemployment.³ Whilst the centres they belong to seem to regenerate and sustain themselves over time, those areas have been neglected. The lack of future-proofing poses existential challenges for the people living in these neighbourhoods. Many of those post-war developments are characterised by a rationalistic and functionalistic design approaches of many modernist architects, generating *systems* which *neglect* the individual.

This leads me to my next point, which is the lack of literature specifically catering to urban areas *neglected* in the city's development. With this paper I aim to bring forth a *nuanced* understanding and a new framing of public space in the scholarly world. This may help to create an inclusive discourse in urban design theory and enrich the horizon of urban design practice in the future.

(2) European Union, *The Future of Cities: Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward* (n.p.: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019) 93-98.

(3) Pablo Sendra, "Revisiting Public Space in Post-War Social Housing in Great Britain," in *Proyecto, Progreso, Arquitectura* (Sevilla, Spain: Universidad de Sevilla, 2013) pp. 114-131.

(2) Problem

Lack of Nuance in Theory about Interventions in Public Space

In most available contemporary literature, scholars pretend to have found the best recipe for creating successful public space. By intervening based on a theoretical scope framed by many scholars, a merely top-down approach is supported and reinforced. By that, the urban designers no longer take into consideration the inherent qualities of the existing public spaces. It is therefore important to scholarly establish a *nuanced* understanding of public space by firstly acknowledging that each public space brings about its very own characteristics, settings, and people.

In particular, the large-scale and under-managed public spaces, often found in the context of modernist housing developments have been neglected in academic discourse. Under-management has been broadly referred to as a lack of maintenance and supervision. This has been understood to cause deterioration and safety hazards. In this paper, however, I would like to build an argument that highlights how *spatial nuancing* applies in the context of under-managed public spaces based on the following research question: **What if under-management is considered a quality in public space?**

(3) Concepts

Revisiting Urban Spatial Practices

The Leitmotif of this work is the inherent complexity of public space, influenced by a multitude of factors and actors which renders the creation of public space in today's urban societies as a matter of a considerate and dynamic regeneration. Therefore, I propose a new spatial practice, to which I denote the expression "spatial nuancing". *Spatial nuancing* is to deliberately reconsider the mainstream view on public space of urban design scholars. I state, that by naming and qualifying public spaces the scholars restrict the public spaces' inherent potential. The application of *spatial nuancing* makes way

for different approaches that encompass the conventional understandings and practices surrounding public space.

The practice of *spatial nuancing* supports the notion of accepting disorder in design, proposed by Richard Sennett in the book “Designing Disorder”. He writes about finding new conditions of urban life for the future, that teaches the people to accept disorder by a new or different urban experience. Therefore he encourages designers to seek for new approaches where differences are being valued instead of dismissed.

Moreover, Sennett recognises the “imposition of order through urban planning and design” as a starting point for disorder in urban contexts.⁴ His critique on the imposition of order links back to the modernist design ideologies mentioned in the introduction.

Therefore I use the expression “systems of neglect” as deriving from the ideological order in post-war modernist housing developments, that until today shape the reality of many neighbourhoods.

The expression “network of growth” describes the appropriation of those *systems of neglect* for the creation of a new, considerate and more sustainable *network* in modernist neighbourhood settings. Important characteristics of this *network* are its changeability, adaptability and flexibility (see Fig. 4-6).

The design proposal which derives from the application of *spacial nuancing* on large-scale public space characterised by under-management, entails the implementation of so-called “places of common”. The term *place of common* derives from the *nuanced* understanding of “place”, contrarily to “space”, in its punctual presence and the meaning it can carry for the people. The word “common”, conversely to “public”, refers to sharing, exchanging and personal engagement with the community. This *place of common* becomes part of the socio-spatial network of a neighbourhood and acts as social incubator for the neighbourhood and its public space.

(4) Richard Sennett and Pablo Sendra, *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City* (London; New York: Verso, 2020), pp. 39-40.

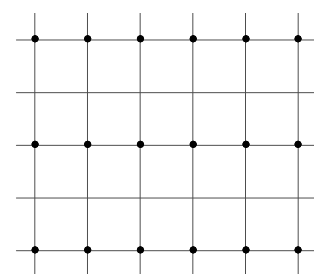


Fig. 4: The built structure is based on a rigid grid that doesn't allow for change and constitutes a *system of neglect*

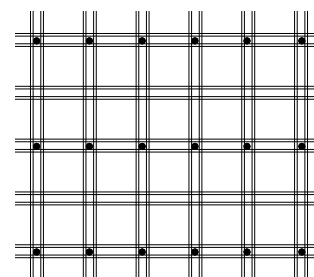


Fig. 5: Introducing a grid based on the existing grid yet follows a new logic

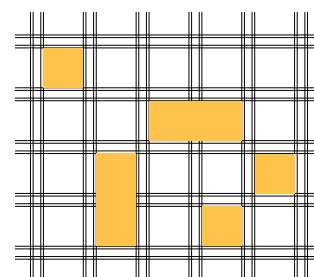


Fig. 6: This initiates a *network of growth* which allows for changeability, flexibility and adaptability of the built and un-built in the future

(4) Argumentation

The (In)Applicability of Urban Design Theory in Reality

(5) Setha Low, "Why Public Space Matters," in Oxford University Press eBooks, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197543733.001.0001>.

Setha Low introduces in her book "Why Public Space Matters" a method to establish a multidimensional definition of public space, as she considers the array of dimensions that impact the publicness of public space as wide. This definition is achieved by decoding the individual combination of the characteristics of a public space. These characteristics are physical aspects, ownership, governance or management authority and funding, control and influence, rules and regulations, access, symbolic and historical meaning, and political activity. By this, Low provides a framework for „researchers, designers, planners, community members, and public space activists to delve into the similarities and dissimilarities of public spaces, furnishing a template for comparison.”⁵

Low's approach indeed helps to understand the complexity surrounding public space. However, by trying to break down the findings into a "template for comparison" she reverses her well-meant approach. She introduces to the scholarly field another tool that imposes rigidity to the understanding of public space instead of embracing the wide range she encountered.

Madrid: History and Urban Development of the Spanish Capital

Madrid, Spain's capital city, is the city under investigation for this Thesis. Madrid's South and East in particular are subject to historical imbalances in development and opportunities.¹⁷ It used to be the area where the workers lived as the industry used to be located there. In contrast, the Northern neighbourhoods of Madrid were popular for the wealthier population because of the recreational character of the forest located in the North. This historically underprivileged geographical location, between

highways and physically cut off from the centre by the river Manzanares as well as its social and demographical dynamics render the South of Madrid problematic, in terms of criminality, unemployment and poverty. Let alone the distribution and accumulation of (neighbourhood) associations give indications of where the people struggle the most (see Fig. 7 in Appendix).

For the fieldtrip I took a further look into the district of Usera which is geographically close to Madrid's popular and wealthier centre.

Instead, by acknowledging the individual complexity of public spaces, the contemporary public space is so to say “under construction, is invisible”.⁶ This is how Pope describes the contemporary city in his book “Ladders”, which also resonates with the position Karen Franck takes where she says that the “researcher’s tendency to specialize in distinct types or distinct uses” creates a disadvantage, which is “that we may never sufficiently recognize how all public spaces make up a complex domain of places and possibilities”.⁷

(6) Albert Pope, *Ladders* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2015).

(7) Franck, Karen A. “Isn’t all Public Space Terrain Vague?” in P. Barron and M. Mariani eds. *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale* (New York: Routledge, 2013) pp. 153-168.

(8) Jan Gehl, *Cities for People* (Island Press, 2013).

In contrast to Low’s approach on classifying public space, Jan Gehl and Jane Jacobs both propose a rather more specific idea of what to aim for in public space. Architect and urban designer Jan Gehl suggests in his book “Cities for People” the creation of “better conditions for city life”, which according to him lead to “more city life.”⁸

This statement shows an inconsiderate portrayal of possible interventions in public space and flattens the practice and the understanding of urban designers. It marks a top-down planner perspective that doesn’t take into consideration the financial instability and lacking support some neighbourhoods or districts may be exposed to. These neighbourhoods would then not easily become subject to more city life, because the “better conditions” wouldn’t have been able to be financed in the first place.

To the right, Usera is enclosed by the river Manzanares and is bordering to all sides on highways. Particularly Usera’s geographical and topographical location has historically impacted the district to be one with the lowest household income and highest unemployment rate in Madrid.¹⁸

Usera consists out of seven neighbourhoods, that host a variety of different nationalities. Orcasur is the name of one of the neighbourhoods. I visited Orcasur during my fieldtrip in

November 2023. With a look into the demographics of the district, Orcasur stands out by its low income and high unemployment rate. Particularly striking is the unemployment rate of women in Orcasur with 13,6%, in comparison to the median women’s unemployment rate in the whole of Madrid with 8%.¹⁹

(17) Ayuntamiento de Madrid, *Plan de Desarrollo del Sur y del Este (SURES): Comisión Permanente*, (Madrid: SURES, 2023), <https://www.madrid.es/portales/munimadrid/es/Inicio/El-Ayuntamiento/Plan-SURES/Comision-Permanente/Comision-Permanente/?vgnnextfmt=default&vgnextoid=a388ed08ea240710VgnVCM1000001d4a900aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=a4ec5c3a93f30710VgnVCM2000001f4a900aRCRD>

(18) Ayuntamiento de Madrid, *Oficina del Sur y Este de Madrid: Documento Estratégico* (Madrid: SURES, 2019), <https://www.madrid.es/UnidadWeb/NxC/OficinadelSur/ContenidosGenericos/ficheros/DocumentoestrategicoOfiSurEste.pdf>

(19) Banco de Datos del Ayuntamiento de Madrid (Madrid: Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2023), https://servpub.madrid.es/CSEBD_WBINTER/inicio.html

On another note, Jane Jacobs addresses in her book “The Death And Life Of Great American Cities” the hazard brought into cities through the car, which brings into place a gradual breakdown of the city to function as a meeting place. As a solution, she calls to restore the small, intimate relationships between neighbours in city life, that have been replaced by the dominant planning ideologies.⁹

(9) Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, 1961.

Her considerations seem to be very relevant to this paper, especially seeing the connection to many modernist-minded planners from the past, where the car was considered to be the main actor of the modern city. However, her proposal doesn't entail a clear plan of action. Instead she seems to be nostalgic about the small, intimate relationships that are not to be found in those neighbourhoods and hopes for them to return. Unfortunately, it is very unrealistic to think that the establishment of such spaces can be undertaken easily. When only taking into consideration the morphological structure and the layout of the existing modernist neighbourhoods, one can see that what is there is far off from what she desires. For sure, small adjustments can be made, yet those still need to be applied according to the existing situation the neighbourhood is exposed to.

**Orcasur:
A Challenged
Neighbourhood**

Orcasur emerged in 1954 by the construction of three social housing villages. Those were created provisionally by the National Housing Institute (Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda) and composed of semi-agricultural single-family houses, two-storey houses, and five-storey houses. However, the buildings were mainly self-built and in bad condition, characterized by minimum housing dimensions.²⁰ The streets within the neighbourhood weren't paved and there was no running water.²¹

A season of over 20 years of fighting for better housing conditions, the inhabitants of Orcasur managed to convince the municipality of Madrid to act. This is when the neighbourhood out of provisionally constructed villages from 1954 went through an integral remodelling of the which started in 1983 and finished in three phases until 1987. The remodelling included the basic urban layout of the existing developments.²² Which was particularly characterized by the double north-south axis and

In contrast to the previous mentioned works, Carmona and Wunderlich acknowledge the need for *nuance* by emphasising in their book “Capital Spaces” that designing according to an “idealised blueprint for the perfect public space” sets a desired quality to a standard, which creates a rigid understanding of the characteristics that a public space should have. Instead they argue, that “spaces take on different flavours as a result of the different groups of interests that create them or the particular range of uses they are intended to serve.”¹⁰

(10) Matthew Carmona and Filipa Matos Wunderlich, *Capital Spaces: The Multiple Complex Public Spaces of a Global City* (Routledge, 2013).

(11) Matthew Carmona, “Contemporary Public Space: Critique and Classification, Part One: Critique,” *Journal of Urban Design*, no. 15(1) (2010): pp.123-148, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574800903435651>.

This underlines my position stated in the preceding line of argumentation, which is the inapplicability of several theoretical works on the reality of existing public space. Regarding the specific case of large-scale under-managed public space, I want to put emphasis on the idea that the presence of under-management in public space can indeed be considered as a quality when taking on the lens of *spatial nuancing*.

Carmona describes in one of his previous works the concerns and consequences of interventions in public space associated with over- or under-management. Whilst over-management can lead to exclusivity and the privatization of the public space, under-managed public spaces become subject to concern because their environment could promote vandalism and anti-social behaviour.¹¹

the Avenida de Orcasur for the main access and distribution of the neighbourhood.²³ The phasing made it possible to re-accommodate the 1.450 people from the demolished homes into the new homes between 1983 and 1987. In total 2.577 homes were built, for old and new residents from the area.²⁴

Orcasur has a legacy of being neglected and not cared for. Even in the 1980s when the neighbourhood went through the remodelling, the implementation was rather careless than careful. Not considering the

already existing struggles the neighbourhood faced and the challenges the people from Orcasur would therefore deal with in the future, especially with regard to its demographical composition and economic situation.

(20) Enrique Fidel, “Orcasitas (Usera, Madrid),” *Urban Idade*, August 4, 2011, <https://urbancidades.wordpress.com/2011/04/26/orcasitas-usera-madrid/>

(21) Luis Moya González, “Estudio socio-urbanístico de nueve barrios de promoción oficial de Madrid,” in *Ciudad y territorio* (n. 3); pp. 73-95. ISSN 0210-0487. (1980)

(22) Ramón López de Lucio, “El Programa de ‘Barrios en Remodelación’, Madrid. 1978-1988. Experiencias de transición entre el bloque abierto y la manzana”, in *Vivienda Colectiva Espacio Público y Ciudad: Evolución y crisis en el diseño de tejidos residenciales 1860-2010*; pp. 173-189. Madrid, 2012.

23) Ayuntamiento de Madrid, *Planes de barrio 2013-2016: Orcasur, (Distrito de Usera). Características del barrio y procesos participativos del plan, n.d.*, https://www.madrid.es/UnidadesDescentralizadas/UDGParticipacionCiudadana/Planes_Barrío/2013-2016/04_Orcasur/Caracteristicas_Actuaciones_2013-2016_Orcasur.pdf

(24) Enrique Fidel, “Orcasitas (Usera, Madrid),” *Urban Idade*, August 4, 2011, <https://urbancidades.wordpress.com/2011/04/26/orcasitas-usera-madrid/>

Another voice in this discourse is Michael Sorkin, who in his book “Variations on a Theme Park” addresses the planners’ tendencies towards over-management. He expresses his concerns about “the end of public space” and compares the results of over-management in contemporary cities with what one can find in a theme park. Through over-stimulating illustrations and a visual representation that fosters consumerism, desired users are attracted, and their activities are determined. This is being evoked additionally by the association of under-managed public spaces as a threat to civility.¹²

(12) Michael Sorkin, Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space (Hill and Wang, 1992) p.XV.

The literature gives a clear understanding of the implications of management in public space. It shows that over-management too has its downsides. In the light of *spatial nuancing* and with regards to the socio-economic context of many large-scale under-managed public spaces, I state that intervening in public space shouldn’t necessarily be associated with more management. Contrary, it could rather evoke that the municipality or planning authority doesn’t intervene at all because of the associated costs.

Lastly, Ignasi de Sola-Morales introduces a new perspective on urban public spaces, for which he coined the term “terrain vague” for the field of spatial studies. A terrain vague is a type

Local Voices of Orcasur: Associations and Neighbourhood Initiatives

In addition to the findings about the history and the socio-demographic data, I had an interesting conversation with an association called Romi Serseni²⁵ based in Orcasur. The interview gave me some valuable insight into local voices of Orcasur. The social workers from the association told me about the high women unemployment rate and the strong dependency on government benefits. The benefits for the unemployed also include social housing. The rights to the benefits however are taken, once the family earns too much money. This

creates a downwards spiral for many families with no urging incentive to find occupation. That subsequently leads to high unemployment rate throughout generations, high drop-out rates in school, unsuccessful integration into the labour market and high criminality, which poses existential concerns for the future of the young people in Orcasur. As an outsider to Orcasur, the streets don’t feel safe. They are empty apart from some groups of people occasionally meeting to drink alcohol or sell products. Orcasur’s social life seems to be asleep and therefore it

of urban public space that sets itself apart from other public spaces by its state of abandonment. Terrains vagues have their quality in their abandonment and under-management. Ignasi suggests to not conveniently intervene in them, because “once the space is filled with a new, all-encompassing, and continuous use, it is no longer available for other possibilities.” Like this, Ignasi ascribes a quality to the under-managed and under-used public space.¹³

(13) Ignasi Solà-Morales Rubió, “Terrain Vague,” in *Anyplace*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, July 1995) pp. 118-123.

His concept of a terrain vague feeds into my hypothesis that derives from my research question, which is that under-management can be considered as quality in public space. I support this counter-hegemonic perspective on under-managed public spaces, for it helps to remove the associated stigma and makes way for approaches that are applicable to the reality of many public spaces in modernist housing developments. Hence, the application of *spatial nuancing* on the matter of under-management in public space encourages the planners to recognise the existing qualities of the neighbourhood, distancing themselves from top-down approaches and seeking to understand what helps the users to participate in public space.

appears that the associations need to put even more effort into bringing the people in.

However, I found out about a neighbour of Orcasur who speaks up about the problems of criminality. He shares with the newspaper EL PAÍS about his recent initiative where he replaces the green area in front of the building he lives in with pointy stones to avoid people appropriating it to go about criminal activities.²⁶

It’s shocking to imagine this to be the reality: the neighbours themselves implement hostile architecture. On the one side this is

a result of the previously mentioned issues relating unemployment because of the social benefits, on the other hand it bears witness of the poor urban design initiatives which evidently entertain criminal activities and create an unsafe environment for the people to live in.

Orcasur’s public space needs to be reactivated for the use of everyone, as public space is a crucial aspect of a healthy urban life. The people of Orcasur should be deserving of it as much as the people from the centre of Madrid are.

(25) Romi Serseni, “Inicio,” n.d. <https://www.romiserseni.es/>.

(26) Miquel Echarri, “Plantas Envenenadas Y Un Jardín De Piedras Puntiagudas: Cuando La Arquitectura ‘Antipobres’ Viene De Los Propios Vecinos,” *El País*, November 12, 2020, <https://elpais.com/icon-design/arquitectura/2020-11-12/plantas-envenenadas-y-un-jardin-de-piedras-puntiagudas-cuando-la-arquitectura-antipobres-viene-de-los-propios-vecinos.html>

(5) Discussion

Theory can't Speak on Behalf of the People

In the following I will restate my key points and, if applicable suggest resolutions to the issue.

My first point is, that defining public space by certain characteristics leads to rigid thinking and categorising.

Through appropriating public space by naming and qualifying, it is being restricted in its inherent potentials, hence existing qualities may be overlooked. What I identify here, I consider a global issue to theory in urban design and architecture. A theoretical approach precedes clear definitions. If the theory is given much weight in the discourse it can easily lead to rigidity in the applicability. Therefore, thorough fieldwork is a crucial aspect of truly understanding the needs and influencing dynamics of a neighbourhood.

Secondly, the way interventions in public space are framed by Jan Gehl and Jane Jacobs come across inconsiderate and flat and it is therefore not clear how to apply them to the reality of public space. This observation supports the latter point, yet also sheds light onto the lack of *nuance*. This issue relates therefore mainly to the lack of literature about public space in areas in the urban context that appear not to be the most popular and are exposed to a multitude of challenges. The way forward, to resolve what has been mentioned is therefore to increase the amount of literature that address these unpopular

Reflection: A Place of Common for Orcasur

By looking at Orcasur through the lens of *spatial nuancing*, new approaches are realistic and applicable. Through the selection of the specific site in Orcasur, I want to propose an example of the application of *spatial nuancing*. The proposal is made up by the implementation and design of a *place of common* in the existing network of public spaces in Orcasur. For the site, I chose an abandoned shopping mall located in the heart of Orcasur, enclosed by several (un)der-used public functions and the large-scale under-managed

public space. The people of Orcasur call the building "El Caracol", due to its two prominent spiral staircases at the south side of the building. Another main characteristic of the building is the large roof that spans across the spaces underneath and covers an area of 40mx70m. The programmatic considerations derive from my site-specific research, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Therefore the *place of common* serves as a place that supports the people particularly in the areas of education and employment. Different associations can hold

settings of urban design and therewith create further awareness for *nuanced* approaches.

My third point is, that counter-acting abandonment with over-management may lead to stagnation of the process or as Sorkin would say, to the “end of public space.”¹⁴ However, under-management or abandonment often still evoke negative associations. This creates the urging need to propose to the field of architecture new approaches that point away from past stigmas. It is more and more important to be aware that potentials of public spaces which no longer fulfil certain criteria in the planners’ understanding of ascribed qualities, may be overlooked, or neglected. The potentials of those places may not be visible in their material or physical manifestation rather, in the socio-spatial configuration that is invisible. This directly ties into my last point:

Instead of filling “terrain vagues” with functions, the quality of its undefined state should be preserved to allow for appropriation. A “terrain vague” that is “foreign to the urban system” and is characterised by under-management and abandonment¹⁵ can then in return, become a desired quality for public space. This framework can initiate a positive feedback loop, that allows the existing neighbourhood network to engage and grow. Public space is no longer generated by top-down interventions but through bottom-up engagement, hence it is “through their actions that people produce space.”¹⁶

events and meetings that foster a strong intersection point for the community and the associations. Most importantly the public space that runs underneath the roof is accessible to everyone and is to become a place of meaning and identification for the community to grow.

The existing architecture of the building is a good representation of a *system of neglect*. The transformation of “El Caracol” into a *place of common* therefore serves as an example of generating a *network of growth*. The new

architectural interventions more so make this *network* evident: The new functional units can move within an independent grid network and can change over time. The public space itself remains a constant to the building and flows in-between the units. The new functions complement the activities on the public space. Overall the intervention supports the organic regeneration and reactivation of public space in Orcasur; all by connecting the most important actors of public space: the people.

(14) Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, 1992.

(15) Ignasi Solà-Morales Rubió, “Terrain Vague,”

(16) Franck, Karen A. “Isn’t all Public Space Terrain Vague?”

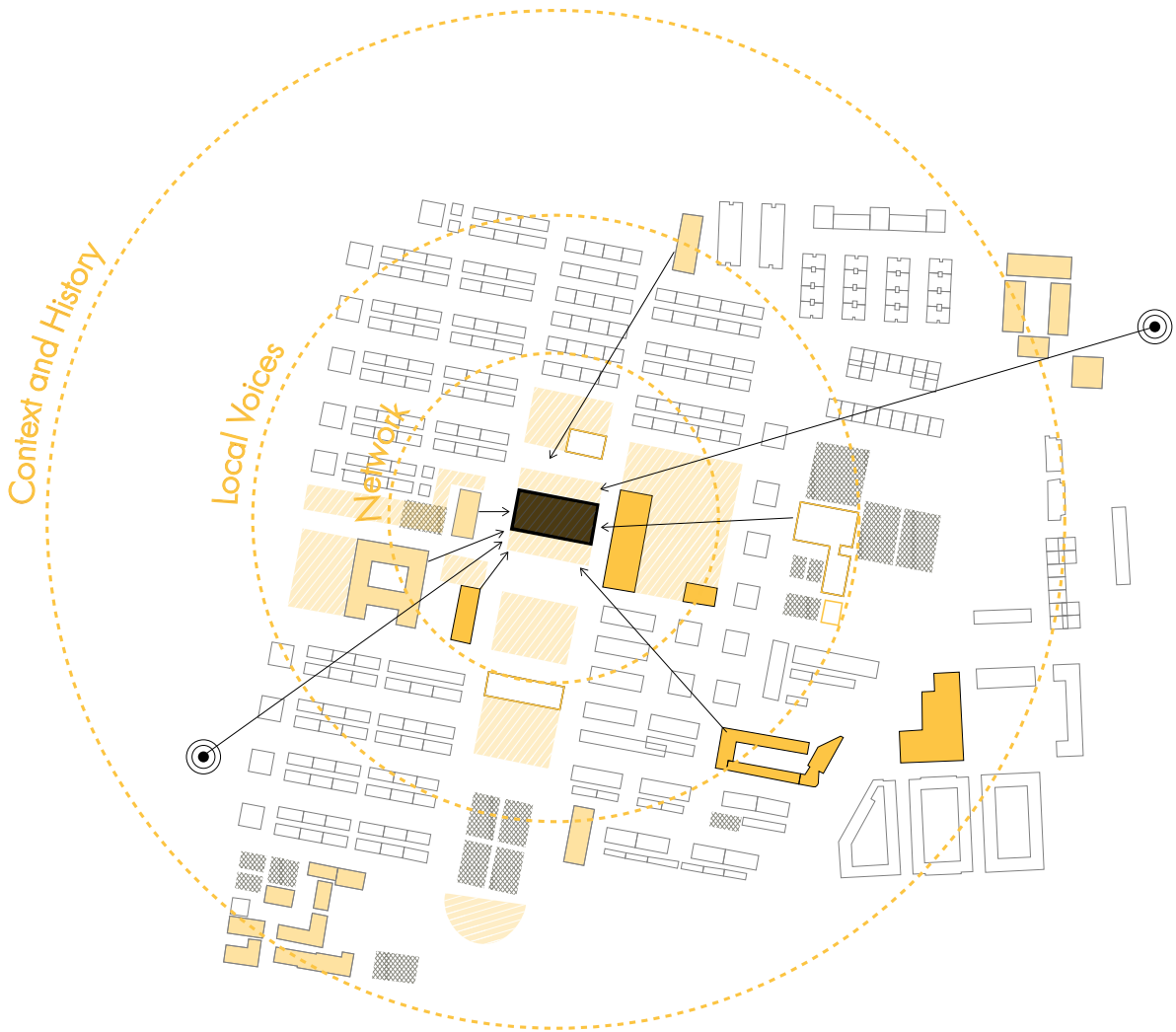


Fig. 8: By responding to and considering the different influences on public space, a *place of common* has the potential to bring together people in a place that becomes a *social incubator* for the enclosing public space

(6) Conclusion

Public Space Design - A Process of Considerate and Dynamic Regeneration

In light of the new and *nuanced* understanding of public space, the existing theory from Gehl or Jacobs might not be applicable to the variety of individual characteristics and potentials every single public space presents. It is not to disregard everything that is written but to relate to the principles in their applicability and meaningful contribution, which embraces the existing attributes and works with the given imperfect conditions, rather than applying a certain agenda of redesign that covers up any trace of the narrative the public space tells.

As it is the planner's job to intervene, it is still their responsibility to what extent and in what way this would come into place. This paper emphasises the importance to make planners, urban designers, architects etc. stop, in the motion of doing their job. To hold on and reflect, on what it is that needs to be done and should be done. I acknowledge that the role of the architect seems so often to be the intervening in existing settings, which is the continuous imposition of order from an outsider's perspective on the existing. This top-down intervention can rarely be avoided. However, some strategies subsequently empower the people themselves to be involved, which can lead to a bottom-up development that fosters *networks of growth* (see Fig. 9 in Appendix).

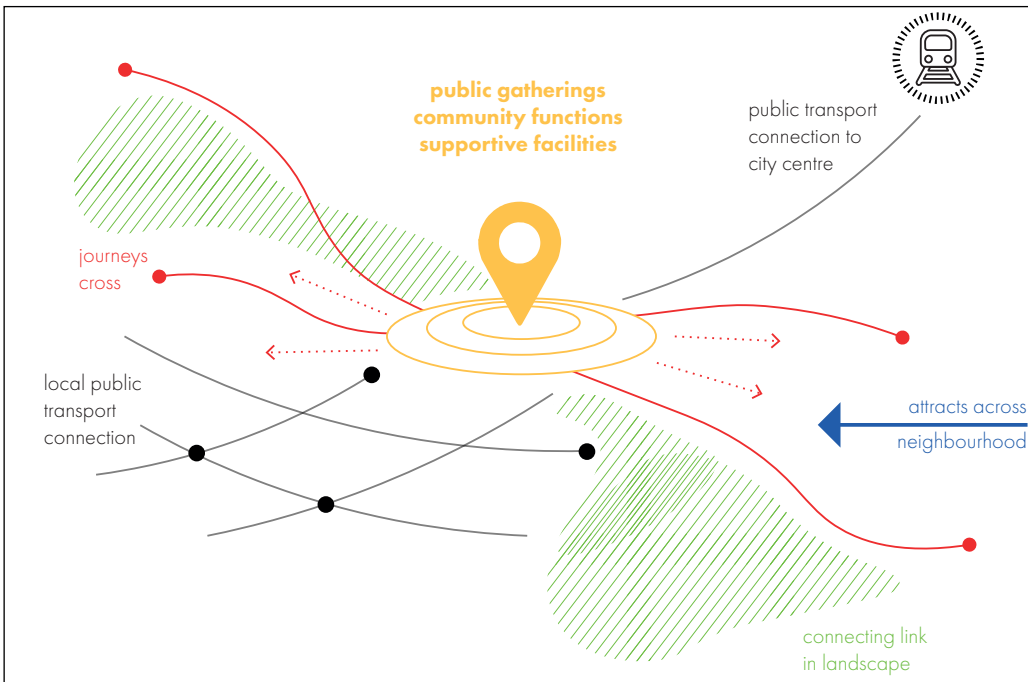
With all that said, I want to engage as an architect in the punctual regeneration of the public space by the proposal of a *place of common*. By intervening not only in the built, but fostering the un-built, I want to contribute to a vision for a neighbourhood that empowers community engagement and reinforces sustainable and social development. As a tool to achieve a community-sensitive design, analysing, observing, and interviewing give fruitful insights into the people's desires and have the power to build an emotional connection between the locals and the *place of common*, hence their surrounding public space.

(7) Appendix

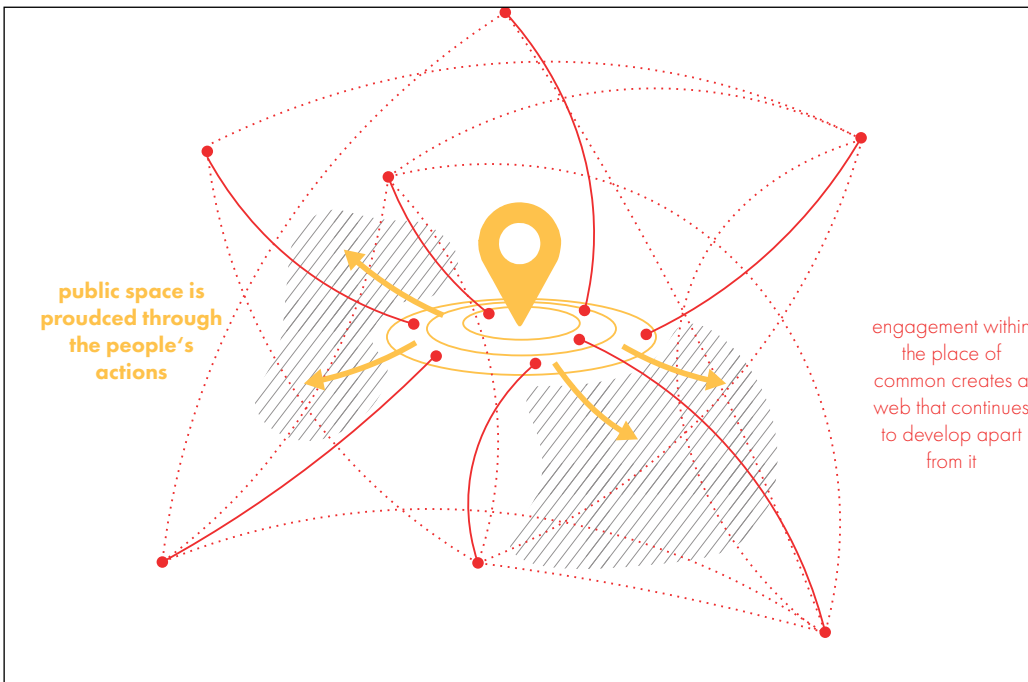
Fig. 7: Distribution of associations in Usera that support people to find employment



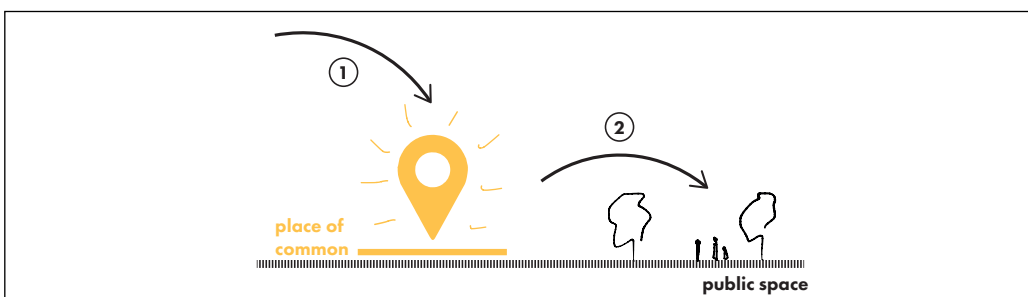
Fig. 9: Top-Up Strategy



(a) Top-Down implementation of a *place of common*, initiated by planners



(b) Bottom-Up engagement by bringing people together in one place



(c) This Top-Up Strategy renders the *place of common* as *social incubator* for the enclosing public space

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