

Moulding the Melting Pot

Learning from the success of everyday intercultural nodes within dynamic immigrant communities

immigrants;
intercultural;
commercial spaces;
occupant adaptation;
melting-pot

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Key Words

immigrants	someone who has moved to a new country, with the hope of permanently residing there. The idea of settling somewhere where you were previously a foreigner
contact zones	places where people can meet others from different social or economic backgrounds
intercultural	where different cultures meet, rather than simply co-exist
occupant adaptation	how end-users of the built environment modify spaces to suit their needs, without architectural involvement
melting-pot	spaces praised for the harmonious mixture of people from many different backgrounds, in which new hybrid ideas and identity are formed collectively

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Fascination

Ethno-scape - a landscape composed of populations of different nationalities, influenced by their heterogeneous backgrounds

Growing up in London, Zurich and New York City, I have become fascinated in the concept of ethnic enclaves: how newcomers bring the influence of their home environment into new environments to form hybrid **ethno-scapes**.

In previous studio projects I have taken a problem-solving approach to these situations, aiming to facilitate integration and cultural exchange through the creation of new community centres and housing schemes. However, when working with such complex sociological processes, I have always felt uneasy with the imposing role of an architect. Within this research I hope to interrogate the relationship and forms of knowledge exchange between architect and user: in these dynamic, reactive settings, architects can learn from the bottom-up occupant-led approaches that have created the melting pots that we see today.

Figure 1



Multicultural commercial premises on Brick Lane, London

The Arrival City

If given the opportunity, **immigrants** can be catalysts for urban change. People migrate in search of a better life, or to escape economic, political, or environmental hardships. These relocations are increasingly international, with 281 million people living outside of their birth-country in 2020, which is triple that of 1970 (UN Migration, 2022). As migration flows increase exponentially, so has xenophobia, with the media tending to focus on the problems that emerge when foreign-born immigrants arrive, or the external help required to facilitate the assimilation deemed necessary.

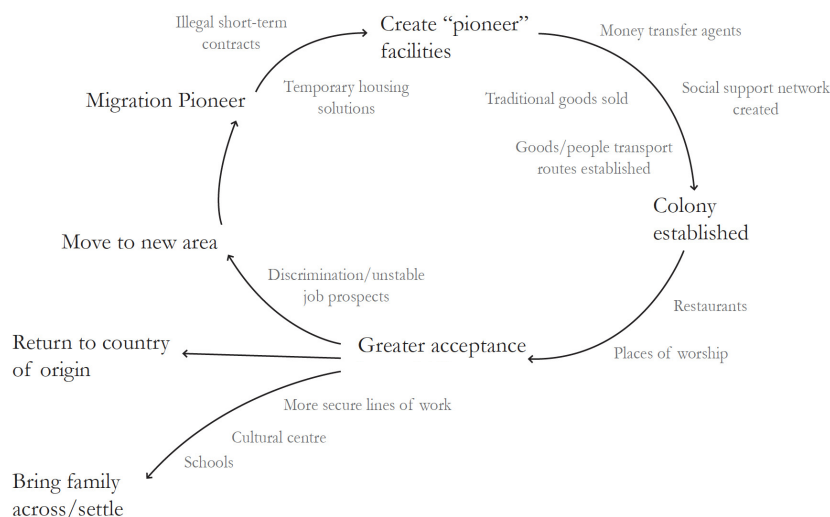
However, Doug Saunders' formative book *Arrival City* highlights the potential of these driven newcomers. He introduces the concept of the "arrival city", a **melting-pot** area where immigrants are concentrated, whose qualities can pre-determine an inhabitant's success. For Saunders, an effective arrival city can stimulate vitality across the whole region, and so is a force to be reckoned with (Saunders, 2010). To ensure a successful arrival city, immigrants need ways to transition into mainstream society: for example, by meeting their economic potential and finding a secure home, without facing barriers like discrimination (Saunders, 2010). Failed arrival cities can become exclusionary poverty traps, which many label as '**ghettos**', where immigrant groups are unable to access opportunities beyond their small homogeneous bubble.

Immigrant – someone who has moved to a new country, with the hope of permanently residing there. The idea of settling somewhere where you were previously a foreigner (Merriam-Webster, 2023). For the purposes of this text, immigrant will mean 'foreign-born' (i.e. they have moved internationally in the course of their life-time), rather than those who are second or third-generation migrants, or those that have relocated within the country.

Melting pot – "a place where many different people and ideas exist together, often mixing and producing something new" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023).

Ghetto - "an area of a city, especially a very poor area, where people of a particular race or religion live closely together and apart from other people" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023)

Figure 2



Early formation of an arrival city

Figure 3



The spatial manifestation of immigrant networks in cities

Research Statement

This research paper will investigate how to 'mould the melting pot', to understand why some Arrival Cities successfully facilitate social mobility, when others fail. Previous studies have demonstrated how quotidian contact between different ethnic groups can prevent segregated enclaves (i.e. failed 'arrival cities') from forming (Amin, 2008; Back & Sinha, 2018) and yet strategies incorporating this tend to remain in the realm of social policy rather than spatial design (Ganji & Rishbeth, 2020). Therefore, the focus of this paper will be on the **intercultural** spaces that support successful immigrant neighbourhoods.

Intercultural - "taking place between cultures, or derived from different cultures." (Oxford Languages, 2023)

When architects try to work with intercultural exchange processes the resulting schemes often simplify the existing situation, and impose "multicultural marketplaces" or "international community centres" where they assume diverse inhabitants will meet and mingle, with no guaranteed success. This connects to the tendency of urbanists to look for problems in the existing cityscape to solve with new blockbuster interventions, rather than learning from the current successes of European melting pots. Therefore this paper will explore the pre-existing backbones of these melting pot neighbourhoods: the community-led nodal social spaces, where convivial intercultural exchange already naturally occurs.

After moving to cheaper neighbourhoods of cities, migrants re-appropriate found, unwanted spaces to suit their needs, working over the top of any formally designed space (Figure 4). Any resulting successful inner-city intercultural nodes (such as shops, cafes and sports fields) can therefore demonstrate power of non-architectural agents in cityscapes. These palimpsestic user-defined adaptations of space may be key to understanding the formation of successful melting pots. Therefore, to understand how to 'Mould a Melting Pot' this thesis will take a bottom-up approach, inverting the traditional knowledge exchange between architect and end-user.

Inclusive - "including everything or all types of people" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023)

Self-supporting - having the resources to be able to survive without outside assistance (Oxford Languages, 2023)

To do so, the thesis will examine:

Q0 - Which factors determine the success of everyday melting-pot spaces as intercultural nodes, and where can these be improved to generate **inclusive, self-supporting** newcomer neighbourhoods?

Q1 - What defines a successful melting pot, and to what extent does Lavapies fit this definition?

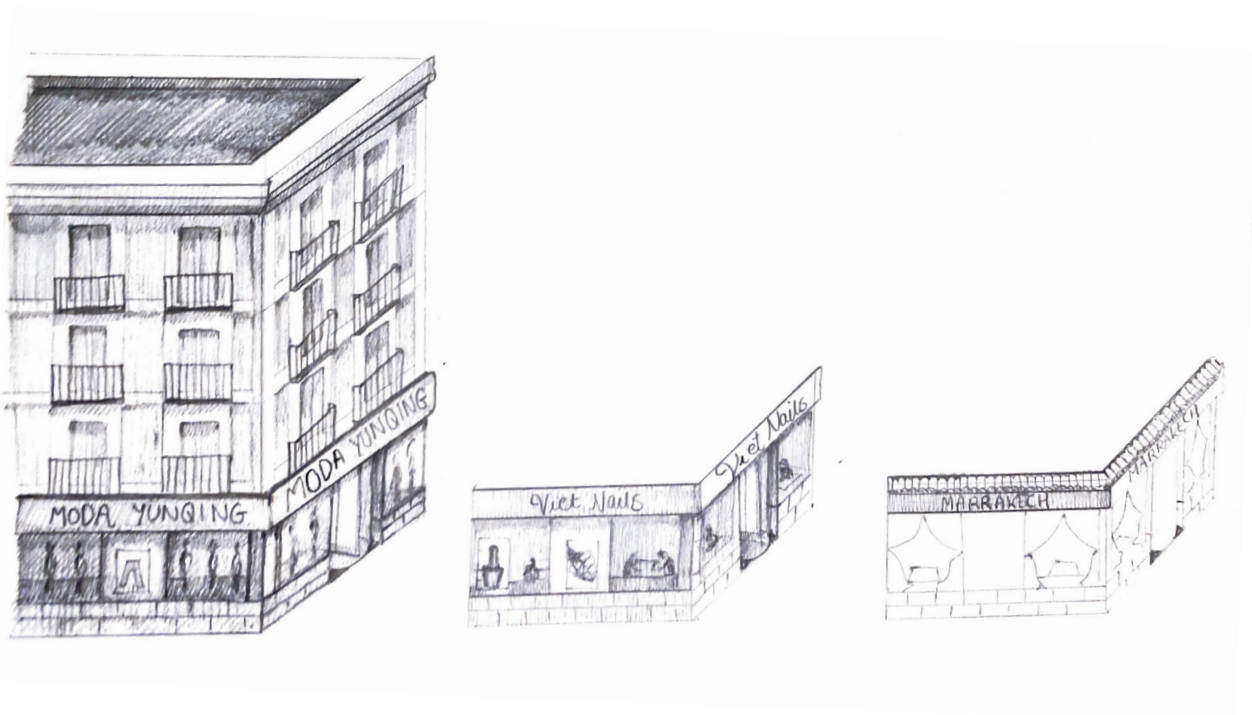
Q2 - Where does intercultural exchange currently occur within the neighbourhood?

Q3 - Why are these places successful intercultural nodes? What role do they play within the neighbourhood?

Q4 - How and why have these intercultural nodes been adapted to suit their specific needs?

Q5 - Where and how can these lessons be applied in an architectural intervention to generate more inclusive, self-supporting neighbourhoods?

Figure 4



The commercial adaptations of found space

Learning from users

Within the built environment there is currently a binary between architect and end-user. Architects tended to add polished, final products into the built environment, and expect occupants to use designs as planned. Historically, the user-adaptation of buildings to suit their needs has been seen by academics as ruining designed spaces (Hill, 1998), rather than enriching them. This school of thought connects into notions of “**high-architecture**” and “**low-architecture**”, in which the more everyday occupant-adapted architecture is deemed less-worthy of appreciation than the designs of starchitects. Architects Brown and Venturi’s *Learning from Las Vegas* drew attention to this phenomenon in their famous visual analysis of the commercial Las Vegas strip, arguing for the value of the popular architecture, that many daily users appreciate even more than more prestigious architectural designs (Brown & Venturi, 1972).

To learn how everyday users would like their built environment to appear, designers are beginning to incorporate **participatory design** processes, but often this technique is only intermittently used amongst more socially oriented practices (Luck, 2018). Practices are also starting to use **post-occupancy evaluations** (POE) to test whether the user is satisfied with their designs. However, POE are mainly used as a tick-box exercise by select architects; value has not yet been widely placed on the end-users’ inhabitation of the building (RIBA, 2020). By learning from the bottom-up ad-hoc work of non-architects, designers may be able to learn more about what the end-users prefer. Therefore by exploring immigrant-led adaptations in everyday intercultural spaces, this research will unveil what inhabitants require within them.

High-architecture - taken to mean prestigious buildings, historically studied in architecture schools and architectural magazines (e.g. museums)

Low-architecture - taken to mean everyday spaces, like supermarkets, which are used on a daily basis by city-dwellers, but are not typically studied in architectural literature

Participatory design – “a collaborative design approach that involves end-users in the design process” (Interactive Design Foundation, 2023)

Post-occupancy evaluations - user surveys conducted by architects a few years after hand-over, to understand whether a building performs as expected (both technically and socially)

Postcolonialism

As an outsider, from the UK, I must continue to reflect on how the post-colonial lens is affecting my work, to ensure that I do not perpetuate any toxic, discriminatory perceptions within my research. Postcolonialism is the understanding of how inhabitants of former colonies are still perceived as inferior and fundamentally different from those of their Western colonisers (such as Spain or the UK) (Said, 1978).

Post-colonialism may also guide whether a newcomer has the necessary socio-cultural capital in their new Western European setting. Due to post-colonial related discrimination, an immigrant's 'cultural capital' (skills, education, traits, and behaviour connected to their social class) may not be so desirable in their new situation, and so they may miss openings, such as employment. 'Social capital' can be understood to mean knowing the people necessary to receive opportunities (Bourdieu and Richardson, 1986). Upon relocating, an immigrant has been uprooted from their previous network, and the disconnect from others in their host city would result in their 'social capital' holding them back from achieving their economic potential (Alba and Nee, 2003; Saunders, 2010; Miampika and Vinuesa, 2009). Scholars such as AbdouMaliq Simone have used these theories to understand the formation of ghettos in cities, as immigrants lack the socio-cultural capital necessary for social mobility (Simone, 2004). Therefore, when evaluating the success of intercultural nodes, it is important to consider their influence on a user's socio-cultural capital.

Space of Thirding

To reduce the sense of 'otherness', immigrants need ways to connect with mainstream society, and vice versa. This may be through the social support infrastructure of schools, churches, youth clubs, bars, and cultural centres, through which they can access the informal contacts necessary to provide opportunities.

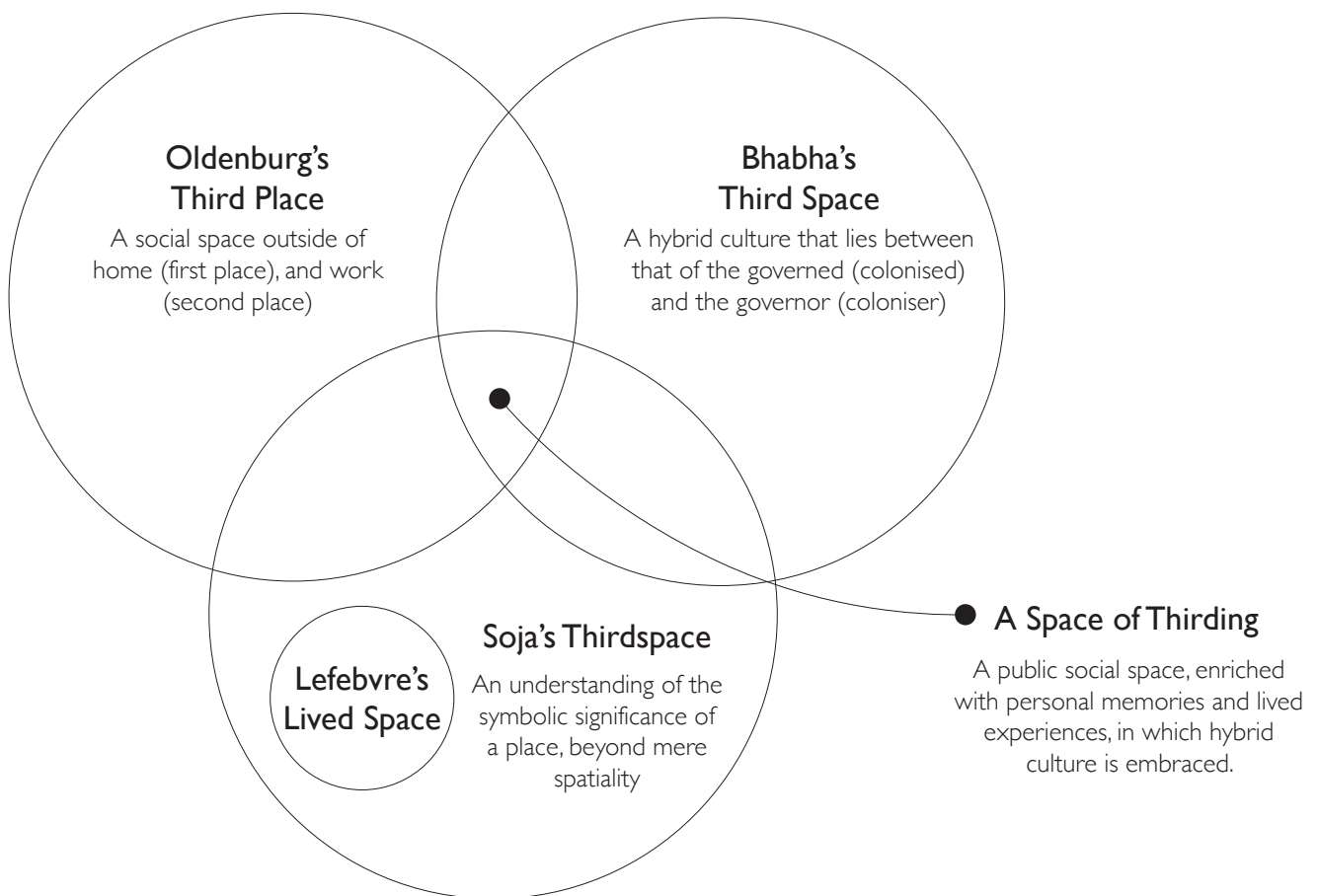
These establishments align closely with Oldenburg's notion of *Third Place*: a free or low-cost social space beyond the home or workplace (Oldenburg, 1999). Immigrants that can access high-quality third places can build social and cultural connections to the 'host' community and maintain cultural identity and a sense of familiarity (Zhuang and Lok, 2023). However, Oldenburg's definition is mainly pragmatic: if a space is accessible by the public and can host social interactions, it can be defined as Third Place, no matter its spatial characteristics. Therefore, an architect can theoretically achieve Third Place simply with their choice of programme.

Therefore, other theories of 'Third-ing' are of more relevance here. Soja's *Thirdspace* recognises an understanding of a place that goes beyond mere spatiality, incorporating memories and spiritual significance (Soja, 1996). He builds upon Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, in which the French philosopher argues that there is a gap in knowledge about the lived experiences of space, where theoretical concepts of space remain too abstract and mathematical, cartesian ideas remain too literal (Lefebvre, 1974). For example, considering how everyday experiences layer over material realities to transform perceptions of a house into a home.

Bhabha's *Third Space* is not typically a physical location: he writes about the dynamism of cultural identity, and about the hybrid cultures formed when diverse minorities meet and adapt to new situations (Bhabha, 2004). Nevertheless, his theories can be translated into architectural analysis when observing how newcomers adapt found spaces designed by powerful within the host society (e.g. bureaucratic planners) to suit their new transnational identities.

Whilst these theories of Third Space are not typically read together, it is important to consider each when concerning social spaces within dynamic immigrant communities (see Figure 5). In their intersection is a 'Space of Thirthing', a social space where every-day immigrant experiences have enriched and hybridised found space, to suit their intercultural context.

Figure 5



Understanding various Third Space and Place Theories

Theoretical Framework

Migration

Migratory flows

Alba, R. D., & Nee, V. (2003).
Remaking the American mainstream: Assimilation and contemporary immigration

Hollifield, J. F. et al (2022).
Controlling immigration: A comparative perspective

Migration Policy

Post colonial

Steinberg, A. Z. (2014).
Preserving, planning, and promoting the Lower East Side: The conflicted role of the Tenement Museum in New York's premier immigrant enclave

Bourdieu, P., & Richardson, J. G. (1986).
Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education.

Social infrastructure

Saiz de Lobado, E. (2021).
Immigration's Identity Construction in Madrid's Landscape: Lavapiés and San Diego

Ethnic-minority Enterprises

Vathi, Z.
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Infrastru

Zhuang, Z. C. (2015).
Construction and reconstruction of ethnicity in retail landscapes: Case studies in the Toronto area

Simone, A. (2004).
People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg.

Bhabha, H. (2004)
The Location of Culture

Hybrid culture

Sp
T

Soja, E. W. (1996).
Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places

Belonging

Top-down Bottom-up

Critical heritage

Jacobs, J. M. (1996).
Edge of empire:
Postcolonialism and the city

Schmiz, A. (2017).
Staging a 'Chinatown' in Berlin: The
role of city branding in the urban
governance of ethnic diversity

Davison, G. T. (2013).
Place-making or place-claiming?
Creating a 'Latino Quarter' in
Oakland, California.

Gentrification

& Burrell, K. (2022)
ing Some, Displacing
rs: Ethnic Minority
ses as Critical Urban
cture in Lodge Lane,
Liverpool,

Participatory Placemaking

Zhuang, Z. C. (2019).
Ethnic entrepreneurship and
placemaking in Toronto's ethnic
retail neighbourhoods.

Wood, J. (1997).
Vietnamese American place
making in northern Virginia

Fallon, K. (2008).
Architecture in action: Traveling with
actor-network theory in the land of
architectural research

Brown, S., & Venturi, I. (1972).
Learning from Las Vegas

Zhuang, Z. C., & Lok, R. T. (2023).
Exploring the wellbeing of migrants
in third places: An empirical study of
smaller Canadian cities

Oldenburg, R. (1999).
The great good place. [...]

Everyday Vernacular

Loukaitou-Sideris, A. (2002).
Regeneration of urban commercial
strips: Ethnicity and space in three Los
Angeles neighborhoods

Lefebvre, H. (1991).
The Production of Space

Adaptive Re-use

Davis, T. (1997).
The Miracle Mile Revisited: Recycling,
Renovation, and Simulation along the
Commercial Strip

Space of chirding

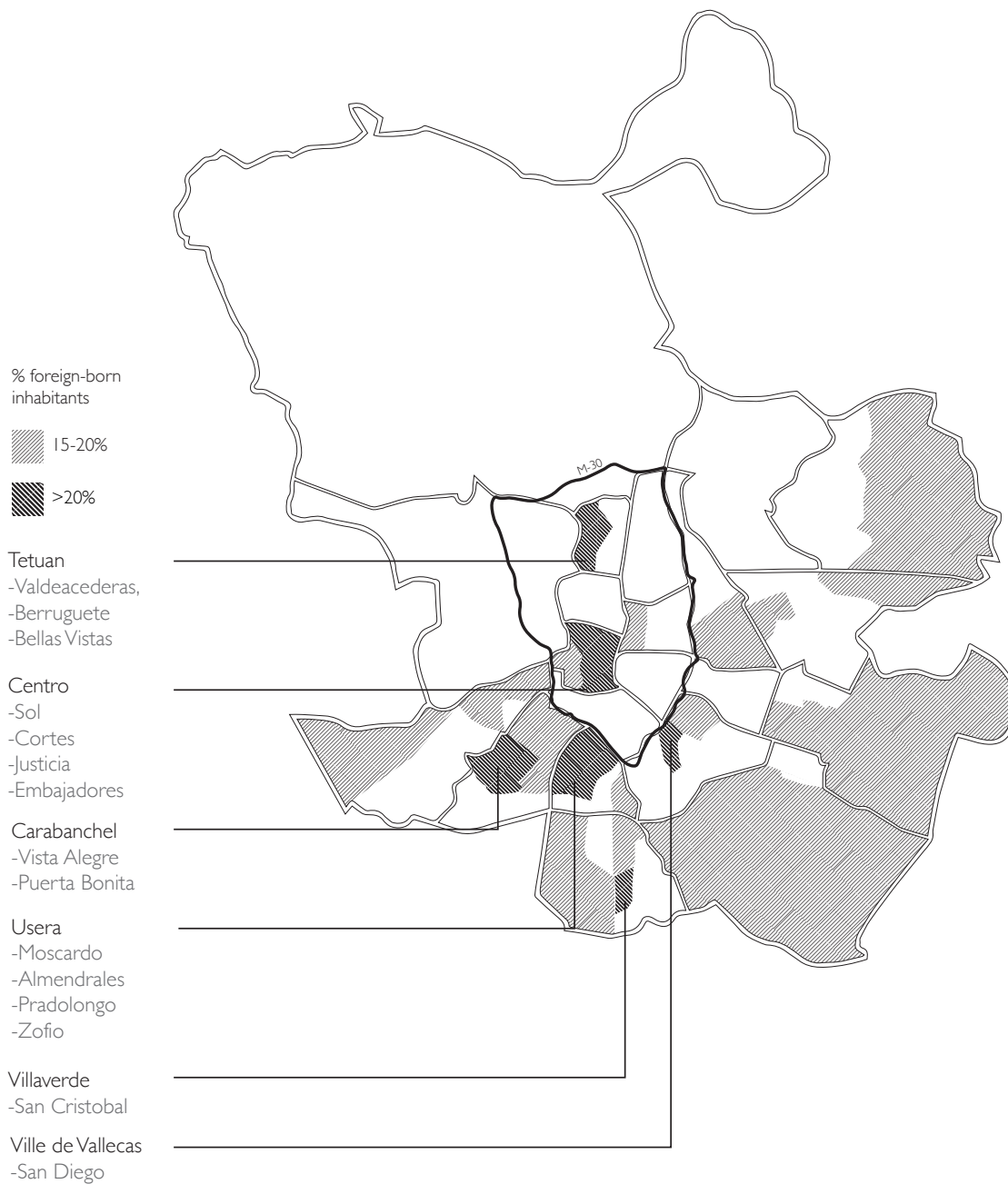
Relevance

When considering European 'melting pots', one may think of London's Brick Lane or Brussels' Schaerbeek, long before any neighbourhood in Madrid. However, Madrid is a worthy site of investigation, as it is rapidly transforming into a much more diverse, international capital, and yet the role of immigrants within the city is still undervalued.

Since the fall of the Franco dictatorship in the late 20th Century, international migration flows into Spain and its capital city have increased drastically. In the city currently, there are almost one million foreign-born residents (Statista, 2023), with some neighbourhoods comprising almost 40% foreigners (Saiz de Lobado, 2021), comparable levels to these other famous European multicultural communities. These diverse areas are at risk of erasure or further exclusion, as top-down schemes prioritise speculation, assimilation and touristification, over working with the complex, inhabitant-led networks found there. As more and more immigrants move into Madrid, architects risk continuing to simplify and overrule the complicated social infrastructure that they will have to work within. This research hopes to demonstrate the power of immigrants as catalysts for change, to encourage designers to learn from, rather than ignore, it.

Working in this area as a researcher may pose similar problems to working there as an architect. Given my architectural training, I am prone to seeking problems to fix with interventions. I hope that by actively seeking out bottom-up 'success stories' within the neighbourhood, I will challenge this way of thinking to become a more open-minded architect. By using sociological techniques in this research, I aim to interrogate the researcher-participant divide and ultimately learn how to use similar methods to reduce the architect-user binary, enriching my designs with this bottom-up approach.

Figure 6



Concentrations of foreign-born inhabitants in Madrid, 2018

Methodology

My research revolves around the inclusion of ever-changing marginalised immigrant establishments in the urban realm, and thus it must involve a mixed methods approach, combining 'top-down' information (such as census data and OS maps) and 'bottom-up data' data to uncover layers of unrepresented narratives.

Literature research:

Given the theme's sociological rather than architectural grounding, I used literature reviews with a sociology focus to build an understanding of potential thematic problem areas within immigrant enclaves. This initial work has also informed my choice of methodology throughout the research plan.

Due to the difficulty of accessing participants for my ethnographically-driven methods, I have used Madrid-based academic texts, online forums and newspaper articles to establish key spokespersons connected to the communities in question (e.g. journalists, charity workers). I have begun to broach contact with them online, to provide an entry-point for the site (Figure 7). Given the short time that I can spend in Madrid, it is crucial to use these connections to focus my research on site.

Given the importance of the contested term 'melting-pot' to my research, I also aim to use a literature review of dictionary definitions and sociology papers to establish my own understanding of a successful 'melting-pot'.

Selective and demographic mapping:

Thus far, I have overlaid historic densities of foreign-born inhabitants with sites of immigrant commerce (i.e. immigrant owned supermarkets, shops and restaurants) to visually identify more established densities of immigrants (as per Figure 2). Through this I have identified Lavapies as my primary location of investigation (Figure 8). To ensure feasibility of the study, I will use pre-existing demographic cartography (Figure 9). to find more specific locations within Lavapies where I can

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Q2 - Where does intercultural exchange currently occur within the neighbourhood?

Q3 - Why are these places successful intercultural nodes? What role do they play within the neighbourhood?

Q4 - How and why have these intercultural nodes been adapted to suit their specific needs?

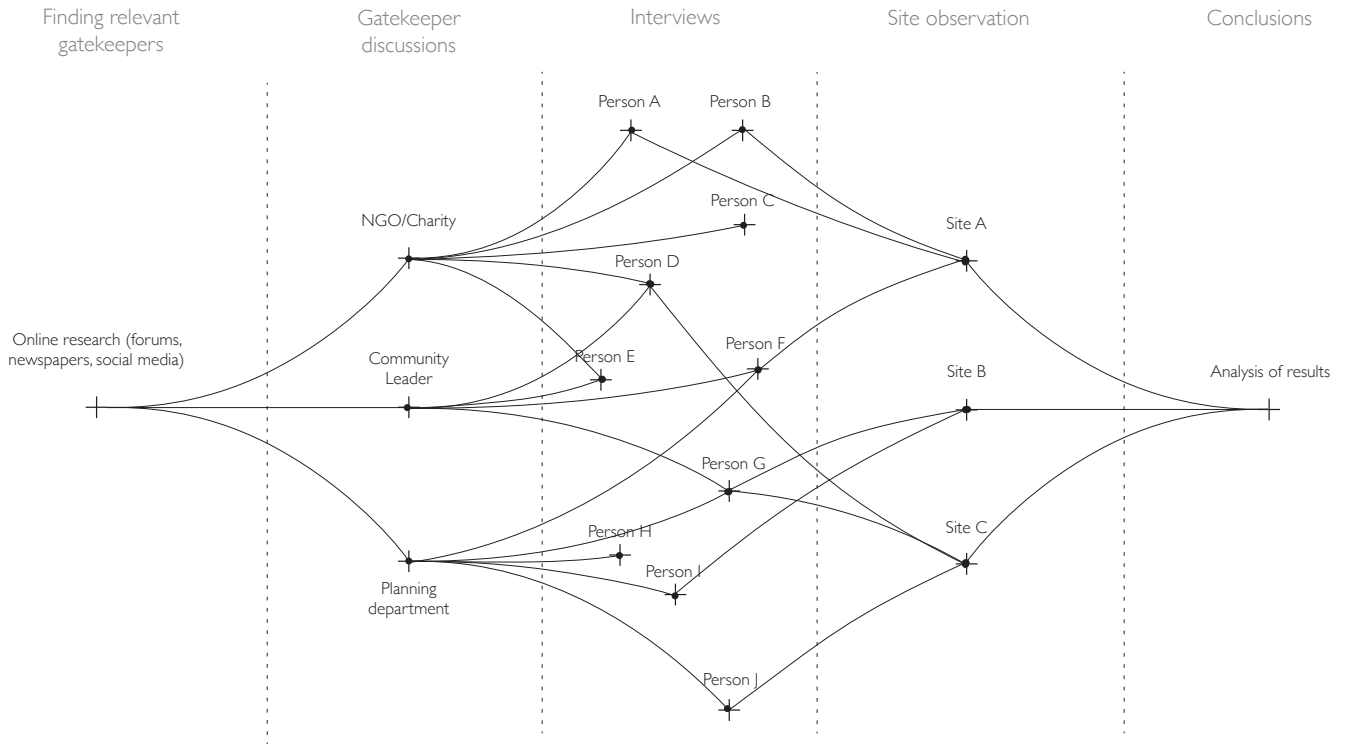
Q5 - Where and how can these lessons be applied in an architectural intervention to generate more inclusive, self-supporting neighbourhoods?

Q.2

Q.1

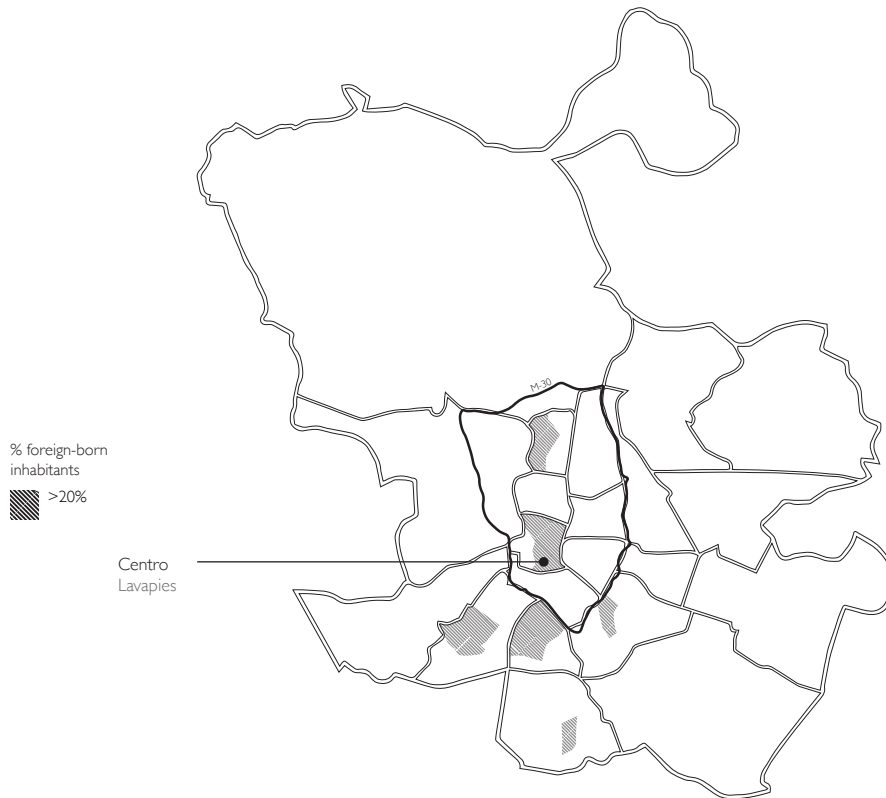
Q.1-2

Figure 7



Use of “Gate-keeper” discussions to identify important nodal points

Figure 8



Site of investigation

conduct my phenomenological research. By exploring the boundary conditions between different ethnic concentrations, I may be more likely to find intercultural contact zones.

Later on in the research process, I will also eventually map the spatial and social characteristics necessary for successful intercultural nodes, to identify locations of intervention.

Q.5

Phenomenological surveys:

Phenomenology is more relevant than ethnography in this research approach, due to the time limitations and my emphasis on individual, subjective lived experiences, rather than those of the entire community.

To understand which everyday nodes are most important in the creation of intercultural newcomer networks, I need to conduct in-person phenomenological surveys of public space users of the selected neighbourhoods. To broach the language barriers within these multicultural communities, I have chosen to use collective mapping (as used in Figure 10). Using paper maps, with printed instructions in various languages, I will ask users of public spaces in the neighbourhoods in question to pin-point the social spaces that facilitated a sense of belonging and new connections upon their first arrival into the neighbourhood.

Q.2-3

By using participant-based mapping, I can spatially locate data, and gain the perspectives of lived experiences that traditional cartography conceals. To provide a semblance of control, the survey will be repeated at varying times on different days during the fieldwork phase (to capture a greater population base). Given the limitations of this approach (e.g. time limitations and language barriers), the emphasis will be on learning deeply about the lived experiences of select individuals, rather than attempting to cover the preferences of the whole community. The research will be triangulated using literature reviews (of previous sociological research on this theme), and deeper in-depth structured interviews with the key spokespersons, wherever possible.

Figure 9



Ethnic concentrations within Lavapiés

Figure 10



Using push-pins in an collaborative emotional mapping exercise

From this, I hope to narrow down three specific sites of investigation to assess the role that they play within their neighbourhoods. To avoid interfering with daily life and disturbing patterns, I will use passive observation to examine how these three sites are used, and by whom (e.g. a place for neighbours to meet, or tourists to experience new products), using hand-drawing where possible to record this (see Figure 11). If feasible despite the language barrier, I hope to begin more active observation and begin semi-structured interviews with the users of the space, to delve deeper into their experiences of the premises.

Q.3

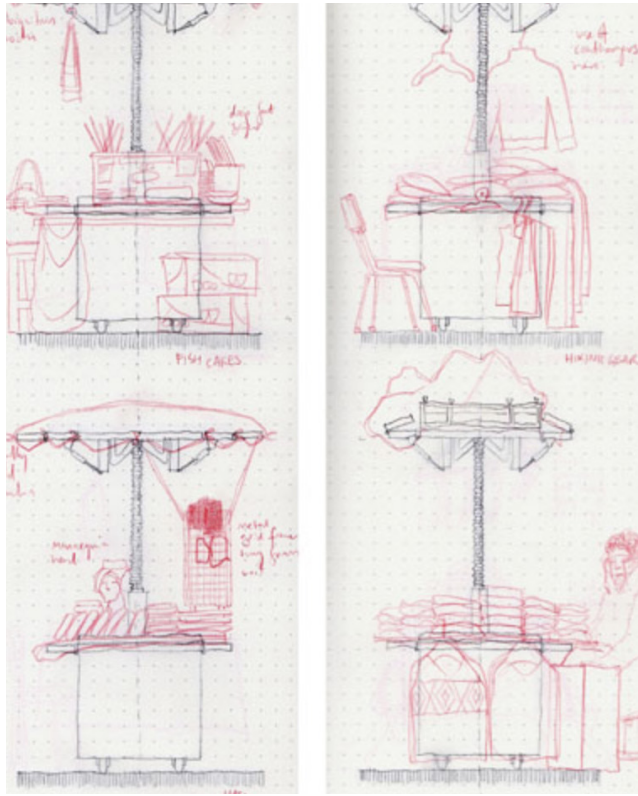
Morphological analysis:

To gain an understanding of how these spaces have been adapted to suit their current use, I will begin morphological analysis on site, by digitally photographing the interior adaptations that facilitate the current use. If photography appears too intrusive in a given site, or the incorrect tool to represent each space's complexity, I will use annotated hand drawings instead (which may also open up more conversations and collaborative documentation) (Figure 12).

Q.4

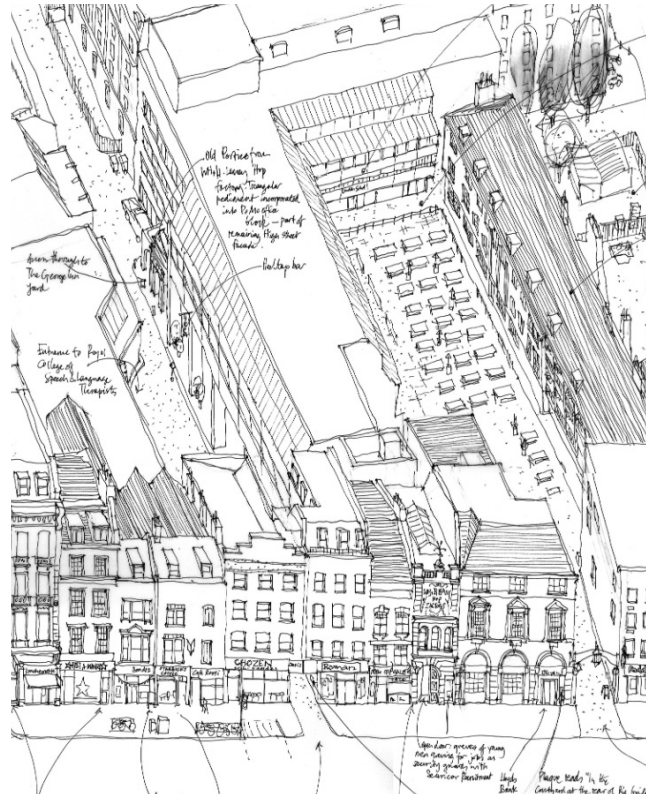
Once I have returned to the Netherlands, I will triangulate my data and gain a temporal perspective, by visually comparing these photographs to historic Google Street view images (Figure 12), archival and planning documents, and historic photographs. This methodology is much more spatial, connecting the observed social behaviour to material characteristics, to achieve outputs worthy of architectural study.

Figure 11



Hand-drawing as an anthropological surveying tool

Figure 12



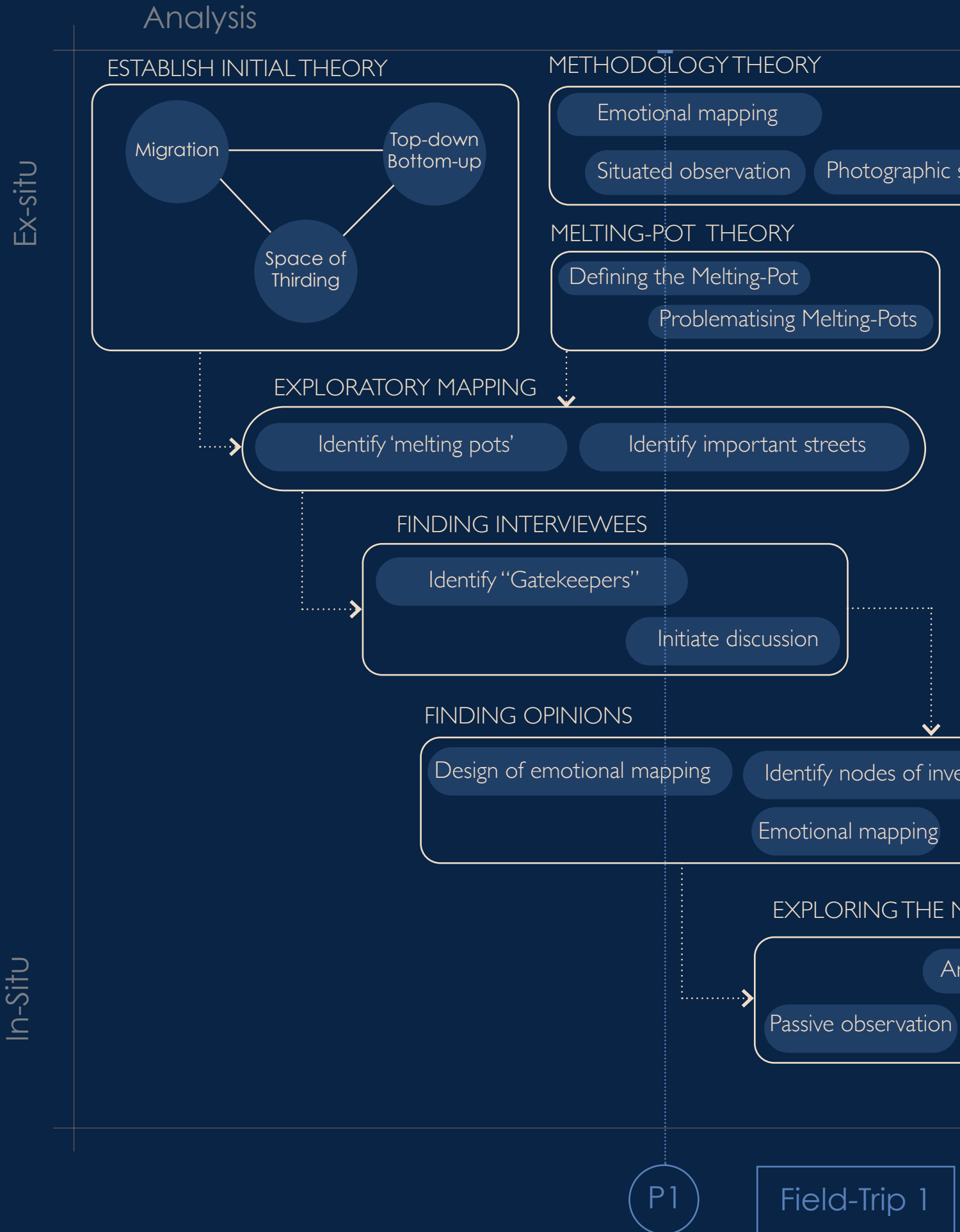
Hand-drawing to represent and annotate use of space

Figure 13



Analysing the changing shop-fronts of Lavapiés using Google Street View

Research Planning



Design



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Figure 2: By Author

Figure 3: By Author

Figure 4: By Author

Figure 5: By Author

Figure 6: By Author, based on data from: Comunidad de Madrid. (2018). *INFORME DE POBLACIÓN EXTRANJERA EMPADRONADA EN LA COMUNIDAD DE MADRID*. https://www.comunidad.madrid/sites/default/files/informe_de_poblacion_enero_2018_definitivo.pdf

Figure 7: By Author

Figure 8: By Author

Figure 9: Carretero, N. (2013, October 16). *Lavapiés, el barrio laboratorio*. <https://www.yorokobu.es/lavapiés/>

Figure 10: Pánek, J. (2018). *Emotional Maps: Participatory Crowdsourcing of Citizens' Perceptions of Their Urban Environment*. *Cartographic Perspectives*, 91, Article 91. <https://doi.org/10.14714/CP91.1419>

Figure 11: Raymond. (2014). *Extracts from a Graphic Anthropology / Raymond Lucas | Describing Architecture*. <http://www.describingarchitecture.com/portfolio/extracts-from-a-graphic-anthropology-raymond-lucas/>

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Figure 13: By Author, using images from Google Street View