

RESEARCH PLAN

Architectural Design Crossovers

Who owns the city?

A response to privatised public spaces

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A response to privatised public spaces

KEYWORDS / *public space, pops, privately owned public space, gentrification, ownership, commons, Thatcherism, symbiotic relationship*



Throughout history the notion of ‘public space’ has always been evolving¹, although it is still often misunderstood as being constant. Not only does public space change in meaning and therefore form, but as well as how they are used by the people who inhabit the city. Public spaces give people the freedom to move from one place to another, they create places of rest and places of fast traffic, they can function as a transition zone or destination, form social hubs and spaces of democracy.

Defining public space is difficult, because a lot of public spaces are not even truly public or never have been. Actually many public spaces are regulated by the government or private investors in order to move responsibility of maintenance, or for example to prevent criminality.² ‘Ownership’ is therefore an inevitable part of public space, especially the tension it can create between who ‘owns’ the space legally, and the ‘sense of ownership’³ which is to be created for the public. Public space can mean different things for different domains, and since there seems to be no consensus then what is the value of such definition? As an example, Don Mitchell related public space to the Greek *agora* and showed the importance of public space within democratic cities. The agora or marketplace was the heart of the *polis* and had a social, political and commercial character. It was described here as a place of gathering, socializing, trade and politics: a representation of democracy.⁴ Although the democratic nature of public space sounds logical, this idea of ‘public space’ in England has not always existed. An episode by *99% Invisible* discusses how from the 5th to 15th century kings and lords controlled all land in exchange for services, while peasants had rights to live on it and use it: this idea was called ‘the commons’.⁵ Eventually because of a movement which started in the 1930’s, nowadays in England you have the ‘right to roam’ which means everyone has the freedom to walk through privately owned land.

¹ Avermaete, T. et al. *Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity and the Public Sphere* (2009)

² Minton, A. *The Privatisation of Public Space* (2006)

³ Greater London Authority *Expanding London’s Public Realm*. (2020)

⁴ Mitchell, D. *The End of Public Space? People’s Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy* (1995)

⁵ *99% Invisible* Katie Mingle’s *Right to Roam* (2021)

But one thing is to ‘roam’, another is to ‘own’. And while the agora in Ancient Greek times initially seemed to have a democratic character, inclusion has always been a problem: women, slaves and foreigners were at that time not even allowed to participate in the political activities in these public spaces.⁴ Apparently ownership, the democratic character of public space and accessibility for all are important aspects of these spaces, but this is not always as black and white as we think.

This grey area of public and private has become a problem in contemporary London. Anna Minton addresses in her book *Ground Control* this issue of how the nature of public space in London has shifted over the past decades due to political influences.⁶ The number of ‘Pops’ or so-called privately owned public spaces has increased extensively within the UK and especially in London.⁷ Comparable with the idea of ‘the commons’ in England, these spaces are publicly accessible but are provided and maintained by private developers, offices or residential building owners.² This was mainly the result of the financial crisis in the 1980’s when ‘Thatcherism’ introduced privatisation as a solution to bring prosperity to poor areas in London, by creating engines of regional economic growth, focusing on consumerism.⁶ Although Thatcherism, - which promoted the interests of conservatives in Great-Britain after the financial crisis - has boosted poor neighbourhoods economically, it resulted in large scale gentrification and the neglectance of local people’s needs. An extreme form of this was seen during the development of the London Olympic Area in 2012. Besides, it has changed the dynamics of public space in freedom of use since these spaces are now regulated by private investors which can indirectly determine how we use public space.

It would be naive to think the privatisation of public spaces in London will stagnate, but the additional problems it creates should not be ignored. Architecture is an inclusive discipline that can result in unique solutions by mediating between different disciplines. By understanding the change in nature of public space throughout history and the reasons behind these changes politically, economically and socially: architecture can attempt to contribute in creating places where public, as well as private interests can benefit both. The aim of this research is to discuss the complexity of this grey area between privately owned public space and public space, not necessarily to reflect on morality. The nature of public space shifts, and it is important to know why these changes occur and if these changes are still relevant in current times.

This research aims to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

To what extent could architecture contribute to a more symbiotic relationship - and mediate - between the public and private interests, as a response to privatisation of public spaces in the City of London?

/ What is the nature of public space and how is it different from privately owned public space?

/ How did the nature of public space change through history and what layers of influence caused these changes?

/ Which elements define public space?

/ Which elements define privately owned ‘public’ space?

/ If architecture can mediate: is there one architecture, or are there many minor forms of architectural practice that make the (im)balance between private and public visible? What are the characteristics and through which mechanisms do these architectural practices challenge and overturn these (un)balanced, (un)equal relations?

Recent research has mainly brought forward the observation of changes in nature of public space within metropolitan cities. However, the fact that the amount of privately owned public spaces will only increase the upcoming years, along with the additional problems it causes, is being ignored. Contemporary architectural research should therefore focus on how to improve these spaces and take responsibility: a lot of potential lies in creating spaces which attempt to mediate between being beneficial for public, as well private interests. Architecture could possibly create spaces where the imbalance between private and public will be less visible and tangible, more suitable in current times.

The problem addressed in this research is relevant in the City of London, Great-Britain, as well on a global scale. Many metropolitan cities are dealing with this issue and should invest in creating spaces *for* the public. This research investigates London, but should as well present insights for other case studies. It aims to give a different perspective on the privatisation of public space in London: how it was formed, the initial intention and how it can be improved in the future. As well give a critical view on ownership, the changing nature of public space and if this genuine public space still exists.

⁶ Minton, A.
Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-first-century City. (2012)

⁷ CBRE Group
Privatisation of Public Space: an inevitable rise in privately owned public spaces within our cities by 2040. (2021)

The theoretical framework used for this research consists of readings discussing the nature of public space, its history and the political influences that changed the nature of public space through time. Books written by Ana Minton and Owen Hatherley will be used to discuss the social issues London is facing today and clarify the social, economical and political context. Alexi Marmot provides a historical background on how public space has changed since the Great Fire, the Blitz and the Big Bang. This reading could show how important moments in history like these have influenced public space.

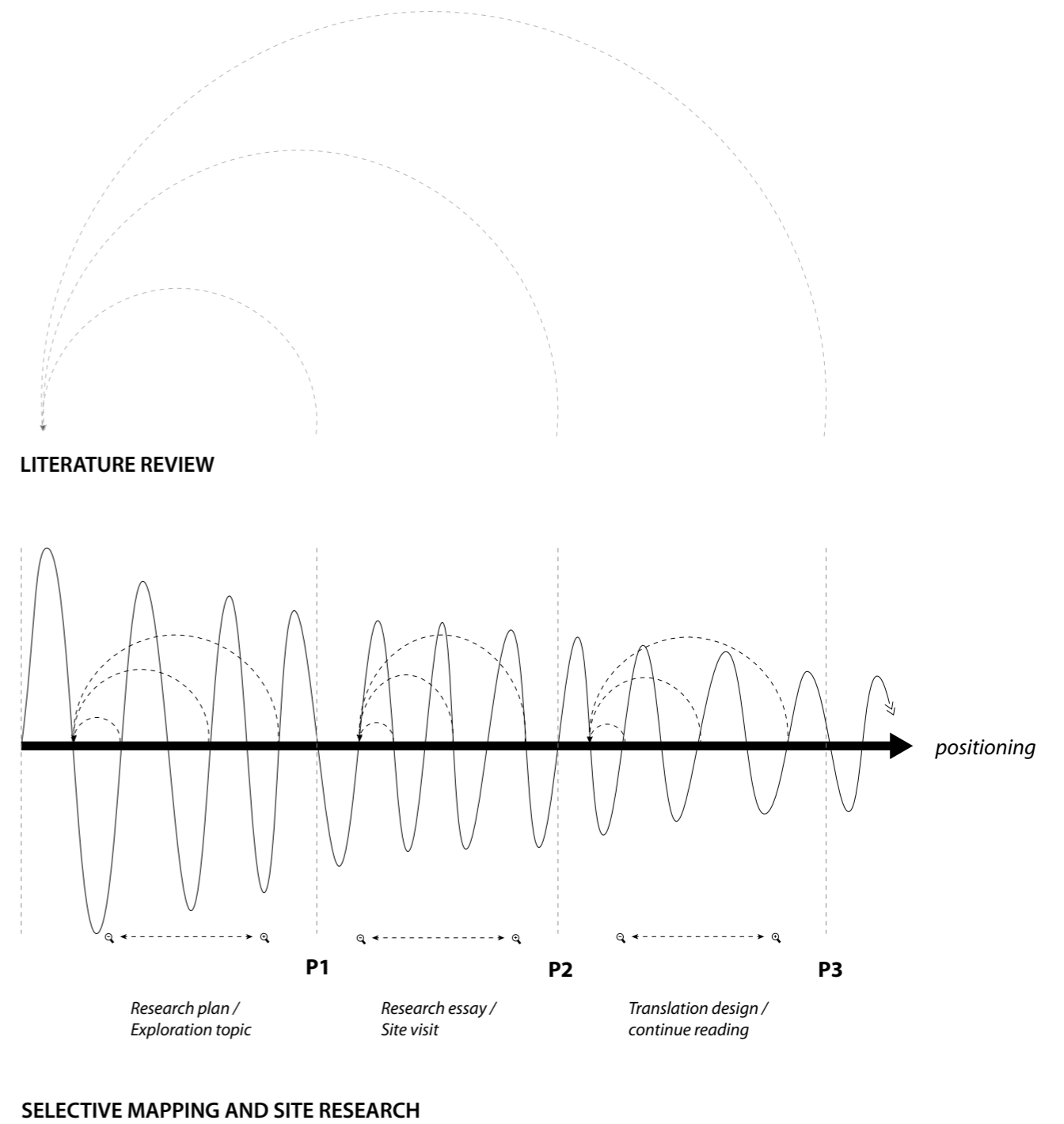
The book *Architectural Positions* will help to define public space: as well as the readings from writers such as Michael Hebbert, Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford and Ali Madanipour. These will also define privately owned public spaces, social exclusion and how this can be visible in spatial dimensions. Besides, provide useful knowledge and examples of well-functioning inclusive design. The aim of this theoretical framework is to discuss the complexity of this grey area between privately owned public space and public space, not necessarily to reflect on morality. The nature of public space shifts, and it is important to know why these changes occur and if these changes are still relevant in current times.




The methodology of this research can be divided in three domains: literature review, selective mapping and site research. This should not be seen as a linear process, but as an exploration through these different domains. It will be a constant process of reflection and use new knowledge to reflect on previous work. Tony Fretton, a London based architect and former coordinator of the Chair of Interiors, Buildings, Cities in Delft, has been so kind to make time to meet via Zoom, once in two weeks. These conversations are part of this research' methodology.

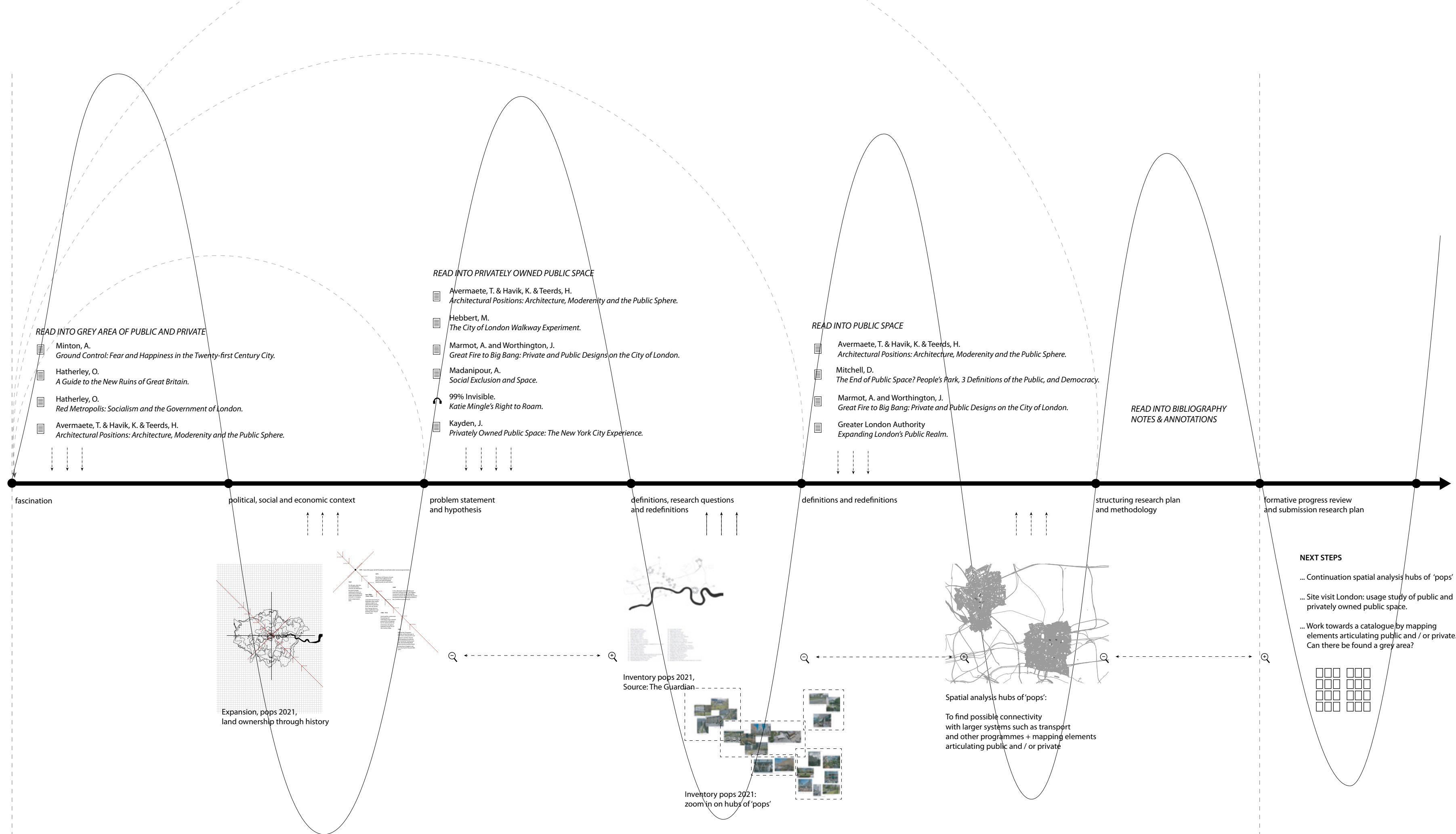
An extensive literature review will define the terms and create a theoretical framework which will be the start of this research. The selective mapping of privately owned public spaces within London City is used as a next step. This will help to narrow the focus on places of interest: where are 'pops' seen most frequently? The hubs of 'pops' should be analysed more closely in order to define the spatial dimensions and explore the connections with larger systems in London on which they depend. This will be supported by the literature review which discusses the different manifestations of privately owned public spaces. The selective mapping will help to eventually see connections between different disciplines. All together it will help with positioning and create the translation towards a design project, as a response to privately owned public space.

The historical map does not bring forward the connections between different larger systems, but provides knowledge of London's historical expansion. On top of that, it aims to present the shifts from privately owned public land to more publicly owned land, compared again to current privately owned public spaces in London. This data is obtained from educational videos, articles from The Guardian and books discussing England's landownership through history.

Visiting London allows us to analyse the site. Photography and video will be used as a tool to document the usage of public space and privately owned public space. This usage study could help to articulate this grey area of public and private into spatial dimensions and eventually be a tool in which there can be mediated between the two.



-  Moment of reflection
-  Exploration through domains
-  Positioning: connections, conclusions, move towards architectural positioning



NEXT STEPS

- ... Continuation spatial analysis hubs of 'pops'
- ... Site visit London: usage study of public and privately owned public space.
- ... Work towards a catalogue by mapping elements articulating public and / or private. Can there be found a grey area?

P1

FOOTNOTE / *hierachical organization of annotated bibliography*

Minton, A. *Ground Control: fear and happiness in the Twenty-first-century city*. London: Penguin, 2012.

Minton discusses the problem of privatization of poor housing and public spaces in London, which causes gentrification. She shows the betrayal of local promises, using the example of the Olympic area in 2012. The book contains other examples on gentrification. It gives a brought understanding of the influence of large political systems in history and influence of local authorities in the creation of these spaces.

Hatherley, O. *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*. London: Verso, 2010.

Hatherley is a journalist who has written about politics, architecture and social issues in Great Britain. This book discusses British architecture and how it has changed by political influence explained through analysing different cities supported by photographs. Hatherley describes problems such as gentrification and shows how Britain has turned into a metropolitan city focussed on business instead of its citizens.

Hatherley, O. *Red Metropolis: Socialism and the Government of London*. London: Repeater, 2020.

This book discusses the history of socialism in London and makes an argument for resistance against a government of suburban landlords which exploit Londoners.

Mitchell, D. “The End of Public Space? People’s Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 85, (1995): 108-133.

Describes public space using the *agora* as an example from the ancient Greek and writes about the importance of public space in democratic cities.

Avermaete, T. et al. *Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity and the Public Sphere*. Amsterdam: SUN Publishers, 2009.

Multiple chapters describe public sphere and how it has changed through time. Useful for the definition of public, as well as privately owned public spaces.

Hebbert, M. “The City of London Walkway Experiment”, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (1993): 433 - 450.

This article gives an interesting view on public space within the City and how it has changed. It contains examples of ‘pops’ which failed to work and shows examples of the influence on public use.

Marmot, A. and Worthington, J. “Great Fire to Big Bang: Private and Public Designs on the City of London”, *Built Environment*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1986): 216–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23286646>.

This paper discusses how the roles of public and private have changed after the Great Fire and Big Bang. It provides an overview of the changes in urban fabric after these disasters.

“Jane Jacobs”, Project for Public Spaces, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.pps.org/article/jjacobs-2>

Biography of Jane Jacobs, an urban writer and activist: discussing her ideas and beliefs. One of her most important works from 1961 was *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Her view on cities as ecosystems and mixed-used development could be interesting to use in this research.

Jacobs, J. “The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety”, in *The City Reader*, edited by R.T. LeGates and F. Stout, 58-62. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Jacobs outlines in this chapter her notions on what makes a neighbourhood a community and what makes a city liveable. She lays emphasis on safety. How a sense of personal belonging and social cohesiveness comes from narrow crowded multi-use streets. And how basic urban vitality comes from resident's participation: where human activity takes place.

Madanipour, A. "Social Exclusion and Space", in *The City Reader*, edited by R.T. LeGates and F. Stout, 112-120. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Discusses social exclusion within cities and its spatial dimension. He gives a clear definition of social exclusion and starts with explaining how social life is divided into public and private spheres: which means drawing boundaries round spatial and temporal domains and excluding others from these domains. Interesting text since it focuses on the influence of public and private spheres on social exclusion.

Manning, J. and Rifkin, A. et al. *Complex City: London's Changing Character*. London: RIBA Publishing, 2020.

This book touches upon the historical growth London has gone through. It contains a lot of mappings which could be useful within this research and for mapping strategies.

"Privatisation of Public Space: an inevitable rise in privately owned public spaces within our cities by 2040", CBRE Group, Inc., accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.cbre.co.uk/research-and-reports/our-cities/privatisation-of-public-space>.

This source discusses how privately owned public spaces have increased in number and size across the UK since the start of the century, especially in London. The exact number of 'pops' is difficult to determine given that most local authorities are not diligently recording details of these sites and have been reluctant, alongside landowners, to disclose information regarding the nature of their ownership and on what terms the public is entitled to use their land.

Katie Mingle, "Katie Mingle's Right to Roam", 99% Invisible, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/katie-mingles-right-to-roam/>

Episode with information about the 'commons' and the 'right to roam' in England.

Greater London Authority. *Expanding London's Public Realm*. PDF file. October 28, 2021. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/expanding_londons_public_realm_combined_final.pdf (2020)

Julian Lewis recommended reading this document, touching upon the public realm in London and discussing specifically ownership as well.

Kayden, J. *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2000.

Book discussing different manifestations of privately owned public spaces in New York and how this started in 1961.

FOOTNOTE / *An extended annotated bibliography used for mappings, the personal glossary and produced mappings can be found in the appendix.*

PERSONAL GLOSSARY 23

EXTENDED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: MAPPINGS 25

HISTORICAL MAPPING: CITY EXPANSION AND PRIVATISATION SHIFTS LONDON 26

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CONTEXT AND CONNECTION TO RAILWAY SYSTEM 34

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FOOTNOTE / *hierachical organization of personal glossary*

Public space

Defined by Don Mitchell as spaces in democratic cities, related back to the Greek *agora*: seen as spaces of 'democracy'. A place of gathering, socializing, trade and politics. In this research looked at critically and redefined, since the nature of public space can change along with the change of democracy and its ownership, and has - even in democratic cities - excluded people in a way.

Pops: privately owned public space

A current issue within London where public spaces are sold to private investors. These spaces are publicly accessible which are provided and maintained by private developers, offices or residential building owners.

Gentrification

A process whereby the character of a poor area is changed by wealthier people moving in, improving housing, and attracting new businesses, often displacing current inhabitants in the process. It often increases the economic value of a neighborhood, but it results in demographic displacement.

Ownership

Seen in this research as the act, state, or right of possessing land. Along with the ownership comes the state of responsibility and accountability of the land. It is often seen the government sells publicly owned land to private investors in order to shift this responsibility and accountability.

Symbiotic relationship

This term is used to describe the interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both. In this case a mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups. This research examines the relationship between the public and private interests and what influences could stimulate a symbiotic relationship such as large scale transport systems or more small scale architectural practices.

Commons

The original meaning of the term 'commons' comes from the way communities managed land that was held 'in common' in medieval Europe. The land was often owned by kings and landlords and along with this shared land came a clear set of rules about how it was to be used.

Thatcherism

This term represents the political ideas and policies of the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, especially the idea that industries and services should be owned by private companies, not by the state.

FOOTNOTE / *hierachical organization of annotated bibliography*

“The London Evolution Animation”, Entopia, published on May 7, 2014. Youtube video, 7:22, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB5Oz9b84jM&ab_channel=entopia

Video showing the expansion of London through history with old road networks.

“Pseudo-public space: explore the map and tell us what we’re missing”, The Guardian, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/24/pseudo-public-space-explore-data-what-missing>

Map showing privately owned public spaces in London.

“Privately Owned Public Spaces”, London Datastore, accessed September 20, 2021, <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/privately-owned-public-spaces>

Dataset of privately owned public spaces in London.

“Who owns England? History of England’s land ownership and how much is privately owned today”, Countryfile, accessed October 8, 2021, <https://www.countryfile.com/news/who-owns-england-history-of-englands-landownership-and-how-much-is-privately-owned-today/>

History of land ownership in England and its shifts from private to public. Around 17% of British land is still not registered who owns the land.

“Selling England (and Wales) by the pound”, Private Eye, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://private-eye.co.uk/registry>

Digital map showing land owned by overseas

companies and foreigners.

“Map of Publicly Owned Land”, Mayor of London, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://apps.london.gov.uk/public-land/>.

Digital map showing publicly owned land in London with multiple layers in different boroughs.

“Who Owns England?”, Who Owns England, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://map.whoownsengland.org/>

Digital map showing major landowners in England.

Jim Edwards, “This map shows you why it’s impossible for ordinary people to buy houses in London”, Insider, accessed October 7, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/london-map-of-property-owned-by-foreigners-2015-9?international=true&r=US&IR=T>



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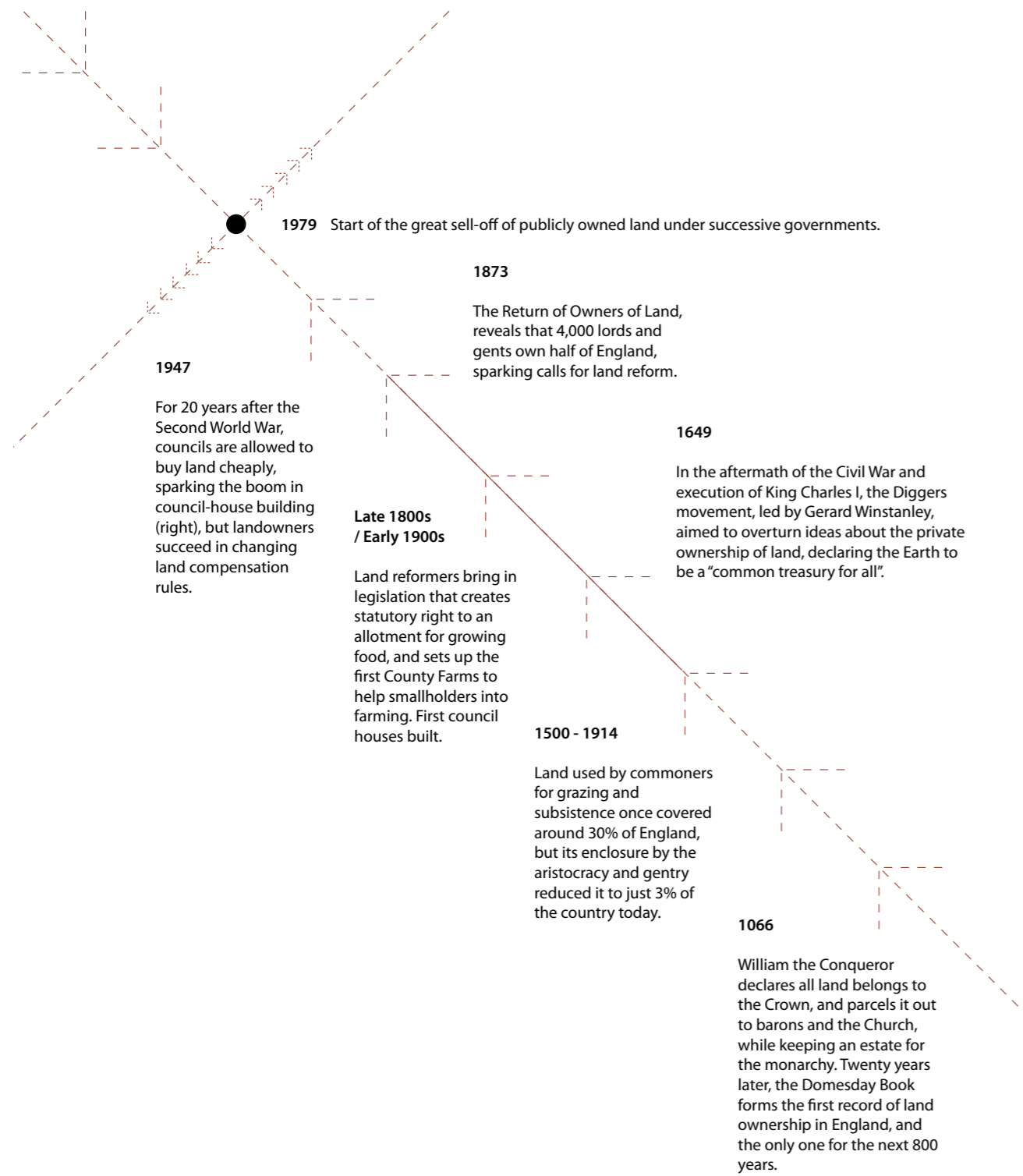
“Who Owns England?”, Who Owns England, accessed October 7, 2021.

“Who owns England? History of England’s land ownership and how much is privately owned today”, Countryfile, accessed October 8, 2021.

“The London Evolution Animation”, En-topia, published on May 7, 2014, Youtube video, 7:22.

“Privately Owned Public Spaces”, London Datastore, accessed September 20, 2021.

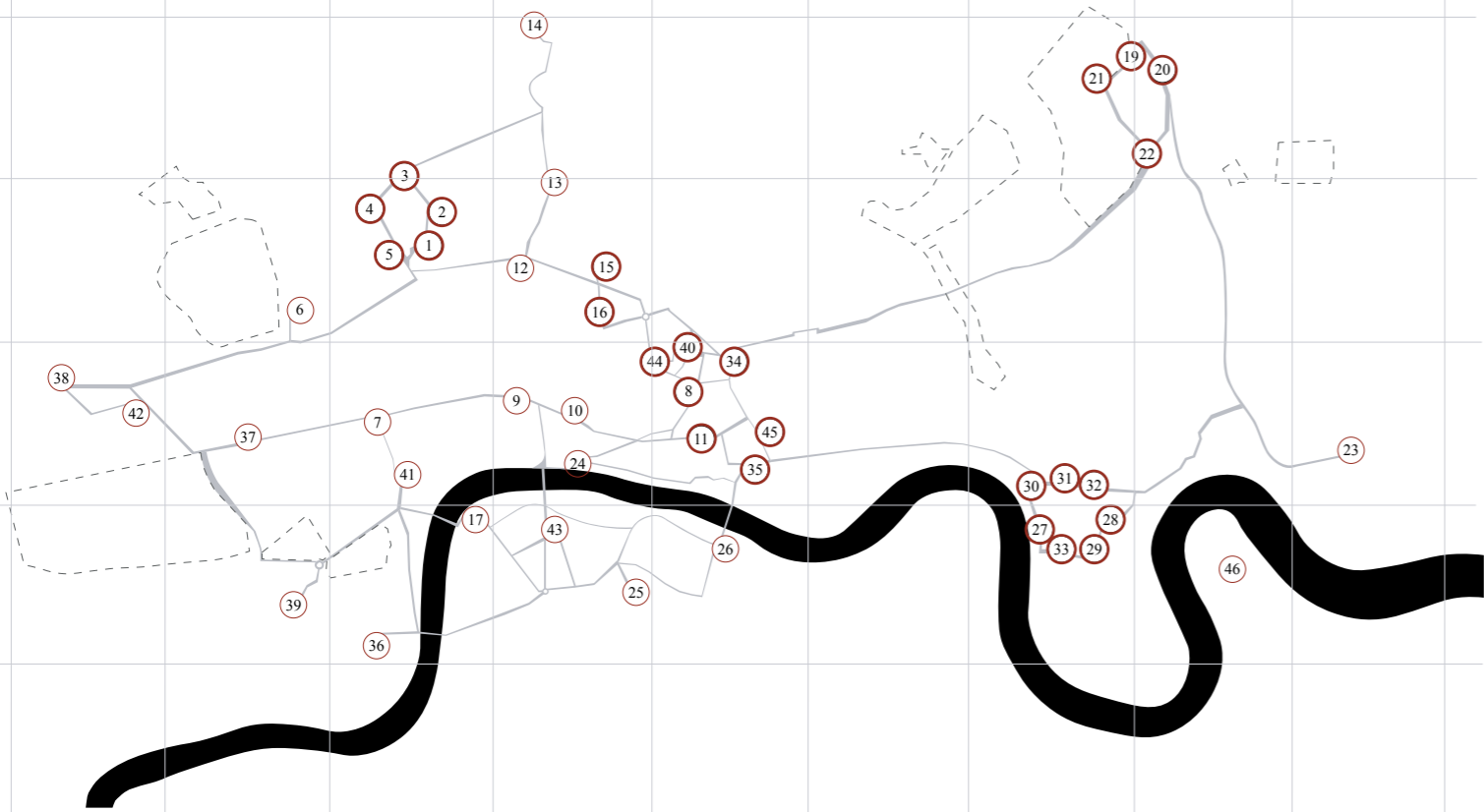
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Used sources

“Who owns England? History of England’s land ownership and how much is privately owned today”, Countryfile, accessed October 8, 2021.

IMAGE BY AUTHOR (LEFT)



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|---|---|
| 1. Granary Square (<i>Camden</i>) | 24. Bankside (<i>Southwark</i>) |
| 2. Wharf Road Gardens (<i>Camden</i>) | 25. Tabard Square (<i>Southwark</i>) |
| 3. Lewis Cubitt Park (<i>Camden</i>) | 26. More London (<i>Southwark</i>) |
| 4. Gasholder Park (<i>Camden</i>) | 27. Cabot Square (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 5. Pancras Square (<i>Camden</i>) | 28. Canada Square Park (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 6. Regents Place (<i>Camden</i>) | 29. Jubilee Park (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 7. Central St Giles (<i>Camden</i>) | 30. Westferry Circus (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 8. Exchange Square (<i>City of London</i>) | 31. West India Quays (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 9. New Street Square (<i>City of London</i>) | 32. Crossrail Place Roof Garden (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 10. Paternoster Square (<i>City of London</i>) | 33. Reuters Plaza (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 11. Open space at Leadenhall Building (<i>City of London</i>) | 34. Bishops Square, Spitalfields (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 12. New River Head (<i>Islington</i>) | 35. St Katherine Dock's Surrounds (<i>Tower Hamlets</i>) |
| 13. Angel-on-the-Green (<i>Islington</i>) | 36. Channel Four Community Garden (<i>Westminster</i>) |
| 14. Arsenal Podium (<i>Islington</i>) | 37. Brown Hart Gardens (<i>Westminster</i>) |
| 15. City Road Basin (<i>Islington</i>) | 38. Paddington Central (<i>Westminster</i>) |
| 16. Pear Tree Street (<i>Islington</i>) | 39. Cardinal Place (<i>Westminster</i>) |
| 17. The London Eye (<i>Lambeth</i>) | 40. Broadgate Plaza (<i>City of London</i>) |
| 18. Merton Mansions Gardens (<i>Merton</i>) | 41. St Martin's Courtyard (<i>Westminster</i>) |
| 19. Victory Park and Portlands (East Village) (<i>Newham</i>) | 42. Merchant Square (<i>Westminster</i>) |
| 20. Mirabelle Gardens (East Village) (<i>Newham</i>) | 43. NEO Bankside (<i>Southwark</i>) |
| 21. Water Glades (East Village) (<i>Newham</i>) | 44. Broadgate Circle and Finsbury Avenue Square (<i>City of London</i>) |
| 22. Westfield Stratfield City (<i>Newham</i>) | |
| 23. Excel Centre (<i>Newham</i>) | |

Used sources

“Pseudo-public space: explore the map and tell us what we’re missing”, *The Guardian*, accessed October 7, 2021.

“Privately Owned Public Spaces”, *London Datastore*, accessed September 20, 2021.

IMAGE BY AUTHOR (LEFT)

3. Lewis Cubitt Park (Camden)



4. Gasholder Park (Camden)

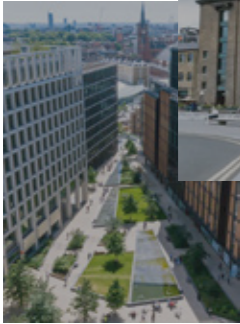


2. Wharf Road Gardens (Camden)

1. Granary Square (Camden)



5. Pancras Square (Camden)



44. Broadgate Circle and Finsbury Avenue Square (City of London)



40. Broadgate Plaza (City of London)



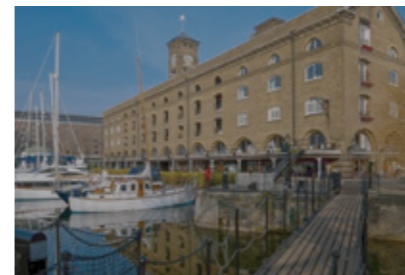
8. Exchange Square (City of London)



34. Bishops Square, Spitalfields (Tower Hamlets)



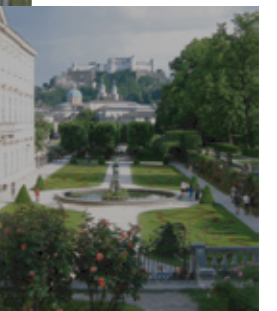
11. Open Space at Leadenhall Building, Leadenhall St (City of London)



35. St Katherine Dock's Surrounds (Tower Hamlets)



19. Victory Park (East Village) (Newham)

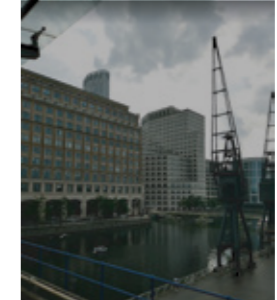


20. Mirabelle Gardens (East Village)



22. Westfield Stratfield City (Newham)

31. West India Quays (Tower Hamlets)



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30. Westferry Circus (Tower Hamlets)



28. Canada Square Park (Tower Hamlets)



27. Cabot Square (Tower Hamlets)



33. Reuters Plaza (Tower Hamlets)



29. Jubilee Park (Tower Hamlets)

Used sources

The photographs are obtained from Google and presented in a collage, according to the configuration of privately owned public spaces as shown on page 30 in this appendix.

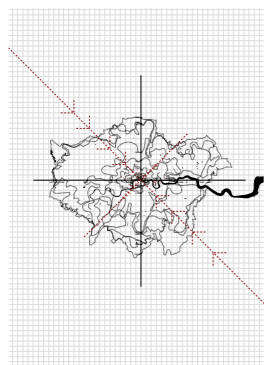
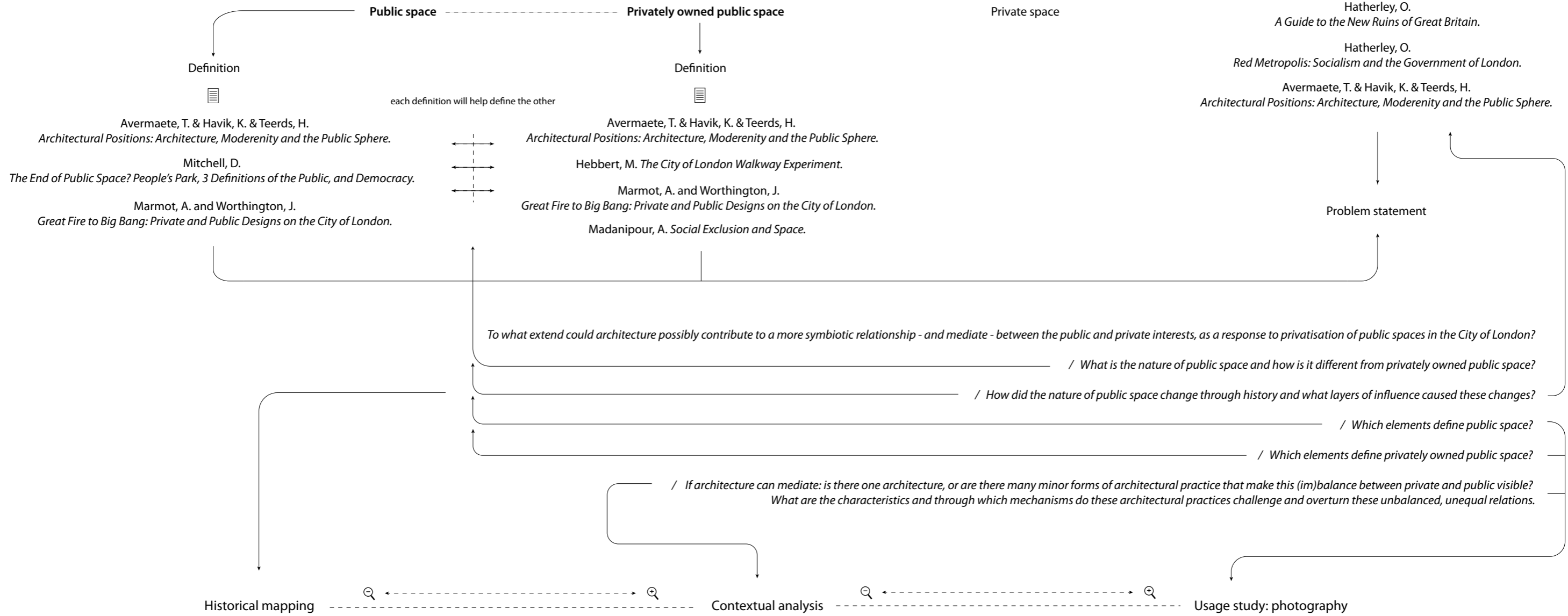
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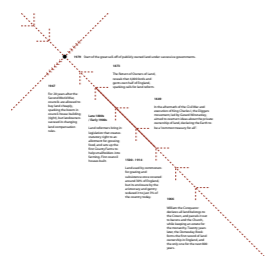


CHANGING NATURE OF PUBLIC SPACE

Political, social and economic context



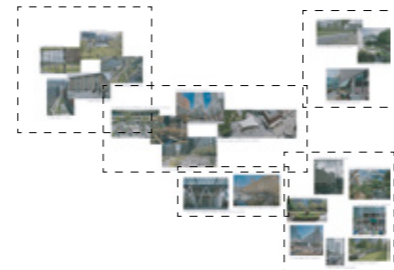
1 Expansion, pops 2021, land ownership through history



2 Inventory pops 2021, Source: The Guardian

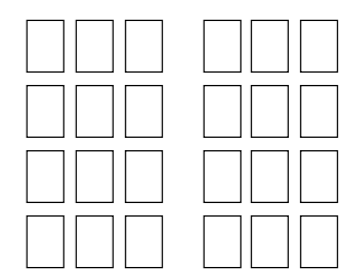


3 Inventory pops 2021: zoom in on hubs of 'pops'



4 Spatial analysis hubs of 'pops': to find possible connectivity with larger systems

Side steps: constantly zoom in



5 Catalogue of private / public spatial dimensions

DESIGN PROJECT

