

Research Plan

On The Edge

- A study into social integration within community boundaries

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1. Introduction

In recent years, London has gradually become the most diverse city in the world in terms of ethnicity. People coming from different backgrounds have been forming their own communities in different neighborhoods of London, the significant ones include Bangladeshi community in whitechapel, Jamacans community in Brixton, Arab community in Edgware Road.¹ Visible or Invisible boundaries were formed on the edge of these communities. However, the edges are formed not only by the difference of ethnicity, but also the economic status.

The Gentrification process of London was caused by the growth of business opportunities and population. On one hand, Gentrification has led to the increase of hygiene and quality of life, on the other hand, the rising cost of

living that comes with its process has pushed locals out of the city center, or has led to the loss of identities of certain communities.²

During the modernization process, the expansion of desirable areas for commercial buildings in central London has led to the segregation of economy buildings between their surrounding neighborhoods. In areas like Tower Hamlets or Hounslow, a phenomenon that occurred with gentrification is the 'commuter's effect'.³ The concept of 'commuter's effect' describes a certain area with high production but relatively low income, which is interesting to me because it indicates people who work in this area commute to their work from somewhere else instead of living in the same area, and residence of this area is more deprived than the workers who commute there.⁴ Therefore I am fascinated by the

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interactions between people who work in these high rise commercial buildings and the local people living in the communities around them.

What's also interesting to me is the contrast between the morphology of a commercial area and the residential area around them. In historic London, the height of buildings used to represent the symbol of control, for example the religious control represented by the church towers, resulted from their symbolic positions in the urban fabric and the city's skyline. Nowadays, with the high rise buildings housing financial companies, private apartments, the control of the city's skyscraper has shifted to capitalism. How will the big contrast of building height and footprints change people's behavior in the city? Therefore, it's necessary to study urban morphology of these edges between new developments and pre-existing communities to find the inner connection between human behavior and urban environment.

Problem Statement

Social Segregation caused by boundaries between new developments and existing communities has led to severe gaps between different groups of people. These gaps include but are not limited to their income, their sense of identity and their perspective of the city.

The idea of a border is where different groups meet, and it should be an active zone of exchange for both ideas and products.⁵ The centralized development of communities should be avoided, instead, resources should be located on the edge between communities to open gates between different racial and economic groups, in order to improve social sustainability.⁶

1. Coates, Sarah. "Population Estimates by thnic Group and Religion, England and Wales." Office for National Statistics, 16 Dec. 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/populationestimatesbyethnicgroupandreligionenglandandwales/2019>. Accessed 3 Oct. 2022.

2. "Gentrification." National Geographic Society, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/gentrification>. Accessed 4 Oct. 2022.

3. What Are the Regional Differences in Income and Productivity? <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc1370/>. Accessed 4 Oct. 2022.

4. Ibid.

5. Sennett, Pablo Sendra, Richard, and Richard Sennett. *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City*. Verso Books, 2022.

6. Ibid.

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Figure.1 Photography - Whitechapple area, London

2. Research Questions/ sub-Questions

What are the urban **morphologies** of these spatial boundaries?

1. Where are these spatial boundaries located?
2. What are the functions located on the spatial boundaries between new developments and existing communities?
3. When and why did the new developments occur?

What's the **psychological** impact on people due to the big contrast of urban fabric between different communities?

1. What's the element that influences the urban fabric's relevance to social segregation or any other human behavior?
2. Why is it important to link people from different communities together?

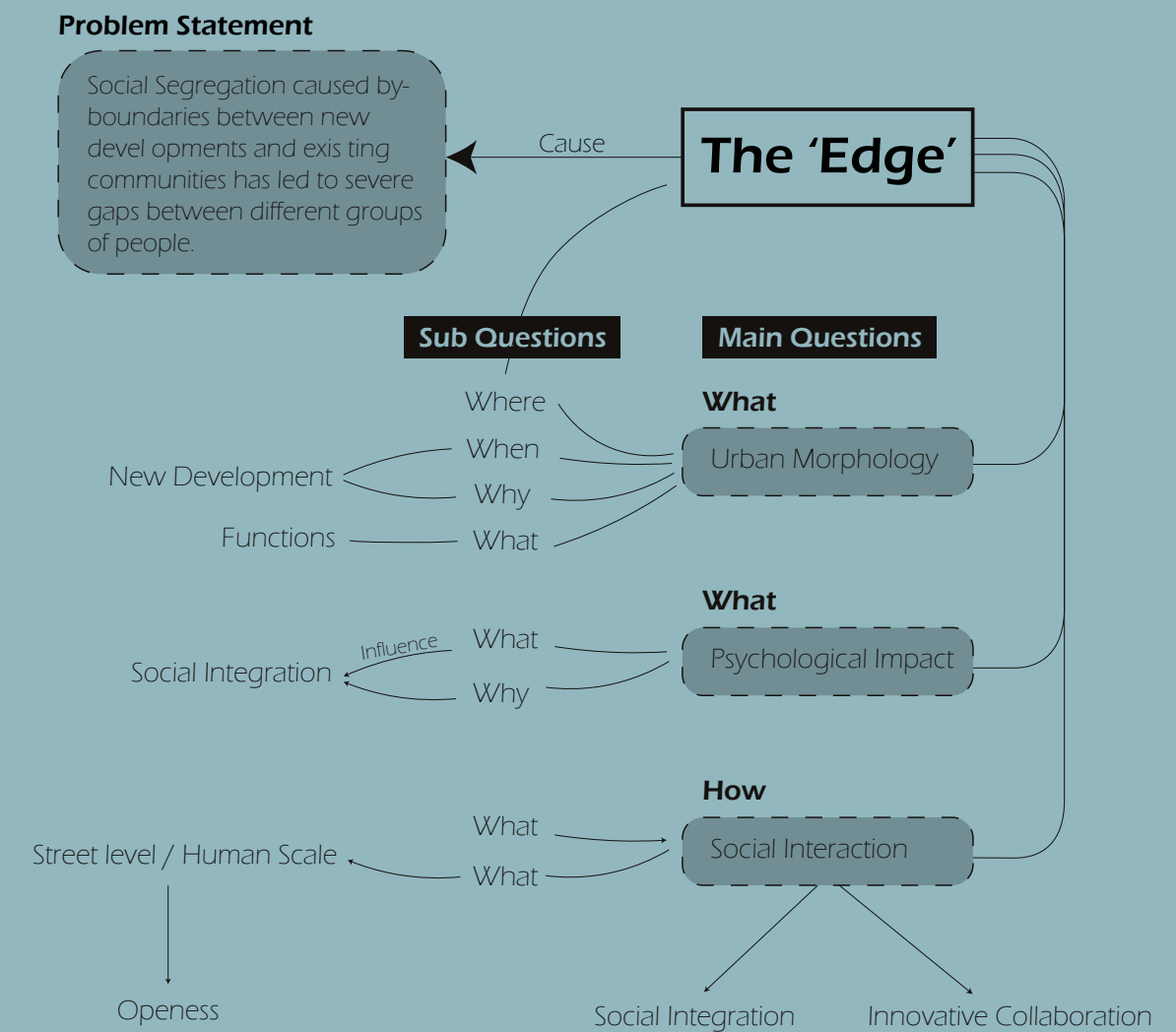
How does a space promote spontaneous **interaction** at the edge of communities?

1. What's the current social interactions between locals and people who commute to work in those new developments?
2. What are the forms of spatial boundaries in human scale? Are they indoors or outdoors? Are they considered pleasing or unpleasant?

Main Question:

In the process of gentrification, how to design with openness within the 'edge' area to both promote social integration and innovative collaboration?

Research Diagram - Research Questions



3. Theoretical Frameworks

Definition

To understand the difference in definitions of the 'edge' and 'boundaries', we could simply identify 'edge' as the description of a certain physical spatial condition, which is characterized by big contrast in urban fabric, for example the space between new developments of high rise and the surrounding low rise neighborhoods. While 'boundaries' describes a zone of contact, associating physical condition with human's interaction within this area.

In his book 'Theory of the Border', Thomas Nail pointed out the important role social divisions play in the study of borders. Because this means " the study of borders cannot be approached solely according to any one type of

division or social force", it is crucial to recognize the complexity of boundary conditions, which include not only physical forms but also territorial, economical and many other social phenomena.⁷

Position

The phenomenon of social segregation started with the reign of gentrification which has largely shaped the modern city. Richard Sennet stated in his book 'Designing Disorder - Experiment and Disruptions in the City' that, developers came to dominate the financing and construction of housing projects, and they preferred the commercial benefits of homogeneous living then mixed user ones.⁸ This book also pointed out that social segregation implies the missing of the middle and lower-middle classes in the city center,

because they are more spread out in the outer city. The " missing middle" phenomenon is interesting to investigate further, in order to explore the possibility of bridging the social gaps by bringing the middle class back into the city.

Richard Sennet further elaborated on what he thought was the way to social integration. He thinks it is essential that cities operate as an open system to become more democratic as a tactile experience. One other theoretical support for social integration comes from 'Palaces for the People' by Eric Klinenberg, in which he stated the power of social infrastructure in bringing people to look after each other, and therefore improving the urban living quality by social integration.⁹

Context

It is noted that democratic spaces with openness, spaces of resistance, are crucial in the development of a heterogeneous city. In the book 'Work, Body, Leisure', various cases of flexible offices, virtual models, living conditions to better adapt to

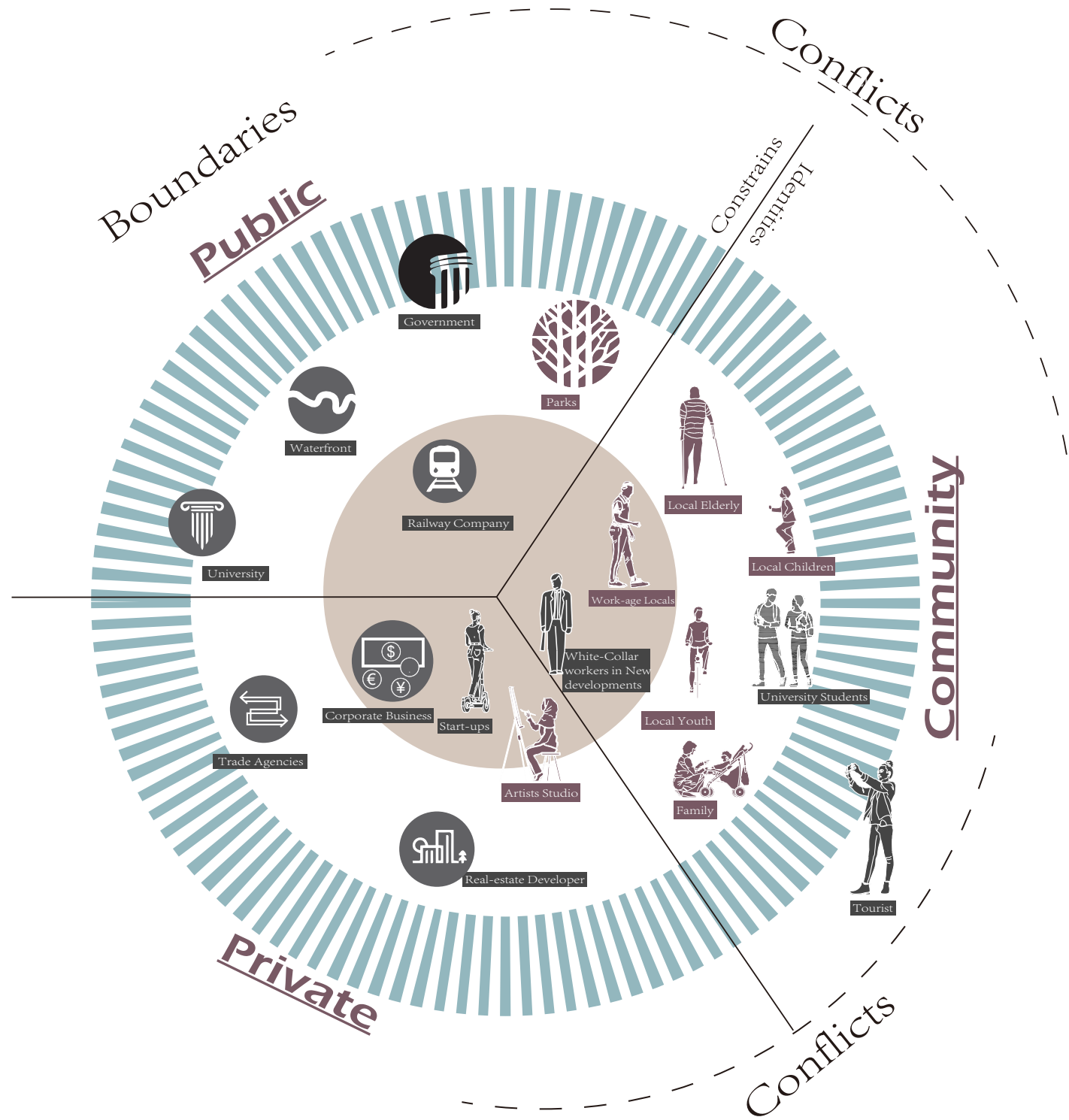
the needs of all bodies. Examples of combining the ideology of social integration with designing in a human body scale are also discussed in this book.

7. Nail, Thomas. *Theory of the Border*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

8. Sennett, Pablo Sendra, Richard, and Richard Sennett. *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City*. Verso Books, 2022.

9. Klinenberg, Eric. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. Crown, 2018.

Research Diagram - Actors Network



4. Methodological Framework

The Urban Scale - Location Mapping

The word "Edge" implies a dramatic deviation or difference of both wealth and living conditions from both sides. Therefore in order to identify potential locations for investigation, I made a location map (Figure.2) focusing on four elements within London. First the areas of dramatic change: the places that moved up in socio-economic status for the past decade, creating conflicts between new developments and original neighborhoods around. Second element is the area with development opportunities, providing the potential for the next design stage. Third and Fourth elements are the towers over 100m and infrastructures, indicating the shift of power to capitals and the empowering and disempowering effects of infrastructure.

The Borough Scale - Density Mapping

Starting with methodological studies of 'edge' areas, I aim to understand the site conditions in tangible, physical spaces. In order to identify the conditions within a certain area, mappings of physical space and activities are necessary for the understanding of basic geographical conditions. Therefore I decided to begin the mapping process of a study into the pure urban fabric and density. In the density map (Figure.3), urban sections of designated areas line up, overlaying with urban plans to showcase different scales of built environments along the 'Edge'. The stacking of urban sections not only indicates sectional conditions but also the density and discontinuity of urban fabrics. By comparing the density mapping of three locations, I choose whitechapel area for further investigation on the

demographic profiles, for its relatively smaller urban scale but big social contrast.

The Street Scale - I. Time Map

However, according to 'Spatial Agency - Other Ways of Doing Architecture', merely mapping the physical spatial conditions is not enough for a thorough investigation of borders, since traditional mappings of physical conditions lack information about human interactions. Actor network helps with identifying the different players of these 'Edge' areas.¹⁰ The concept of 'Spatial Agency' indicates the accumulation of individuals' constituent to the society.

To study the individual contributions to the society from both sides of the 'edge', I plan to map out individual's daily and weekly cycles within the area, indicating the locations of destinations or spontaneous drop bys. To make a reasonable comparison, I choose individuals from both sides of the 'edge', white collar people work in the new developments and working class people who are local to the

neighborhood and work within the area. By interviewing and mapping out their timemap/recognition map of the area, I can find locations with more potential for spontaneous social interactions.

The Street Scale - II. Photography

Referencing on the book 'Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary',¹¹ I also plan to create a series of photography on street views, and by selecting the public areas of interest, focusing on gathering space, to showcase the openness of the streets and the contrast in terms of building scale and ground floor functions between the new and the old.

10. Farias, Ignacio, and Thomas Bender. *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies*. Routledge, 2012.

11. Mathur, Anuradha, and Dilip da Cunha. *Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary*. 2009.

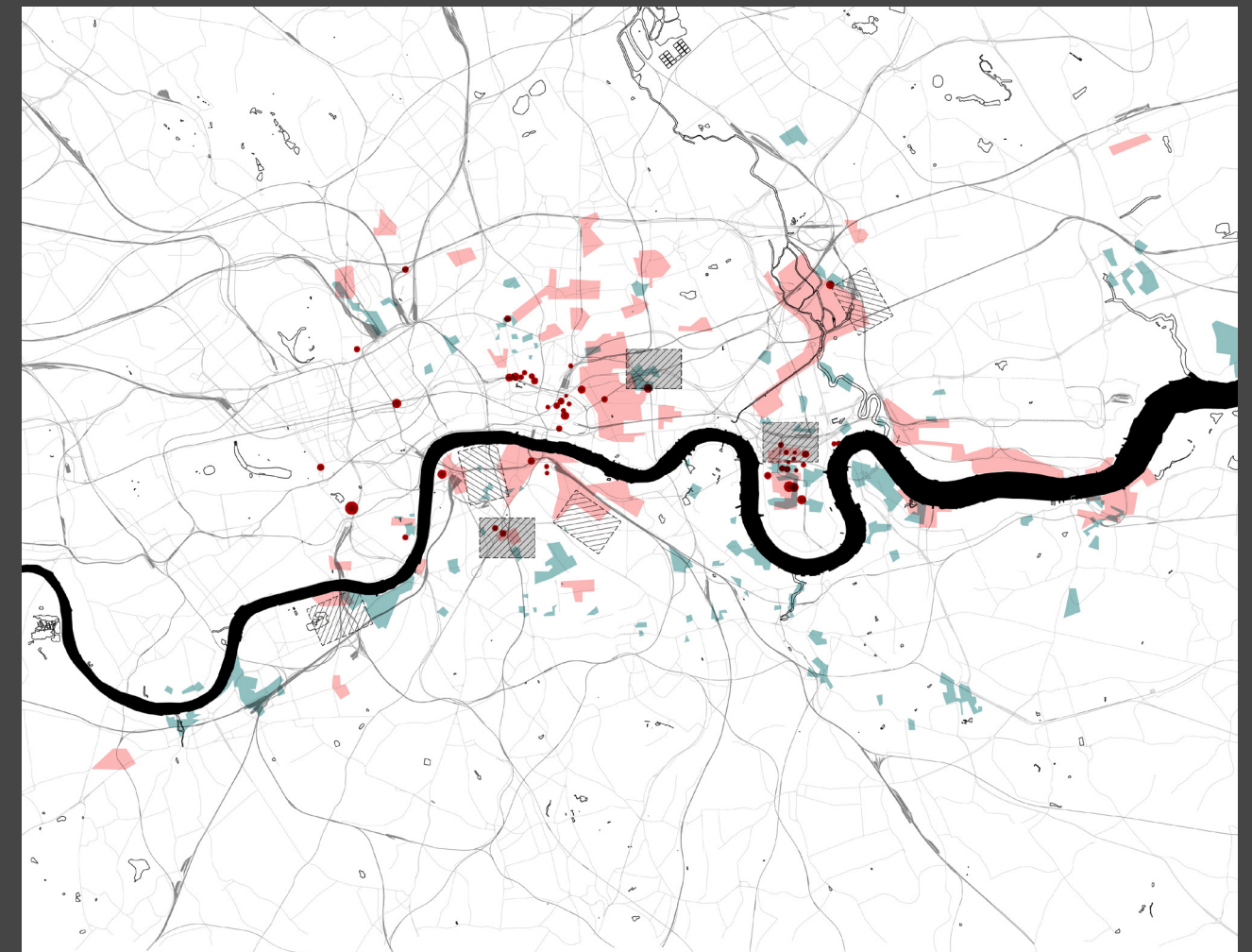


Figure.2 Location Mapping

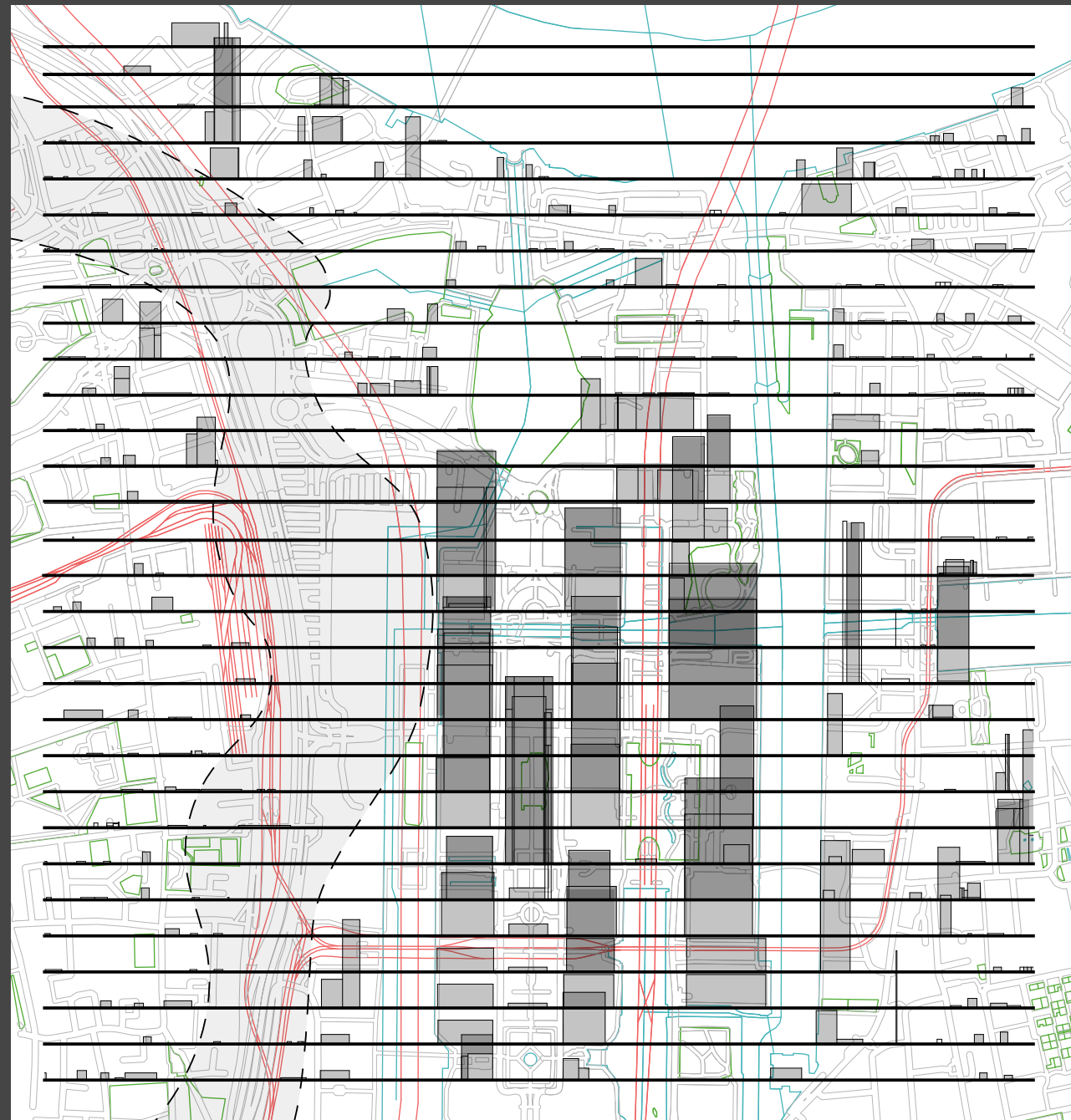
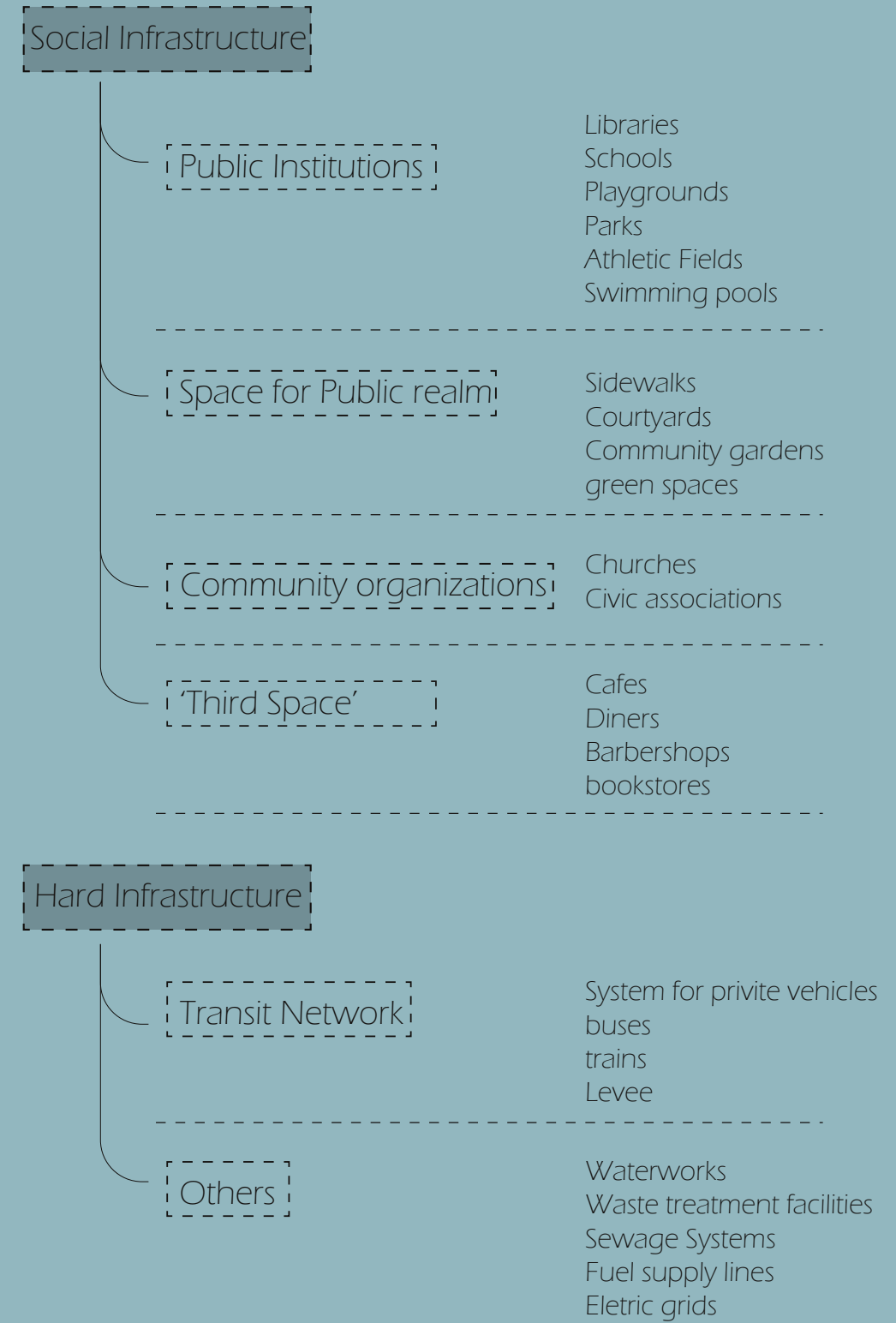
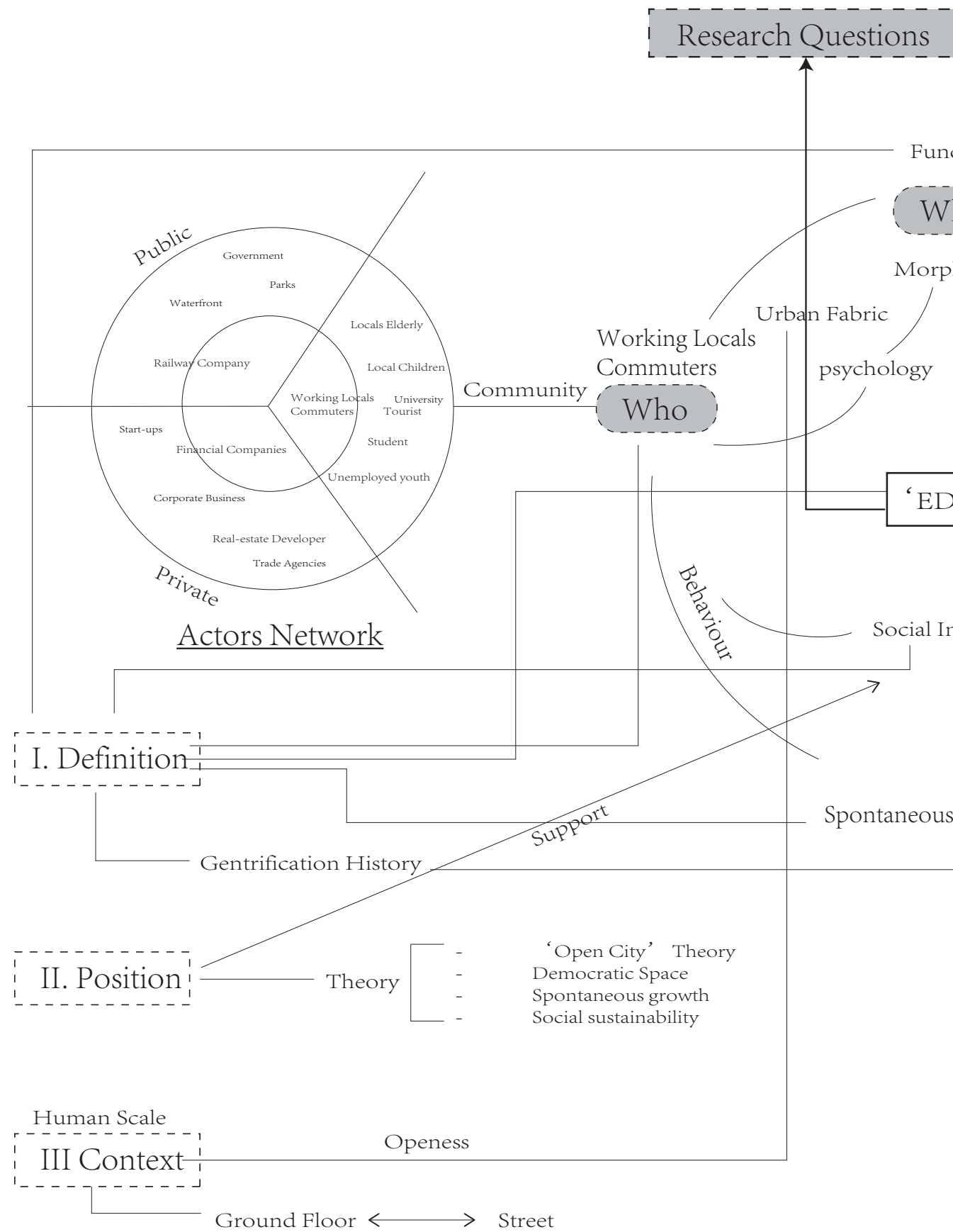


Figure.3 Density Mapping of Canary Wharf Area

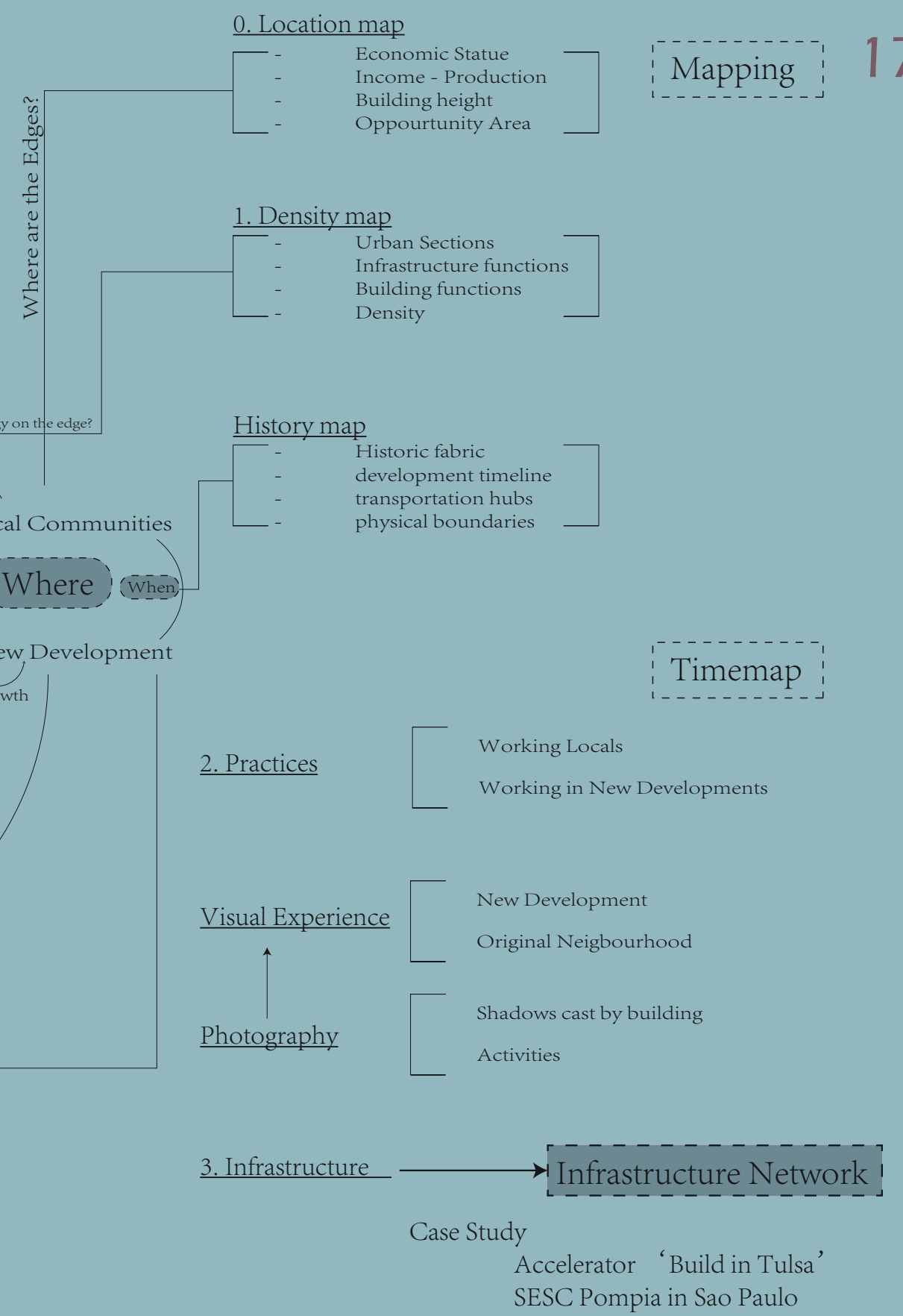
Research Diagram - Infrastructure Network



Research Diagram - Theoretical Framework



Research Diagram - Methodological Framework



Mapping

Timemap

Research Plan

5. Expectation

Some architects argue that designing for spontaneity is what cities need now.¹² People naturally come together through seemingly spontaneous experiences. To improve social integration, I hope to create a spatial intervention on boundary space between new developments and an existing community, to promote daily, spontaneous social interaction.

The ideal result of designing for experience is that, even though people might not know what they need, they are still connected or reconnected in novel and essential ways. To adapt and reset spaces through experience, the design should have a potential of spontaneous growth, therefore it should start from a small scale, and create an open system that allows for further interventions.

In terms of the methods leading to social integration, what architects can do is to design space for economic, educational or leisure activities to bridge the contrast of wealth and power. The case of building Tulsa proved that by building an innovation center to help minority entrepreneurs, the gaps between local startups and big business could be shortened, and it helps the collaborations of different parties, making sure local minorities are not excluded in the gentrification process.¹³ Therefore in the design stage I might look into an innovation accelerator mixed with social functions.

12. Digital, Carter. "Hassell." *Why Designing for Spontaneity Is What Cities Need Now*, <https://www.hassellstudio.com/conversation/why-designing-for-spontaneity-is-what-cities-need-now>. Accessed 4 Oct. 2022.

13. Overall, Michael. *Building Tulsa: The Story of a City and Its World-Class Architecture*. 2019.

Annotated Bibliography

Farias, Ignacio, and Thomas Bender. *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies*. Routledge, 2012.

This book helps me with identifying the benefit in using actor-network during the process of demography analysis. This book takes it as a given that the city is made of multiple partially localized assemblages built of heterogeneous networks, spaces and practices. The multiple and overlapping enactments that constitute urban life require a commensurate method of analysis that encompasses the human and non-human aspects of cities – from nature to socio-technical networks, to hybrid collectivities, physical artifacts and historical legacies, and the virtual or imagined city.

Glaeser, Edward, and David Cutler. *Survival of the City: Living and Thriving in an Age of Isolation*. Hachette UK, 2021.

This book provides theoretical foundations of the necessity of office space in the post-covid era, how working together will boost creativity and protect mental health. It argues city life will survive but individual cities face terrible risks, argue Edward Glaeser and David Cutler, and a wave of urban failure would be absolutely disastrous. In terms of intimacy and inspiration, nothing can replace what cities offer.

Klinenberg, Eric. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. Crown, 2018.

This book analyzed the social infrastructure network in cities and how it is beneficial to urban health, helping fight inequality by providing spaces for social interaction. In a time of deep division, how do people come together and find a common purpose?

Mathur, Anuradha, and Dilip da Cunha. *Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary*. 2009.

This book is a reference for the photography part of my methodological framework, the collage drawings with photographs in the book could be similar to my street view photographs compilation.

Nail, Thomas. *Theory of the Border*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

This book provides the theory of defining border - the combination of physical spatial conditions and human interaction. Borders are complex composites. Since each border is actually several borders, there is already quite a crowd. "The border" is the name of this commonality. The border is "a process of social division."

Overall, Michael. *Building Tulsa: The Story of a City and Its World-Class Architecture*. 2019.

This book provides a successful case study of the Tulsa redevelopment, a program not only helps minority entrepreneurs but also is a reflection of the neighborhood's history. The Tulsa case could be an example in reference for the social integration of the whitechapel area for the similar minority background and conflicts with the modern city.

Sennett, Pablo Sendra, Richard, and Richard Sennett. *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City*. Verso Books, 2022.

This book focuses on the infrastructure disorder within cities. It argues because of the social segregation caused by infrastructure, the call for an open city is urgent. It proposes a reorganization of how we think about and plan the social life of our cities. According to the authors, we should develop places that nurture rather than stifle, bring together rather than divide, and remain open to change rather than resistant to it.

Towers, Graham. *Building Democracy*. Routledge, 2003.

This book is a continuity of democratic space theory that was proposed by the last book. It looks more thoroughly into the revival of community values in the face of the self-evident short-comings of the free market, specifically in terms of community architecture.

Verzier, Marina Otero, and Nick Axel. *Work, Body, Leisure*. Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2018.

This book provides many cases of design spaces for working together, but specifically according to human scale, and how space design should adjust according to the human body.

Further and Related Readings

"1. Infrastructural Practice and the Making of City." *Dwelling Urbanism*, De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 27–50, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783035618310-002>. Accessed 4 Oct. 2022.

Architekten, GRAFT, and Marianne Birthler. *Unbuilding Walls: Vom Todesstreifen Zum Freien Raum / From Death Strip to Freespace*. Birkhäuser, 2018.

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