Spatial (In)Justice

Social Geographies of Third Place

Research Plan

Architectural Design Crossovers

AR3DC100 Graduation Studio

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"There exists a mutually influential and formative relation between the social and the spatial dimensions of human life, each shaping the other in similar ways." (soja, 2010)

Bangla community protesting the gentrification of Brick Lane.
Manush, Nijjor. 2021. Image. https://novaramedia.com/2021/09/22/a-labour-council-just-greenlit-the-social-cleansing-of-bangladeshi-brick-lane/.

Abstract

Spatial (in)justice is characterised as the geography of social (in)justice. London is a manifestation of power structures and their neoliberal policies since the late seventies. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government aimed to reduce social housing in favour of the middle class, and social class inequality consequently became a driver of spatial injustice. The city is a network of ecologies composed of infrastructure, economic ideologies, and wealth. The inequality that emerges as a by-product of these systems highlights the injustices in London caused by social, economic and spatial patterns. Evidently, social inequality and gentrification, in conjunction with urban third places, create an environment where the social production of space can correspond with an ever-changing urban environment.

Keywords

Introduction and Problem Statement

Justice (and injustice) evolve over time as a social construct, a global concern sustained through democracy and issues of human rights in urban environments. In the case of London, these spaces are heavily influenced by political and economic currents and widespread systemic inequalities. Urban spaces in the city are inherently political and are driven by power dynamics that can often lead to isolation and control over marginalised residents. This can be seen most clearly in the Grenfell Tower fire in the cities' wealthiest borough; Kensington and Chelsea. It quickly emerged as an unfortunate consequence of systemic inequalities and neoliberal policies. This has exacerbated social inequalities in the city and has become increasingly evident in the hyper-commodified housing sector. An example of this is the privatisation of Ernö Goldfinger's Balfron Tower located in Tower Hamlets. Built in the 1960s as a brutalist utopia for social housing in the 1960s, the building became an architectural icon of urban regeneration and a commodity for the middle classes. Social inequalities in London housing are undeniable and continue to plague the city. The urban agglomeration of Battersea has become highly desirable to overseas investors 's "Poor door" manifests it's self as spatial injustice. The visibility of oppression, discrimination and inequality is evident in these housing projects. However, this study explores how the notion of spatial injustice and how it's materialisation in the city's third places.

The term 'third place' was first introduced by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, who highlights the importance of accessible public space in urban communities, referring to the places we inhabit between home (first place) and work (second place). As a byproduct of social production, local third places in low-income neighbourhoods are important in fostering better social relations and social inclusion in relation to citizenship, poverty, and racism. "Third places often serve to bring people together for the first time people who will create other forms of association later on" (Oldenburg 1999). The current need to strengthen third places is related to theories of the "right to the city," first introduced by sociologist Henri Lefebrve and explored by many scholars, including economic geographer David Harvey, who defines the right to the city as "far more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is the right to change ourselves by changing the city" (Harvey, 2012).

This research is based on the notion of spatial injustice and relates to London's High Streets as a third place and the importance of the social production of these archetypes in locally marginalised communities. These micro-economies emerge from human practices of material conditions that in effect produce social systems and communities. The social and economic class divide is visible in the differentiation of the city's main streets and is a representation of human and cultural community practices and an agent for the social and spatial dimensions of human life. Gentrification threatens these neighbourhoods, class divisions are increasing and the UK capital has become a playground for the 'alpha elites' (Minton 2017) whose economic and political power is deeply rooted in London's ecology and infrastructure.

Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following question in hope to conceptualise, and re-imagine the city of London;

What are the spatial conditions in third places that create and sustain injustice?

To support the research of this question, the following sub-questions are required;

1.What distinctive human practices define the urban space?

2.How is social oppression embedded in the urban fabric?

Theoretical Framework

The concept of spatial justice was coined by urbanist Edward Soja and further developed by scholars such as David Harvey. In their theories, the city is viewed through a geographical lens with a socio-spatial perspective to assess the impact of urban planning and accessibility on our social structures. This raises the question of the influences of social production in a spatial context and its impact on equality in the city. The theories of existing scholars explore the concepts of oppression, discrimination, and notions of social justice in the city, as well as the relationship of spatial qualities in third places. Ray Oldenburg examines the importance of third places in our cities from a sociologist's perspective and calls for the revival of "great good places" in our cities as part of the social vitality of communities.

To understand the injustices that arise from our spatial conditions, we must first engage with the social production of space according to Henri Lefebvre, who argues that human experience is relative to space and time of different practices in cultural and material conditions. This theory provides a framework for understanding the historical transformations of urban spaces in the context of gentrification and changing social conditions. The theory that space and time are socially produced through human habits provides a framework for how the third place is conceived, perceived, and experienced. conceived, perceived, and experienced. Building on this, Lefebvre's theories of the right to the city provide a lens to consider the spatial inequalities in London that arise from the social production of space. These notions can provide a framework for the

spatial conditions that create and sustain injustice. Lefebvre's conceptual framework forms the basis for Soja and Harvey alike. Soja's theories of spatial justice are heavily influenced by David Harvey's notions of injustice in understanding systemic urban accumulation and the social production of space in relation to notions of justice in the city.

A critical understanding of Edward Soja's Seeking Spatial Justice serves as a framework for this research to understand the social, economic, spatial, and political infrastructure that produces injustice in our cities. Soja posits theories of ontological research to understand human nature and the geographies in which they correlate. Understanding the interplay between human patterns and geography is critical to understanding the social injustice that results from place. This research project utilises critical theory to understand the problems of oppression in our spatial qualities, with significance for the social and historical existence of human geographies.

Methodology

The position of this research assumes the significant role of urban spatial conditions in the creation and maintenance of social injustice and challenges London's High Street as an archetype of the third place and its significance in urban life. It analyses immigration patterns and the socio-spatial landscapes that have emerged, examining the symptoms of inequalities and injustices at a scale from the city to the architecture. This research primarily questions the relationship between the social and the spatial and how this manifests it's self into conceptualisations of injustice. This theoretical framework will review literature to understand the existing theories of scholars on the city in relation to social production and justice. This form of methodology will provide an existing contextualisation of the city that can be applied to the context and provide a basis for conceptualising a design project.
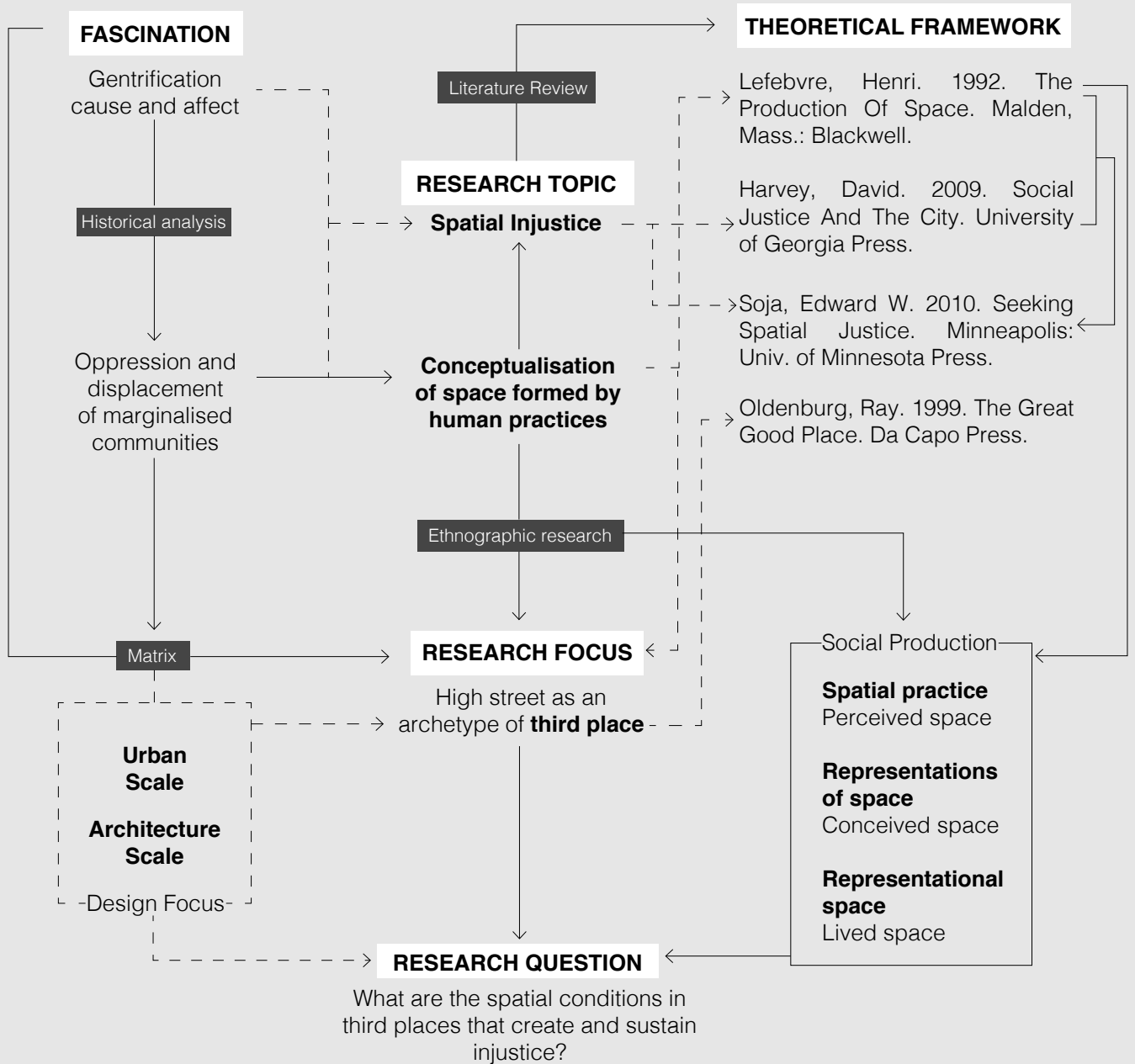
In order to consider London within a social and geographical framework, a methodology of ethnographic research will enable the study of human geographies in socio-cultural environments within the city at an urban and architectural level. Ethnographic research is used to describe the human practices and material expressions of a space, place or building. Initially, the project will explore the effects of gentrification at the city scale by contextually analysing historical urban geographies and the specific social effects of changes in the spatial environment. In analysing the urban displacement of low-income communities, data mapping can be used as a tool to understand the geography of an area and to capture the spatial-geographic patterns of gentrification.

Mapping using transects is a useful tool to understand the relationship of the high street in the context of the neighbourhood. The high street is explored as a node of exchange and expression, and how everyday human practices are represented there. It also analyses the spaces, micro-economies and street culture that raise recurring themes of immigration, oppression and discrimination. It is possible to analyse both third and first place to understand the contextualisation of oppression in London neighbourhoods. "UNDO-REDO's" comparative framework in Paris Haussmann could provide a basis for an analytical comparative matrix of the features of London's homogeneous urban landscapes, comparing urban and architectural features of neighbourhoods in the city to find patterns of inequality and injustice. To put this into practice, relevant case studies will be explored to understand the human practices that arise from spatial conditions to translate this into design research and defined architectural positioning.

Relevance

This study argues that 'third place' plays an important social, economic, and political role in our communities. However, the threatening scarcity of such places in our cities is increasing. In London, this manifests itself in the form of gentrification and the associated displacement of culture and community. Oldenburg defines 'the third place's function as a staging area" (Oldenburg 1999) We can see this in the role of the high street as a 'stage' for local residential actors who have emerged from discrimination and oppression. The use of third space as a site of activism and social movements can be visibly explored in our public spaces. Social inequality has remained a constant in the urban landscape of all cities around the world. In London, this inequality has become increasingly apparent with the economic boom, housing crisis and increasing poverty in the city. The problem of social injustice in our urban environment can be seen on a global scale caused by the limited access to resources, safe and adequate housing. This research aims to focus on vulnerable communities suffering from displacement from cities through spatial justice and urban empowerment with the theories of the right to the city.

Research Diagram

FASCINATION

Gentrification cause and affect

Historical analysis

Oppression and displacement of marginalised communities

Matrix

Literature Review

RESEARCH TOPIC
Spatial Injustice

Conceptualisation of space formed by human practices

Ethnographic research

RESEARCH FOCUS

High street as an archetype of **third place**

Urban Scale

Architecture Scale

-Design Focus-

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Lefebvre, Henri. 1992. The Production Of Space. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

Harvey, David. 2009. Social Justice And The City. University of Georgia Press.

Soja, Edward W. 2010. Seeking Spatial Justice. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

Oldenburg, Ray. 1999. The Great Good Place. Da Capo Press.

Social Production

Spatial practice
Perceived space

Representations of space
Conceived space

Representational space
Lived space

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the spatial conditions in third places that create and sustain injustice?

Annotated Bibliography

Harvey, David. 2009. Social Justice And The City. University of Georgia Press.
Economic Geographer David Harvey focuses on the issues of city planning and policies defined by politics, capatalism and social geographical frameworks. In this book Harvey questions the social production of space relative to the notions of justice in the city in terms of employment, housing, city zoning, transport and how these contribute to poverty in the city.

Harvey, David. 2012. Rebel Cities: From The Right To The City To The Urban Revolution. Verso.
In the chapter's defining The Right to The City Harvey explores the relationship between urbanisation and capitalism, using Henri Lefebvre's theory on the right to the city as a framework while analysing Haussmann's renovation of Paris to understand systemic urban accumulation. Rebel Cities defines the struggles of the city in capitalist and class, understanding the London Riots as a product of this. The anti-capitalist resistant nature of the book calls into question the social and geographical ways in which we can reorganise cities.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1992. The Production Of Space. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.
Sociologist Henri Lefebrve, who coined the notion of The Right to The City, theories the social production of space. Lefebrve theorises three nodes of the production of space, defined as the spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space.

Minton, Anna. 2017. Big Capital. London: Penguin Books.
Journalist, Anna Minton writes about the issues surrounding the housing crisis in UK's capital, questioning 'who is London for?'. The book sets out the political drivers of this housing crisis and how it fuels the social inequalities of " the pinnacle of new London: a playground for the rich, built on an inhuman scale."

Oldenburg, Ray. 1999. The Great Good Place. Da Capo Press.
Oldenburg gives a sociologist perspective on the importance of third place, arguing the social vitality of such spaces are critical to local economies.

Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2004. People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. Public Culture, 16(3), pp. 407-429.
AbdouMaliq Simone is an urbanist with a focus on the spatial and social distribution of urban landscapes. This essay explores the notions of marginalisation and the economic infrastructure that derives from cultural and economic activity from residents with limited access to resources.

Soja, Edward W. 2010. Seeking Spatial Justice. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
Geographer Edward Soja, coined the term spatial justice in this book, derived from the notions of geography and socio-spatial theory. Soja argues the inadequacy of resources as a direct response of spatial injustice, referring to basic human needs and the right to the city.

2011 London Riots, Tottenham high road.
2011. Image. https://citygeographics.org/2011/08/22/
the-london-riots-the-unemployment-link/.