



## Commoning-Desiring Machine

Choosing the site.



## Site Choice

I need to choose a site - the location of my project. In fact, any location should work, as long as the theory was constructed properly, but to feel confident I need some place that I know well. Some place where I can navigate the spatial and social discourses and which I know, will motivate me for the long research period. In this case, the answer is obvious, it will be my hometown, the capital of Poland – Warsaw.



## Warsaw

The city is a semi-periphery European capital, that had heavily experienced all major political shifts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so its spatial form is a peculiar bricolage of different ideologies that organized the production of space and the tumultuous material conditions that defined the bygone century.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Warsaw was a place where Polish pride was to be reborn. After more than 100 years of Russian occupation, in 1916 Warsaw was “One of the most neglected cities of Europe in terms of aesthetics”<sup>1</sup>, at least according to contemporaneous Varsovian art historian Alfred Lauterbach. Only after nearly two decades something begun to change. The new dictatorship of marshall Piłsudski highlighted the importance of the capital as a worthy setting for national celebrations and as a showcase of Poland’s modernization<sup>2</sup>. Warsaw was set for a massive transformation, and its most tangible manifestation was to be the Piłsudski district, a monumental urban scheme that was to be the new representative axis of Warsaw<sup>3</sup>.

Any modernization plans were quickly tampered. Already on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September in 1939 first bombs fell on the worker settlements in the Wola district<sup>4</sup>. Over the five years, 84% of buildings of left-bank Warsaw were destroyed<sup>5</sup>. That means 9865 buildings were fully destroyed, 2973 – severely,

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1 Lauterbach, A. in Piątek, G. (2020). *Najlepsze miasto świata: Warszawa w odbudowie 1944–1949*. Wydawnictwo WAB, Warsaw.

2 Piątek, G. (2020). *Najlepsze miasto świata: Warszawa w odbudowie 1944–1949*. Wydawnictwo WAB, Warsaw.

3 Ewolucja Kartograficzno-Urbanistycznych Projektów Dzielnicy im. marszałka józefa Piłsudskiego W Warszawie. (2014, October 14). Retrieved January 9, 2023, from <https://jedenraz.wordpress.com/2013/09/22/ewolucja-kartograficzno-urbanistyczna-planow-dzielnicy-im-marszalka-jozefa-pilsudskiego-w-warszawie/>

4 Piątek, G. (2020). *Najlepsze miasto świata: Warszawa w odbudowie 1944–1949*. Wydawnictwo WAB, Warsaw.

5 Ibid.

while 4225 – partially<sup>6</sup>. The city faced an existential dilemma, shall it be rebuilt or left aside in the dustbin of history.

Polish government had considered moving the capital to Łódź or Cracow, there were even talks of leaving the demolished city as a monument of the War<sup>7</sup>, however political reasons eventually meant that the city was to be reconstructed. The post-war years are the story of the centrally-planned reconstruction of the Capital of the Polish People's Republic. This albeit being a political decision of Stalin was only possible due to the zeal of commoners, forming one of the most impressive endeavours in common praxis, as the rebuild was crowd-funded and many people worked voluntarily.<sup>8</sup> The new Warsaw was to reconstruct some of its destroyed fabric, while still improving the living conditions in the city, forming a socialist city ideal. Jerzy Grabowski, an architect, and general secretary of the committee for reconstruction proclaimed that the reconstruction plan will allow building "anew the prettiest and the best city in the world – Warsaw"<sup>9</sup>.

Parallel to reconstruction, Warsaw was developing its urban fabric in very distinct architectural styles. The first important shift occurring after the War was the introduction of socialist realism as the only (!) allowed style for newly build architecture. Enforced in 1949 by a decree the new movement was to be national in form and socialist in content. Although the movement lasted seven years it resulted in some of the most distinct Warsaw architecture such as the Palace of Culture and Science and the MDM housing district.

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6 Ibid.

7 Jak feniks Z popiołów, czyli cały Naród Buduje swoją stolicę. Krótka Historia zniszczeń I Odbudowy Warszawy. (n.d.). Retrieved January 9, 2023, from <https://www.1944.pl/artykul/jak-feniks-z-popiolow-czyli-caly-narod-budu,5138.html>

8 Gliński, M. (n.d.). Kto odbudował Warszawę? I Dlaczego Tak? Retrieved January 9, 2023, from <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/kto-odbudowal-warszawe-i-dlaczego-tak>

9 Grabowski, J. in Piątek, G. (2020). Najlepsze miasto świata: Warszawa w odbudowie 1944–1949. Wydawnictwo WAB, Warsaw. (translated by the author)

The overly monumental and economically disastrous socrealism was replaced by socmodernism, which lasted as the dominant style until the neoliberal turn of the 90s. From more conventional economic structures to more refined brutalist formal experiments, socmodernism is perhaps the style that took the biggest toll on the contemporary urban landscape in Poland, sprouting endless block of flats, and more refined buildings from avant-garde architects.

Although mostly poorly constructed, the socialist modernism urban landscape was much more harmonious and ordered than what had followed it, which is the chaos brought by neoliberalism. The violent privatization and unplanned development of the 90s heavily changed the polish landscape, which did not omit the capital of the country. Sadly, the economic imperative of the useful floor area and return on the investment are still the strongest factors shaping contemporary Warsaw, even though the city governance is clearly shifting from rampant neoliberalism to a more refined type of western liberal social-democracy.

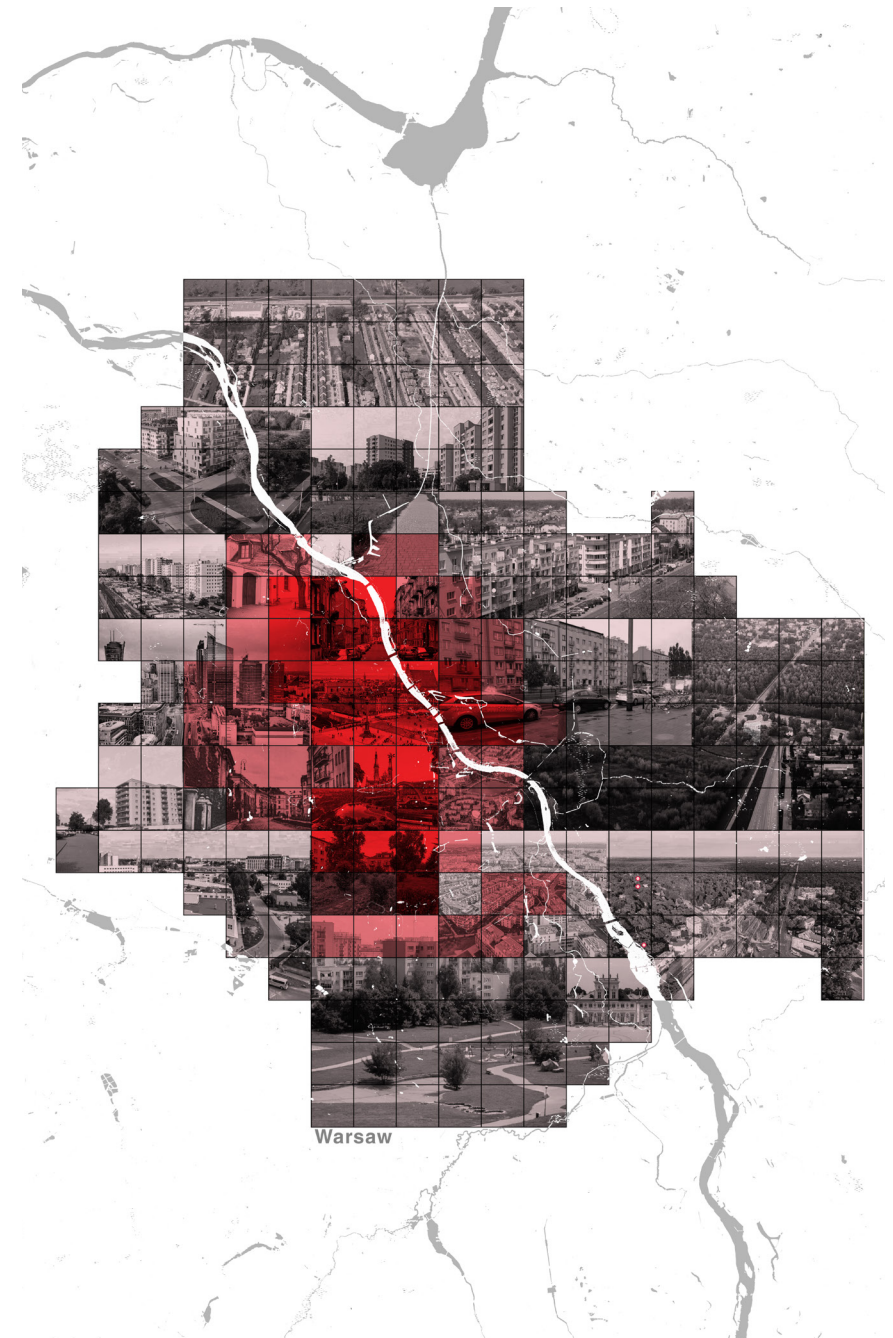
That quick bio of Warsaw is outlined not to mindlessly introduce the site and later forget about it. Rather I see the city's convoluted history and its diverse spatial practices, as a big opportunity for its future, to create a multitude of diverse urban praxes. It is rather to be treated as a virtual, that has some immanent potential to be explored in establishing new narratives on the city, creating new images, and forming new urban assemblages.

## Stories

The latent stories of places, create our mental images that are imposed on the environment - the exo-identities. Creating a certain exo-identity can be a strategy in how a city is to be experienced by its visitors, where is the focus of development, where there are hotspots of leisure services, etc. In the case of Warsaw, the city council proposes touristic narratives that focus around the downtown, seldomly including anything there is around. There is a clear distinction for the council of what is to be desirable, and what is to be overlooked, within city's carefully curated image. Maps with Chopin's Warsaw, Jewish Warsaw, Royal Warsaw, finally the most celebrated one, the Warsaw Uprising, all concentrate around the very centre of the town, what can be perhaps best seen when the main tourist catalogue is projected on the city map.



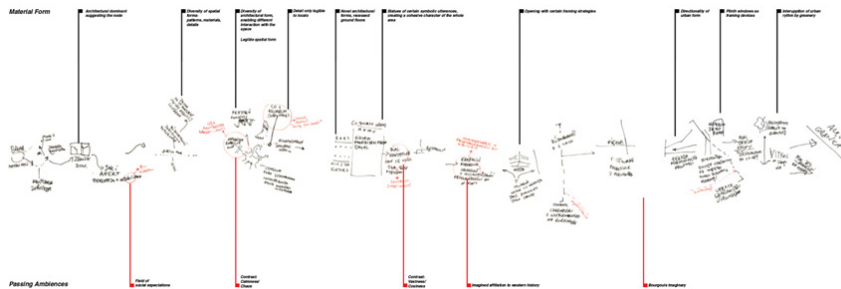
Whereas each district of the city possesses a certain exo-identity. Each area has a distinct character, one that is autonomous, but perhaps that could comprise the polyphonic voices communicating the convoluted history of the city.



## Śródmieście Południowe

If I think about my desirescape within the city I clearly know where it intensifies. The peak intensity would concentrate around Plac Zbawiciela – The Savior Square, and within its surroundings. Whenever in town there is a strange attraction, a current that drives me, I end up nearly every time in this place. Why is it so? It is hard to put it into words, but perhaps it's the combination of the setting, the possibility of bumping into my friends – but also some interesting strangers, and some other subconscious drives. It is a space where there's a lot happening, and it seems that everything is close. That's mainly it, that's the hotspot of my desirescape, the node of the nodes. But it is not the only one, the whole MDM district is like a giant node, or rather an assemblage. It is a space of a certain ambience, 15 minutes walk from there is the former communist party house, which changed into a bustling urban square, in fact, there is definitely a constellation of interesting spaces in the whole neighbourhood of Śródmieście Południowe (translating to Downtown South).

This is where this whole research started. Analysing my interaction with the district I established the main principles of my theory. After a series of cognitive maps and psychogeographic walks, I managed to compile maps of nodes and routes, while also acknowledging the affects that worked upon me, choreographing my movement through the city.

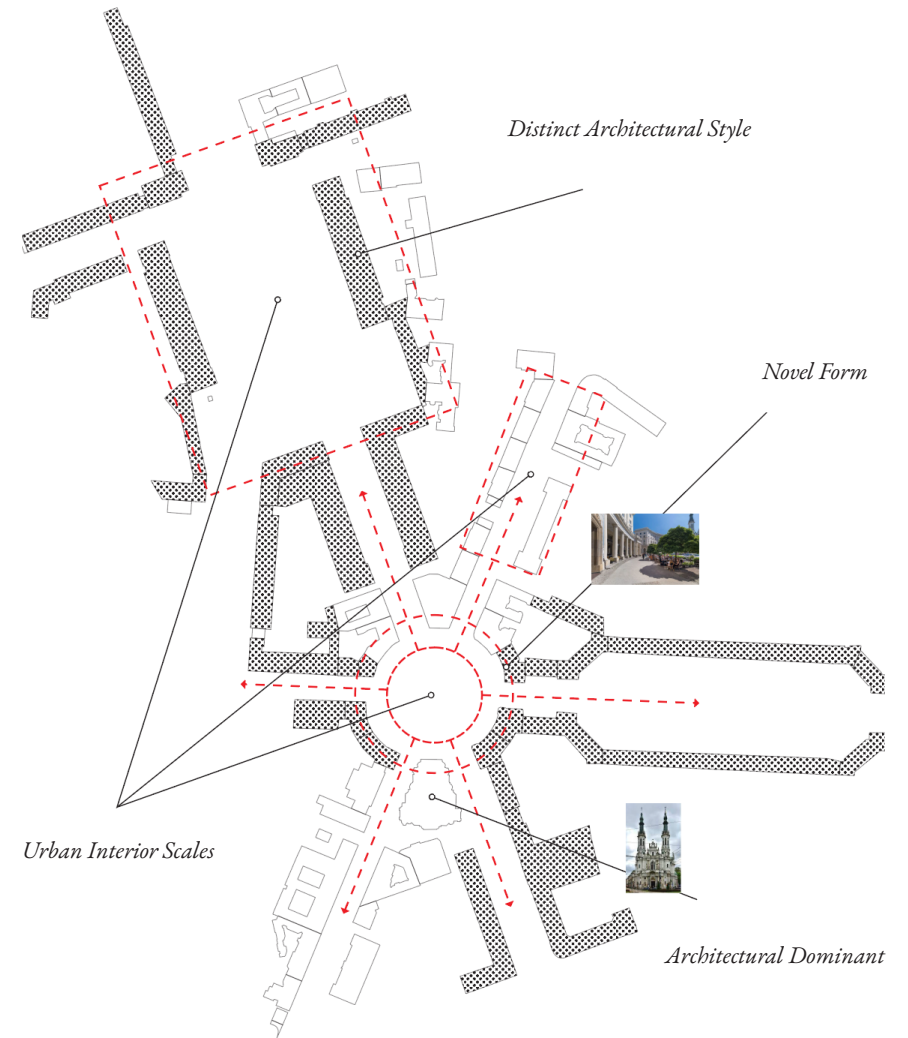


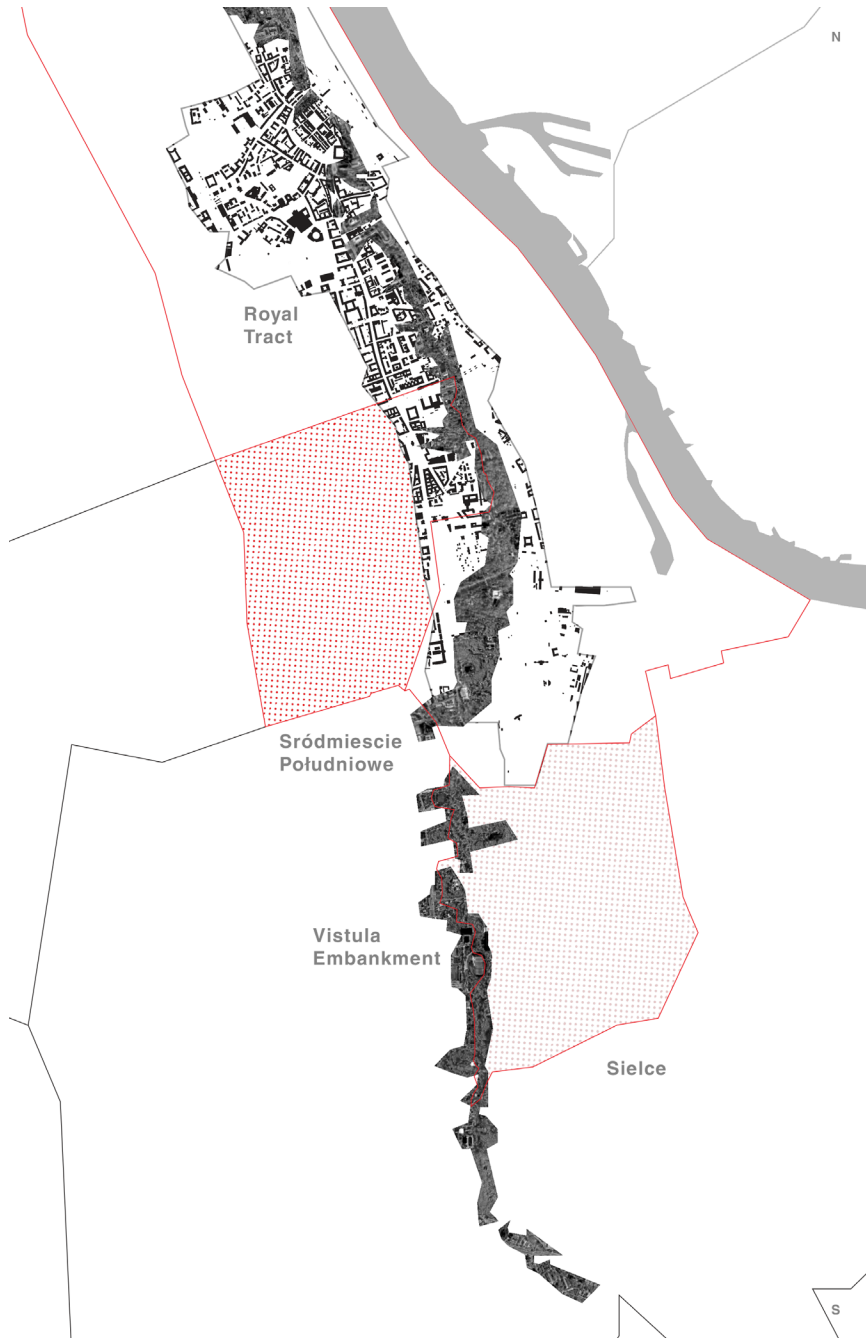
Śródmieście is a site of desire intensification, which is manifested not only in my preferences but also in how the site is considered in the greater context



of the policies of the city. It is a district that is best documented in all the promotional material of the city and established narratives of how the public should ‘consume’ it. It is a place where you can buy the most expensive cocktails and have the biggest variety of vegan restaurants, but also with myriad galleries and public buildings. It is where the surplus-life is to be absorbed by capital and not only. It is no coincidence that it is home to a large amount of non-governmental commoning practices, I identified eleven (out of which 7 in the south- the more ‘hip’ area) but possibly there’s more, what is for sure is that it’s not only me that feeds off this condition of urban intensity.

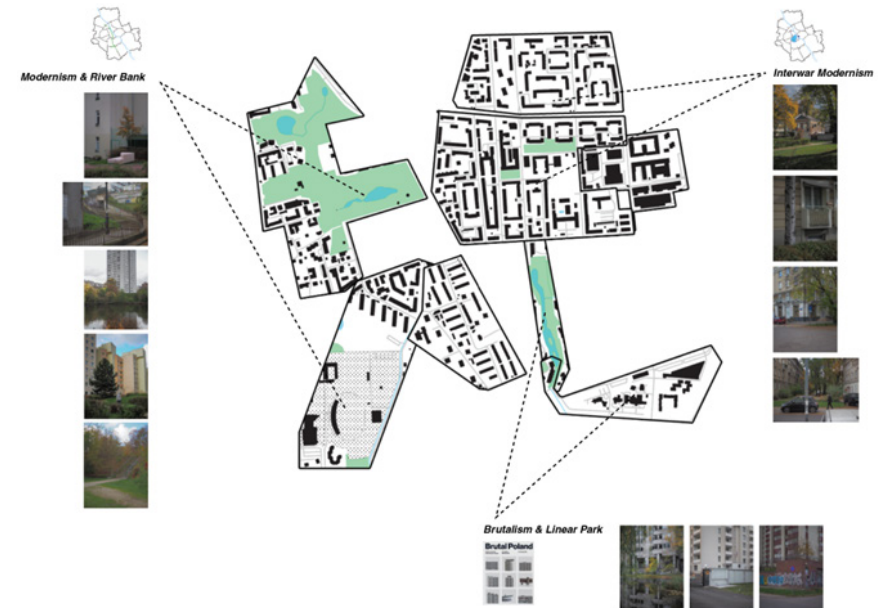
To end up at the neighbourhood of my final site, one is to walk 20 minutes south from the Savior Square, passing the surrealist housing and a large shopping mall, then slowly descend a park route opposite Warsaw’s Royal Baths to finally arrive at Sielce – the subject of my project, a location diametrically different from Śródmieście, yet at the same time deeply connected to it.





## Sielce

Sielce is a strange district, located in one of the wealthiest Warsaw neighbourhoods – Mokotów, it seems somehow forgotten. City Board highlighted Sielce as one of the most degraded districts in the area belonging to the 5% of city areas under the revitalization scheme<sup>10</sup>. The proximity of downtown and old Mokotów could mean that the site boasts one of the best settings in the city, which following the well-known cliché of property managers of three most important factors of a desirability of the address would make it one of the most lucrative places in the city. Well apparently ‘location, location, location’ is not enough, there’s something more to it.



<sup>10</sup> Jabłczyński, K. (2022, March 21). Rewitalizacja Warszawy. Rada Miasta Wybrała Najbardziej Zdegradowane Tereny stolicy. Gdzie jest najgorzej? Tu Będą Potrzebne Duże Zmiany. Retrieved January 9, 2023, from <https://warszawa.naszemiasto.pl/rewitalizacja-warszawy-rada-miasta-wybrala-najbardziej/ar/c9-8685301>



It is also not the case that there is no architectural quality in the area, or no important landmarks. Firstly, the royal baths can be entered from Sielce, which is easily the most important park in the city, if not in the whole country. There is the Warszawianka complex, albeit rundown, still a magnificent sports complex, designed by a former Le Corbusier assistant Jerzy Sołtan, with a lot of potential for redevelopment. Then there is the dense fabric of early modernism housing that dominates the centre of the district and the natural buffer of the Vistula embankment. It seems as if Sielce are full of immanent spatial quality that just waits to be somehow tied together.





Thus, I tried to quickly map this virtual desirescape. Already by identifying the location of leisure services and points of interest some patterns began to emerge and certain hotspots of potential started to appear. This could later constitute the field of potentiality that is to be actualized by my interventions.

By going down in scale I managed to focus not only on the positive quantities of surplus potential, but also on those spots of antagonism, which can also motivate commoning practices, in resistance to the assault of common urban life.



I established a more specific site of my interest, jumping again in scale, this time to 1/5000. The map shows the gated communities in black, which proved to be the source of my biggest frustration when I lived in Sielce. The scale allows to better understand the spaces in-between the buildings and what potentials they offer to the users, highlighting the spaces of where new nodes of intensification of desire can be established.



I established a line that traverses the whole district, following the patterns of the already existing infrastructure. The line is passing through potential nodes, all with individual character, that could form the base for further analysis.

Finally, this is it, I arrived at the site of my project. Equipped with this theoretical apparatus I will propose my solution for what is to invigorate the commoning struggle in the area, building upon the desire infrastructure, that is to be harnessed by new forms of collective praxis.



## Bibliography

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