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Lisbon. Livable Cities

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INTRODUCTION

Lisbon. Livable Cities Cities, Culture, People & Place

Lisbon, the capital of Portugal has increasingly become a 'mecca' for European expats wishing to relocate. Attracted by sun, beaches, food, culture and a low cost of living, it has been ranked as the world's third most livable city for foreigners. Inevitably, the results of this have been varied. Seen as a boost to the local economy, it also adds to property prices. It places strain on public services like health and transport, and is criticized repeatedly from a social sustainability standpoint.

Livable for many then, Lisbon is also a city of challenges for others. Like a multitude of other places across Europe, it has experienced epochs of deindustrialization, periods of population growth and decline, and varied phases of investment and disinvestment. It has had architectural and urban 'golden ages', as well as times of abandonment and degeneration. It has seen attempts at city boosterism, concerns about resilience and public health, efforts to improve its sustainability, and attempts to preserve its heritage. It has been a site of innovations in housing, and a place of social unrest.

In all this it is prototypical – a city that has documented the social and urban changes of recent times – whether they be Daniel Bell's post-industrial society, Jane Jacob's life and death of cities, or David Harvey's city and social justice. It has echoed Richard Florida's cultural city and reflects the traits of the smart city. It is the home of UNESCO world heritage sites and a place where public transport can be, and is, complicated and slow. It is a city and, as such, is contested.

Interested in examining the city as a site of livability across times and places, the papers collected in this volume offer here were responses to the above context from the perspective of history social and cultural studies broadly defined.

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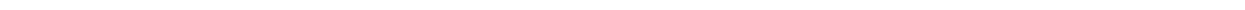
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INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FROM SPATIAL PLANNING DIMENSIONS FOR URBAN INFORMAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN NANJING, CHINA

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INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of ever-expanding globalization and fast-food trends, changes in food systems are profoundly impacting culinary culture and social lifestyles. Building a healthy and sustainable food system is not only necessary to address environmental and health challenges, but also a crucial way to maintain cultural diversity and social vitality. According to,¹ “food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.” The food system involves not only the physical flow of food but also multiple dimensions, including economic, social, environmental, and political. The resilience and sustainability of the food system determine whether human society can continue to have sufficient, safe, and nutritionally balanced food.

The food system is comprised not only of the formal sector, such as large-scale agriculture, food processing enterprises, large supermarkets, and retail chains, but also of the informal sector, which plays a significant role. The informal sector generally refers to food production and distribution activities that are not subject to strict national regulatory oversight and lack comprehensive legal protections. This includes smallholder farmers, family workshops, street vendors, farmers' markets, and small-scale local food processors. In many developing regions, the informal sector constitutes a crucial component of the food system and plays an irreplaceable role in both urban and rural food supply and consumption.

Informal food systems in this study refer to food systems that involve informal activities like informal food production and informal food vending. Informal food systems help meet the basic food needs of low-income populations. Street vendors and farmers' markets are often the primary means of obtaining fresh food, particularly in impoverished urban communities and rural areas. The informal sector plays a key role in alleviating food insecurity and ensuring food affordability. Informal food systems employ a large number of workers, particularly women, migrant workers, and low-skilled workers. They create employment opportunities in agricultural production and retail distribution, thereby alleviating unemployment and providing marginalized groups with a vital means of livelihood. Informal food systems rely on local production and short supply chains and are often highly regional. Through farmers' markets, community sales, and small-scale processing, informal food systems have, to a certain extent, promoted local economic cycles, strengthened urban-rural connections, and increased the participation of small-scale farmers in the food system and their market integration.

This study aims to optimize informal food systems with spatial planning instruments. It first analyzed the components and characteristics of informal food systems in China. Then, this study analyzed the possibilities of integrating informal food systems into planning. Finally, spatial planning instruments were proposed to optimize informal food systems. Protecting, formalizing, and transforming informal food systems by integrating related food activities into different types and levels of spatial planning are the main ways to improve informal food systems.

COMPONENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INFORMAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Informal sector in food systems

The definition of the informal sector varies from country to country. In academic research and policy practice, definitions of the informal sector vary across countries and regions. Generally speaking, the informal sector refers to economic activities that are not fully integrated into national legal, tax, and regulatory systems. However, due to differences in socioeconomic structures, governance systems, and legal frameworks, the criteria for defining the informal sector also vary. For example, the International Labour Organization (ILO) generally emphasizes the characteristics of the informal sector as lacking formal registration, labor contracts, and social security.

In some developing countries, the informal sector more specifically refers to small-scale family businesses, street vendors, and economic activities not included in official statistics. Meanwhile, in developed countries, the informal sector may more often include unregistered migrant workers or the "gray economy" at the community level. Therefore, the informal sector is not a fixed concept, but a relative classification closely linked to specific national contexts and policy systems. Its definition often varies depending on the scope of legal regulation, the level of socioeconomic development, and national governance capacity. In China, family workers, the self-employed, and casual workers are categorized as informal employment groups.² Additionally, some individual industrial and commercial households are also regarded as the informal sector. Different from the standard of the ILO (10 employees), registered enterprises in China with seven or fewer workers are considered to be informal.³

In this study, Informal food systems refer to food systems that involve informal activities, including informal food production and informal food vending. In the food system, the informal sector generally refers to production, distribution, and consumption activities that are not fully integrated into legal, institutional, or official regulatory frameworks. It encompasses a vast array of small-scale, subsistence-based, and flexible economic activities, such as roadside vendors, small-scale food processing workshops, family-based catering services, individual operators in farmers' markets, and subsistence farming in both urban and rural areas. These activities often lack formal registration, licensing, or taxation, yet they play a key role in food access, job creation, and livelihood security. The informal sector is highly flexible and adaptable, quickly meeting consumer demand for affordable, convenient, and locally sourced food while providing livelihood and employment opportunities for vulnerable groups. However, it also faces challenges such as food safety, unstable nutritional quality, and inadequate protection of workers' rights. Therefore, the informal sector in the food system is not only a crucial pillar of food supply in both urban and rural areas, but also a crucial area that must be addressed to achieve food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable development.

Features of informal food systems

Formal food systems are prone to disruptions during emergencies (such as natural disasters, epidemics, and global supply chain disruptions). However, informal food systems, due to their flexible scale and decentralized networks, can often fill gaps left by the formal sector in a short period of time, providing temporary food security. This characteristic makes the informal food system a key factor in enhancing the resilience of the overall food system. Furthermore, farmers' markets and street food vendors are

important venues for residents to interact, and the food consumption process itself reflects regional characteristics and cultural identity. Therefore, the informal sector plays a unique role in preserving dietary diversity and maintaining social and cultural networks.

Within the food system, formal and informal food systems exhibit significant differences in several aspects. First, in terms of beneficiary populations, formal food systems typically reach a wide range of populations, particularly middle- and high-income groups in urban areas, and their supply networks can operate across regions and even internationally. In contrast, informal food systems primarily target low-income individuals and local communities, with a relatively localized coverage. In terms of principal employment in the food sector, the formal system relies on highly specialized labor, such as agricultural technicians, factory workers, and supermarket employees, and typically offers formal contracts and social security. In contrast, the informal system is dominated by families and self-employed individuals, with a preponderance of low-skilled labor and a high proportion of women and migrants.

Supply chain characteristics also differ. The formal system primarily features long supply chains, from large farms to industrial processing plants to retail chains, with centralized management and standardized operations. The informal system, on the other hand, relies on short supply chains, with local production sold directly to markets or communities, and decentralized and flexible logistics. Accordingly, food production systems exhibit distinct characteristics: the formal system emphasizes large-scale and mechanized operations, achieving high yields with high inputs, while the informal system is more focused on small-scale, low-input, or subsistence production, relying on manual labor and traditional farming methods.

In terms of typical food types, the formal system provides industrially processed foods, packaged staples, and meat products, while the informal system primarily supplies fresh vegetables, fruits, grains, and home-cooked or small-scale processed foods. In terms of packaging, the formal system typically uses standardized, regulatory-compliant packaging, such as plastic or vacuum packaging; the informal system primarily uses simple packaging or bulk packaging, with inconsistent packaging. Regarding the source of purchased food, the formal system relies on supermarkets, chain stores, and large suppliers, while the informal system relies on farmers' markets, street vendors, or community networks.

Regarding food safety and nutrition issues, the formal system is strictly regulated, resulting in relatively low food safety risks, but industrially processed foods may be high in salt, sugar, and fat. The informal system is less regulated and has variable hygiene conditions, posing higher food safety risks. However, the food is often fresh or homemade, resulting in greater nutritional diversity, although it is susceptible to seasonal and yield fluctuations. Major environmental concerns include high energy consumption, packaging waste, and transportation emissions in the formal system, while industrial agriculture can put pressure on soil and water resources. Informal systems face less land use pressure, but local ecological damage and small-scale pollution remain concerns, and food waste is dispersed and poorly managed. Formal food systems emphasize standardization, scale, and regulatory compliance, resulting in high efficiency and widespread coverage, but they can overlook the needs of low-income groups. Informal food systems emphasize flexibility, locality, and low costs, ensuring food access and employment, but they can also face food safety and regulatory challenges. The two complement each other within the food system: the formal system provides stable supply and large-scale food security, while the informal system enhances resilience and local adaptability, forming a crucial component of urban and regional food systems.

Feature	Formal Food System	Informal Food System
Population	Broad coverage, mainly urban high-income groups; can serve national or global markets.	Primarily low-income groups and local community residents; coverage is more localized.
Principal employment in the food sector	Highly specialized labor, including agricultural technicians, factory workers, and supermarket staff; usually with formal contracts and social protection.	Mostly family-run or individual operators; low-skilled labor dominates; high participation of women and migrants.
Supply chains	Long and centralized supply chains, from large farms to industrial processing plants to chain retailers; standardized and formalized management.	Short and local supply chains, from local production to markets or communities; decentralized and flexible logistics.
Food production system	Large-scale, industrialized production with high capital and mechanization; emphasizes efficiency and high output.	Small-scale, low-input, or subsistence production; relies on manual labor and traditional practices.
Typical food	Processed and packaged foods, industrially produced staples and meat products.	Fresh vegetables, fruits, grains, and small-scale or homemade processed foods.
Packaging	Standardized packaging complying with regulations; often plastic or vacuum-sealed.	Simple or minimal packaging, such as paper bags or baskets; often sold in bulk.
Purchased food brought in	Supermarkets, chain stores, large suppliers; domestic or global distribution networks.	Local markets, street vendors, community networks, or informal wholesale.
Food safety issues	Strictly regulated; standardized operations; relatively low food safety risk.	Limited regulation; hygiene conditions vary; higher food safety risk.
Nutrition problems	Processed foods may contain high salt, sugar, or fat.	Foods are mostly fresh or homemade, often nutritionally diverse, but availability may fluctuate seasonally.
Major environmental concerns	High energy consumption, packaging waste, transportation emissions; industrial agriculture can impact soil and water resources.	Lower land-use intensity, but local ecological damage or small-scale pollution may occur; food waste is dispersed and poorly managed.

Table 1. Features of informal food systems

INFORMAL FOOD SYSTEMS AND FOOD PLANNING IN NANJING

Food planning in Nanjing

As of 2020, the urbanization rate in Nanjing had surpassed 80%, with projections indicating an increase to 92% by 2035.⁴ By the end of 2005, Nanjing encompassed a total land area of 6,582.3 square kilometers, of which agricultural land accounted for 4,380.4 square kilometers, construction land covered 1,572.6 square kilometers, and other land comprised 629.3 square kilometers, representing 66.5%, 23.9%, and 9.6% of the total area, respectively. Within the agricultural land, arable land measured 2,455.9 square kilometers, garden land 94.0 square kilometers, woodland 739.3 square kilometers, and other agricultural land 1,090.6 square kilometers, corresponding to 56.1%, 2.1%, 16.9%, and 24.9% of the agricultural land, respectively.

Land designated as permanent basic farmland cannot be converted to other uses without the approval of the State Council. Local authorities must submit an application to the State Council to amend the land-use plan, and any occupation of arable land must be compensated by reclaiming an equivalent area and quality of farmland elsewhere. In Nanjing's land-use plan for 2006–2020, the amount of cultivated land converted to newly added construction land was to be limited to 142.6 square kilometers, while the area of reclaimed farmland was required to be no less than 142.6 square kilometers.

Governance of informal food production and marketing in Nanjing

The unclear regulatory approach to informal food production and street food vending suggests that certain municipal authorities demonstrate a degree of sympathy toward displaced farmers and vendors when implementing city policies.⁵ Flexible governance mediates the interests of vendors, residents, and municipal authorities, serving as a strategy to defer new policymaking and tolerate informal activities that do not pose significant risks. However, when such activities interfere with other citizens' daily lives or disrupt public facilities, they are more likely to be prohibited.

Nanjing is the first city in China to guarantee the legality of street vendors with local regulations. According to the Nanjing City Appearance Management Regulations, *"Vendors are not allowed to set up stalls in prohibited areas and times. The locations and operating hours where stalls can be set up shall be determined by the Urban Management And Law Enforcement Bureau in conjunction with relevant departments in accordance with the principle of not affecting the city's appearance, transportation, and convenience of the people's lives, and shall be implemented after approval by the municipal and district people's governments"*.⁶

As illustrated in Figure 1, areas where stalls are prohibited indicate a prioritization of urban traffic flow and city aesthetics. Outside these restricted zones, urban branch roads, alleys, residential neighborhoods, squares, and other open spaces may host legally sanctioned street markets, with their placement determined flexibly according to local conditions.⁷



Figure 1. Roads where vendors are prohibited in urban Nanjing⁸

INTEGRATING INFORMAL FOOD SYSTEMS INTO FOOD PLANNING

Intersectionality solutions in national-level based food planning

Rather than using the term *food planning*, official Chinese government documents adopt the concept of *food security planning*. In the national food security report, the criteria for assessing food security include production yield, self-sufficiency levels, storage capacity, per capita food availability, and the prevalence of hunger people.⁹ Although these national-level plans reflect the central government's commitment to advancing food development across diverse domains—including arable land, production technology, retail, and nutrition—their policies and indicators remain predominantly result-oriented. At the local level, planning fails to account for the complexity of multi-stakeholder participation, spatial diversity, and multi-scalar dynamics within food systems. The *Rice Bag Governor Responsibility System* and the *Vegetable Basket Mayor Responsibility System* exemplify top-down implementation mechanisms designed to secure food production and supply within respective jurisdictions.¹⁰

Food systems encompass diverse spheres related to food issues, and the intersections among these spheres necessitate planning approaches that integrate a broader range of activities, actors, and multiple spatial and scalar dimensions.¹¹ National-level food planning agendas, such as the *National Food Security Mid- and Long-Term Plan*, do not differentiate local food systems from the broader national system. The contributions of local systems to food security are subsumed under the performance of the overall food system, whereas the planning of local food systems should be tailored to the specific

characteristics of different regions rather than treated merely as a subsidiary component of national planning.

Top-down food planning mandates that local food production and distribution systems fulfill designated responsibilities to safeguard national food security. Nevertheless, planning at the municipal level must still be tailored to the natural conditions, demographic composition, and economic structures of each jurisdiction. With the issue of hunger largely addressed, the concept of food security has expanded in scope, thereby raising new questions for food planning. In this context, the notion of food sovereignty underscores the importance of recognizing who produces, distributes, and consumes food, placing these stakeholders at the center of food systems and policies rather than subordinating them to the demands of markets and corporation.¹² City-level food planning oriented toward food sovereignty could incorporate informal food systems by fostering transparent trade practices and equitable rights to space, thereby ensuring fair incomes for all actors—including small farmers and vendors—while also safeguarding consumers' rights to exercise control over their food and nutritional choices.

Spatial integration for informal food systems

The function of territorial spatial planning is to unpack the challenges faced by informal food systems and to articulate systematic solutions at the municipal level. Such planning demands strict compliance with existing laws, regulations, and overarching policy frameworks. Optimizing informal food systems is often most feasible when initiated through the upgrading of individual cases and community-level interventions. The spatial integration instruments discussed in this chapter offer strategies for enhancing informal food systems within small-scale spatial planning and design. This integration encompasses two key dimensions: the strengthening of existing informal sectors and the deliberate planning and design of potential and available spaces.

The food production dimension of informal food systems encompasses small-scale agriculture and informal urban food cultivation. Spatial integration of existing production is often grounded in case-specific contexts, wherein surrounding environments are reconfigured to formalize supply chains and enhance their benefits. In addition, the integration of potential food production can be classified into two categories. The first involves embedding food production activities within the existing urban fabric, while the second entails reorganizing the broader urban spatial structure to better support the development of food production.

On-farm shops and roadside sales represent typical forms of short food supply chains. Both small farms and their associated on-farm shops are generally operated by families. Roadside farm stands, in particular, are expected to function directly at the farming site and to be managed by a single farm operation.¹³ Beyond food marketing, small farms may provide additional functions such as recreational activities and parking facilities. Sales generated in these contexts contribute to strengthening the relationship between farms and consumers. Moreover, consumers' trust in food quality and safety is enhanced through direct visits to farms. Self-harvest farms are typically managed by full-time or part-time farmers who lease plots of vegetable fields to individual participants. Farmers oversee farm management and provide professional guidance, while participants are responsible for tending to the crops and harvesting their own vegetables. Social farms offer a range of services, including therapeutic and rehabilitative programs, social inclusion, education and training, and employment opportunities for vulnerable populations. Originating from traditional forms of mutual assistance in European rural communities, social farming has evolved through continuous reform and innovation into a comprehensive system that integrates social services with horticultural practices. Community gardens are spaces in which members collectively engage in cultivation and management activities. While the distinction between community gardens and allotment gardens has become increasingly blurred,

community gardens emphasize communal plots and shared responsibilities rather than individually assigned plots.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Informal food systems play a crucial role in enhancing urban food security, sustaining local livelihoods, and strengthening social cohesion. These systems provide not only direct food production and distribution but also multifunctional services such as recreation, education, employment, and social inclusion. By fostering short food supply chains, informal food systems enhance the connection between producers and consumers, thereby increasing trust in food quality and safety.

At the policy level, informal food systems challenge conventional top-down, result-oriented food security planning, highlighting the need for city-level food planning approaches that integrate food sovereignty principles. Such approaches prioritize the agency of local actors, ensure equitable access to space and income, and recognize the contribution of local food production and distribution networks to broader urban food security. Spatial integration tools, including territorial and community-scale planning, offer opportunities to formalize informal supply chains, optimize existing production, and plan for potential food production spaces within urban areas.

Overall, informal food systems not only supplement formal food networks but also provide a flexible, adaptive framework for addressing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of urban food security. Recognizing and integrating these systems into urban food planning can support sustainable, inclusive, and resilient food systems that respond to local needs while contributing to broader societal goals.

NOTES

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LEARNING OUTSIDE-IN: HOW CITY PLACES BECOME PEDAGOGICAL PATHS OF WELL-BEING FOR SCHOOL LEARNERS

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INTRODUCTION

How do out-of-school learning experiences in city neighborhoods support students' inner states of well-being? Among the critical post-pandemic challenges cities and schools face are issues of declining well-being. Research suggests that prolonged isolation, social distancing, and remote learning during the pandemic contributed to an unprecedented decline in adolescent mental and physical health around the globe.¹ Schools themselves have felt the consequences of this crisis firsthand, as they increasingly confront the urgent mental health needs of their students.² As the danger of COVID-19 abated, many schools returned to teaching and learning as usual.³ However, few urban schools effectively and deliberately cultivate student well-being.

As cities grapple with supporting the health of their children, out-of-school pedagogical experiments during the pandemic may offer some important insights. During COVID-19, educators at SEK International School Santa Isabel in Madrid, Spain sought to create community connections and learning opportunities throughout their urban neighborhood. With the help of parents and community leaders, they created “learning paths” that expanded both the curriculum and the campus into the city itself. These pathways were so successful that the approach is being replicated at other SEK schools in the Spanish cities of Almería and Pontevedra.

This paper shares emerging research findings from a collaboration among educators at SEK International Schools and researchers from Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Universidad Camilo José Cela. Based on observations, interviews, and photographic documentation, it presents a new framework, the “ABCS” of well-being, and introduces a practical tool, *Making Places for Learning*, for educators looking to leverage the city as a setting, subject, and partner in learning.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The *Learning Outside-In* project is the last phase of a three-year, multi-site collaboration supported by the Felipe Segovia Foundation and led by faculty from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and Universidad Camilo José Cela (UCJC) in Madrid. The initiative partners with educators from three SEK International Schools located in diverse Spanish regions, Madrid (SEK Santa Isabel), Almería (SEK Alborán), and Pontevedra (SEK Atlántico). We, the researchers at HGSE and UCJC, are organizing our inquiry around the following research questions:

1. What qualities of urban places support student well-being?
 2. How do educators design and facilitate learning experiences in those places?
 3. What are the pedagogical implications for schools seeking to engage with the city as the curriculum?
- To explore these questions, we employed a descriptive, ethnographic approach that included site-based observations of 38 classroom learning paths that produced over 1,000 photos and dozens of pages of observational notes. After observations, we conducted over 50 teacher and student interviews, probing for details about how qualities of the places were supporting their experiences of agency, belonging, curiosity and/or satisfaction. From this data we constructed 17 qualitative cases (“Pictures of Practice”) that describe the places and how it supports these felt states. Our aim is not just to document the practice of learning paths but to distill principles that can inform wider adoption.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of our most important findings is the need for a shared language to describe how places influence student well-being. Drawing from the research literatures of educational psychology, environmental design, and place-based pedagogy, we developed a simple yet powerful framework we call the **ABCS** of well-being:

Agency: Feeling empowered to act and make choices.

Agency emerges in places where learners experience freedom, flexibility, and accessibility. Spaces that are *reachable and open* (with multiple pathways, visible options, and accessible materials) signal that movement and exploration are encouraged. When elements are *movable and flexible*, learners can rearrange, reconfigure, and adapt them to their needs, cultivating a sense of authorship. Varied and adjustable spaces, objects, and materials reinforce that choices matter, curtailing passivity and strengthening empowerment.

Belonging: Feeling connected to self, others and one’s surroundings.

Belonging grows in environments that are *visible and connected*, offering sightlines to others, perspectives on nature, and cues that affirm students’ identities and interests. Places that are *expressive and invitational* include culturally meaningful symbols, images, and materials that welcome diverse identities and voices. Communal and compact settings, where small and large gatherings are possible, and where different purposes coexist, create opportunities for serendipitous connection, reinforcing a sense of being part of a larger whole.

Curiosity: Experiencing interest, wonder, and a drive to explore.

Curiosity flourishes in places that are *contrasting and unexpected*, where novelty, ambiguity, and surprise prompt questions and invite inquiry. *Multi-sensorial* environments, rich with varied sights, sounds, textures, and rhythms, stimulate multiple pathways for noticing and discovery. When spaces are *attentional and provocative*, using light, design, or prompts to direct focus and spark reflection, they encourage learners to linger, investigate, and deepen their engagement.

Satisfaction: Encountering joy, calm, and emotional balance.

Satisfaction is fostered in environments that feel *comfortable and calming*, offering soothing colors, cozy textures, and intuitive layouts that restore balance. It can also arise in *progressive and storied* places, where elements trace achievements, connect to memories, or situate learners in a meaningful narrative over time. *Natural and safe* qualities like fresh air, greenery, water, and protection from harm offer refuge and delight, supporting both emotional regulation and joy.

These dimensions are not exhaustive, but they provide a practical lens through which educators can understand the broader foundational purposes that environments can play in supporting learning and development. Crucially, the ABCS connects the **inner states** of learners with the **outer qualities** of places. It invites educators to ask: *How does this place support agency and belonging? How does it foster curiosity and satisfaction?*

We are currently developing a coding scheme and visual tool to help teachers and researchers identify how learning places support each of the ABCS dimensions. For example, a plaza may foster **agency** by giving students freedom to move and interact, or it may nurture **satisfaction** through aesthetic beauty or quietude.

A TOOL FOR PRACTICE

While the ABCS framework provides a theoretical lens for understanding qualities of place, we also wanted to offer educators a practical entry point for design. In our work with teachers, we noticed that while many valued the idea of place-based learning, they often asked: *But how do I begin?* That question led us to create *Making Places for Learning*, a two-step design tool that helps teachers systematically find, select, and use urban places as extensions of the curriculum. The tool is meant to function as a bridge between theory and classroom practice, offering educators a way to design learning experiences that are purposeful, contextualized, and deeply connected to their surroundings. The tool builds on ideas first articulated in *The Place of Learning: Why Where We Learn Matters*, a white paper developed by Daniel Wilson and colleagues at HGSE's Project Zero which underscores the need to situate learning more meaningfully within students' community contexts and local environments.⁴

Step 1: The Where & What

Teachers start by mapping and identifying compelling places in their city, parks, markets, museums, bridges, alleyways, waterfronts. These are not random selections but chosen for their resonance with curricular goals. By looking beyond the textbook, teachers learn to see the cultural, historical, and ecological richness already present in the urban environment as a living curriculum. For instance, a history teacher might select a city square as a site for understanding democratic assembly, while a science teacher might use a riverbank to study ecosystems.

Step 2: The Why & How

The second step invites teachers to articulate the learning design: *Why this place, and how will we use it?* To guide this process, we introduce four types of place-use that capture different orientations:

Learning AT Place: Using the site as a setting for familiar activities (e.g., reading in a garden, sketching on a plaza).

Learning OF Place: Studying the place itself, its history, function, and meaning (e.g., examining a market as an economic and social system).

Learning THROUGH Place: Using the place as a metaphor or conduit for exploring broader ideas (e.g., exploring resilience by studying a neighborhood rebuilt after flooding).

Learning WITH Place: Collaborating with the people and communities connected to the place to co-create meaning or projects (e.g., designing a mural with local artists in partnership with residents).

These modes of engagement encourage teachers to move from seeing urban sites merely as destinations for field trips toward conceiving them as ongoing partners in learning pathways.

The framework emerged inductively from observing how SEK International School educators were experimenting with place-based learning in diverse contexts. It was refined through conversations with the literature on place-based education, experiential learning, and urban pedagogy. By naming and structuring different ways of engaging with place, the tool supports teachers in being both creative and intentional. It helps them align learning experiences not only with curricular content but also with students' sense of belonging, agency, curiosity and satisfaction.

Ultimately, *Making Places for Learning* is more than a checklist. It is a mindset-shifting tool. It asks teachers to reconsider the relationship between curriculum and place, to see the city not as a backdrop but as an active participant in learning.

The value of the *Making Places for Learning tool* becomes clearer when we see it enacted by teachers in real contexts. The following case illustrates how the two-step tool and its four place-use orientations can guide the design of a rich learning path. It also shows how the framework is not only descriptive but reflective, helping educators recognize both the opportunities they seized and the ones they might extend further. In this way, the tool moves beyond theory to serve as a compass for practice.

CASE STUDY: FLAMENCO IN THE MARKET

A vivid example of applying the Making Places for Learning approach comes from Cristina, a Spanish immersion teacher at SEK Santa Isabel in Madrid. The school itself is an urban campus tucked into the heart of the city, a four-story vertical building that rises among narrow streets, plazas, and cafés. With limited outdoor space on site, students' daily environment is shaped by the rhythms of the neighborhood around them. Working with a mixed-age group of 3- to 12-year-old students, Cristina designed a learning path that wove together language, culture, and community within the nearby Antón Martín Market and its surrounding neighborhood (see Notes).

Setting the Scene

The learning path began as a treasure hunt. Each student carried a packet filled with images of foods, local icons, and cultural references. As they stepped out of their school into the cobblestone streets of the historic Barrio de las Letras, curiosity took over. Students searched for strawberries in a fruit stall, compared favorite foods, and debated whether certain pastries were “Spanish” or “Argentinian.” The packets provided not only vocabulary prompts but also questions that encouraged observation, comparison, and conversation.

Designing with Place

- **AT Place:** Cristina turned the market's tables and chairs into an outdoor classroom. Students completed vocabulary worksheets in an open-air setting, making the activity more engaging and interactive.
- **OF Place:** Upstairs at the flamenco school, students studied photos and posters, listened to music, and observed a live class. The place itself became the subject of inquiry.
- **THROUGH Place:** Back in the classroom, students reflected on their experience to explore deeper themes of identity, tradition, and artistic expression.

Cristina's design at the Antón Martín Market provides a vivid illustration of how place-based learning can foster student well-being. By taking learning outside the classroom and into the neighborhood, she created an experience that touches on multiple dimensions of the ABCS framework.

Agency: Students were empowered to explore the market and the flamenco school on their own terms. The treasure hunt packets offered multiple pathways and choices, students decided what to observe, compare, and discuss, reflecting a “reachable & open” design. The outdoor classroom and flexible activities, such as comparing foods or debating cultural origins, allowed them to engage in ways that were movable, flexible, and personally meaningful.

Belonging: The market and flamenco school became places of connection. Students interacted with peers, vendors, and cultural symbols, supporting a sense of belonging. The communal aspects of the market, small groups gathered around stalls, tables, or performance spaces, mirrored the ABCS principle of communal & compact design. Cultural artifacts, music, and local foods served as expressive and invitational elements, helping students connect across differences while grounding them in their own identities.

Curiosity: The design sparked surprise and inquiry at every turn. Unexpected encounters, strawberries outside the market, the rhythms of live flamenco, the textures and colors of vegetables, offered

contrasting, multi-sensorial stimuli. The open-ended treasure hunt and live observation of the flamenco class provoked attention, questions, and reflection, supporting the ABCS dimensions of attentional & provocative and contrasting & unexpected experiences.

Satisfaction: Students experienced delight and contentment throughout the outing. Comfortable and engaging spaces, tables in the market, the open-air streets, and the visually rich flamenco studio, provided restorative environments. Opportunities to reflect back in the classroom helped students make sense of their experiences, reinforcing a sense of progress and competence. The immersive, aesthetically pleasing, and culturally meaningful surroundings enhanced satisfaction, aligning with the ABCS principles of comfortable & calming, progressive & storied, and natural & safe.

Taken together, these elements show how a single outing can become a rich tapestry of learning. Cristina's design not only cultivated knowledge and skills but also demonstrated how well-being is embedded in place-based learning: students felt curious, connected, and empowered, illustrating the inseparable relationship between thoughtful design of place and holistic student development.

A Missed Opportunity and a Possibility

Cristina's design beautifully integrated three of the four place-uses. What was missing? Learning WITH Place. What if students co-created something with the flamenco dancers or interviewed the fruit vendors? What if they turned their observations into podcasts or public exhibits? These projects would not only deepen learning but increase students' sense of agency, belonging, curiosity and satisfaction, key drivers of well-being.

Looking Ahead: Making Cities Learnable

As we reflect on our early findings, several themes emerge:

- Well-being is not a by-product of good teaching, it is an essential outcome.
- Cities are filled with untapped pedagogical potential.
- Teachers need tools, frameworks, and support to design place-based learning.

In the coming year, we will publish 17 ethnographic *Pictures of Practice* and an accompanying guidebook for educators interested in using the ABCS framework and *Making Places for Learning* tool. Our goal is not to prescribe a single method but to build a movement, a global community of educators who see their cities not just as backdrops but as collaborators in learning.

CONCLUSION

As cities strive to be livable, we propose a companion question: *What makes cities learnable?* We argue that learnability is a core dimension of livability. When students feel seen, included, and supported by their city, they thrive, not only academically, but in all the areas of development. A city that invites exploration, dialogue, and participation becomes a partner in learning, offering opportunities for curiosity, collaboration, and reflection at every turn.

Educators like Cristina demonstrate what is possible. Through intentional design, collaboration with community members, and a focus on student well-being, ordinary streets, markets, and neighborhoods transform into extraordinary learning landscapes. In these spaces, students encounter language, culture, and history firsthand; develop empathy for others; and experience agency as they co-create knowledge with the people and places around them.

Ultimately, making cities learnable is about more than designing experiences, it is about cultivating mindsets. It asks educators, policymakers, and communities to see students as active participants in their urban environments, and to recognize the city itself as a rich, dynamic classroom. By embracing this perspective, we can reimagine both education and urban life: where curiosity is nurtured,

connection is deepened, and every street corner has the potential to spark wonder, learning, and well-being. Every student can thrive as a citizen of a truly learnable city by merging place and pedagogy.

NOTES

¹ Carol S. Weinstein and Robert James, “The Pandemic’s Toll on Adolescent Well-Being: Lessons for Educators,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 37, no. 5 (2022): 567–82; Russell M. Viner, Sophie Russell, Roberta Saulle, Harry Croker, Charlotte Stansfield, Jenny Packer, and Robert Booy, “School Closures During Social Lockdown and Mental Health, Health Behaviors, and Well-Being Among Children and Adolescents During the First COVID-19 Wave: A Systematic Review.” *JAMA Pediatrics* 176, No.4 (2022): 400–409.

<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.5840>.

² Christine Vestal, “COVID Harmed Kids’ Mental Health—And Schools Are Feeling It,” *Stateline*, November 8 (2021), <https://stateline.org/2021/11/08/covid-harmed-kids-mental-health-and-schools-are-feeling-it/>.

³ Richard Adams and Sarah Gray, *Teaching and Learning in Post-Pandemic Schools: Rebuilding Communities of Practice* (London: Routledge, 2023).

⁴ Daniel Wilson, Jessy Orozco Contraras, Tim Jia, and Maureen Isimbi Kalimba, “The Place of Learning: Why Where We Learn Matters.” Designing Learning Places Lab, Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2024), <https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/2024-10/The%20Place%20of%20Learning.pdf>.

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DWELLING WITHIN ALMSHOUSING: REFLECTIONS ON ETHNOGRAPHIC DESIGN METHODS TO EXPLORE HOW OLDER PEOPLE LIVE INDEPENDENTLY WITHIN A NEW ALMSHOUSE IN LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

To meet the needs of an ageing population, UK government policy on housing emphasises the importance of providing older people with housing that suits their needs to live independently for longer.¹ Among the oldest models of social housing are almshouses, which have existed in England for over a thousand years.² Today, there are approximately 30,000 almshouses, ranging from cottages, flats, and residences across villages, towns, and cities,³ and more are being built. Accommodating older people in this type of housing raises questions about how the interior design can aid their independence and daily lives.

This paper reflects on an ethnographic study conducted during a ten-night residency at a recently constructed almshouse in South London, operated by a charity with a long-standing history of providing homes for older residents. The almshouse accommodates 65 residents, each of whom lives independently in one of the apartments which are arranged around a central courtyard with communal living spaces. The design of this project focuses on supporting independent living in its spaces and independence later in life while maintaining a sense of community.

This paper is part of my PhD studies in architecture, which focuses on studying how older people live decently within almshouse settings. What I will present here is not my findings, but rather a reflection of my experience in living on site and adopting multi-ethnographic research tools such as interviews, observation, photographic surveys, measured surveys, and ethnographic sketching. Each method provided a unique perspective on the setting, contributing to a layered understanding of the residents' lived experiences. This reflective perspective examines my cultural background, personal experience, and researcher identity, and how they influenced the ethnographic research process and interpretation.

THE ALMSHOUSE SETTING

Ethnographic research begins with a theory-based research question concerning cultural process, followed by choosing a suitable site where that question is relevant.⁴ For my study, which focused on the research question "In what ways can contemporary almshouse designs promote independent living from an interior design perspective?," the almshouse was an appropriate choice.

The almshouse chosen for my study is one of the most recent almshouse developments in the UK. Located in a heavily inhabited part of South London, it is run by a charitable organisation with over 500 years' experience in providing housing for older people in the city.

The goal of this almshouse design is to support an independent lifestyle for older people. The building consists of five floors with 57 apartments and accommodates 65 residents aged 65 and older. It provides a variety of apartment types, including one- and two-bedroom units, some of which are wheelchair-accessible. Each apartment has a living room, a shower room, and a kitchen.

The apartments are arranged along a U-shaped walkway around a central courtyard garden. The walkway connects the apartments to the communal spaces (e.g., a garden room and multiple activity rooms) on the ground and first floors, creating a quadrilateral layout. This spatial structure supports both privacy and interaction, allowing residents to locate themselves according to their preferences and needs—retreating into an apartment, sitting on benches in walkways, or engaging in communal activities.

While residents are expected to manage their daily lives independently, a staff office is available on weekdays to attend to their needs. The almshouse also includes studio apartments for visiting researchers to reside in during their fieldwork, one of which became my home during my stay.

LIVING IN THE ALMSHOUSE

The almshouse design, with its accommodation for visiting researchers in studio apartments, facilitated negotiations with the managing charity to obtain permission to reside there for the duration of my fieldwork. This idea aligns with the methodology of this research, which is based on ethnography. It represents the principle that researchers immerse themselves in the field during ethnographic research, becoming part of everyday routines. This involvement seeks to achieve "insider knowledge," enabling observation from the viewpoint of those being studied.⁵

My ten-night stay in studio (see figure 1) facilitated closeness and a relationship of trust. One of the most challenging aspects of field relations between the researcher and the researched is building rapport and trust.⁶ The many differences between myself (researcher) and the almshouse residents (the researched) meant that building trust was extremely important. According to LeCompte and Schensul (2010), when researchers are viewed as different from the research community building trust requires greater effort.⁷

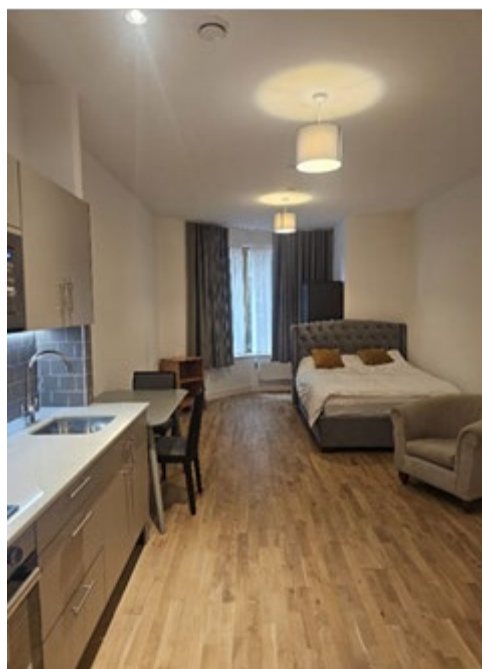


Figure 1. Almshouse Studio by Najwa Almalki

Staying in the studio helped me maintain a continuous presence throughout the fieldwork, facilitating informal communication and strengthening familiarity. The location of the studio next to one of the main entrances and the mailboxes led to informal interactions with the residents when they returned in the evening or picked up parcels. Residing in the studio made me a neighbour rather than a frequent visitor. For example, I would ask the residents for guidance on how to operate the home appliances in my studio because they owned the same ones. This familiarity and trust reduced the time it took for residents to open up to me and for me to enter their apartments to collect data.

In addition, living in the almshouse allowed me to walk and move freely within the building, highlighting the importance of walking in the production of ethnographic data. Moving through common spaces shows how our actions impact everyone and everything around us.⁸ Staying in the almshouse provided valuable insights into the daily and weekly rhythms and routines of the residents, and how these patterns influenced their use of private apartments and shared spaces. During the week, residents appeared more dynamic and active in communal areas, with some engaging in activities in the garden room, others in the walkway, sitting, or tending to their plants. On weekends, movement slowed and the atmosphere was quieter, as some residents left the almshouse or preferred to remain in their apartments with visiting family.

Moreover, the studio allowed me to develop my understanding of the data and reflect on what I saw and witnessed. It was a space where I had the flexibility to either immerse myself among the residents of the place or withdraw for quiet reflection.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In this section, I describe the research tools and multi-method ethnographic approach used to collect data. This involved engaging with private apartments and communal spaces to study how interior design shapes the experiences of older adults in independent living.

One of the main challenges in this case study was managing multiple practices. I was simultaneously moving between interviews, observing, taking photographs, drawing, and measuring spaces, each requiring a different approach to interacting with residents and managing time. Balancing these practices, along with navigating ethical concerns, shaped the study process and its results.

Interviews

Interviews, a conversational approach to gathering information,⁹ was the core method used in this study. Pre-arranged interviews were conducted flexibly across 21 apartments. Before starting each interview, I explained the research aims, procedures, potential inconveniences, confidentiality, and the right to refuse.¹⁰ This was not only an ethics requirement, but one of the strategies mentioned in the literature to build trust.

Each interview began in an apartment living room, over a cup of tea, creating a relaxed atmosphere. Next, I invited each resident to take me on a walking tour—a common approach used to answer research questions when exploring the interaction between people and their environment.¹¹ Moving through the rooms, participants reflected on their lived experiences in each space to “give the researcher a glimpse into the private areas of everyday life.”¹² After each walking interview, the living room served as a space for final reflection.

The movement paths (figure 2) depict our different roles and paths—guest/researcher (orange) and resident/interviewee (blue)—as we navigated the space. I explored each corner of the rooms while residents stood near the interior of the rooms, guiding and observing. This reflects how the residents allowed me, as researcher, to immerse myself in their environments.



Figure 2. Movement Paths of Researcher and Resident by Najwa Almalki

Walking interviews typically follow a semi-structured approach, combining pre-determined questions with the flexibility to respond to the environment and participant responses as things unfold. This tends to be conversational in nature.¹³ For my research, I conducted semi-structured interviews, using pre-prepared questions; and spontaneous questions to delve deeper into responses. Question guides were developed by reviewing the literature on indoor spaces and independent living in later life. During resident visits I was able to develop an understanding of the common topics among them, which helped me to formulate further questions. These lists of questions were a useful guide.

Interviews were also conducted with staff, whose diverse responsibilities required a semi-structured interview aligned to their specific experience and role. Their responses helped me understand their perceptions of residents' needs, adding to the input from residents.

Observation

While interviewing helped me grasp people's perceptions, observing the residents allowed me to see their actual behaviours and daily actions,¹⁴ which interviews alone may not have revealed. Examples include movement patterns and the sensory atmosphere of the place. I found myself drawn to the living room, where conversation unfolded; and the kitchen, where tea was made and shared. While in these rooms, I was seeking to understand how they used these spaces and adapted to them. In particular, observing women with dementia in their kitchens allowed me to assess whether the design met their needs and facilitated their independence. Such moments enabled residents to communicate what was vital to them with their deteriorating ability to remember, communicate, and reason.¹⁵

Observation was also a useful tool in the communal spaces, helping me identify the patterns and behaviours of residents using these spaces. An example is how they used the walkway—whether it was to sit and talk to a neighbour in the evening, for meditation, or simply for movement and walking. The architectural layout of the almshouse is a quadrangular design arranged around a central courtyard garden. Walking along the interior walkway with its glass windows provided visual access to various corners of the building, allowing for multi-point observation.

Although observation is valuable, adding another research method, such as interviews, was essential because the nature of field observation is such that it produces only a limited range and category of data.¹⁶ This was possible because the more the researcher is an observer, the more likely the researcher is to engage in relatively structured interviews.¹⁷

Sometimes my observations in the communal areas took the form of participant observation. I participated in activities in the garden room alongside residents, staff, and visitors. This approach not only developed my understanding of how residents interacted and used their shared spaces but also

underlined the value of participant observation in the ethnographic approach. Participant observation allowed me to learn first-hand the culture of the group being studied which is essential before offering valid interpretations of the behaviour of its members.¹⁸

Photographic Surveys

Photography is an essential tool in ethnography, not only for recording visual details but also for representing knowledge and capturing moments of cultural exchange and interaction.¹⁹ Fieldwork photography, when guided by conscious intent, primarily functions as a means of documenting experiences to remember events, illustrating what was observed, and capturing complexities that cannot easily be described in written text.²⁰

Photographic surveys were conducted in residents' apartments immediately following the walking interview and observations. The photographs facilitated visual documentation of the space, layout, and objects. Two of the 19 residents did not wish for their apartments to be photographed, for privacy reasons. From this it became clear that while photography is useful for documentation purposes, personal boundaries should be respected.

The photographic surveys enabled me to visually record the interior layout, such as movement paths, furniture arrangements, and seating arrangements, and enabled me to see how residents, staff, and visitors used the communal spaces. This tool was a challenge for me as I had to consciously avoid taking pictures of people as ethical rules dictated. It required me to be aware of timing, taking pictures before or after activities when the spaces were empty.²¹

The photograph in figure 3 shows how a resident leaves her apartment door open to improve the air quality. However, my interview with the Building Service Engineer revealed that fire regulations require doors to remain closed. This example made me reflect on how the design of physical spaces shapes institutional routine and how residents experience independence within an almshouse setting. I reached this understanding through the interview conducted in an observational and visual context, which provided in-depth visual insights and informed the overall data both analytically and interpretively.²²



Figure 3. Open Door to Improve Air Quality by Najwa Almalki

Additionally, my Arab facial features and clothing garnered interest from the residents, who initiated conversations regarding origins and culture. This was done in a very polite and respectful manner, and I felt absolutely at ease. Many residents even shared their personal experiences of interacting with Arab people or even travelling to Arab countries. I believe these short conversations helped foster a deeper, more intimate relationship between me and the residents.

In some ways the requirements of the research pushed me out of my comfort zone. In my culture, asking someone to allow me to visit their home and take pictures of their bathroom would be considered inappropriate and rude. When I started visiting the residents' apartments, in certain situations I felt my actions were inconsistent with my values and upbringing as an Arab. Despite carrying out my study in the knowledge that I was acting ethically and had the residents' permission, it was difficult for me and created a sense of groundlessness. The term "groundlessness" is discussed in social research and used to describe experiences of discomfort, anxiety, fear, and anger, and is an apt description for how I felt—as though my feet were not firmly planted on the rules I was raised on.²⁷

In addition to my role as a researcher, I am also a young mother. Living with older residents created an additional dynamic relating to age and experience. Eighty-five percent of the study participants were female. I sensed their desire to discuss their experiences of motherhood, family life, and caregiving in times gone by. This contrasted with the independent lives they now led in the almshouse. This required careful listening, and generated some transfer of emotional weight. I was aware, however, that ethnographic listening helps build relationships and allows not only for the beneficial exchange of information between researchers and participants, but also for them to feel respected and heard.²⁸

This experience gave me a different perspective on fast-paced London life, revealing a dimension of the city I had not previously considered—that of the accommodation of its older people. Living in an almshouse revealed this quieter side of the city, transforming my view of London in my head from a tourist hotspot into a place that catered for shared living and an ageing population.

This reflection will inform my further application of this framework in upcoming fieldwork in other almshouses. It also provides methodological insights that may be useful for researchers interested in studying ageing from the perspective of homemaking and interior design, particularly in contemporary settings.

CONCLUSION

This paper described a study that examined older people living independently in a contemporary almshouse in London. Living with the residents and employing multiple ethnographic tools—interviews; observation; photographic and measured surveys; and ethnographic sketches—provided a layered approach to my understanding of residents' experiences in their almshouse environment. I also shared reflections on my experience as a researcher from a cultural and personal perspective, highlighting how these factors affect interpretation. These insights highlight the value of the ethnographic approach and researcher reflexivity when working with older people, enriching interior design research by uncovering the spatial experiences of later life.

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THE STONY PATHS OF CARE MUNICIPALISM IN TÜRKİYE: THE EXAMPLE OF CHILDCARE

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INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the concept of care municipalism, this paper aims to develop an understanding of municipally-led care infrastructures and everyday care practices in urban communities with growing care needs. Austerity and market-driven policies have attempted to ‘fix’ the care crisis by shifting responsibility from public institutions to private individuals and informal networks. Türkiye is taken as an example of a country under the influence of the twin forces of neoliberalism and religion, which also supports home care for ideological and political reasons, with growing social inequalities and care needs that are not being met by the national care infrastructure. Indicators such as the relative poverty rate and the poverty risk or social exclusion rate, people living in inadequate housing and having loans other than mortgages are social problems of the country. Under these circumstances, the gap between the demand and supply of formal state care is to some extent filled by municipal care practices, if not by home care, and the recent debate in Türkiye over the kindergartens provided by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality shows that there are indeed conflicts between the national and local governments over the issue of care. In order to achieve a more equitable distribution of the care burden among urban residents, this paper argues that further public care infrastructures need to be developed at the municipal level, and highlights the possibility of providing everyday care through existing practices of care municipalism in large Turkish cities through the case of childcare.

Developments in early childhood and childcare policies

Childcare, simply defined as the responsibility for the care of young children by parents at home or by public or private institutions outside the home,¹ is an important social need and policy area that is growing in importance around the world. It is a one type of the broader category of care. Brannen points out that until the 1970s, childcare was associated with the private sphere of the home and mothers, but today it is seen as an issue that affects both public and private spaces, depending on various factors. She also points to the differences in policy between countries such as the UK, the US and other European countries. As well as national differences, globalization is a factor in “the commodification of childcare”.² In such a context, Brannen highlights, for example, inequalities in care resulting from transnational care work and the relationality of care, which considers the child as an active agent in the production of the care relationship and space, rather than a simple recipient.

When we focus on childcare for preschool children, it is referred to in the childcare literature as “early childhood education and care” (ECEC). This paper is also interested in ECEC policies in the Turkish case. There are several studies that analyse ECEC policies in specific countries and/or compare them for different countries. Not only do the policies themselves and their regulations differ between countries, but other factors such as the country’s level of development in terms of gender equality, social welfare or the economy are also important for understanding its childcare policies. Some Nordic countries are better off than more traditional but also poorer societies in these respects, which is reflected in their well-developed childcare policies. However, there are also differences between them, as in the case of Sweden and Denmark, when it comes to implementing some reforms in their childcare policies, which deteriorate in quality against the financial crisis.³

Dedeoğlu and Adar also point to the wider country context when assessing the level of development of ECEC policy in the country. They argue that the country’s gender and welfare mix strongly determines the way in which care services are institutionalized. They give the example of Turkey, where neoliberalism in the economy is combined with conservatism in politics, resulting in the non-institutionalization of care services under “a neo-paternalist care regime”.⁴ In this sense, childcare for each country is at the centre of socio-cultural, economic and political-ideological dimensions. It is shaped by the dominant ideology in a given country at a given time and creates a contested space between different actors. It is also affected by events such as the financial crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic. Houlberg et al. use an experimental survey to show how politicians’ decisions to cut and spend in periods of austerity or growth are influenced by their political ideology (left or right), the strength of interest groups and the perceived deservingness of the target group. Here, left-wing politicians are willing to spend more on childcare and unemployment. It is also found that childcare, youth and elderly policies tend to be the least cut, but not the most spent.⁵

The particular policies favoured in the area of childcare also become a “trap for women”.⁶ Giuliani and Duvander study the early introduction of the cash-for-care policy in Sweden in 2008. The policy was later abandoned in 2016 because of its negative impact on gender equality and women’s employment, especially in rural areas. Although the policy was well-intended as an income compensation or payment for private childcare, it promoted the male-breadwinner family model, which was not suited to the dual-earner carers in the Nordic countries. The authors show that it was mainly low-income groups with lower levels of education and of foreign origin who benefited most from the scheme when it was in place. They point to two possibilities: one hypothesis is that the policy withdraws women from the labour market, and the other is that it creates a disincentive to enter the labour market. They found that the policy had the most negative effects in rural areas, where municipalities adopted the policy the most and where the structure of the labour market differs from that in cities. The same cash-for-care policy that Sweden has already abandoned is still in place in Turkey for disabled family members. It was adopted in 2006 and the regulation on home care allowance was published in 2023.⁷ In 2021, 535.805 disabled people received the support.⁸ Regarding childcare, the Social Security Institution has an ongoing project to support working mothers with children aged 0-24 months with 300 euros per month for 12 months.⁹ The second project shows that there is also an awareness in Turkey of the possible negative impact of childcare allowances on women’s employment.

It is also important to consider parents’ expectations when developing childcare services. The more participatory the childcare planning process, the more satisfied users will be in terms of having their needs met. Moussié first describes what informal women workers consider to be a good childcare centre and then emphasizes that different parties, including municipalities, urban planners, childcare providers, informal women workers and their organizations, should work together for better and more inclusive childcare services. According to Moussié, women working in the informal economy in different sectors in different countries associate good childcare facilities with the following elements: affordability and

accessibility; appropriate opening hours; participation and communication; education and learning; health services; infrastructure and qualified staff with good working conditions, and nutrition.¹⁰ According to Moussié, among the above-mentioned actors, municipalities have the advantage of being more accessible to childcare service users than national actors and can play an important role in providing, regulating and coordinating childcare services with other actors such as NGOs and community groups. In this paper, we will also look at how Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has become a leader in the provision of public childcare at the city level in Turkey.

Andrews et al. contribute to the discussion by exploring Australian mothers' views of a good neighbourhood in which to raise their children by comparing the expectations and evaluations of inner city and suburban mothers in Melbourne. They conclude by emphasizing that it is wrong to assume a one-size-fits-all approach when developing public policies, such as housing, transport, safety and social policies. Kalíšková and Münich examine the relationship between the availability of local public kindergartens and the employment rate of mothers of preschool children in the Czech Republic. They emphasize that when childcare is unavailable, not only does the employment rate of mothers fall, but the state also loses financial revenue. Although their account of childcare in the Czech Republic gives the impression that there is a wide range of childcare provision in the country, mainly provided by the public sector, they still find large regional and municipal differences in how they deal with the excess demand for childcare, which is reflected in the high rejection rates of applications. As a result of the growing imbalance between supply and demand for childcare services, we also learn from the literature that new actors and innovative practices are emerging in this area. Some of these developments are seen as positive, others as worrying. To start with the latter, Dedeoğlu and Adar's analysis of changes in childcare under the current Turkish regime deciphers how religious actors have come into play in line with the dominant conservative ideology of the national government.

Looking at innovative childcare practices in the European context, Cortesi et al. examine the example of the European H2020 Families_Share project, which was a grassroots initiative to develop a platform for sharing parental tasks and related educational or leisure activities. The authors promote the project as “a new sustainable welfare model for cities, municipalities and companies”.¹¹ For the authors, the need for such socially innovative practices based on digital platforms is growing in a context of ever-increasing demand for childcare due to factors such as ageing, female employment, changing family structures and relationships, and neighbourhood inequalities. They mention the concepts of “community building and socialized parenting”, “shared time and volunteer childcare” or “shared childcare” to refer to the initiative, which still needs to address the issues of trust, regulatory issues, tensions between formal and informal care work or productive and reproductive work. Cortesi et al. therefore suggest a “mixed-model approach” based on cooperation between formal/institutional and informal childcare providers, with municipalities playing a mediating role.

Gallego and Maestripiéri also look at citizen-led and institution-led social innovation through the example of Barcelona's 0-3 education and care policy. According to the authors, since the 2010s, EU policy has shifted towards a combination of local welfare and social innovation models as a way of compensating for the withdrawal of the state from service provision, as opposed to civil society and the private sector. The socially innovative ECEC policies are led by local councils and supported by the notion of new municipalism. Gallego and Maestripiéri refer to Barcelona en Comú, which provided a favourable political climate for new municipalist approaches and community-based initiatives, such as forms of social and solidarity economy and commons. Specifically, the city government developed “A Push for 0–3” strategy that addressed social inequalities, took into account the diversity of needs, and developed public-private cooperation. It sought to combine the universality and diversity of care needs and to develop “community responses to the collective problem of how to care for very young children within the framework of the public system”.¹² However, they highlight the challenges of limited

budgets, public collaboration and the risk of gentrifying social policy, the latter of which the authors argue can be avoided if the public sector learns from these projects. Zechner’s analysis of childcare commons or self-organized nurseries (*grupos de crianza compartida*), also in Barcelona during the same period, examines this experience from a micro-political and feminist perspective, reflecting on the dualities of self-governance-universality, movements-institutions and autonomy-interdependence. Her dialectic of these binary oppositions produces an alternative citizenship based on care: “Any new ‘social contract’ today must build on both commons and the public, on both autonomy and heteronomy as principles, and on caretizenship”.¹³

CARE MUNICIPALISM IN TÜRKİYE

Before discussing the case of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality as an example of new and caring municipalism in Türkiye, we would like to review the system of early childhood education and care in the country in order to provide a context. According to national statistics, the child population ratio of the Turkish population has been decreasing since the 1970s and corresponded to the 26% of the population in 2023. However, the Turkish child population ratio is the highest among European countries in the same year. Regional differences in the child population ratio are also observed in the country.¹⁴ A report on the early childhood education and care policy in Türkiye points to the Ministry of National Education (MoNe) and the Ministry of Family and Social Services as the main responsible public institutions, but emphasizes that early childhood care for 0-2 year olds in the country is very limited and childcare is perceived as a women’s issue. In the same report, we see that 42,5% of women in a 2013 survey sample didn’t work because they had young children.¹⁵ According to MoNe’s 2023-2024 education statistics, 10% of children in primary and secondary education are in preschool education in preschool education institutions, which is about 25% of total education institutions.¹⁶ A 2020 report by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation entitled “Preschool Education Statistics of Turkey” shows the country’s situation in preschool education in detailed graphs, and at first glance, the fact that half of the kindergartens are private institutions stands out.¹⁷

In addition to numbers, there are also ideological affiliations of the national government that influence the symbolic space of childcare in Türkiye. This can be seen in the organization and religionization of education and the perspective on women, which is reflected in the deletion of women from the name of the current Ministry of Family and Social Services in 2011, the country’s withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)¹⁸, and the announcement of 2025 as the Year of the Family with the logo below, which is used in all official documents in public institutions. This is the political-ideological field where Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality stands out as an example of care municipalism and we will now briefly look at how.



Figure 1. The family year logo. (Source: T. C. Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı. “Aile Yılı’na özel “devlet himayesinde huzurlu aileleri” temsil eden logo tasarlandı.” Accessed March 18, 2025. [https://www.aile.gov.tr/haberler/aile-yilina-ozel-devlet-himayesinde-huzurlu-aileleri-temsil-eden-logo-tasarlandi/.](https://www.aile.gov.tr/haberler/aile-yilina-ozel-devlet-himayesinde-huzurlu-aileleri-temsil-eden-logo-tasarlandi/))

Istanbul was won by the Republican People’s Party in the 2019 and 2024 local elections, despite hurdles in the former. Since the first elections, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) has prioritized social services, including childcare, youth, women, the elderly and the family. In just 5 years, IMM has established 117 kindergartens, 69 in the European side and 46 in the Anatolian side, with a target of 150 kindergartens in 150 neighbourhoods of the city and the slogan of “The children of this city will be equal”. According to the information on the municipal website dedicated to its kindergartens in Istanbul,¹⁹ these children’s activity centres are full-time day care centres five days a week for the 3-6 year old children whose parents/guardians reside in Istanbul. They are open to foreign immigrant families as long as they have an identity number assigned by the state. They have a system of prioritizing needy families and children in the application and admission process. In addition, they have a fee, but some families receive the service for free according to the same procedure.

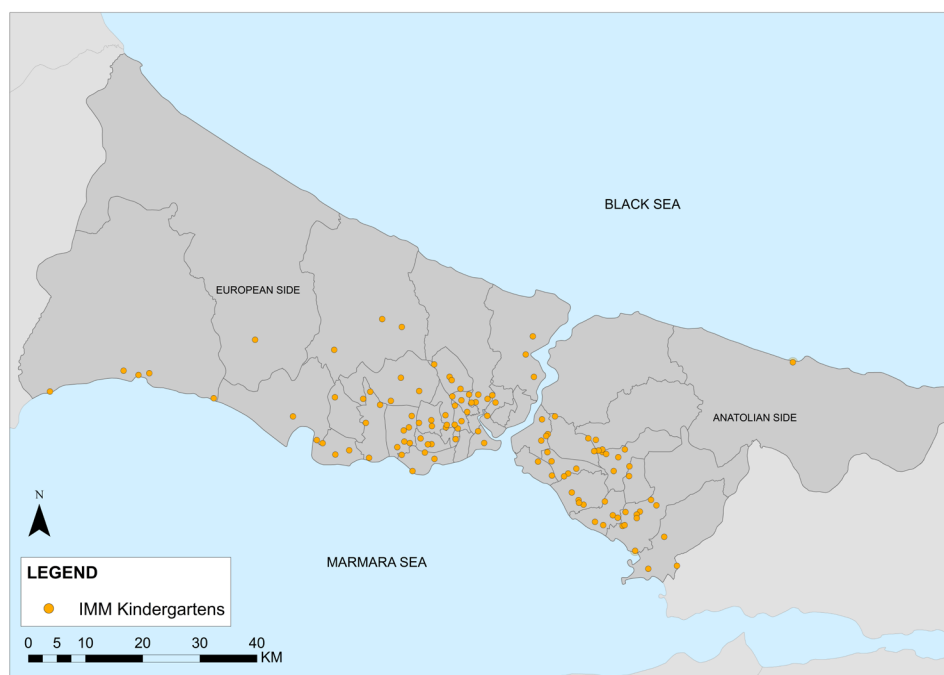


Figure 2. The IMM kindergartens in Istanbul. (Prepared by Tuğçe Şanlı)

The mission of the childcare services, under the brand name “yuvamız istanbul” (Our Creche Istanbul), emphasizes the goal of providing accessible public childcare services to the residents of Istanbul so that all children have access to the right to pre-school education and parents/families can participate in working life and become economically independent through the cooperation of the municipality, family and society. The vision also refers to the concepts of social municipalism, early childhood education, equal educational opportunities and gender equality, as well as the leadership of Atatürk as the founder of the Turkish Republic in achieving these goals. The unequal care burden of mothers is also mentioned in the vision statement and the goal of their participation in the labour force in addition to the active participation of families in economic and social life along with this municipal childcare initiative. In this sense, based on these statements, it can be said that IMM is aware of the debates in the care literature mentioned above and the important role that municipalities can play in this area.



Figure 3. The logo of IMM creches “our creche Istanbul” (Source: X. “Yuvamız İstanbul (@yuvamizistanbul) / X.” Accessed March 19, 2025. https://x.com/i/flow/login?redirect_after_login=%2Fyuvamizistanbul.)

Considering that these 117 IMM kindergartens all around Istanbul are for 3-6 year old children, we can ask if they are enough and what is the situation of mothers with younger children. We can see from the IMM website that the Social Services Department also has 14 IMM Women’s Centres with various support services for women, including a project called “Istanbul Baby” that aims to provide guidance on baby care to particularly disadvantaged mothers/families. The 20 Istanbul Family Counselling and Education Centres also support these services with additional services, including health and developmental screening services for children and other educational and counselling services. All of these centres, starting with the Children’s Activity Centres, have their monthly calendars for organized events and publications. Some examples of posters for the former are shown below.



Figure 4. Atelier of the world under water and felt work for children in March in children’s activity centres (Source: Yuvamız İstanbul. “Etkinlikler.” Accessed March 19, 2025. <https://yuvamiz.ibb.istanbul/etkinlikler.>)

CONCLUSION

In the light of this brief overview of IMM's childcare and related services, we argue that it has become a good practice example of care municipalism in Türkiye in a short period of time. For the same reason, they have to cope with many legal and other challenges from the national state, such as the threat to close their kindergartens or the prohibition to open new ones. The national-local administrative conflict on the issue of childcare is not only a political-economic conflict, but also a socio-cultural conflict on the issues of women, family and education. Despite all the obstacles to its municipal efforts, IMM has so far been able to show how a metropolitan municipality can provide affordable, accessible and trustworthy childcare to different sectors of the urban society, giving priority to disadvantaged groups such as low-income families and not excluding the city's foreign immigrant residents.

In this sense, IMM is an example of creating a good urban environment at the neighbourhood level with good childcare spaces and services as defined in the literature. What is different from European examples of self-organized nurseries or childcare commons is the formality and more structured nature of IMM efforts, which are still provided by the municipality, albeit in cooperation with families and community groups. In the Turkish context, informal care used to be associated with the care of grandparents, for example. More recently, there are also informal caregivers from Caucasian or African countries who live with middle- and upper-income families to take care of their children or the elderly family members. Apart from these arrangements, informality is incorporated into the national care and education system through religious organizations, as studied by Dedeoğlu and Adar. It is an informality that is enforced top-down by the national political system, in contrast to the bottom-up and democratic initiatives developed by the public in Europe.

Therefore, in the Turkish context, the more accessible, formal and more controlled care efforts of the municipal actor provide a more credible option for families in need of care services.

NOTES

- ¹ Julia Brannen, “Childcare,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 457.
- ² Julia Brannen, “Childcare,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 458.
- ³ Caroline de la Porte et al. “Still A Poster Child for Social Investment? Changing Regulatory Dynamics of Early Childhood Education and Care in Denmark and Sweden,” *Regulation & Governance* 17, no. 3 (2023): 628–643, doi: 10.1111/rego.12492.
- ⁴ Saniye Dedeoğlu and Aslı Şahankaya Adar, “Caring Piously: New Institutionalisation of Childcare Services in Turkey,” *Social Policy and Society* 23, no. 3 (2024): 772.
- ⁵ Kurt Houlberg et al. “Spending and Cutting are Two Different Worlds: Experimental Evidence from Danish Local Councils,” *Local Government Studies* 42, no. 5 (2016): 836–837.
- ⁶ Cited by Giuliana Giuliani and Ann Zofie Duvander, “Cash-for-care Policy in Sweden: An Appraisal of Its Consequences on Female Employment,” *International Journal of Social Welfare* 26, no. 1 (2017): 49.
- ⁷ “Regulation on Home Care Allowance was Published in the Official Gazette,” Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Family and Social Services, accessed March 15, 2025, <https://www.aile.tr/eyhgm-en/haberler/regulation-on-home-care-allowance-was-published-in-the-official-gazette/> and “Evde Bakım Yardımı Yönetmeliği,” Resmî Gazete, accessed March 15, 2025, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2023/05/20230526-2.htm>.
- ⁸ “Engelli ve Yaşlı İstatistik Bülteni,” Engelli ve Yaşlı Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, accessed March 15, 2025, https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/85040/eyhgm_istatistik_bulteni_haziran_2021.pdf.
- ⁹ “Evde Çocuk Bakım Hizmetleri Yoluyla Kayıtlı Kadın İstihdamının Desteklenmesi Operasyonu,” Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu, accessed March 15, 2025, <https://www.sgk.gov.tr/Content/Post/1614aae2-961b-4cd9-97fb-5cc0f2def657/Evde-Cocuk-Bakim-Hizmetleri-Yoluyla-Kayitli-Kadin-Istihdaminin-Desteklenmesi-Operasyonu-2022-05-12-10-36-21> and “Eğitilmiş Çocuk Bakıcılarının Teşviki Yoluyla Kayıtlı Kadın İstihdamının Desteklenmesi Projesi II Edu-care II,” Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu, accessed March 15, 2025, <https://uyg.sgk.gov.tr/AvrupaBirligiveDisliskilerProjePortali/resources/documents/educare/eduCareBrosur.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Rachel Moussié, “Childcare Services in Cities: Challenges and Emerging Solutions for Women Informal Workers and Their Children,” *Environment & Urbanization* 33, no. 1 (2021): 125.
- ¹¹ Agostino Cortesi et al. “Families_Share: Digital and Social Innovation for Work–life Balance,” *Digital Policy, Regulation and Governance* 24, no. 2 (2022): 163.
- ¹² Raquel Gallego and Lara Maestripieri, “Integrating Social Innovation and Public Policy: Lessons from Early Childhood Education and Care in Barcelona, Spain,” *Journal of Public Policy* 44, no. 4 (2024): 858.
- ¹³ Manuela Zechner, “No Commons Without Micropolitics. Learning with Feminist and Municipalist Movements in Spain,” *International Journal of the Commons* 17, no. 1 (2023): 457.
- ¹⁴ “İstatistiklerle Çocuk, 2023,” TÜİK, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Cocuk-2023-53679>.
- ¹⁵ “Türkiye’de Erken Çocukluk Bakımı ve Okul Öncesi Eğitime Katılım,” ERG and AÇEV, accessed March 17, 2025, [Türkiyede-Erken-Cocukluk-Bakimi-ve-Okul-Oncesi-Egitime-Katilim-30.10.17.pdf](https://www.erg-acev.org.tr/Turkiyede-Erken-Cocukluk-Bakimi-ve-Okul-Oncesi-Egitime-Katilim-30.10.17.pdf).
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- ¹⁷ “Preschool Education Statistics of Turkey,” TESEV, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://www.tesev.org.tr/en/research/preschool-education-statistics-of-turkey/>.
- ¹⁸ “Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 210,” Council of Europe, accessed March 18, 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treatyid=210>.
- ¹⁹ “Yuvamız İstanbul,” İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, accessed March 19, 2025, <https://yuvamiz.ibb.istanbul/anasayfa>.

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ACCESSIBLE CITIES. LEVERAGING PLANNING PRACTICES TO DESIGN INCLUSIVE PUBLIC URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Livable cities are those that prioritize human well-being and social sustainability, transforming urban and built environments into spaces that foster accessibility, inclusivity, and responsiveness to the diverse needs of their inhabitants. Such cities should not only accommodate but actively support the varied lifestyles and abilities of their populations. Design and architecture play a pivotal role in this transformation, shaping spaces that not only serve functional purposes but also enhance the quality of life for all individuals. Accessibility, when integrated into every stage of the design process, becomes a key tool for promoting social inclusion, ensuring that people—regardless of physical, cognitive, sensory, or cultural differences—can fully engage in society. In this framework, design practice extends beyond technical or aesthetic concerns to become a medium for conveying values like equity, safety, participation, integration, and overall life satisfaction, contributing to communities that are more equitable, thriving, and connected.¹ By prioritizing accessibility, cities can foster environments where every citizen has equal opportunities to live, work, and feel a meaningful member of their community. Inclusive design no longer looks at accessibility as a supplementary adjustment or final step in urban planning. Instead, it represents an intrinsic design parameter, fundamentally shaping every aspect of the planning and architectural process. It requires a deliberate focus on those whose needs are often marginalized—particularly individuals with disabilities—who frequently encounter barriers that hinder their participation in public life. These barriers, whether architectural, sensory, or social, do not merely restrict access but actively reinforce forms of social inequality and exclusion. Inaccessible environments perpetuate these divides, limiting social mobility and sustaining systemic disadvantage. Consequently, the outskirts of urban and civic life often coincide with those communities that are structurally excluded from full citizenship.

The study presented here, which focuses on the elaboration of the guidelines for the *PEBA - Piano per l'Eliminazione delle Barriere Architettoniche* (Plan for the Elimination of Architectural Barriers) for the City of Turin, adopts this inclusive design perspective. Its objectives were shaped by a commitment to integrate a wide array of stakeholders and capture the needs of the urban population in a comprehensive and participatory manner. Through a collaborative partnership between the City of Turin and TAL, the Turin Accessibility Lab²—an academic research center within the Department of Architecture and Design at the Politecnico di Torino—it was possible to define a methodological framework that extends beyond the normative imperatives of barrier removal. The project embraced a

broader and more nuanced understanding of accessibility, incorporating physical, sensory, cognitive, and cultural dimensions, in an effort to encompass as many aspects of urban life as possible to make them more accessible, not only to those with disabilities but to all citizens. The aim was to shift from a PEBA to a wider Accessibility Plan, promoting an approach to urban design that serves the needs of everyone.³



Figure 1. Guidelines design for the PEBA (Architectural Barriers Elimination Plan), Turin Accessibility Lab, 2024, Research context for the Accessibility Plan. Courtesy: authors

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical foundation of this approach is grounded in the principles of Universal Design, first articulated by Ronald L. Mace, which rejects the notion that accessibility should be an optional or auxiliary consideration.⁴ Instead, it proposes an integrative design philosophy that responds to the full spectrum of human diversity. Universal Design envisions an environment that is flexible, adaptable, and accommodating to everyone, irrespective of age, ability, or circumstance. Addressing this complexity demands a multidisciplinary effort, one that draws upon legal, social, and cultural knowledge to produce environments that are truly inclusive.⁵ The exclusion of people with disabilities cannot be rectified through infrastructural interventions alone. It also requires confronting the deeper systemic norms and planning traditions that have historically marginalized them.⁶ Despite legislation, PEBA's often remain unimplemented or ineffective, with poor adoption of Universal Design principles to create truly inclusive urban systems, highlighting the need for greater integration between planning and policy: although significant advancements have been made in improving the physical accessibility of urban spaces, many individuals with disabilities (whether permanent, temporary, or situational) remain excluded from crucial aspects of city life. At international level, the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) highlights that the environment is a key factor in either enabling or disabling an individual's ability to fully participate in society. It stresses that physical, social, and cultural environments must be designed to be inclusive and accessible, allowing people with disabilities to live independently, engage in everyday activities, and enjoy the same rights and opportunities as others. When barriers in the environment are removed, such as inaccessible buildings

or public spaces, individuals with disabilities can thrive, exercise their rights, and contribute to their communities.⁷ This comprehensive view of accessibility is not limited to physical spaces but extends to digital environments, transportation systems, and social interactions, all of which must be aligned to foster genuine inclusivity. Therefore, Universal Design is conceived as an evolving and iterative process that permeates every phase of urban policy and spatial development. Such an undertaking also necessitates the active participation and leadership of public institutions, particularly municipal governments, whose role in implementing inclusive frameworks is critical.⁸

Within this paradigm, inclusive design becomes a strategic means for reactivating and enhancing existing social and physical resources within the city. It must engage with ongoing cultural and policy processes to foster urban accessibility in the most comprehensive sense. In this context, co-design emerges as a particularly effective methodological tool, capable of supporting inclusive planning through collaborative practices that involve not only individuals with disabilities but also service providers and local communities. This form of participatory research facilitates the co-creation of solutions that respond meaningfully to users' real and diverse needs.⁹

The development of guidelines for Turin's PEBA consisted of two main phases. The initial phase was dedicated to establishing the normative and conceptual framework, alongside an analytical mapping of user needs within public urban spaces, with a particular focus on individuals experiencing permanent disabilities. The involvement of associations in participatory activities and mapping (described below), paired with a literature review drawing on a broad range of sources, including books, scientific articles, and conference proceedings on the theme of Universal Design / Design for All with a specific focus on urban accessibility, allowed to identify and understand the key critical issues to be addressed. The literature was selected to include experiences that were comparable both geographically and culturally to the context of Turin. To ensure the relevance of the accessibility requirements derived from the literature review, the study also incorporates reference technical standards, such as the *UNI EN 17210* standard, which outlines functional requirements for accessibility and usability of built environments. Simultaneously, the project examined relevant case studies from both Italian and international contexts, identifying best practices that had been implemented in other municipalities. These included initiatives regarding existing PEBA's and Accessibility Plans developed in cities such as Trento,¹⁰ which employed digital platforms to foster participatory processes by encouraging citizens to monitor the status of the work in progress and upload suggestions; Genova,¹¹ whose geoportal allows citizens to know the accessibility level of a number of public facilities, as well as access to a detailed summary sheet for each surveyed building; and Lecce,¹² which created a Municipal Accessibility Laboratory, a physical space dedicated to bringing citizens together and involving them in the decision-making process, promoting actions that aim to progressively involve as many people as possible. Other instructive examples were drawn from recipients of the European Commission's Access City Award—such as San Cristóbal de La Laguna in Spain and Skellefteå in Sweden—which have implemented innovative strategies for accessibility, involving improvements to transport systems, public infrastructure, and inclusive technologies. Such cities have developed programs that promote active engagement of disabled individuals in decision-making processes: among the other initiatives, San Cristóbal de La Laguna has established a Disability Council to involve people with disabilities in decision-making and an Ombudsman to independently advise the City Council on accessibility issues, while, similarly, the *Skellefteå for All 2015-2025* strategic plan focuses on increasing accessibility, awareness, and opportunities for people with disabilities, using a systematic approach in which inclusive design principles are embedded across planning, construction, and purchasing activities, and reinforced through a dedicated local framework for inclusive public environments. Progress is further supported by an ongoing assessment process that tracks implementation and outcomes over time, promoting responsibility within municipal departments and encouraging sustained attention to accessibility goals.

Enabling alignment among different urban components—ranging from street crossings to guidance systems and transit infrastructure—ensures that public spaces function effectively for all users throughout the year.¹³

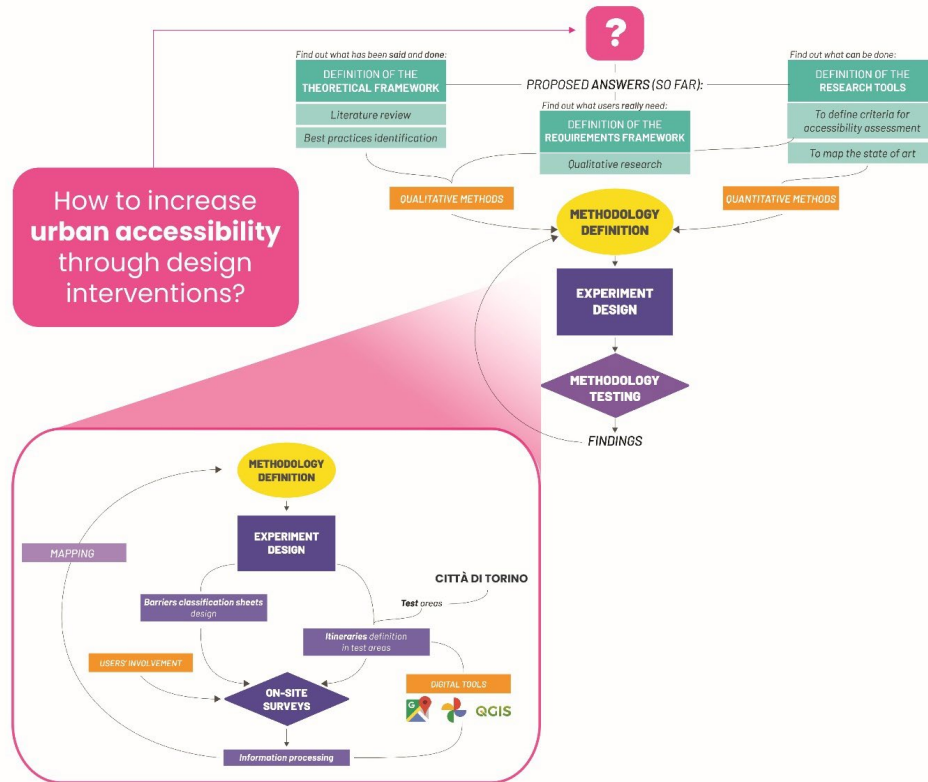


Figure 2. Guidelines design for the PEBA (Architectural Barriers Elimination Plan), Turin Accessibility Lab, 2024, Methodological outline of the project. Courtesy: authors



Figure 3. Guidelines design for the PEBA (Architectural Barriers Elimination Plan), Turin Accessibility Lab, 2024, Listing of best practices from winners of the Access City Award. Courtesy: authors

ACHIEVED RESULTS

In the subsequent phase, attention shifted to the development of toolkits designed to aid the City of Turin in the formulation and implementation of the PEBA. A significant component of this stage involved empirical research conducted through fieldwork and the application of dedicated data collection instruments. The methodological framework was tested on selected paths and facilities across sample areas within Turin. For public outdoors spaces, for every test area designated by the municipality, crucial points of interest were identified by the researchers within TAL, pinpointing the public facilities locally present (e.g. schools, hospitals, market areas, libraries, parks, public transportation stops...). Subsequently, “functional paths” connecting them were created, along which georeferenced surveys were conducted, aiming to assess the real-world accessibility of each route by identifying both the presence of barriers and the lack of facilitators. For this purpose, a set of barrier classification sheets was created, which included both normative requirements and theoretical

recommendations organized by topic. The collected data was finally processed with QGIS software, resulting in a set of maps highlighting the main types of barriers (indicated as punctual, linear, or area-related) identified along the paths, as well as the most problematic zones of the tested area, where the highest overall number of barriers was located. A similar approach was used in the surveying of public facilities. These were in this case selected in collaboration with the municipality, in an effort to include different types in the test. This comprehensive approach ensured that a wide range of public spaces was assessed, providing a more representative view of the city's accessibility challenges. Two sets of evaluation survey and checklist for public buildings and facilities have then been designed: the first was targeted to untrained personnel with the scope of identifying if the building met the minimum legal requirements for accessibility, so as to allow for a more detailed survey, or be declared as unsuitable for public use; the second set was designed to be used by accessibility experts, whom were asked to verify in detail the presence of barriers and facilitators regarding different aspects of accessibility, some of which specific to the type of facility. These instruments allowed for the identification and analysis of not only physical but also sensory, cognitive, and cultural barriers. The resulting data provided a comprehensive overview of the accessibility conditions in the surveyed areas, establishing a foundation for future interventions.

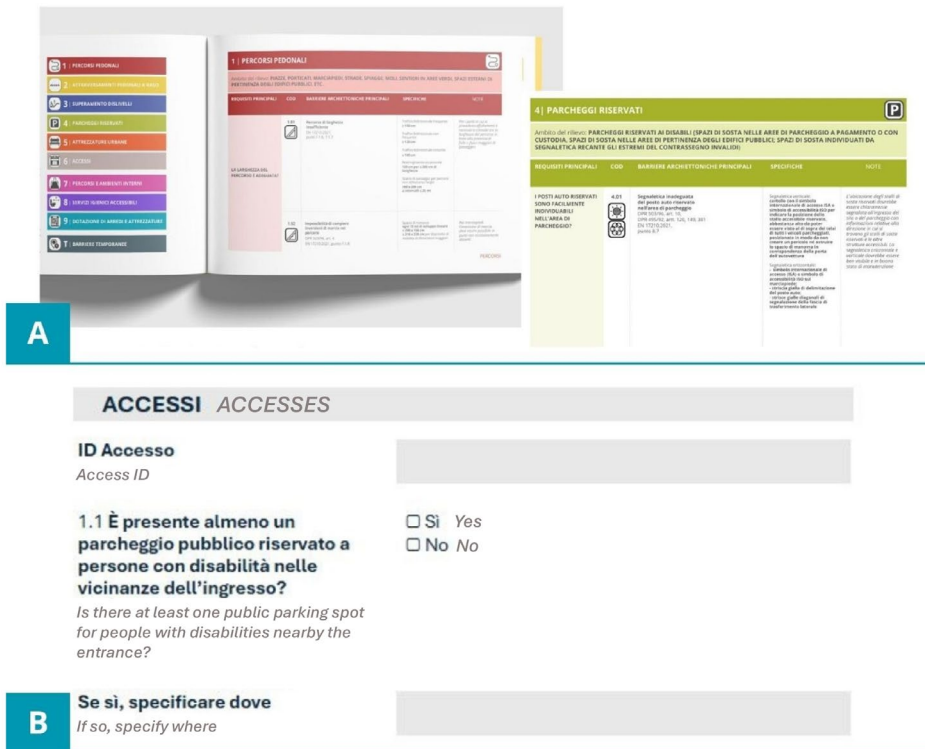


Figure 4. Guidelines design for the PEBA (Architectural Barriers Elimination Plan), Turin Accessibility Lab, 2024, Some of the meta-project results: barrier classification sheets (A), detail of public building survey sheet (B). Courtesy: authors

The analysis took account of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, including the physical features of pathways, services and structures, as well as the legibility, navigability, and user-friendliness of public spaces. Among the main critical issues identified were the poor communication of spaces and buildings, both in terms of signage and linguistic accessibility, with information, when present, potentially excluding non-native speakers with the very limited use of languages other than Italian on

public signs; the lack of attention paid to the sensory accessibility of places (whether visual, tactile or auditory), especially for blind and visually impaired people, but also for those with cognitive disabilities and the people that, in general, have difficulties in wayfinding and orientation.. More alarmingly, the study revealed infrastructural elements that posed safety risks, such as the large number of traffic signals lacking auditory signaling and the often, in terms of proximity to the roadway, distance from the sidewalk access ramp, as well as the inadequacy of the road surface for easy access by wheeled mobility devices and people with walking difficulties. Finally, some of the identified issues were systemic, which indicated a lack of care in the design of the overall accessibility of public features: a typical example of this can be found in pedestrian crossings, where a recurring issue was the presence of a ramp on one side and a step on the other side of the road, making it dangerous and in some cases impossible to cross. These findings highlighted the urgent need for targeted improvements to enhance the inclusiveness and safety of the urban environment, but they also outlined the importance of raising awareness among urban designers and public officials on the issue of accessibility in public spaces

The project was situated within a complex urban framework, and engaged a diverse range of actors whose roles were shaped through a participatory and interdisciplinary process. Key stakeholders from the municipal administration—including the Disability Manager, city councilors, and representatives from various departments (Assessorate for City Care, Civil Protection and Civil services; the Assessorate for Welfare, Rights and Equal Opportunities; Assessorate for Ecological and Digital transitions; Assessorate for Urban planning)—played an essential role, as did second-level associations representing people with disabilities (FISH - Italian Federation for Overcoming Handicaps; FAND - Federation of National Associations for Persons with Disabilities; CPD - Council for People in Difficulty). These associations brought invaluable experiential knowledge and situated expertise to the table. The academic team, consisting of university researchers in the field of architecture and design and municipal technicians, brought methodological and technical competencies, focusing on leveraging the PEBA design to broaden the accessibility of the urban environment.

The interaction among these actors had multiple outcomes. First, it facilitated a co-design process that was structured yet adaptable, driven by continuous dialogue and mutual recognition of each participant's competencies. This dynamic was reinforced by regular round tables and feedback sessions involving both institutional representatives and local community members, aimed to collect as many information as possible regarding undertaken and ongoing initiatives, as well as major systemic criticalities. Secondly, on-site inspections and data collection enabled direct engagement with the physical context, ensuring that the design solutions were rooted in the realities of the urban environment. The placement of a researcher (PhD student and co-author of this article) within the municipal Decentralization Division for a six-month period further enriched this process, ensuring daily contact with city technicians and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges involved. Finally, through these integrated efforts co-designing guidelines for the development of the PEBA strived to spread awareness among all stakeholders, in order to make the city planning practices more inclusive and navigable for all residents.

A central feature of the participatory methodology was the realization of so-called “urban walks,” which brought together members of disability associations, municipal representatives and researchers. These walks served as both an evaluative and educational tool, facilitating the real-time observation of accessibility conditions along specific urban routes. Participants were given information about the selected route and final destination beforehand, then, leading the way, were left free to stop whenever they felt like to assess key elements such as access to public transport, the usability of pedestrian pathways, crosswalks and vehicular zones, and the accessibility of facilities such as public toilets, libraries, parks, and markets. These urban walks provided an invaluable opportunity for stakeholders to directly experience the challenges faced by people with disabilities, fostering empathy and a deeper

understanding of their needs. The qualitative insights gathered during these walks through reports from both the researching team and the participants were subsequently integrated into the evaluation criteria for public space and building accessibility.



Figure 5. Guidelines design for the PEBA (Architectural Barriers Elimination Plan), Turin Accessibility Lab, 2024, Images from the urban walks. Courtesy: authors

CONCLUSION

Looking ahead, the future development of Turin’s guidelines for the PEBA will need to place greater emphasis on the often-overlooked dimensions of cognitive and cultural accessibility. While the current initiative successfully addressed a wide range of physical and sensory needs, it also revealed significant gaps in the consideration of cognitive challenges, particularly those related to orientation, perception, and environmental comprehension. People with cognitive disabilities often face difficulties that stem from complex or poorly designed signage, absence of intuitive wayfinding systems, or environments that cause sensory overload. Similarly, cultural accessibility remains insufficiently addressed in many urban contexts, despite the fact that social, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is an integral part of contemporary urban life. This lack of attention to cultural factors can alienate diverse groups, limiting their access to public services and civic engagement.

Promoting cognitive and cultural accessibility requires expanding participatory design methodologies to ensure that planning processes are informed by a broader range of lived experiences. This involves engaging individuals who face barriers not only due to disability but also due to linguistic, educational, or socio-economic differences. By considering these intersecting factors, urban design can move beyond accessibility for a single group and towards inclusivity for all. Designing for cognitive and cultural inclusion entails more than collecting feedback; it necessitates the active involvement of interdisciplinary expertise from designers and architects, communication experts, psychologists, sociologists, urban planners, policymakers and the communities themselves to inform design strategies capable of embracing the full heterogeneity of users’ experiences.

Ensuring public spaces are comprehensible and usable across diverse populations involves careful attention to communication design. This includes simplifying the structure of messages, using intuitive visual language, and selecting terminology that avoids excessive technical jargon. Symbolism and metaphor can also play a crucial role in conveying complex information in ways that are immediately understandable across different cultural and educational backgrounds.

Ultimately, the future of accessibility in urban contexts and the development of livable cities will depend on a sustained commitment to dynamic, interdisciplinary, and inclusive planning practices to devise innovative solutions that reflect the full spectrum of human diversity while maintaining a high standard of spatial quality and user experience. In this process, livable cities become the goal, a vision where accessibility and inclusivity are not afterthoughts but foundational principles, ensuring that urban spaces are adaptable, resilient, and capable of fostering a sense of belonging for all.

NOTES

¹ Marco Bozzola et al., «Il packaging per l'utenza diversificata Metodologie e strumenti per il design dell'accessibilità», *Atti della Conferenza annuale della Società Italiana di Design*, 2024, 88–98, <http://www.societaitalianadesign.it/2024/10/29/design-per-la-diversita-2/>.

² Turin Accessibility Lab supports the City of Turin in the development of the Accessibility Plan with a working group coordinated by Daniela Bosia, with contributions from Angela Lacirignola, Cristina Azzolino, Lorenzo Savio, Francesca Raimondi, Dora Uricchio and Claudia Rolletto.

³ Antonio Lauria, «Some reflections on universal design strategies», *SPECIE DI SPAZI*, 1^a ed., Cluster AA Accessibilità Ambientale (IT: Antefirma Edizioni Srl, 2023): 398–404, <https://doi.org/10.57623/979-12-5953-089-9>.

⁴ Ronald L. Mace, «Universal design: Barrier free environments for everyone», *Designers West* 33, fasc. 1 (1985): 147–52.

⁵ Inger Marie Lid, «The Particular and the Universal. Reflections on Knowledge Production, Human Diversity and Human Rights in Universal Design», *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics* 303 (giugno 2023): 53–58, <https://doi.org/10.3233/SHTI230399>.

⁶ Barbara Chiarelli e Ilaria Garofolo, «Accessibility Beyond Architectural Barriers: How to Broaden Perspective and Elevate Design Culture in Italy», in *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference of Ar.Tec. (Scientific Society of Architectural Engineering)*, a c. di Rossella Corrao et al. (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), 611:332–44, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71863-2_21.

⁷ Giulio Borgnolo, ed., *ICF e Convenzione ONU sui diritti delle persone con disabilità: nuove prospettive per l'inclusione* (Gardolo, Trento: Centro studi Erickson, 2009).

⁸ Lilian Müller, «Who Are We Building for? Tracing Universal Design in Urban Development», in *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics*, a c. di Ilaria Garofolo e Giulia Bencini (IOS Press, 2023): 3–9, <https://doi.org/10.3233/SHTI230392>.

⁹ Cloe Benz et al., «Community-Based Participatory-Research through Co-Design: Supporting Collaboration from All Sides of Disability», *Research Involvement and Engagement* 10, fasc. 1 (maggio 2024): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-024-00573-3>.

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¹⁰ «Piano di eliminazione delle barriere architettoniche e sensoriali», Comune di Trento, accessed September 1, 2025, <https://old.comune.trento.it/Aree-tematiche/Lavori-pubblici/Piano-di-eliminazione-delle-barriere-architettoniche-e-sensoriali>.

¹¹ «P.E.B.A - Piano di Eliminazione delle barriere architettoniche», Comune di Genova, accessed December 28, 2025, <https://www.comune.genova.it/tutti-gli-argomenti/persona-con-disabilita/peba-piano-eliminazione-barriere-architettoniche>

¹² «Laboratorio Comunale per l'Accessibilità (LCA)», Città di Lecce, accessed September 1, 2025, [https://www.comune.lecce.it/aree-tematiche/accessibilita-e-diritti/servizi-comunali/laboratorio-comunale-per-l-accessibilita-C3%A0-\(lca\)](https://www.comune.lecce.it/aree-tematiche/accessibilita-e-diritti/servizi-comunali/laboratorio-comunale-per-l-accessibilita-C3%A0-(lca)).

¹³ Isabella Tiziana Steffan e Marie Denninghaus, «Awards as Tools to Implement Inclusion and Accessibility in the Built Environment», in *Proceedings of the 20th Congress of the International Ergonomics Association (IEA 2018)*, a c. di Sebastiano Bagnara et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 824:1516–23, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96071-5_155; Radoslav S Hristov, «Making Libraries Accessible: The Vision of Access City Award Winners», *IFLA Journal* 50, fasc. 1 (marzo 2024): 7–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03400352231219671>.

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HOW ADOLESCENTS INTERACT WITH URBAN GREEN SPACES, THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR WELLBEING AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR URBAN DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

Urban green spaces are essential components of city environments, contributing significantly to health and well-being.¹ Yet, much of the research has disproportionately focused on adults, leaving a gap in understanding the unique experiences of adolescents. This study investigates how adolescents perceive, use, and engage with urban green spaces, and what potential implications these interactions could have on their wellbeing. Adolescence, typically defined as ages 10 to 19, is a period marked by intense biological, psychological, and social changes.² This research aims to fill that gap by exploring adolescent experiences using focus groups. Findings will be related to how adolescents aged 12-16 years interact and engage with green spaces, with potential implications for their wellbeing and the gender and age differences among this relationship and conclude with recommendations for urban design.

METHODS

Participants were recruited through secondary schools in the UK in March 2021.³ The use of school-based recruitment helped ensure access to adolescents and boosted participation rates due to the trusted environment. Four online focus groups were held (segmented by gender and age: year 7 and year 11 secondary school year groups), using Zoom. The chat function was also enabled so that participants had the option to type responses alongside using their microphones. Safeguards were in place, including password protection, anonymized usernames (colours), and private meeting links. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. A topic guide structured the discussion, beginning with general perceptions of green spaces proceeding to usage patterns, safety, and ideal features. All sessions were recorded (with consent), transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using computer software NVivo 12. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted, starting with initial coding of two transcripts to construct a codebook. Codes were then refined, and the codebook was applied against all transcripts. Themes were derived from codes and reflexivity from the researcher.

RESULTS

There were 10 different themes that were developed during analysis, however, due to space constraints, only three will be discussed.

Theme one How adolescents use green spaces

Distinct gender differences emerged in their primary uses of urban green spaces. In the focus groups, boys and girls provided markedly different activities that can be seen as competitive, prompting the question of how to design neighborhood green spaces that accommodate diverse needs cohesively. In short, girls prefer to use green spaces for relaxation activities whereas boys prioritize recreation.

Throughout the focus groups, boys repeatedly mentioned using green spaces for football, suggesting their primary use is recreational. When older boys were asked to define green space, their responses consistently focused on playful, leisure activities, reinforcing the perception of green spaces as primarily for recreation (see below):

“Blue: A football pitch.

Orange: A park.

Red: Parks.

Purple: Fields.

Black: Swings. *laughter*

[Year 11, Boys]

Younger adolescent boys similarly viewed green spaces as areas for recreation. When asked where they prefer to go outdoors and what they consider "green space," their responses again highlighted the use of outdoor spaces for play. The mention of funfairs further indicates that boys view themselves as consumers of fun, purpose-built activities in green spaces, which seems to be a significant aspect of their perception (see below).

“FAC1: So, when you go outside, where are the places that you might go”

Orange: Um I will go to like the local park near me

[From chat:

Green: to the park, riverside, nearby funfairs.

Red: Parks, lakes, Woods”]

[Year 7, Boys]

Specifically, the younger adolescent boys declare, several times, that they prefer larger green spaces and another reference to feeling “open”, allowing a sense of freedom and open space to run around in (see below):

“Blue: It would have lots of grass, trees some ponds, walkways, some equipment and it will be big”

[Boy, Year 7]

Following up on his peers’ comments another participant from the year 7 boy group specifies that he would make his ideal green space “very big”.

“Green: I'll make my green space very big and, and it has good facilities. Good. Like, make it clean, and with a lot of green space and making, so people can't be at risk when they play there...”[Year 7 Boy]

“Blue: Um I put six and a half, because there's enough space for everyone to walk around, and cycle there or whatever you like to do. and sometimes there's a place to sit down and the other .5 is the litter and stranger danger

FAC1: Thank you. And what about blue you've given it a same score.

Blue: it's because of litter and maybe there's not really anything that, may be not a lot of equipment, or maybe there's no grass or maybe it's not very big”

[Year 7, Boys]

For girls, there seems to be an undertone of relaxation throughout the way they speak about urban green spaces. Creating a tranquil and relaxed environment for adolescent girls is key, but this could lead to competing demands for space between boys and girls. For adolescent girls, green space is often viewed as a place to relax and enjoy fresh air. This is notable when the moderator initially poses the question of what they consider to be green space. The older girls state that the first thought that comes to mind when thinking of green space are lakes, somewhere to refresh, and take a break, and as one year 11 girl stated through the chat that it is a place where they can be in contact with nature (see below)

“FAC1: When I say green space, what kind of thing comes to mind?”

Black: Lakes.

Purple: Somewhere to refresh, like take a breath.

Orange: I think of parks and the countryside.

Red: I think of fields.

Blue: I think of empty places, like the countryside.

From chat:

From Green to Everyone: A place we can be in contact with nature” [Year 11, girls]

When the same question was posed to the younger adolescent girls, the set of responses was less descriptive but indicative that they also perceive green spaces to be a place for relaxation. Initial perceptions of green space typically include parks, fields, and gardens. The younger adolescent group also consider gardens as green space more readily than the older adolescent girls, suggesting that the younger group use it more. When the year 7 girls were further probed about where they go when they want to go outside, a lot more participants responded with their garden (see below):

“FAC1: Give us an insight into where it is that you go when you go outside. Where do you generally go.

Purple: my garden and the parks

Red: parks and shops mostly

Blue: I try to go to the park as I do not have a garden

Pink: I go to green spaces and also other spaces e.g. shops friends/family’s houses

Black: I go to the park

Light Green: I usually go to the park, shops and to friends

Brown: my garden”

[Year 7 Girls]

In the focus groups, the girls describe green space as a place to “breathe fresh air.” (See below)

“Red: I feel free because I’m able to breathe fresh air

Purple: when I go green spaces I feel refreshed”

[Year 7 Girls]

“FAC1: Okay. When I think about green spaces, I feel—can anyone immediately finish that?

from chat

From Green to Everyone: When I think about green spaces, I feel peaceful and thoughtful.

From red to Everyone: I feel active/healthy.

From Orange to Everyone: frustrated as sometimes it is an outlet.

From Blue to Everyone: I feel healthy and free.

From Black to Everyone: when I think about green spaces, I feel very refreshed as it gives me more fresh breathing time and the availability to move freely than when I'm at home you must be really weary especially if you like in a flat”. [Year 11 Girls]

Adolescent girls require specific features in green spaces that promote relaxation. When discussing what they appreciated most about their local green spaces, the girls primarily focused on natural features, with nearly all responses reflecting this preference.

“FAC1: So how well provisioned are they for people of your age. So when you're giving them a 10 what are the kinds of things that are in the parks that you really appreciate.

From chat

“Orange: When I am outdoors in green space I enjoy the smell of nature Blue: I enjoy the grass and hills

Light Green: When I am outdoors in green space I enjoy walking around, relaxing or staying there with my friends to just have fun

Black: when I am outdoors in green spaces I enjoy the nature e.g. birds

Brown: when I am outdoors in green space I enjoy the weather

Purple: when I am outdoors I enjoy hanging out with friends

Blue: and the massive trees

Red: when I am outdoors in a green space i enjoy the fields”

[Year 7 Girls]

Policymakers should design green spaces that balance adolescents’ differing needs—accommodating boys’ preference for recreation and sports alongside girls’ desire for relaxation and connection with nature. This requires providing both active zones (e.g., pitches, play areas, equipment) and tranquil, well-maintained natural areas (e.g., seating, gardens, lakes). Cleanliness and safety must be prioritized to ensure inclusivity and encourage sustained use by all genders and age groups.

Theme two Independence sought in green spaces by older adolescents

A subset of older adolescents specified that one of the reasons for going out to green spaces was to gain some independence indicating that this may be a specific need that urban adolescent residents are able to achieve from green spaces.

If green spaces provide older adolescents with a "time out" that supports their developing sense of identity, this suggests that green spaces play a key role in meeting their unique developmental needs. By offering a space for solitude and self-reflection, these environments may aid in the formation of identity, autonomy, and emotional well-being during this critical stage of adolescence.

In the chat, several Year 11 female participants responded to the question about what they enjoy doing outside, highlighting their sense of independence when outdoors. One participant mentioned that she enjoys reading outside, while others expressed a desire for "time alone." This need for autonomy and distance from family could be safely facilitated through well-designed green spaces, offering adolescents a space to enjoy personal time in a secure environment.

“From chat

[From black to Everyone: I like to read outside

From Orange to Everyone: walking my dog, taking a study break, time alone, breaks from being at home, picnics.

[...]

From Orange to Everyone: I feel free, I also feel alone but in a nice way.

From Black to Everyone: calm

From Orange to Everyone: my household gets quite busy, and it can become too much so i like to take time alone and put music on, this calms me and makes it easier to manage the people at home.”

[Year 11 Girls]

The older adolescent boys also expressed that a key need met through green spaces is their sense of independence. Through the chat, they mentioned reasons like "to get away from problems" and "to get away from people." One Year 11 boy explicitly stated, "to be independent," underscoring the importance of autonomy during this stage of adolescence.

[From chat

“From Black to Everyone: to get away from people
From Red to Everyone: get away from problems
From Black to Everyone: to be independent”
[Year 11, Boys]

Theme three Competing Demands in Green Space between younger and older adolescents

In the focus groups, older adolescents noted that local green spaces lack appropriate facilities for their age. Year 11 girls rated these spaces lower, expressing dissatisfaction with the limited options available to them, catering primarily to younger children.

“FAC1: A 6 as well, and what about facilities that are available for you at your age for what you want to do in the park?”

Red: Yeah, I’d give it a 6 or a 7.

FAC1: A 6 as well.

Red: There’s not really park equipment so to say.

from chat

From Green to Everyone: Facilities 4. The parks are mostly aimed for children, so they have their personal area, and they have a sports place. Where you can play either basket or football. There aren't many activities, so if I go there I would either take my little cousin and watch her play or walk around the park.”

[Girls, Year 11]

Green, a participant in the Year 7 boy group, echoed concerns about the lack of activities in local green spaces. When asked about his ideal green space, he emphasized the need for various activities suited to his age group, starting with the importance of having a large area with good facilities. The moderator then probed for clarification on what they meant by "good facilities" (see below). Green emphasizes the importance of having various facilities in green spaces to attract users his age.

“Green:

I'll make my green space very big and, and it has good facilities [...]

“FAC1: Thank you. And when you say good facilities, what in particular, would you like to see.

Green: Well I’m gonna add many different things because normally an average park when i go to a park its only like a skatepark there so I’m gonna add new things to get more people involved to make people come out and stop staying inside, you can add some swings, you can add some table tennis you can add some football you can add goals you can add anything to drive people to stop spending time inside their house on the screen and go outside and enjoy themselves.”

[Boy, Year 7]

The recurring sentiment that there’s not much to do in these spaces may serve as a barrier to their use. In the Year 7 girl group, after rating the existing facilities, several participants offered suggestions to address the lack of well-provisioned features.

“Pink: um.. what would make parks better is if there was more of a child friendly places. So then, because a lot of older kids and bigger kids like to come to the park to hang about other than like play. So, what would make it better, if there was a park which only was for smaller kids that would actually play, and use the facilities, and there's also a part for like the older kids that would hang about and stuff
Brown: I was just going to say that I agree with what pink said because a lot of older kids go to the playground, and they don’t really use the equipment properly they just mess around with it and climb on the equipment which causes it to get damaged.” [Girls, Year 7]

The heterogeneity among adolescents’ needs in green spaces is now clearer (see figure 1).

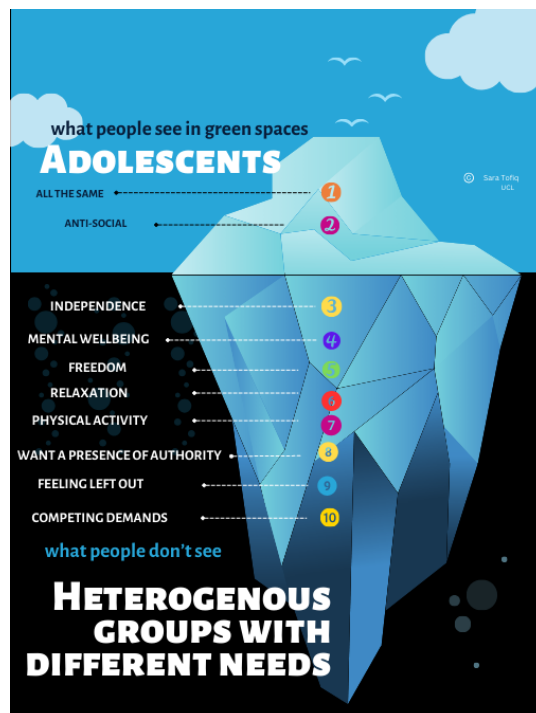


Figure 1. Adolescents are not a homogenous group

CONCLUSION

This study identified three key themes: gender differences in how adolescents engage with green spaces, the need for independence by older adolescents, and the competing priorities between adolescents. Understanding this can enable targeted support for the well-being of each specific group in adolescence. Therefore, local policymakers should ensure green spaces meet the needs of all adolescents by providing age-appropriate, diverse, and safe facilities. This includes creating separate areas for different age groups, adding varied recreational features (e.g., sports areas, seating, and social spaces) that meet multiple adolescent needs such as safety, relaxation and recreation.

NOTES

¹ Jo Barton and Mike Rogerson. "The importance of greenspace for mental health." *BJPsych international* 14, no. 4 (2017): 79-81.

² Sarah-Jayne Blakemore. "Development of the social brain in adolescence." *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 105, no. 3 (2012): 111-116.

³ Note that this work was affected by the Covid pandemic, and one of the outcomes of this was that the recruitment and focus groups had to be held online.

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PLANNING FOR HEALTH IN A CHANGING CLIMATE: IDENTITY, RESILIENCE, AND URBAN WELLBEING IN SARAJEVO, MEDINA AND LJUBLJANA

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INTRODUCTION

As climate change accelerates and urban populations grow, cities are increasingly seen as key spaces for advancing environmental resilience and public health. Urban health is now understood as shaped by spatial form, ecological systems, governance, and cultural identity—not just healthcare or individual behavior. Climate-responsive planning has emerged as a vital strategy for promoting wellbeing, equity, and sustainability. This article examines how place-based, culturally grounded planning can enhance urban health in Sarajevo, Medina, and Ljubljana—three cities with distinct climates, planning traditions, and socio-cultural contexts. Each is responding to climate challenges while navigating identity, heritage, and spatial justice. Historically, Sarajevo and Medina shared Ottoman governance for 360 years, while Sarajevo and Ljubljana were under Austro-Hungarian rule for 113 years. These legacies have shaped their spatial organization and planning cultures, influencing current approaches to resilience. Sarajevo’s complex topography and blend of European and Oriental urban forms create a walkable, human-scaled environment, in old part of city, that supports physical activity, social interaction, and cultural exchange. Its layered morphology fosters microclimatic adaptation and urban wellbeing. Medina’s 24-hour urban activity and religious significance drive planning focused on thermal comfort, sustainable infrastructure, and mobility—balancing modern needs with spiritual heritage under Vision 2030. Ljubljana exemplifies sustainable urbanism through long-term planning, green infrastructure, and participatory governance. Its integration of nature, clean mobility, and community initiatives supports both health and climate resilience. The article explores how cities can integrate health and climate adaptation into planning by aligning global frameworks—like the Leipzig Charter, Paris Agreement, and WHO Healthy Cities—with local identity and environmental conditions. Using a comparative case study approach, it analyzes interventions in green infrastructure, mobility, public space, and governance, drawing on planning documents, scientific literature, and theoretical models such as Barton and Grant’s Health Map. The central argument is that livable, resilient cities emerge from culturally embedded, ecologically informed, and socially inclusive planning—not from universal templates. By examining identity, resilience, and wellbeing across three diverse contexts, the article offers insights into fostering urban health in a changing climate.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LINKING URBAN HEALTH, CLIMATE RESILIENCE, AND IDENTITY

Urban health and climate resilience are increasingly understood as co-produced outcomes of spatial, ecological, and socio-cultural systems. A foundational framework in this discourse is the Health Map for the Local Human Habitat, developed by Barton and Grant.¹ Building on Dahlgren and Whitehead's model of social determinants of health, the health map conceptualizes the city as a layered ecosystem in which planning decisions—ranging from transport and housing to green infrastructure and cultural amenities—shape health outcomes across scales.² It emphasizes that wellbeing is not only influenced by individual behavior and access to services, but also by the quality of the built and natural environment, social networks, and governance structures.

Barton further argues that spatial planning must be reoriented to actively promote health, noting that “we have literally built unhealthy conditions into our settlements.”³ The health map thus serves as both a diagnostic and design tool, enabling planners to assess how urban form and policy interventions affect physical, mental, and social wellbeing. It also provides a framework for cross-sectoral collaboration, bridging public health, urban design, and environmental governance.

Complementing this ecological perspective, Tyler and Moench propose a resilience framework that focuses on adaptive capacity, institutional integration, and exposure reduction.⁴ Their model highlights the importance of iterative learning and local contextualization—principles that align with Barton and Grant's emphasis on place-based planning. Similarly, Sharifi and Yamagata advocate for resilience-oriented urban planning that integrates spatial morphology, governance, and participatory processes to enhance cities' ability to cope with climate uncertainties.⁵

From a public health standpoint, Krefis and colleagues underscore the complexity of urban wellbeing, identifying green infrastructure, mobility systems, and social cohesion as critical mediators of health outcomes.⁶ Their systematic review calls for interdisciplinary approaches that account for both objective indicators (e.g., air quality, thermal comfort) and subjective experiences (e.g., mental wellbeing, perceived safety).

Importantly, cultural identity itself is increasingly recognized as a determinant of urban health. Dempsey and colleagues argue that place attachment, heritage continuity, and community participation contribute to social sustainability and psychological resilience.⁷ In cities with strong spiritual or historical significance—such as Medina and Sarajevo—urban form and cultural symbolism play a vital role in shaping collective wellbeing.

Together, these frameworks converge on a shared understanding: that urban health and climate resilience are deeply embedded in the spatial, cultural, and ecological fabric of cities, and that culturally grounded, participatory planning is essential to fostering wellbeing in diverse urban contexts. This theoretical foundation informs the comparative analysis of Sarajevo, Medina, and Ljubljana, each of which demonstrates unique pathways toward integrating identity, resilience, and health into urban transformation.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article employs a comparative case study methodology to explore how three culturally and climatically distinct cities—Sarajevo, Medina, and Ljubljana—integrate health, climate resilience, and identity into urban planning. The selection of cases was guided by their geographic diversity, cultural significance, and active engagement in climate-responsive urban transformation. Each city represents a unique planning context: Sarajevo as a historically layered European city with emerging green strategies; Medina as a religious and pilgrimage hub undergoing rapid infrastructural modernization; and Ljubljana as a recognized leader in sustainable urbanism within the European Union.

The analysis draws on a combination of urban planning documents, scientific literature, and policy frameworks, including local master plans, climate action strategies, and international guidelines such as the Leipzig Charter, the New Urban Agenda, and the WHO Healthy Cities Programme. These sources were triangulated with peer-reviewed studies on urban health, climate adaptation, and spatial identity to ensure analytical depth and contextual accuracy.

The study is informed by the Health Map for the Local Human Habitat, developed by Barton and Grant,⁸ which provides a conceptual lens for understanding how built environments influence health outcomes across ecological and social scales. This framework is complemented by resilience-oriented planning models developed by Tyler and Moench, and by Sharifi and Yamagata,⁹ and interdisciplinary perspectives on urban wellbeing discussed by Krefis and colleagues, and by Dempsey and colleagues.¹⁰ Together, these theoretical tools support a holistic analysis of how place-based planning can foster livable, equitable, and climate-adaptive urban environments.

The comparative approach emphasizes contextual specificity, allowing for the identification of locally grounded strategies while highlighting transferable principles across diverse urban settings. The findings are presented thematically, focusing on spatial form, green infrastructure, mobility, public space, and participatory governance as key dimensions of urban health and resilience.

GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN POLICY FOUNDATIONS FOR HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE, AND CLIMATE-RESILIENT CITIES

A robust constellation of global and European policy frameworks provides strategic direction for planning cities that promote health, resilience, and wellbeing in the face of accelerating climate change. These frameworks reflect a growing recognition that urban environments must not only mitigate and adapt to climate risks, but also foster social cohesion, equity, and a sense of place. By integrating health into climate-responsive urban planning, and by reinforcing identity through participatory and inclusive design, these policies offer normative and operational guidance for transforming cities into spaces of care, sustainability, and resilience.

The Leipzig Charter emphasizes integrated urban development through just, green, and productive city-making, underscoring the importance of multi-level governance and participatory approaches.¹¹ The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction advances urban resilience by promoting risk-informed planning, investment in resilient infrastructure, and the principle of “Build Back Better.”¹² The New European Bauhaus Initiative introduces a transdisciplinary paradigm that merges sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion in the transformation of living environments, fostering cultural and social dimensions of the green transition.¹³

At the global level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development links urban transformation to health, equity, and climate action, particularly through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 6, 10, 11, and 13.¹⁴ The Paris Agreement recognizes cities as pivotal actors in climate mitigation and adaptation, empowering local governments to contribute to national climate targets.¹⁵ The European Green Deal reinforces this trajectory by setting a path toward climate neutrality by 2050, promoting clean energy, biodiversity, and a just transition.¹⁶ The New Urban Agenda advocates for inclusive, participatory, and environmentally responsible urban planning,¹⁷ while the WHO Healthy Cities Programme foregrounds health in all policies and the reduction of health inequalities through intersectoral collaboration and local action.¹⁸ Complementary frameworks such as the Urban Agenda for the EU, the European Climate Law,¹⁹ SDG 17, and the EU Missions on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities collectively strengthen the policy landscape, enabling cities to lead the transition toward sustainability, health equity, and climate resilience.

CASE STUDY: SARAJEVO, MEDINA, AND LJUBLJANA

Medina: Climate-Responsive Urbanism Rooted in Spiritual Identity

Medina, Islam’s second holiest city, is undergoing a major urban transformation under Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. The Rua Al Madinah Project, spanning 1.5 km² near the Prophet’s Mosque, blends heritage-sensitive architecture, shaded pedestrian corridors, and green infrastructure to host up to 30 million pilgrims annually while preserving spiritual and cultural identity.²⁰ The historical core around the mosque has become a model for climate-adaptive design. The Medina Piazza Shading Project introduced 250 retractable umbrellas with passive cooling and misting systems, enhancing thermal comfort for 750,000 daily visitors.²¹ These spaces support prayer, rest, and social interaction, aligning with urban health frameworks that link public space to resilience and inner peace. Medina’s compact, low-rise morphology—with shaded alleys and traditional materials—acts as a passive cooling system and a symbol of continuity. Planners are integrating green and blue infrastructure, including xeriscaped parks, recycled water irrigation, and drought-resistant vegetation, to improve air quality, biodiversity, and public health. With the population expected to grow from 1.6 million in 2025 to 2.7 million by 2040,²² Medina offers a replicable model of climate-responsive urbanism rooted in identity and wellbeing.



Figure 1. Greening integration in Medina’s urban landscape



Figure 2. Shading systems in Medina’s urban landscape

Sarajevo: Urban Identity, Green Infrastructure, and Climate Adaptation

Sarajevo’s urban morphology is deeply influenced by its topographic complexity, spanning from valley floors to steep mountainous terrain. This landscape, combined with a fusion of European and Oriental urban forms, has shaped a spatial structure marked by layered development, microclimatic variation, and adaptive typologies. The Draft Urban Plan 2016–2036 for Sarajevo’s six central municipalities emphasizes polycentric development, rational land use, and mixed-use zoning, while introducing protective regulations for heritage areas and a green buffer zone around the urban core.²³ It prioritizes green and blue infrastructure to enhance climate resilience and wellbeing.

Sarajevo is structured into micro, mezo, and macro urban centers to ensure equitable access to services. Two primary centers and several secondary hubs support decentralization and aim to rebalance east-west population distribution, with growth projected from 366,551 in 2013 to over 540,000 by 2036.²⁴ As the population grows, climate-adaptive infrastructure and inclusive public space design will be essential. The city's topography contributes to microclimatic variation and seasonal air pollution, reinforcing the need for green and blue infrastructure to buffer heat, improve air quality, and support mental wellbeing. The draft plan defines land use categories, embeds social infrastructure (10–20%), and mandates green space ratios (30–80%),²⁵ A green buffer zone protects forested areas and enhances ecological connectivity. Green corridors, park forests, and river-adjacent zones are planned to improve resilience and health. Forests are protected as ecological zones, and rivers are integrated through terraced green spaces and resilient infrastructure. A “green transport longitudinal” connects ecological zones, promoting mobility and reducing heat island effects. Health and wellbeing are central to the plan, with equitable access to healthcare, education, and social services. Mixed-use zones include social infrastructure, and polycentric development targets underserved areas in the north and west. To combat pollution and promote health, the plan invests in public transport and bike paths to reduce car dependency. Pedestrian zones and green corridors improve air circulation and encourage active lifestyles, supported by renewable energy systems in dense neighborhoods. Public participation is central, with initiatives involving citizens in designing public spaces. These participatory processes reflect growing civic engagement and show how co-designed spaces enhance wellbeing, identity, and resilience.



Figure 3. Sarajevo historic core – a living urban fabric: spatial continuity, cultural layers, and pedestrian connectivity

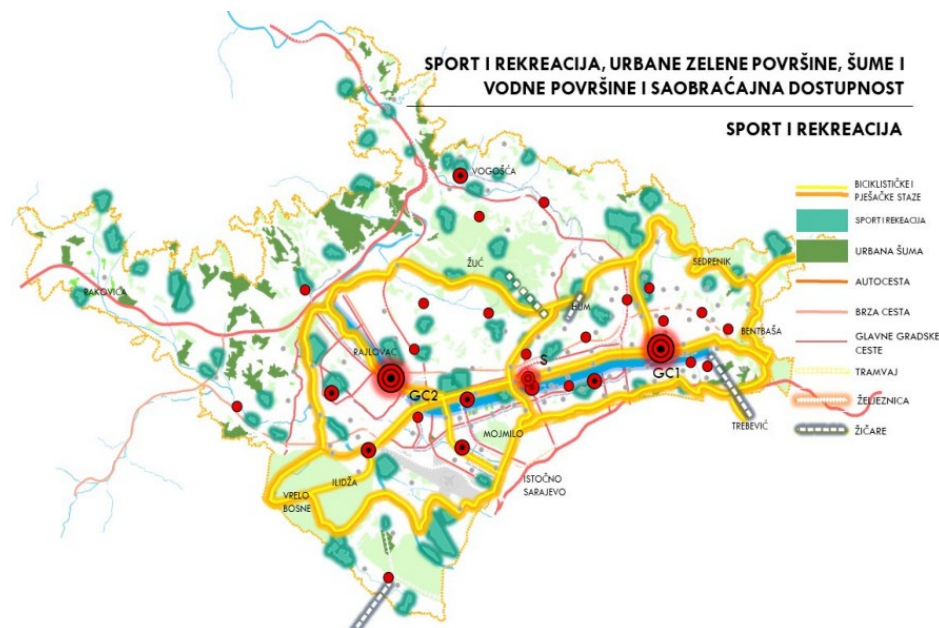


Figure 4. Sports and recreation, urban green areas, forests and water bodies and traffic accessibility (planned state)



Figure 5. Green infrastructure and pedestrian pathways in Sarajevo's urban landscape

Ljubljana: Nature-Based Urbanism and Inclusive Climate Resilience

Ljubljana exemplifies climate-responsive urban planning that integrates sustainability, public health, and cultural identity. Guided by long-term commitments to green infrastructure, mobility, and participatory governance—especially since its designation as European Green Capital in 2016—the city has redefined spatial priorities through the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) and Vision Ljubljana 2025.²⁶ A key intervention was the closure of the city centre to motorized traffic, expanding pedestrian zones to over 10 hectares. This improved air quality and reduced noise pollution—black carbon on Slovenska Street dropped by 70%, and noise by 6 Db.²⁷ Revitalized riverbanks, new pedestrian bridges, and redesigned squares like Kongresni trg have created a vibrant, inclusive urban landscape. To ensure accessibility, Ljubljana introduced the Kavalir electric shuttle and expanded the BicikeLJ bike-sharing system, now supporting over 900,000 trips annually. Walking increased from 19% to 35%, and car use dropped from 60% to 42%, with 95% public support.²⁸ Scientific studies

confirm that green spaces support mental health, social interaction, and a sense of place.²⁹ Comparative assessments show strong performance in green infrastructure and mobility, while noting the need for continued focus on social equity and economic resilience.³⁰ With a population projected to exceed 291,000 in 2025,³¹ Ljubljana’s integrated planning model offers a replicable framework for aligning climate adaptation with inclusive wellbeing and cultural continuity.



Figure 6. Ljubljana’s urban vision in practice: public space, mobility, architecture, and green infrastructure



Figure 7. Ljubljana’s Green infrastructure and pedestrian pathways in Ljubljana’s urban landscape

Comparative Analysis: Identity-Driven Resilience and Urban Wellbeing Across Contexts

Sarajevo, Medina, and Ljubljana demonstrate shared principles—green infrastructure, pedestrian design, and revitalized public spaces—as strategies for urban health and climate resilience. Each city reduces environmental stressors while promoting wellbeing, though approaches vary. Ljubljana’s model is rooted in EU-aligned sustainability and participatory governance. Sarajevo’s planning reflects its topography and historical layering, with a focus on spatial equity. Medina’s strategy balances spiritual heritage with large-scale infrastructure to manage climate and pilgrimage flows. Cultural identity shapes resilience: Medina’s mosque-centered design supports spiritual and thermal comfort; Sarajevo’s layered urban forms foster social cohesion; Ljubljana’s ecological orientation reflects civic

pride and sustainability. Transferable strategies include green/blue infrastructure, inclusive public spaces, active mobility, and citizen participation. Context-specific adaptations—Medina’s shading systems, Sarajevo’s microclimatic planning, and Ljubljana’s modal shift—highlight the need for locally grounded approaches. These cases show that resilient cities emerge from planning that respects culture, environment, and community.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored how three culturally and climatically distinct cities—Sarajevo, Medina, and Ljubljana—are advancing urban health through context-sensitive planning strategies that integrate climate resilience, cultural identity, and spatial wellbeing. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Barton and Grant’s health map and resilience-oriented urban planning models, the analysis demonstrates that urban health is not merely a product of infrastructure or services, but of the deeper relationship between people, place, and environment.

Each city illustrates a unique pathway toward livability and resilience. Sarajevo leverages its compact, walkable urban form and layered cultural heritage to foster social cohesion and environmental adaptation. Medina integrates spiritual identity and large-scale infrastructural innovation to manage extreme climatic conditions and fluctuating population densities. Ljubljana exemplifies how long-term ecological planning and participatory governance can transform urban space into a restorative and inclusive environment.

The comparative analysis reveals that while global frameworks provide essential guidance, effective urban health strategies must be locally grounded, culturally responsive, and ecologically informed. Livable cities emerge not from standardized models, but from planning processes that respect the complexity of place and the lived experiences of their inhabitants. As climate change continues to reshape urban futures, the integration of health, identity, and resilience into planning practice will be essential to building cities that care for both people and planet.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the importance of place-based planning in addressing the intertwined challenges of climate change and urban health. While Sarajevo, Medina, and Ljubljana differ in geography, governance, and cultural context, they share a commitment to designing cities that support wellbeing through spatial, ecological, and social interventions.

A key insight is the role of cultural identity as both a resource and a constraint in urban transformation. In Medina, religious heritage shapes the spatial logic of public space and infrastructure, guiding climate adaptation in ways that preserve spiritual meaning. In Sarajevo, historical layering and architectural diversity foster a sense of belonging and continuity, which supports psychological resilience and civic engagement. Ljubljana’s ecological identity, cultivated through decades of green planning, has become a source of pride and collective action.

Another important theme is the integration of green and blue infrastructure as a strategy for climate resilience and public health. All three cities demonstrate how nature-based solutions—such as shaded corridors, riverfront restoration, and xeriscaping—can buffer environmental stressors while enhancing mental wellbeing and social interaction. These interventions are most effective when combined with inclusive mobility systems and participatory governance, ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed and locally supported.

However, the study also highlights challenges. In Sarajevo, spatial fragmentation and uneven access to green space remain barriers to health equity. In Medina, the scale of transformation raises questions about long-term sustainability and community involvement. In Ljubljana, continued attention to social inclusion and affordability is needed to maintain the gains of ecological urbanism.

Future research should explore how these strategies evolve over time, particularly in response to shifting climate conditions, demographic changes, and political dynamics. There is also a need for more empirical data on the health impacts of urban interventions, especially in non-Western contexts. Ultimately, this study affirms that resilient and healthy cities are built through planning processes that are adaptive, inclusive, and deeply rooted in the cultural and ecological fabric of place.

NOTES

- ¹ Hugh Barton and Marcus Grant, “A Health Map for the Local Human Habitat,” *Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health* 126, no. 6 (2006): 252–253, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466424006070466>.
- ² Göran Dahlgren and Margaret Whitehead, *Policies and Strategies to Promote Social Equity in Health: Background Document to WHO – Strategy Paper for Europe* (Stockholm: Institute for Futures Studies, 1991).
- ³ Hugh Barton, “A Health Map for Human Settlements,” *Built Environment* 31, no. 4 (2005): 339–355.
- ⁴ Stephen Tyler and Marcus Moench, “A Framework for Urban Climate Resilience,” *Climate and Development* 4, no. 4 (2012): 311–326, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2012.745389>;
- ⁵ Ayyoob Sharifi and Yoshiki Yamagata, “Resilient Urban Planning: Major Principles and Criteria,” *Sustainable Cities and Society* 37 (2018): 1–15.
- ⁶ Anke C. Krefis et al., “How Does the Urban Environment Influence Health and Wellbeing? A Systematic Review,” *Urban Science* 2, no. 1 (2018): 21, <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci2010021>.
- ⁷ Nicola Dempsey et al., “The Social Dimension of Sustainable Development: Defining Urban Social Sustainability,” *Sustainable Development* 19, no. 5 (2011): 289–300, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.417>.
- ⁸ Barton and Grant, “Health Map,” 252.
- ⁹ Tyler and Moench, “Urban Climate Resilience,” 311–326; Sharifi and Yamagata, “Resilient Urban Planning,” 1–15.
- ¹⁰ Krefis et al., “Urban Environment Influence,” 21; Dempsey et al., “Urban Social Sustainability,” 289–300.
- ¹¹ European Ministers Responsible for Urban Development, *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities* (Brussels: European Commission, 2020).
- ¹² United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* (Geneva: UNDRR, 2015).
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NONPROFIT HOSPITALS AS CATALYSTS FOR SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND URBAN LIVABILITY IN EGYPT: THE CASE OF 57357, BAHEYA, AND AHL MASR

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INTRODUCTION

Cairo, a Global South megacity of over 10 million, embodies the aspirations of a global city, striving to symbolize modern, globalized development through advanced infrastructure and economic liberalization.¹ As urban scholars note, global city-making often involves creating attractive environments for international capital, marked by modern transit systems, alongside high-end residential and consumptive spaces.² However, this pursuit frequently exacerbates inequalities, marginalizing populations who do not fit the "world-class" vision and pushing them into precarious living conditions.³ In Cairo, these dynamics are evident in historic neighborhoods like Magra Al-Oyoun, where the 57357 Children's Cancer Hospital stands, and in modern districts like New Cairo, home to Ahl Masr's Trauma and Burn Hospital. Yet, as Ghertner⁴ and de Boeck⁵ argue, global cities also extend hope—defined as a "prospective momentum"⁶—offering opportunities for inclusion through urban infrastructure and services. This paper examines how nonprofit hospitals—57357 Children's Cancer Hospital, Baheya Foundation for Breast Cancer, and Ahl Masr Foundation for burns—counter the exclusionary tendencies of Cairo's global city ambitions by providing specialized healthcare and fostering social empowerment. Located in strategic urban nodes, such as Magra Al-Oyoun (near the 4th line subway's El-Malek El-Saleh station), Giza's Pyramids neighborhood, and New Cairo (near the AUC Monorail Station), these hospitals leverage Egypt's expanding transit infrastructure to enhance accessibility for Egyptians, Arabs, and Africans. Their community-driven funding model, rooted in cultural traditions like zakat, distinguishes them in the region, offering free care and empowerment programs like 57357's Reactive Therapy Center, Baheya's awareness campaigns, and Ahl Masr's Burn Prevention initiatives.

This paper examines three pioneering institutions—57357 Children's Cancer Hospital, Baheya Foundation for Breast Cancer, and Ahl Masr Foundation for burns—and asks three interrelated questions:

- 1- How do these nonprofit hospitals strategically use location and integration with Cairo's expanding rapid-transit network to overcome the exclusionary logic of global-city making?
- 2- In what ways do they deliver social empowerment that goes far beyond medical treatment?
- 3- What transferable lessons do they offer other megacities of the Global South, particularly with regard to cultural funding mechanisms and the inclusion of refugee populations?

By answering these questions, the paper argues that nonprofit hospitals integrate healthcare with urban infrastructure, offering a scalable, culturally rooted model for equitable and resilient global cities in the Global South

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NONPROFIT HOSPITALS AS THERAPEUTIC URBAN ANCHORS

The emergence of these hospitals can be understood through three intersecting theoretical lenses. First, theories of “spatial justice”⁷ highlight the right to the city for marginalized groups and the role of counter-institutions in redressing structural inequality. Second, the concept of “therapeutic landscapes”⁸ has recently been extended to the Global South to describe places deliberately designed for physical, psychological, and social healing within hostile urban environments. Third, AbdouMaliq Simone’s⁹ notion of “people as infrastructure” and Asef Bayat’s¹⁰ “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” help explain how grassroots charitable movements create durable urban systems that operate parallel to, yet increasingly intertwined with, state-led neoliberal infrastructure. When read together, these frameworks position the three Egyptian hospitals as rare examples of “therapeutic urban anchors”—institutions that simultaneously deliver life-saving care, foster long-term human capabilities, and reconfigure accessibility through deliberate co-location with new mass-transit nodes. Their 100 % donation-based model, deeply rooted in Islamic traditions of zakat and waqf but modernized through digital crowdfunding and celebrity-led Ramadan campaigns, distinguishes them from both state hospitals and conventional medical NGOs.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, desk-based multiple-case-study approach¹¹ focused on three landmark Egyptian nonprofit hospitals: 57357 Children’s Cancer Hospital, Baheya Foundation, and Ahl Masr Trauma and Burn Hospital. All data were collected from publicly available online and archival sources, including:

- 1- official hospital websites, annual reports, and verified financial statements;
- 2- fundraising campaign archives and Ramadan television appeals (2007–2025);
- 3- Egyptian government infrastructure plans and transit maps published by the National Authority for Tunnels and the Ministry of Transport;
- 4- satellite imagery and spatial data from open sources (Google Earth, Egyptian government portals such as idsc.gov.eg, and Wikipedia-sourced transit maps under Creative Commons);
- 6- peer-reviewed articles, reputable news reports, and verified NGO databases on refugee healthcare in Egypt.

The three cases were purposively selected because they are (a) 100 % funded by private and community donations with no patient fees, (b) explicitly designed with social-empowerment programs beyond medical treatment, (c) strategically located on or adjacent to new metro, monorail, or planned high-speed rail nodes, and (d) extensively documented in the public domain, allowing for robust secondary analysis. Spatial relationships between hospital locations and transit infrastructure were examined through simple overlay mapping using open-source GIS tools. This secondary-data approach ensures replicability and provides a broad, longitudinal perspective while remaining fully aligned with the exploratory and interpretive goals of the study.

CAIRO’S GLOBAL CITY AMBITIONS AND URBAN CHALLENGES

Cairo’s transformation into a global city reflects neoliberal policies aimed at attracting international capital through modern infrastructure and economic reforms.¹² The 4th line Cairo subway, connecting central Cairo to Giza, and the West and East Cairo Monorail, linking Sheikh Zayed City and New Cairo,

exemplify efforts to create a "world-class" metropolis.¹³ Urban renewal projects, such as replacing slums in Magra Al-Oyoun with Arabesque-style residential compounds, aim to enhance aesthetics and livability.¹⁴ However, these developments often displace low-income residents, pushing them into informal settlements or precarious employment, as seen in Cairo's underprivileged communities.¹⁵ Magra Al-Oyoun, home to 57357, is a historic yet dense neighborhood with a 13th-century Mamluk aqueduct, facing overcrowding and healthcare disparities. Similarly, Giza's Pyramids area and New Cairo, hosting Baheya and Ahl Masr, navigate the tension between modern development and social exclusion.¹⁶ Despite these challenges, Cairo's global city-making extends hope to marginalized populations through accessible infrastructure and services.¹⁷ Nonprofit hospitals, strategically located near transit hubs, counteract exclusion by providing free healthcare and empowerment opportunities. The 4th line subway's El-Malek El-Saleh station improves access to 57357, while the Pyramids station, East and West Cairo Monorail enhance connectivity to Baheya and Ahl Masr.¹⁸ These hospitals, rooted in Egypt's tradition of community-driven charity, serve as urban anchors, fostering inclusion and resilience in a city marked by inequality.¹⁹

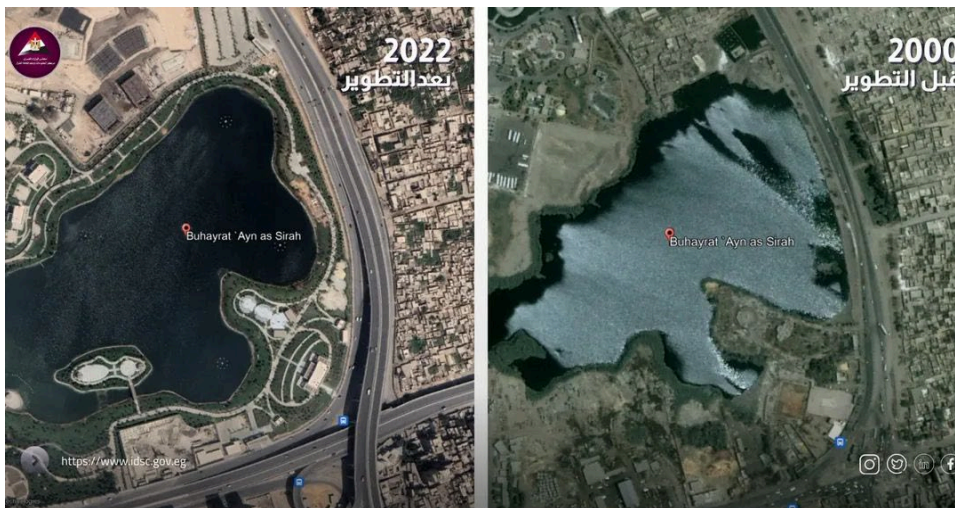


Figure 1. A satellite view of Ain-El-Sira (Aqueduct of Cairo) slum area before (right) and after (left) development shows the transition from a trash site into a tourist-friendly landmark (Source: idsc.gov.eg)



Figure 2. Cairo Rapid Transit map (Source: Wikipedia.org)

57357 Children’s Cancer Hospital: A Beacon of Pediatric Care

Founded in 2007 in Magra Al-Oyoun, the 57357 Children’s Cancer Hospital emerged from a societal movement to address Egypt’s pediatric oncology crisis. In the 1980s, the Children’s National Cancer Institute offered only eight beds and outdated treatments, with survival rates below 40%.²⁰ A 1995 Ramadan fundraising campaign, led by Dr. Sherif Abouelnaga, raised \$8 million, enabling the construction of the world’s largest pediatric oncology hospital, with 345 beds entirely funded by donations.²¹ Treating over 20,000 children annually, including refugees from Sudan and Libya, 57357 has increased survival rates to 71.4% by 2023.²² Its Reactive Therapy Center provides psychosocial support, art therapy, choir programs, and an in-hospital school, ensuring educational continuity and social reintegration.

Baheya Foundation: Empowering Women Through Breast Cancer Care

Inspired by Mrs. Baheya Wahbi’s battle with breast cancer, the Baheya Foundation, established in 2015, transformed her Giza residence into a specialized hospital in the Pyramids neighborhood, with a second branch in Sheikh Zayed City.²³ Serving over 130,000 women, Baheya offers free early detection, diagnostics, surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and rehabilitation.²⁴ Its awareness campaigns promote breast self-examination, complementing Egypt’s 2020 nationwide early detection initiative.²⁵ Psychosocial support, including home visits, arts workshops, and markets for patients’ handmade products, fosters emotional and economic empowerment. For example, Hind Ahmed, a widowed mother, rebuilt her life through Baheya’s psychological care and entrepreneurship training.²⁶ Accessible via the 4th line subway and West Cairo Monorail, Baheya counters the exclusionary effects of global city-making by empowering women, aligning with Cairo’s inclusive urban vision.²⁷

Ahl Masr Foundation: Transforming Burn Care

Established in 2013 by Heba Elsewedy, the Ahl Masr Foundation addresses Egypt’s burn injury crisis, where 60% of severe cases are fatal without urgent care.²⁸ Its 200-bed Trauma and Burn Hospital in New Cairo, near the AUC Monorail Station, has treated over 8,000 patients, including 6,500 children, since 2024, performing 4,000 surgeries. Serving underprivileged communities in flammable shanty homes, Ahl Masr offers free surgeries, rehabilitation, and psychological support through 20 ICU rooms designed to minimize infection.²⁹ The Burn Prevention and Awareness Program educates on safety, while post-treatment initiatives reduce stigma and promote reintegration.³⁰ Enhanced by New Cairo’s transit infrastructure, Ahl Masr embodies hope for marginalized groups, challenging the exclusionary narrative of global cities.³¹

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THREE HOSPITALS

A comparative overview (Table 1) reveals both common patterns and distinctive contributions.

Dimension	57357 Children’s Cancer	Baheya Breast Cancer	Ahl Masr Burns & Trauma
Year founded	2007	2015	Hospital opened 2024
Primary transit access	Metro Line 4	West Monorail	East Monorail
Patients treated (cumulative)	>300,000	>130,000	>8,000
Signature empowerment program	In-hospital school & art therapy	Handicraft markets & entrepreneurship	Burn-prevention community education
Refugee outreach	High	Moderate	Emerging

Table 1. Comparative overview of Cairo’s flagship nonprofit hospitals

All three institutions share four critical features: 100 % philanthropic funding, zero-fee care, deliberate co-location with new mass-transit nodes, and explicit non-medical programs aimed at long-term human development.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF MARGENALIZED POPULATIONS AND URBAN LIVABILITY IN A GLOBAL CITY

Cairo’s nonprofit hospitals, distinguished for their community-driven funding, leverage Egypt’s cultural tradition of zakat to provide free care and empowerment programs, serving as urban anchors. The 57357’s in-hospital school, Baheya’s markets, and Ahl Masr’s social support empower patients across Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and other nations, fostering resilience and inclusion. Egypt’s expanding transit infrastructure amplifies this impact, enhancing access to healthcare and fostering urban livability. Since 2018, Egypt’s high-speed rail projects, including a 2,000 km network, further transform connectivity.³² The first line, spanning 660 km from Ain Sokhna to Marsa Matruh via Cairo’s New Administrative Capital, extends westward to Sirte, Libya, fostering regional economic ties. The second line, stretching 1,100 km from Sixth of October City to Abu Simbel, extends to Wadi Halfa, Sudan, via a 6 km bridge across Lake Nasser, improving access for southern marginalized communities. These lines, with a design speed of 250 km/h, halve travel times, making healthcare at 57357, Baheya, and Ahl Masr accessible to distant populations, see figure 3.³³

In addition, the North Sinai train, part of the Arish-Taba Logistic Corridor, connects Cairo to Taba, offering a transformative opportunity for Bedouins.³⁴ The Cairo-Taba rail, under development, provides Bedouins with direct access to Cairo’s healthcare and economic opportunities, countering their exclusion from global city benefits. For example, patients from North Sinai can reach 57357’s pediatric oncology care or Baheya’s breast cancer treatment, fostering inclusion and hope.³⁵

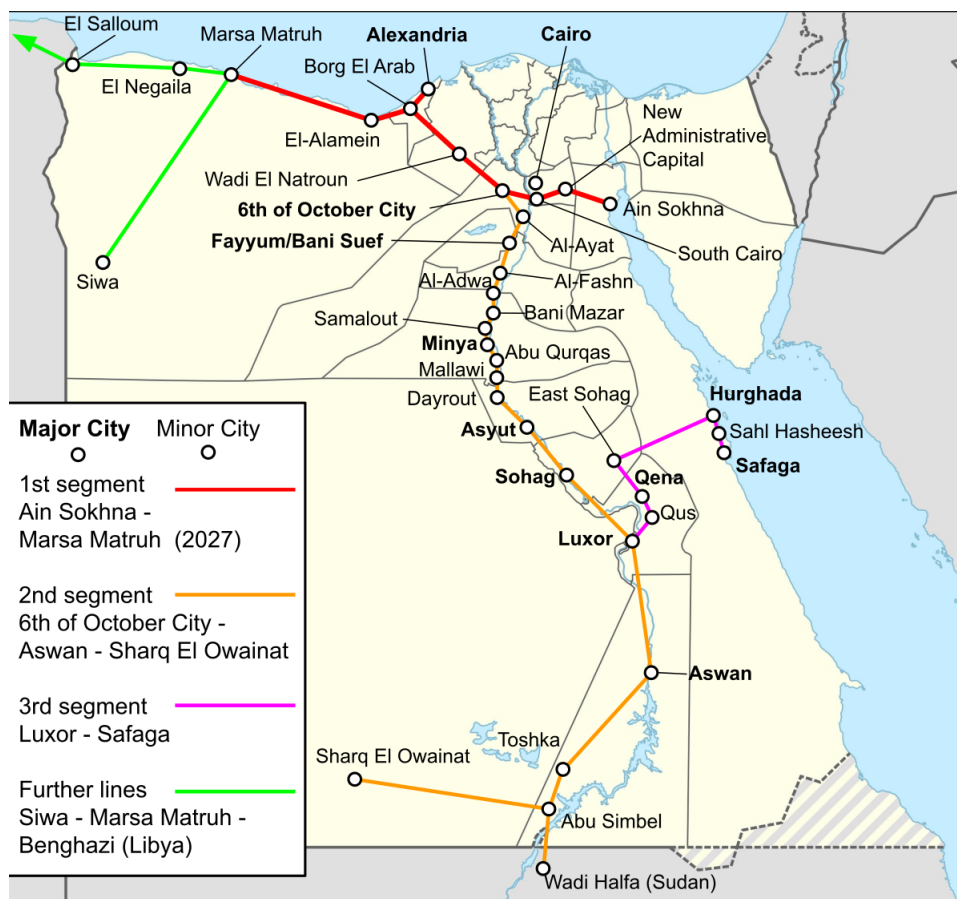


Figure 3. Map of the High-speed rail in Egypt connecting the west, east, north, and south of Egypt (Source: Wikipedia.org)

Lessons for Global South Cities

The model of 57357, Baheya, and Ahl Masr offers a scalable framework for Global South cities like Lagos or Mumbai, where urban density and healthcare disparities mirror Cairo’s challenges.³⁶ Integrating nonprofit healthcare with transit infrastructure, as seen in Cairo, enhances accessibility and resilience. This model, blending nonprofit healthcare with modern transit, counters exclusionary global city dynamics, offering lessons for equitable urban development.³⁷ Egypt’s hospitals uniquely combine cultural funding, transit integration, and empowerment, serving broader populations, including refugees. Egypt’s refugee support, hosting over 500,000 registered refugees and nearly 9 million unregistered refugees from Sudan, Syria, and Libya, complements this model.³⁸

Nonprofit hospitals provide critical care to refugees, with 57357 treating Sudanese and Libyan children and Baheya supporting Syrian and Sudanese women, aligning with Cairo’s role as a refuge hub. The in-hospital school at 57357 ensures educational continuity for refugee children, fostering integration. However, refugees face barriers like documentation costs and urban exclusion in informal settlements.³⁹ Transit infrastructure, such as the high-speed rail, eases access to healthcare, offering a contrast to regional models like Lebanon’s strained refugee healthcare system, which relies on NGOs with limited integration.⁴⁰ Egypt’s policy of eschewing refugee camps in favor of integrating refugee care within nonprofit hospitals and transit infrastructures constitutes a distinctive model of urban resilience. By embedding refugee support into institutions with deep cultural roots and aligning these services with mobility networks, Egypt demonstrates how Global South cities can cultivate inclusive and sustainable

urban systems. This approach not only mitigates structural disparities but also advances a framework of hope and social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to answer three questions about Cairo’s flagship nonprofit hospitals. First, by deliberately locating on new rapid-transit lines and leveraging Egypt’s cultural fundraising traditions, 57357, Baheya, and Ahl Masr dramatically extend specialized healthcare to populations that global-city aesthetics typically exclude. Second, through in-hospital schools, handicraft markets, burn-prevention education, and psychosocial programs, they deliver social empowerment that transforms patients from passive recipients into active urban citizens. Third, their fusion of charitable funding, transit integration, and refugee-inclusive care offers a replicable blueprint for other megacities of the Global South. Theoretically, these hospitals challenge purely aesthetic interpretations of world-class city making⁴¹ and extend Simone’s “people as infrastructure” by showing how collective anticipation and charitable momentum can produce durable, high-quality urban systems that out-perform many state-led initiatives. Practically, they demonstrate that livability in the Global South need not await full formal inclusion but can be incrementally built through culturally rooted, transit-enabled counter-institutions. Limitations remain—notably the long-term financial sustainability of a purely donation-based model in an era of economic uncertainty, and the risk that rapid urban expansion could eventually price these institutions out of their current locations. Future research should track patient outcomes longitudinally, map changing accessibility as transit networks mature, and conduct comparative studies with philanthropic hospitals in Istanbul, Mumbai, or São Paulo. Ultimately, in a city often criticized for pursuing global status at the expense of its poor, 57357, Baheya, and Ahl Masr stand as powerful reminders that hope is not merely rhetorical. When healthcare, culture, and infrastructure are strategically aligned, even the most marginalized residents—and the refugees who share their city—can claim a rightful place in the future of the globalizing metropolis.

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THE CHANDIGARH CHALLENGE: BALANCING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Following the partition of British India into Pakistan and India in 1947 the government of India decided to build Chandigarh as a new capital for Punjab. The aim was to create a modern planned city that would represent the aspirations of the newly independent nation. This commission was given to Le Corbusier, who developed the renowned masterplan for Chandigarh together with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret and a team of Indian architects such as Aditya Prakash and Balkrishna Doshi.

With a projected population increase of 35 % by 2035, the Chandigarh metropolitan region serves as an illustrative case study of dynamic urbanization in India. This leads to a conflict of interests between the aim to preserve the central part of the city and the urgent needs of urban development. Would it have been in Le Corbusier's interest to design the city as a living museum or did the team of urban planners intend to create constantly renewing urban structure?

This paper presents the results of an urban design studio that developed alternative scenarios for a balanced urban transformation, taking into account the pioneering character of Le Corbusier's masterplan, and examine answers for the city of the 21st century in terms of density, new housing and functional mix, sustainability and climate adaptation.

With a 'research by design'-methodology several teams created innovative concepts that in the sense of 'What if...?' scenarios - show how cultural heritage and urban development could be balanced. The design teams interpreted the site in different ways and derived urban visions for future development. What all contributions have in common is a re-densification strategy with the addition of new functions combined with a re-organization of parking and qualification of the existing public spaces.

These design projects provide a valuable basis for further planning steps. By comparing the proposed urban design scenarios, important findings can be derived for the discussion about the various alternative options of future urban transformation of Chandigarh.

„Chandigarh is free. It is beautiful. It is an expression of the nation's faith in the future.”

(Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, on the inauguration of Chandigarh, 1950s)

RESEARCH GAP AND METHODOLOGY

Objective

Chandigarh is a city of extraordinary architectural and historical importance, which, like other Indian cities, is subject to enormous development pressure. However, it is currently apparent that there are certain obstacles to adapting the historic core of the city to the changing needs of society. This in turn

leads to various problems, including vacant plots and buildings and a decline in investment and maintenance. The aim of this project is to identify ways in which Chandigarh could develop further in terms of urban development without compromising its historically valuable features.

Hypothesis

Chandigarh is a vibrant city, not an architectural and urban planning museum. The center of Chandigarh can (and must) be developed in terms of urban planning in order to continue to fulfil its central functional role in the urban fabric. In this process, it is essential to ensure a balance of urban development and the cultural heritage of the architecture and urban fabric of the functional city.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project consists of three parts: (i) The first part includes the work with literature sources in the thematic field of the modernist movement in architecture and urbanism, and the theoretical background of the *Functional City*, the *Charta of Athens*, the role of *Le Corbusier* and the *Planning History of Chandigarh*. (ii) The second part comprises an analysis of Chandigarh's urban fabric and condition today through personal site visits and interviews with local stakeholders and experts. (iii) The third part consists of a 'research-by-design'-methodology, which uses an urban design master studio at KIT to develop a series of alternative proposals. These design projects are presented in intermediate and final presentations to local experts in order to include feedback in the process and facilitate a qualified discussion. The results are documented and published at the end of the process.

“The seed of Chandigarh is well sown. It is for the citizens to see that the tree flourishes.” (*Le Corbusier, Edict of Chandigarh, 1959*)



Figure 1. TriCity – Chandigarh with Panchkula and Mohali: Aerial Image with Municipal Border - Sector 17 - The Commercial Heart of Chandigarh.¹

URBAN PLANNING HISTORY OF CHANDIGARH

Chandigarh occupies a singular position in the history of twentieth-century architecture. It represents the largest concentration of Le Corbusier's work in a single location, while also serving as the arena where Pierre Jeanneret matured professionally and where Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew advanced their conception of "tropical architecture." Equally significant, the city provided a platform for India's first generation of modernist architects, including Aditya Prakash, Anant Prabhawalkar, and Bhanu Prakash Mathur, who developed a lasting body of work across the city.²

The creation of such a remarkable ensemble must be understood within the context of India's early postcolonial years. After two centuries of colonial rule, independence led to a national drive for accelerated modernization. Tensions within society between the desire for emancipation from and dependence on the former colonial power shaped the architectural debate. Instead of simply copying Western models, the new republic sought to convey self-confidence and progress by adapting modern urban planning concepts to the Indian context.³

The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 intensified this need. The Indian state of Punjab, left without a capital, required a new administrative center. Existing cities such as Amritsar were deemed unsuitable, and the creation of an entirely new city aligned with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of a modern India, who described Chandigarh as "a symbol of the nation's faith in the future."⁴

The first scheme came from A.L. Fletcher, a civil servant who drew inspiration from the British "New Towns" and the writings of Ebenezer Howard. Fletcher envisioned a modest administrative town surrounded by green space. In 1949, P.N. Thapar was appointed as the Chief Administrator and P.L. Verma as the Chief Engineer, tasked with bringing this vision to life. Internal conflicts soon forced Fletcher to withdraw, but Thapar and Verma remained devoted to the project throughout their careers. In the late 1940s, American planner Albert Mayer, working for Nehru in Uttar Pradesh on creating 'model villages,' was asked to draft the new master plan for Chandigarh, given his background as a town planner influenced by Garden City principles. Recognizing the symbolic importance of the project, Mayer accepted and collaborated with the Polish architect Matthew Nowicki, to design the city's signature government buildings and contribute to housing and public buildings. Tragically, Nowicki died in a plane crash in August 1950. To keep the project moving forward, Thapar and Verma sought replacements in Europe and found Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, a London-based couple specializing in 'Tropical Architecture' after working in Africa.⁵

Fry and Drew were excited about designing housing and civic buildings for Chandigarh but were hesitant to take on the monumental state buildings. They suggested bringing in Le Corbusier, who was eager to design significant, world-class buildings, but could not imagine relocating to Chandigarh as a salaried employee of the Punjab government. Instead, he proposed that his cousin and former partner, Pierre Jeanneret, take on the role, with Le Corbusier overseeing the project from Paris. Thus, in 1951, Jeanneret, Fry, and Drew moved to Chandigarh as employees of the Punjab Government, while Le Corbusier was appointed as the "Architectural Advisor" with a small annual honorarium, under the condition that he spend at least one month per year on-site.

Thapar and Verma's insistence that foreign architects serve as government employees was decisive, ensuring close collaboration with Indian professionals and the training of a new generation. Around sixty architects, planners, and draftsmen formed the newly established "Architects Office," the city's first completed building and the nucleus of its design culture.

While Le Corbusier's contract required him to implement Mayer's plan, he quickly modified it, making the city more compact and rectilinear, and altering the layout of the sectors. He retained the central green belts and adopted the 7Vs system for the road network, inspired by CIAM principles. His responsibility apart from the master plan was limited to the Capitol Complex, the Museum Complex in Sector 10, and overseeing building designs in Sector 17 and along Jan Marg and Madhya Marg.

The larger development of the master plan was carried out by Jeanneret, Fry, and Drew in collaboration with Indian architects such as Dethé, Lamba, and Prabhawalkar. The city's core program included government buildings, housing for government staff, a university, a library, a museum complex, a library, technical training institutes, and essential infrastructure like markets, bus and train stations, clinics, and schools.

In 1954, Fry and Drew left the project as their contracts were not renewed, but Jeanneret remained as the city's Chief Architect, becoming a mentor for Indian architects and planners. The Indian architects

on the team had largely colonial training, and Chandigarh’s radical modernist design made the “Architect’s Office” a professional workshop where teaching and mentoring became integral to the culture. Teaching and mentoring came naturally to Jeanneret, unlike Le Corbusier, and he quickly grew into that role. Under him and then with him, the Indian architects built out most of the city and in turn trained a new cadre of architects who then went on to continue that work in Chandigarh and beyond. This culture of teaching and collaboration as a planning team shaped the city’s development and its distinctive and strong architectural character, with Chandigarh becoming the vibrant, modern city it is today.⁶

“The city of Chandigarh is planned to human scale. It puts us in touch with the infinite cosmos and nature. It provides us with places and buildings for all human activities by which the citizens can live a full and harmonious life. Here the radiance of nature and heart are within our reach.” (*Le Corbusier, Edict of Chandigarh, 1959*)

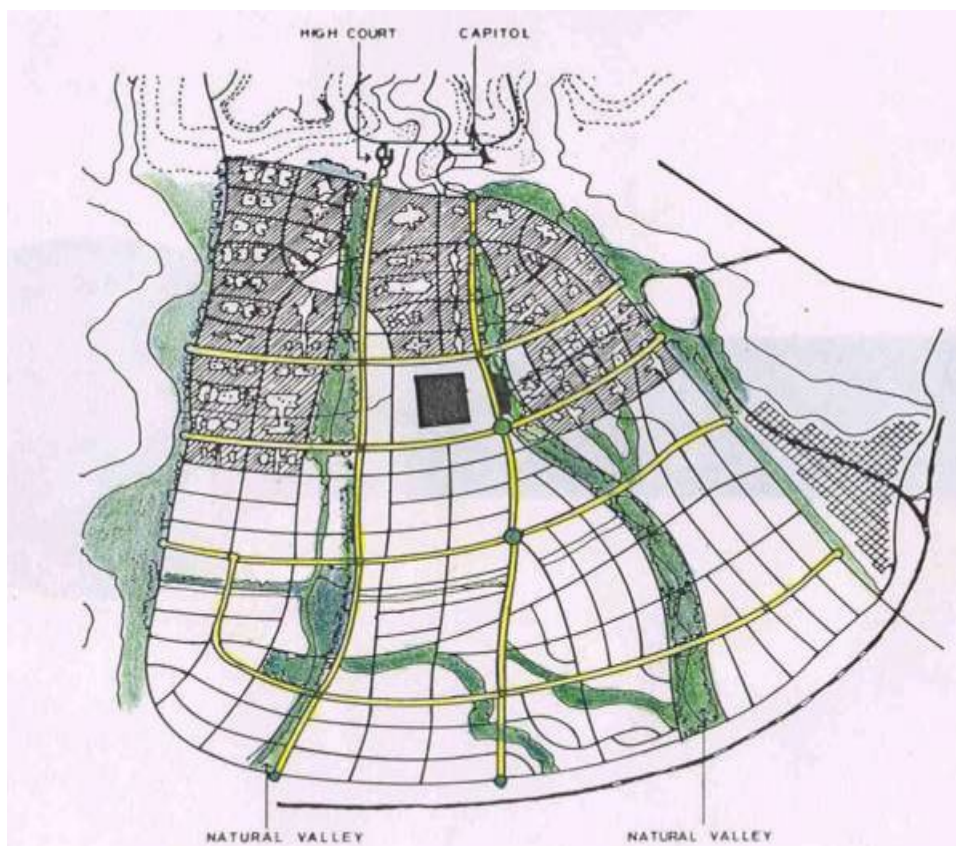


Figure 2. First Master Plan Draft based on Garden City Concepts and Superblocks by Albert Mayer and Mathew Nowicki.⁷

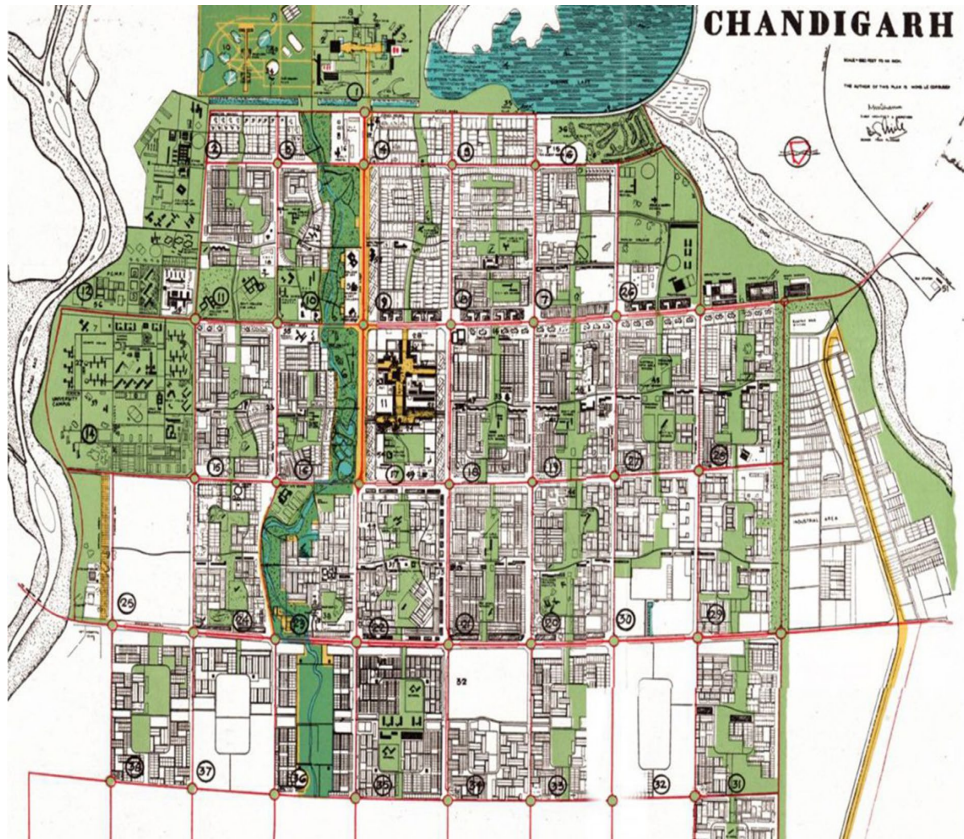


Figure 3. Masterplan based on the *Principles of the Functional City* by Le Corbusier, 1950.⁸



Figure 4. Chief Engineer P.L.Varma with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret.⁹

CHARTA OF ATHENS IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANDIGARH

In 1928, the first of the international congresses of modern architecture, CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne), took place in La Sarraz (Switzerland). CIAM was primarily the initiative of Parisian architects Le Corbusier and Gabriel Guévrékian, as well as Swiss art historian Siegfried Giedion. Their stated goal was to establish an avant-garde of the international modern architecture movement in order to supplant the influence of the then-dominant academic neoclassicism.¹⁰

Le Corbusier subsequently summarized the results of the CIAM Congress of 1933 and published them in 1943. The core of the demands was the spatial separation of the four functions of living, leisure, work and transport in urban planning, i.e. a systematic division of the city into clearly separated functional areas. This was intended to avoid the abuses and conflicts of the industrial cities of the 19th century. This concept of the so-called functional city, which had already been envisaged in Ebenezer Howard's Garden City model, often led to a rigid allocation of function and space in the post-war period.¹¹ Le Corbusier consistently adhered to this model, but despite high recognition from other modern architects as a pioneer of CIAM, he remained unsuccessful for a long time – until he was finally offered the opportunity to implement his ideas in Chandigarh, India.¹²

From today's scientific perspective, however, this approach has serious limitations. The functional separation ignores essential social and cultural dynamics of Indian urban life, in which the informal economy, family structures and social exchange are closely intertwined spatially.¹³ The planned city of Chandigarh hardly responds to the social and cultural reality of the Indian population, leading to the marginalization of informal settlements and the social exclusion of large sections of the population.¹⁴ The planning concept took little account of the poorest population groups; informal settlements sprang up on poorly serviced open spaces. Thilo Hilpert sums this up succinctly: “Chandigarh is the ideal city for a privileged minority – modern, clean, empty.”¹⁵ The resulting monotony and lack of urban vitality illustrate the partial failure of the functionalist model in this context.

Furthermore, the focus on private transport led to an infrastructure that disadvantaged broader sections of the population and reinforced social inequalities.¹⁶ Important cultural and social aspects of urban space were not taken into account, resulting in urban planning that is strongly technocratic in nature.¹⁷ The case of Chandigarh provides a fundamental insight for contemporary urban planning: planning must be multidimensional and context-sensitive, taking into account the cultural, social and economic interrelationships of urban society in order to create liveable and resilient urban spaces.¹⁸

The critical analysis of the Charter of Athens based on Chandigarh contributes significantly to the further development of urban theory by highlighting the limitations of the modernist paradigm and paving the way for integrative, participatory planning approaches.¹⁹

Chandigarh is thus exemplary of the ambivalence of modern urban planning: conceived as a technocratic utopia, it proves to be a social and cultural challenge in practice. This insight is highly relevant for architects and urban planners in order to design future urban developments in a sustainable manner that takes local realities into account.

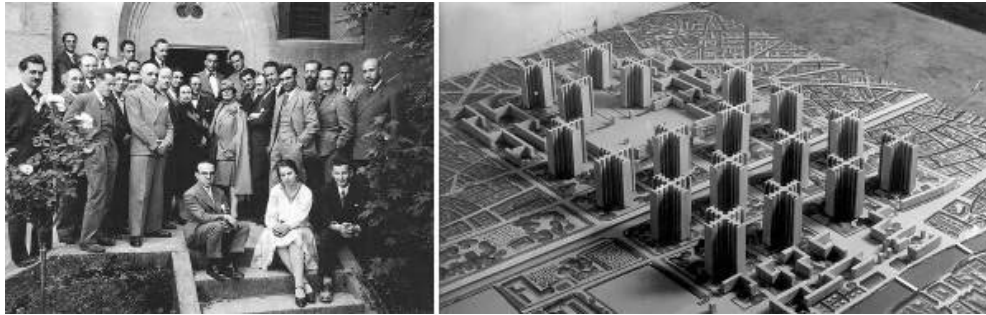


Figure 5. Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), First Meeting in La Sarraz, CH 1928 (left)²⁰ - Ville Radieuse (The Radiant City), Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin for Paris, 1925 (right).²¹

URBAN CHALLENGES TODAY

The Functional City and the Charta of Athens were not received positively by all professionals and scholars in the fields of architecture and urbanism. Very early on, projects like Chandigarh²² and Brasilia²³ received criticism for their functional separation, car-oriented development and lack of human scale in open spaces. When visiting Chandigarh today – almost 75 years after its initial construction phase – we are able to observe where the functional city works well, and where to identify deficiencies. With a focus on Sector 17, the following urban challenges can be summarized: The commercial heart of Chandigarh is characterized by functional monotony. Except for retail, office and administration, there is relatively little mixed-use. Old building stock, inadequate maintenance, declining attractiveness of the commercial offering and increasing vacancy rates are creating a downward spiral. At the same time, large areas on the backside of the pedestrian areas can be identified that are completely undeveloped or are only used for ground-level parking.

Furthermore, in line with the theoretical concepts of the Athens Charter, the center of Chandigarh is suffering from car-oriented functional separation. Large-scale ground-level parking spaces restrict alternative developments and create an unattractive environment. Oversized pedestrian areas, unused open spaces and large distances between buildings create a feeling of emptiness in the pedestrian zone. “This city is ruled by architects. We have to act now. Chandigarh is dying!” (*Anonymous local expert in interview, Chandigarh, March 2025*)



Figure 6. Images of Sector 17, 2025. ²⁴

DESIGN TASK

The students of the Urban Design Master Studio at KIT had a total of 15 weeks to develop the results presented below structured by two intermediate and the final presentation. This included diving into the specific theoretical background and an unfamiliar cultural context in India as well as going through an intense urban design process. The project was organized into seven teams to develop alternative proposals in order to be able to discuss and evaluate different options and qualities with local stakeholders and experts.

The task for the students was (i) to create a new urban development vision for the city, (ii) to focus on Sector 17 – the “heart of Chandigarh” and (iii) to balance heritage and urban development.

The urban design process was divided into the following steps:

- Research on the theoretical background of the *Functional City*, the *Charta of Athens*, *Le Corbusier* and the *Modernist Movement in India*.
- Analysis of the situation and urban structure in Sector 17.
- Mapping the potentials and challenges.
- Developing an urban design concept in plan and model.
- creating a specific thematic focus supported by atmospheric visualizations.

RESULTS

In the following paragraphs, a selection and summary of three exemplary projects is presented. All of them were developed in an urban design master studio at KIT. For the full overview and graphical details of the proposals, please refer to the KIT publication.²⁵

All projects share the same planning premises: As the analysis revealed, there is plenty of undeveloped and underused land within Sector 17, in addition to a growing vacancy rate for shops and office space. Therefore, there is no pressing need to tear down existing buildings in order to gain space for new development and to overcome the challenges mentioned in the section above. All three proposals maintain the existing buildings and thus the unique character and cultural heritage of Chandigarh, while focusing on the transformation of the open, fallow land and undeveloped areas, combined with careful interventions within the existing urban fabric and open spaces.

The common aim of these projects is to use new additional urban development to create a balanced mix of uses and stabilize the existing functions by adding a new user base. This means adding mainly residential, and supporting social infrastructure like nursery schools, a (primary) school and new central public functions along the main pedestrian spine. The proposals reduce street-level parking by concentrating it in strategically located multi-storey car parks. They qualify the public spaces with new program and landscape design elements. Regarding sustainability and climate adaptation, there are various specific proposals for additional shading, introduction of new vegetation, reduction of sealed surfaces as well as storm- and rainwater management in public spaces.

The difference between these three concepts lies in the specific urban planning and landscape design, which allows to compare and to evaluate their individual qualities. Even though all concepts start with the same premises and questions, it is interesting to see how different the outcomes in terms of urban structure and spatial qualities are.

Team 1: Same Heart, New Pulse: Continuity Within Chandigarh's Timeless Grid

The irregular grid of this concept is inspired by Piet Mondrian's famous geometrical paintings from the 1920's to 40's. After an analysis of existing structures, this approach uses the proportions of several buildings of the masterplan, e.g. standardized building length and width as a new basic element to fill the grid. Using straight and angled building configurations to fill the existing voids in combination with the 'Mondrian Grid' results in an intriguing and complex urban design based on a relatively simple set of rules.

With the self-similarity of building proportions and configuration new and existing buildings blend into a well-balanced mix of scales and functions. By not using the traditional perimeter block, there is a lot of freedom and opportunity to innovative interpretation of inner city public and semi-public spaces.

In addition to the grid this proposal introduces four precisely positioned new buildings in the central spine that redefine the vast public spaces next to the town hall and Neelam square. The existing road bridges are repurposed for cyclists and pedestrians to reduce the noise impact in the central pedestrian spine. Each new neighborhood is equipped with a multi-story car park and neighborhood square with adjacent ground-floor functions for the everyday needs of the new residents.

In summary, this proposal offers a flexible strategy to guide the densification of sector 17, while maintaining the urban logic of the masterplan. The openness of the grid is able to adapt to various functions and development scenarios. At the same time, it can be read as innovative re-interpretation of the existing urban fabric.²⁶



Figure 7. KIT Team 1, Same Heart, New Pulse.²⁷

Team 2: The Cooled Grid

This proposal addresses the climatic and social challenges of Chandigarh’s Sector 17 by combining densification with strategies for climate resilience and reactivation. Extreme heat, humidity, and monsoon rains are met with shading structures, water features, and greenery that improve the microclimate and restore the sector’s central role. The pedestrian zone is reorganized into thematic strips for art, culture, sports, commerce, and mobility. Modular structures allow flexible uses and create a multifunctional public realm. Vertical extensions and new buildings increase density and add housing, education, and cultural spaces while maintaining the order of the grid.

Mobility is restructured through consolidated parking and a tram line linking Sector 17 with Mohali, Panchkula, and other centers. A southern hub integrates bus, tram, and bike services, transforming infrastructure into civic space and freeing land for public use. Residential neighborhoods follow a flexible framework with varied apartment sizes. Activity belts along the strips support interaction, while rear courtyards provide shade, privacy, and recreation. Climate-responsive elements such as green roofs, shading devices, and water systems enhance comfort and biodiversity. Central squares act as neighborhood hubs with local services and cultural programs that reinforce identity and cohesion. Together these measures form a coherent framework that balances density and openness, embeds climate strategies in daily life, and secures long-term resilience. The Cooled Grid revitalizes Sector 17 as a climate-adapted, socially vibrant, and culturally significant center while preserving the logic of Chandigarh’s modernist heritage.²⁸

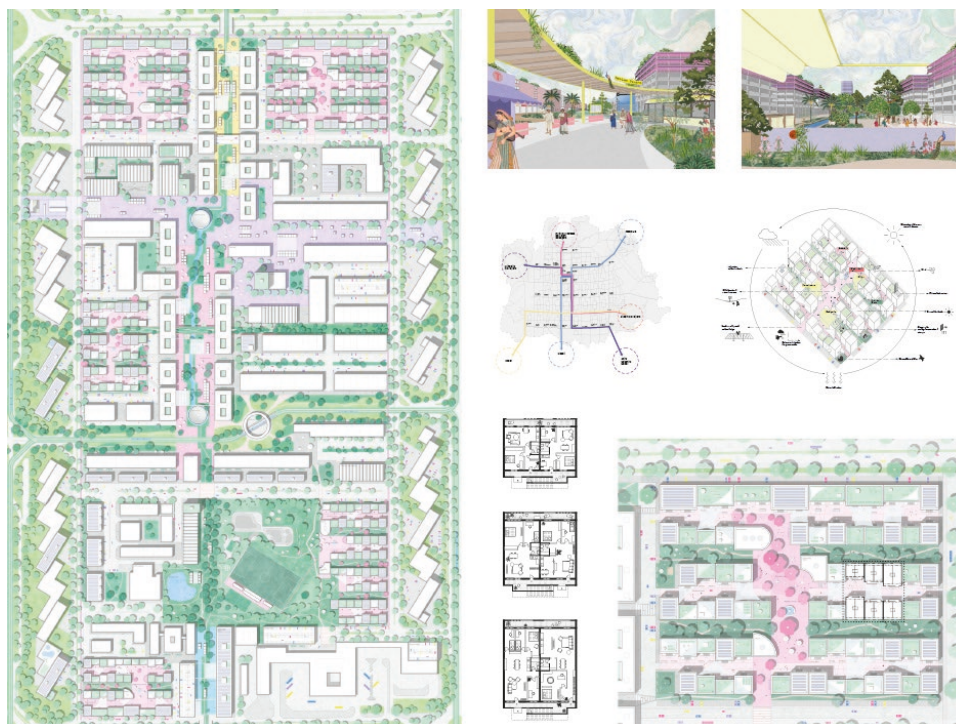


Figure 8. KIT Team 2, *The Cooled Grid*.²⁹

Team 3: Sector 17 – From Heritage to Revitalization

This approach is characterized by the aim to densify sector 17, while continuing some of the underlying principles of the modernist city, for instance the use and logic of certain typologies and the flow of open spaces, while following a different, more contemporary path when it comes to designing the mix of uses, mobility-concept and programming of public spaces. The existing structures are completed by adding a series of well-defined new typologies. First, there is a set of three new high-rise buildings that occupy specific central areas within the main pedestrian zone, thus bringing in new contemporary office and retail spaces to the center and activating the main spine. Second, on the rear side of the pedestrian zone several straight forward buildings complete the existing urban structures adding further non-residential program. Third, four geometrically well-defined areas are occupied groups of slab buildings that are oriented diagonally with an optimal solar orientation in this climate zone - mimicking the non-residential buildings at the flanks of sector 17. Fourth, a special cluster of co-housing or student housing is placed on top of the existing underground parking. Fifth, four residential high-rise buildings add a new typology for housing and also add this new function on the edge of the sector. Lastly, the need for parking is addressed by six strategically located multi-storey carparks in each neighborhood.

This concept is a valuable contribution because it shows the development potential of sector 17 and depicts how the cultural heritage could be conserved while adding new elements that use a similar conceptual approach as the existing urban layout. The proposed structures present a balanced vision, continuing the existing structures while developing their own distinct character and thus creating an inspiring dialogue between the existing buildings and new additions.³⁰

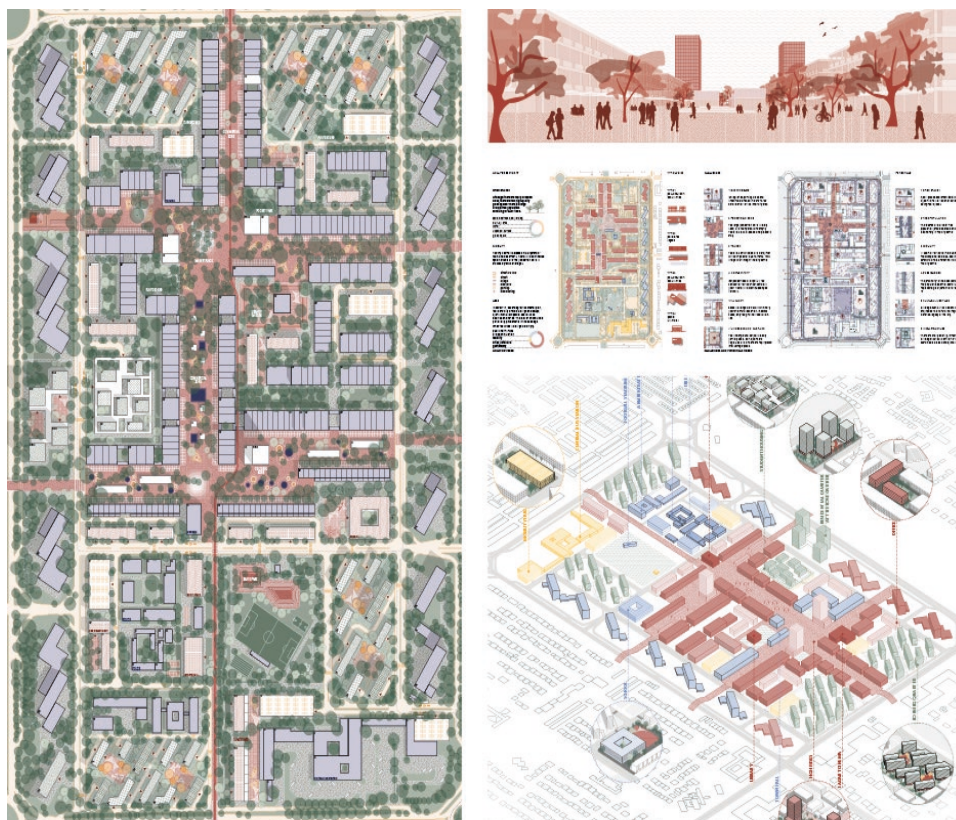


Figure 9. KIT Team 3, Sector 17 – From Heritage to Revitalization.³¹

CONCLUSION

Referring back to the urban challenges of Chandigarh summarized at the beginning of this article, what are the results and contributions of this project to overcome these issues?

The project started with a critical analysis of the urban fabric and cultural heritage of Chandigarh as an outstanding early example of a 'Functional City' based on the Chart of Athens.³² The 'City Beautiful' with its tree-lined streets, little traffic congestion, lively neighbourhood squares and well-designed communities has a very livable character overall.

However, the personal analysis during an extended visit, literature research and interviews with local stakeholders reveal the weaknesses of the existing urban building structures and its vast and underused public spaces. It has come to a point where the urban fabric, for the most part frozen in the time of construction in the 1950s to the 1970s, is not able – or allowed – to adapt to the rapid changes in society regarding the way we live, work, move, shop and spend our leisure time.

In addition, the city of Chandigarh is not able to create housing for the growing population, which leads to increased inequality and excludes the poor, young and new arrivals from affordable housing. This in turn leads to raising inequality and restricted access to amenities and opportunities, as well as limited participation and inclusion. (see Lefebvre's 'Right to the City').³³

These challenges come together in Sector 17 - commercial heart of Chandigarh - as if under a magnifying glass. Therefore, this urban design master studio focuses on this well documented central sector as an exemplary case study. Within this project, a series of alternative urban design solutions have been developed, which show a balanced approach that opens the path to urban development, while maintaining the character and cultural heritage.³⁴

Apart from the specific solutions presented, many urban strategies that have been applied are transferable to similar contexts. For example, introduction of mixed-use and densification of the

existing urban fabric. Strengthening and stabilizing of inner cities with new residential functions, integration of innovative mobility solutions and reducing car-dependency, qualification of public spaces and climate adaptation.

With these “What if...?” scenarios in this urban design approach, we would like to raise awareness of the potentials and opportunities of Sector 17 and Chandigarh as a whole. We aim to contribute to the discussion about the future urban development of Chandigarh with local stakeholders, decision makers, scholars in academia and last but not least: the residents of this unique and beautiful city.

The process described here therefore demonstrates the possibilities of a research approach based on ‘research by design’. A purely academic discussion about the future of Chandigarh would not be able to convey the pros and cons of urban development in Chandigarh in this way. Only by testing and developing various design approaches, the potential of existing urban structures becomes apparent. Comparing several design approaches creates a learning process that elevates the quality of the discussion about specific solutions and may facilitate informed decisions about the urban future of Chandigarh.

We sincerely hope that the city of Chandigarh will overcome its current stagnation and break out of the downward spiral. By taking an innovative approach to the city's cultural heritage, Chandigarh will demonstrate its ability to embrace change and create a new vision for the future while remaining a sustainable, livable city and outstanding example of modern urban planning for future generations.

NOTES

- ¹ Figure 1: *TriCity – Chandigarh with Punchkula and Mohali: Aerial Image with Municipal Border - Sector 17 - The Commercial Heart of Chandigarh* Photos: both from Google Earth, April 8, 2025. © Google, Image data: © Maxar Technologies, © CNES / Airbus with graphical additions by the authors.
- ² Vikramaditya Prakash: *Chandigarh architectural travel guide*. Barcelona, Edicions Altrim S.L., 2014, 8ff.
- ³ Boris Niclas: *Funktional geplant. Der Versuch der Realisierung der Charta von Athen in Chandigarh und Brasilia*. Magisterarbeit, Universität Oldenburg, 2009, 42.
- ⁴ Vikramaditya Prakash: *Le Corbusier's Chandigarh Revisited: Preservation as Future Modernism*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2023, 2.
- ⁵ Boris Niclas: *Funktional geplant. Der Versuch der Realisierung der Charta von Athen in Chandigarh und Brasilia*. Magisterarbeit, Universität Oldenburg, 2009, 41-44.
- ⁶ Vikramaditya Prakash: *Chandigarh architectural travel guide*. Barcelona, Edicions Altrim S.L., 2014, 8-12.
- ⁷ Figure 2: *First Master Plan Draft based on Garden City Concepts and Superblocks by Albert Mayer and Mathew Nowicki*. Photo: © ARAM, aram.co.uk, 2016 .
- ⁸ Figure 3: *Masterplan based on the Principles of the Functional City by Le Corbusier, 1950*. Plan: © Le Corbusier, Source: freearchitectureportal.com
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REVITALIZING VIETNAMESE WEAVING TRADITIONS THROUGH COMPUTATIONAL DESIGN AND DIGITAL FABRICATION

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INTRODUCTION

This research reexamines the evolving intersection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), vernacular craftsmanship, and digital iteration by investigating the integration of traditional Vietnamese bamboo and rattan weaving (BRW) with additive manufacturing. Rooted in a cross-cultural participatory design methodology (Fig. 1), the project situates local craft knowledge at the center of inquiry and reimagines traditional practices as living systems—dynamic, responsive, and vital to both cultural continuity and contemporary innovation. Rather than positioning computational tools as disruptors, this study conceives them as extensions of heritage, exploring how modularity and digital fabrication can extend and reimagine the embodied knowledge systems embedded in traditional BRW.

By leveraging computational design and rapid prototyping, the research facilitates intergenerational knowledge exchange in Phú Nghĩa Commune, enabling artisans to experiment with modular systems while preserving the symbolic and aesthetic integrity of weaving traditions. As Lai¹ emphasizes, bamboo weaving is not merely material technique but an “immaterial repository” of ecological intelligence, gendered labor, and local identity, which resists standardization yet adapts when engaged through sensitive design mediation.

The project therefore positions BRW as a nexus of heritage preservation, sustainable material practice, and community empowerment. Drawing on design anthropology² and situated design theory, the methodology combines ethnographic immersion, collaborative prototyping, and community workshops. Craft is treated not as static folklore but as iterative design knowledge, where the dialogue between artisan expertise and computational tools produces hybrid forms of fabrication that are simultaneously technical and cultural.

This dual framing responds to broader challenges confronting Vietnamese craft villages, where peri-urbanization, industrial competition, and youth migration threaten the continuity of traditional knowledge³ Studies of intangible heritage in Vietnam underscore how traditional crafts function as ecological and social systems, deeply entangled with local geographies, economies, and cosmologies.⁴ In the case of Phú Nghĩa, located in the flood-prone karstic lowlands of the Red River Delta, the community’s shift from unstable rice cultivation to weaving was an ecological adaptation rather than a nostalgic return to tradition. Over generations, bamboo, rattan, and rushes became materials of resilience, embodying situated knowledge and cultural continuity.⁵

The design strategy outlined here unfolds in four phases:

1. **Ethnographic study** – fieldwork, interviews, and material mapping with artisans
2. **Schematic design iterations** – hybrid prototyping that merges weaving with digital joinery
3. **Modularity and Circular Design:** Crafting for Adaptability and Sustainability
4. **Cross-cultural collaboration and Communication:** co-design strategies across geographies and material ecologies.
5. **Strategic Framework and Conclusion:** Integrating Craft and Technology for Cultural and Ecological Futures

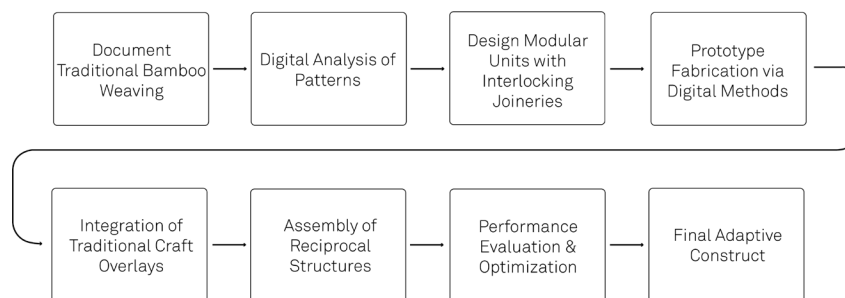


Figure 1. Flowchart of the Modular Design Process in Bamboo Weaving Integration

ETHNOGRAPHIC ENGAGEMENT AND MATERIAL ECOLOGIES: CRAFT, CULTURE, AND COMPUTATION IN PHÚ NGHĨA COMMUNE

The research begins with ethnographic grounding, where craft is understood as an embodied epistemology and as a situated response to ecological, cultural, and socio-economic conditions. Following participatory ethnographic design methods,⁶ artisans were treated not as informants but as co-researchers whose tacit knowledge actively shaped the design process. Methods included immersive fieldwork, participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and iterative prototyping sessions conducted with weavers in Phú Nghĩa Commune (Chuong Mỹ District).

This ethnographic orientation revealed that bamboo and rattan weaving (BRW) is not simply a manual technique but a living system of adaptation. Situated in the flood-prone karstic lowlands of the Red River Delta, Phú Nghĩa’s transition from unstable rice cultivation to craft production exemplifies how ecological necessity shaped cultural continuity. Over generations, communities transformed fibrous plants such as bamboo (tre, nứa), rattan (mây), and rushes (cói) into resilient material languages of design, embedding ecological intelligence into vernacular practices.⁷

During interviews and collaborative workshops, master artisan Mr. Hanh traced his family’s weaving lineage, demonstrating how basketry techniques were historically tied to both ritual practices and pragmatic adaptation to environmental instability. These insights aligned with Lai’s argument that bamboo weaving operates as an “immaterial repository” of ecological wisdom and gendered labor, transmitted through apprenticeship and oral traditions.⁸ The ethnographic process also foregrounded how weaving is spatially and socially embedded in communal life: courtyards, temples, and village roads double as production spaces, enabling weaving to remain visible within the cultural fabric of Phú Nghĩa.⁹

The literature review informed this stage of inquiry. The Study on Artisan Craft Development for Rural Industrialization in Vietnam (SACD), conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in collaboration with ALMEC and the International Development Center of Japan, highlighted three persistent tensions in Vietnam’s craft sector:

- **Ontological tension** between modularity and tradition;
- **Ecological intelligence** of local materials such as mây, trúc, and giang;

- **Pedagogical continuity** of ICH through youth engagement.

These themes resonate with Nguyen’s findings on cultural resource fragility, where industrial demand and land-use changes threaten the sustainability of traditional crafts. In Phú Nghĩa, artisans expressed similar concerns, noting increasing difficulties in sourcing high-quality raw materials from provinces such as Thanh Hóa and Hòa Bình, regions long known for supplying weaving villages. The collaborative documentation of weaving patterns and local plant species also contributes to a broader material atlas of the Red River Delta, positioning BRW as a site where ecological knowledge and cultural continuity converge.

SCHEMATIC DESIGN ITERATIONS: HYBRID PROTOTYPING AND TACIT KNOWLEDGE

The project advanced into schematic design iterations where computational tools were introduced as mediators between artisan knowledge and modular design principles. This stage emphasized co-creation rather than technological imposition, seeking to hybridize manual weaving practices with digital joinery systems.

Collaborative prototyping with Mr. Hanh and other artisans began by mapping traditional weaving geometries—basket bases, herringbone patterns, and cross-knitted surfaces—into computational environments such as Rhino and Grasshopper. Iterations focused on reinterpreting these logics into modular components that could be scaled, disassembled, and reconfigured. Rather than producing fixed forms, the goal was to generate a flexible design language that extended vernacular weaving principles into broader architectural and product design systems.

The process highlighted the critical role of tacit knowledge. Artisans drew on embodied cognition—an intuitive grasp of stress distribution, pliability, and fiber behavior—developed through years of apprenticeship and practice. These insights reflect Polanyi’s¹⁰ concept of “knowing more than we can tell,” where crucial design intelligence remains undocumented but is embedded in hand skills and material intuition. By integrating these tacit systems with algorithmic modelling, the iterations produced hybrid prototypes that were technically robust while retaining cultural authenticity.

Material testing further shaped the design outcomes. Experiments with rattan (mây), ivory bamboo (trúc), and slender bamboo (giang) demonstrated different thresholds of flexibility, tensile strength, and joinery compatibility. Computational simulations were then calibrated against these tests to ensure structural fidelity. (Fig.2) This iterative calibration reflects Sun & Liu’s¹¹ argument that bamboo weaving’s flexibility and renewability make it ideal for circular design, but only if digital intervention is nuanced enough to account for material variability.

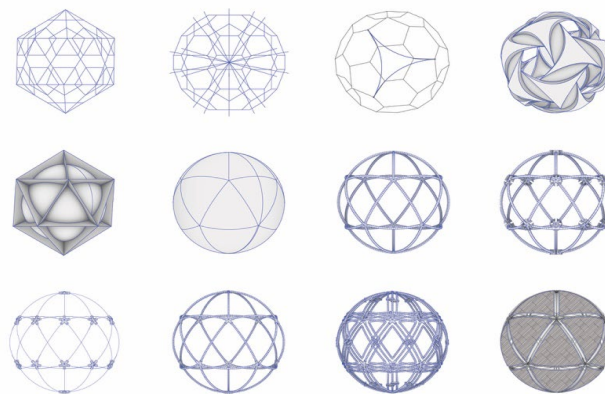


Figure 2. Digital iterations and input were based on the feedback. Platonic solids, using the dodecahedron (12 faces, 20 vertices, 30 edges, and 108-degree angles).

A key breakthrough emerged through the development of customized 3D-printed joints. (Fig.3) These acted as structural couplers between woven components, tolerating bamboo's irregularities while reinforcing modular connections. Algorithmic form-finding techniques allowed woven modules to be assembled into larger systems, including lighting prototypes, partition walls, and speculative furniture. This process resonates with Semper's theory of joinery as the art of connection, reframing weaving as both a cultural and structural practice.



Figure 3. Rapid Prototyping Model of joinery for bamboo connections

The iterative workflow also responded to pragmatic constraints of transnational collaboration. Because prototypes had to be shipped across continents and reassembled in Vietnam, modularity became not only a cultural and ecological design strategy but also a logistical necessity. Components were designed to be lightweight, transportable, and reconfigurable, ensuring resilience against interruptions in digital infrastructure and international communication.

Importantly, the schematic design phase moved beyond object-making to reconceptualize craft as a system of knowledge production. As Reubens & Kachru¹² argue in the Indian context, craft practices must be framed as ecological and social systems that can inform sustainable design futures. Here, BRW's transformation into modular systems reframes artisans as innovators whose inherited techniques are re-contextualized through computational workflows.

Workshops with artisans, university students, and design researchers provided a critical feedback loop. For example, the university students were asked to manipulate parametric models of weaving modules, while artisans proposed new geometric variations based on tactile familiarity with materials. These exchanges underscore how participatory engagement not only safeguards ICH but also generates new forms of design literacy across generations.¹³

MODULARITY AND CIRCULAR DESIGN: CRAFTING FOR ADAPTABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The integration of modularity into bamboo and rattan weaving (BRW) represents a strategic intervention aimed at addressing contemporary design imperatives of scalability, adaptability, and sustainability. Traditional Vietnamese weaving practices have historically followed monolithic logics: baskets, fish traps, and containers were produced as singular, continuous entities. While structurally effective, these typologies limited repairability, disassembly, and reuse, making them difficult to integrate into larger-scale architectural or industrial design systems.

By adopting modular design principles, this research reconceptualized BRW as a system of interlocking, interchangeable parts. This approach aligns with circular economy frameworks, in which modularity enhances lifecycle performance by enabling disassembly, part reuse, and reconfiguration. In Phú Nghĩa, artisans and researchers co-developed weaving modules inspired by basketry geometries but adapted through 3D-printed joints and algorithmic patterning. These modules demonstrated flexibility across applications—lighting fixtures, partition walls, and even speculative furniture—while remaining rooted in the symbolic and tactile language of Vietnamese weaving.

From Craft Object to System

The shift from singular artifacts to modular systems repositions craft not as product but as knowledge infrastructure. Iterations drew on weaving techniques such as the cross-weave, herringbone, and triangular braid, reinterpreted in computational environments as discrete units capable of repetition, scaling, or rotation. Ultimately, the team converged on a random weaving logic comprising three hierarchical layers, enabling woven surfaces to exhibit curvature and structural depth while maintaining adaptability. This hybridization resonates with Semper's 19th-century concept of "joinery as the art of connection," where the act of assembly embodies both technical and cultural significance. It also aligns with Sun & Liu's¹⁴ argument that bamboo weaving's renewability is best harnessed when paired with computational systems that can navigate material variability.

Structural and Environmental Advantages

The modular prototypes demonstrated several structural and environmental advantages:

- Mass customization** allowed modules to reflect individual artisan input, integrating local motifs into global design frameworks.

- Mass production** became feasible through repeatable modules, enabling scalable deployment for architectural applications.

- Circular design integration** supported part reuse, repairability, and low-carbon shipping logistics.

Bamboo's rapid growth cycle and high carbon sequestration capacity¹⁵ further reinforce its potential within regenerative material systems. When combined with modularity, BRW offers a bio-based alternative to resource-intensive construction systems. This reinforces Nguyen's argument that heritage crafts can be repositioned within global design networks when coupled with digital innovation.

Cultural Anchoring and Symbolic Continuity

The incorporation of modularity did not dilute cultural expression but extended it. Traditional motifs were translated into digital overlays, creating hybrid structures where computational precision coexisted with vernacular symbolism. As Habibi¹⁶ has shown in his work on contemporary vernacular architecture, bamboo offers unique opportunities to bridge ecological sustainability with cultural continuity. This project builds on that insight, demonstrating how heritage craft can inform architectural design without succumbing to homogenization.

Comparative Framework

To illustrate this transformation, the research contrasted traditional weaving logics with computational modularity (Table 1).

Aspect	Traditional BRW	Computer Modularity
Design Process	Manual, iterative, region-specific	Parametric scripting, scalable
Joinery	Handcrafted, organic, interlocking	Precision-fabricated, standardized
Material Use	Natural Treatment, hand-finishing	CNC/3D Printing, digital calibration
Flexibility	Limited to artisanal scope	High adaptability, reconfigurable
Cultural Value	Deeply localized motifs and rituals	Integrated overlays, customizable
Sustainability	Low environmental impact, low efficiency	Optimized material use, repairability
Production Speed	Time-intensive, labor heavy	Rapid prototyping, scalable output

Table 1. Traditional Bamboo Rattan Weaving technique in comparison to Computer Modularity

This framework highlights how modular design transforms weaving from object-centered practice into systemic practice, capable of addressing contemporary challenges of urbanization, ecological crisis, and market adaptation.

CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

The success of the design iterations relied on cross-cultural collaboration that extended beyond technical exchanges into a broader dialogue between material ecologies, cultural practices, and digital infrastructures. This stage emphasized collaboration not as one-directional knowledge transfer but as a reciprocal process where artisans, designers, and community stakeholders co-produced a hybrid design language.

A defining dimension of this research was its emphasis on community participation as both a methodological strategy and a cultural imperative. Craft knowledge, especially in the context of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), cannot be sustained solely through documentation; it must be lived, practiced, and transmitted across generations. In Phú Nghĩa Commune, where socio-economic migration and industrial labor markets increasingly pull youth away from traditional weaving, the integration of education and participatory design became a central intervention

Pedagogy as Preservation and Innovation

Workshops were organized with artisans, schoolchildren, and design researchers to foster a mutual learning ecology. These sessions created inclusive entry points for participants of different ages and skill levels:

- Artisans shared tacit knowledge of weaving techniques, material preparation, and symbolic motifs.
- Students contributed digital familiarity, often assisting elders with CAD tools such as Rhino and Grasshopper.
- Researchers/designers introduced computational workflows and modular fabrication methods.

Material Ecologies and Cultural Significance

Phú Nghĩa's weaving tradition is shaped by a nuanced material ecology, where plant species are selected not only for performance but also for symbolic and cultural value:

- **Mây (Rattan):** Highly flexible, used for bindings and fine detailing.
- **Trúc (Ivory Bamboo):** Strong and durable, suited for structural elements.
- **Giang (Slender Bamboo):** Lightweight and pliable, ideal for intricate braiding.
- **Song (Thin Bamboo):** Uniform in structure, often sourced from central Vietnam.
- **Cói and Tre/Núá (Rushes and Large Bamboo):** Texturally distinct, used in larger-volume weaving.

These species are sourced from diverse ecological regions including Thanh Hóa, Hòa Bình, and Đà Nẵng, each contributing specific material properties. However, their availability is increasingly threatened by industrial demand, changing land use, and ecological disruption—trends documented in Nguyen's¹⁷ research on the fragility of Vietnam's cultural resource ecosystems. The material scarcity adds urgency to cross-cultural collaborations that promote ecological stewardship alongside design innovation.

Hybrid Design Language

Through collaboration, the project developed a design vocabulary characterized by lightweight, modular, and transportable prototypes. Additive manufacturing was deployed to produce custom joinery systems that accommodated bamboo's irregularities while reflecting the structural logic of weaving. This aligns with Naboni & Breseghello's argument that indigenous Southeast Asian crafts embody forms of environmental intelligence—systems calibrated to climatic and material constraints, which digital modeling can extend without erasing cultural specificity.

In this hybrid design space, weaving traditions were reinterpreted as modular units: herringbone braids became repeatable pattern blocks; basket bases were adapted into node geometries; and random weaving logics evolved into layered surface systems. The iterative process transformed cultural motifs into computationally adaptable structures, ensuring that form variability—once a limitation of craft—became a design advantage.

Modes of Collaboration

The methodology addressed significant logistical and technological asymmetries between the U.S.-based design team and the Phú Nghĩa artisan community. Connectivity issues, language barriers, and geographic distance made real-time digital collaboration difficult. Instead, asynchronous communication strategies were developed: WhatsApp voice notes, annotated sketches, and the shipping of physical prototypes allowed dialogue to continue despite infrastructural limitations. This necessity reinforced the importance of modularity—components had to be transportable, lightweight, and easy to assemble without advanced machinery.

Workshops became critical sites of knowledge exchange. Artisans were invited to manipulate digital models, suggesting modifications that resonated with their tactile understanding of weaving. (Fig. 4) At the same time, younger participants with familiarity in digital interfaces acted as reverse mentors, guiding artisans through CAD environments. This created a reciprocal educational ecology where intergenerational and intercultural expertise coalesced. Such collaborative models resonate with Noel's¹⁸ emphasis on intergenerational craft transmission and Gunn & Donovan's¹⁹ notion of design as a reflexive, negotiated practice.



Figure 4. The Weaving community participate various weaving techniques to prototype the final spheric form.

Toward Situated Design Ethics

The collaboration underscored the need for a situated design ethic,²⁰ where technologies are adapted to regional material cultures, socio-economic contexts, and ecological realities. Structural testing was conducted using locally sourced bamboo, ensuring that digital prototypes were not universal abstractions but context-specific interventions. As Reubens & Kachru²¹ argue, sustainable design futures demand that heritage crafts be reframed as evolving systems of environmental and social intelligence.

By re-situating bamboo weaving within a global dialogue of design innovation, the project reframes artisans not as passive custodians of tradition but as active collaborators in shaping modular and computational futures. In doing so, the collaboration gestures toward a decolonial design praxis—one where heritage, ecology, and technology are aligned rather than in conflict.²²

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND CONCLUSION: INTEGRATING CRAFT AND TECHNOLOGY FOR CULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL FUTURES

Strategic Framework for Hybrid Craft-Digital Practices

To sustain and scale these outcomes, the research proposed a strategic framework with four key components (Table 2).

Component	Description	Expected Outcome
Documentation & Digital Archive	Systematic digitization of weaving patterns, cultural narratives, and techniques	Creation of a comprehensive cultural archive accessible to artisans, researchers, and policymakers
Collaborative Design Platforms	Digital forums and co-design workshops connecting artisans and computational designers	Innovation through intercultural dialogue and reciprocal design authorship
Policy Advocacy	Partnerships with local/national governments and cultural institutions to incentivize sustainable crafts	Increased funding, resource access, and protection for cultural ecosystems
Educational Programs	Training modules combining traditional weaving with CAD/CAM skills for artisans and students	A new generation of digitally literate artisan-designers capable of adapting heritage to contemporary contexts

Table 2. Hybrid Craft-Digital Practices outcome

This framework aligns with broader scholarship emphasizing the potential of hybrid approaches in sustaining intangible cultural heritage.^{23 24} It underscores that safeguarding BRW requires not only technical interventions but also policy engagement, archival infrastructure, and pedagogical continuity. Vietnam’s traditional craft villages such as Phú Nghĩa are undergoing profound socio-economic transformations shaped by peri-urbanization, industrialization, and global markets. As Nguyen²⁵ and Van et al.²⁶ argue, artisans face pressures to commodify products, severing the intergenerational pedagogies that once sustained craft. The introduction of mass-produced plastic or industrial substitutes further threatens the economic viability of weaving traditions. Yet, as Ducros²⁷ notes, heritage valorization can act as a form of resistance and adaptation, transforming “the local” into a platform for negotiating globalization. In line with this, the research positions BRW modularity not as a retreat into nostalgia but as a pathway toward cultural resilience and economic renewal.

Socio-Economic Transformation of Craft Villages

Research Contributions

This study advanced several contributions at the intersection of craft, computation, and cultural sustainability:

- Cultural Resilience:** Weaving traditions were preserved not only as livelihoods but as embodied cultural memory, reaffirmed through community workshops and intergenerational dialogue.
- Structural Innovation:** Customized 3D-printed joints and computational patterning extended weaving beyond baskets and mats into architectural-scale, modular systems.
- Pedagogical Transformation:** Educational outreach reframed weaving as a systems-based design literacy, empowering youth to reinterpret tradition through digital platforms.
- Sustainability:** Bamboo and rattan’s bio-based properties were amplified through modular and circular design, reinforcing their ecological relevance in contemporary architecture and product design. Together, these contributions demonstrate that craft knowledge is not static heritage but an evolving epistemology, capable of informing regenerative design ecologies.

Future Trajectories: Toward Regenerative Craft–Digital Ecologies

This project represents an initial iteration within a longer trajectory of practice-led inquiry. Future directions include:

1. **On-Site Fabrication Labs** — establishing local digital hubs in villages to reduce reliance on external prototyping and foster artisan-led experimentation.
2. **Artisan Autonomy** — embedding decision-making further within communities to develop independent design ecosystems rooted in BRW logic.
3. **Economic Viability** — conducting longitudinal assessments on compensation, market access, and intellectual property frameworks for artisans.
4. **Scalability Across Geographies** — applying the methodology to other Southeast Asian crafts (e.g., brocade, ceramics, bamboo construction).
5. **Parametric & Structural Simulations** — refining architectural applications of BRW for climate-responsive and low-cost housing.
6. **Policy Integration** — embedding participatory craft-digital practices into national strategies for rural development, cultural heritage preservation, and climate adaptation.

By reframing weaving as part of a circular design economy, communities can generate new livelihoods while maintaining symbolic continuity. Ultimately, the project challenges Western-centric models of innovation by advancing a decolonial design praxis: one in which sustainability, cultural continuity, and technological adaptability converge. In this vision, craft villages are not displaced by modernization but re-positioned as sites of global design leadership, where ancestral knowledge and computational tools collaborate to shape regenerative futures.

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THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LISBON AFTER THE 1755 EARTHQUAKE: THE GENESIS OF *BAIXA POMBALINA* (POMBALINE DOWNTOWN)

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INTRODUCTION

On November 1, 1755, the city of Lisbon was shaken by a violent earthquake, followed by a tsunami caused by its proximity to the Tagus River. These two factors devastated the vital center of the city in a Dantesque way. In this catastrophe scenario, the majority of buildings of medieval origin were completely destroyed, either by the intensity of the seismic oscillation or by the fires that followed.

However, it was not just buildings of fragile construction quality that were devastated, distinct and more robust buildings were also reduced to rubble, such as convents, palaces, hospitals and even the Royal Palace.¹

With this scenario, it became urgent to rebuild Lisbon, which generated the opportunity to design a “section” of the city inspired by the Enlightenment ideals that flourished in Europe, as if it were a blank board.²

Ironically, the apocalyptic earthquake of 1755, which devastated the old city, gave rise to an innovative urban and architectural space, the new center of Lisbon, called *Baixa Pombalina*, recognized throughout Europe for its visionary and experimental design.³

Among the various proposals presented, the plan chosen for *Baixa Pombalina* was that of Eugénio dos Santos and Carlos Mardel, dating from 1758 (Figure 1). This plan reformulated the affected area into a bold space of the Portuguese Enlightenment, with an orthogonal urban grid that articulated built spaces of notable architectural quality with large, pleasant and harmonious public spaces.

Despite the modern layout, the plan respected the old urban grid of the areas that had not been destroyed, allowing the continuity and articulation of the urban fabric. Innovative infrastructures, new topographic methods for the implementation and execution of works, modern construction legislation and a new typology of housing construction were introduced.

Eugénio dos Santos' plan was characterized by a symmetrical rectangular grid, with blocks oriented approximately in an east-west direction, delimited by two main squares: to the north, Praça do Rossio; and to the south, Terreiro do Paço, today called Praça do Comércio.

Public spaces, of a geometric and regular character, were organized into squares, streets and cross streets, and the facades of the buildings followed a symmetrical and standardized architecture. This uniformity allowed the hierarchization of spaces according to their functions — commercial, residential or administrative.

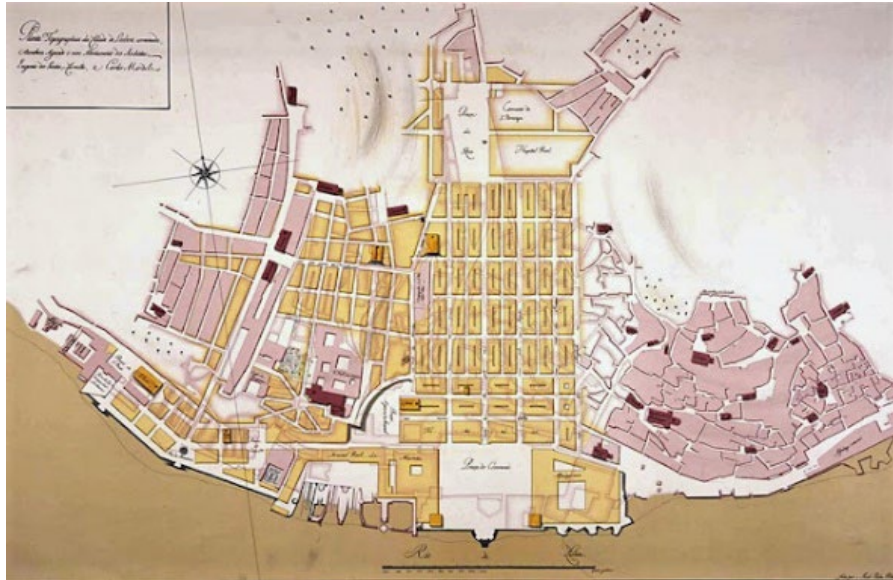


Figure 1. Plan of the Lisbon reconstruction project after the 1755 Earthquake, June 12, 1758. Color lithograph from the Lisbon Museum.⁴

Without a doubt, the generating unit of this plan is the block city, a defining element of the entire project that allowed the interpretation of the urban scale and rational design of the *Baixa Pombalina*. These blocks are divided into lots with façades of different widths, but with the same depth and height (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Pombalina Cartulary - Typical facade on the main streets.⁵

Another innovative aspect was the introduction of hallways in the rear facades — small, long and narrow courtyards inside the blocks (Figure 3). These were not designed as places to stay, but as service spaces, guaranteeing health and safety in the homes. Despite their small size, the hallways are of enormous importance, as they create voids that articulate the interior space of the blocks with the buildings.

Located at the core of each block, the hallways stand out in the repetitive design of the urban grid through their symmetry and rhythm, creating visual and architectural continuity between the different buildings on the rear facades. These voids thus contribute to a clear reading of the block as an urban unit, reinforcing the rational and functional character of the *Baixa Pombalina* plan.



Figure 3. View of a hallway

The hallways of *Baixa Pombalina* play an important role in controlling temperatures inside buildings, especially during the summer, by contributing to cooler and more comfortable environments.

It can be said, therefore, that the hallways constitute a passive construction system, which promotes more efficient and continuous ventilation. This natural ventilation is essential to prevent the occurrence of construction anomalies associated with humidity and poor air circulation. The so-called chimney effect — created by the difference in air pressure between the lower and upper areas — causes hot air to rise, at the same time that cooler air circulates at lower levels.

Baixa Pombalina is considered (still today) the ingenious conception and solution after an unprecedented catastrophe. More than a physical reconstruction, it was an ideological, technical and aesthetic project for the modernization of the city, whose influence continues until today in Lisbon's urban landscape and in the history of European architecture and urbanism.

THE ETYMOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DIMENSION OF THE WORD "SAGUÃO"

The term hallways, widely used in contemporary Portuguese to designate entrance or circulation spaces in buildings — such as vestibules or atriums — has a rich and complex etymological origin, with roots in Semitic and Latin languages.⁶ According to linguistic records, it is a word originating from the Spanish language, *zaguán*, which, in turn, derives from the vulgar Arabic *satuán*, a form that dates back to the Classical Arabic *ustuán*, all with the basic meaning of “covered passage” or “entrance area”.⁷

In addition to this main origin, the term finds historical and semantic relationships with other words of a functional nature, used in ancient architectural contexts, such as *alfurja* and *enxaguão*. The term *alfurja*, coming from the Arabic *al-fujra*, designated a narrow alley through which water flowed, generally associated with drainage and cleaning in housing complexes. *Enxaguão*, whose formation results from the combination of the intensive prefix “en-” with *xaguão* (variant form of hallway), referred to spaces used as trash or washing areas.

These etymological parallels reveal that the hallway, although currently associated with grandeur or architectural comfort, has a functional origin deeply rooted in everyday practice. Historically, it was a transition space between the outside and the inside, with functions linked to circulation, ventilation, drainage and even the disposal of waste.

This finding allows for a critical reflection on the processes of semantic and symbolic evolution of architectural spaces. Initially utilitarian and discrete elements can, over time, acquire representative aesthetic meanings, revealing the mutability of the uses and values attributed to the built space.

Therefore, its semantic evolution also accompanied changes in the understanding of residential and urban architecture itself. In *Baixa Pombalina*, the systematic incorporation of hallway into Pombaline buildings reflected a notable technical and hygienic advance, in light of the concerns illustrated with the well-being of the inhabitants and the healthiness of urban spaces.

These interior courtyards, despite being inspired by Mediterranean and Arabic-based construction traditions, acquired a functional and typological value that was highly innovative for the time in the Pombaline context. Its rational layout in the center of the blocks and the systematic repetition throughout the urban grid gave the city a coherent character, where functionality was combined with formal regularity and constructive efficiency.

The hallway, in this sense, is no longer just a service passage or marginal area. It has become an essential architectural device to ensure cross ventilation, entry of natural light, and thermal balance in interiors. Furthermore, by integrating the principles of passive architecture, it anticipated concerns that are now central in the discussion about sustainability and energy efficiency in buildings.

Understanding the origin of the word and its functional transformation throughout history allows us not only to value this architectural element, but also to understand how language reflects the needs and innovations of societies over time.

THE HISTORY OF THE DOMESTIC COURTYARD TO THE POMBALINO HALLWAY

The courtyard is an architectural element transversal to the history of architecture, which appears in different times and geographies, assuming different forms, functions and meanings. In general terms, the courtyard is an open space inside a building or block, functioning as a sheltered, intimate area, and often hidden from the public.⁸

The versatility and adaptability of the courtyard are notable: it serves as a space for circulation, spatial distribution, natural lighting and ventilation, leisure or domestic activities. In Italian and French architectural traditions, for example, the courtyard — respectively called *corte* and *cour* — represents a place of mediation between public space and private space, functioning as an anteroom to the experience inside the buildings.

In Portugal, however, the courtyard rarely assumes this function of spatial distribution or what it symbolizes. It is often understood as a sheltered space for private use, without direct connection with urban space, more associated with the intimacy of family life than with the social or monumental organization of the building. The hallway, as a smaller and more functional type of courtyard, is often understood as an “interior patio”, linked to domestic tasks, ventilation, health and maintenance.

This functional use of the courtyard dates back to Roman architecture, where the *cohortus* (or *hortus*) was the central space of the *domus*, reserved for domestic life. As Vitruvius states in his *De Architectura*, the courtyard was essential to guarantee light, ventilation and dignity to the living space. Despite formal variations between cultures, the concept remains: it is an open and protected space that brings dignity to the private sphere of architecture.

Viollet-le-Duc, in the 19th century, mentioned that courtyards in medieval noble residences allowed families to distance themselves from the street, providing greater privacy and comfort. This characteristic is also observed in the Italian Renaissance, where courtyards (*corti*) gain importance as centers of architectural and social organization. Leon Battista Alberti highlights its role in distributing spaces around a central nucleus, reflecting Renaissance values of order, rationality and proportion.

In Portugal, during the 15th and 16th centuries, some royal and stately palaces began to introduce internal courtyards as a way of enhancing the health, comfort and monumentality of housing. At the

same time, the influence of the Islamic tradition, especially in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, left a heritage legacy: the patio as the central nucleus of the house, a living space facing inwards and in opposition to the street, as seen in Andalusian and Algarve (South of Portugal) houses.

In the 18th century, especially with the reconstruction of Lisbon after the 1755 Earthquake, the typology of the courtyard has undergone changes. The space of the cour or corte, until then larger and often monumental, was reduced in size, creating what would come to be known as the hallway. This element appears with a clear function: to guarantee the ventilation and health of buildings, functioning as a thermal chimney and hidden technical space.

Thus, the hallway is more than a simple “well” of infrastructure, it represents the historical continuity of the courtyard as a space of mediation between the functional and the habitable, between the interior and the exterior. At the same time as it serves utilitarian purposes — such as lighting, ventilation, drainage and support for domestic activities —, the hallway preserves the ancestral idea of spatial dignity within the dwelling, although without the formal exuberance of Renaissance or Arab courtyards.

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTUALIZATION: *BAIXA POMBALINA* AND THE HALLWAY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Only in 1978, *Baixa Pombalina* was officially classified as a Monumental Complex, forming part of a historical area delimited by 235,260 m², comprising 62 blocks and 430 lots.⁹ Despite this heritage appreciation, the area remained, for decades, in a process of oblivion and abandonment, until it became truly aware of its degraded state of conservation and the consequent decline of urban life.¹⁰

How was it possible to leave forgotten an area recognized as the “first urban plan of the contemporary world”? *Baixa Pombalina* has always stood out in the city of Lisbon, due to its importance in carrying out economic, social and cultural activities that defined the daily lives of Lisbon residents. However, its traditional function was gradually replaced by a logic of intensive tourist exploitation, leading to the mischaracterization of authentic urban uses and habits.

Currently, streets, squares and buildings take on a scenic character, aimed at the rapid consumption of the urban landscape by visitors, often to the detriment of the residents' ways of life. The memory of the place and the traditional social grid have been compromised by the combined effects of globalization, mass tourism and real estate speculation.

Therefore, architectural preservation was limited, in many cases, to the maintenance of the main facades, in a “beautiful skin” logic that hides the true structural and functional problems inside the buildings and blocks. Although the exterior public space is, in general, well maintained, the original rhythms and metrics of the facades were not always respected, with changes being observed in the openings of the ground floors, especially in the commercial areas, which put the integrity of the cage structural system at risk – one of the most innovative and resilient construction solutions in Pombaline period.

CURRENT STATE OF HALLWAYS

Within this framework of degradation, the hallways — discreet and essential elements of Pombaline morphology — are among the most neglected areas of *Baixa* (downtown). Its hidden location, within the blocks and away from direct perception of the public road, contributes to its state of abandonment and depreciation.

In most cases, the hallways are occupied by illegal constructions at ground floor level or covered with improvised annexes. On the interior or rear facades, there are a lot of sewage installations and exhaust ducts, seriously compromising the architectural image, health and safety of the buildings. The accumulation of rubbish and the lack of periodic maintenance are also common, further aggravating the physical degradation of these spaces.

These arbitrary interventions result in a significant reduction in ventilation and natural lighting for interior spaces, compromising thermal performance, fire safety and habitability. In many cases, sanitary areas were adapted in a way that was inappropriate to the original typologies, becoming obsolete and dysfunctional today.

There is also a growing mischaracterization in the rear facades, sometimes through the closure of balconies, sometimes through changes to the openings (dimensions, materials and compositional rhythm), contributing to the loss of the architectural unity that characterizes Pombaline buildings. Furthermore, some hallways were converted into private storage rooms for commercial stores or homes on the ground floor, making these spaces inaccessible to other residents, which goes against their function of common and shared use (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Some views of hallways with disruptive interventions and construction anomalies

INTERVENTIONAL MEASURES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE POMBALINE HALLS

Given their fundamental function, both in the physical structure of buildings and in the environmental comfort of homes, hallways must be the subject of a conscious and integrated intervention that restores their typological dignity and ensures the continuity of their original function of natural ventilation and lighting (Figure 5).

To achieve this, it is essential:

— Requalify the lobbies, ensuring their accessibility and promoting systematic cleaning, conservation and maintenance actions;

- Eliminate illegal constructions and annexes that obstruct or distort the space, returning it to its original scale and morphology;
- Enhance the rear facades, removing dissonant elements (closed balconies, adulterated gaps, exposed chimneys) and restoring the metrics and Pombaline architectural language;
- Reposition technical equipment (such as air conditioning units or exhaust ducts) in more discreet and less hostile locations, such as attics or internal technical areas;
- Reorganize infrastructures, integrating them into well-sized and accessible technical ducts for maintenance, respecting current health and safety requirements;
- Modernize drainage and sewage systems, promoting environmental sustainability and combating pathologies;
- Rethink the insertion of sanitary spaces, promoting solutions compatible with the typology and structure of the building;
- Explore new functions for hallways, creating connections with ground floor spaces, whether commercial or residential, and considering them as fire safety zones, including the implementation of alternative evacuation routes;
- Value and make known the rear facades of the Pombaline building.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The preservation of the Pombaline hallways constitutes a strategic opportunity to revalue downtown Lisbon, going beyond mere aesthetic or heritage conservation. These urban voids, often invisible, are essential for housing quality, guaranteeing environmental comfort, typological identity and historical continuity to the building complex.



Figure 5. View of the rear façade renovation works

Their recovery, based on an integrated, technical vision sensitive to the symbolic and functional value of these spaces, could contribute not only to the improvement of urban life but also to the consolidation of a sustainable rehabilitation policy consistent with the principles of Pombaline architecture.

As *Baixa Pombalina* is one of the most important historical urban areas in Europe, it faces complex challenges that require a multidisciplinary and integrated intervention, guided not only by material or physical conservation, but also by the socio-economic and cultural revitalization of the area. Therefore, the requalification process must observe and comply with the principles established in International Charters and Conventions — such as the Venice Charter (1964) and the Kraków Charter (2000) —

which emphasize the importance of protecting the authenticity, integrity and historical context of cultural assets.

The preservation of Baixa cannot be understood as a mere aesthetic recovery of the main facades, nor restricted to public space. It is essential to broaden the view of the private space, especially the less visible elements, such as the rear facades and interior hallways, which play a crucial role in the functionality, habitability and security of the building. These spaces must be recognized as inseparable components of architectural and urban heritage.

Furthermore, the intervention must promote the sustainability of the urban grid, combining heritage conservation with the modernization of infrastructural systems, which involves updating hydraulic, electrical and sanitary installations, always respecting the original construction solutions, such as the cage system, to guarantee structural safety and the comfort of inhabitants.

Another essential point is the involvement of the local community and users of *Baixa Pombalina*, so that the requalification process incorporates their needs, habits and memories, guaranteeing an authentic and dynamic urban experience. The requalification must balance the tourist function with local residential and commercial use, preventing social degradation and real estate speculation that could compromise the identity of the place.

Finally, it is essential that asset management is continuous and coordinated, involving public and private institutions and civil society, in order to ensure effective supervision, periodic maintenance and planned intervention. Only in this way will it be possible to preserve the authenticity and historical value of *Baixa Pombalina*, ensuring its continuity as a unique example of urban planning and architectural history.

NOTES

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THE INFLUENCE OF URBAN COLORS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF URBAN IMAGE: BLUE LISBON

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INTRODUCTION

Color is the most important component of nature and one of the main means for humans to perceive the world. The meaning of urban color can be divided into two levels: broad and narrow. In the broad sense, urban color refers to the sum of all perceptible colors in the urban environment. In the narrow sense, urban color refers to the colors of the main body of the city, mainly reflected in the environmental colors formed by buildings. This article mainly takes the broad definition of urban color as the research basis and combines color theory to analyze and study urban color.

The connotation of urban color and urban image

Urban color refers to the sum of all perceptible colors in the urban environment, which involves all aspects of the city, including geography, climate, architecture, history, culture and many other factors.¹ Gareth Doherty believes that urban color is interrelated with geographical location, spatiality and built urban environment.² Different countries have different cultural habits due to different colors. The identity of the city comes from color. Urban color is manifested as a powerful social, economic and political force. Hasanvand Salman and other scholars believe that color has an impact on urban space and urban image.³ Urban color is a product endowed with multiple meanings, especially color contains multiple meanings and external forces in urban living space.⁴ Important factors affecting urban color culture include creative productivity, close social relations, aesthetic freedom and free expression.⁵ Therefore, urban color has become a branch of human cultural phenomena. Exploring the significance of urban color from a cultural perspective helps us grasp the historical and cultural connotations of a city, thereby shaping its image. As a complex and multidimensional perceptual system, urban image is a deep integration of a city's material spatial form and spiritual and cultural connotations.⁶ The shaping of a contemporary city image requires that the city maintain its unique historical memory while displaying a modern charm that keeps pace with the times, ultimately forming a comprehensive image system that is recognizable, approachable, and sustainable.

A full city image includes the visual image of the city that the public intuitively feels, and this visual image is more transformed into the final city image through imagery. The term imagery comes from psychological terminology, which is used to express an organization of interaction between people and the environment. It is a psychological description of people's perception of the real world in the human brain, which is recognized by people through experience, thus forming a perceptual image.⁷ The urban

color image is the overall cognition of the various elements of urban color by the observers in the city. Kevin Lynch pointed out that "so far, the content of our research on the material form in the urban image can be conveniently summarized into five elements - roads, boundaries, regions, nodes and landmarks."⁸ Urban color is the material carrier of the urban image and a concentrated reflection of social forms and cultural traditions. The cultural sense of belonging of residents is constructed through the urban color image.⁹ Ultimately, the urban image will show the cultural image of the city's historical context and the emotional image that resonates with the public.¹⁰

LISBON'S BLUE TILES

As a traditional Portuguese decorative art form, Portuguese tiles are widely used in modern buildings and important public spaces. The iconic blue color of tiles is deeply rooted in people's hearts, forming a unique urban humanistic and artistic landscape. The city of Lisbon cleverly combines tile art with modern architecture. Blue tiles are called "the curtain of the Portuguese city stage". It is precisely because of the imagery of urban colors that blue carries the urban memory of many generations in Lisbon.

The development and cultural value of blue tiles

Since the 13th century, tiles have occupied an irreplaceable and important position in architectural art. Although this craft did not originate from Portugal, it was the Portuguese with their unique artistic vision and innovative spirit that pushed the application of tiles to the extreme - they not only pioneered the use of tiles as a large-scale decorative medium for building facades and urban landscapes, but also gave them distinct national characteristics. By the late 15th century and early 16th century, tiles were not only widely used in ordinary wall decoration, but also introduced into the decorative design of national palaces. Manuel I (1469-1521) played an important role in promoting and developing tile decoration. In the mid-16th century, the application of overglaze painting technology developed the original painted pottery technology, which improved the Portuguese tile production process and made the creative style more diverse. Since the 18th century, tiles have been widely used in churches and monasteries, palaces and homes, parks, bridges and steps. In addition to decorative patterns, whole tiles are also used to tell the life stories of saints or express some secular themes, as well as fables and legends.¹¹

The early 20th century was the modernist style stage experienced by Portuguese tiles. At that time, tile art was deeply influenced by the French Art Nouveau style. In the late 1930s, the Portuguese Pavilion at the Paris National Exhibition Center used tiles for artistic decoration, forming an effective visual connection with the building, and showing the unique style of Portuguese tile art on an international scale. After the 1950s, tiles played an important role in beautifying urban public spaces in the process of urban modernization. Especially in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, tile art has become a unique visual landscape in modern cities. From the 1960s to the 1970s, tile art clearly demonstrated the transformation of light effect art and pop art. In 1959, Lisbon's first subway station also used tiles for cultural expression, and applied strong modernist style tile art works in the subway station. Entering the 21st century, tiles continue to be used as a creative method of public art, further radiating unique charm and brilliance in urban public spaces.¹²

The cultural value of Portuguese tile art is reflected through the complementary relationship between tiles and architecture. In modern Portuguese architecture, this tradition has been creatively continued, especially in public transportation spaces such as subway stations and train stations, where tile murals have become an important art form for telling urban stories. Through centuries of inheritance and innovation, Portugal has successfully promoted tile art to a world-renowned cultural symbol and one of the most recognizable visual languages in this maritime country.

Lisbon's blue tile case

Among the city colors of Lisbon, blue tile paintings permeate almost every corner of the city and tell the history and culture of Portugal.

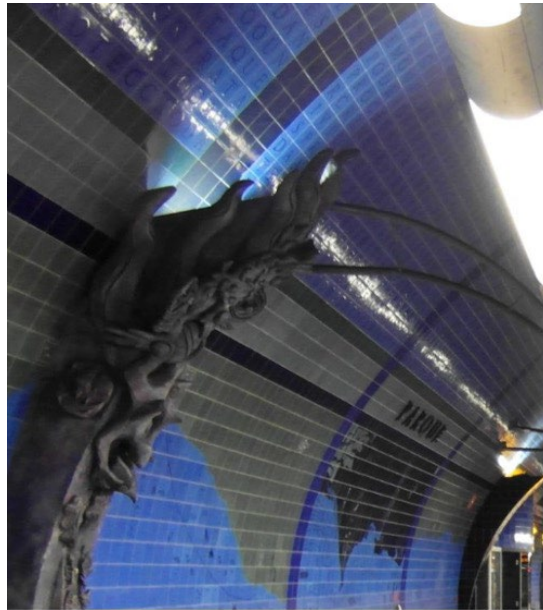


Figure 1. Part of the tiles at Parque Station on the Lisbon Metro¹³

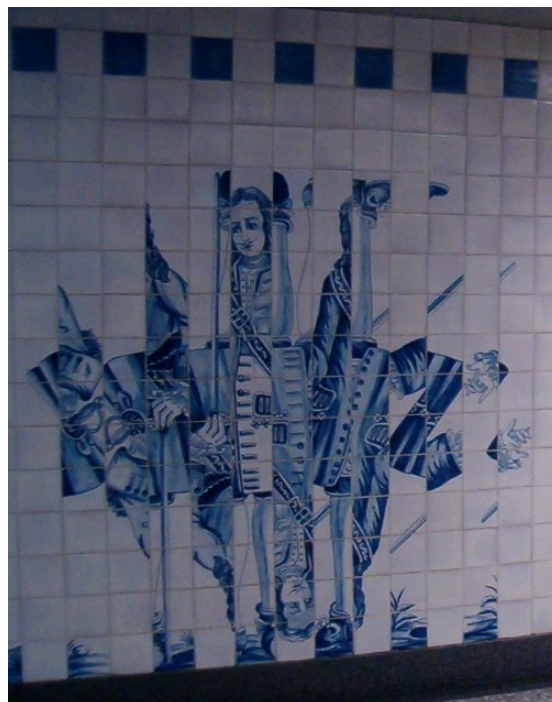


Figure 2. Part of the tiles at Campo Grande Station on the Lisbon Metro¹⁴

Figures 1 and 2 are both selected from tile murals in Lisbon subway stations. The entire mural in Figure 1 uses blue as the background, symbolizing the boundless ocean and human exploration of the unknown world. The sculptures attached to the wall reflect the totems of the ocean in Portuguese mythology. The letters on the blue tile background are the original text of the Declaration of Human Rights. This mural shows many symbolic icons related to the Portuguese Age of Exploration, full of human care and poetry,

and also reflects respect for human rights. The tile mural in Figure 2 uses blue and white colors, and uses non-traditional methods to lay Portuguese tiles. The whole painting is disrupted and reassembled in a modernist style. Each palm-sized tile is a fragment of history. When they are spliced into a huge narrative picture with geometric rhythm, they produce amazing artistic magic.



Figure 3. Avenida Infante Santo apartment murals¹⁵

Figure 3 The mural named O Mar was created by Maria Keil. This tile mural, with blue as the main color, tells the relationship between Portugal and the ocean. The sails are integrated with the horizon, and the waves complement the structure of the walls and stairs. In the mural, the mother holds the child and lifts the sailboat, allowing the viewer to feel the mother and son's pious expectation for their family members who have crossed the ocean, the busy shuttle of the caravan, and the pride of the explorers sailing far away. These tile arts have long surpassed the simple decorative function and become a living archive recording national memory. This tile painting comes from a large apartment community, far away from the sightseeing routes of most tourists, which shows that Lisbon has integrated tile art into every corner of residents' lives. Only by grasping the perceptual characteristics of color can people's aesthetic feelings be triggered, and then rise to psychological activities such as association and imagination related to it, and finally obtain the beauty of the city's color image. In the infiltration of sunshine and sea breeze, Lisbon uses blue tile art to deeply penetrate the culture into the hearts of the people and continue to tell the glory of the Age of Discovery.

LISBON'S BLUE OCEAN CULTURE

Lisbon's ocean culture is deeply rooted in Portugal's maritime history and geographical features. Facing the Atlantic Ocean and located at the estuary, the city has been the center of Portugal's maritime industry for more than 500 years. This unique seaside location has shaped Lisbon's distinctive blue urban landscape.

Portugal was the first country to sail around Africa and the first European country to sail to South America, South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia. In 1415, Portuguese navigator Henri the Navigator expanded Portugal's influence to North Africa, and the expedition found that the fleet continued to sail south along the West African coastline. Wherever they arrived, the Portuguese fleet would continue to trade with the locals. In the mid-15th century, many of Portugal's national policies and strategies were quite advanced, such as the awareness of sea power and the monopoly of maritime trade routes. Portuguese navigator Vasco Da Gama arrived in India in 1498, the first time a European explorer reached India by water. In 1500, Portuguese explorers discovered the Newfoundland region of Canada.

In the same year, Portuguese navigator Pedro Cabral discovered Brazil. In the early 16th century, Portugal had already begun to build Lisbon into a financial center in Europe. Although Portugal gradually slowed down its pace of ocean exploration since the end of the 16th century, a profound ocean culture had already been formed.¹⁶

Lisbon's maritime culture is a vivid continuation of the glorious history of Portugal's maritime empire in the contemporary era. This city facing the Atlantic Ocean shows its cultural genes that are inseparable from the ocean. In 1925, Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa wrote: "For those travelers coming from the sea, Lisbon, even from a distance, is like a fantasy rising in a dream. Under the bright blue sky and golden sun, Lisbon's outline is so clear. The church tops, towers and old churches stand above countless houses, as if watching this bright place, this blessed nation from afar." Looking back at the heyday of Portugal, countless explorers set sail. Today, Lisbon's Monument to the Discoverers was rebuilt to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of navigator Henri the Navigator. The monument is shaped like a giant sailing ship in the blue waves, with the bow facing the sea. Henri the Navigator stands on the top holding the sailing ship in his hand, telling people about the great history.

Lisbon integrates marine culture into urban development. Blue and white tiles decorate the facades of buildings, depicting patterns of navigation instruments, sailboats and waves, telling the glory of the Age of Discovery.¹⁷ The nautical element carvings of Mosteiro dos Jerónimos show the deep roots of the city and the ocean. In Lisbon's restaurants, the aroma of cod is everywhere. This traditional delicacy from the Age of Navigation is still the favorite taste of the Portuguese. Fado, a musical form listed as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, is the emotional memory brought back by ocean explorers. Lisbon interweaves urban colors in urban planning and design. Whether it is a subway station or a seaside promenade, there are art installations with sailing as the theme, telling the city's never-fading blue feelings.

THE INFLUENCE OF URBAN COLORS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF URBAN IMAGE

The choice of urban colors is based on multiple elements such as the city's natural resources, cultural landscapes, and social and cultural structures. The purpose is to enhance the city's recognition, reflect the vitality of urban development, and highlight the city's unique cultural composition. Therefore, the choice of urban colors has a far-reaching impact on the construction of urban image.

City colors affect the outside world's visual impression of the city

A beautiful city image often affects people's visual senses first, and city colors are the most contagious visual elements. A harmonious city color system can create a pleasing city style and significantly improve residents' visual comfort and city affinity. Different object colors give our eyes different perceptions. Lisbon chose blue as the city color. This color is relatively more comfortable for the human eye even under sunlight. The strong color contrast formed by blue and white tiles enhances the visual comfort of the entire city image.

The reflection of the Tejo river surface forms a dynamic blue halo. The river eventually flows to the Atlantic Ocean, playing a window role in the shaping of the city image. The blue of Lisbon, through the open and inclusive image generated by its association with the ocean, reminds the outside world of Portugal's history, and then uses the continuity of history to trigger a sense of awe for Portugal's marine culture. The blue city color shapes Lisbon into a very personalized city image.

City colors affect the inheritance of the city's cultural image

As the core connotation of the city's image, the city's cultural image not only carries the continuation of the historical context, but also highlights modern civilization. In the long process of urban development, Lisbon has gradually formed a highly recognizable urban color system by relying on its unique marine

geographical environment and maritime cultural tradition. This blue and white color combination is not only a visual response to the Age of Discovery, but also a material carrier of the city's cultural genes. This established color and color combination formed by historical development has inherited the corresponding historical path.

Urban color is a cultural code formed by historical accumulation and carries a unique urban memory. The blue and white tones in Lisbon's well-preserved historical city have become a mark of its inheritance of marine civilization. This color choice is not only a tribute to the maritime tradition, but also highlights the ecological wisdom of the harmonious coexistence of Lisbon residents and the ocean. Choosing blue as the main urban color has far-reaching and long-term strategic significance. Blue tells the past and present of Lisbon, and also shows the city's progress and modernity.

Urban color affects residents' emotional identification with the city's image

Emotional identification is a deep psychological connection based on cognition. When the public understands the connotation of the city through personal experience or cultural perception, they will naturally have an emotional resonance of love and identification, and the cultural characteristics of the city are the key elements to stimulate this emotion. Through its distinctive urban color system, Lisbon has successfully constructed emotional symbols that evoke collective memory, allowing every resident and tourist to feel the beating cultural pulse of the city in the splicing of tiles and the reflection of the waves, thus generating a deep emotional belonging.

Lisbon's urban image shaping accurately grasps the fit between the city's personality and the public's psychology. Through in-depth research on architectural functions and people's psychological demands, the visual language of blue is systematically integrated into the city. The ubiquitous blue arouses everyone's interest in the city. Subways, churches, transportation and even souvenirs are all derivatives of the application of blue color. This color strategy not only embodies the city image of "peace and bravery", but also constructs a unique city identification system. Residents read cultural identity in blue, and tourists perceive the city's character through blue. Lisbon's urban colors allow residents or tourists to find a sense of identity in city identification.

Lisbon's blue urban color system constructs a city image that is both functional and emotional. When people see the relevant colors, they can associate them with the relevant city appearance and city image, continuing people's memory of the city. As a port city with a long history, whether it is the natural landscape of the coastline or the humanistic creation of tile paintings, these city colors have transcended the simple visual symbolic meaning and sublimated into an emotional bond connecting the city's memory and identity. Blue has become an indispensable spiritual sustenance in the lives of residents. This color choice not only echoes the geographical characteristics, but also condenses collective memory. Choosing blue as the city color can effectively enhance residents' emotional identification with the city's image, which has positive significance for the construction of the future city image.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the choice of urban color is extremely important in constructing a city's image. Selecting suitable colors for a city should first begin with a historical perspective, analyzing the city's evolutionary process. Secondly, it should consider the visual aspects of the natural and cultural environment, analyzing the proportion of different colors within the existing urban color scheme. Finally, it should refine the choice of urban colors based on public sentiment and perception, creating a city color image that evokes a sense of cultural belonging. Skillful use of urban colors can not only shape a harmonious and beautiful urban image but also promote the accumulation and enhancement of urban culture while gaining public resonance.

For Lisbon, defining its urban color as blue is very fitting. Lisbon's maritime culture and tile culture are both showcased to the world through the impression of blue color, and the urban color has continuously shaped Lisbon's livable urban image. Through the analysis of the impact of urban color on urban image construction, it can be concluded that when urban color is elevated to the level of urban image, a sublimation from the material world to the spiritual world is achieved. This positive interaction between cultural identity and emotional resonance is the driving force for sustainable urban development.

NOTES

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- ³ Hasanvand Salman, *Urban Colorscape and Legibility* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2015), 1-3.
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- ⁶ FanNing Zeng, "Application of Color Regionality in VIS Design," *Design* 9 (2017): 64-65.
- ⁷ Wei Wu, *Urban Landscape Planning - Special Urban Color Planning* (NanJing: Southeast University Press, 2009), 42.
- ⁸ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1960), 35.
- ⁹ BaiTao Mao, *The Formal Implications of Architectural Space* (BeiJing: China Construction Industry Press, 2018), 270-282.
- ¹⁰ Yan Lin, *Image Garden* (BeiJing: Machinery Industry Press, 2004), 13-18.
- ¹¹ Alex Pais Paulo Henriques and Ana Almeida, *Museu Nacional do Azulejo Guide* (Lisboa: Instituto Portugues de Museus, 2006), 1-239.
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BEIRUT'S ADAPTIVE MODERNISM: A CANVAS FOR THE PERPETUAL REWRITING OF URBAN IDENTITY

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the Horseshoe building in Beirut's Hamra district as a lens to explore the tension between globalization and local urban identity. Designed in 1957 by Polish architect Karol Schayer, the building introduced Lebanon's first curtain wall construction, embodying modernist architectural ideals imported from the West. Yet, its artisanal assembly and integration into the vibrant social fabric of Hamra reflect a distinct localization of this international style design. Over decades, the Horseshoe building has witnessed Beirut's cycles of prosperity, conflict, and recovery, evolving from a hub for intellectual and political exchange to a symbol of Lebanese artistic renewal. Today, the Horseshoe building is more than an artifact of modernist heritage; it is a site of adaptive reuse and urban resilience. This research argues that adaptive reuse of modernist structures in developing contexts provides critical insights into how urban environments negotiate modernist forms while responding to local needs. By framing the Horseshoe building as a microcosm of Beirut's urban identity, this study highlights how modernist architecture, often criticized as a homogenizing force, can transform into a medium for survival, community-building, and cultural expression. The paper will be asking: how can the tectonics and usage of an architectural work reflect broader frameworks of influence and urban identity? What factors made this modernist project adapt itself so seamlessly with the needs of the locals over time? And how do the notions of collective memory and urban appropriation play out in contexts of crisis and chronic re-traumatization? It posits that such buildings, through their adaptability, can reconcile the global and the local, serving as nodes of liveability and resilience in ever-shifting urban landscapes.

Historical context: Beirut, a city of influences

Ottoman times: Beirut as cultural crossroad

It is truly with the advent of the industrial age that Beirut rose to prominence. The Egyptian general Ibrahim Pacha, governor of Greater Syria between 1831 and 1840, had a large role to play in this sudden developmental boom, as he saw potential in Beirut as a 'door to the Orient' and invested in the city accordingly.¹ Inaugurated in 1863, the Beirut-Damascus Road, one of the first of its kind in the region, facilitated the transport of goods such as silk to European buyers through Beirut. The town thus started to attract workers, merchants and families from neighboring Lebanese villages and Arab cities.²

French Mandate Period: An Arab city, hybridized

The French Mandate over Lebanon, officially starting in 1923, kickstarted radical changes in Beirut, which was pronounced capital of the newly declared *Grand Liban* (Greater Lebanon). The French Mandate period introduced new construction techniques to Lebanon, with a strong French influence on both architecture and urbanism.³ The *Société des Ciments Libanais* was established in 1929 under a half-Lebanese, half-French ownership system.⁴ The company founded Lebanon's first cement factory in the coastal village of Chekka, which still operates today as the Holcim cement company. In parallel, the expansion and modernization of the Beirut Port allowed for the extensive importation of industrial construction materials. Together, these two factors led to a strong dependence on reinforced concrete in construction throughout the country.⁵

Concrete quickly proved to be an economical alternative to sandstone, leading to the latter's gradual replacement for the erection of vernacular Lebanese central hall buildings.⁶ As Saliba writes: "the malleability of concrete and its predilection for imitation, was soon appropriated by the builders themselves as a "new vernacular" tradition, fostering the hybridization of architectural form and the proliferation of eclectic ornamentation."⁷

The modern office layout, derived from Le Corbusier's Domino scheme with its free plan and neutral grid of columns, was first implemented in the reconstructed Beirut Central District.⁸ There, the old medieval fabric of the city was decimated as part of France's *mission civilisatrice*, aiming to create a modernized urban fabric suited to the needs of a forward-thinking metropolis.⁹ However, the modern interior layout was cloaked in eclectic, ornate facades in the attempt to reflect Arab heritage.¹⁰

Post-independence Lebanon: An international style, embraced and negotiated

The Lebanese independence in 1943 marked a turning point in the country's architectural development, as the newly sovereign state sought to assert its modern identity through the built environment. Architecture became a means of nation-building, with public and private construction reflecting the aspirations of progress, autonomy, and cosmopolitanism. However, French legacy continued to have a lasting influence on Beirut, as urban regulatory frameworks were based on French architect Michel Ecochard's master plan for the city. For instance, zoning regulations incentivized raising buildings on *pilotis*, which became a defining feature of Beiruti apartment blocks, with the ground floor typically used for commercial spaces or car parking.¹¹

Both foreign and local architects, often trained abroad, embraced modernism in the forging of a progressive identity for Beirut. Beirut's Hamra neighborhood became a key site for modernist architecture in the mid-20th century due to its emergence as a cosmopolitan, intellectual, and commercial hub following Lebanese independence and particularly during the presidential mandate of Fouad Chehab (1958-1964).¹² Hamra's rapid urbanization was also facilitated by the expansion of nearby institutions like the American University of Beirut (AUB), which attracted a liberal, educated population of various religious sects and spurred demand for modern housing, cafés, offices, and cultural venues.¹³

This climate of experimentation and modernist ambition attracted both local and international architects to Hamra and its surroundings. The Starco Center (1954-62), designed by the Swiss firm Addor et Juillard, is a mixed-use development that adopted international style aesthetics implemented with a sensitive adaptation to local construction know-how.¹⁴ Nearby, the Gefinor Building (1969), designed by Austrian-American architect Victor Gruen, introduced a mixed-use typology to Beirut, blending offices, retail, and services in a sleek modernist envelope, blending naturally with the dense and variegated fabric of the city. Further along Hamra Street, Alvar Aalto's Sabbag Center (1967-70), designed in collaboration with Alfred Roth, introduced a public urban piazza and a staggered rear façade, bringing a distinct "human touch" to an otherwise rigid modernist composition.¹⁵ These projects

collectively transformed Hamra into a vibrant showcase of modernism’s global reach and its local reinterpretation in a postcolonial Mediterranean context.

CASE STUDY: THE HORSESHOE BUILDING AS AN ADAPTIVE SITE OF RESILIENCE

Karol Schayer in Lebanon

Karol Schayer (1900–1971) was a Polish architect trained at the Polytechnic of Lvov, which at the time embraced a progressive approach to architecture in the vein of constructivist modernism.¹⁶ The outbreak of World War II in 1939 forced Schayer to flee Poland. He eventually landed in Palestine, where he designed military barracks for the Allied Forces in Eritrea. In 1946, he arrived in Lebanon, like many other Polish war refugees.¹⁷ Yet, he was determined to settle permanently and sustain himself through his architectural practice. This fact distinguishes him from other Western architects practicing in Beirut as he immersed himself in the Lebanese context for 25 years, partnering with local architects such as Bahij Khoury Makdisi and Wassek Adib and designing over a hundred built projects across the country.¹⁸

Some of his notable built projects in Beirut, designed with Makdisi and Adib, include the Bahij Makdissi residential building (1954), the old Carlton Hotel (1955-7, demolished), and the Cinema Edison building (1957).

The Horseshoe Building: An international style for Beirut

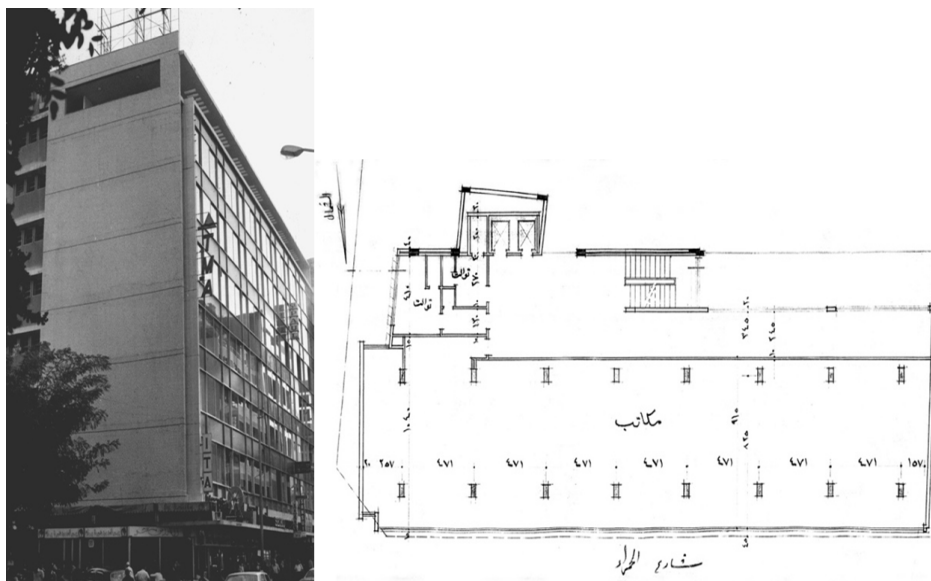


Figure 2. Karol Schayer & Wassek Adib with Bahij Makdisi (1957). Murr (Horseshoe) Office Building, Hamra, Lebanon, courtesy of Dr. George Arbid and the Arab Center for Architecture

Schayer collaborated with Makdisi and Adib to design the first curtain wall building in Lebanon: the Murr office building. It is often referred to as the Horseshoe building, after the popular Horseshoe café which occupied its ground floor and sidewalk at the time. The curtain wall faces north, allowing for plenty of even light with minimal heat gain. The building responds to its context by following the slab lines of the adjacent Al-Hamra cinema and office building.¹⁹

The interior layout is simple and functional, with a neutral grid allowing for many office layouts and subdivisions. The circulation spaces and sanitary facilities are relegated to the back side of the building, while the stretch of office space faces north towards the busy commercial street of Hamra.

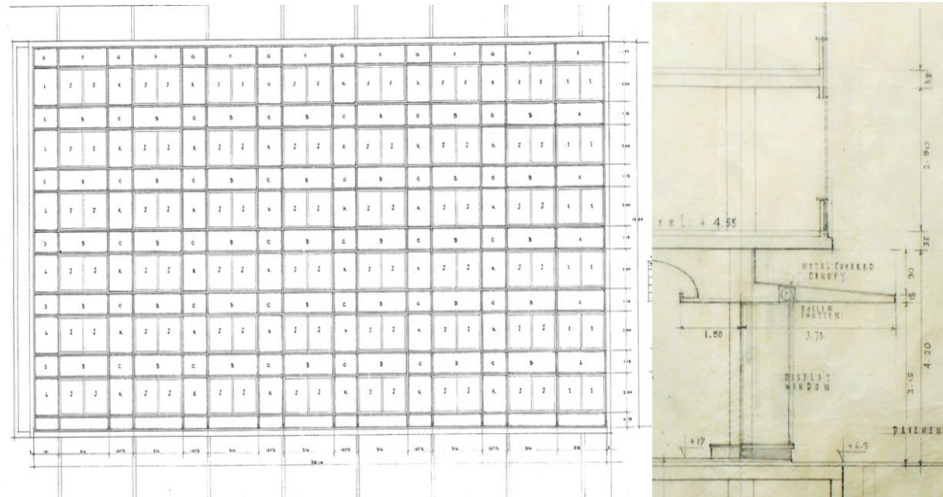


Figure 2. Karol Schayer & Wassek Adib with Bahij Makdisi (1957). Murr (Horseshoe) Office Building, Hamra, courtesy of Dr. George Arbid and the Arab Center for Architecture

The execution of the curtain wall façade on the Horseshoe Building required careful consideration of the local construction industry’s technical capabilities and available materials. Rather than importing an entirely foreign system, the architects adapted the glass panel modules to fit existing, standardized window types commonly used in Lebanon at the time. This pragmatic approach ensured the feasibility of the design, acquiring an almost artisanal quality while maintaining the visual language of modernism. A critical distinction between the Horseshoe and canonical examples like Mies van der Rohe’s contemporaneous Seagram Building (1955-8), in Manhattan, lies in the operability of the windows. Unlike the sealed glass skin of the Seagram, the Horseshoe’s curtain wall incorporates windows that can be opened, reflecting an attentiveness to climate, user comfort, and human agency. This small but significant detail signals a more humane and context-sensitive approach to modernism, one that privileges adaptability over aesthetic purity and reclaims the user’s interaction with architecture as an essential component of design. While the Seagram Building depends entirely on active heating and cooling systems, Schayer’s design demonstrates a more contextually responsive approach better suited to a city like Beirut, where electricity shortages are frequent. By allowing for natural ventilation and passive climate regulation, the building performs more effectively in the region’s hot and humid summers, underscoring a modernism that is not only formally international but also environmentally and infrastructurally adaptive.

Layers of historical appropriations: A charged site of memory

During Lebanon’s mid-century golden age predating the 1975 outbreak of Civil War, the Horseshoe building stood as a symbol of Beirut’s progressiveness and cosmopolitanism. Nestled in the heart of Hamra, it became a hub for artists, intellectuals, and high-profile tenants who shaped the city’s cultural and political life. Its iconic Horseshoe café, overlooking bustling Hamra Street, was frequented by writers, artists, and political figures alike – cementing the building’s role not merely as a piece of architecture, but as a living stage for the city’s golden age of cultural production and ideological exchange.²⁰

These cafés operated as think tanks, where the public performance of everyday life coexisted with covert political activity: “people formed and shared political ideologies, challenged authority, formulated movements, and played their part in the transitional and formative time in Beirut between 1967 and 1990.”²¹ In this context, modernist spaces in Hamra were sites of radical thought often

fostering pan-Arab and leftist imaginaries, turning the city into a stage for ideological debate and resistance to hegemonic political paradigms.²²

The building's modernist language, particularly its ground floor *pilotis* and curtain wall façade, spoke to Beirut's aspirations of global modernity while remaining distinctly local in its social appropriation. Indeed, the *pilotis* did not function as a form of disconnection or abstraction, as often critiqued in modernist urbanism, but rather as a means of continuity, blurring the boundaries between private architecture and public life. Beneath the building, the sidewalk café culture flourished, with the Horseshoe café acting as a vital artery in the urban life of Hamra.²³ This coffee shop functioned in continuity with other sidewalk cafés like Modka and Wimpy cafés further along Hamra street, creating nodes of intellectual and social exchange. These cafés transformed the *pilotis* into a seamless extension of the street, fostering encounters between artists, students, and political thinkers in active dialogue with the everyday dynamisms of the city.²⁴



Figure 3. The Horseshoe building over time

The Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) drastically altered the social and spatial fabric of Hamra. The neighborhood was fairly isolated from most violent conflict, which allowed the Horseshoe café to stay operational and active as a forum for political discussion and a “warehouse of news.”²⁵ It was also a necessary space of repose and socialization during distressing everyday circumstances. This function was bolstered by the high concentration of print houses and the presence of the American University of Beirut, which remained key intellectual hubs in the area.²⁶

The Sabah mural by Yazan Halwani, painted on the side of the Horseshoe building in 2015, serves as both a tribute and a reclamation of Beirut’s cultural memory. Inspired by conversations with residents who reminisced about the pre-war Lebanese golden age, Halwani reimagines the blind wall of the Horseshoe building as a canvas for the expression of Lebanese culture. The portrait of Sabah, the iconic Lebanese singer, embodies a nostalgic yet defiant gesture, anchoring the present to a more vibrant and pluralistic past. Blending portraiture with Arab calligraphy, the mural merges tradition and modernity, echoing the layered identity of Hamra itself.²⁷ The artist, who was only twenty-two years old at the time the mural was executed, engages with the collective memory of the pre-war generation to simultaneously honor the past and offer hope for a better future.



Figure 4. Oussama Baalbaki, 2017. *Good night Hamra!* Acrylic on canvas, 150x180cm

Halwani's mural allowed Schayer's building to become a landmark and reviving feature for the neighborhood of Hamra. This is notably exemplified by the *Good night Hamra!* painting by the well-established Lebanese artist Oussama Baalbaki (1978-) in 2017. Baalbaki's paintings of Beirut often focalize on important mnemonic features in the city, allowing the viewer to easily identify the site being represented.²⁸ His painting of Hamra thus emphasizes the imageability of the Horseshoe building with the addition of the Sabah mural, occupying a strategic corner at the entrance of the neighborhood.

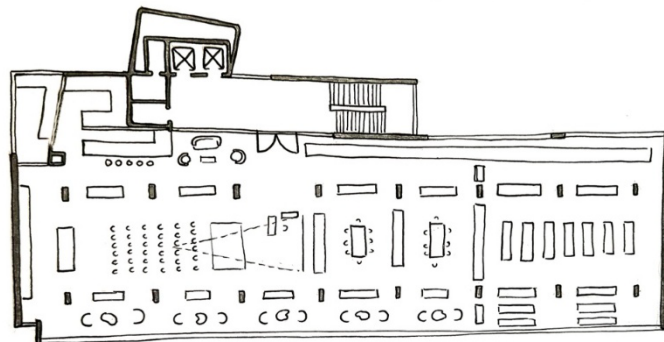


Figure 5. *Barzakh Coffee Shop* functioning as event space, 2025. Sketch by author

Today, the Horseshoe building houses Barzakh, a hybrid cultural space that has appropriated and injected life into the building's first floor. Positioned between a bookstore, café, and event venue, Barzakh embodies a spirit of resistance.²⁹ The founder of the coffee shop reclaimed the first floor of the modernist building as it was falling into disuse, transforming it into a dynamic space for dialogue, performance, and political imagination.³⁰ This adaptive reuse of flexible office space into a cultural space epitomizes the potential of modernist structures to act as neutral grounds for diverse programmatic imaginaries over time.

Since its inception, the Barzakh coffee shop mobilized to support the community and advocate for social justice in various ways. Notably, in response to renewed violent attacks on Gaza after October 7, 2023, the coffee shop organized a series of events celebrating Palestinian culture and craft to raise awareness, create a safe space for those affected by the situation and fundraise for the cause. Events included poster sales, film screenings about Gaza, *tatriz* (Palestinian embroidery) workshops, writing workshops engaging with Palestinian literature, poetry reading nights, musical performances and roundtable discussions.³¹ By acting as a platform for Palestinian cultural expression, the coffee shop is taking a strong stance against a decades-long project of community erasure and cultural appropriation.³² Through these periodic activities sustained for almost two years, Barzakh established itself as a dynamic platform for communal gathering and collective resistance.

During the Israeli attacks on Beirut starting in September 2024, the Horseshoe building became a node for humanitarian relief, as the Barzakh Coffee and Bookshop mobilized to provide hot meals to displaced families. Indeed, between September and November 2024, it is estimated that above 1.4 million people were internally displaced from the South of Lebanon due to widespread airstrikes.³³ This mass displacement led to a rapid over-densification of urban areas and brought together diverse communities, fostering networks of mutual aid during a time of profound uncertainty.³⁴ In the face of government inaction, survival mostly depended on grassroots solidarity and collective resilience. In Beirut, areas such as Hamra, characterized by their ethno-religious plurality, became key destinations for large numbers of displaced people, intensifying overcrowding in a district already marked by high population density.³⁵

In response to this dire situation, the Barzakh team leveraged the existing infrastructure of the coffee shop to cook 4,000 meals a day from the back kitchen, while remaining operational as a coffee shop, event space and bookstore. They were accepting both monetary and food donations from their community, which helped sustain their efforts. Friends and contacts aided with the cooking, assembling and distribution of meals to local schools housing displaced people.³⁶ This mobilization illustrates the strong network forged by the coffee shop over years of community service and involvement. By occupying a highly adaptable space that reflects Hamra's cultural grit and reviving the Horseshoe Building's enduring legacy of political engagement, Barzakh successfully positioned itself as a hub for a progressive, creative and youthful community.

Studying the successive layers of appropriation of the Horseshoe Building reveals the vital role that it has played in the lives of Beirut's residents. As a charged site of memory, the building acts as a stage for an ongoing struggle: the preservation of cultural identity, the celebration of local art and craftsmanship, and the nurturing of mutual aid in times of adversity. In the words of Umberto Eco, "freedom and liberation are an unending task."³⁷ In pursuing this task, the Lebanese people reinterpreted an international architectural language, shaping it into a form that simultaneously expressed an embrace of progressive, outward-looking ways of life and a steadfast affirmation of Lebanese identity and culture.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the case of the Horseshoe Building in Hamra challenges the prevailing narrative that modernism is inherently rigid, impersonal, or detached from its context. Rather than imposing a universal aesthetic, the Horseshoe demonstrates how the International Style adapted itself to the Lebanese urban fabric while attuning itself to the local climate, scale, and social life of Beirut. Its open, accessible design fostered a sense of place and became a cultural landmark, emblematic of Beirut's post-independence cosmopolitanism. This study invites a broader reconsideration of modernist architecture in the Global South and in contexts of crisis, urging future research to explore politically subversive spaces, contested territories and informal sites of resistance embedded within seemingly globalized forms. The Horseshoe thus stands as a testament to the capacity of modernism to be both contextually grounded and quietly radical. By reframing the value of modernist buildings in Global South contexts in those terms, the author hopes to encourage a broader reading of what heritage conservation may be: One that retains the original flexibility of the architecture and its layers of history in a way that invites more spontaneous (re)uses over time.

NOTES

- ¹ Samir Kassir, *Histoire de Beyrouth [History of Beirut]* (Tempus Perrin, 2003), 89.
- ² Robert Saliba, “Genesis of Modern Architecture in Beirut, 1840-1940,” in *Architecture Re-Introduced: New Projects in Societies in Change*, ed. Jamal Abed (Geneva: The Agha Khan Award for Architecture, 2004), 23.
- ³ Naji Assi, “Typologies and Construction Techniques,” in *Architectures of Beirut, 1925-1970: Restoration Manual*, ed. Fadlallah Dagher (Editions Al-Ayn, 2022), 20.
- ⁴ Robert Saliba, “Genesis of Modern Architecture in Beirut, 1840-1940,” in *Architecture Re-Introduced: New Projects in Societies in Change*, ed. Jamal Abed (Geneva: The Agha Khan Award for Architecture, 2004), 32.
- ⁵ Naji Assi, “Typologies and Construction Techniques,” in *Architectures of Beirut, 1925-1970: Restoration Manual*, ed. Fadlallah Dagher (Editions Al-Ayn, 2022), 20.
- ⁶ Assi, 23.
- ⁷ Robert Saliba, “Genesis of Modern Architecture in Beirut, 1840-1940,” in *Architecture Re-Introduced: New Projects in Societies in Change*, ed. Jamal Abed (Geneva: The Agha Khan Award for Architecture, 2004), 32.
- ⁸ Saliba, 33.
- ⁹ Samir Kassir, *Histoire de Beyrouth [History of Beirut]* (Tempus Perrin, 2003), 262.
- ¹⁰ Robert Saliba, “Genesis of Modern Architecture in Beirut, 1840-1940,” in *Architecture Re-Introduced: New Projects in Societies in Change*, ed. Jamal Abed (Geneva: The Agha Khan Award for Architecture, 2004), 33.
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- ¹² Assi, 34.
- ¹³ Sari Hanafi and Rigas Arvanitis, *Knowledge Production in the Arab World: The Impossible Promise*. (Routledge, 2015), 294.
- ¹⁴ Habib Sayah, “Construire à Distance: Les Réalisations de l’Agence Immobilière Genevoise Addor et Julliard à Beyrouth Dans Les Années 1950-1960” (EPFL, 2007).
- ¹⁵ Roula El-Khoury, “[Aalto in Beirut] Contribution, Collaboration and Continuity: The Case of Sabbag Center” (paper presented at the Alvar Aalto Researchers’ Network Seminar – Why Aalto?, Jyväskylä, Finland, June 9-10, 2017), 7.
- ¹⁶ Georges Arbid, “Practicing Modernism in Beirut: Architecture in Lebanon, 1946-1970 [Thesis]” (Harvard University, 2001), 100.
- ¹⁷ Arbid, 107.
- ¹⁸ Arbid, 100.
- ¹⁹ Arbid, 120-1.
- ²⁰ Anna Kathleen Medearis, “The Beirut Coffeehouse & Café [Thesis]” (American University of Beirut, 2022) https://scholarworks.aub.edu.lb/bitstream/handle/10938/23893/MedearisAnna_2023.pdf?sequence=1, 73.
- ²¹ Medearis, 76.
- ²² Medearis, 50.
- ²³ Medearis, 69.
- ²⁴ Medearis, 73.
- ²⁵ Medearis, 76.
- ²⁶ Medearis, 73.
- ²⁷ Willy Lowry, “Beirut Street Artist Yazan Halwani Finds Inspiration in City’s ‘Lost Culture,’” *The National*, August 14, 2017, accessed August 3, 2025, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/watch-beirut-street-artist-yazan-halwani-finds-inspiration-in-city-s-lost-culture-1.619736>.
- ²⁸ See for example *Beirut Port* (2020), *Mineral Sunset* (2023), or *Where to?* (2023).
- ²⁹ “About Us – Barzakh Bookshop & Café,” Barzakh, accessed August 3, 2025, <https://brzkh.org/about-us/>.
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- ³¹ Ayache.
- ³² Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
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ANDALUSIAN INFLUENCES: WATER AND THE REVIVAL OF NARROW STREETS AS PUBLIC RITUAL IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN SPACES

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INTRODUCTION

Across the Mediterranean, urban life traditionally involved shared rituals centered around narrow passages, ritual ablution, and public water wells. Today, the majority of life happens on the interior separated behind privatized walls sealed away from the public, social spaces of the city." The old city of Alexandria exemplifies region-specific traditions in which vernacular urban design principles conspire to blur the boundary between public and private life. Narrow streets bordered by dense, relatively tall buildings maximize shade and encourage interpersonal contact in both social and commercial activities while water plays a key practical and poetic role bringing people together in public squares and outdoor markets. The spatial, cultural, and social traditions founded on shade, water, and respite evolved over centuries, but in the last one hundred years city planning has shifted away from passive environmental design in public spaces generally and the role of water in particular. As the essential, pre-existing relationship between water, public space, and daily ritual has diminished, an alternative logic embeds in the new urban form and imparts fundamental shifts in the choreography of everyday life. What happens when a city's most essential element is no longer part of its everyday choreography?

This paper examines the historical civic role of water and its potential reactivation within contemporary Andalusian urbanism to restore social connection and collective identity. The region of Andalusia provides a singular lens for this study: a region whose urban fabric was shaped by centuries under Islamic rule, and later by Christian governance, leaving behind a layered spatial and cultural heritage.¹ This is research rooted in embodied experience — shaped by fieldwork in Spanish cities — and concludes with the development of an architectural handbook. This guide proposes site-specific interventions that draw from historic water practices to revive communal civic life within the modern city. Beyond reorienting public activity outward, such a revival can also nurture a quiet yet vital byproduct: a shared sense of responsibility for the place one inhabits, and the people with whom it is shared.

HISTORICAL ANDALUSIAN URBANISM

The historic urban fabric of Andalusian cities emerged from community-driven patterns and spatial traditions that evolved over centuries in response to climate, culture, and collective life. This fabric was defined by three primary features: organic street patterns that encouraged shaded movement and chance

encounters, a porous threshold between public and private realms, and the anchoring presence of a central public square. Water was inseparable from this daily ritual. The presence of water sustained bodies and spirits alike through three primary forms: purification in the public squares, fountains that cooled the climate and passersby alike, and *sabil-kuttabs* that combined charity, education, and public service. Together, these spatial foundations and water-centered practices shaped a civic culture where the boundaries between infrastructure, ritual, and community dissolved.

Urban Morphologies

Unlike modern infrastructural systems where urban planning is dictated by governments, early Mediterranean cities evolved organically in response to the changing needs of their communities. For example, El Gòtic—Barcelona’s Old Town—was the first settlement to emerge in what is now modern-day Barcelona.² The streets were formed through an adaptive process, resulting in narrow, winding pathways. Such adaptation was a direct response to the needs of their inhabitants, as these streets offered protection by limiting sightlines and making navigation less intuitive for potential invaders.³ However, modern urban developments are driven by different goals. In contrast to El Gòtic, a major district of Barcelona today known as the *Eixample* district as seen in *fig.1.1*, was the outcome of large-scale governmental intervention.⁴ Conceived in the 19th century, the district was designed by urban planner Ildefons Cerdà with orthogonal streets and broad boulevards. Cerdà introduced a radically different vision, one driven by concerns over sanitation, traffic circulation, and infrastructural efficiency, concerns of a growing industrial city. Although the *Eixample* district is regarded today as one of the most thoughtful examples of modern urban planning, the labyrinth of El Gòtic still attracts residents who value its intimate scale and enduring sense of community.⁵ El Gòtic and the *Eixample* thus represent two opposing foundations of urban form: the former shaped by the incremental needs of an ancient community, and the latter by the systematic vision of modern planning.

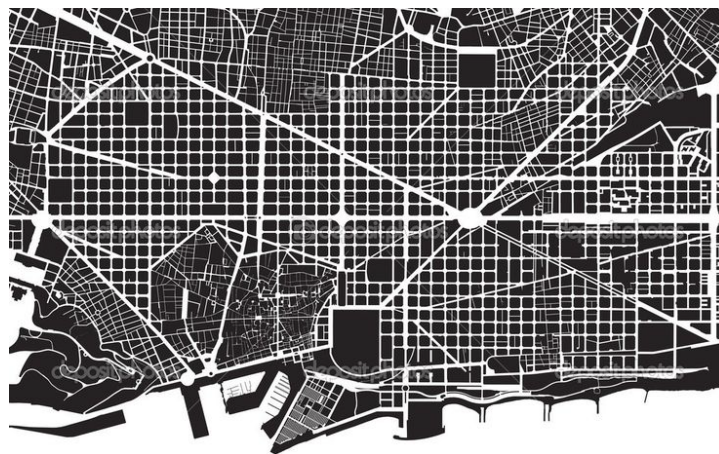


Figure 1.1. Diagrammatic Nolli Map of Barcelona authored by Jumana Rageh

In addition to the infrastructure of Andalusia, vernacular cities were characterized by a distinctive spatial interplay between public and private realms. Rather than the stark separation modern European buildings face today—where glass facades create hermetically sealed private bubbles—historical urban layouts featured a nuanced gradient of spaces, ranging from the intimate interiors to the vibrant public streets.⁶ In contrast, urban typologies common to modern metropolises emphasize the contrast between a nuanced spectrum of privacy found in historic urban layouts and the stark, binary division of spaces today — where areas are either completely private or fully public.⁷

Several architectural elements facilitated the blurred boundary between private and public. A prime example is the *mashrabiya* (fig. 1.2)— a projecting latticework façade element that adorns the exteriors of many buildings. Historically made of timber or *areesh*, it served multiple purposes: providing shade and ventilation, and screening inhabitants from public view.⁸ Most importantly, *mashrabiyas* allowed residents, especially women, to observe the street without being seen. This element juxtaposes one of the most private aspects of traditional Arab culture—women—with one of the most public aspects of the city— the street.

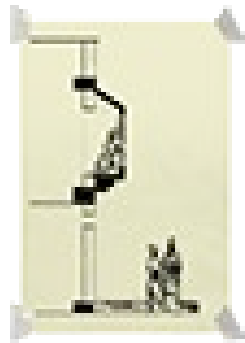


Figure 1.2. *Mashrabiya* authored by Jumana Rageh

In contrast, modern buildings in metropolises like Dubai and Cairo often offer only an illusion of privacy, as floor-to-ceiling glass facades expose the domestic interiors to outside viewers.⁹ In historic Andalusian cities, the organic formation of passageways and the integration of communal spaces reinforced an urban fabric where architecture served both function and fellowship—a stark departure from the compartmentalized, disconnected landscapes of the contemporary metropolis.

Water and Ritual Practices

Central to the Andalusian civic model was the presence of water, which functioned not only as an essential resource but also as a cultural medium that structured communal life. Urban water within Andalusian cities was not limited to its functional role. Rather, water served as a medium for social connection and ritual, embedding itself into the daily rhythms of civic life. The category of water referred to in this paper refers to the layered phenomenon as *urban water*—that is, public water whose significance extends beyond utility to shape the social and spatial fabric of the city.

To better understand its role, we divided *urban water* into three subcategories: sustenance, purification, and ritual. The dimension of purification reveals the evolving relationship between water, privacy, and community. Historically, the *hammām*, or communal purification basin, was not merely utilitarian; it was communal and ritualistic. Andalusian bathhouses ranged in size from 180m² to 380m², serving up to 30 people at a time.¹⁰ In addition to their primary function of cleansing, *hammāms* also became the stage for social interaction, where social hierarchies dissolved and people came together in shared rituals of exchange.¹¹

Much more visible than the *hammām* were the ablution taps located in public squares. Referred to in Arabic as *šanbūr* or *ḥanaḥīyya*, these taps provided water for the ritual of purification before prayer. For Muslims, ablution is a prerequisite for worship, and in line with the five obligatory daily prayers, these taps were frequented at least five times a day.¹² This setting created a social hub for daily civic interaction. In mosque courtyards built around the 10th century, the act of ablution—*wuḍūʿ*—was not only spiritual but also spatial.¹³ Within such courtyards, ablution basins occupied central space, slowing one's pace as worshippers removed their shoes, purified themselves, and transitioned toward prayer.

With the intensification of urban growth and the prioritization of built density over open courtyards, public activity increasingly withdrew from shared civic spaces.¹⁴ The courtyard gradually lost its prominence, and the act of public ablution no longer took place within the public realm. By the 20th century, with the advent of modern plumbing and increased concerns over sanitation, public ablution basins were reduced to simple bathrooms enclosed within mosque walls.¹⁵ This spatial condensation marked not only a practical shift but also a cultural one, as the collective, civic dimensions of purification were replaced by more private practices within the mosque interior.

THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF ANDALUSIA IN THE 15TH CENTURY

With the rise of the Renaissance and, more decisively, the Spanish Inquisition, urban life in Andalusia underwent a profound transformation. New civic values changed the use of public space, privileging monumental order over the shared rituals of everyday life.¹⁶ In this process, the integration of water as a medium of community—once so fundamental to ritual and communal purification—was increasingly displaced, eroding its civic presence in favor of more isolated forms of use.

A Shift of Power in Andalusia

Public space was no longer a stage for daily civic life but was re-scripted as a platform for surveillance, punishment, and public ceremony.¹⁷ Plazas became settings for state power to be displayed and reinforced, often at the expense of informal gathering and mutual exchange. This transformation recast the public realm as a place to be observed rather than a place to belong. This period saw a growing reliance on authority-driven interventions, in which both the mosque and its surrounding urban context were recast as symbolic artifacts rather than lived communal spaces. Religious buildings were converted to cathedrals, their courtyards repurposed, and their ablution fountains left dry or ornamental.¹⁸ Streets were widened to accommodate processions, and grand axes were carved to frame monumental facades — spatial moves that signaled power and spectacle over accessibility and shared function.¹⁹

Although the physical urban fabric — including streets, plazas, and buildings — largely persisted, patterns of inhabitation and social use underwent profound transformation. The open thresholds and fluid social exchanges of the past gave way to closed doors, higher walls, and taller buildings that sealed life indoors.²⁰ Acts of hospitality that once spilled into alleyways were replaced by guarded privacy; spaces once animated by water, trade, and conversation grew quieter, more segregated, and more tightly controlled.²¹ Over time, increased modernization altered daily life by also emphasizing their aesthetic appeal rather than their civic function. As a result, many of these spaces became heavily oriented toward tourism, with local social and economic life playing a diminished role.

The Decline of Water as Ritual Practice

Whereas the Inquisition-era walls marked the beginning of a retreat from collective life, the centuries that followed cemented it — yet traces of the old water culture still ripple beneath the surface of Andalusian cities today. In the contemporary city, water is treated solely as a pragmatic civil utility, a resource to be delivered via underground sewer systems, not seen or celebrated. In contemporary Granada, Seville, or Córdoba, fountains remain scattered through plazas and courtyards, but their role is largely ornamental, serving as postcard backdrops for tourists rather than functional gathering points for residents. Former ablution basins have been repurposed as decorative pools; others are kept dry to avoid maintenance costs in an age of water scarcity.²²

In narrow alleyways once animated by shared cisterns and informal markets, misuse now prevails. *Sikkas*, or narrow alleyways, once animated by pedestrian activity and neighborly interactions, have undergone a more ignoble transformation. Without the communal infrastructure that once kept them lively, these intimate passages have gained a notorious reputation as informal urination spots —

colloquially dubbed “pee roads” by locals (*fig 2*).²³ The absence of functioning public water points and neglect have turned these spaces from vibrant social veins into marginalized corridors, echoing a breakdown in both infrastructure and social norms.

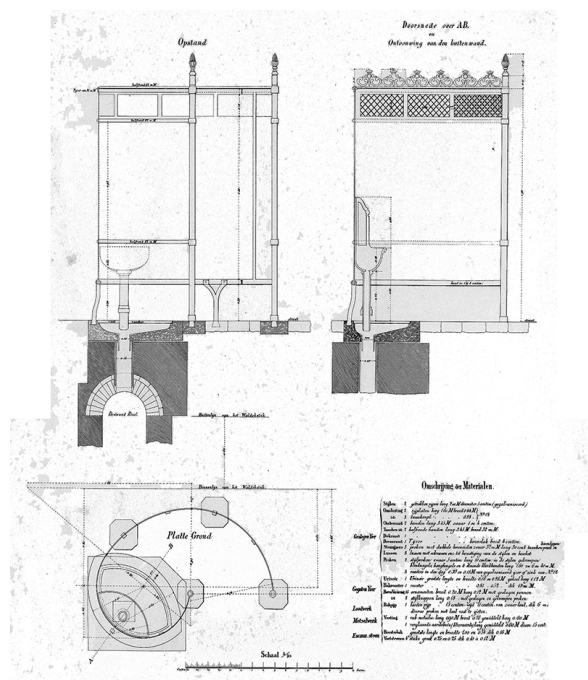


Figure 2. 19th century *Plaskrul*

URBAN REVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR CONTEMPORARY SETTINGS

The erosion of water as a visible, civic element coincides with the transition to isolation in modern life, but opportunities exist to reengage water in contemporary urban design. Specific urban interventions can revive the historical connections between people and their civic environment by reintroducing water as a medium for sociality, ritual, and shared experience. Pursuing this aim generates an architectural language that responds to the narrow passages of the *sikka*—the alleyway that once formed the social backbone of Andalusian cities. These interventions can be understood through three subcategories of urban water: purification, sustenance, and ritual, each explored within an intentionally restricted site.

Purification

Within the domain of purification, the reality faced by locals in Andalusian *sikkas* are associated with neglect and poor sanitation. In response, we reimagined the most overlooked element of civic life—the bathroom—through a contemporary reinterpretation of the 19th-century *plaskrul*, or “pee curl” (*fig 3.1*).²⁴ This modest intervention integrated a discreet yet dignified purification space into the *sikka*’s walls, respecting its narrow span while restoring water’s role as an everyday civic necessity. (*fig*) By connecting our modern *plaskrul* to the building’s existing plumbing infrastructure, the system can leverage modern water supply and waste management. This approach allows the historical element to coexist seamlessly with contemporary standards of sanitation, making purification both practical and pleasant for daily users without disrupting the character of the *sikka*.

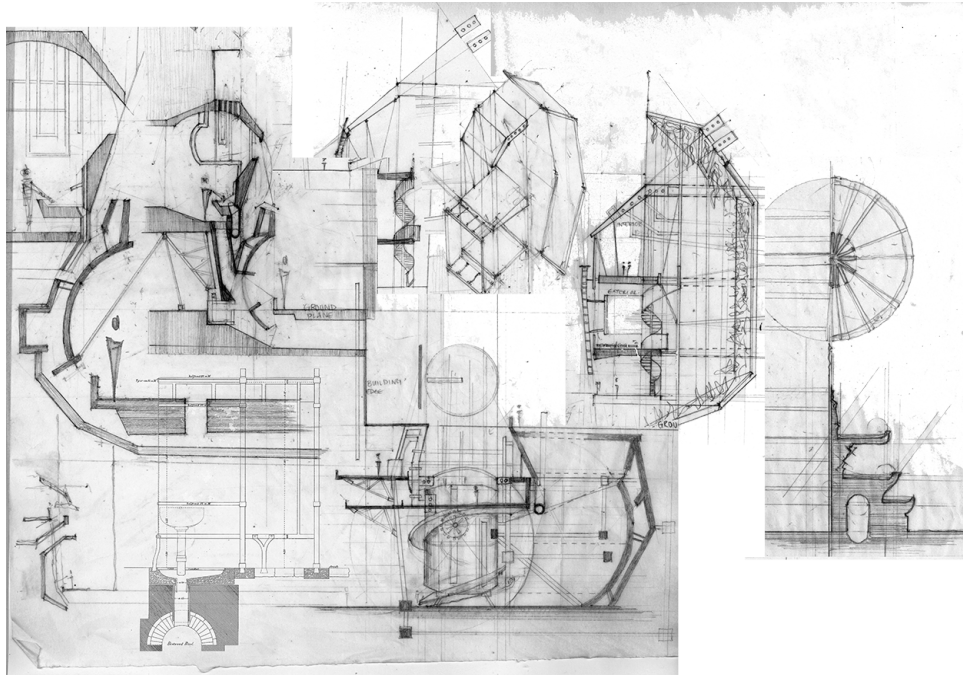


Figure 3.1. *Contemporary Reinterpretation Exploration* authored by Jumana Rageh

Ritual

Urban water has played a historical role in marking urban thresholds, marking the entry into a palace, or a plaza. The potential of this feature is rarely tested within the urban fabric of a *sikka*. Figure 3.2 represents a reinterpreted fountain positioned at the intersection of two *sikkas*, echoing the use of water in Islamic courtyard architecture to announce welcome and transition. In this way, the *sikka* itself becomes a site of encounter, where water redefines not only movement but also the experience of entry. Additional interventions, as seen in figure 3.3—seating, exhibition surfaces, and practical infrastructure such as pressure-washing systems—can be embedded within the street to reinforce the civic dimension of daily passage.

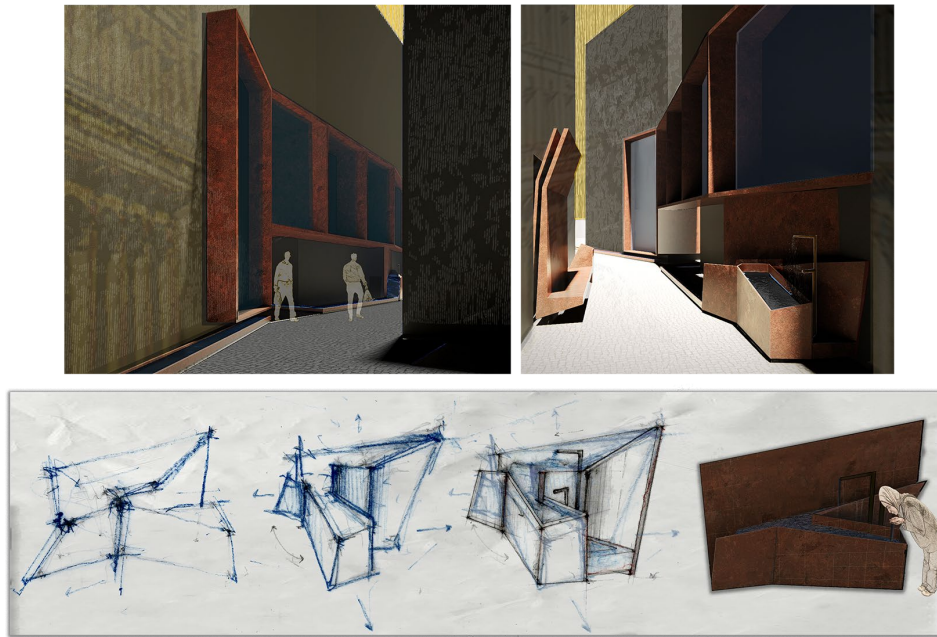


Figure 3.2. Contemporary Reinterpretation Fountain authored by Jumana Rageh and Leen Almanaa

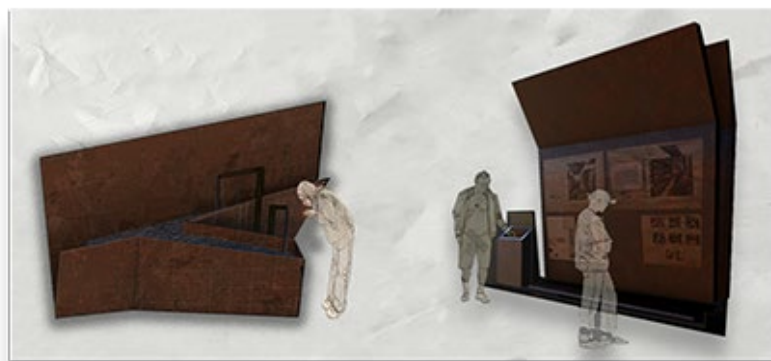


Figure 3.3. Contemporary Reinterpreted Fountain authored by Jumana Rageh and Leen Almanaa

Sustenance

Larger communal nodes where larger groups gather call for more ambitious gestures. A sunken courtyard was proposed as a hybrid space of academic and urban exchange, echoing the typology of the *sabil-kuttab*, which combined a public drinking fountain with a small classroom above (fig 3.4).²⁵ Historically, the classrooms of *sabil-kuttab*s provided small-group classes for girls, usually taught by neighborhood residents, before public schools and state institutions offered women formal education.²⁶ Here, both water and knowledge could be shared, reinstating the link between sustenance and education. We envision this modern *sabil-kuttab* taking various forms to accommodate different groups and types of education. Larger study halls were conceived in the underground realm of the *sikka*, possibly featuring a central water filtration silo, where the sensory presence of water—its sound, reflection, and movement—organizes spaces for focus and contemplation (fig 3.5). In this way, the design extends the integration of water beyond its functional role, exploring how sensory, reflective, and spatial experiences can dissolve boundaries and create layered, almost fictional realms of learning and communal life. Through these strategies, what began as an exploration of Barcelona’s streets evolved

into a study of how water once animated the rhythms of civic life—not as mere infrastructure, but as ritual and memory. In reactivating the spirit of the *sikka*, this work seeks to reintroduce the blur between public and private, restoring water as a shared civic gesture that sustains both community and culture.

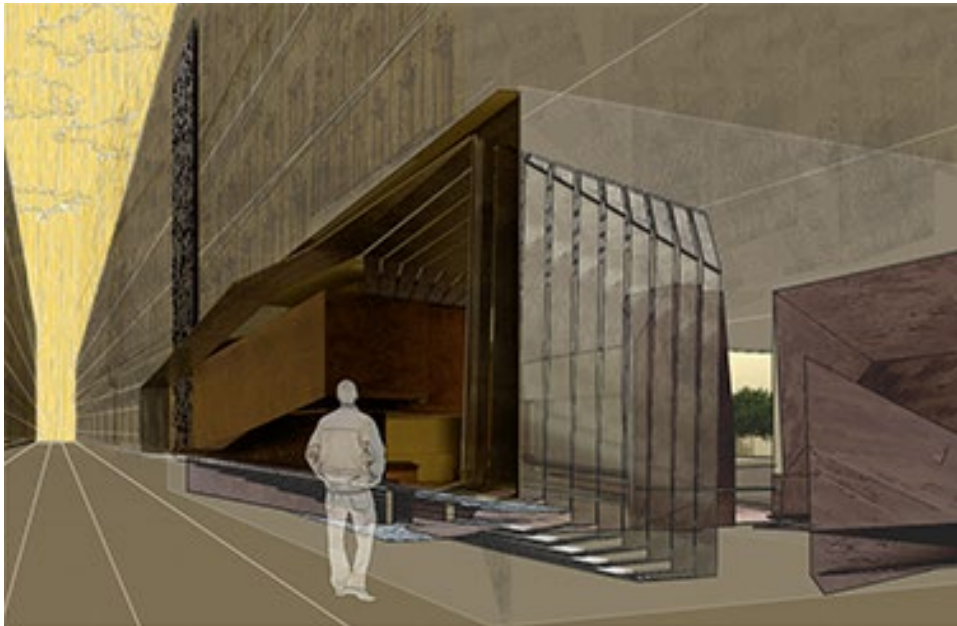


Figure 3.4. Contemporary Sabil-Kuttab authored by Jumana Rageh and Leen Almanaa

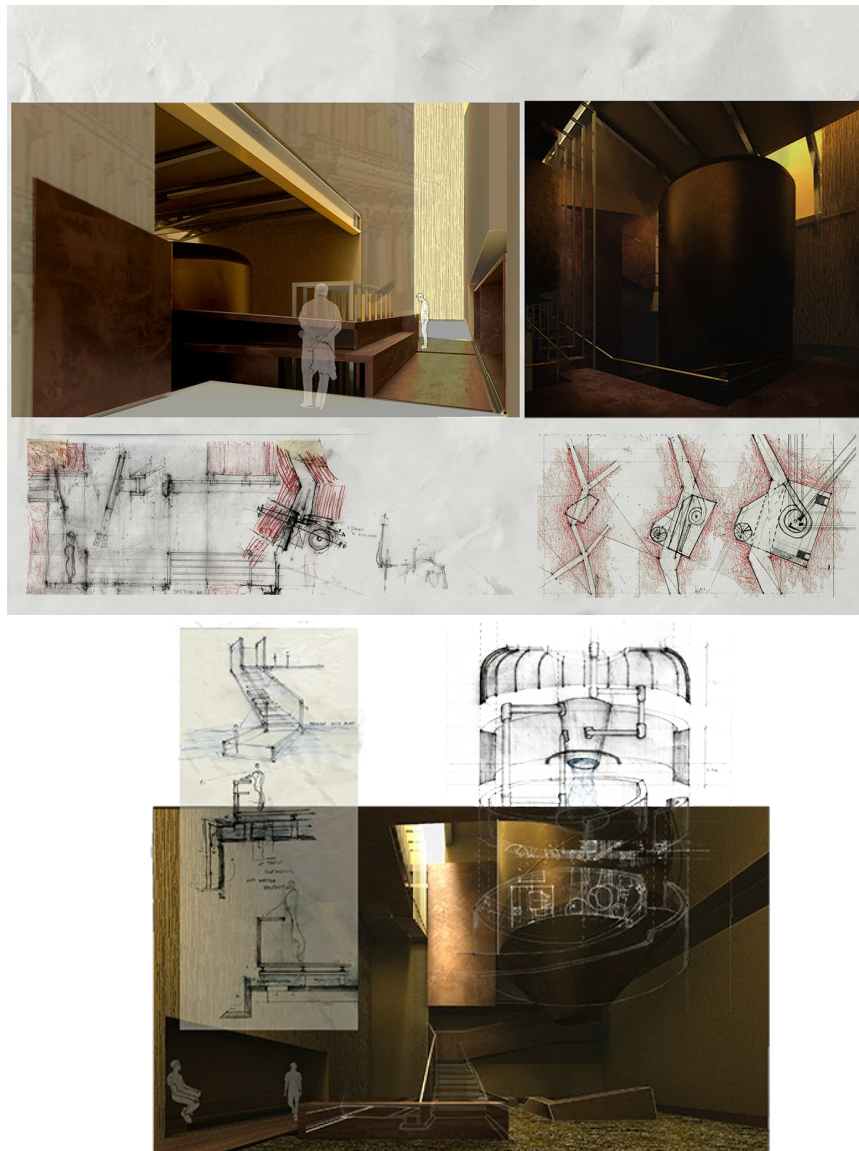


Figure 3.5. Contemporary Reinterpreted Sabil-kuttab authored by Jumana Rageh and Leen Almanaa

CONCLUSION

The erosion of civic life in Andalusian cities is not only a story of lost traditions but also of silenced streets, increased crime, and pedestrian unease. Yet, this loss is not irreversible. The traces of a shared urban culture remain embedded in the very bones of the city, waiting to be reactivated through careful and deliberate design. Proposed strategies reintroduce water as a cultural and architectural medium, as contemporary interventions restore the fluid thresholds of intimacy and collectivity that once defined Andalusian civic life. Revival requires a nuanced approach more akin to acupuncture- featuring targeted, integrated strategies deployed at a human scale to replace sweeping, macro scale, institutional reforms. Just as historical streets grew incrementally and adaptively, interventions today must respect the integrity of the inherited fabric while addressing present needs directly. The current study highlights how historic Andalusian urbanism evolved organically from the interplay of narrow streets, porous thresholds, and shared water practices. It examined how the civic role of water—as sustenance, purification, and ritual—wove infrastructure into social life. In addition, the research considers how traditions were abandoned during the Inquisition, and how historic traces survive today in diminished

or distorted form. Finally, the proposed strategies reimagine the *sikka* as a site of renewed public ritual, where interventions—from reinterpreted fountains to contemporary *sabil-kuttabs*—restore water as both necessity and symbol of community. Ultimately, the project posits alternative morphologies inspired by the subtle choreography of water and shared space in Andalusian cities, that might ameliorate social isolation in the contemporary metropolis. The challenge is not to recreate the past, but to learn from its spirit so that the public realm may once again become a place where architecture sustains fellowship.

NOTES

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THE INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN CULTURAL ROUTES ON URBAN HERITAGE AND TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE EUROPEAN ROUTE OF HISTORIC GARDENS IN LISBON

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between heritage and tourism has long been a central concern in cultural studies.¹ As carriers of collective memory and identity, historic heritage sites require protection within frameworks of authenticity and integrity, yet they are simultaneously regarded as core resources for tourism development, driving economic growth and international exchange.² Striking a balance between conservation and utilisation, while avoiding over-commercialisation or excessive “museumification”, remains a critical challenge. Against this backdrop, the Council of Europe has, since the 1980s, advanced the concept of European Cultural Routes, offering a new model for transnational cooperation and institutionalised practices in heritage management.³

Cultural routes connect dispersed heritage sites through transnational thematic networks, thereby constructing shared European cultural narratives and emphasising cooperation, education, and tourism innovation.⁴ Since the certification of the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes in 1987, the system has become an integral part of European heritage protection and cultural tourism.⁵ In recent years, garden heritage has gained particular attention due to its distinctive interweaving of natural and cultural values.⁶ The European Route of Historic Gardens (ERHG), incorporated into the framework in 2020, not only promotes the systematic protection of gardens but also highlights the roles of tourism, education, and cultural exchange in fostering social identity.

Existing scholarship has largely focused on the overall network and transnational comparisons of cultural routes, with relatively limited attention to localised urban practices. Lisbon, with its diverse garden heritage and its proactive participation in the ERHG under the leadership of the Associação Portuguesa dos Jardins Históricos (AJH), provides a particularly illustrative case. Its gardens simultaneously embody local culture while being embedded within wider European heritage and tourism systems through transnational networks.

This study, therefore, takes the ERHG as a case study to examine its impact on heritage protection, tourism development, and urban identity construction in Lisbon, offering a new analytical framework for understanding the interactive relationship between heritage, conservation, and tourism.

THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF EUROPEAN CULTURAL ROUTES

The European Cultural Routes initiative, launched by the Council of Europe in the 1980s, is an important policy tool aimed at reinforcing common heritage and identity through transnational thematic networks.⁷ Unlike traditional “routes”, cultural routes are not singular physical pathways but cross-regional heritage networks built around specific cultural themes.

Cultural routes fulfil multiple functions, combining heritage conservation, tourism development, and cross-border cooperation.⁸ According to the Council of Europe, a cultural route must operate across broad geographical areas and establish systematic practices through academic research, heritage identification, network organisation, and public dissemination.⁹ Implementation generally involves theme-setting, the selection of heritage elements, the establishment of networks, and the coordination of joint activities. This process not only promotes the shared presentation of heritage but also provides a platform for transnational cooperation and public participation.

As an innovative model of heritage protection and dissemination, cultural routes stress the dynamic and social functions of heritage. They raise public awareness through research and educational activities, encourage the participation of contemporary art and creative industries, and foster interaction between tradition and modernity. Youth engagement is particularly prioritised, with school collaborations, educational tourism, and intercultural dialogue widely employed to cultivate a sense of European identity in future generations. Thus, cultural routes function as laboratories for heritage transmission, social cohesion, and identity formation.

In terms of governance, cultural routes operate through transnational associations or networks, whose members—spanning multiple countries—share responsibilities in research, promotion, and management. These networks rely on regular evaluation and strategic planning to ensure sustainability and adaptability to social, economic, and environmental change. Moreover, by collaborating with local governments and communities, they integrate transnational themes into regional policies, producing tangible benefits for local economies, tourism, and social development.

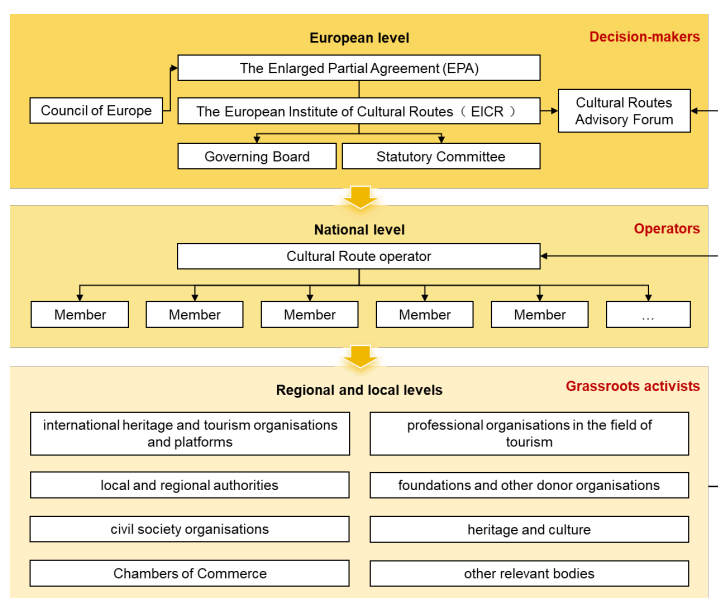


Figure 3. Diagram of the Governance Structure of the European Cultural Routes

Cultural routes also generate value in tourism and branding. Through narrative-driven and theme-based design, they attract visitors while grounding their brand identity in authenticity and uniqueness. Each route develops a recognisable visual identity, leveraging media and digital platforms to enhance international visibility, thereby becoming important tools for shaping urban and regional images.

Overall, European Cultural Routes embody the intersection of heritage protection, tourism development, and transnational cooperation. Their multi-layered institutions and practices incorporate dispersed heritage into unified narratives, shaping shared cultural memories while offering cities and regions opportunities to consolidate their positions within global cultural networks.

THE EUROPEAN ROUTE OF HISTORIC GARDENS

The European Route of Historic Gardens (ERHG) represents a significant application of the cultural routes framework to heritage that merges natural and cultural values.¹⁰ Its origins lie in Lloret de Mar, Spain, where efforts were made to valorise marginalised garden heritage by initiating a transnational network. Subsequently, the City of Aranjuez and the University of Barcelona joined the initiative, leading to the establishment of the European Network of Historic Gardens in 2016. This network was founded on a mission of heritage conservation, educational exchange, and tourism innovation, gradually expanding its scope to strengthen European identity and social cohesion through gardens. In 2020, the ERHG was formally certified by the Council of Europe.

Its organisational structure reflects both its transnational and academic orientations. The General Assembly acts as the highest decision-making body, the Board of Directors manages daily governance and strategic implementation, while the Scientific Committee brings together experts and scholars responsible for research, heritage protection, and educational activities.

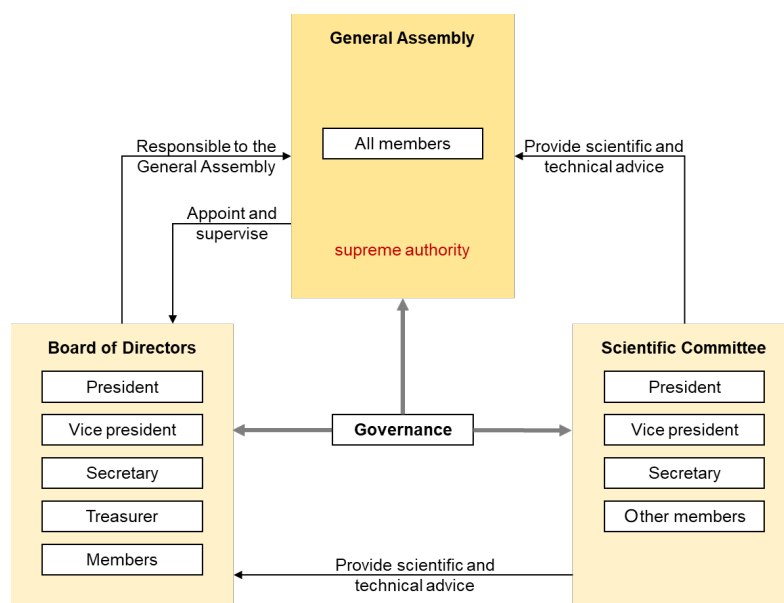


Figure 4. Organisational Structure of ERHG

The membership system consists of full members, honorary members, and Collaborators, spanning gardens, museums, universities, and cultural institutions from across Europe. This diversity ensures both governance effectiveness and scholarly integrity, while enabling cross-disciplinary cooperation.

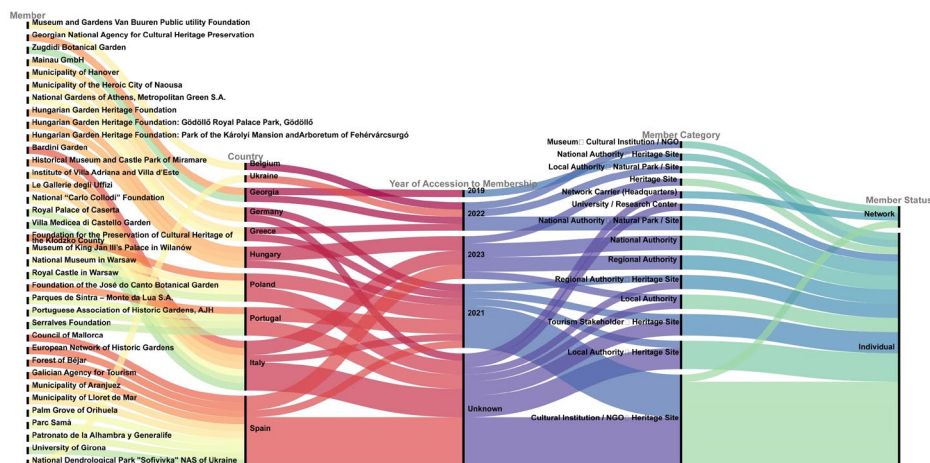


Figure 5. ERHG Membership System

In practice, the ERHG prioritises capacity-building, cultural dissemination, and sustainable development. In terms of capacity-building, it supports transnational research and educational projects to deepen the study of garden history and values, encouraging youth participation in conservation. Cultural dissemination is pursued through initiatives such as the European Forums on Historic Gardens and the European Days of Historic Gardens. The former brings together members and experts to discuss conservation, management, and tourism issues—complemented by site visits to inform decision-making. The latter, held annually on 26 April, promotes public awareness through outreach, tree planting, and integration into broader transnational narratives. Additionally, film productions, tourism packages, and public exhibitions further enhance the visibility and attractiveness of historic gardens.



Figure 6. The 7th European Forum on Historic Gardens Schedule and Group Photo of Members

Financial sustainability is secured through a hybrid funding model combining membership fees with support from European cultural and research projects. Membership fees cover the association’s operations, while EU-funded projects finance joint research and promotional initiatives. This structure not only sustains core activities but also broadens the network’s capacity to undertake large-scale cross-border projects. These research activities yield scholarly outputs and provide practical guidance for policy and garden management.

As the network has expanded, the ERHG’s international influence has grown significantly. Collaborations with UNESCO, the European Union, and other international organisations have fostered synergies in both academic research and cultural promotion, while joint projects and international

conferences have enhanced its brand value. At the same time, the ERHG has developed a distinctive visual and narrative identity, embedding historic gardens within Europe’s shared cultural memory. In doing so, it has transformed gardens from localised aesthetic and tourism resources into central elements of European identity and international cultural exchange.

In summary, the ERHG, through institutional governance, diverse activities, and transnational cooperation, integrates historic gardens into the cultural routes framework. It not only strikes a balance between conservation and tourism development but also strengthens European identity through branding and international dissemination. This provides essential context for its implementation in Lisbon.

CASE STUDY: LISBON

As Portugal’s capital, Lisbon is both the country’s political and economic centre and one of its most concentrated and diverse regions for historic garden heritage. Since the sixteenth century, its gardens have embodied multilayered cultural memories, evolving from aristocratic estates to civic public parks. They encompass a wide variety of types, including leisure estates, monastic gardens, public parks, and private gardens, with diverse styles and functions. The Baroque Palácio da Fronteira garden is celebrated for its azulejo tiling, tiered terraces, and water features, epitomising seventeenth-century garden artistry. The Convento do Bom Sucesso retains characteristics of medieval monastic gardens, while nineteenth-century public parks such as Estrela, Príncipe Real, and S. Pedro de Alcântara exemplify the integration of leisure and aesthetics, providing accessible natural and cultural spaces for citizens.¹¹ These gardens are not only of artistic and aesthetic value but also vital carriers of Portuguese cultural identity.

The significance of Lisbon’s historic gardens lies in three main aspects. Culturally, they serve as “living archives” of historical and social transformation, tracing the trajectory from aristocratic culture to civic society. In terms of tourism, they are integral to cultural tourism, linked with nearby gardens in Sintra to form a metropolitan heritage tourism network. Ecologically, they act as vital components of urban green infrastructure, regulating climate, improving air quality, and supporting biodiversity.

The Associação Portuguesa dos Jardins Históricos (AJH) plays a central role in conservation and promotion.¹² Established in 2003, it has created a national inventory of 822 historic gardens, designed twelve tourism routes, and launched the Quality Label of Historic Garden. With around 120 listed gardens, Lisbon’s metropolitan area ranks among the highest in number and representativeness, setting benchmarks in restoration and certification that serve as models for heritage conservation and utilisation.

As both the capital and AJH’s key base, Lisbon is irreplaceable in Portugal’s engagement with transnational cultural networks. On one hand, its gardens have been integrated into European cultural routes through AJH’s initiatives, serving as important channels for external cultural exchange. On the other hand, Lisbon’s variety of gardens and tourism practices provide exemplary cases for the study and development of the ERHG.

In recent years, Lisbon’s historic gardens have been increasingly incorporated into tourism products and cultural programming within broader strategies of cultural tourism and urban branding, giving rise to a “garden + city brand” model. For instance, international tour operators often combine visits to the Palácio da Fronteira with Sintra’s gardens, while the city council and AJH leveraged the European Green Capital 2020 award to showcase historic gardens as platforms for civic education and ecological exhibitions, thus aligning heritage with urban sustainability.

In summary, Lisbon’s historic gardens play pivotal roles not only in national heritage conservation and tourism development but also as cultural bridges linking Portugal to Europe through transnational cultural routes.

MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE: EUROPEAN CULTURAL ROUTES AND LISBON

As a Council of Europe-certified cultural route, the ERHG serves not only as a transnational network for tourism and cultural dissemination but also as a mechanism for advancing heritage protection, tourism development, and urban branding. Lisbon’s engagement exemplifies a “heritage activation–urban valorisation” cycle.

In terms of heritage protection, the ERHG promotes authenticity, integrity, and sustainable management through its Quality Label of Historic Garden. Lisbon’s gardens have thus gained access to international funding and technical support, shifting from fragmented restoration to systemic revitalisation. The city’s Botanical Garden has undertaken “urban biodiversity monitoring”, recording 120 native plant species and 30 migratory bird species in 2023, making it a case study for the EU’s “urban ecological restoration” initiative. The Príncipe Real garden has introduced pesticide-free management, winning the European Environment Agency’s “Green Space Excellence Award”.

In terms of tourism development, the ERHG network has enhanced Lisbon’s market positioning. By linking with the World Heritage gardens of Sintra, it has created “capital–periphery” routes that extend tourist stays and increase expenditure. Activities such as the European Days of Historic Gardens combine heritage with educational experiences, engaging both citizens and visitors. Multilingual promotional platforms have further expanded the gardens’ visibility within Europe’s tourism networks. In terms of urban branding, the ERHG has provided Lisbon with an internationally recognised platform. The city was named European Green Capital in 2020, with its gardens positioned as green infrastructure integrating ecological and cultural values. The ERHG has framed Lisbon as a “crossroads of European garden culture”, synthesising Roman, Islamic, and Portuguese overseas influences. The video series Gardens that Sustain Europe, particularly the episode Lisbon: Dialogue between the Ocean and Gardens, has attracted over 500,000 YouTube views, increasing official website traffic by 40%. The ERHG website lists Lisbon as a “must-visit city of European garden culture” alongside Paris and Florence, with international search volumes for Lisbon rising by 65% year-on-year in 2024.

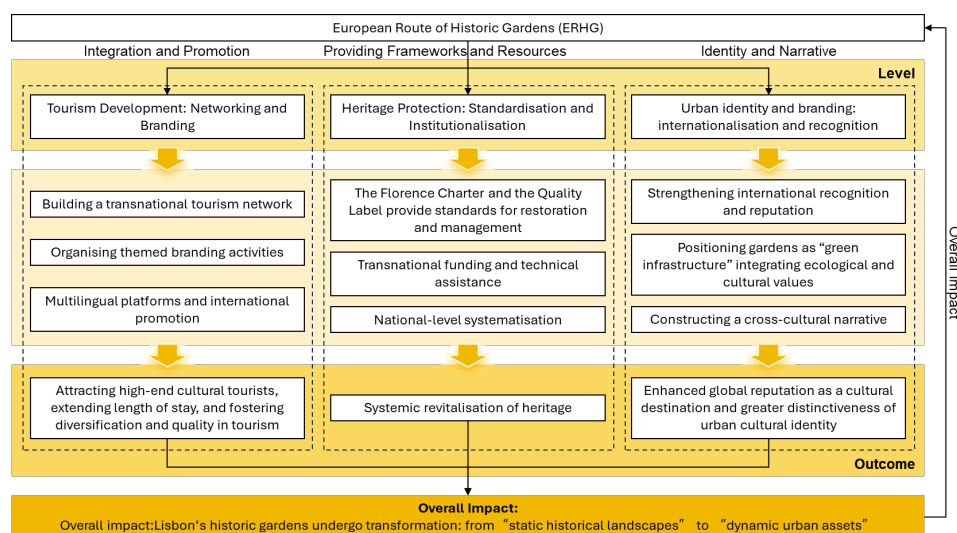


Figure 7. ERHG’s multidimensional impact mechanism diagram for Lisbon

In sum, the ERHG’s influence on Lisbon is threefold: it has raised conservation standards through certification and standardisation; it has enhanced garden value through transnational cooperation and tourism design; and it has reinforced urban branding through cultural networks and international dissemination. As a result, Lisbon’s gardens have transformed from “static historical landscapes” into “dynamic urban assets”, exerting profound impacts on heritage protection, tourism economy, cultural

identity, and image-building—demonstrating the systemic functions of protection–utilisation–identity embedded within European cultural routes in contemporary urban development.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has examined the ERHG in Lisbon as a case study of the mechanisms through which European Cultural Routes influence urban heritage protection, tourism development, and branding. The findings indicate that cultural routes are not merely tools for heritage conservation but integrated systems linking protection, utilisation, and identity. Through transnational certification, networked governance, and international dissemination, Lisbon’s gardens have evolved from static historic landscapes into dynamic urban assets, creating interactive cycles between heritage protection, tourism enhancement, and city image construction.

In practical terms, cultural routes operate through three key functions: firstly, enhancing conservation through certification and standardisation, thereby institutionalising and sustaining restoration; secondly, expanding tourism value through transnational networks and activity design, diversifying and improving the quality of visitor experiences; and thirdly, strengthening Lisbon’s international image through cultural networks and brand dissemination, positioning its garden heritage as both a pillar of urban identity and a component of European cultural identity.

Theoretically, cultural routes should not be viewed solely as linear connections of heritage sites but rather as operating mechanisms of transnational heritage networks. They integrate conservation, tourism, and cultural communication into unified frameworks that combine institutional governance, social participation, and brand-building. As hybrid heritage forms that intertwine nature and culture, gardens serve simultaneously as repositories of historical memory and as vital components of modern ecological and social life, offering new interdisciplinary perspectives for heritage studies, tourism research, and urban studies.

From a policy and practice standpoint, four implications emerge: strengthening transnational cooperation and diversified funding to enhance sustainability; maintaining a balance between conservation and utilisation to avoid over-commercialisation; promoting public participation and community identity to embed heritage in everyday life; and leveraging digital technologies for visualisation and international dissemination to reach new generations of audiences.

Overall, the Lisbon case highlights the unique value of European Cultural Routes as bridges between heritage protection and tourism development, offering cities new opportunities to establish their identity and image within global cultural networks.

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- ⁹ Silvia De Ascaniis et al., "Online Communication Strategies of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe," *HTHIC* (2020): 81.
- ¹⁰ Susana Silva and Paulo Carvalho, "Historic Gardens Heritage in Portugal: From the Originality of an Art to the Inventory Process," *Sustainability* 14, no. 10 (2022): 5978, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14105978>.
- ¹¹ A. Cunliffe, *Lisbon & Cintra: With Some Account of Other Cities and Historical Sites in Portugal* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907).
- ¹² Ana Luísa Soares et al., "Historic Gardens of Lisbon—A Landscape Heritage Inventory Model," in *Proceedings of the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools (ECLAS) 2014 Conference: Landscape: A Place of Cultivation* (Porto, Portugal, 2014), 21–23.

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FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY: TRACING THE TRANSFORMATION OF ANKARA'S RESIDENTIAL COURTYARDS THROUGH OTTOMAN-REPUBLICAN HISTORICAL SHIFTS

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INTRODUCTION

Ankara, in transition during the early twentieth century from an Ottoman small town to the capital city of Republican Turkey, began to expand with new constructions. The courtyards, which had been an important part of Ottoman neighborhoods and daily domestic production practices, were intrinsic to this transition. Ottoman to Republican shifts introduced changes in housing, such as concepts of domestic privacy, the separation of production from domesticity, and the relocation of service spaces from the courtyards to the interiors of the houses. Although the new housing included courtyards, these were physically changed and had new social connotations. This study¹ investigates this transformation of the private Ottoman courtyard with its productive nature into a courtyard of modernity, marking Ankara's new transformative domestic and urban character in the early twentieth century.

OTTOMAN-REPUBLICAN SHIFTS: THE COURTYARD TRANSFORMATION IN ANKARA'S LATE-OTTOMAN HOUSES

Constructed with a stone masonry base and timber-frame upper floors, the traditional Anatolian houses² are notable for their architectural characteristics. The multi-windowed character and the protruding mass enhance interactions with the daily activities both with an orientation to the private courtyards and another to the public street life (Figure 1). In traditional houses, with an integrated kitchen built as a separate annex within the courtyard, and with *abdesthane* – a lavatory – typically located in more secluded corners, the courtyards functioned as core spaces for daily production and domestic services.³ One of the first architects to systematically reinterpret traditional Turkish houses in a modern framework during the 1940s was Sedad Hakkı Eldem (1908-1988) who conceptualized the modern Turkish house as a one- or two-story structure organized around a central courtyard.⁴ Drawing inspirations from the Ottoman daily life, Eldem imagined the courtyard as the heart of domestic life, and like the Ottoman precedents, as a multifunctional space for daily work and production. His house designs of the 1940s featured courtyards surrounded by porticos with wooden columns, with adorned ceilings bearing *kilim* motifs (traditional Turkish carpet), celebrating vernacular cultural identity.⁵ However, the courtyard interpretations had taken on other forms before the 1940s in the early Republican era Ankara.



Figure 1. Hidden from view, private courtyards reflect the intimacy of traditional Ankara houses.
Source: © Author.

An analysis – based on the 1930 cadastral map and aerial photographs of the early twenty-first century – reveals important data on courtyard transformation of Ankara’s historic neighborhoods, and their urban characteristics – namely, the spatial relationships between lots, streets, houses, and courtyards. Through this analysis, a significant disruption is observed in the traditional Ottoman-era configuration of houses and their courtyard spaces. After Ankara’s designation as the new capital city, rapid population growth and consequential housing shortage triggered a transformation and a shift in housing construction and usage: large residential plots were subdivided, and new buildings were constructed on former courtyard spaces. Property owners quickly adapted to this pressure for profit and built small rental units within their courtyards or subdivided their houses for rent. These developments significantly altered the historical spatial organization of the neighborhood. This will be exemplified through a further examination of the Jewish neighborhood⁶ and three housing examples from there (Figure 2, rows 1 and 2).⁷

The first house (the house of the Araf family) is located directly opposite the synagogue, on a street, historically inhabited by the religious leader and affluent residents of the neighborhood. Distinguished by its spatial expansion, and the integrated courtyard configuration, the house stands out from the rest in the neighborhood. Three distinct courtyards, i.e., a street side entrance courtyard, a small service courtyard and a large rear courtyard makes the case a rare and exceptional example (Figure 2, row 3). The street-facing courtyard provides an access to a grand entrance; i.e. an elegant double staircase, which leads to the main entrance foyer on the ground floor. Beneath the staircase, a separate gate leads to the basement level, to the *taşlık* space – a stone-paved inner hall – historically a key space for domestic production activities and a transitional space between the courtyards. This case also features a large rear courtyard, accessible only through the *taşlık* space. The rear courtyard together with *taşlık* were essential spaces for daily domestic production, particularly a small garden allowing for limited cultivation. The living spaces in the upper floors, oriented toward the courtyard, maintain a strong visual connection between the interior spaces and productive functions and activities below. Accessed from *taşlık*, there is another service courtyard, a part of a rear annex building that housed service spaces and possibly quarters for domestic staff.⁸ Within this annex, there is a space once functioned as a private *hamam* (traditional Turkish bath) for family’s own use, which is a luxurious and an uncommon feature within this housing typology.⁹

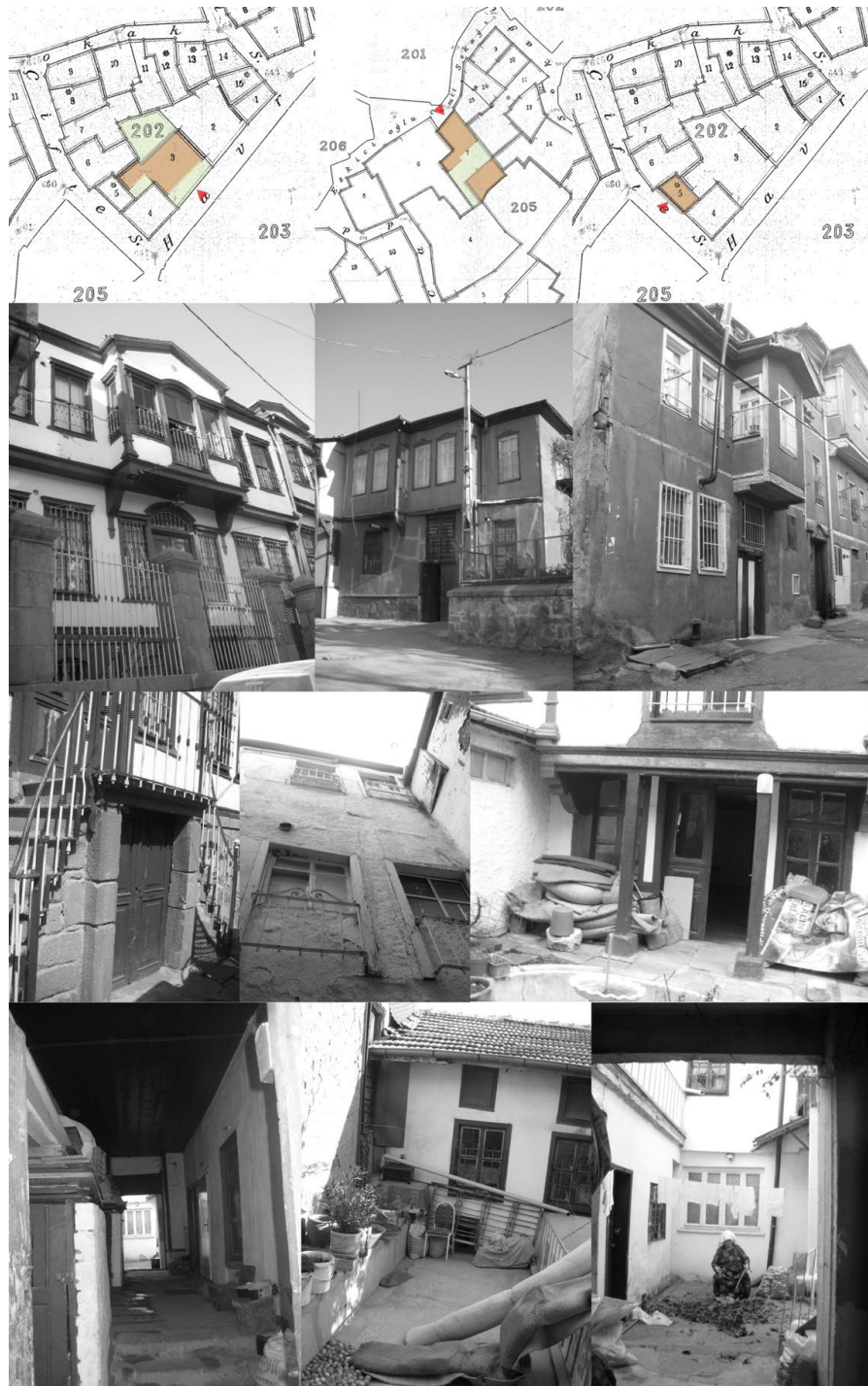


Figure 2. Three examples showcase Ankara's transformed traditional houses and courtyard practices.
Source: © Author.

The second house represents a typology more suitable for middle-class families. The house features a spacious rear courtyard, historically used for common domestic production activities in the city during the nineteenth century such as *sof* production (a distinctive wool historically produced in Ankara) or winemaking. In its original use, the entrance of the house provided direct access from the street into *taşlık* space which functioned as a transitional, yet private space leading to the rear courtyard. During the mid- to late-twentieth century, the spatial configuration of the courtyard and the interior spaces of the house underwent significant changes as the spaces adjacent to the *taşlık* space were rented to

separate households. This usage effectively transformed *taşlık* into a passageway and the extension of the street. Once a private courtyard, now became bordered by two new structures, arbitrarily constructed, and intertwined with the old (Figure 2, row 4). The spatial integrity of the courtyard has been significantly compromised, resulting in the loss of its original functional and architectural character.

Modest in scale and built to accommodate a smaller family, the inclusion of the third case, a house without a courtyard, into this study is significant due its symbolic role of the transition period. The house was a response to the housing shortage and growing population pressures of Ankara's rapid urbanization on traditional residential neighborhoods as it became the new capital city. It was built through the subdivision from a larger residential lot and constructed on what was formerly a courtyard of a larger house. This case represents a significant shift in early-twentieth century residential usage patterns: A departure from the traditional Ottoman house with a private courtyard to a new traditional house without one occurred and the service functions moved indoors. This exemplifies the need for an architectural transition from inward-facing multi-functional domestic open areas to a more fragmented and perhaps smaller individual residential units shaped by demands due to socio-cultural changes and urban growth. Meanwhile, new housing transitions were occurring in Ankara,¹⁰ along with the changing demographic settlement patterns.¹¹

THE FACE OF THE NEW CAPITAL CITY: THE CONNECTIONS OF STREETS, LOTS, AND BUILDINGS IN ANKARA'S NEW HOUSING (1920s)

The early Republican period marked a significant transformation of Ankara after its designation as the new capital city of Republic of Turkey, marked by urban expansion and new constructions, most notably housing. The new capital city required the implementation of a comprehensive urban development plan, which was designed by the German architect and urban planner Carl Christoph Lörcher (1884–1966).¹² Lörcher's urban development plans had a foundational role in forming a dual structure of the city: the historic core that juxtaposed with the new development zones (Figure 3).

During the 1920s, the old city, *Ulus* (meaning "Nation," to commemorate the new nation-state), had key redevelopment zones.¹³ One major development area was Anafartalar Street, the commercial spine of the old city (Figure 4). During the 1920s, the new residential and commercial buildings emerged along this axis, which had the evolving architectural language and urban ambitions of the new capital city.

Hisarönü neighborhood was another area profoundly impacted by urban transformation (Figure 4).¹⁴ Located at the heart of the old city, this neighborhood was severely damaged by a major fire of 1916 in Ankara.¹⁵ After the fire and during the 1920s, this zone was designated as a new housing zone, prompting the construction of numerous houses and apartment buildings. Despite numerous constructions, the rapid migrations to the capital city quickly overwhelmed the accommodation capacity of the old city. This necessitated a planned southern expansion. In 1925, a comprehensive urban development plan for Yeni Şehir – literally, the "New City" was proposed by Lörcher. This neighborhood was to become the embodiment of the new Republican identity of a modern capital city and thus played a symbolic role (Figures 3, 4).

Upon examination of Ankara's housing typologies¹⁶ of the 1920s, there is an evident presence of traditional timber-frame house construction alongside emerging housing forms. This period witnesses new building techniques, including reinforced concrete structures; stone masonry and concrete hybrid systems combining new and traditional materials; and even Ankara's first steel-frame houses.¹⁷ Perhaps most notable introduction to Ankara's housing typology was the emergence of its first apartment buildings, i.e., multi-story residential structures that represented a new housing model, previously unfamiliar to the local population (Figure 5).

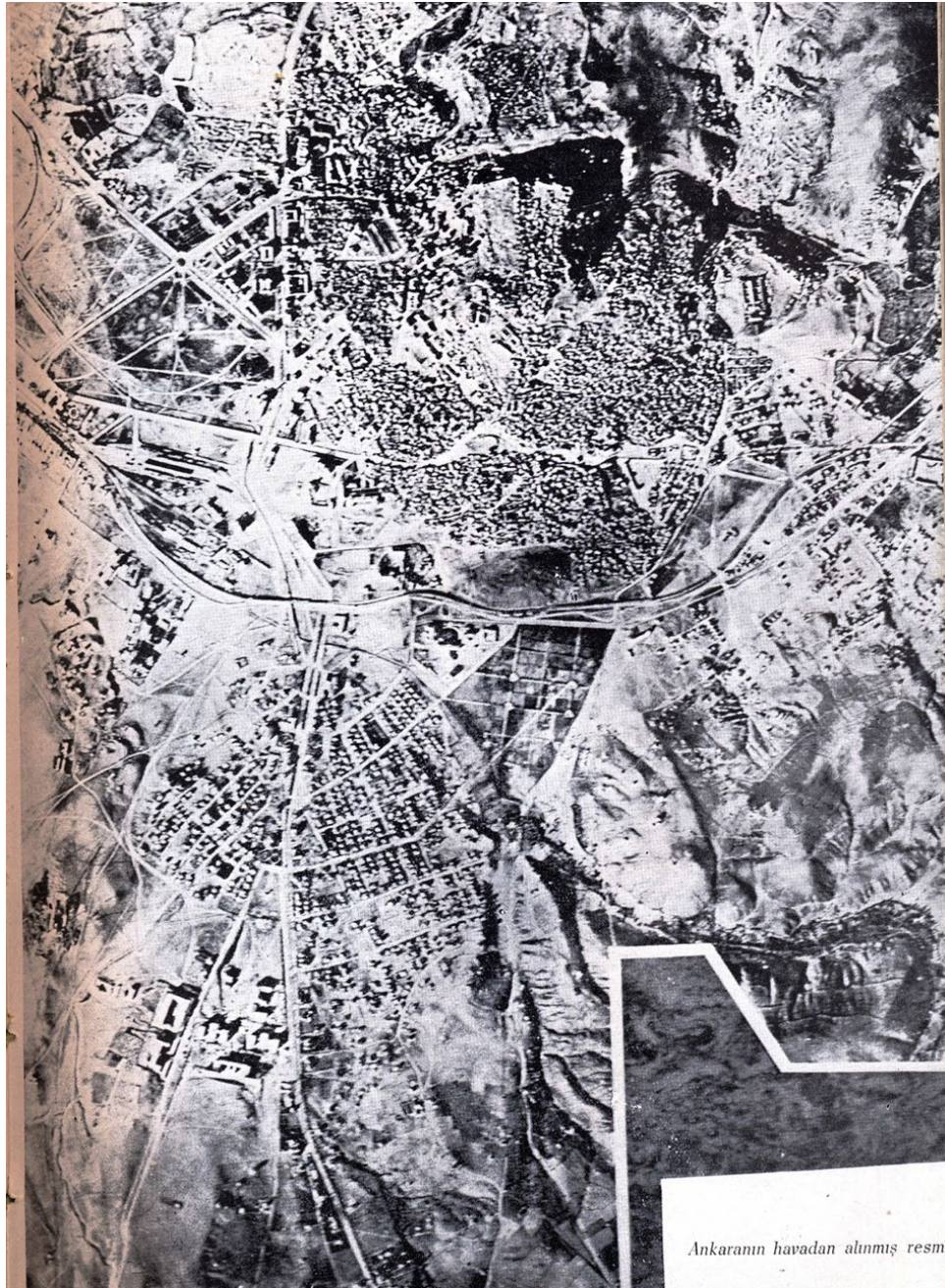


Figure 3. Aerial Photograph of Ankara.

North: Uluş with organic streets and a planned periphery; South: Planned Yeni Şehir with single-family houses, the railways creating a rupture between the 'old' and the 'new'. Source: (Türkkan, 1936).¹⁸



Figure 4. Upper row: The Old City (Ulus), Left – Anafortalar Street, Right – Hisarönü Neighborhood. Lower row: The New City (Yeni Şehir). Source: (VEKAM¹⁹).

1920's residential buildings in Ankara demonstrated a distinct typology based on the spatial relationships between streets-lots and courtyards-houses (Figure 5): (1) Block-lot houses, (a) characterized by a centrally positioned building within the lot, enclosed by a surrounding courtyard; (2) Semi-attached corner lot houses, with one side of the building fronts a street (a) with or (b) without a courtyard; (3) Adjacent lot houses, with houses sharing party walls, often located near commercial zones (a) often accompanied by a small rear courtyard or (b) without a courtyard; and a rare typology (1b) Block-lot inner courtyard houses specific to apartment complexes. The last one exhibits a distinct lot typology of internal courtyards, in some cases, in addition to the external ones. These inner courtyards are not private and foster open communal spaces.

Referred to a block-lot type, the first typology consists of detached houses set within spacious courtyards. A single-family house located north of Ankara's historic city center is a notable example with its positioning in an expansive courtyard, exemplifying the spatial expansion possible, typical of detached lots situated way from the dense commercial core. It was designed to take the best advantage of the site's steep topography, and the courtyard featured a designed incorporation of distinct zones of service activities and social interaction and functional transition between them (Figure 5). In contrast, in areas situated closer to commercial zones, there are smaller, attached houses. Built in an adjoining manner, these houses may have limited or no courtyard space exemplified by Hisarönü neighborhoods' compact houses (Figure 5).

A significant shift in housing and housing typology was marked by the introduction of Ankara's first row apartment buildings constructed during the early Republican period. These introduced new spatial arrangements that illustrated the evolving norms of privacy and a departure from traditional residential layouts (which expand around a central gathering/living space). Featuring small rear courtyards, the apartment flats featured living spaces oriented towards the street, while private spaces such as bedrooms and service spaces of kitchens, bathrooms and lavatories, faced inward, towards the private courtyard. Interestingly, these courtyards embodied Ottoman concepts of privacy and seclusion. However, despite the private character, these courtyards no longer featured a function related to domestic production activities and rather functioned more as ventilation shafts of the service spaces. Moreover, the ground floor spaces of the old city's apartment buildings started to be allocated to commercial uses such as

shops and workplaces. This demonstrated a significant integration of residential and commercial functions.

Another significant housing typology emerged in the form of large apartment complexes with inner courtyards (Figure 5). These complexes accommodated residential units with private spaces of the units facing to the inner courtyard and socialization spaces oriented externally. As notable examples to this typology, architect Mr. Kemalettin's foundation apartment complexes prevail.²⁰ One such, the Second Foundation apartment-complex, was organized around an expansive courtyard offering a social space for residents to gather and interact. This type was a significant departure from traditional courtyard usage, built to serve domestic production activities, to a collective socializing environment. Self-sufficient, these complexes enabled the residents to meet their daily needs without them needing to leave the complex. The street-facing spaces on the ground floor accommodated commercial functions such as shops, restaurants and offices in line with the historic center's character of being a vibrant commercial hub. The spatial circulation inside the building also encouraged socialization: The main vertical circulation axes within the building featuring halls eased and encouraged neighborly interactions. Notably, a theater was integrated into the courtyard space, accentuating the multi-functional socialization character of this "inner" courtyard.

Meanwhile, a new and planned settlement developed in Yeni Şehir's (New City) unsettled lands. This settlement was formed predominantly of single-family houses within block-lots, surrounded by expansive courtyards with gardens (Figures 4, 5). These houses were constructed in rows, alongside wide streets, exemplifying the garden city concept,²¹ which originated in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century for a middle- or working-class family.²² The courtyards of the new city's houses were not the private, concealed, courtyards of daily domestic production activities, but were open spaces facilitating interactions and social gatherings. The garden areas of these courtyards also shifted away from food cultivation toward recreational functions such as spaces of exercise and rest in fresh air and sun, promoting healthy living.

FAMILY RESTRUCTURED; GENDER ROLES RESHAPED; COURTYARD RECONFIGURED

These transformations in housing and use of courtyards were closely intertwined with broader socio-political shifts in family structures, daily life, understanding of hygiene and health, and gender roles in the early Republican era. The courtyards were spaces of domestic privacy and key sites of household-based production in the late Ottoman period, such as: food preparation, *sof* weaving, winemaking, and other economic domestic activities. These were typically under the management of women within the extended family structure and the courtyards functioned as the spatial backbone of the self-sufficiency of the multi-generational household.

After the Republican period, the production-oriented courtyards slowly began to change function. New ideas of hygiene and health encouraged the relocation of service functions indoors, with separate kitchens and bathrooms, eased by new urban infrastructures and/or retrofitting of urban installations. This was also a reflection of a larger economic and social shift. The housing transformed from inward-facing, private yet multifunctional domestic layouts to smaller, compartmentalized single-family units, mirroring the relocation of production to the external urban life, to workplaces, factories, and workshops. More than simply a matter of architectural convenience; these changes also mirrored the profound changes in women's roles and the family organization. Women increasingly succeeded in education and entered the workforce, and thus their daily routines extended beyond the home. This resulted in the loss in the centrality of domestic production and the new housing responded by eliminating spaces for daily production activities in courtyards.

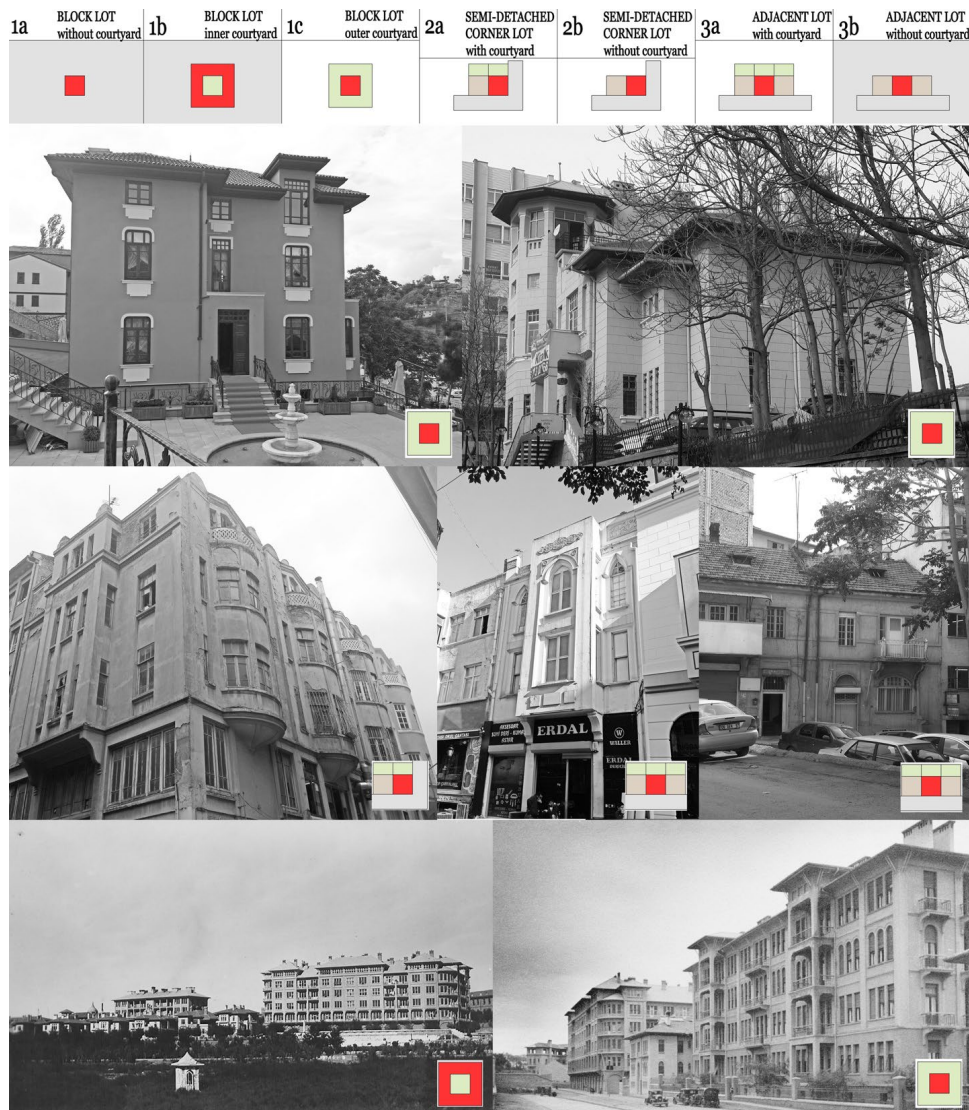


Figure 5. Top row: Courtyard typologies in 1920s Ankara. Second row: Single-family houses with large courtyards, Left – Old City periphery; Right – New City. Third row: Houses with private rear courtyards, Old City, Left – row-apartment blocks; Right – single-family houses. Fourth row: Apartment complexes with expansive (inner) courtyards (one with a theater hall), Old City periphery. Source(s): Upper three rows: © Author. Fourth row: (VEKAM²³).

The new housing model of the 1920s and 1930s was more compatible with this social transformation from the extended Ottoman household to the Republican nuclear family. The housing typologies displayed characteristics of subdivided lots and smaller household units in planned districts. In line with the modernization ideals of the Republic, the new residential neighborhoods also included shared or semi-public exterior areas replacing the private service-oriented courtyards, encouraging social interaction.

The Republic’s vision on public life, visibility of community and social participation were also reflected in the new housing production. In apartment complexes, the courtyard became a communal space, marking a mixed-gender leisure venues which reflect a broader cultural transformation. The new ideals of healthy living were not limited to the relocation of service spaces indoors; apartment complexes were also equipped with shared amenities, including common terraces and laundry rooms situated on the attic floor, as well as childcare facilities designed to support working mothers. In Yeni Şehir, the courtyard

was reimagined as a space of evening gatherings, children’s play, and open-air activities, all replacing the labored domestic tasks. Symbolizing the Republic’s modern, outward-facing identity, the house transformed from an isolated economic unit and became part of an interconnected urban and social system.²⁴

The architectural transformation of courtyards of the capital city was not merely a matter of changing form; rather it embodied the lived realities of a society in transition, reshaping gender roles, and redefining family structures.²⁵

CONCLUSION: TURNING INWARD OUTWARD IN RECONFIGURING THE COURTYARD

This study illustrated a significant shift in the role of domestic courtyards and their spatial configuration in Ankara’s evolving urban fabric form from the late Ottoman era to the early Republican period. The courtyards of the new housing typologies transformed from the traditional housing’s enclosed and hidden private space to an open, semi-public social space, facilitating leisure, exercise and interaction, aligned with the modernization and European garden city ideals. This transformation reflects broader sociocultural changes emphasizing the new Turkish identity.²⁶

The increasing population and the rapid urbanization revealed its pressures not long after these initial optimistic beginnings. High-rise apartment blocks and wide boulevards significantly harmed and altered the fabric of historic neighborhoods. In most cases, the original courtyards of historic traditional houses were altered, some subdivided, some gradually filled with annexes built by landlords to accommodate more tenants. Disputes over land ownership have, in some cases, led to the partial construction of high-rise buildings on the courtyards of historic houses, resulting in spatial incongruities and urban anomalies within the historic fabric. The changing courtyard thus remains both a record and a symbol of Ankara’s twentieth-century historical shifts and transformation.

NOTES

¹ This study builds upon the author's master's and doctoral research, with an extended emphasis on courtyards. See: Deniz Avcı, *Upgrading the Old: The Adaptation of Traditional Residential Buildings to Contemporary Life* (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2012); Deniz Avcı Hosanlı, *Housing the Modern Nation: The Transformation of Residential Architecture of Ankara during the 1920s* (PhD diss., Middle East Technical University, 2018). The focus on courtyards was subsequently elaborated and presented in a seminar: Deniz Avcı, "Ankara'da Geç Osmanlı ve Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Konut Üretiminde Avlu Kullanımı ve Dönüşümleri [Courtyard Use and Transformations in Late Ottoman and Early Republican Housing Production in Ankara]", MSMB Mimarhane Seminar, Ulucanlar Prison Museum, Printing Depot Conference Hall, Ankara, October 5, 2019.

² Widely employed in twentieth-century scholarship by Turkish Republican-era architects and historians such as Sedad Hakkı Eldem, Doğan Kuban, Cengiz Bektaş, Eyüp Kömürçüoğlu, and Önder Küçükerman, the term "Turkish house" has recently been reconsidered, as these residential typologies were not exclusive to Ottoman Turks but were shared by diverse communities across the Ottoman Empire. Contemporary scholarship favors more geographically specific terminology, such as "Anatolian house," or, for city-specific examples, "Ankara house." The most notable case is the Safranbolu town (city of Karabük) with its well-preserved traditional houses. See: Sedad Hakkı Eldem, *Türk Evi: Osmanlı Dönemi [Turkish Houses: Ottoman Period]* (İstanbul: Güzel Sanatlar Matbaası A.Ş., 1984); Doğan Kuban, *The Turkish Hayat House* (İstanbul: T.C. Ziraat Bankası Yayınları, 1995); Cengiz Bektaş, *Türk Evi [Turkish House]* (İstanbul: YEM Yayın, 2013); Eyüp Kömürçüoğlu, *Ankara Evleri [Ankara Houses]* (İstanbul: İstanbul Matbaacılık T.A.O., 1950); Önder Küçükerman, *Turkish House: In Search of Spatial Identity* (İstanbul: Apa Ofset Basımevi Sanayi ve Ticaret A.Ş., 1985).

³ Features such as *dibehtaşı* (a grinding stone for processing wheat), *tandır* (fixed clay ovens), and in-ground water jars reflect a practical and resourceful approach to household spatial organization. See Eyüp Kömürçüoğlu, *Ankara Evleri [Ankara Houses]* (İstanbul: İstanbul Matbaacılık T.A.O., 1950).

⁴ Eldem envisioned the houses with expanse spatial arrangements in tranquil village settings, emphasizing connections with nature. Sedad Hakkı Eldem, "Yerli Mimariye Doğru [Towards a Regional Architecture]," *Arkitekt*, nos. 3-4(111-112) (1940): 69–74; Sedad Hakkı Eldem, "Evlerimizin İçi [Interiors of Our Houses]," *Mimar*, no. 7 (1931): 233–36.

⁵ It is also noteworthy that Eldem's vision emerged after the 1940s, a period marked by national aspirations and a renewed interest in traditional architectural styles. In contrast, the 1920s-1930s in Turkey were characterized by a stronger orientation toward Western modernist housing, reflecting the Republic's broader goals of modernization and alignment with international architectural trends.

⁶ The spatial organization of Ottoman urban areas reflected ethnic and religious diversity, demonstrating a more inclusive pattern of coexistence. For example, while this particular neighborhood was predominantly Jewish, it also accommodated Turkish Muslim families. The multi-ethnic character of civic life was evident in the built environment, with a synagogue and a mosque coexisting within the same neighborhood, alongside schools serving Jewish, Greek, and Muslim students. This exemplifies the Ottoman urban tradition, where residential areas were typically developed without strict socio-economic segregation. For more info, see Avcı, "Upgrading the Old: The Adaptation of Traditional Residential Buildings to the Contemporary Life"; Deniz Avcı Hosanlı and A. Güliz Bilgin Altınöz, "Ankara İstiklal (Yahudi) Mahallesi: Tarihi, Dokusu ve Konutları [İstiklal (Jewish) Quarter in Ankara: History, Tissue and Houses]," *TÜBA-KED - Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi Kültür Envanteri Dergisi [Turkish Academy of Sciences Journal of Cultural Inventory]*, no. 14 (2016): 71–104.

⁷ Located in the best-preserved section of the neighborhood, these houses remained largely unaffected by surrounding high-rise developments and major boulevard construction, allowing for a representative understanding of the area's residential diversity and spatial transformation. Selection criteria included typological characteristics, physical scale, and relevance to various family structures.

⁸ Modified over time, the small service courtyard transformed into a ventilation shaft with the windows of the service spaces (kitchens and bathrooms) opening onto it.

⁹ There are some traces of this bath on the upper floors, most notably a *kurna* (a traditional basin), repurposed to be used as a sink on the upper floor lavatory.

¹⁰ Deniz Avcı Hosanlı, "Housing in Transition: The First Apartments of the New Capital City, Ankara," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 36, no. 3 (2021): 1141–63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-020-09799-5>.

¹¹ Deniz Avcı Hosanlı and T. Elvan Altan, "Population Movements, and Settlement in the New Capital City: Spatial and Social Transformation of Ankara during the 1920s," in *Settlements and Displacement in Turkey: Struggle and Rejuvenation*, ed. Özlem Erdoğan Erkarıslan and Ela Alanyalı Aral (London: Routledge, 2023), 17–43.

¹² Ali Cengizkan, *Ankara'nın İlk Planı: 1924-25 Lörcher Planı [Ankara's First Plan: The Lörcher Plan of 1924-25]* (Ankara: Ankara Enstitüsü Vakfı, 2004).

¹³ According to the new plans, Station Street, a key passage linking the railway station to Ulus, was one of the first streets to embody the modern identity of the capital city and one of the earliest areas to undergo redevelopment and retrofitting. It was widened, repaved with stone, enhanced with tree-lined sidewalks and surrounding gardens and implemented with modern infrastructural systems such as drainage.

¹⁴ Deniz Avcı Hosanlı, "1920'lerin Ankara'sından Bir Mahallenin ve Konutlarının Anlattıkları [Narrative of a Neighborhood and Its Housing from the 1920s' Ankara]," *İdealkent - Kent Araştırmaları Dergisi (Journal of Urban Studies)* 11, no. 31 (2020): 1517–48, <https://doi.org/10.31198/idealkent.795488>.

¹⁵ Taylan Esin and Zeliha Etöz, *1916 Ankara Yangını: Felaketin Mantiği [The 1916 Ankara Fire: The Logic of Disaster]* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2015).

¹⁶ For more on Ankara's early republican housing, see Yıldırım Yavuz, "1923-1928 Ankara'sında Konut Sorunu ve Konut Gelişmesi [1923-1928 Housing Problems and Housing Development in Ankara]," in *Tarih İçinde Ankara*, ed. Ayşıl Tükel Yavuz (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 2000), 233–53; Gülsüm Nalbantoğlu, "1928-1946 Döneminde Ankara'da Yapılan Konutların Mimari Değerlendirilmesi [Architectural Evaluation of Residential Buildings Constructed in Ankara between 1928 and 1946]," in *Tarih İçinde Ankara*, ed. Ayşıl Tükel Yavuz (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 2000), 253–70; Ali Cengizkan and N. Müge Cengizkan, eds., *Bir Şehir Kurmak: Ankara 1923-1933 [Building a City: Ankara 1923-1933]* (Ankara: Koç Üniversitesi VEKAM, 2019); Avcı Hosanlı, "Housing the Modern Nation: The Transformation of Residential Architecture of Ankara during the 1920s"; İnci Aslanoğlu, *Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Mimarlığı (1923-1938) [Early Republican Period Architecture (1923-1938)]* (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2010). For more information on Ankara's republican era housing, see Nuray Bayraktar, ed., *Sivil Mimari Bellek Ankara 1930-1980 [Civil Architectural Memory Ankara 1930-1980]* (Ankara: Koç Üniversitesi VEKAM, 2017).

¹⁷ While such construction technologies were not new to Istanbul by the late nineteenth century, their implementation in Anatolian cities occurred predominantly in the early Republican era.

¹⁸ Halit Ziya Türkkan, "Tayyare Fotoğrafı İle Harita Yapmak [Creating a Map Using Aerial Photography]," *Belediyeler Dergisi* 2, no. 14 (1936): 28–38.

¹⁹ VEKAM *Library and Archive, Ankara Photograph, Postcard, and Engraving Collection, Inventory no(s): 2498, 0938, 1890, 2948_1*.

²⁰ Constructed between 1925 and 1928, the first foundation apartment complex offered modest residential units suitable for smaller families or single occupants, whereas the second was designed to provide larger, more luxurious units. Although all of Mr. Kemalettin's apartment complexes were intended to include spacious central courtyards, this was realized in only one instance. See, Aslanoğlu, *Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Mimarlığı (1923-1938) [Early Republican Period Architecture (1923-1938)]*; Metin Sözen, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Mimarisi [Republican-Era Turkish Architecture]* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1996); Metin Sözen, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Mimarlığı [Republican-Era Turkish Architecture]* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1984).

²¹ Esra Akcan, *Çeviride Modern Olan: Şehir ve Konutta Türk-Alman İlişkileri [Modernity in Translation: German-Turkish Relations in Urbanism and Housing]* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009); Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernizm ve Ulusun İnşası: Erken Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Mimari Kültür [Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic]*, 3 (2012) (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2002); Sibel Bozdoğan, "Modern Yaşamak: Erken Cumhuriyet Kültüründe Kübik Ev [Modern Living: Cubic Houses in Early Republican Culture]," in *Tarihten Günümüze Anadolu'da Konut ve Yerleşme*, ed. Yıldız Sey (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı İşbirliği, 1996), 313–28.

²² This housing concept was likely reinforced in Ankara by German architects and urban planners, including Carl Christoph Lörcher (1884–1966) and Hermann Jansen (1869–1945), who designed the city's first two urban development plans. In Ankara, however, the translation of the social house adopted a more luxurious, villa-type form. For more information on Ankara's urban development plans, see Mehmet Sarıoğlu, *"Ankara" Bir Modernleşme Öyküsü (1919-1945) ["Ankara" a Story of Modernization (1919-1945)]* (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, 2001); Aykut Kansu, "Jansen'in Ankarası İçin Örnek Bir Bahçe-Şehir - Ya Da Siedlung: 'Bahçeli Evler Yapı Kooperatifi', 1934-1939 [Jansen's Model Garden City for Ankara – or Siedlung: 'Garden House Building Cooperative', 1934-1939]," in *Cumhuriyet'in Ütopyası: Ankara*, ed. Funda Şenol-Cantek (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Yayını, 2012), 193–214; Gönül Tankut, "Jansen Planı Uygulama Sorunları ve Cumhuriyet Demokrasisinin Kent Planına Yaklaşımı [Problems with Implementing the Jansen Plan and the Republican

Democracy's Approach to Urban Planning],” in *Tarih İçinde Ankara*, ed. Ayşıl Tükel Yavuz (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 2000), 301–16.

²³ VEKAM Library and Archive, Ankara Photograph, Postcard, and Engraving Collection, Inventory no(s): 1894_1, ALB_05_55.

²⁴ Women's increased presence in public life, education and professions was the cause and consequence of this spatiality.

²⁵ Despite representing idealized Republican aspirations; in practice, the social transformations brought about by reforms took decades.

²⁵ The integration of theaters as a new social and cultural amenity into apartment complexes was not an arbitrary decision, but rather an architectural innovation to redefine communal spaces in housing. Symbolizing the Republican ideals and urban aspirations, the new housing blended residential, commercial and cultural functions.

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‘NOTHING IS ABSENT WHOSE PRESENCE IS TO BE DESIRED’: SYRIAN ANTIOCH AS A LIVABLE MEDITERRANEAN CITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY¹

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INTRODUCTION

Modern studies of Roman urbanism tend to focus on discrete urban structures and amenities and how they constitute particular narratives of the ancient city’s built environment or on the theories and practices of city planning and administration.² Rarely does the livability of an ancient city, either as an *emic* or an *etic* concept, appear as one of the main questions under investigation. This is in no small measure due to the fact that most Greek and Latin literary sources that attest to urban infrastructure dwell on themes of civic pride and greatness rather than livability. It is indeed quite unusual for urban livability to be given consideration in civic discourses and even more so as one of the cited reasons for a city’s claim to greatness. My paper examines one such exceptional example, Libanius’ *Oration* 11, a late fourth-century encomium that praises the famous orator’s native city of Antioch (modern Antakya in southeast Türkiye), to examine the extent to which the author’s ideas about how and why Antiochenes lived good lives approximated modern concepts of urban livability.³

Antioch: Contexts and Settings

Greek and Roman cities and their inhabitants drew ‘surplus resources’ from their hinterlands to support a sophisticated urban way of life. Cities also thus became stages upon which the principally landowning elite performed their identities as givers of gifts to their fellow citizens in exchange for recognition and support. This tradition of Mediterranean civic evergetism is well studied by Paul Veyne and others.⁴ Overtime, such elite munificence resulted in cities sharing many common architectural features as both individuals and civic communities competed with each other to embellish their cities and to make them as beautiful as possible in terms of highly visible features such as temples, marketplaces, colonnaded arcades or stoas, theatres and other entertainment buildings, gynmasia, aqueducts and fountains. In the words of Aelius Aristides, a Greek intellectual who rose high in the Roman order, Greek poleis transformed themselves into contestants in an empire-wide beauty pageant after the *pax romana* made wars between Hellenic city-states obsolete as a form of competition: ‘All the other sources of contentions have died out in the cities, but this single rivalry holds all of them, how each will appear as fair and charming as possible’.⁵

The outcome of this pageant is palpably visible in the exquisitely-adorned cities of the Antonine (early second century) period, often considered a ‘Golden Age’ of the Roman world, when ‘Everything is full of gymnasiums, fountains, gateways, temples, handicrafts, and schools. And it can said in medical terms

that the inhabited world was, as it were, ill at the start and has now recovered'.⁶ During this time, '[c]ities gleam with radiance and charm, and the whole earth has been beautified like a garden.'

Aristides and other intellectuals of the Greek Second Sophistic followed rhetorical formulae when composing different kinds of speeches.⁷ Menander Rhetor's handbook offers itself as a template for how to praise a city by listing the main components of a such a civic encomium that amounts to boasts about its greatness and claims to consideration, with either explicit or implicit comparisons to other cities.⁸ Even as Libanius' oration follows in this tradition, it offers a fresh line of argument about Antioch's livability as its special virtue.⁹ As a native of the city, Libanius' speech was motivated not only by his professional pride to showcase his mastery of the art of civic panegyric but by his civic patriotism.¹⁰ He begins by suggesting that a livable city is a lovable city and vice versa. To praise a city is akin to showing devotion to one's mother (11.1), thus emphasising the importance of a city's ability to attractive affective emotions of intimacy, love and loyalty. He suggests that his audience often experienced the city and the good life it provided but but do not appreciate what made it possible inn the first. His speech therefore builds a case for Antioch's lovability and suggest that it amounts to a central argument that a reader should focus on Antioch's livability as a prime factor.

For the sophist, a livable city is a lovable city and vice versa. To praise his native city is likened to showing one's devotion to one's own mother, such was the affective link connecting the speaker and his beloved Antioch (11.1). He expresses concern that his contemporary audience, whether they be natives of the city or not, might not appreciate how the city came to enjoy its present good fortune. His speech therefore offers a reasonably exhaustive rehearsal of the many reasons for Antioch's status as a successful city. First, Libanius begins with the land and its climate as reasons why Antioch enjoyed all the conditions for fostering human prosperity and happiness. Then he discusses the city's foundation and history since he believes that even events from a remote past—Antioch was more than six centuries old by his time—contribute to its present status. The orator then goes on to enumerate the city's urban amenities and how the people crafted felicitous urban lives forth for themselves by living harmoniously with each other and with their environment.

Libanius begins with geography and environment as reasons why Antioch enjoyed the conditions for supporting human prosperity and happiness. He claims that the city was founded at a divinely favoured location and is rich with the gifts of nature. Greek scientific writers ascribe to a belief in the four humours as constituents in the human body and the corresponding notion that health results when they are in harmonious proportion to each other and that, on the other hand, illnesses arise where they are out of balance.¹¹ The Hippocratic medical treatise *Airs Waters Places* builds on this belief to analyse how geographical locations have an impact on individual human health as well as on human societies.¹² Meanwhile, according to the Greek scheme of the continents, people in Europe experienced a harsh environment, variable climate so that the people remain brave since they had to endure challenges but are overall stupid.¹³ Those in Asia lived with more constant and good weather that allows more everything to grow easily, so that the people live well, are clever but suffer from cowardice since they are too smart to fight for others. The Greeks occupying the centre enjoy the best of both, at least according to the philosopher Aristotle.¹⁴

As judged by these criteria, Antioch's location was excellently chosen even if it is not at the exact centre of the world (which ancient Greeks identified with Delphi in central Greece). The city still enjoyed a moderate climate in terms of the nature of the wind patterns, rainfall, and how they affected plants, animals and humans in different seasons of the year. The Zephyr or west wind is said to love 'the whole city, with undying love; and restraining himself in the winter because he knows that if he comes then he will grieve us, he arrives with the summer, to check the heat'(11.223). Seasons are distinct but seasonal changes are marked by 'mildness and harmlessness'. No season should cause people to be 'bathed in sweat and to spend their time struggling about the springs, while the other compels them to

spend their time in bed like sick folk, shut in by the snow' (11.32). There, winters are mild and winter 'rain refills the earth's store of water while summers bring heat to speed the growth of crops but are moderated by breezes so as not to cause distress to people.' The overall effect is that, Antiochenes spent their time freely and happily mixing with each other outdoors and under the cover of colonnaded walkways through all the seasons.

Libanius then turns to the city's foundation and history. After Antioch was founded more than 700 earlier, it 'indeed did not at once become large and populous' (11.69) even as it only came into its full glory later on when 'the timing was right'. Libanius' invocation of the notion of *kairos*, opportune moment, suggests that the gods have taken an especial shine to Antioch, as indeed the aetiological story that god Apollo wooed Daphne at the site of one of Antioch's suburb, heretofore named Daphne, also reinforces. This use of traditional myths in story-telling and place-making reified Antioch as a place with a significant deep past, traces of which remained visible here and there in the landscape. It added shaped people's affective associations with their community and encouraged a sense of pride in their homeland.

Yet the suggestion that Antioch was beloved of the gods may appear to be undercut by the propensity of the city for earthquakes. Antioch stood along the seismically active East Anatolian Fault. The 2023 earthquake centred in Gaziantep devastated large swathes of Türkiye while notable earthquakes devastated Antioch during the first, second, and third centuries.¹⁵ Libanius takes note of the destruction caused by previous earthquakes by claiming that (11.228), 'the city would have been four times the size it now is, if it had not already been stricken on three occasions'. He also does not brush over the earthquakes but claims that the city is still dear to the gods because it kept rising from the ashes of destruction, rebuilt each time thanks to the dedication of its citizens and the love that Roman emperors had for the city. He thus presents the notion that is more important for ensuring that help would arrive following disasters than to try to find an ideal risk-free location for one's 'lovable city'. Finally, even Antioch's seismic history could act as an asset in that it, somewhat ironically, can bolster the city's sense of heritage or historical tradition. Ancient cities that experienced earthquakes routinely built on top of collapsed stone buildings and reused material from destroyed structures in new constructions. This process contributed to a visible sedimentation of the city's human past and reminded later inhabitants that they were living within a historic city with a rich heritage (11.229).

Antioch as a Green (Biophilic) and Blue City

Next Libanius enumerates the city's urban amenities and how the people crafted felicitous urban lives for themselves by living harmoniously with their environment and with each other. This is echoed by the recent advocacy for urban environments that foster deep connections between people and 'nature', such as articulated by Timothy Beatley in his seminal *Biophilic Cities*.¹⁶ The latter argues that implementing biophilic principles in urban design brings benefits in the form of improved mental health for inhabitants and in terms of biodiversity and climate adaptation. At first sight Antioch may not appear to qualify as a biophilic city. As a built environment, it is framed by a rectilinear Hippodamian (rectangular) grid beloved by Greek urban planners. Also, edifices such a Hippodrome and a royal palace dominated the city. To many, Antioch appeared as a dynamic urban construction site that is, quote, 'always filled with building activity; some buildings are being torn down, some are half completed, and for still others the foundations have just been laid or are being excavated'(11.227).

Yet the city was nevertheless not overbuilt, especially as compared to late ancient Rome and Alexandria. Also, perhaps more importantly, its built space adapted to the natural landscape rather than totally transforming it through civil engineering.¹⁷ Roads and side streets follow the gentle slopes of the mountainsides and the river with the result that, according to Libanius, the people of Antioch 'have the sources of every happiness, springs, plants, gardens, breezes, flowers, the songs of birds, and the

enjoyment of spring earlier than the others have it’ (11.197). In these respects, Antioch can be said to be embodying biophilic principles in that it ‘learns from nature and emulates natural systems, incorporates natural forms and images into its buildings and cityscapes, and designs and plans with nature’.¹⁸



Figure 1. *Daphne near Antioch* by Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598)

(https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Ortelius_Daphne_Antioch.jpg&oldid=441920860)

Another aspect of a biophilic city is the room given to diverse green spaces within it and especially surrounding the city. There was a tendency to encroach on green spaces there to be sure, as Libanius notes: ‘Everywhere are the cries of those urging on the workmen, and ground that last year was planted with vegetables is built upon this year.’ Even so, green spaces remained much in evidence both within the city and in the surrounding valleys through which many fast-flowing streams fed by fresh mountain springs flowed.

Modern urban theorists of ‘Blue Urbanism’ have shed light on the relation between the existence of extensive water features in a community and the health and well-being, including mental well-being of its inhabitants.¹⁹ The importance and centrality of Antioch’s waterscape to its livability was recognised even in antiquity.²⁰ Libanius claims that the city was superior to other similarly located communities because of the ready accessibility of sweet spring waters. Set in the middle of the Amuq Valley, Antioch’s drinking water came from springs fed by the karsts overhanging the plateau of the suburb of Daphne, about 6 km south of the city centre (11.28). Daphne remained a favourite retreat of the urban population. Its wooded and well-watered surroundings was associated with health, bathing, festivities and pleasure thus well embodying key biophilic principles (11.239)(Fig. 1).²¹ Antioch’s plentiful water supply, according to Libanius, ensured open access ‘since everyone has water flowing within his house, the public fountains flow merely for display’ (11.247). As such there was no privatisation or gated treatment of public goods (see below on Antioch as a just city).²²

Waterfronts in particular have been the focus of attention for some urban theorist and one can readily apply this aspect of ‘Blue Urbanism’ to consider the case of Antioch.²³ The city relied on the port of

Seleucia Pieria, 40km down river, as its maritime gateway to the Mediterranean. Although not on the sea, it was built along a major (if not a particularly wide) river and enjoyed many water features fed by springs from the surrounding hills and mountains. Indeed Greeks and Roman writers, including the philosopher Plato, often advocated for locating cities some distance away from the sea.²⁴ According to Libanius, the sea brings tides and flooding, noisiness of the port as sailors on ships near the port or on shore, and the bad general behaviour of sailors. In port, quote, ‘things which have the power to ruin and destroy the morals of a city’ (11.38). The city of Alexandria, Antioch’s rival, was known for its rowdy sailors and journeymen, many of whom participated in urban riots for which it was well known in antiquity.²⁵ So when Libanius claims Antioch’s situation allowed it to ‘enjoy the good things which come from the sea’ without suffering the negatives (Or. 11.39), he is making a comparison his audience would have immediately recognised.

Antioch as a Just City

Susan Fainstein has argued that socio-economic equity stands as a core criterion for determining livability.²⁶ Ancient Greek civic communities were typically fractured along socio-economic class and civil strife between rich and poor.²⁷ The coming of the Roman Peace sadly merely frozen this civil strife as the Romans generally protected the local elites from insurrection from below.²⁸ Libanius does not deny wealth inequality as a factor in Antioch but suggests that richer citizens eagerly used their wealth to pay for public projects out of a sense of duty to the community they loved (11.134): ‘a wealthy man would be more ashamed of fleeing a liturgy (a wealth-indexed obligatory payment for public goods) than he would be of diminishing his property through his liturgies’ (11.135). In short, they should play constructive roles as agents of Antioch’s urban livability.²⁹

Such an idea is echoed by Libanius’ emphasis on the capacity of Antiochenes to live peaceably with each other under just (as opposed to equal) conditions as a key feature of the city’s livability (11.151). He suggests that, in Antioch, the paternalistic care that richer citizens showed towards their poorer fellows sustained a hierarchical yet harmonious society, quote, ‘with us, the commons emulates the conduct of children toward their parents, and the senate emulates the conduct of fathers toward the commons’ (11.152). This civic ideology may remind us of Lee Kwan Yew’s Singapore in a twentieth-century context, for example.³⁰ The overarching idea is that, in a lovable and livable city, there needs to be a high degree of social trust between the rich and poor that in turn has to be secured through upon demonstrated goodwill and the generous sharing out of material benefits.³¹ Civic munificence remained the ruling ideology of many ancient Mediterranean communities whereby the plutocratic elite contributed to public infrastructure by sponsoring buildings and cultural programmes even to the point of bankrupting themselves as was notably happening during Libanius’ time (11.135).³²

On the other hand, for this system to function well, the common people not only had to reward the rich’s civic patriotism with appropriate recognition and public rewards such as honorary statues;³³ it also had to behave responsibly and well. Libanius points to stable families and a high degree of home ownership as desirable factors since they help blur the divide between the rich and poor and incline citizens to behave in a more orderly and dignified manner in their speech, dress and public conduct.³⁴ The people would thereby be empowered to live orderly and beautiful lives that include, inter alia, the ability to show compassion towards others, even strangers. According to Libanius, Antiochenes did not periodically drive out foreigners (11.174), as the Romans in the city of Rome were reputed to do, but rather made them feel welcome and at home.

Antioch as a Dynamic, Sociable and Convenient City

Libanius' Antioch was a city renowned for its higher education, vibrant dynamic culture, forms of public entertainment and widespread availability of good shopping. Ambitious young men came from elsewhere the city to receive advanced education in Greek literature and oratory, the crowning glory of civilisation according to our author the professional rhetor (11.270).³⁵ In addition, the city was a place of opportunity where the talented and eager could unfailingly earn fame and wealth. Meanwhile, for people with more mundane life goals and popular tastes, it offered ready access to Roman urban public entertainments such as chariot races and stage shows without the negative effects, at least so Libanius claims, of partisan fan violence that was endemic in other cities.³⁶

Even the city's built environment helped ensure that it remain a culturally dynamic city. Libanius notes that other bad weather and the lack of covered walkways in other cities often exacerbated social exclusion and inequality (11.215). But this is not the case in Antioch where the good weather year round and the existence of a networks of stoas facilitated 'meetings and mixings with other people' throughout the year. Public buildings such as temples and baths and private ones such as individual house are well connected via the stoas (covered colonnaded walkways) and people living every quarter of the city enjoy ready access to amenities they require nearby (11.212). Vibrant neighbourhoods existed.³⁷ Shops could be found not only in designated marketplaces but throughout all the residential neighbourhoods and were bustling.³⁸ This feature echoes not only the modern notion of a 'fifteen minute' city but also closely follows the ideas behind the design of a 'caring city' built around diversity and accessibility.³⁹ Meanwhile, as a cosmopolis and an important western terminus of the ancient Eurasian silk routes, Antioch had ready access to rare and precious goods from faraway places.⁴⁰ They catered to all residents regarding of status or wealth as 'the goods satisfy and meet all taste allowing the rich to consume as they wished and the poor to meet their own needs'. Libanius is keen to emphasise how this enhances even the poorer Antiochenes' enjoyment of life, quote, 'The finest thing of all is that with its care it shelters poverty in many ways, and does not merely grant the means of getting a bare existence, but adds the means of doing so enjoyably'.

CONCLUSION

Greek and Roman authors habitually invoke metrics of greatness when they appraise cities adducing reasons why their subjects possessed the most beautiful, the largest, the best monuments and structures and such. Libanius' praise of Antioch does not ignore these metrics but he tends to direct his audience's attention more to themes related to livability. For him, Antioch's livability did not arise from a single act at the time of its foundation or in subsequent years but was the fortuitous result of multiple, accretive factors: a moderate while variable climate, a favourable setting in a well-watered green valley not far from the sea, and a core of privileged urban inhabitants that could commandeer sufficient resources to develop the city and indeed collaborated with each other to make the city more beautiful and livable for everyone.

Libanius ultimately underscores how livability is as much about the urban community's sense of belongingness and their mutual trust and belief in a shared future as it is about the presence or absence of a basket of tangible urban amenities and material goods. His maxim that 'Nothing is absent whose presence is to be desired' (11.20) has to be understood in the sense that, thanks to the reciprocal relations between rich and poor, Antioch possesses everything it needs to prosper, in measure. Ultimately, Antioch's livability, per Libanius, stems from its adherence to the Delphic axiom of 'Nothing too much (Μηδὲν ἄγαν)' by successfully balancing the competing claims of nature and urbanity, individual wealth and common welfare, tradition and innovation.⁴¹

NOTES

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² On the former, see William Hutton, *Describing Greece: Landscape and Literature in the Periegesis of Pausanias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 127-74; regarding the latter, see O.F. Robinson, *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration* (London: Routledge, 1992).

³ References to this speech by Libanius in text and footnotes are henceforth in the form of chapter and line number, e.g., 11.50. English translations in text are from Glanville Downey, 'Libanius. In Praise of Antioch (Oration XI)', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 103, no. 5 (1959): 652–86. For another English translation, see *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters*, trans. A.F. Norman, Loeb Classical Library 478 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 2:420-517 (*Antiochikos*) and *Antioch as a Centre of Hellenic Culture as Observed by Libanius*, trans. A.F. Norman, Translated Texts for Historians 34 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000). The Greek text is in Richard Foerster, ed. *Libanii Opera*. 12 vols. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903–27), Vol. 1, fasc. 2, *Orationes VI–XI*.

⁴ Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Allen Lane, 1990). French original: Paul Veyne, *Le Pain et le Cirque: Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976).

⁵ Aelius Aristides, *Oration On Rome 97*, in *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works*, trans. Charles A. Behr, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2:94-95. On this speech, see James H. Oliver, *The Ruling Power: A Study of the Roman Empire in the Second Century after Christ through the Roman Oration of Aelius Aristides* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953) and Laurent Pernot, 'Aelius Aristides and Rome', in *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods*, ed. William V. Harris and Brooke Holmes (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 175–202.

⁶ Aelius Aristides, *Oration On Rome 97*, in *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works*, trans. Charles A. Behr, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2:95. Roman intervention protected the local civic elite from potential unrests from the bottom, see Benjamin Gray, *Stasis and Stability: Exile, the Polis, and Political Thought, c. 404–146 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 270–305.

⁷ See Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47–82 (on civic identity) and 83–120 (on education).

⁸ On Menander Rhetor (late third century) on epideictic speeches and civic encomia in particular, see in D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson (eds. and trans.), *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 76-95. The main content topics include an introduction, the origins or foundation of the city, the location of the city, the people, the city's achievements, a comparison with other cities, and an epilogue. On Menander and rhetorical education, see Malcolm Heath, *Menander: A Rhetor in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁹ On the city's infrastructure, see J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). For an updated treatment of Antioch in the context of its surrounding region, see Andrea U. De Giorgi, *Ancient Antioch: From the Seleucid Era to the Islamic Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Libanius, *Oration 1.22-23* (Autobiography) and *Oration 11* (*Antiochikos*), in *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters*, trans. A.F. Norman, Loeb Classical Library 478 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1:52-55 (Autobiography) and 2:420-517 (*Antiochikos*). On the local patriotism of sophists in the Roman Empire and their contributions towards civic munificence, see Arjan Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹¹ On the ancient Greek theory of the four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile), see Hippocrates, *On the Nature of Man 4–7*, in *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 260–71; Hippocrates, *On the Sacred Disease*, in *Hippocratic Writings*, trans. J. Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 179–200; and Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* (*De Naturalibus Facultatibus*), trans. A. J. Brock, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

¹² Hippocrates, *Airs Waters Places 12–24*, trans. Jacques Jouanna, in *Hippocrates*, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library 520 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 110–31.

¹³ On the causal interrelationships between climate, environment and human physiognomy, see Hippocrates, *Airs Waters Places*.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 7.7.1327b, trans. Carnes Lord, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 209: 'the peoples inhabiting the cold places and those of Europe are full of spirit but somewhat deficient in intelligence and

skill... Those in Asia, on the other hand, have souls endowed with intelligence and skill but are lacking in spirit... But the Greek race participates in both, just as it occupies the middle position geographically’.

¹⁵ Of notable relevance to the current discussion are studies on the responses of survivors to the Gaziantep earthquake of 2023. One such example is L. Tomak, T. Demirel, and I. Demir, ‘Evaluation of the demographic characteristics and general health status of earthquake survivors affected by the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquake; a section from Gaziantep Nurdağı district.’ *BMC Public Health* 24, no. 1 (April 1, 2024): 937. doi: 10.1186/s12889-024-18444-7. Survey questionnaires on earthquakes can investigate the incidences of longer-term psychological effects, including PTSD, than purely medical data based on physical injuries sustained during the seismic events. This literature can also be used to help assess the overall livability of a city sited within a seismically active zone.

¹⁶ Timothy Beatley, *Biophilic Cities: Integrating Nature into Urban Design and Planning* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011), 45-81. The idea of a biophilic city indeed goes beyond those that the author previously formulated around the notion of ‘Green Urbanism’, see Timothy Beatley, *Green Urbanism. Learning from European Cities* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Examples include, regarding Carthage in North Africa, the levelling of the summit of the Byrsa Hill of the Punic city and the construction of a massive artificial platform supported by arched cryptoporticus for the siting of a new Forum for the new Roman city, see Frédéric Hurlet, ‘La Carthage romaine, de la colonie gracchienne à la capitale de l’Africa.’ In *Carthage: Les Dossiers d’Archéologie*, no. 314 (2006): 38–45. Regarding Rome, one can point to many examples, including how the Romans engineered the terrain during the construction of the Circus Maximus on the site of the Vallis Murcia (Valley of Murcia). These interventions include adding the symbolic inclusion of feature of the *euripus* (sea) on the central spine of the Hippocrates as an architectural trace or vestige of the river stream that used to flow through the valley, see John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 61–72.

¹⁸ Beatley, *Biophilic Cities*, 46.

¹⁹ Many of the basic ideas behind ‘Blue Urbanism’ are outlined in Timothy Beatley, *Blue Urbanism: Exploring Connections Between Cities and Oceans* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014). For more detailed explorations of connections between urban blue spaces and human health, see, for example, Mathew P. White, Amanda L. Smith, Kelly Humphries, Sabine Pahl, Deborah Snelling, and Michael Depledge. ‘Blue Space: The Importance of Water for Preference, Affect, and Restorativeness Ratings of Natural and Built Scenes’, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30, no. 4 (December 2010): 482–93; Sebastian Völker and Thomas Kistemann, ‘The Impact of Blue Space on Human Health and Well-Being’ *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health* 214, no. 6 (November 2011): 449–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijheh.2011.05.001>; Sebastian Völker and Thomas Kistemann, ‘Developing the Urban Blue: Comparative Health Responses to Blue and Green Urban Open Spaces in Germany’, *Health & Place* 35 (September 2015): 196–205.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2014.10.015>; and Anna Brückner, Timo Falkenberg, Christine Heinzl, and Thomas Kistemann, ‘The Regeneration of Urban Blue Spaces: A Public Health Intervention? Reviewing the Evidence’, *Frontiers in Public Health* 9 (2022): 782101. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.782101>.

²⁰ On the city’s variegated water resources in a regional context, see De Giorgi, *Ancient Antioch*, 66-75.

²¹ See Christine Kondoleon, *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 144-54, esp. 146-51 (Fikrut Yegül, ‘Baths and Bathing in Roman Antioch’).

²² On access to water as a sine qua non of urban livability, see Margaret E. Keck, “‘Water, Water Everywhere, Nor Any Drop to Drink’”. Land Use and Water Policy in São Paulo, Brazil,’ in Peter Evans, ed., *Livable Cities: Urban Struggles for Livelihood and Sustainability* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 162-94.

²³ Beatley, *Blue Urbanism*, 62. For how Blue Urbanism perspectives apply to comparable river-based waterfront cities, see Gábor Sonkoly and Julien Bastoen, ‘Riverine Urban Heritage in Blue Urbanism: The Danube and Seine Compared,’ *Journal of Historical Geography* 72 (2021): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2021.01.003>.

²⁴ Cf. Plato, *Laws* IV, 704a–705b on why it is best to establish a city eighty [Attic Greek] *stadia*, or about 14.8km, away from the sea so as to be safe from undue foreign influences and naval/piratical raids as well as to foster autarky and social stability.

²⁵ Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 159–203; Ramsay MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 174–201. Libanius’ claims regarding the people of Antioch’s inherently peaceable nature are indeed somewhat spurious, see Wendy Mayer, ‘Religious Conflict and Urban Violence in Late Antiquity: Alexandria and Antioch’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 28, no. 2 (2020): 231–60, <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2020.0021>.

²⁶ Susan S. Fainstein, *The Just City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

²⁷ On civil strife or stasis in Greek city-states, see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 278–326; Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 204–235; and Andrew Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City* (London: Routledge, 1982), 117–143.

²⁸ On the Roman Peace and its support of the local aristocracy that then had to find a point of balance between the two, see Plutarch, *Precepts of Statecraft*, in *Moralia*, vol. 10, trans. H. N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library 321 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 155–299.

²⁹ See Peter Evans, 'Introduction: Looking for Agents of Urban Livability in a Globalised Political Economy,' in Peter Evans, ed., *Livable Cities: Urban Struggles for Livelihood and Sustainability* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1–30.

³⁰ Paternalism represents Singapore's ruling ideology and it has developed into a sophisticated form of technocratic rule that offers prosperity and security in exchange for certain forms of personal freedom and autonomy. In an interview given to BBC, Lee Kwan Yew explains that "I am often accused of interfering in the private lives of citizens. Yes, if I did not, had I not done that, we wouldn't be here today. And I say without the slightest remorse, that we wouldn't be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters — who your neighbour is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit, or what language you use. We decide what is right" (BBC, 2015), as cited in 'Singapore's Technocratic Paternalism and How Behavioural Economics Justifies More of the Same Liberalism Unveiled'. January 2021, 80–111 https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811220753_0004.

³¹ On how the social trust between rich and poor came to be built upon the material and symbolic foundations of the elite's Maussian gift-giving, see Veyne, *Bread and Circuses* (fn 4 above).

³² Cf. Cicero, *On Offices (De officiis)* 2.52–60 for his argument on why the elite's civic munificence ought to focus more on building useful urban infrastructure, such as harbours, aqueducts and city walls, than on paying for expensive and—to him—frivolous popular programs such as gladiatorial games or lavish banquets.

³³ See John Ma, *Statues and Cities: Honorific Portraits and Civic Identity in the Hellenistic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁴ This visible good conduct and peaceful order among citizens represents more an ancient political ideal than frequently achieved lived reality. See Aelius Aristides, *Orations 23–24 (On Concord)*, in *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works*, trans. Charles A. Behr, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2:58–89, on the elite emphasis on civil harmony or *homonoiā*.

³⁵ On Libanius and Hellenic rhetorical education, see, Bernard Schouler, *La tradition hellénique chez Libanios*. 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984); Raffaella Criboire, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); and idem, *Libanius the Sophist: Rhetoric, Reality, and Religion in the Fourth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

³⁶ See Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

³⁷ Gunnar Brands, *Antiochia in der Spätantike: Prolegomena zu einer archäologischen Stadtgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 72–116.

³⁸ The colonnaded stoas allowed a mix of commercial shops, artisanal workshops and elite houses to form vibrant mixed neighbourhoods. While Libanius appears to be suggesting that this was a feature unique to Antioch, this is not the case historically, see the examples of other eastern cities such as Syrian Apamea and Ephesus: Jean-Charles Balty, 'Apamée et la Syrie du Nord aux époques hellénistique et romaine', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 62 (1991), 15–36 and Sabine Ladstätter, 'The Commercial Agora of Ephesus: A Case Study of Urban Retail in the Eastern Mediterranean', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 30 (2017): 365–88. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759400074138>.

³⁹ See Juliet Davis, *The Caring City. Ethnics of Urban Design* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), esp. 63–87.

⁴⁰ On Antioch as a cosmopolis and place on the ancient Eurasian silk routes, see Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria: From Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 234–78; De Giorgi, *Ancient Antioch*, 128–67.

⁴¹ Delphic maxims: Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10.24.1, trans. W.H.S. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 4:522–23. *Inscriptiones Graecae* II² 4963 (4th c. BCE Athenian inscription listing the maxims), in *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 3, ed. W. R. Paton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 224–25.

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IMAGINATIVE HERITAGE: INNOVATING USER EXPERIENCE TO PRESERVE CULTURAL IDENTITY

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INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia possesses a deeply layered cultural heritage that reflects its historical role as a major crossroads of civilization. This heritage is manifested through globally recognized sites such as Diriyah and Al-Hijr (Hegra), as well as through rich traditions of craftsmanship, oral poetry, ritual practices, and Islamic architectural expression.¹ Together, these tangible and intangible heritage elements form the foundation of cultural identity, social cohesion, and historical continuity. However, accelerated urban development, modernization, and globalization increasingly threaten the survival and visibility of these heritage forms, particularly those dependent on oral transmission and embodied practice rather than material permanence.

Cultural heritage extends beyond monuments and artifacts to encompass intangible practices such as storytelling, folklore, performing arts, craftsmanship, and collective memory.² Despite their central role in identity formation, intangible heritage elements remain underrepresented within conventional preservation frameworks, which have historically prioritized physical conservation over experiential continuity.³ Rapid urban transformation and digitally mediated lifestyles further marginalize these traditions, weakening intergenerational knowledge transmission and reducing opportunities for community participation.⁴ As a result, conventional conservation approaches are increasingly insufficient for addressing the complex, living nature of cultural heritage in contemporary urban contexts.

In response to these limitations, emerging digital technologies—particularly augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI)—offer new possibilities for preserving cultural identity and enhancing user experience within heritage environments.⁵ These technologies enable immersive storytelling, multisensory engagement, and interactive learning, allowing heritage to be experienced as a dynamic and evolving system rather than a static archive. While Saudi Vision 2030 emphasizes digital transformation, cultural tourism, and heritage-led development, the application of immersive and intelligent technologies within heritage practice remains uneven and is often confined to visually oriented representations of tangible assets.⁶

This research investigates the role of AR, VR, and AI in addressing these challenges by examining their capacity to reconstruct historical sites, revitalize cultural narratives, and support intergenerational knowledge transmission within a comprehensive heritage conservation framework.⁷ Rapid urbanization, globalization, and technological change have intensified pressures on both tangible and intangible heritage, making innovative, technology-supported approaches increasingly necessary.

Aligned with the strategic objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, this study explores how immersive and intelligent technologies can provide scalable, inclusive, and sustainable solutions for heritage preservation, cultural tourism, and education.

A key original contribution of this research is the Hazzazi House Virtual Reconstruction, a historic Hijazi residence in Jeddah digitally reconstructed and evaluated by the author. This locally grounded case study is examined alongside four international projects—Virtual Pompeii, Virtual Angkor, the Virtual Dance Museum, and Digital Storytelling of Indigenous Oral Traditions—to enable comparative insights across both tangible and intangible heritage contexts.⁸ Through this comparative framework, the study situates the Saudi experience within a broader global discourse on digital heritage innovation. Beyond technological evaluation, the research critically addresses ethical considerations related to authenticity, representation, accessibility, and cultural ownership in AI-driven heritage reconstructions. It argues that immersive technologies must be implemented through participatory, culturally grounded, and ethically governed frameworks to avoid superficial digitization or historical distortion.⁹ Overall, the study contributes to contemporary heritage discourse by demonstrating how technological innovation can be balanced with cultural authenticity, positioning immersive digital heritage as a vital component of future-oriented, socially sustainable heritage strategies.

Literature Review

This study conceptualizes immersive cultural heritage experiences through a three-stage framework: **Preparation**, **Processing**, and **Perception**. This model integrates heritage theory, learning theory, technological systems, and user-experience research to explain how digital heritage environments are designed, activated, and experienced.

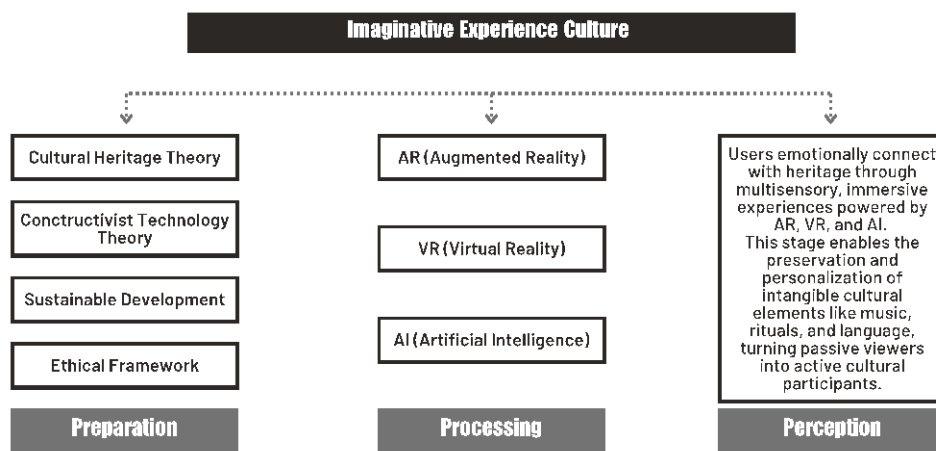


Figure 8. Framework of Immersive Cultural Heritage Experience: From Theory to User Perception

1. Preparation

The preparation stage establishes the theoretical and ethical foundations guiding immersive heritage design. Cultural Heritage Theory emphasizes the interdependence of tangible and intangible heritage in shaping collective identity and cultural meaning.¹⁰ Heritage is understood not merely as preserved objects but as socially constructed memory embedded within spatial and cultural contexts. Pierre Nora’s concept of sites of memory further explains how places act as anchors for collective remembrance, particularly when traditional modes of memory transmission weaken.¹¹

Constructivist learning theory provides an additional foundation, framing immersive technologies as tools that support experiential learning through interaction, participation, and reflection.¹² In digital

heritage contexts, users actively construct meaning by navigating, interacting with, and interpreting cultural narratives rather than passively consuming information. Sustainability principles further emphasize the need for heritage practices that balance cultural continuity with social, environmental, and economic viability.¹³ These principles are reinforced by international policy frameworks, including ICOMOS guidance linking heritage preservation to the Sustainable Development Goals and national development agendas such as Saudi Vision 2030.¹⁴

Ethical digital heritage frameworks stress inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity, particularly in AI-driven reconstructions that risk misrepresentation or cultural appropriation.¹⁵ Responsible heritage digitization therefore requires participatory governance, transparency in technological decision-making, and respect for source communities.

2. Processing

The processing stage represents the technological activation of cultural heritage content through AR, VR, and AI. These technologies translate historical data, architectural documentation, oral narratives, and performative practices into immersive and interactive environments. Research demonstrates that multisensory engagement strengthens embodied understanding and emotional connection to heritage, supporting deeper learning and cultural empathy.¹⁶

AR and VR technologies bridge tangible and intangible heritage by enabling users to interact with reconstructed spaces, objects, and practices in context.¹⁷ AI further enhances these environments by supporting procedural reconstruction, adaptive storytelling, and intelligent interpretation of incomplete or fragmented heritage data.¹⁸ Case studies such as the Letoon site illustrate how photogrammetry and CGI-based VR improve accessibility and interpretation while supporting user-centered heritage engagement.¹⁹

3. Perception

Perception refers to the cognitive, emotional, and phenomenological processes through which users engage with immersive heritage environments. Heritage derives significance not only from monuments and artifacts but from the intangible knowledge, practices, and meanings that animate them.²⁰ Intangible cultural heritage—including rituals, music, craftsmanship, and oral traditions—remains particularly vulnerable to modernization and globalization, making its preservation essential for sustaining collective memory and cultural worldviews.²¹

Immersive technologies strengthen heritage perception through multisensory engagement. VR enables users to experience reconstructed environments and rituals, while AI-supported audio archives preserve music and language, fostering emotional connection and linguistic continuity.²² Haptic interaction enhances embodied understanding of craftsmanship, and emerging scent-based technologies further enrich immersive heritage experiences.²³ Research consistently confirms that multisensory and personalized experiences deepen cultural engagement and identity formation.²⁴

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative case study methodology to examine how immersive digital technologies support cultural heritage preservation. The approach enables in-depth analysis of digital tools used to document, interpret, and sustain both tangible and intangible heritage. Five case studies were selected to reflect diversity in geography, heritage type, technological maturity, and cultural context.

An original case study—the Hazzazi House Virtual Reconstruction in Historic Jeddah—was developed by the author using Revit for architectural modeling, Enscape for visualization, and AR deployment via mobile platforms. Data collection included archival research, site measurements, interviews with

owners and heritage experts, and post-experience surveys. All cases were evaluated using standardized criteria covering documentation methods, technology integration, multisensory experience, strengths, limitations, and future potential.

Case Studies on Tangible Heritage

The Virtual Pompeii Project

A 3D and VRML-based digital reconstruction of Pompeii’s Theatre District, aimed at educational tourism. It incorporates visual models, ambient Roman sounds, and user-triggered events (e.g., gladiator matches) but is limited by outdated technology and lack of interactivity²⁵ (Table 1).

<i>Documentation Process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VRML-based 3D reconstruction of Pompeii (AD 79) using archaeological records. - Historical audio, scripts, and imagery enhance authenticity.
<i>Integration of Technology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VRML ensures accessibility and low system requirements but is outdated. - Enables navigation, model manipulation, and basic animation. - Upgradeable to modern VR/AR platforms.
<i>Multisensory Experience</i> <i>User</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detailed visual models and ambient Roman soundscapes. - Limited tactile interaction: haptics is potential. - Interactive exploration with event triggers and object information.
<i>Pros</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Archaeologically grounded and educational. - Global access to a fragile heritage site. - Expandable for mixed-reality tourism.
<i>Cons</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower rendering quality and interactivity than modern engines. - Incomplete data and risk of obsolescence.
<i>Recommendations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Migrate to advanced engines. - Enhance interaction, accessibility, and educational features.

Table 1. Virtual Pompeii Project

The Virtual Angkor Project

The Virtual Angkor Project is a digital reconstruction of 13th-century Angkor, Cambodia, developed by historians and 3D artists to simulate the city’s original form Evans²⁶ (Table 2).

<i>Documentation Process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LiDAR & Photogrammetry. - Historical Inscriptions for daily life, social hierarchies, and religious functions.
<i>Integration of Technology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unreal Engine and Unity enable high-fidelity 3D visualization. - VR tours support immersive exploration. - AI and procedural generation reconstruct missing elements.
<i>Multisensory Experience</i> <i>User</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Photorealistic models recreate Angkor’s urban environment. - Ambient Buddhist chants, nature, and market sounds enhance immersion. - AI avatars enable interaction with rituals, traders, and citizens.
<i>Pros</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detailed urban reconstruction supports virtual archaeology. - Reduces need for physical excavation. - Provides global access and immersive learning. - AI assists in predicting missing architecture.
<i>Cons</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High development costs. - Potential inaccuracies in AI reconstructions. - No haptic interaction: validation is challenging.

Table 2. The Virtual Angkor Project

The Hazzazi House Virtual Reconstruction

In addition to reviewing global projects, this research includes an original case study conducted by the author on Hazzazi House, a heritage building in Historic Jeddah. The structure was reconstructed in Revit and rendered using Enscape for AR/VR exploration. This case highlights both the potential and challenges of applying immersive technologies in Saudi heritage settings. (Table 3)



Figure 9. Exterior Shot of Hazzazi House



Figure 10. Interior Shot of Hazzazi House

<i>Documentation Process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hazzazi House digitally reconstructed in Revit using historical data, site measurements, and owner interviews. - Model rendered in Enscape and deployed as an AR tour via Augin. - Post-tour survey with owner, heritage experts, and public conducted. - 100% rated the AR experience as excellent and emotionally engaging. - 75% recommended applying the model to other heritage buildings.
<i>Integration of Technology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AR tour developed using the Augin app (iOS). - Model created in Revit and rendered in Enscape.
<i>Multisensory User Experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visual focus on Hijazi architectural elements - No audio, tactile, or olfactory layers implemented. - Interactivity limited to static visual walkthroughs.
<i>Pros</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authored by a Saudi researcher with direct site access. - Suitable for education, tourism, and cultural programs. - Aligned with Vision 2030 digital heritage objectives. - Survey confirmed strong emotional and cultural impact.
<i>Cons</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Material-rendering issues and limited platform control. - Absence of narrative, gamification, and multisensory features. - Partial building representation highlighted as a key gap.

Table 3. The Hazzazi House Virtual Reconstruction

Case Studies on Intangible Heritage

Analysis of the Virtual Dance Museum Case Study: Cypriot Folk Dancing

The Virtual Dance Museum is an initiative to digitally preserve Cypriot folk dances using motion capture, 3D modelling, and VR/AR visualization. The project allows researchers, students, and the public to experience traditional dances interactively²⁷ (Table 4).

<i>Documentation Process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8-camera motion capture (480 Hz) with skeletal/mesh data, video, and cultural metadata. - 3D mannequin with digitized traditional attire.
<i>Integration of Technology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sketchfab with VR/AR delivery. - Autodesk Maya for cloth simulation. - Gamified learning elements.
<i>Multisensory User Experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accurate 3D dance visuals with traditional audio. - Interactive viewing, slow motion, and virtual practice. - Haptic feedback remains potential.
<i>Pros</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High accuracy and strong educational value. - Remote access and costume preservation.
<i>Cons</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High costs and device demand. - Limited facial/hand detail.

Table 4. Virtual Dance Museum

The Digital Storytelling of Indigenous Oral Traditions

This project uses 3D animation, VR, and AI-generated voiceovers to document and preserve Indigenous oral storytelling traditions²⁸ (Table 5).

<i>Documentation Process</i>	- <i>Native speakers record myths and chants with cultural metadata.</i> ²⁹ - <i>Stories visualized through 3D animation and VR.</i>
<i>Integration of Technology</i>	- <i>AI speech preserves endangered languages.</i> - <i>VR/AR apps with AI storytellers and 3D characters.</i>
<i>Multisensory Experience</i> <i>User</i>	- <i>Immersive animated worlds with AI voice narration.</i> - <i>Interactive story navigation: scent features are future potential.</i>
<i>Pros</i>	- <i>Preserves languages and engages youth.</i> - <i>Global access with community co-creation.</i>
<i>Cons</i>	- <i>Ethical concerns over AI voices.</i> - <i>High costs and translation challenges.</i>

Table 5. The Digital Storytelling of Indigenous Oral Traditions

RESULTS

This research analyses comparative case studies addressing both tangible and intangible heritage documentation through 3D technologies. Tangible heritage, including architectural structures and historical artefacts, was documented using 3D scanning, photogrammetry, and virtual reconstruction to ensure spatial and material accuracy. Intangible heritage, such as performances, craftsmanship, and oral traditions, was preserved through motion capture, spatial audio, and interactive digital platforms, supporting research, education, and public engagement.

The findings demonstrate that 3D, VR, AR, and AI technologies significantly enhance accessibility, interpretation, and engagement by overcoming physical and geographical constraints. Case studies including Virtual Pompeii, Virtual Angkor, and the Hazzazi House Virtual Reconstruction illustrate how immersive environments revitalize historic urban contexts and strengthen public participation. The Hazzazi House case further confirmed strong emotional and educational impact through positive public feedback.

AI-driven and interactive applications were particularly effective in cultural learning and intergenerational knowledge transfer, highlighting the urgency of systematic documentation amid globalization and urbanization. The study also identifies digital heritage’s growing role in tourism and economic sustainability, while acknowledging technical, financial, and ethical challenges related to accessibility, authenticity, and platform limitations.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that immersive digital technologies significantly enhance accessibility, engagement, and interpretation of cultural heritage. AR supports contextual, on-site interpretation, while VR and AI enable global access, adaptive storytelling, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The Hazzazi House case illustrates how localized, culturally grounded digital heritage projects can support national heritage strategies and Vision 2030 objectives. However, challenges remain related to technical complexity, cost, accessibility, and ethical governance. Addressing these challenges requires structured frameworks, participatory design, and multisensory integration beyond visual dominance.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that AR, VR, and AI represent critical tools for sustaining cultural identity in rapidly transforming societies. Through comparative analysis and an original Saudi case study, the paper demonstrates the potential of immersive technologies to support heritage preservation, cultural tourism, and education while emphasizing the necessity of ethical, inclusive, and culturally sensitive implementation. The study advocates for adaptive digital heritage frameworks aligned with

sustainability goals and national development strategies, positioning immersive heritage as a cornerstone of future cultural resilience.

NOTES

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SAFEGUARDING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN PORTUGAL (2008–2025): NETWORKED PRACTICES AND EMERGING LINES OF INQUIRY FROM THE LISBON CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

Portugal's 2008 ratification of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) inaugurated a wave of inscriptions that now structure the National Inventory (NIICH), the central instrument of ICH safeguarding in Portugal. Yet how inventory practices and implementation of safeguarding measures have affected the communities responsible for the practices' transmission remains understudied. This article opens the conceptual-scoping phase of a doctoral thesis addressing that gap, through an interpretive analysis of two patrimonialization processes in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA): *Kola San Jon* and *Marchas Populares de Lisboa*.

The approach is qualitative and interpretive. National and international legal instruments frame how the inscription and revision dossiers prepared for the NIICH are read, namely for their stated motivations, the threats to continuity identified, and the safeguarding measures proposed. The *threat-action gap* is operationalized as the analytical lens. Findings reveal misalignment: while threats are largely territorial - touristification, demographic shifts, demolition risk and land tenure insecurity - safeguarding measures remain confined to the cultural domain. This stresses the need for cross-sectoral policies and for the articulation of ICH safeguarding with territorial management instruments and local development strategies.

THE DYNAMICS OF PATRIMONIALISATION: KEY ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS

Patrimonialisation and Communities as Relational Formations

UNESCO's 2003 Convention¹ marked a paradigmatic shift in heritage governance by recognizing not only monuments and sites but also practices sustained by communities, groups, and individuals. This transition from "outstanding universal value" to "cultural diversity"² gave ICH considerable symbolic and political significance³, but also generated conceptual indeterminacies, raising questions about the Convention's validity and operational potential.⁴

The interpretation of the Convention has evolved. Early emphasis on inventorying and identifying practices gave way to safeguarding transmission, placing bearer communities at the center - at least discursively.⁵ This shift underscores a tension: while heritage is defined as "living," institutional frameworks risk crystallizing or instrumentalizing it for political, touristic, or identity purposes.⁶

A further criticism concerns the adequacy of "communities, groups and individuals" (CGI)⁷ as an operative concept. As Hertz⁸ argues, the formula oscillates between democratizing participation and

legitimizing factions. While invoked as symbolic bearers of rights, UNESCO provides no clear criteria for CGIs identification or inclusion. In practice, “community”⁹ rarely exists as a bounded entity; rather, it functions as an analytical construct rendering legible shifting relations, built of strong and weak ties. In this sense, “community” is best understood as a relational formation, reshaped continuously by networks of interaction, institutional frameworks, and everyday tactics.

Patrimonialization is both performative - declaring a practice “heritage” redefines its social meaning and economic horizon¹⁰ - and transformative, triggering a preservation-transformation dialectic that co-produces continuity and change.

These dynamics do not unfold in a vacuum but are embedded in spatial settings whose density, diversity, and circulation shapes how relations are formed, sustained, or disrupted. Patrimonialization and community thus appear mutually constitutive: heritage processes reconfigure practices and identities, while relational formations condition how heritage is claimed, transmitted, and transformed.

Urbanity as Structuring Context

Drawing on Boudreau,¹¹ urbanity can be conceived as a historically situated, unevenly distributed field of interdependencies, mobilities, differences, and affects shaping social relations and political dynamics. This perspective detaches urbanity from the city as a bounded entity and reframes it as a logic of action and reorganization of power that also permeates suburban, rural, and transnational contexts. Treated as an epistemological lens rather than a fixed category, urbanity informs how cultural practices are configured, transformed, and contested under globalization, governance, and mobility.

As a catalyst of cultural diversity, urbanity multiplies social relations. In this context, weak ties become crucial: as Granovetter¹² demonstrated, such connections are fundamental for accessing new information and fostering innovation. Building on this, Hannerz¹³ proposed the network metaphor to conceptualize the “global ecumene,” a world interconnected by migrations, marketplaces, and media. These ties are not only face-to-face but also mediated by mass communication, limited-circulation formats, and interpersonal media. As Noyes¹⁴ notes, the postmodern world is thus not a collection of bounded nation-states, but a “network of networks.” In urban contexts, such topographies inflect cultural transmission, shaping how practices circulate, transform, and persist. Urbanity is therefore treated here as a structuring context for the LMA cases, influencing CGI’s characteristics and capabilities.

Yet this spatial embeddedness, central to understanding intangible heritage dynamics, remains largely unacknowledged in the Portuguese law. Although Article 20 of Decree-Law 139/2009 of 15 June stipulates that manifestations inscribed in the Portuguese National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (NIICH) should be considered during preparation of sectoral plans such as spatial planning - thus suggesting cross-sectoral articulation - this provision has remained more a normative ambition than a realized practice.

Inventory Logic and the *Threat-Action Gap*

Within the Portuguese legal framework, article 8 of Decree-Law 139/2009,¹⁵ stipulates that applications for the inscription of ICH practices in the national inventory are to be submitted to the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage¹⁶ through a dedicated electronic form on the NIICH website. Two elements are particularly relevant here: the identification of “threats to the continuity of the practice, representation and transmission,” and the specification of “programmed safeguarding measures.” In principle, this “threat-action” schema translates Article 11 of the UNESCO Convention into a domestic tool, aligning risk identification with mitigation.

Close reading of dossiers reveals a persistent mismatch. Threats are routinely described in structural terms - housing precarity, ageing, labor casualization, tourist saturation - whereas proposed actions

remain confined to culture-specific interventions. The dossiers rarely acknowledge the financial, organizational, or regulatory capacity required to address the threats they enumerate.

Motivations for patrimonialization expose a second tension. The form does not require proponents to state why inscription is justified, and entities designated to coordinate safeguarding lack clear frameworks for assuming responsibility once a practice is inscribed. This gap creates diffuse accountability, allowing applications to proceed without reflection on potential consequences for community expectations, institutional involvement, or sustainability.

Finally, the form designates a single proponent, underplaying the fact that heritage practices are sustained by networks of actors. While communities, associations, municipalities, and state agencies may all be involved, representation is channeled through one interlocutor. This structural feature helps explain recurrent misalignments between diagnosed threats and proposed actions, which frame the Lisbon cases analyzed next.

RESEARCH PATHWAYS

Research Design and Sources

This study undertakes a comparative documentary analysis of inscription dossiers, using the *threat-action gap* as the principal analytical framework. The framework serves to assess how inventory procedures align identified risks with safeguarding measures, informed by three conceptual dimensions - patrimonialization as valuation and re-creation, communities as relational formations, and urbanity as a structuring context.

The approach is qualitative and interpretive: documents are read for how they articulate motivations, diagnose threats, propose safeguarding measures, and designate responsible actors. The two LMA cultural practices are mobilized heuristically to demonstrate the framework's organizing power.

The corpus analyzed comprises: (i) UNESCO's 2003 Convention¹⁷ and its Operational Directives (revisions up to 2024);¹⁸ (ii) Portuguese legal and procedural instruments regulating patrimonialization and inventory practice;¹⁹ (iii) the KSJ inventory²⁰ and (iv) revised inscription²¹ dossiers, and (v) the Marchas Populares de Lisboa (MPL) inventory dossier.²²

Analytical procedure

Building on the design and sources outlined above, the analysis applies a qualitative and interpretive procedure in three steps.

First, each dossier is read closely, and four elements are extracted: motivations for patrimonialization, if any; threats to the continuity, as identified by the proponent; programmed safeguarding or valorization measures; and actors identified as responsible for implementing the safeguarding plan, usually limited to the proponent.

Second, alignment between threats and actions is assessed. Inspired by policy gap assessments and ICOMOS heritage impact evaluation,²³ the method compares identified threats with proposed measures. Threats and actions are grouped by policy domain (built environment; culture; economy; dissemination; research) and classified as aligned, partially aligned, or misaligned. A simple ordinal scale (Absent-Very Strong) indicates the degree of correspondence.

Third, a cross-case synthesis compares the two LMA practices' inventory processes, identifying common misalignments and context-specific variations. This yields provisional propositions to guide the subsequent empirical phase and suggests new avenues for research on ICH safeguarding in Portugal. The exercise is interpretive: it shows identified threats demand more robust, cross-sectoral responses than those currently in place. This suggests that inventory procedures should be articulated with broader strategic and planning instruments, capable of mobilizing and articulating practicing communities and public administration across multiple policy domains.

Limitations

Findings are document-bounded, reflecting how actors present motivations, risks, and measures in formal texts. While MPL’s patrimonialization is recent, KSJ includes a revision, introducing temporal evolution but also asymmetry. Conclusions are therefore indicative, offering a conceptual basis for later empirical work. Coding threat-action alignment is another limitation: classifications rely solely on dossier content, though initiatives may exist beyond it. However, this article aims not to measure safeguarding effectiveness but to test an analytical procedure. Future phases will add interviews, ethnography, and network analysis to capture practices and capacities beyond inscription files.

INVENTORIES IN PRACTICE: CASE ANALYSES AND COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS

Kola San Jon: inscription dossier analysis

The application for the inscription of KSJ in the NIICH was submitted in 2013²⁴ by *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude* (ACMJ), a community-based NGO founded in 1984 in Cova da Moura, Amadora. The *Grupo de Kola San Jon*, integrated into ACMJ’s cultural life, provides logistical continuity, external mediation, and anchors the practice in community participation.

KSJ is a cyclical ritual celebrated annually around Saint John’s Day. Central to the festivity is a procession through the neighborhood, led by drummers and *koladeiras* with their partners, followed by “ship commanders” carrying the flags of Cape Verde and Portugal. Music, dance, and handmade drums transform the streets into a stage of belonging and recognition. Though informal, the group has maintained a stable core for decades, ensuring intergenerational transmission. Rights are collectively attributed to the residents of Cova da Moura.

The dossier frames KSJ as the recognition of a Cape Verdean tradition re-created in Lisbon. In a stigmatized neighborhood, the ritual strengthens cohesion while reaffirming transnational ties, but vulnerabilities in social fabric and transmission remain.

Domain	Threats	Coverage
Built environment & urban governance	Risk of demolition/displacement; uncertain land tenure; interruption of community-led planning program	Absent
Culture & transmission	Fragile intergenerational transmission; risk of decontextualization; self-devaluation of Cape Verdean culture	Strong
Social cohesion & local economy	Rupture of sociabilities; weakening of associations; fragility of neighborhood networks	Partial
Dissemination, valorization & awareness	Historical stigma; undervaluation of Cape Verdean culture	Strong
Knowledge, research & documentation	Risk of memory loss; dispersal or devaluation of knowledge	Very Strong

Table 1. *Kola San Jon (inscription): assessment of threats and coverage by public policy domain*

Safeguarding program places strong emphasis on cultural transmission. Workshops on drumming, dance, and tambor construction, school-based activities, intergenerational tandems, and photography training reinforce learning and documentation. Annual support sustains continuity, though efforts remain vulnerable to the loss of neighborhood structures essential to transmission.

Social cohesion and the local economy are only partially addressed: tambor workshops, external partnerships, and skill valorization create opportunities but cannot offset fragile sociabilities or

dependence on Cova da Moura’s spatial fabric. Dissemination is strong, countering stigma through exhibitions, a documentary, a children’s book, digital platforms, and diasporic exchanges. Knowledge and documentation are even more robust, with a documentation nucleus, online archive, and academic partnerships.

The most critical gap lies in urban governance, where no measures address demolition risks, tenure insecurity, or displacement. Overall, safeguarding is strongest in knowledge and transmission, partial in socio-economic resilience, and absent territorially.

Kola San Jon: revision dossier analysis

The revision of the KSJ inscription²⁵ was not only a legal obligation but an opportunity to underline new territorial and demographic threats, reinforce strategies of transmission, and consolidate KSJ as a local beacon of citizenship and interculturality.

Domain	Threats	Coverage
Built environment & urban governance	Gentrification, speculation, metropolitan urban transformations; risk of demolition (as 6 de Maio, Santa Filomena); loss of the Kola–neighborhood link	Absent
Culture & transmission	Aging drummers; fragile generational renewal	Very Strong
Socio-economic conditions	Precarious work; lack of funds; rising cost of living; outward migration	Partial

Table 2. Kola San Jon (revision): assessment of threats and coverage by public policy domain

As Table 2 shows, the 2024 revision strengthens safeguarding in some domains but reveals regressions in others. The territorial gap persists: references to neighborhood upgrading are general, insufficient to counter speculation or secure continuity of place. Culture and transmission emerge as the strongest domain, now assessed as very strong, with training in schools, apprenticeship programs, and biographical research (including women) directly addressing fragile renewal. By contrast, the socio-economic dimension, newly introduced in 2024, receives only partial coverage: precarious labor, lack of funds, inflation, and outward migration are acknowledged but not tackled. Both inscription and revision confirm a structural imbalance - robust in cultural and knowledge domains but absent or partial in territorial and socio-economic spheres - leaving KSJ exposed to precarious urban conditions and vulnerable livelihoods.

Marchas Populares de Lisboa: inscription dossier analysis

The application for the inscription of the MPL in the NIICH was submitted by the *Associação de Coletividades do Concelho de Lisboa* (ACCL). While ACCL is the formal proponent, the process involves twenty-eight neighborhood collectives - associations with social, cultural, recreational, and sporting functions - each responsible for its own march. These grassroots associations, some dating to the nineteenth century, ensure continuity by providing rehearsal spaces, workshops, and mobilizing networks. The Lisbon Municipality also plays a key role through its company *EGEAC*,²⁶ which coordinates the *Festas de Lisboa*. The dossier highlights MPL as Lisbon’s emblematic festivity, cyclically renewed every June around Saint Anthony’s Day, fostering cohesion and projecting neighborhood identities onto the city stage.

Domain	Threats	Coverage
Built environment & urban governance	Gentrification, touristification; demographic change; political dependence	Weak
Culture & transmission	lack of young men; memory loss; leadership succession	Partial
Social cohesion & local economy	Fragile finances; erosion of associational life	Partial
Dissemination, valorization & awareness	Stigma; Loss of assets/skills; political dependence	Strong
Knowledge, research & documentation	Memory loss; archival dispersion	Very Strong

Table 3. Marchas Populares de Lisboa (inscription): assessment of threats and coverage by public policy domain

As Table 3 shows, safeguarding measures related to the built environment and governance rely mainly on protection of association premises, which may prevent demolitions but does not mitigate gentrification, touristification, or demographic change. For cultural transmission, measures include school projects, documentation, and online musealization, strengthening intergenerational learning. Social cohesion and the local economy are only partially covered: recognition of the festive ecosystem, valorization of professional skills, and support to artists generate visibility and income but fail to provide stable financing. Dissemination and awareness are strongly reinforced through campaigns, exhibitions, itineraries, and internationalization, enhancing prestige yet risking touristification without territorial safeguards. Patrimonial valorization (territory, collections, crafts, inventory updates) and knowledge and documentation (documentary center, public database, digitization, archival networks, interpretive center) are robust, consolidating legitimacy and memory. Yet without complementary urban measures, even strong cultural coverage cannot offset territorial vulnerabilities.

Comparative Insights: Kola San Jon and Marchas Populares de Lisboa

Placed side by side, the two LMA dossiers reveal both convergences and contrasts in how inscription requirements are articulated. Both register territorial threats as decisive, showing how a uniform inventory template generates distinct constellations of threats, measures, and actors once filtered through different socio-spatial contexts.

KSJ remains strongly anchored in Cova da Moura, where networks are relatively small but dense. The annual procession reflects this territorial embedding, with routes tied to residents' houses and local histories. Such anchoring fosters cohesion but also heightens vulnerability, as demolition or insecure tenure directly threaten continuity.

The MPL, by contrast, rely on a broad and institutionalized network, but territorial anchoring is less secure. Still, the practice depends on neighborhood links: marches gain meaning by being performed by residents representing their own territories, coordinated by the collectives based within them.

Critical Reflections on Safeguarding through Inventories

Placing patrimonialization, community relationality, urbanity, and the *threat–action gap* within a single frame helps explain why uniform instruments produce uneven effects. The LMA cases show how identical requirements intersect differently with spatial conditions, organizational capacities, and symbolic agendas, generating distinct alignments between diagnosed threats and proposed measures.

Findings highlight a key lacuna: the lack of articulation between inventory procedures and socio-spatial realities. Both dossiers record territorial threats - demolition, tenure insecurity, gentrification, demographic change - yet proposed actions remain confined to cultural domains. This confirms a structural gap in ICH governance: safeguarding is siloed in cultural policy while risks emerge from housing, planning, and socio-economic fields. MPL benefit from density and visibility, facilitating diffusion but risking commodification; KSJ is sustained by segregation, which limits circulation yet shields it from overexposure. Diasporic circuits linking Portugal and Cape Verde further expand renewal routes.

Taken together, the results suggest inventories should integrate territorial diagnostics and mobilize actors beyond the cultural sector, enabling more cross-sectoral and context-sensitive safeguarding strategies.

CONCLUSION

This article has scoped Portugal’s patrimonialization of ICH, focusing on how safeguarding instruments interact with communities through urbanity and inventory practice. Comparing MPL and KSJ inventory and revision dossiers shows that a uniform template produces uneven outcomes: in Cova da Moura, patrimonialization remains tied to community capacity yet exposed to territorial precarity, while in Lisbon’s historic center inscription risks widening the *threat–action gap* by diagnosing structural pressures but offering symbolic remedies.

The analysis is dossier-based, reflecting how actors represent motivations, risks, and measures; other initiatives may exist beyond this record. For present purposes, this limitation is accepted: the aim was to test an analytical procedure and identify patterns, not to measure implementation. Future research will triangulate findings with interviews, ethnography, and network analysis.

Since 2013, revisions to the inventory form have reshaped how communities, threats, and measures are described, showing how the tool itself is part of patrimonialization. At the policy level, the 2024 reorganization dissolving the DGPC and redistributing responsibilities to Regional Coordination and Development Commissions marks an institutional turning point, potentially opening space for cross-sectoral strategies.

In sum, patrimonialization emerges not as static listing but as ongoing negotiation among communities, networks, and institutions. Recognizing this dynamic provides a foundation for empirical work and for rethinking inventories as possible entry points into integrated safeguarding processes.

NOTES

- ¹ UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-safeguarding-intangible-cultural-heritage#item-2>. The Convention was approved on 17 October 2003, during the 32nd General Conference of UNESCO, and entered into force on 20 April 2006. Portugal deposited its instrument of ratification on 21 May 2008. By the end of 2024, one hundred and eighty-three States had ratified the Convention.
- ² UNESCO's concern with protecting cultural diversity may, in certain local contexts, converge with efforts to safeguard the conditions for transmitting a cultural practice perceived as "threatened" by globalization and its inherent processes of homogenization or hybridization. However, authors such as Néstor García Canclini and Marwan M. Kraidy warn that homogenization and hybridization can be two sides of the same coin when operating under the logic of global capital - hybrid practices are frequently co-opted by hegemonic forces, which disguise domination under the discourse of diversity.
- ³ See Laurajane Smith, *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2004); Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006); Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds., *Intangible Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2008); Smith, "Editorial: A Critical Heritage Studies?," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 18, no. 6 (2012): 533–40; Tim Winter, "Clarifying the Critical in Critical Heritage Studies," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, no. 6 (2013): 532–45; and Ricardo Abreu and Paulo Peixoto, eds., *Construindo políticas patrimoniais: Reflexões em torno dos 10 anos da Convenção do Património Cultural Imaterial, e-cadernos CES 21* (Coimbra: Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra, 2014).
- ⁴ See Lyndel V. Prott, "Defining the Concept of Intangible Heritage: Challenges and Prospects," in *World Culture Report 2000: Cultural Diversity, Conflict and Pluralism* (Paris: UNESCO, 2000), 156–57; Richard Kurin, "La Salvaguardia del patrimonio cultural inmaterial en la Convención de la UNESCO de 2003: Una valoración crítica," *Museum International* 56, nos. 221–22 (2004): 68–81; Nathalie Heinich, *La fabrique du patrimoine: De la cathédrale à la petite cuillère* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2009); and Daniel Rico, "¿La Sibila, patrimonio inmaterial? Un concepto a la deriva," in *La Sibila: Sonido, Imagen, Liturgia, Escena*, ed. Maricarmen Gómez Muntané and Emilio Ros-Fábregas (Madrid: Editorial Alpuerto, 2015), 13–36.
- ⁵ Emanuel Hertz, "Bottoms, Genuine and Spurious," in *Between Imagined Communities and Communities of Practice: Participation, Territory and the Making of Heritage*, ed. Regina F. Bendix, Aditya Eggert, and Arnika Peselmann (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2012), 25–40.
- ⁶ Prott, "Defining the Concept of Intangible Heritage"; Heinich, *La fabrique du patrimoine*, 24.
- ⁷ UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 2003, arts. 2 and 15, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.
- ⁸ Hertz, "Bottoms, Genuine and Spurious".
- ⁹ Different theoretical perspectives allow these dynamics to be understood in specific ways. Noyes (2003) conceives communities as dynamic social systems, sustained by interaction among members. Wenger's (1998) notion of "communities of practice" links cultural transmission to the collective generation of knowledge through participation. Foucault (1975) highlights how regimes of power/knowledge shape the language through which communities are bounded and recognized. Smith (2006) extends this to show how heritage discourse translates communities into compliant categories aligned with dominant epistemologies. In contrast, Michel de Certeau (1980) stresses the micro-resistances embedded in everyday communal tactics, while James C. Scott (1990) shows how groups can outwardly conform yet preserve alternative meanings in hidden transcripts.
- ¹⁰ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
- ¹¹ Julie-Anne Boudreau, "Reflections on Urbanity as an Object of Study and a Critical Epistemology," in *Critical Urban Studies: New Directions*, ed. Jonathan S. Davies and David L. Imbroscio (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 55–70.
- ¹² Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973): 1360–80.
- ¹³ Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
- ¹⁴ Dorothy Noyes, *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 18.
- ¹⁵ Work on the legal framework for safeguarding ICH was initiated in 2007 by the Department of Intangible Heritage of the Institute of Museums and Conservation (*Instituto dos Museus e da Conservação, I.P. – IMC*), a Portuguese public institute that operated between 2007 and 2011. See Paulo J. M. F. da Costa, "O 'Inventário Nacional do

Património Cultural Imaterial: Da prática etnográfica à voz das comunidades,” in *Políticas Públicas para o Património Imaterial na Europa do Sul: Percursos, Concretizações, Perspetivas* (Lisbon: Direção-Geral do Património Cultural, 2013), 93–116; and Clara Saraiva Queirós da Costa, *Património Cultural Imaterial: Políticas patrimoniais, agentes e organizações. O processo de patrimonialização do Kola San Jon em Portugal* (PhD diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2018). This process resulted in two key instruments: Decree-Law no. 139/2009 and Ordinance no. 196/2010. The former—later amended by Decree-Law no. 149/2015, of 4 August—established the NIICH as “a participatory, systematic, updated, and tendentially exhaustive survey” (art. 15).

¹⁶ Following the extinction of the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage (DGPC) in December 2023, two new entities were created: *Património Cultural, I.P. (PC, IP)* and *Museus e Monumentos de Portugal, E.P.E. (MMP, EPE)*, which divided responsibilities previously concentrated in the DGPC. The Regional Coordination and Development Commissions (*Comissões de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional, CCDRs*) of the North, Centre, Alentejo, and Algarve had already assigned competences in the cultural sector, which they retained. In the case of CCDR–Lisbon and Tagus Valley, however, the DGPC had previously encompassed regional competences in culture, making this a new area of responsibility in the regional administrative framework implemented in January 2024.

¹⁷ UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

¹⁸ UNESCO, Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2008 to 2024 revisions, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/directives>

¹⁹ See Portuguese legal and procedural instruments regulating patrimonialization and inventory practice, available at MatrizPCI, *Legislação e Normativos*,

<https://matrizpci.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/pt-PT/File/LegislacaoNormativos?idUtilitario=1>.

²⁰ *Inventário Nacional do Património Cultural Imaterial: Ficha de Inventário — “Kola San Jon”* (2013), MatrizPCI, <https://matrizpci.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/InventarioNacional/DetalleFicha/337?dirPesq=3>.

²¹ Património Cultural, I.P., Revisão de Inventário — Kola San Jon (Lisbon: PC, IP, 2024), https://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Revisao-de-Inventario-Kola-San-Jon_2024.pdf

²² Património Cultural, I.P., *Ficha de Inventário — Marchas Populares de Lisboa*, Anexo I and Anexo II (Lisbon: PC, IP, 2024), https://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ficha-inventario_AnexoI_-Marchas-de-Lisboa.pdf; https://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ficha-inventario_AnexoII_-Marchas-de-Lisboa.pdf.

²³ ICOMOS, *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties* (Paris: ICOMOS, 2011).

²⁴ The application for the inscription of KSJ in the NIICH was submitted in April 2013, and approved the same year, in September. The revision request was submitted in June 2024 and approved in January 2025.

²⁵ The revision of the KSJ inscription is framed by Portuguese law through Decree-Law 139/2009 and Ministerial Order 196/2021, which require periodic reviews of elements in the national inventory every ten years. Article 12 of the UNESCO’s 2003 Convention and the 2024 Operational Directives mandate updates and emphasize monitoring and participatory evaluation.

²⁶ EGEAC (*Empresa de Gestão de Equipamentos e Animação Cultural*) is Lisbon’s municipal company responsible for managing cultural venues, festivals, and heritage initiatives

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TULUM'S ECONOMIC AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION: FROM TRADITIONAL TRADES TO A TOURISM-CENTRIC CITYSCAPE

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INTRODUCTION

Tulum, on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, became an independent municipality in 2008; however, its coastal importance dates back to the pre-Columbian era, when it was a major Maya city.¹ For centuries, the sea sustained local economies through trade and fishing, thanks to the region's prime fishing spots.² Coastal access remains one of the region's main sources of income, but both the reasons for this and the actors profiting from it have changed.³ State-led development, real estate speculation, and private investment have been reshaping both the landscape and its meaning. Fishing territories were gradually privatized and converted into luxury hotels and beach clubs (as seen in Akumal), displacing local landholders and erasing traditional uses. Despite this dispossession of locals and the erosion of local Mayan communities, it is precisely this "Mayan experience" that continues to attract tourists.⁴

This process reflects a broader Latin American trend of eco-branded extractivism, often present in tourism, in which not only natural resources but also culture and identity are commodified.⁵ In Tulum, this dynamic takes two main forms: first, Indigenous fishing communities of Mayan heritage have been progressively dispossessed, losing access to the coast through restrictive legislation and degraded ecosystems, and losing access to housing and the city more generally through gentrification.⁶ Second, local cultural identity has been appropriated and repackaged for tourism, as state and corporate actors frame Tulum as an ecological and spiritual destination. By deploying Indigenous imagery to market elite spaces, these actors both dispossess and outprice local residents, while simultaneously excluding them from regional decision-making.⁷ These intertwined forms of material displacement and symbolic appropriation expose contradictions that call into question who has the right to the city. Following Lefebvre, this right entails both the capacity to shape urban futures and the recognition of diverse knowledges and practices.⁸ In Tulum, this right has been systematically denied to Indigenous communities, who make up 32.7% of the population, and the region, instead, has been increasingly defined by consumption, profit, and exclusion.⁹

Drawing on Gómez-Barris's concept of the "extractive zone," and expanding it to extractivist tourism, this article argues that so-called sustainable development in Tulum masks ongoing colonial dispossession by transforming culture into a commodity and displacing those who embody it.¹⁰ The city's reconfiguration, through environmental degradation, privatization, and rising living costs, shows how injustice and dispossession can be reproduced under the guise of green urbanism. This case

illustrates how extractivism extends beyond material resources to encompass symbolic and epistemic appropriation, reshaping urban life and eroding livability.¹¹ In doing so, it contributes to debates on tourism, land use, and the right to the city by demonstrating how even so-called “sustainable” development can still reinforce colonial hierarchies, privileging elite aesthetics over indigenous people’s right to the land.

Historical transformation and labor shifts

Since the late 1990s, Tulum has undergone rapid transformation through regional development strategies, which focus on rapid tourism expansion, similar to those seen in Cancún and the Maya Riviera.¹² Those changes, however, change more than just the landscape and have a restructuring impact on the lives of those who live in those regions. In the case of Tulum (as many other regions), traditional professions and ways of life are being substituted by activities that can be sold to visitors. Fishing, once central to local subsistence, declined sharply as hotels and resorts replaced fishing areas and restricted coastal access; in just 20 years, the number of registered fishers in Quintana Roo fell from about 1,500 in 1995 to fewer than 600 in 2015.¹³ Many fishers adapted by offering recreational services such as boat tours and snorkeling, transforming ecological knowledge into labor for the tourism economy, but many others were priced out of the region, being forced to relocate.

Coastal commodification and privatization

Playa Pescadores exemplifies this shift in coastal use. In 1982, locals established the Pescadores de Tulum cooperative, which originally supported local subsistence fishing but today primarily caters to tourist excursions.¹⁴ The beach itself follows this change, it is now dominated by restaurants and hotels, no longer supports local food production but functions as a site of tourist consumption.¹⁵ Besides a change in commerce, this shift reflects a larger redefinition of labor, where fishers become service workers and the coast is commodified for its visual and recreational value.

A similar transformation occurred in Akumal, which began developing as a tourism hub in the 1960s. Diving clubs and resorts redirected the local economy away from fishing toward seasonal tourism, while privatization of beach access curtailed residents’ autonomy and integrated marine biodiversity into a tourism circuit that excludes those outside the sector. The speed and scale of this shift are visible in satellite images of Akumal (Figures 1 and 2). In 2005, modest accommodations and open beaches were still visible, but by 2023 these had been replaced by a dense strip of large resorts, erasing community access and reshaping the shoreline for extractive value.



Figure 1. Satellite image of Akumal in 2005. Source: Google Earth.



Figure 2. Satellite image of Akumal in 2023. Source: Google Earth.

Chemuyil Bay also followed suit. Since 2003, the construction of a 1,300-room resort has cleared over 100 hectares of jungle and mangroves near the Xcacel-Xcacelito sea turtle sanctuary.¹⁶ Despite legal requirements to preserve dunes and nesting sites, construction continued amid protests, showing how environmental regulations are subordinated to investment interests. The Akumal-Chemuyil corridor saw a similar dynamic in the mid-2010s, when the expansion of the Bahía Príncipe complex destroyed coral reefs and enclosed public beaches.



Figure 3. Satellite image of Chemuyil in 2005. Source: Google Earth.

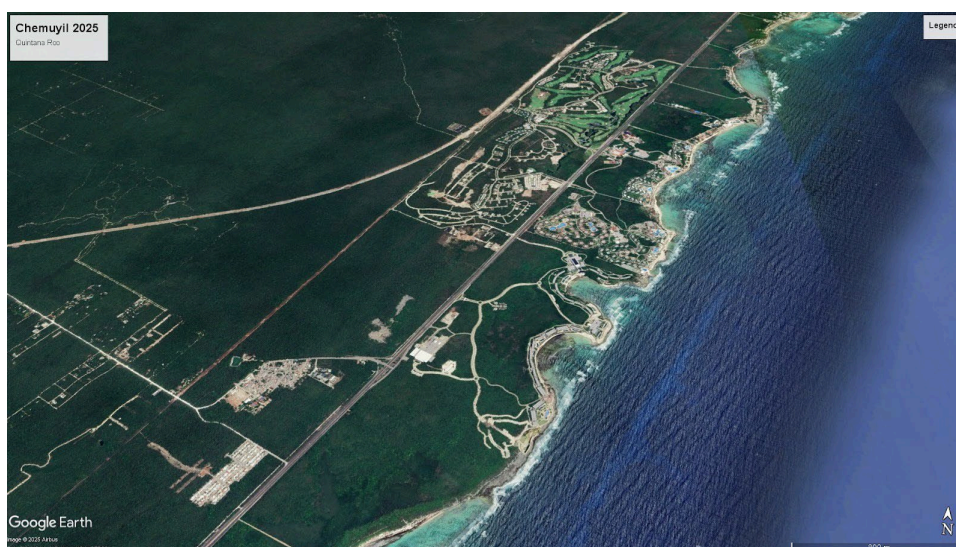


Figure 4. Satellite image of Chemuyil in 2025. Source: Google Earth.

Figures 3 and 4 show the rapid urban development that took place between 2005 and 2025. Not only have those constructions changed the landscape, but they changed the local fauna and flora. The Kumal-Chemuyil development caused deforestation, habitat fragmentation, and contamination of cenotes and subterranean water systems, leading to biodiversity loss and ecological disruption.¹⁷ These processes reflect dynamics of tourism extractivism, where land, water, and ecosystems are commodified and depleted to sustain a tourism-driven economy that prioritizes short-term profit. In this model, the environmental and social costs are externalized onto local communities and ecosystems.¹⁸

Urban development and gentrification

Urban growth in central Tulum also seems to follow the same logic of transformation as the coast. In La Veleta, for instance, speculative real estate has replaced modest homes with luxury condominiums and short-term rentals,¹⁹ leading to rising land prices. This gentrification process, coupled with infrastructure upgrades, has intensified displacement pressures across the Playa del Carmen–Tulum corridor, contributing to housing precarization and pushing lower-income residents toward more peripheral areas (Frías Cienfuegos 2024). The satellite images make this transformation visible: in 2005,

La Veleta (Figure 5) appeared as a sparse settlement with only a few scattered dwellings and unpaved streets carved into the jungle. By 2025 (Figure 6), however, the same grid has been almost completely urbanized, filled with dense construction oriented toward the tourism and real estate market. This accelerated growth has reshaped the neighborhood into a space for global consumption, while eroding its role as a residential area for local families.

Another urbanization, Aldea Zamá, named after what is believed to be Tulum’s original name, developed directly on former jungle lands and has become a high-income enclave largely inhabited by foreign residents.²⁰ These projects intensify segregation and displace low-income households, particularly Maya workers employed in tourism and construction.



Figure 5. Satellite image of La Veleta in 2005. Source: Google Earth.

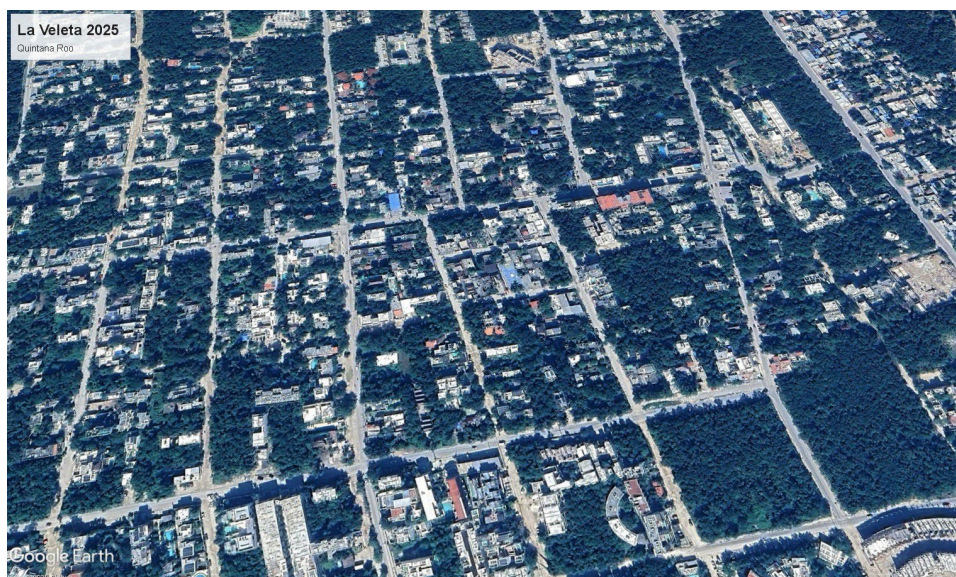


Figure 6. Satellite image of La Veleta in 2025. Source: Google Earth.

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the rapid urbanization of La Veleta, which was driven by speculative real estate development that has transformed the area into an exclusive and costly enclave, largely inaccessible to residents. This dynamic comes as another example of tourism extractivism in the region,

where land is commodified for luxury tourism and foreign investment, inflating property values, straining water and energy supplies, and fueling gentrification that displaces local communities.²¹

RIGHT TO THE CITY AND EXCLUSION

Tulum's transformation highlights struggles over power and access that disregard residents' ability to claim the city. This stands in contrast to the right to the city, which entails not only access to space but also the collective capacity to shape its meaning and functionality, making it a livable place residents can appropriate.²² In Tulum, however, the decisions and legislative powers are concentrated in the hands of investors and state actors. Meanwhile, Indigenous communities are dispossessed both materially and symbolically, leaving them at the margins of the right to the city, not allowed to shape their own territory.²³ Luxury resorts, ecological degradation, loss of ejidal lands, and gentrification illustrate a model that privileges capital over social inclusion and environmental justice. Indigenous Maya residents are excluded from decision-making, displaced by speculation, and relegated to informal settlements with inadequate infrastructure.²⁴ Gentrification in La Veleta and the expansion of camps like 2 de Octubre show how far the city has moved from the possibility of a livable urban environment.

This contradiction brings us back to the question of the “right to the city,” but also to which city?—the city imagined as a vacation enclave for global consumers, or the city where tourism workers and Indigenous residents struggle to secure housing, infrastructure, and recognition. At the same time, these processes have not gone uncontested. Local and Indigenous groups have organized protests and legal actions to defend territorial rights and access to natural resources. In August 2025, for instance, residents of Tulum blocked Federal Highway 307 for nearly ten hours to demand free access to beaches that had been enclosed by private actors.²⁵ Ejidatarios have also mobilized against broken agreements linked to the Tren Maya and the Tulum airport, denouncing the dispossession of communal lands.²⁶ These struggles resonate with wider national movements in Mexico, such as communities in Oaxaca and Puebla that have successfully challenged Canadian mining projects through collective legal action.²⁷ Together, these cases illustrate that while dispossession is systemic, social mobilization remains a crucial counterforce, asserting demands for justice, autonomy, and the right to territory in the face of extractivist urbanization.

The question “who has the right to the city?” exposes the inequalities embedded in so-called green or sustainable tourism. In Tulum, these models function as new forms of colonial dispossession, creating cities not for residents but for consumers. As a result, livelihoods are eroded, ecological resilience is weakened, and urban life is reshaped around spectacle and consumption rather than around the needs of locals.



Figure 7. *Maya Naj (House in Mayan)* in the Tulum municipality. Source: Picture taken by Jair Ortega Castaneda.

NAJ TULUM

Aldea Zama, 77760 Tulum, México – [Buena ubicación](#) - [Ver mapa](#)



Figure 8. “Apartahotel” in Tulum called “Naj Tulum” Source: Booking.com

Figures 7 and 8 highlight this contrast. While Naj in Maya simply means “house,” in Tulum, the term is rebranded to market luxury apartments. This juxtaposition exemplifies how Indigenous dwellings and language are aestheticized for tourism, reducing cultural meaning to a brand for global consumption.

Extractivist tourism in Tulum mirrors the logic of natural resource extraction: it depends on the intensive use of land and ecosystems for short-term profit, with little reinvestment in the well-being of local

populations. The economic benefits remain highly concentrated, often flowing to foreign investors or large national developers, while local residents bear the brunt of environmental costs and social displacement. Public infrastructure remains insufficient, and basic services are unequally distributed. As of 2020, over 70% of infrastructure investments were directed toward tourist zones, while residential areas lack reliable access to potable water, sanitation, and transportation.²⁸

Consequently, Tulum has become increasingly unlivable for many of its original residents. Soaring real estate prices, fueled by speculative investment and luxury development, have pushed working-class and Indigenous families to the peripheries, often into informal settlements with poor access to services. The environmental degradation of coastal and jungle areas, which were once central to livelihoods and community life, has reduced the availability of clean water and disrupted ecosystems.²⁹ As tourism consumes more natural and social resources, it leaves less behind for the people who live there. What remains is not a shared prosperity, but a fractured urban landscape marked by inequality, cultural erasure, and environmental exhaustion.

A livable city should guarantee affordable housing, basic services, ecological balance, cultural continuity, and participation.³⁰ According to UN-Habitat (2022), this requires spatial justice, environmental sustainability, and democratic planning. In Tulum, these principles are systematically undermined by tourism-driven development, producing segregation, precarity, and ecological decline.

Tourism extractivism: land, culture, and paradoxes

Tourism extractivism in Tulum mirrors the logic of natural resource extraction, as it relies on intensive use of land and ecosystems for short-term profit, with little reinvestment in local well-being. Extractivism, once largely associated with the large-scale extraction of raw materials, has been reconceptualized to capture broader operations of value extraction that extend beyond primary commodities.³¹ In tourism frontiers, this can include the extraction of discursive and symbolic value from places, identities, and experiences.³² In Tulum, this means not only exploiting natural resources but also commodifying Indigenous identity and culture.

Developments such as Aldea Zamá and Selvazama embody this logic. They market eco-chic lifestyles that draw on Indigenous cosmologies while displacing the very communities whose traditions are appropriated. Tourists are invited to “live like the Maya” through jungle yoga, temazcales, and artisanal markets, yet Indigenous residents are excluded from territorial and economic benefits.³³ This dynamic constitutes cultural extraction, where meaning is stripped from lived practice and repackaged as spectacle.

Today, Tulum is globally branded as a luxury tourism hub. Yet for its original inhabitants, the shift has meant economic precarity, ecological degradation, and cultural erasure. Fishermen, once central to local life, have been forced into precarious service roles as access to traditional fishing grounds disappeared under hotels and private beaches.³⁴ Environmental decline, from coral bleaching to polluted cenotes, further undermines livelihoods.³⁵

The paradox is clear. While tourists consume an imagined version of Indigenous life, the actual Maya communities are denied the resources and spaces to sustain their own traditions. What is marketed as cultural appreciation is, in practice, cultural extraction, deepening dispossession under the guise of sustainable tourism

CONCLUSION

The case of Tulum exemplifies how contemporary extractivism transcends the material realm, operating just as powerfully through the commodification of symbols, aesthetics, and cultural imaginaries. What is marketed globally as eco-tourism and spiritual retreat is, in practice, a deeply extractive project, one that reconfigures land, displaces communities, and obscures ongoing colonial relations under the

language of sustainability and regeneration. This form of symbolic extraction relies on the aesthetic appropriation of Indigenous cosmologies, tropical ecologies, and environmental discourse to legitimize new forms of accumulation and exclusion. These exclusions materialize through a web of asymmetric relations between locals and foreigners (including affluent Mexican elites), between artisanal fishers and tourism entrepreneurs, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, and between ejidatario farmers and real estate developers.

By analyzing the discursive architectures that sustain Tulum’s transformation, this paper demonstrates that tourism-led “green” development often functions not as an alternative to extractivism but as its mutation. The production of ecological fantasy in Tulum invites urgent reflection on how sustainability is mobilized to depoliticize displacement and erase histories of resistance.

Any serious attempt to address climate injustice must not only critique the extractive economies of oil, mining, or agribusiness but also confront the symbolic economies that transform land, identity, and ecology into luxury commodities for global consumption. A decolonial lens makes visible the contradictions of eco-development and insists on centering the voices, territories, and epistemologies of those systematically marginalized by it. In this sense, resisting symbolic extraction is not just about preserving culture or nature; it’s about reimagining life beyond the logics of dispossession.

NOTES

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THE ROLE OF SUPPORT SERVICES IN PATHWAYS INTO AND OUT OF HOMELESSNESS¹

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), more than 2.1 million people across the 36 developed countries for which data are available are homeless.² Throughout the world exactly what it means to be homeless varies from nation-to-nation. In the United States, being homeless means being unsheltered or sheltered. In Europe the definition is more generous (e.g., encompassing people living in overcrowded conditions).³ However, maintained across countries is the view that adequate (secure, available services, affordable, accessible, inhabitable, well located and culturally adequate) housing is a fundamental human right.⁴ It forms the basis of stability and security for an individual or family; and is a vital source of ontological security. In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that 122,494 people were homeless on Census night.⁵ Such point-in-time estimates are expected to greatly understate the number of people who will experience homelessness in their lifetime.⁶

Despite the scale of the problem there is a paucity of rigorous quantitative evidence (i.e., longitudinally modelled empirical evidence) on the: ‘...way that people fall into and climb out of homelessness. In particular, we need to know more about the consequences homelessness has, for example on physical and mental health, social networks, etc., and how these consequences evolve the longer individuals are homeless.’⁷ Certainly, there are numerous information-rich case studies. However, the generalisability of such case studies to the homeless population, in general, is limited by their own respective contexts and participants. This study endeavours to fill this gap in our understanding. In particular, this study examines the role of support services in predicting entry into homelessness and exits out of homelessness. To be more specific, this study investigates the following research questions:

- (1) what role do support services play in determining exits out of homelessness?; and
- (2) what role do support services play in determining entries into homelessness?

To be clear, support services here include the provision of; housing services, tenancy services, emergency relief services, legal services, financial services, gambling services, meals programs and family violence services. It also includes people’s personal experiences with accessing support services. For example, the difficulty or ease with which people have been able to access welfare services.

By addressing these research questions, this study generates new knowledge on homelessness. This study employs an underutilised longitudinal dataset coupled with sophisticated longitudinal modelling techniques. These methods use variation in people’s experiences of homelessness over time to arrive at more generalisable conclusions regarding the homeless population at time points within the experience

of homelessness. Johnson and others⁸ explain that research efforts on homelessness have been hampered by the absence of longitudinal data.⁹ Indeed, there is a paucity of appropriate longitudinal data¹⁰ for the study of homelessness.¹¹ In this regard, Australia’s Journeys Home Survey is a path-breaking example of what is possible.

Material and methods

Journeys Home survey

This study draws on extremely rich data from the Journeys Home: A Longitudinal Study of the Factors Affecting Housing Stability, a nationally representative longitudinal survey of 1,692 Australians homeless, at-risk of homelessness or vulnerable to homelessness. The survey data also provide detailed information about respondents’ demographic, human capital, and family background characteristics; housing circumstances; wellbeing; employment outcomes; family relationships; and prior experiences of homelessness.¹²

Modelling methods

How pathways into homelessness depend on services is modelled using covariate adjustment (lagged covariate adjustment). Distinct from earlier studies, lagged variables are used to break the simultaneity between services and programs and homelessness that would otherwise bias the study’s estimates. Every feasible step is taken to minimise the risk posed by potential confounding influences. Specifically, this study adjusts for numerous lagged co-variates. The use of lagged co-variates is significant because it breaks the simultaneity (i.e., the present cannot predict the past). The chronology of events introduced in this study forbids hypothesised bidirectional relationships, such as, those that may be observed between mental health and homelessness; or those between alcohol consumption and homelessness). This is important to recognise as the simultaneity would otherwise bias the coefficients in an unknown direction and to an unknown extent. In comparison to contemporaneous associations, the standard errors are larger, however, the estimates are less likely to be biased.¹³ That said, potentially confounding factors cannot be unequivocally ruled out. 95% confidence intervals and robust standard errors are reported. Goodness of fit statistics are used to evaluate model fit. Initial model specifications are guided by the existing literature and underlying theory.^{14,15} StataNow/MP 18.5 is the statistical package that is used.

Specifically, random effects logit regression models for entry and exit models are estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. To address research question one the model takes the general form:

$$Exit_{i,t} = \alpha_0 + \sum_{j=1}^k \alpha_j x_{i,t,j} + \mu_i + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

Where $Exit_{i,t}$ takes a value one if the individual i exits homelessness (literal or cultural) in time $t+1$ and zero otherwise. α_0 is the constant term. $x_{i,t,j}$ refers to an individual i ’s covariate j (including support services variables). μ_i is an idiosyncratic individual-specific random effect and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ is the error term, independently and identically distributed.

To address research question two the model takes the general form:

$$Enter_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \sum_{j=1}^k \beta_j x_{i,t,j} + \mu_i + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (2)$$

Where $Enter_{i,t}$ takes a value one if the individual i enters homelessness (literal or cultural) in time $t+1$ and zero otherwise. β_0 is the constant term. $x_{i,t,j}$ refers to an individual i ’s covariate j (including support services variables). Again, μ_i is an idiosyncratic individual-specific random effect and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ is the error term, independently and identically distributed.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for the variables used throughout this study are reported in Table 1.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Percentage	Minimum	Maximum
Literal exit			0.9	0	1
Literal entry			1.2	0	1
Cultural exit			6.4	0	1
Cultural entry			4.9	0	1
Age 15 to 19			14.3	0	1
Age 20 to 29			32.1	0	1
Age 40 to 49			19.3	0	1
Age 50 to 59			9.3	0	1
Age 60 years and over			3.1	0	1
Female			45.0	0	1
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander			19.7	0	1
Immigrant from an English-speaking country			5.8	0	1
Immigrant from a non-English speaking country			6.6	0	1
Couple (lag)			20.2	0	1
Number of children under 18 years of age (lag)			31.5	0	1
Long-term health condition (lag)			45.7	0	1
K6 (lag)	7.9	5.9		0	24
Unknown educational attainment (lag)			0.8	0	1
Year 12 only (lag)			7.9	0	1
Year 12 and certificate I or II (lag)			2.3	0	1
Certificate III or IV (lag)			14.7	0	1
Trade certificate or apprenticeship (lag)			5.9	0	1
Diploma (lag)			5.1	0	1
University degree or higher (lag)			2.9	0	1
Employed (lag)			23.7	0	1
Percentage time in work since studying (lag)			27.5	0	100
Individual weekly income (lag)	438.6	334.0		0	9246
Social connectedness (lag)	0.0	0.7		-1.45	3
Public housing (lag)					
Community housing (lag)					
State care ever (lag)					
No carer at 14 years of age (lag)					
Non-response to experience violence (lag)			58.7		

Incarceration ever (lag)		0	1
Alcohol consumption per day (lag)		0	90
Illicit drug use once a week or more (lag)	3.3	0	1
Regional (lag)	30.5	0	1
Remote (lag)	3.7	0	1
Unknown location (lag)	2.3	0	1
Homeless (lag)	2.1	0	1
Difficulty with welfare services (lag)	9.3	0	1
Number of times support services used (lag)	7.4 28.3	0	507

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Table 2 column 1 pertains to exiting literal homelessness (Equation 1). Importantly, the footnote ‘a’ indicates that people with Unknown education (lag), Year 12 and certificate I or II (lag) and Public housing (lag) perfectly predict ‘failure’ (e.g., Literal exit = 0). That is, people described by these groups are not found to exit literal homelessness.

The figures in table 2 column 1 also shows that being female is associated with a lower likelihood of exiting literal homelessness 95% CI [0.0503, 0.9377], statistically significant at the 5% level. It also shows that being in community housing is associated with a dramatic 30.59-fold higher likelihood of exiting literal homelessness 95% CI [0.8519, 1098.3745], statistically significant at the 5% level. Having no carer at 14 years of age corresponds to an approximately 5-fold increase in the probability of exiting literal homelessness 95% CI [1.3064, 18.8458], statistically significant at the 5% level. Alcohol consumption per day is associated with a marginally higher likelihood of exiting literal homelessness 95% CI [1.0152, 1.0802], statistically significant at the 1% level. Living in a remote location is associated with a probability of exiting homelessness is 5.7 times that of people who do not live in remote locations 95% CI [0.7245, 44.6362], statistically significant at the 10% level. The number of times support services are used is not linked to exiting literal homelessness.

Table 2 column 2 relates to entry into literal homelessness (Equation 2). Notably, footnote ‘b’ indicates that omitted observations which perfectly predict ‘failure’ (e.g., Literal entry = 0) include: Unknown education (lag), Year 12 and certificate I or II (lag), Public housing (lag), Community housing (lag) and Unknown location (lag). That is, people described by these groups are not found to enter literal homelessness. Specifically, the results indicate that being between 50 to 59 years of age 95% CI [1.1265, 13.6942] and being 60 years or over 95% CI [0.9190, 26.4704] is associated with a greater likelihood of entry into literal homelessness, statistically significant at the 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

People who have ever been in State care are roughly twice as likely to enter literal homelessness 95% CI [0.9293, 4.8479], statistically significant at the 10% level. Having no carer at 14 years of age is associated with a 3.3 times greater likelihood of entering literal homelessness 95% CI [1.0308, 10.2836]. Similarly, not responding to exposure to violence self-report corresponds to a greater likelihood of entering literal homelessness 95% CI [0.8881, 9.2138], statistically significant at the 10% level. Alcohol consumption per day is associated with a marginally higher likelihood of exiting literal homelessness 95% CI [1.0138, 1.0718], statistically significant at the 1% level. Living in a remote location is associated with a probability of exiting homelessness is 5.3 times that of people who do not live in remote locations 95% CI [1.0368, 26.5846], statistically significant at the 5% level. The number of times support services are used is not linked to entering literal homelessness.

Table 2 column 3 relates to exits out of cultural homelessness (Equation 1). It is important to note that footnote ‘c’ indicates that people with Public housing (lag) perfectly predict ‘failure’ (e.g., Cultural exit = 0). Apart from this, the patterns share many similarities with those reported for exits out of literal homelessness. Distinctly though, being between 20 and 29 years of age 95% CI [0.4213, 0.9622] and being female 95% CI [0.5014, 0.9589] are separately associated with a lower likelihood of exiting cultural homelessness, both are statistically significant at the 5% level. Notably, being in a couple 95% CI [0.4219, 0.9645] is negatively linked to exiting homelessness, statistically significant at the 5% level. Further, attaining a university degree or higher 95% CI [0.9636, 3.6572] is associated with a greater likelihood of exiting cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 10% level. Individual weekly income 95% CI [0.9985, 1.0001] is marginally negatively associated with exiting cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 10% level. Community housing corresponds to a substantially higher likelihood 95% CI [2.1564, 85.2051] of exiting cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 1% level. Having ever been in State care corresponds to a higher likelihood of exiting homelessness, 95% CI [1.0063, 2.1722], statistically significant at the 5% level. Similar to literal homelessness, alcohol consumption per day is positively associated with exiting cultural homelessness 95% CI [1.0062, 1.0417], statistically significant at the 1% level. The number of housing support services used 95% CI [1.0029, 1.0109] corresponds to a greater likelihood of exiting homelessness, statistically significant at the 1% level.

Table 2 column 4 concerns entries into cultural homelessness (Equation 2). It is especially relevant to note that footnote ‘d’ indicates that Omitted observations which perfectly predict ‘failure’ (e.g., Cultural entry = 0) include: Public housing (lag) and Community housing (lag). That is, people described by these groups are not found to enter cultural homelessness, six month to six month. Table 2 column 4 shows that being 60 years of age or older 95% CI [1.0220, 5.5061] is associated with a much higher likelihood of entering cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 5% level. Unknown educational attainment 95% CI [1.2465, 10.6232] is associated with a 3.6-fold increase in the probability of entering cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 5% level. Employment 95% CI [0.4028, 1.0788] is associated with a lower likelihood of entering cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 10% level. State care ever 95% CI [1.0283, 2.4115] is positively associated with entering cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 5% level. Non-response to exposure to violence 95% CI [1.0234, 3.3435] is positively associated with entry into cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 5% level. Alcohol consumption per day is positively associated with entering cultural homelessness 95% CI [1.0122, 1.0453], statistically significant at the 1% level. As for entry into literal homelessness, Table 2 column 2, pathways into cultural homelessness do not appear to be helped nor hindered by support services.

	(1) ¹⁶ Literal exit	(2) ¹⁷ Literal entry	(3) ¹⁸ Cultural exit	(4) ¹⁹ Cultural entry
15 to 19 years of age	2.2468 (2.5724)	1.1970 (0.8838)	1.0329 (0.2649)	1.2437 (0.3694)
20 to 29 years of age	1.6326 (1.0253)	1.1590 (0.6829)	0.6367** (0.1341)	0.8447 (0.2015)
40 to 49 years of age	1.3023	1.9203	0.7450	1.0866

	(0.9936)	(1.1146)	(0.1684)	(0.2776)
50 to 59 years of age	2.5614 (2.0743)	3.9276** (2.5028)	0.8507 (0.2391)	0.7776 (0.2964)
60 years of age and over	2.8590 (3.9144)	4.9322* (4.2283)	0.5371 (0.3136)	2.3721** (1.0191)
Female	0.2172** (0.1621)	0.5978 (0.2411)	0.6934** (0.1147)	0.8441 (0.1480)
Aboriginal and/Torres Strait Islander	0.6407 (0.3673)	0.8844 (0.4456)	0.7385 (0.1670)	0.7210 (0.1580)
Immigrant from English-speaking country	1.2346 (0.7608)	1.2362 (0.7182)	0.9162 (0.2637)	0.6740 (0.2943)
Immigrant from non-English-speaking country	0.9109 (1.2098)	0.9537 (0.7661)	1.0278 (0.3539)	0.6595 (0.2749)
Couple (lag)	0.6967 (0.4458)	0.9924 (0.4125)	0.6379** (0.1346)	0.8316 (0.1782)
Number of children under 18 years of age (lag)	1.2443 (0.4902)	0.7181 (0.2884)	0.9029 (0.1543)	0.9577 (0.1441)
Long-term health condition (lag)	1.1584 (0.5647)	0.5113 (0.2112)	1.0709 (0.1804)	0.8198 (0.1545)
K6 (lag)	1.0736 (0.0474)	1.0225 (0.0381)	0.9990 (0.0145)	1.0061 (0.0161)
Unknown educational attainment (lag)	(omitted)	(omitted)	0.8370 (0.7987)	3.6389** (1.9891)
Year 12 only (lag)	0.5301 (0.5172)	1.8446 (1.0197)	1.0603 (0.2739)	0.8574 (0.2620)

Year 12 and certificate I or II (lag)			0.2010 (0.2058)	0.4387 (0.3022)
Certificate III or IV (lag)	0.6450 (0.4777)	1.4483 (0.7391)	0.9892 (0.2148)	1.2747 (0.2990)
Trade certificate or apprenticeship (lag)	0.4357 (0.4553)	0.7243 (0.5748)	1.0323 (0.2991)	1.0057 (0.3423)
Diploma (lag)	1.6030 (2.2175)	1.8178 (1.0912)	0.7436 (0.3033)	0.7436 (0.3010)
University degree or higher (lag)	3.1081 (2.7117)	0.9105 (0.8044)	1.8773* (0.6387)	1.0844 (0.4926)
Employed (lag)	1.1521 (0.6113)	1.2532 (0.5575)	0.9432 (0.2310)	0.6592* (0.1657)
Percentage time in work since studying (lag)	1.0013 (0.0072)	0.9897 (0.0072)	1.0035 (0.0029)	1.0030 (0.0031)
Individual weekly income (lag)	1.0000 (0.0006)	1.0001 (0.0003)	0.9993* (0.0004)	0.9998 (0.0004)
Social connectedness (lag)	0.8368 (0.2974)	0.9463 (0.2044)	0.9635 (0.1120)	0.8719 (0.1120)
Public housing (lag)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)	(omitted)
Community housing (lag)	30.5896* (55.8883)	(omitted)	13.5548*** (12.7135)	(omitted)
State care ever (lag)	1.6105 (0.7427)	2.1225* (0.8944)	1.4785** (0.2902)	1.5747** (0.3424)
No carer at 14 years of age (lag)	4.9618**	3.2557**	1.3910	1.0698

	(3.3784)	(1.9105)	(0.3850)	(0.3700)
Non-response to exposure to violence (lag)	3.6514 (3.1570)	2.8606* (1.7072)	1.5153 (0.4588)	1.8498** (0.5587)
Exposure to violence (lag)	1.6374 (0.9369)	0.8938 (0.3608)	1.2963 (0.2352)	1.1462 (0.2360)
Incarceration ever (lag)	1.9561 (1.3458)	0.8841 (0.6294)	0.9706 (0.2808)	0.7910 (0.2750)
Alcohol consumption per day (lag)	1.0472*** (0.0166)	1.0424*** (0.0148)	1.0238*** (0.0090)	1.0286*** (0.0084)
Illicit drug use once a week or more (lag)	0.8650 (0.6851)	2.4850 (2.2679)	1.4468 (0.5094)	0.7162 (0.3722)
Regional (lag)	0.8475 (0.4349)	1.0554 (0.3876)	1.1639 (0.1786)	1.3154 (0.2206)
Remote (lag)	5.6868* (5.9782)	5.2501** (4.3450)	0.5853 (0.4033)	1.0427 (0.6250)
Unknown location (lag)	2.7019 (2.7847)	1.0000 (.)	1.0437 (0.9424)	1.6993 (2.1412)
Difficulty with welfare services (lag)	1.8435 (1.0103)	0.2288 (0.2623)	1.2864 (0.2973)	1.1627 (0.3213)
Number of times support services used (lag)	1.0047 (0.0047)	1.0038 (0.0031)	1.0069*** (0.0021)	1.0030 (0.0022)
<i>Summary statistics</i>				
Observations	3691	3674	3876	3839
Individuals	1262.0000	1288.0000	1339.0000	1338.0000

Exponentiated coefficients; Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses; Wave fixed effects included.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 2. Random effects logit regression results

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of pathways into and out of homelessness and how this depends on support services. The central findings of this study indicate that the number of support services used is associated with marginally higher likelihood of exiting cultural homelessness, statistically significant at the 1% level. However, this was not statistically significant for literal homelessness. Literal homelessness appears to be quite obstinate. Further, and perhaps most strikingly, public housing perfectly predicts not entering or exiting literal or cultural homelessness. That is, there is no observed variation in housing exits or entries among people in public housing. These results plainly show, as is expected, that people in public housing are not entering or exiting homelessness. If you are in public housing, you are not going to be homeless. Remarkably, community housing is also strongly associated with exits out of literal homelessness, a 31-fold increase, and cultural homelessness, a 14-fold increase. It is also worth noting that higher levels of educational attainment may be protective against literal and cultural homelessness.²⁰

The results of this study suggest that the number of times support services are used can go some way to preventing entry into cultural homelessness but this link is dwarfed by the role of social housing. From a public policy perspective, these results are vitally important. They provide very strong evidence for social housing as a remedy to homelessness. The absence of any link observed between support services and literal homelessness is a stern rebuke to support service providers and it deserves further attention. It shows how housing need can persist while other non-housing needs are met.²¹

NOTES

¹ This paper uses data collected from the Journeys Home project, a longitudinal survey based study managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS). The findings and views reported in this paper, however, are those of the author and should not be attributed to either DSS or the Melbourne Institute.

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³ Koen Hermans. "Toward a harmonised homelessness data collection and monitoring strategy at the EU-level." *European Journal of Homelessness* 18 (2024): 191-219, accessed August 21, 2025.

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⁶ Rosanna Scutella, Guy Johnson, Julie Moschion, Yi-Ping Tseng, and Mark Wooden. "Understanding lifetime homeless duration: Investigating wave 1 findings from the Journeys Home project." *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 48 (2013): 83-110. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1839-4655.2013.tb00272.x>.

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⁸ Guy Johnson, Rosanna Scutella, Yi-Ping Tseng, and Gavin Wood. "How do housing and labour markets affect individual homelessness?" *Housing Studies* 34 (2019): 1089-1116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1520819>.

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¹¹ Guy Johnson, David Ribar, and Anna Zhu. "Women's homelessness: International evidence on causes, consequences, coping, and policies." *The Oxford Handbook of Women and the Economy* (2018): 799-824 Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190628963.013.34>.

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¹³ Julie Moschion and Guy Johnson. "Homelessness and incarceration: A reciprocal relationship?" *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 35 (2019): 855-887. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-019-09407-y>.

¹⁴ Deborah Cobb-Clark, Nicolas Herault, Rosanna Scutella, and Yi-Ping Tseng. "A journey home: What drives how long people are homeless?" *Journal of Urban Economics* 91 (2016): 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2015.11.005>.

¹⁵ Guy Johnson, Rosanna Scutella, Yi-Ping Tseng, and Gavin Wood. "How do housing and labour markets affect individual homelessness?" *Housing Studies* 34 (2019): 1089-1116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1520819>.

¹⁶ Omitted variables and observations include: Unknown education (lag) 21 observations, Year 12 and certificate I or II (lag) 104 observations, and Public housing (lag) 6 observations.

¹⁷ Omitted observations include: Unknown education (lag) 21 observations, Year 12 and certificate I or II (lag) 104 observations, Public housing (lag) 6 observations, Community housing (lag) 7 observations and Unknown location (lag) 10 observations.

¹⁸ Omitted observations include: Public housing (lag) 7 observations.

¹⁹ Omitted observations include: Public housing (lag) 7 observations and Community housing (lag) 7 observations.

²⁰ Peggy Kelly. "Risk and protective factors contributing to homelessness among foster care youth: An analysis of the National Youth in Transition Database." *Children and Youth Services Review* 108 (2020): 104589. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104589>.

²¹ Cameron Parsell, Andrew Clarke, Christopher Ambrey, and Margarita Vorsina. 2019. "Support requirements and accommodation options for people in the ACT with high and complex service needs." Brisbane.

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FORMS OF CULTURE: A SURVEY OF CULTURAL BUILDINGS IN 3 CITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Research on cultural infrastructure often fragments along disciplinary lines: urban economics prioritises quantitative metrics, architectural scholarship focuses on spatial form, and cultural studies emphasises user narratives and meaning-making. Each approach produces valuable insights but risks partiality when applied alone to complex urban phenomena. This paper presents a triangulated methodology that integrates quantitative **facts**, spatial analysis through **drawings**, and stakeholder **voices** to study cultural buildings as living infrastructures. We demonstrate this approach through comparative analysis of multi-tenant creative hubs in Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Ho Chi Minh City—contexts where cultural economies are significant urban drivers.¹

Cultural buildings—conceived here not as singular institutions but as multi-tenant creative hubs, collaborative networks, and sites of adaptive reuse—are not simply backdrops for creative production. They are infrastructures that live, endure, and sometimes collapse under the weight of economics, policy, and human improvisation.

Where investment in cultural infrastructure is often channelled into top-down flagship institutions—museums, concert halls, cultural centres—conceived as icons of urban renewal, this study focuses instead on the incremental transformation of existing buildings: the bottom-up adaptive reuse of warehouses, offices, schools, convents, even former prisons, into cultural buildings. These spaces host diverse cultural producers within fragile, shifting constellations of uses and stakeholders, sustained less by centralised planning than by improvisation.

This comparative analysis of creative buildings across the Asia-Pacific identifies the patterns, strongholds, and gaps that shape their survival. In a time when cultural spaces are precarious—threatened by gentrification, speculative development, and short-term policy cycles—the urgency is not only to record what is vanishing, but to develop ways of knowing that capture how culture persists.

METHODOLOGY

Work AC’s “49 Cities” project demonstrates the power of systematic comparison through juxtaposing spatial form alongside quantitative metrics of visionary cities, built and unbuilt.² Urban data such as density, FAR and population are most compelling when visualised alongside the architectural drawings of the radical urban propositions. We saw an opportunity to apply a similar method to cultural buildings, integrating 3 divergent approaches of analysis— facts, drawings and voices, into a graphic format to compare the various cultural buildings based on criteria we identify as essential to their success. We

formatted quantitative data such as governance and funding structures public interface and accessibility, alongside architectural drawings and photography that captured the nuanced spatial logic of communal spaces vs private work spaces among buildings rich with architectural details and atmosphere, qualities that can enable or constrain cultural practice. Here, drawings are not representations but analytic instruments. They capture what numbers cannot: the intimacy of a narrow stair, the improvisation enabled by a void, the atmosphere of a corridor as social condenser. The third register—**voices**—grounds both fact and drawing in testimony. Interviews with artists, architects, tenants, and managers reveal how spaces are lived, resisted, and co-produced. These voices ensure that research does not speak about cultural actors but with them, acknowledging the often invisible labour that keeps buildings alive. Together, these registers establish a methodology for examining cultural infrastructure as a dynamic ecology rather than a static entity. The contribution of this paper lies not simply in comparing cultural buildings in Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Ho Chi Minh City, but in demonstrating this method to document how cultural spaces endure.

By collaging data with drawings, and facts with voices, this paper argues for a research practice that neither romanticises cultural spaces as relics of authenticity nor reduces them to economic instruments. Instead, it approaches them as infrastructures of endurance: fragile yet resilient, always provisional, always negotiated.

Background

Across cities worldwide, cultural infrastructure is often deprioritised. When governments and developers face urgent pressures around housing shortages, healthcare, or basic services, cultural space tends to slip down the agenda. It is treated as an afterthought—a desirable extra rather than essential infrastructure. In this context, cultural buildings become structurally undervalued—vulnerable to market logics, redevelopment pressures, and shifting political winds. They are rarely protected as critical civic assets, despite their role in sustaining the social and creative life of cities.

Artists and cultural workers are often the first to occupy underutilised buildings—old factories, redundant office towers, disused institutional complexes—because these spaces offer light, flexibility, access, and the ability to make noise away from residential areas. Yet this very nimbleness also makes them vulnerable: the value they generate through creative use frequently accelerates their own displacement as rents rise or redevelopment clears the site. This paradox, well-documented in research on the “creative city” demonstrates how cultural infrastructure is squeezed by larger urban priorities: vital enough to revitalise neighbourhoods but seldom valued enough to be preserved in the long term.³ The cultural spaces examined in this study—from Melbourne’s Nicholas Building to Hong Kong’s Tai Kwun to Ho Chi Minh City’s Café Apartment—each face this precarious condition in different ways. In Melbourne, heritage buildings play a central role in hosting cultural activity, but their protection remains piecemeal, often hinging on short-term activism or nonprofit stewardship. Rising property values and redevelopment pressures place long-standing creative communities at risk, while cultural policy, administered through agencies such as Creative Victoria, is frequently reactive rather than strategic.

Hong Kong presents a different landscape: extreme land scarcity and a highly financialised property market make cultural space an exception rather than a norm. Here, cultural projects often emerge through elite-driven partnerships or philanthropic initiatives.⁴ While these projects generate striking architectural outcomes, their dependence on commercial viability frequently limits grassroots experimentation. These conditions are shaped by a mix of government, private, and non-profit funding bodies, and by urban typologies and densities that differ markedly from those in Melbourne.

In Ho Chi Minh City, by contrast, cultural infrastructure thrives within informality. Spaces like the Café Apartment operate through regulatory tolerance rather than official sanction, transforming residential blocks into layered assemblages of studios, cafés, and galleries. This informality fosters vibrancy but remains inherently unstable: what flourishes today may be closed tomorrow through sudden enforcement.

Across these three contexts, a common pattern emerges: cultural infrastructure is essential yet seldom treated as such. Its endurance depends on a patchwork of governance models, financial compromises, and human improvisations. This precarity exposes the limits of conventional research approaches. Architectural drawings can describe a building's form, and economic studies can quantify its rent models, but neither alone captures the fragile ecologies of survival that sustain cultural space. To understand how cultural buildings endure, research must move between facts, atmospheres, and voices—a methodology developed in this paper.

Method: Between Data and Drawing

Research on cultural infrastructure often fractures along disciplinary lines. Urban economics privileges numbers: rents per square metre, tenancy turnover, revenue streams, subsidy models. Architectural scholarship privileges form: plans, typologies, and spatial analyses of adaptive reuse. Cultural studies privileges narratives: interviews, ethnographies, testimonies. Each produces insights, but each risks partiality when taken alone. This project responds by developing a method that deliberately holds these registers together.

We call this method a triangulation of **facts, drawings, and voices**.

1. Facts (Quantitative Metrics)

The first register involves gathering **quantitative data** about cultural buildings: rent levels (commercial vs. subsidised), length of leases, proportion of cultural to non-cultural tenants, governance models (nonprofit, hybrid, informal), and frequency of change of use. These figures provide a hard-edged scaffold, situating cultural buildings within broader systems of property markets and governance frameworks. Without this scaffold, accounts of cultural spaces risk romanticising precarity or ignoring the economic realities that shape survival.

Our approach has been to compare buildings across contexts—placing one in Melbourne alongside one in Hong Kong, or one in Ho Chi Minh City against one in Hong Kong. This comparative pairing sharpens observation: it makes visible how similar architectural conditions play out differently under divergent governance models, or how different forms of tenancy arrangements produce parallel constraints.

For example, Collingwood Yards sustains its cultural tenants by cross-subsidising 83% of studio rents with revenue from commercial tenants.⁵ By contrast, Hong Kong's Cattle Depot charges average just HK\$2.5 per square meter per day, but has restrictive rules such as three-month leases and bans on wall painting.⁶ Juxtaposing these two cases reveals not only that numbers matter, but that numbers are embedded in wider logics of governance and care. The quantitative register thus illuminates how survival is not merely architectural but infrastructural, entangled in economic metrics that both enable and constrain cultural life.



Figure 1. Comparative quantitative analysis of ten cultural buildings across the Asia–Pacific region (Melbourne, Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh City), developed for *Forms of Culture at Melbourne Design Week 2025*. Source: Lam and Garner 2025.

2. Drawings (Phenomenological Conditions)

The second register translates ephemeral cultural qualities into experimental drawings. Conventional architectural drawings freeze form, but here, drawings are used as analytic devices: they reveal conditions otherwise invisible to data. Sectional perspectives capture how a stairwell fosters intimacy by compressing movement, or how a central void produces atmospheres of chance encounter. Axonometric diagrams map sound leakage between studios, or the layering of public and private thresholds in courtyard typologies.

Vertical stacking in Melbourne’s Nicholas Building was studied against the JCCAC in Hong Kong, while courtyard campus conditions at Abbotsford Convent were compared to Tai Kwun. These comparative drawings allowed us to see not just what a single building affords, but how similar typologies are inflected differently by local economies, governance structures, and cultural practices.

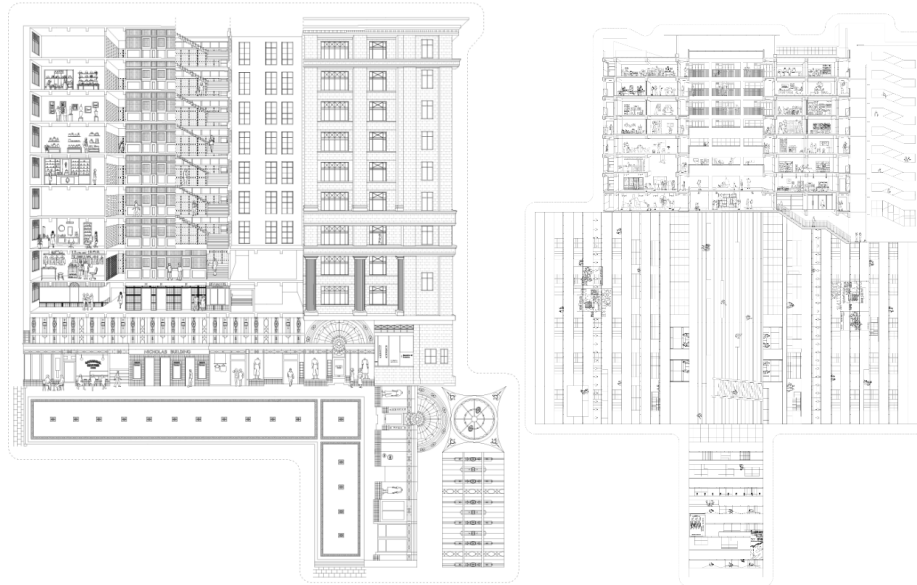


Figure 2. Comparative sectional drawings of the Nicholas Building (Melbourne, left) and Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre (JCCAC, Hong Kong, right), produced by RMIT Architecture students for the Forms of Culture exhibition at Melbourne Design Week 2025. (Source: Lam and Garner 2025.)

Consider the VCA Arts Building in Melbourne, where a cellular layout of small studios and internalised circulation fosters an architecture of improvisation. A sectional drawing reveals how its enclosed rooms cluster along narrow corridors, producing intimate atmospheres and allowing students to continually reorganise space at will. Set against drawings of Collingwood Yards, where studios are arranged around a central courtyard and partitioning is fixed under long-term tenancy agreements, a different logic emerges: the courtyard operates as the collective social and creative core, while individual spaces remain tightly controlled. The comparison underscores how endurance is often spatially encoded—not in form alone, but in how form interacts with governance and user agency.

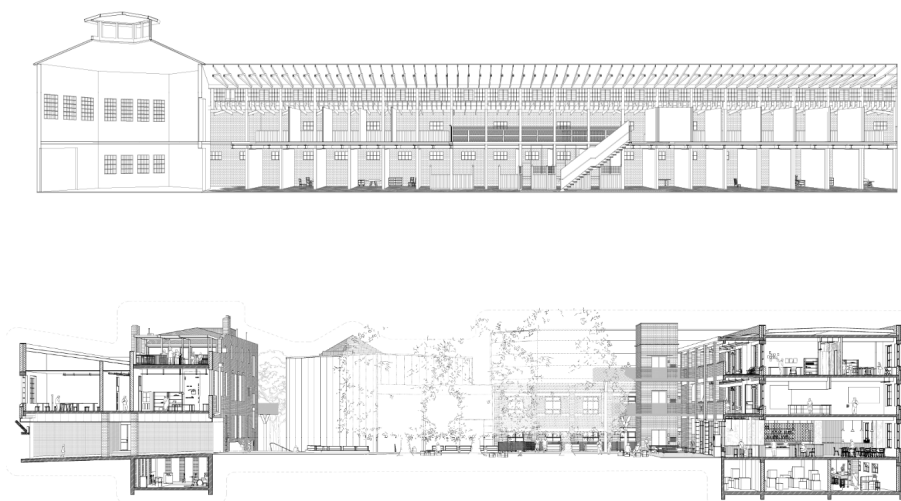


Figure 3. Sectional drawings of Cattle Depot (Hong Kong, top) and VCA Arts Building (Melbourne, bottom), produced by RMIT Architecture students for the Forms of Culture – Exhibition, Melbourne Design Week 2025. (Source: Lam and Garner 2025.)

Thus, drawing in this method operates as research: it renders cultural atmospheres legible and comparable across contexts, producing insights that neither data nor anecdote alone could capture.

3. Voices (Testimonies)

The third register captures the voices of those who inhabit, govern, and adapt cultural buildings: artists, managers, architects, developers. Their testimonies reveal what neither numbers nor drawings can: the lived tactics of care. These voices anchor the research in subjectivity, making visible the often-invisible labour of endurance.

Our method here was direct and comparative. We met with owners, managers, and tenants of each building, conducted interviews, and circulated questionnaires that invited reflection on how these spaces are used, sustained, and transformed over time. By collecting and comparing voices across cities, we could observe how similar architectural conditions—corridors, courtyards, thresholds—were animated differently by cultural actors under varying systems of governance and economics.

A Nicholas Building tenant, for example, describes the place as a “vertical arcade” where one can stumble from milliner to tattooist to architect.⁷ At JCCAC in Hong Kong, artist KaHo Albert Yu explains that his studio is an “infrastructure for work that doesn’t fit anywhere else”—VR, motion capture, 3D scanning.⁸ Meanwhile, conversations with developers and managers revealed parallel but often conflicting perspectives: a Hong Kong landlord framed short leases as “flexibility,” while Melbourne tenants described them as “precarity.”

Taken together, these testimonies evidence how cultural buildings are not neutral containers but co-produced by the practices and negotiations of their users. The comparative approach—placing quotes and experiences from Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Ho Chi Minh City side by side—allowed us to see not only what was particular to each context but also the recurring tactics of endurance shared across cities.



Figure 4. Interviews and exhibition discussion with Nicholas Building tenants Charles Deicke and Sophie Nash, with accompanying quotes, as part of the *Forms of Culture – Exhibition*, Melbourne Design Week 2025. (Source: Lam and Garner 2025.)

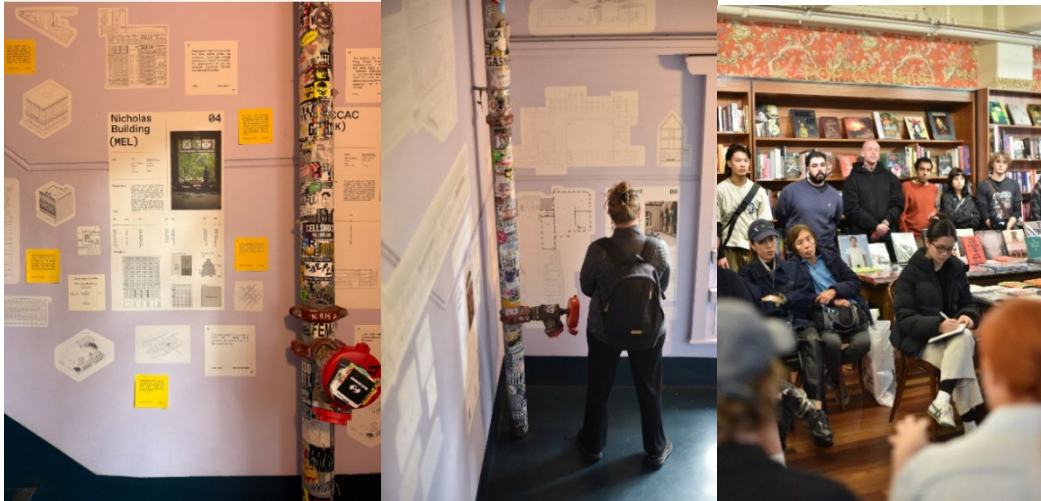


Figure 5-8. *Forms of Culture – Exhibition (installation of comparative building analysis) and public symposium event, Melbourne Design Week 2025.*

*Produced by RMIT Architecture students and curated by Lauren Garner and Vicky Lam.
(Source: Lam and Garner 2025.)*

Architecture as Condition

If cultural buildings are to be understood as infrastructures of endurance rather than static monuments, then their architectural form must be analysed as **condition**. A condition is neither object nor style, but the set of possibilities a building affords—what it enables, what it constrains, and how it mediates between users and systems. Through our method of facts, drawings, and voices, three recurring typologies emerge: **vertical arcades**, **porous campuses**, and **retrofitted rhythms**.

Vertical Arcades

Stacked vertical buildings, such as Melbourne’s Nicholas Building or Hong Kong’s Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre (JCCAC), function as “vertical arcades.” Their cellular layouts and shared circulation spaces produce chance encounters and collective atmospheres. A Nicholas tenant describes wandering from “a milliner’s studio, to a bookstore, to a tattoo parlour, to an architect’s office”.⁹ Drawings of the building’s central lightwell and narrow corridors make visible this density of adjacency, showing how proximity fosters serendipitous interaction.

From a quantitative perspective, these buildings endure because of their adaptability. Small tenancies can be easily combined or subdivided, allowing them to accommodate fluctuating needs over decades. Occupancy data shows unusually high tenant turnover paired with unusually long building life: the Nicholas has absorbed shifting uses for nearly a century, proving that flexibility of form can offset volatility of market.

Porous Campuses

In contrast, campus-like typologies such as Tai Kwun in Hong Kong or Abbotsford Convent in Melbourne operate through **porosity**. Multiple buildings organised around courtyards and gardens invite permeability: public and private uses bleed together, producing atmospheres of openness. At Abbotsford, visitors might encounter a farmers’ market, a gallery, and a concert within the same day. Aerial drawings reveal the layering of circulation and program across eleven buildings, while tenancy records demonstrate the breadth of uses sustained across 6.8 hectares.

Such porosity generates a different endurance logic: diversity rather than density. Tai Kwun, supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, leverages its heritage fabric to create spaces where art, history, and

leisure overlap. Here, the quantitative story of philanthropic funding collides with qualitative drawings of cloisters and courtyards: atmospheres of lingering sustained by governance mechanisms that stabilise rent beyond commercial market rates.

Retrofitted Rhythms

A third typology emerges in retrofits: buildings whose past lives imprint conditions on current use. The VCA Stables in Melbourne, a conversion from Victorian horse stables, retained stall partitions that now function as flexible studio walls. As one faculty member noted, “the partitions weren’t fixed for long—the space reorganised itself.” Sectional drawings emphasise rhythm and repetition, showing how inherited partitions become spatial instruments of improvisation.

Similarly, the Café Apartment in Ho Chi Minh City demonstrates how retrofits can flourish in informality. Residential apartments converted into cafes and studios sustain overlapping programs, though always precariously. Occupancy surveys document high tenant churn, while drawn diagrams reveal stacked layers of appropriation—domestic thresholds re-coded into commercial interfaces.

Architecture as Condition

Across these typologies, the method demonstrates how endurance is encoded spatially. Corridors, courtyards, and partitions are not neutral features but infrastructures of encounter, adaptation, and improvisation. When paired with data and voices, drawings reveal how form sustains culture not by permanence but by enabling provisionality. Architecture, then, is best understood not as container but as condition—an unstable framework in which cultural life is continuously negotiated.

Systems that Sustain (or Undermine)

Architectural form alone cannot guarantee the survival of cultural buildings. Endurance is equally determined by the systems operating behind the walls: governance models, funding mechanisms, and bureaucratic frameworks. These invisible architectures either sustain creative practice or quietly undermine it.

Nonprofit stewardship

In Melbourne, nonprofit stewardship has emerged as a key mechanism of endurance. Abbotsford Convent was preserved from commercial redevelopment when the state government gifted the site to the public and a nonprofit foundation assumed control. The Convent operates on a mixed revenue model—below-market studio rents, venue hire, fundraising. Data from the Abbotsford Convent Foundation (2025) shows cultural use maintained across eleven buildings precisely because governance privileges cultural and social value over profit. Similarly, Collingwood Yards sustains itself through cross-subsidy: commercial tenants like cafes and record shops offset the cost of artist studios, subsidising 83% of rents. Here, the numbers tell the story: without redistribution, affordability collapses.

Hybrid philanthropy

Hong Kong often relies on public–private hybrids backed by philanthropy. PMQ, for instance, received HK\$100 million from the Musketeers Foundation for renovation. Yet the obligation to remain self-financing through rental income drives management to favour “retail-ready” tenants. Critics argue PMQ risks becoming “a shopping mall in a very cool building”. By contrast, Tai Kwun enjoys ongoing funding from the Hong Kong Jockey Club, which allows programming to focus less on revenue and more on cultural integrity. Financial structures thus shape not only tenant mix but the very ethos of cultural projects.

Over-bureaucratized state control

Government-run models can cut both ways. Hong Kong’s Cattle Depot charges artists as little as HK\$2 per square metre per day, but this generosity is undercut by rigid rules: leases renewed every three months, bans on painting studio walls, prohibitions on photography. Testimonies describe a place that feels less like an artist village and more like a monitored facility. Low rent without autonomy proves unsustainable—units sit vacant, a reminder that endurance is never secured by subsidy alone.

Informal economies

In Ho Chi Minh City, cultural survival leans heavily on informality. The Café Apartment transformed residential units into overlapping creative-commercial programs without official sanction. Regulatory tolerance allowed it to flourish, but also made it precarious: enforcement could arrive at any moment. Survey data reveals constant tenant churn, while drawings capture the layered retrofits—balconies as shopfronts, apartments as stacked cafes. Here, informality itself becomes a system: flexible, opportunistic, but fragile.

Systems as invisible architectures

Taken together, these cases show that governance and finance act as invisible architectures. They condition who can afford to stay, what activities are permitted, and how spaces evolve over time. Cultural endurance is therefore not only a question of form but of systems—subsidy, trust, bureaucracy, tolerance. When systems support adaptability, culture thrives; when they impose rigidity, even generous architecture withers.

People as Infrastructure

If systems are the invisible architectures of cultural endurance, then people are its living infrastructure. Buildings may provide conditions and governance may stabilise rent, but cultural life persists only through the continual labour of caretakers, programmers, tenants, and artists who sustain it through maintenance, risk, and improvisation.

In Melbourne, Tim Peach’s stewardship of Curtin House transformed a neglected building into what he described as “the heart of Melbourne’s vertical laneway culture.” His curatorial ownership—taking risks on unconventional tenants and programming eclectic uses—illustrates how cultural leadership often emerges not from government intervention but from individual initiative. A similar ethos underpins the Nicholas Building Association, which has collectively coordinated repairs, lobbied for preservation, and sustained community atmosphere in the absence of engaged ownership.

Cultural programmers and managers perform a quieter but no less critical role: mediating between the volatility of artistic practice and the order demanded by funders, audiences, and bureaucracies. At Tai Kwun, international-standard management could easily have tipped into spectacle, yet testimony shows a deliberate emphasis on supporting local artists despite strong tourist numbers. Here, endurance depends less on architecture or subsidy than on institutional decisions to privilege integrity over profit. Artists and tenants, meanwhile, are not passive occupants but co-producers of cultural space. A Nicholas Building tenant described renovating their derelict studio by hand—repairing windows, painting walls, sharing tools—gradually building a collective ecosystem across floors. At JCCAC, artist KaHo Albert Yu frames his studio as “infrastructure for practices that don’t fit anywhere else”—VR, motion capture, 3D scanning. Such accounts show how endurance is assembled from below, through everyday acts of care, improvisation, and shared investment in place.

Endurance, then, is not fully captured by tenancy records or architectural drawings. It is embodied in the people whose often-invisible labour animates and maintains these buildings, ensuring they remain sites of cultural life rather than static containers.

Three Urban Logics

Comparing Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Ho Chi Minh City reveals not just different buildings but divergent urban logics—structural patterns of governance, economy, and culture that shape how cultural infrastructure persists or dissolves.

In Melbourne, endurance depends on a fragile alliance between heritage listing, nonprofit stewardship, and tenant-led activism. The Nicholas Building remains standing through heritage protection yet relies on continual campaigns by its occupants to defend it from sale. Abbotsford Convent survives because the state transferred ownership to a nonprofit trust, which now governs the site as a public cultural asset. Such cases reflect a civic environment where citizens expect to intervene, and where preservation is achieved through continual negotiation rather than guaranteed by policy.¹⁰

In Hong Kong, cultural infrastructure emerges only rarely from within speculative property markets. Projects like PMQ and Tai Kwun materialised through elite philanthropic foundations and public–private partnerships, justified under the banner of the “creative city”.¹¹ Their survival depends on financial insulation from the market they inhabit. Yet this model often displaces cultural practice with cultural branding: PMQ’s retail-heavy tenancy mix shows how quickly subsidised space can tip into spectacle.

In Ho Chi Minh City, by contrast, cultural space survives through informality. The Café Apartment was never officially sanctioned; it endures through tacit tolerance and a continual recalibration of risk. This informality enables cultural activity to flourish in otherwise prohibitive conditions, but leaves it vulnerable to sudden regulatory enforcement.

These three logics—negotiated preservation, elite insulation, and tolerated informality—produce cultural vitality in radically different ways. Yet each is precarious, sustained only insofar as it remains secondary to more dominant urban agendas of housing, infrastructure, and commercial development. Endurance here is not a stable condition but a contingent effect, continually reassembled at the edge of disappearance.

Towards a Spatial Ethics of Care

If cultural buildings are fragile, marginalised, and structurally undervalued, how might they be sustained without being sanitised? Preservation alone is insufficient: freezing buildings in time often erases the very practices that made them vital. What is needed is a **spatial ethics of care**—a framework that prioritises adaptability, agency, and cultural function over profit or monumentality.

Care, Not Conservation

Conservation tends to lock buildings into static images of the past. Care, by contrast, assumes change as inevitable. It asks how buildings can evolve with their users while retaining the conditions that support culture. In the Nicholas Building, this might mean staging renovations floor by floor, allowing tenants to return, rather than the common pattern of eviction, refurbishment, and rent hikes. Care treats cultural buildings as **living entities**: adaptable yet anchored, resilient precisely because they are allowed to shift.

Adaptability with Integrity

Endurance requires spaces that are loose-fit and long-life—able to be reconfigured by tenants without losing their core character. The VCA Stables exemplify this: stall partitions were not preserved as museum relics, but reinterpreted as flexible studio walls. Here, care took the form of **adaptive rhythm**: keeping enough of the past to guide improvisation, while enabling new uses to flourish. Planning for change—through long leases, tenant representation, and revisable governance—ensures that adaptability does not dissolve into instability.

Agency as Design Principle

An ethics of care also insists on **agency**: cultural users must have real say in how their spaces evolve. This can mean elected artist representatives on boards, community-led advisory councils, or sliding-scale rent systems that maintain diversity. At Collingwood Yards, for example, cross-subsidy embeds affordability into the governance model, ensuring that cultural function is not a temporary accident but a structural priority.¹²

Institutionalising Care

Finally, care must scale. Emerging creative land trust models point to how cities might institutionalise endurance. London's Creative Land Trust, launched in 2019, acquires properties and caps rents permanently at affordable levels.¹³ Sydney has recently followed suit. These models operationalise care by removing property from speculation and dedicating it to cultural use in perpetuity. They transform care from sentiment into legal and financial mechanism.

Care as Urban Strategy

A spatial ethics of care reframes cultural buildings as **urban commons**—resources sustained not by market logic but by shared responsibility. Rather than treating cultural space as a surplus luxury, cities must recognise it as essential infrastructure, as critical to civic life as housing or transit. Only then can cultural buildings endure—not as frozen monuments, but as living infrastructures of creativity, community, and care.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study reveals cultural spaces as complex ecosystems where architectural form, operational systems, and human agency intersect to create conditions for creative practice. Success depends on dynamic dialogue between space and culture, supportive governance structures, and communities of care that sustain cultural life through both prosperity and challenge.

The research demonstrates that while each city requires tailored approaches fitting its social fabric and governance context, common principles emerge. Cultural infrastructure needs security and resources without suffocating creative freedom. It requires flexibility to adapt while maintaining integrity of purpose. Most crucially, it depends on people—passionate stewards, skillful managers, invested communities—who collectively ensure these spaces remain vibrant and inclusive.

As urban pressures intensify globally, the urgency grows to protect and reimagine cultural spaces before they disappear. The examples from Melbourne, Hong Kong, and Ho Chi Minh City offer both cautionary tales and inspiring models. By embracing a spatial ethics of care that prioritizes adaptability, community agency, and cultural sustainability, cities can ensure that diverse forms of culture continue to enrich urban life for generations to come.

The future of cultural infrastructure lies not in preserving buildings as monuments but in nurturing them as living environments where creativity, community, and care intersect. In recognizing space and culture as co-produced, we open possibilities for more responsive, resilient, and inclusive cultural ecosystems that can weather the storms of urban change while fostering the human connections that make cities truly livable.

NOTES

- ¹ In 2023-24, the creative economy contributed \$41.2 billion to the Victorian Economy, according to Creative Victoria, Victoria State Government Data <https://creative.vic.gov.au/resources/data-insights/victorias-creative-economy/economic-impact>. In Hong Kong, the culture and creative industries contributed approximately \$134 billion HKD. <http://www.gov.hk>
- ² Work Architecture Company. *49 Cities*. New York: Inventory Press, 2015
- ³ Richard Lloyd. *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Post-industrial City*. New York: Routledge, 2005
- ⁴ Ying Zhou. "Confounding Decolonizing Etiquettes: Cases from Hong Kong and Shanghai." In *Architectures of Colonialism: Constructed Histories, Conflicting Memories*, 199–216. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2024.
- ⁵ VPDA (Victorian Premier's Design Awards). "Collingwood Yards.", 2022.
- ⁶ Heritage Office, Development Bureau (HKSAR). "Cattle Depot Artist Village (Ex-Ma Tau Kok Animal Quarantine Depot): Revitalisation." 2025. Accessed September 10, 2025.
- ⁷ Nicholas Building Association. "Forms of Culture Questionnaire Responses." Unpublished research data, 2023.
- ⁸ KaHo Albert Yu. Interview with author. Hong Kong Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, Hong Kong, March 2023.
- ⁹ Vicky Lam, and Lauren Garner. . "Forms of Culture – Questionnaire." Unpublished research data, 2025.
- ¹⁰ Abbotsford Convent Foundation. "History / Governance of the Site." 2025
- ¹¹ Ying Zhou. "Confounding Decolonizing Etiquettes: Cases from Hong Kong and Shanghai." In *Architectures of Colonialism: Constructed Histories, Conflicting Memories*, 199–216. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter. (Open-access chapter.) 2024
- ¹² VPDA (Victorian Premier's Design Awards). "Collingwood Yards." 2022. Accessed September 10, 2025.
- ¹³ Creative Land Trust. "Rent Policy and Affordability Framework" and "About/Properties." 2019/2025. Accessed September 10, 2025.

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COLOURFUL PALETTE AND SPATIAL RELATIONS IN A BUILD ENVIRONMENT: LEARNING FROM MINIMAL ART AND MINIMALIST ARCHITECTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The article deals with the comparison between two artists who created some of their pieces in a so-called Minimal Art and both in an exterior city public space. The choice of Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt is linked by those objects done in a European city, as there is not that much Minimal Art in public space by American artists done outside galleries throughout Europe. Two chosen objects serve for comparison regarding colors and spatial relations to the existing build environment. The paper balances between architecture and fine art oeuvre. Donald Judd's *Stage Set* object standing in Vienna, forming an open space below the frame structure made from colorful plates, letting people walk below and through the object, which touches the plot only by a few slim columns joined to the ground. Sol LeWitt's *Black Form - Dedicated to the Missing Jews* surrounds the whole footprint, which means that people must walk around the artwork shaped as cubic geometrical solid made from smaller blocks, clearly defining the spot by its black volume. Both artworks were located firstly on the different sites and after a while they were moved to the other places, each for varied reasons. Comparing those two works of fine art might bring a theme of a build structure permeability and the matter of defining a parcel by the solid, fulfilled volume or void, mostly vacant arrangement of material. In this case a paper explores some of the architectural aspects of those minimal art pieces in public space and brings the focus on using colors by minimalists in fine art as well as in a built architectural structure, from interior to the urban fabric.

Terminology

One of the important moments in the history of Minimal Art is the shift from two-dimensional painting to three-dimensional work of art, in terms of Donald Judd "objects", Sol LeWitt's "structures", and so on. Before that, the characteristic reduction, especially of using colors in minimal aesthetic happened on canvas, walls, or generally saying on flat surfaces. *Black Square on White Background* (1915), "zero-degree of painting," as James Meyer calls the painting by Kazimir Malevich was created nearly in same period as Alexander Rodchenko *Pure Colors: Red, Yellow, Blue* (1921) and completing the monochrome triptych was the moment, when Rodchenko changed to producing objects for practical use as James Meyer mentioned analogies between Constructivist and Minimalist practice.¹ Furthermore Holland group de Stijl formed during that time within painters, sculptors, architects and writers, that gave the collective born their journal with first issue published in 1917 and edited by Theo van Doesburg. Except principles like complete abstraction of their artworks, rejection of literal reality

perceived by five senses and using basics like straight lines, right angle (horizontal and vertical arrangement), three primary colors have been used – red, yellow, blue – with three primary non-colors: black, grey, white.² In 1979, art historian Rosalinda Krauss tried to find out what that time sculpture is in her text *Sculpture in the Extended Field*. Krauss described those artworks starting in 1960s placed outside the interiors of galleries by negative definition saying, those artifacts are “not-architecture” and “not-landscape” differentiate from previous modernist sculptures by the inversion definition and opposite description logic about a piece of art.³ The discussion about intervening the approach of creating sculpture and architecture is dated back to later twentieth century like Penelope Curtise wrote in her novel *The Pliable Plane: The Wall As Surface In Sculpture And Architecture, 1945-75*, mentioning John Perreault’s comment about “sculpturness,” and “architecture being architecture”⁴ or Hans Frei, Swiss architect who made an important analysis of Minimal Art and minimalistic architecture in the article *Leave the Channels – Follow the Roots*. Of course, there was more of the historical inspiration between architecture and sculpture and Hans Frei wrote about architectural inspiration from the art as “(...) exposure of the principles characteristics of design” and “means of self-representation by form” using the term “becoming sculpture” to emphasize those tendencies of intervening architectural and sculptural principles of making and pointing to the non-symbolical part of the Minimal Art, creation without any storytelling or narrative. The other notes deal with terms for describing buildings following almost the same principles as minimalist fine art. Arising from importance of Rudolf Arnheim for Minimal Art, already mention in Martin Steinman essay *La forme fortte*, who saw the building as “(...) an intelligible presentation of the ‘construction apparent’,” and Frei mentions the lesson that have been learned by architecture from the Minimal Art as “(...) emphasizing the presence articulated in the material of an object” and for that kind of architecture Frei uses a term “New Simplicity.” The other term used by Jacque Herzog was “specific architecture” formulated during the collaboration with the artist Rémy Zaugg on project *Elsässertor* in Basel (1990) and the project model in scale 1:50 is compared by H. Frei with Sol LeWitt’s cartesian spatial grids. H. Frei wrote “(...) with Sol LeWitt, the arrangement of the whole crystalizes within the logic of the structure; with Herzog & de Meuron and Zaugg, the structure is effected by functional and contextual orders outside of the structure which demarcate the endless in-, next to- and above each another of its elements and determine the resulting arrangement.” However, the idea of building such a model was to move ahead with the proposal from interior.⁵ The actual realization of the building *Elsässertor II* completed in 2005 in Basel used the glass shell as the building cannot stay completely as an open structure and the glazing is mirroring on its surface the outer surrounding of the city. Frei writes “Another factor in the importance of Minimal Art as a model is its ties to contemporary metropolitan reality” which can be illustrated for example by works and interest of Richard Serra⁶ in New York with his *Titled Arc*, or another outdoor works like *Seattle Right Angles Propped* and those Minimal Art pieces in Europe like Donald Judd’s *Stage Set* and Sol LeWitt’s *Black Form*. Another Frei’s important note is the way Donald Judd thinks about his “Specific Object” not as the artwork itself, rather “(...) not to the particular way in which an object is constructed, but to the relationship that a form has to its contents.” One of the essential notes by H. Frei about material from which minimal artworks used to be made is comparison to industrial products already not produced from marble, wood and bronze, but artificially made materials. Frei’s comparison comes from Robert Smithson remark “(...) about exhibitions of modern art not being aesthetic events but rather cartographic representations of the material and spiritual conditions of our civilization.”⁷

ONTOLOGICAL FORM OF SIMPLE BOXES

Philip Ursprung describes simple monumental black box with a note by Hans Frei about a building reflecting its surrounding and which clearly differs its exterior and interior appearance “(...) in the Lichtenstein art museum the outer shell and the interior are also conceived completely independently of each other”⁸ and regarding the building envelope, the outdoor is done in a way of rough concrete, and the interior spaces are built according to typical white box exhibition space with all the features like zenith lighting through the whole ceiling, white walls and different, wooden finished floors. Comparing that kind of simple box with those made by Donald Judd and other minimalist artists during sixties and seventies as interventions into the exterior space might lead to complex visual effect, the impact of Vaduz box by Morger Delgado and Kerez is summarized by P. Ursprung in one word “reflection” even the building envelope is not made by glass or any other kind of reflecting surfaces. The concrete was made by using pebbles from the river Rhine and the surfaces are highly polished, handcrafted, something completely opposite from the minimalist artist practice, leaving the material in its manufactured roughness.⁹ In *Srovnávací studie* by Tomáš Pospiszil, the comparative study analyses similarities and differences of western elemental volumes of art produced during 60s and 70s typical for Minimal Art and eastern world artworks formally like those produced through western world but based on slightly different principles due to the Iron Curtain causing less engagement within the contemporary discussion about new tendencies. One of his spoken characteristics of Minimal Art is its site specificity, artworks done for certain places unconceivable without the surrounding space field and for that reason moving an artwork to the other location can't be done without a new way of installing it.¹⁰

Stage Set

Donald Judd's essay *Specific Objects*, considered as the manifest of Minimal Art was published in 1965 and examines the edges of painting, its boundaries made by rectangles and describing three dimensions as real space without any illusionism,¹¹ framing character corresponds to the figure, or object in its space, with its background. *Stage Set* located at Stadtpark, Vienna, was originally designed and built in 1991 for an exhibition *Donald Judd: Architecture* at the Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna (MAK). Composed of a steel frame, measuring 7,5 meters x 10 meters x 12,5 meters with 6 panels originally made of synthetic textiles in six colors: red, yellow, blue, black, green and orange. Each panel measures 10 meters x 2,5 meters, two of them are positioned lower than the other four and the distance between the panels is 2,5 meters. In 1996, one year after the death of Donald Judd, the *Stage Set* was moved from the interior of the museum to the outside and after years those textile plates started to degrade and were replaced by tarpaulin in 2012.¹² When the *Stage Set* was in the gallery, one could walk around and through it, nevertheless cannot have a look from an appropriate distance. It used to be more “space inside a space” saying with Martina Mikulka and comparing to the new outdoor placement.¹³ Peter Noever, the director of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst during the time of that interior exhibition, called the *Stage Set* “Judd's artistic intervention in the baroque rococo classicism, section of the MAK's Permanent Collection.”¹⁴ The title *Stage Set* might remind the criticism of Minimal Art by Michael Fried in an essay *Art and Objecthood* (1967), calling those objects “theatrical” and describes them having “(...) a kind of stage presence”.¹⁵ The boundary between beholder and object is often erased in Minimal Art and in the case of *Stage Set* one can even appear literally inside the artwork non-limited by the entrance fee or opening hours of the gallery. Currently the *Stage Set* is installed close to a bridge going over the Vienna river, “mirroring” the bridge frame and is sometimes called a connection or “gate” between the first and the third district of Vienna, but this was certainly never the intention of the artist.¹⁶ Just a formal analogy can be made by watching the steel frame and colorful plates of *Stage Set* with Le Corbusier's exhibition pavilion, designed in 1960 and opened as

the Centre Le Corbusier - Heidi Weber Museum in 1967 as an ideal space for hosting artworks. The main difference is the fact of those two structures' permeability, when Le Corbusier's pavilion requires to enter through door to be in the building, Judd's Stage Set is open as much as possible and one doesn't need to go through anything to be surrounded by the object, which is even more obvious since the Stage Set is placed outside the gallery into the public space.

Black Form - Dedicated to the Missing Jews

Art and architecture historian Adachiara Zevi puts Sol LeWitt into post-Abstract Expressionism generation and describes him as avoiding chance to any improvisation, emotivity, organicity, and anthropomorphism, rather focusing on geometrically certain and self-referential structure.¹⁷ Starting with the exhibition at the Finch Collage Gallery LeWitt's switched from solid objects to so called "open structures" like a *Standing Open Structure Black (1964)* sometimes so-called *Telephone booth*, black cuboid frame defining space of the size allowing person to stand inside the artwork, in fact the structure was made in dimensions corresponding to human body. In other words, a human body was inscribed into the geometrical structure like back in times *The Vitruvian Man* drawing with man's body in the circle. In 1968 LeWitt made his first wall isometric drawing in the same building, SoHo neighborhood at 112 Green St. in New York, where used to be gallery of Paula Cooper, focusing on Minimal and Conceptual Art.¹⁸ After starting with only pencil drawings on walls, LeWitt moved to be more colorist, then before and one of the reasons might be his longer stay in Italy, creating there some of his pieces for the certain space conditions like in cloister San Nicolò in Spoleto and so one. Another input to make especially isometric drawings, one of the representation systems that architecture is using, came to LeWitt from his one-year (1955-56) practice in the architecture studio of Ieoh Ming Pei,¹⁹ being in the architectural office influenced his way of thinking similarly like architects, who make plans that somebody else fabricate.²⁰ Even other artists considered as minimalists had architecture training like Tony Smith gain it from New Bauhaus School in Chicago during late 1930s and even practicing for a short time as an architect and Frank Stella thought of his painting as the artwork having much to do with building.²¹ *Black Form – Dedicated to the Missing Jews* was made as a block of aerated concrete, 175 x 520 x 175 cm and painted black, located in Schlossplatz, in front of a Münster's baroque palace as a temporary installation for the duration of Skulptur Projekte, after that dismantled in February 1988 and since 1989 the work has been installed in front of Altona Town Hall in Hamburg, Platz der Republik. LeWitt said about the Black Form "I wanted to make a piece that was completely different from the lacy architecture behind it, so I made it in a sort of ungainly block. I wanted it to be hard to swallow in terms of form and completely antithetical to the site, then I decided to make it even more antithetical by painting it black, once that was done I thought, well I'll give it a title that will make it even more unpalatable."²² Unfortunately, the abstract form of a block didn't give a single hint of the memorial function, and the symbolical explanation of the artwork was LeWitt's the first about his own works. Nevertheless, many people found out the black cubic disrupting the baroque Schloss palace²³, building built in 1787 and designed by Johann Conrad Schaub. At the end, LeWitt decided to donate the memorial to city of Hamburg, and nowadays it stands in front of the neighborhood town hall building, marking a space once taken by a memorial to Kaiser Wilhelm I, figurative riding statue, that has been moved closer to the town hall building.

CONCLUSION

Compared with the parallel historical period of postmodernism in architecture, minimalist architecture as well as Minimal Art engage negative space, reverse of its own volume and moreover does not hold any symbolic function or refers to any previous style, it is self-referential as Valerio Olgiati wrote and named his book *Non-Referential Architecture*²⁴. Using white paint or primary colors is not that typical

as it might be considered thinking about minimalism and rather the natural color of material is left as it is more based on the principle of materiality, of natural appearance and inherent manufactured surfaces. Even the condition of site specificity is not kept every time like it was proved on those two described examples, but what is more important to architecture practice and discussion about the build environment is the fact of thinking about build up objects not only in terms of their own volume and meaning, but also in a kind of inverse way considering the object's impact on remaining space and its relations to already existing structures. This kind of approach focuses on space in-between throughout the three dimensions perceiving and not only to the relation object-object, but also to relation person-object like in mentioned LeWitt's artefact *Standing Open Structure Black* and the actual possibility to pass through the object like in Judd's *Stage Set* on the contrary to solid block of LeWitt's *Black Form*. The Nolli Plan, created in the early eighteen century, is a cartographic representation of the city of Rome. The plan utilizes a two-dimensional approach, depicting the city's landscape of buildings as black figures on a white background. Publicly accessible spaces, including streets and squares, are delineated in white, while the some of buildings are represented by ground floor plans to show even accessible interiors and only the mass of walls is delineated in black. The application of a reverse process of thinking, characterized by an emphasis on negative space rather than mere residue of building mass, has been demonstrated to effectively translate the orientation into the lived space environment dedicated to human body and free movement both an interior of buildings and an urban fabric exterior. This approach underscores the significance of invisible mass, which is the actual space for living. Consequently, it integrates the concept of spatial consideration into the built environment.

NOTES

- ¹ James Meyer, *Minimalism*, (Phaidon, 2000), 19-20.
- ² Hans L C Jaffé, R R Symonds, and Mary Whitall, *De Stijl*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 9-11.
- ³ Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture In The Expanded Field", *October* no. Vol. 8., no. Vol. 8. (1979): 37, accessed July 7, 2025, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/778224>.
- ⁴ Penelope Curtis, *The Pliable Plane: The Wall As Surface In Sculpture And Architecture, 1945-75'*, (MACK, 2022), 9.
- ⁵ Herzog & de Meuron, "065 Elsässertor: Office And Cargo Building Basel, Switzerland", accessed May 20, 2025, <https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/065-elsassertor-office-and-cargo-building/>.
- ⁶ Hal Foster, *Richard Serra*, online, (MIT Press, 2000), 158, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=138690&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>.
- ⁷ Hans Frei, Leave The Roots, Follow The Canals, *Arch+*, 121-122, accessed September 2, 2019, <https://www.archplus.net/download/artikel/752/>.
- ⁸ Andreas Ruby et al., *Minimal Architecture*, (New York: Prestel Pub, 2003), 56.
- ⁹ Ruby et al., 58.
- ¹⁰ Tomáš Pospiszyl, *Srovnávací Studie*, (Praha: Fra, 2005), 140.
- ¹¹ Donald Judd, *Specific Objects*, 1965, 4, accessed July 7, 2025, <http://atc.berkeley.edu/201/readings/judd-so.pdf>.
- ¹² Martina Mikulka, "Donald Judd, Stage Set 1991", 2019, 2-8, accessed July 7, 2025, https://www.martinamikulka.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Judd_Donald_Stage_Set_Vienna.pdf.
- ¹³ Mikulka, 2.
- ¹⁴ Peter Noever, "Again In Focus: Donald Judd – Stage Set", accessed July 7, 2025, <http://www.noever-design.com/again-in-focus-donald-judd.html>.
- ¹⁵ Michael Fried, *Art And Objecthood*, 1967, accessed May 7, 2025, <http://theoria.art-zoo.com/art-and-objecthood-michael-fried/>.
- ¹⁶ Mikulka, "Donald Judd, Stage Set 1991", 8.
- ¹⁷ Francesco Stocchi, Rem Koolhaas, and Adachiara Zevi, *Sol Lewitt: Between The Lines: Between The Lines*, (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2018), 81-82.
- ¹⁸ "Paula Cooper Gallery", accessed July 7, 2025, <https://www.paulacoopergallery.com/information>.
- ¹⁹ Josep Maria Montaner Montaner and Vittorio Savi, *Less Is More*, (Barcelona: Sala d'Exposicions del Col.legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya, 1996), 40.
- ²⁰ Stocchi, Koolhaas, Zevi, *Sol Lewitt: Between The Lines: Between The Lines*, 83-84.
- ²¹ Anna C Chave, "Minimalism And The Rhetoric Of Power", *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (1990), 53.
- ²² "Skulptur Projekte Archiv", accessed July 7, 2025, <https://www.skulptur-projekte-archiv.de/en-us/1987/projects/54/>.
- ²³ Stefan Goebel, "Black Form (Dedicated To The Missing Jews): The Destruction Of A Holocaust Memorial: The Destruction Of A Holocaust Memorial", online, 2023, accessed July 7, 2025, <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/munitions-of-the-mind/2023/02/08/black-form-dedicated-to-the-missing-jews-the-destruction-of-holocaust-memorial/#>.
- ²⁴ Valerio Olgiati and Markus Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*, (Park Publishing (WI), 2019).

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CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF DIVERSITY THROUGH CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AND STORYTELLING PRACTICES: THE CASE OF ASIAN COMMUNITIES LIVING IN LISBON

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Lisbon has experienced a marked intensification of its multicultural character, largely shaped by the arrival of migrants from diverse regions of the world. Among these groups, Asian communities have grown steadily in number and visibility. According to government statistics, in 2022, migrants of Asian origin accounted for 15 percent of the total foreign population in Portugal (123,875 individuals), with more than 52,000 residing in Lisbon alone.¹ The settlement of these communities has not only reshaped Lisbon’s demographic landscape but also contributed to the layering of cultural configurations that make the city increasingly plural and complex.

In Europe, Asian storytelling traditions have long influenced children’s literature. Classic Indian-origin collections such as the *Jataka Tales* and the *Panchatantra* were translated and adapted into European forms, most famously *La Fontaine’s Fables*. More recently, Asian literature has gained global recognition, with award-winning authors writing in Asian languages contributing to the diversification of the literary field. Yet, in Portugal, these narratives remain strikingly marginal. A search of the *Plano Nacional de Leitura* catalogue (National Reading Plan) using the keyword “Ásia” yields only nineteen entries, most of which address Portuguese discoveries and colonial history.² Children’s literature is almost entirely absent from this list, exposing a cultural gap between Lisbon’s demographic diversity and the literary resources available to young readers.

This absence is significant because children’s literature is more than entertainment: it is a vital medium of cultural memory and a powerful means of shaping collective identity. For migrant communities in particular, stories function as bridges between past and present, home and host society, heritage and adaptation. They allow families to transmit cultural knowledge, sustain intergenerational dialogue, and provide children with tools to negotiate hybrid identities in contexts of migration.

In this context, the present study examines the idea of Lisbon as a livable city from the perspective of Asian communities—specifically Chinese and Hindu families. It focuses on children’s literature and storytelling practices as key cultural approaches to transmitting memory and forging new understandings of diversity. Drawing on exploratory ethnographic research, the paper analyzes how these communities use stories to narrate experiences, preserve cultural heritage, and negotiate identity and belonging in a city undergoing profound social and urban transformations. It also reflects on the

role of children's stories in creating intergenerational dialogue within Asian families and in fostering intercultural understanding between Asian communities and Portuguese society.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND CULTURAL MEMORY OF DIASPORA

Building on the discussion in the introduction, which emphasized both the demographic growth of Asian communities in Lisbon and the absence of Asian children's literature in the Portuguese public sphere, it becomes essential to frame the cultural and symbolic role of stories within diaspora life. To understand this role, I draw on insights from anthropology, memory studies, communication, diversity studies, and children's literature.

Memory, understood as a process that is simultaneously individual and collective, operates in the space between remembering and forgetting. It is through this dynamic that culture maintains a "sense of the importance of the past."³ As scholars of memory have argued, remembrance is never purely private, but is mediated by social and cultural frameworks that give shape to how identities are remembered, enacted, and transmitted.⁴

On a personal level, memory is the ground on which continuity of the self is constructed. As Marita Sturken observes, "Memory forms the fabric of human life, affecting everything from the ability to perform simple, everyday tasks to the recognition of the self. Memory establishes life's continuity; it gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past. As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity," even in the case of hybrid or diasporic identities.⁵ On the collective level, memory emerges through acts of commemoration and representation. As Barbara Misztal notes, collective memory is shaped by the parts of the past that are "collectively commemorated, that enact and give substance to the group's identity."⁶

To analyze how children's literature and storytelling sustain such processes, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory) is particularly illuminating.⁷ Nora suggests that archives, festivals, monuments, and other symbolic forms become repositories of memory once "living memory" fades. In this sense, stories can be understood as cultural archives or repertoires, preserving traditions while adapting them to new contexts.⁸ This is especially relevant for diasporic communities, where stories not only keep cultural knowledge alive but also provide children with spaces for negotiating belonging in unfamiliar settings.

Within Lisbon's changing cultural landscape, the notion of superdiversity helps capture the conditions in which these processes unfold. Steven Vertovec defines superdiversity as the "new combinations and interactions of variables" that characterize contemporary migration flows and complicate older, more limited understandings of diversity.⁹ For Lisbon, this means that children's literature and storytelling do not operate within isolated communities, but within a city where multiple linguistic, cultural, and generational resources intersect. Paul Gilroy has described such contexts as producing new forms of cosmopolitan conviviality, where difference becomes part of the fabric of everyday life.¹⁰ At the same time, Thomas Blom Hansen cautions that diversity must not be reduced to celebratory pluralism; rather, it should alert us to internal differences within groups and to the ways in which prejudice, inequality, and segregation persist even in multicultural environments.¹¹

In this context, children's literature and storytelling can be seen as vital cultural practices. For Asian families in Lisbon, they serve not only as tools for transmitting heritage but also as means for engaging with the complexities of superdiversity, for creating bridges between generations, and for situating migrant childhoods within a city that is itself undergoing profound transformation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative and exploratory approach, focusing on the Hindu and Chinese communities currently living in Lisbon. The aim is to understand how children’s literature and storytelling practices are mobilized to transmit cultural memory, negotiate identity, and create a sense of belonging among migrant families. A qualitative design was employed as it allows for the exploration of meanings, practices, and lived experiences within specific cultural contexts.

The research was guided by the following questions:

How do Asian migrant communities in Lisbon use children’s literature and storytelling to transmit cultural heritage across generations?

What types of stories, formats, and media are most commonly used in these communities to represent cultural identity and memory?

What challenges do families face in accessing and consuming children’s literature related to their cultural heritage in Lisbon?

What role can children’s literature play in making Lisbon a more inclusive and culturally diverse urban space for immigrant children and their peers?

To address these questions, three complementary methods were employed: participant observation, exploratory survey and informal conversations.

Participant Observation (March–April 2025)

Immersive fieldwork allows researchers to observe both explicit and tacit cultural practices in situ. Danny L. Jorgensen emphasizes that through active participation, a researcher gains access to the subjective meanings behind daily behaviors, not merely their surface-level appearance, which distinguishes this method from non-participatory observation.¹² Boccagni and Schrooten reflect on the particular suitability and challenges of participant observation in migration studies and emphasize the need to consider multi-sited observational strategies and the researcher’s positionality across fragmented, transnational networks.¹³ In the present study, participant observation was conducted during seven weekly sessions of the “Introductory Session to Hinduism for Children,” offered by the Hindu Community of Portugal in Lisbon under the UPĀYANA Project. Field notes and reflections were collected to document how storytelling is enacted pedagogically and culturally across age groups, and to observe how participants receive and react to various narrative formats.

Exploratory Survey (June–July 2025)

An exploratory survey was distributed among families from Lisbon’s Chinese community, focusing on households with children. The survey sought to gather information about types of children’s literature consumed (e.g., oral tradition, books, digital media); availability and access to culturally relevant storytelling materials; preferred storytelling modes, and the perceived role of such materials in supporting cultural belonging and exchange.

Although response numbers were limited, the survey yielded valuable data that complemented observational and conversational findings, providing a broader perspective on community preferences and challenges.

Informal Conversations

Informal, spontaneous conversations were held with educators, parents, and community members. These naturalistic interactions helped understand motivations, challenges, and perceptions about the access to children’s literature and storytelling among the communities.

By triangulating participant observation, informal conversation, and exploratory survey methods, this study achieved a preliminary yet multi-layered understanding of how storytelling functions as a tool for cultural transmission, intergenerational dialogue, and urban intercultural exchange.

THE HINDU COMMUNITY OF LISBON

The observation process at the Hindu Community of Portugal revealed a series of recurring practices through which cultural knowledge, values, and identities were transmitted to children. These patterns illuminate how diaspora families mobilize stories and creative activities to sustain connections with their heritage while adapting to the social and linguistic environment of Lisbon.

One of the central findings was the frequent use of storytelling as a pedagogical and cultural tool. Mythological narratives such as the *Ramayana*, puranic stories like Prahlada and Narasimha, or Krishna's childhood stories were repeatedly told to convey religious values, ethical lessons, and a sense of belonging. This practice aligns with Jerome Bruner's view of narrative as the primary human mode for organizing experience and transmitting meaning.¹⁴ The stories provided children with interpretive frameworks that made abstract concepts concrete and memorable.

The active involvement of family members and elders reinforced these lessons. During the sessions, mothers and grandmothers often joined in storytelling or assisted with artistic activities, creating intergenerational spaces of cultural memory. This practice reflects Jan Assmann's theory on the relation between communicative and cultural memory, as oral exchanges between generations keep communicative memories alive in everyday contexts, while ritual and text anchor them in longer traditions in the form of cultural memory.¹⁵ The interplay of these two forms of memory was particularly visible in the Hindu community in Lisbon, where family and temple life intersected to foster dialogue between generations and crystalize communicative memory into cultural one.

Another significant feature was the interweaving of mythology with personal family memory. Children connected mythological figures and places with their lived realities, such as associating Krishna's hometown of Vrindavan with a child's grandmother's recent trip there. These instances illustrate how diaspora children stitch together mythic and personal time, locating family experience in broader symbolic universes.¹⁶

Creative activities provided further avenues for the transmission of cultural identity. Mask-making, drawing, music, and role-play games were integral parts of the sessions. Research on arts-integrated learning shows that multimodal expression deepens engagement and strengthens the embodiment of cultural memory.¹⁷ The children's active retelling of stories through performance and art suggests that such practices operate not only as memory aids but also as rehearsals of identity.

Children's emotional and intellectual engagement illustrated the vitality of these practices. During the multimodal storytelling sessions, children's curiosity and emotional engagement were expressed in questions about the exact location of Ayodhya, the mythical birthplace of Rama, or why people venerate Yama, the god of death, and their enthusiasm to repeat sessions reveal the strong affective pull of these stories. Aesthetic experiences, as Jonathan Lilliedahl has shown, intensify engagement by allowing learners to integrate emotional resonance with intellectual exploration.¹⁸

The Portuguese language played a crucial mediating role in the transmission of cultural memory. Although the content was rooted in South Asian traditions, Portuguese served as the primary language of instruction, reflecting the children's everyday linguistic environment. Rather than signaling assimilation, this practice illustrates what translanguaging scholars describe as the creation of spaces where multiple linguistic and cultural resources interact together.¹⁹ For these children, Portuguese was not only a language of the host society but also a tool for negotiating and internalizing heritage.

Finally, it became clear that certain cultural themes resonated more strongly than others. Narratives of Ganesha, Krishna, *Ramayana*, and Durga/Kali were repeatedly retold and remembered by the children.

This selective emphasis reflects the canon-forming process that occurs in diaspora settings, where a smaller set of key figures and stories are reiterated across spaces, providing anchors of identity and memory.²⁰

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate how the Hindu community in Lisbon uses storytelling and creative practices to mediate between heritage and host culture. Stories are not transmitted in isolation; they are woven into everyday family life, multimodal artistic activity, and the Portuguese language itself. In doing so, they enable children to build affective and intellectual bridges between India and Lisbon, heritage and present life, family and community. These findings suggest that storytelling in diaspora is not merely a tool for cultural preservation but also a dynamic practice of adaptation, re-imagination, and identity negotiation in a multicultural urban space.

THE CHINESE COMMUNITY OF LISBON

The survey conducted among parents at a local art school and a community school revealed how Chinese families in Lisbon use children’s literature and storytelling practices to transmit cultural heritage to the next generation. The results show both creative strategies and structural challenges, highlighting the dynamic negotiation of cultural identity in diaspora.

The results first demonstrate that families rely on multilingual practices and a variety of storytelling modes. Parents reported engaging with children’s literature and narratives in Mandarin and Cantonese alongside Portuguese and English. This multilingual repertoire was complemented by diverse methods of storytelling, including oral narration, shared reading, videos and animations, music, dance, and games. The strong presence of visual and interactive formats illustrates what scholars of bilingual education describe as “translanguaging spaces,” in which children creatively combine linguistic and multimodal resources to construct meaning and identity.²¹

In addition, families reported children’s cultural pride and hybrid forms of belonging. Most parents observed that their children expressed pride in Chinese heritage while simultaneously identifying with Portuguese culture. Such experiences reflect the hybrid cultural positioning of diaspora children, who negotiate multiple attachments across different cultural contexts.²² Children’s stories often served as a bridge between home and host culture, and some children had already shared Chinese narratives with peers in schools or at cultural events. Although these initiatives were occasional and not systematized, they suggest the potential of children’s literature to foster intercultural dialogue in Lisbon’s public sphere.

The survey also revealed persistent challenges in accessing and engaging with heritage literature. Parents emphasized a lack of time for shared reading, the scarcity of Chinese-language children’s books in Lisbon—particularly picture books and culturally relevant materials—and the dominance of formal schooling focused on language mechanics rather than cultural storytelling. These findings align with research showing that diasporic education often privileges linguistic competence over broader cultural transmission.²³ Language barriers further compounded these difficulties, since some children were unable to read or understand Chinese, limiting their access to heritage texts and the cultural knowledge embedded within them.

Finally, parents proposed a range of solutions to strengthen cultural transmission. Suggestions included the development of more bilingual materials in Portuguese and Chinese, greater access to storytelling events and festivals in schools and libraries, and the use of social media and video platforms for more flexible and engaging dissemination. Parents emphasized that these materials should be age-appropriate, visually attractive, and easy to share with peers. Such proposals echo recent scholarship on multimodal and digital storytelling, which highlights the role of creative, interactive resources in supporting intercultural learning and sustaining diasporic cultural practices.²⁴

Taken together, the survey findings show that Chinese families in Lisbon are committed to transmitting cultural heritage to their children through storytelling and literature. Their practices illustrate how hybrid identities are negotiated through multilingual repertoires, how cultural pride is sustained in diaspora, and how creative strategies are developed in response to structural barriers. At the same time, parents' proposals point toward the need for institutional support and innovative formats if Chinese children's literature is to fulfill its potential as a resource for intercultural dialogue in Lisbon's superdiverse urban context.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study has shown that children's literature and storytelling constitute vital media for cultural transmission among Lisbon's Asian communities. Both the Hindu and Chinese cases demonstrate that families actively draw on mythological stories, folk tales, and visual narratives to preserve cultural memory across generations. These practices are not only mechanisms of heritage preservation but also creative strategies through which children in diaspora articulate hybrid identities. A key insight is that the Portuguese language emerges as the primary medium of learning and expression for second-generation children, even when the cultural content is drawn from heritage traditions. Both observational data and survey responses illustrate how Portuguese enables children to negotiate between ancestral culture and host society, thereby facilitating forms of belonging that are both hybrid and dynamic. In this sense, language operates as a bridge rather than a barrier, anchoring heritage stories within Lisbon's everyday linguistic environment.

The research also highlights the role of multimodal and embodied storytelling practices. Activities such as drawing, games, dance, music, and performance made stories more accessible and memorable, allowing children to "live" the narratives rather than merely hearing them. These creative methods foster embodied learning and intergenerational dialogue, reinforcing cultural memory while cultivating pride and curiosity about heritage.

Parents in both communities recognize the potential of heritage storytelling to promote intercultural understanding among peers, yet they also note that such exchanges remain occasional and unsystematic. Structural challenges—including limited access to Chinese- and Indian-language children's books in Lisbon, scarce bilingual resources, and an emphasis in heritage education on linguistic mechanics over narrative traditions—constrain families' efforts. In response, many rely on imported books, digital platforms, or community schools to ensure their children's exposure to heritage stories.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that children's literature and storytelling are not merely cultural tools but living practices through which Asian diaspora families in Lisbon preserve memory, shape identity, and imagine belonging. When supported by institutional initiatives, such as improved public access to bilingual materials, inclusive language policies, and creative platforms for intercultural exchange, these practices can strengthen intra-community bonds and foster mutual understanding in Lisbon's superdiverse society. In this way, stories become more than private traditions: they emerge as shared resources that contribute to making Lisbon a more livable and culturally inclusive city for all.

NOTES

- ¹ GEE – Gabinete de Estratégia e Estudos, *População Estrangeira Residente em Portugal – Ásia* (Lisbon: Ministério da Economia e do Mar, 2023), based on INE/SEF data.
- ² Plano Nacional de Leitura, *Catalogue Search “Ásia,”* accessed July 2025, <https://www.pnl2027.gov.pt>
- ³ Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill, 2003), 15.
- ⁴ Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, eds., *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1–3; Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, eds., *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 1–2; Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–6; Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill, 2003), 16.
- ⁵ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.
- ⁶ Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 16.
- ⁷ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989), 19.
- ⁸ Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 17.
- ⁹ Steven Vertovec, “Super-diversity and Its Implications,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007): 1024–1054, at 1025.
- ¹⁰ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004), xv.
- ¹¹ Thomas Blom Hansen, quoted in Steven Vertovec, ed., *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies* (London: Routledge, 2015), 22–23.
- ¹² Danny L. Jorgensen, “Participant Observation,” in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Robert Scott and Stephen Kosslyn (New York: Wiley, 2015), 8–9.
- ¹³ Paolo Boccagni and Mieke Schrooten, “Participant Observation in Migration Studies: An Overview and Some Emerging Issues,” in *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*, ed. Evren Yalaz and Ricard Zapata-Barrero (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 212–13.
- ¹⁴ Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Construction of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 4–5.
- ¹⁵ Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 110–12.
- ¹⁶ Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 112–15.
- ¹⁷ Jonathan Lilliedahl, “Building Knowledge through Arts Integration,” *Pedagogies* 13, no. 2 (2018): 136–38.
- ¹⁸ Lilliedahl, “Building Knowledge,” 136–38.
- ¹⁹ Ofelia García and Angel M. Y. Lin, “Translanguaging in Bilingual Education,” in *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, ed. Ofelia García, Angel M. Y. Lin, and Stephen May (Cham: Springer, 2016), 2–5.
- ²⁰ Rita Ávila Cachado, “Locating Portuguese Hindus: Transnationality in Urban Settings,” *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas* 76 (2014): 115–17.
- ²¹ Ofelia García and Angel M. Y. Lin, “Translanguaging in Bilingual Education,” in *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, ed. Ofelia García, Angel M. Y. Lin, and Stephen May (Cham: Springer, 2016), 2–5.
- ²² Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.
- ²³ Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill, 2003), 16–17.
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CONTEMPORARY HYBRID SPACES: ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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INTRODUCTION: ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Artists and architects have been interconnected throughout many periods of art history. Although this relationship has inevitably led to certain conflicts, tensions, and frictions, artists and architects have fundamentally formed a productive alliance in their respective fields. The collaboration of art and architecture in the public sphere has resulted in projects with highly remarkable outcomes.

Architects' desire to work with artists is often driven not so much by the artists' ability to create two or three dimensional works, but rather by an interest in their ideas, thought processes, and philosophies. It could be said that at one time, architects Mies van der Rohe and Richard Meier graced their spaces by choosing to work with artists such as Alexander Calder and Frank Stella. Today, however, architects and artists collaborate on a more equal footing — designing buildings, organizing exhibitions, and co-authoring books. In short, in most of the projects they undertake today, artists and architects work together from the very first step. This, of course, can be viewed as a positive development. However, this subject has also given rise to a diversity of perspectives. Art critic and Time Out London visual arts editor Ossian Ward, in his article *Scaling Up*, which discusses Hal Foster's compilation *The Art-Architecture Complex*, argues that contemporary art and architecture have entered into a competition for grandeur.

"In discussing his book with me, Foster went further, suggesting that art and architecture are currently locked in attritional "space wars": "Rosalind Krauss coined the phrase 'the expanded field' to suggest how sculpture had exceeded its own limits. But now it is simply becoming confined by ever-grandier architectural frames. These buildings are not only massive icons but also produce spaces that are sublime and intense, which can also lead to an experience of intimidation." This follows, of course, from 18th-century philosopher Edmund Burke's early definition of the sublime in esthetics as "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible." Foster continued: "So rather than the old virtue—you can call it modernist, you can call it Minimalist—whereby one is made reflexive about a body in space, there's a way in which much architecture now wants to overwhelm you as a body in space, to use the space to overwhelm you."

Citing Dia:Beacon, the Guggenheim and Tate Modern among examples of this menacing accrual of institutional real estate, alongside the corresponding gigantism in the work of James Turrell, Bill Viola, Olafur Eliasson and others, Foster notes "a strong tendency in both contemporary art and architecture toward the creation of atmosphere and effect." He believes that "this spatial sublime has become esthetic experience for many people," given that nowadays we expect to be continually awestruck or

hyperstimulated when watching blockbuster movies or visiting the latest mega-malls. In other words, architects are also feeding the spatial boom in art creation and appreciation as part of a wider “experience economy.”¹

Actually, art and architecture are disciplines that operate on extremely different levels and serve very different functions. Architects are tasked with creating spaces that fulfill a specific function. The form of architecture is determined by the form of the human body. Artists, on the other hand, provide a commentary on society through their work. This can be seen in many different forms: a performance, a walk, or a lighting installation. Of course, like architecture, art also serves a necessary function—but this function is not as direct or clearly defined as in architecture. Art offers us a perception of who we are, where we come from, what we do, and where we are going. There is also a prevailing belief that artists possess a greater degree of ‘freedom’ in their practice, as they don’t deal with the overwhelming details or demands that constrain architects. In some respects, this perception may hold some truth, however it is important not to underestimate the level of responsibility artists bear toward the integrity and impact of their work.

In light of the points mentioned above, it can be said that artists are, in some ways, not entirely free. However, they do possess autonomy. While architects are often just one component in a large machine that includes many people, varying demands, and budget constraints, artists typically act independently and complete their work at their own pace. Owing to this autonomy, artists are able to transcend the often constraining and repetitive aspects of the design process. This freedom enables them to pose critical questions, engage in reflective thinking, explore the spatial qualities of a given environment, and actively contribute to the development of the project in collaboration with the architect.

Architect Adam Caruso is particularly interested in this autonomous state that artists possess, and he believes that in collaborative situations, the role of the architect is to ‘protect the artist’. According to Caruso, architects are programmed to think about building regulations and load capacities; from this perspective, his role is to ensure that the artist's ideas are not compromised. He explains his reason for working with artists by saying that he is provoked by them. Closely involved with contemporary art, Caruso draws significant inspiration from this field. Just as it is easy for artists to comment on the work of architects, Caruso says it is equally easy for architects to go to an exhibition and engage with an artist’s work on a direct level—sometimes artists are too close to their work to see certain things. He also notes that when he is affected by a particular piece, the influence can be seen immediately in his own work.²

This kind of mutual influence also naturally affects how artists and architects choose one another for collaborative projects. Architects and artists who share similar perspectives and aesthetic approaches often come together in joint projects. These shared interests sometimes even lead to each party highlighting a specific element of the other’s approach. Today, this collaborative mode of working presents a structure that attracts attention on many different levels. The outcomes challenge the viewer’s expectations and encourage new ways of thinking about the meaning and significance of art and architecture in contemporary society.

Hybrid Spaces: Common Strategies

In the 1960s and 1970s in America, a group of artists created a symbolic rebellion against architecture, which was seen as a form of authority and political control. Starting in 1968, over the course of six years, Robert Smithson proposed a series of works for the Texas Airport, Christo and Jeanne-Claude wrapped their first buildings in Switzerland, the following year Michael Heizer created a work with fissures opening in the surface of the earth in the Nevada Desert, and in 1974, Gordon Matta-Clark created his piece *Splitting*, where he divided a building into two parts. Each of these art projects was

initially referred to as ‘Anti-architecture’. Later on, Robert Smithson used the term ‘Dearchitecture’ to describe this new movement, while Gordon Matta-Clark coined the term ‘Anarchitecture’ (a combination of Anarchy and Architecture).³

One of the earliest attempts to establish a connection between ideas from modern art and modern architecture can be seen in a pair of images featured in the 1941 book *Space, Time and Architecture*. In the book, author Sigfried Giedion presents a comparison between Picasso’s Cubist painting *L’Arlésienne* and a photograph of a Bauhaus-style building in Germany designed by Walter Gropius.⁴ At this point, Giedion draws a parallel between the spatial experience created by Cubism through the transparency of overlapping planes and the structure of the Bauhaus building, which is composed of glass surfaces. Critic and writer Christian Bjone, who considers Giedion’s comparison to be forced and superficial, instead examines another work by Picasso—*Still Life with Chair Caning*, notable for its use of collage technique—alongside artist Krzysztof Wodiczko’s 1988 photographic projection onto the façade of the Hirshhorn Museum. According to Bjone, there are clear similarities between the Picasso collage he describes and the Hirshhorn projection. The circular format of the collage aligns closely with the museum’s circular plan. The contrast Picasso creates between photographic reality and painted imagery is echoed in Wodiczko’s approach of projecting photographic images onto an actual building. The ‘journal’ headline in Picasso’s work can be likened to the microphones seen in Wodiczko’s projection. Compared to Giedion’s earlier image pair, this comparison reveals a richer and more contemporary set of ideas and visual metaphors. According to Bjone, if contemporary artists and architects wish to collaborate, they must draw upon the aesthetic flexibility of collage, the multidisciplinary language of architectural fragmentation, and the critical strategies found in *détournement* (subversion, corruption, or reversal).⁵



Figure 1. Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912



Figure 2. Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Public Projections*, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, 1988

In site-specific art, it is also possible to evaluate artists' combinations of architectural structures, with various materials within the framework of collage logic. In fact, it can be said that in this context, the collage technique extends beyond the use of different materials together to the integration of two distinct disciplines. The architectural structure, which already has a function, undergoes a transformation through the artist’s process and acquires a new function. In his installation *Clothed House*, created for the 1999 Venice Biennale, artist Matej Andraž Vogrinčič covered the façade of an old building that was once used as an orphanage. Composed mostly of women’s clothing in various colors and textures, the garments both emphasize the building’s surface and entirely transform its exterior. This work establishes associations with the history and past lives of the building’s former residents. It also matching the building itself in dimensions and becomes intertwined with the structure.⁶



Figure 3. Matej Andraz Vogrincic, *Clothed House*, Venice, 1999

Located in Los Angeles, *Chiat/Day Building* designed by Frank Gehry, along with the *Binoculars* sculpture by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, exemplifies the logic of collage. In this collaborative work, the architect and the artists illustrate how the concept of collage can serve as a source of inspiration in the creation of architectural form. The idea of placing the monumental binoculars structure next to the building—originally proposed by Oldenburg for an earlier collaboration—came from architect Frank Gehry. The cylindrical forms of the 13.75-meter-tall sculpture function as a traditional double-columned gateway.



Figure 4. Claes Oldenburg/ Coosje van Bruggen, *Binoculars*, Frank Gehry, *Chiat/Day Building*, California, 1991

A similar suggestion by Oldenburg for the Chicago Stock Exchange also reflects this notion. Upon closer examination, it can be said that *Binoculars* represents a turning point in Gehry’s career, marking his transition from geometric forms to curvilinear elements.

The adaptations of the curved and spiral surfaces commonly used by artists in their abstract sculpture works have become quite striking in contemporary architecture today. One of the primary reasons for this development is that computer programs enable the creation of detailed shapes in three dimensions and generate buildable coordinates, transforming these shapes into dimensioned sections. These new forms of abstract sculpture in architecture are referred to as ‘Blobs’, while the interior spaces created are called ‘Warped Space’. One of the significant architectural examples incorporating such artistic qualities into its composition is *The Guggenheim Museum* in Bilbao, Spain, which features a detailed and twisted structural design. The Guggenheim Museum has been criticized for its sculptural qualities and its introduction of an intuitive and irrational new formal approach to modernism, as discussed in Hal Foster’s book *Design and Crime*.⁷



Figure 5. Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1997

One of the design requirements of the building was to incorporate the sculptures planned to be placed here into the architecture. Richard Serra's work is located on the ground floor, spanning an area 131 meters long and 25 meters wide, with a height varying between 15 and 23 meters. This space was specifically designed structurally to support Serra's massive piece. Composed of eight parts, this installation covers the entire gallery space, extending both across the surface and throughout the volumetric area of the space. In the area stretching from the entrance to the exit, three concentric (coaxial) groups of sculptures and another linear group of sculptures are arranged sequentially to create a sense of continuity.



Figure 6. Richard Serra, Snake, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 1997

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao creates a compromise between the artist and architects by sharing responsibilities related to the qualities of the space. Gehry's gallery disrupts the traditional white cube concept with its large scale and ceiling details. Serra's installation, on the other hand, dominates the gallery's other features with its dynamic vertical wall surface. Although each of the eight works in the collection is unique, the overall experience does not carry the dramatic characteristics found in other exhibitions by the same artist, where the conflict between the work and the surrounding space is much more pronounced.

It is meaningful that arguments against art in architecture have come from both artists and architects. If today we can see the practice of 'Art in Architecture' as a positive scenario, this is the result of efforts by various disciplines aimed at bringing art and space together. At this point, if it is true that art has always encompassed and included spatiality, it would not be wrong to say that over the past 40 years, art's progression toward space has increased strongly. This is observed not only in spatial installations in sculpture and video art but also in large-scale paintings and photographs. Moreover, increasingly—

and with contributions from curators developing new exhibition concepts—art has begun to seek a connection between itself and architectural or urban space.

Nowadays, space is generally beginning to be seen as a public, social, and action arena (actionism, situationism, performances, and environmental art). All these approaches have also created new forms of spatial installation and embarked on a search to establish new connections between art and space. For example, a project carried out at Lufthansa Aviation Center consists of works by a group of artists producing artworks related to the spatial composition. The artists featured in this exhibition have especially created works connected to the identity and architecture of the space. The Lufthansa Aviation Center in Frankfurt was designed by the German architect Christoph Ingenhoven. The building, constructed between 2002–2006, features a comb-like structure with glazed atria and landscaped gardens, symbolizing openness, sustainability.⁸

One of the artists involved in the project, Thomas Demand, redesigned a different version of his work titled *Clearing*, which was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2005, specifically for Lufthansa Aviation Center. Demand created a large-scale artificial forest by assembling thousands of paper-cut leaves. The mural, composed of a dense forest scene, is based on an artificial reproduction of trees. Although entirely man-made, this work offers the viewer an illusion of a landscape that can be seen from inside the building. The photograph of this paper-made design, which imitates nature, emphasizes the concepts of inside and outside, creating a strange effect between the man-made architecture and the image of an artificial forest.

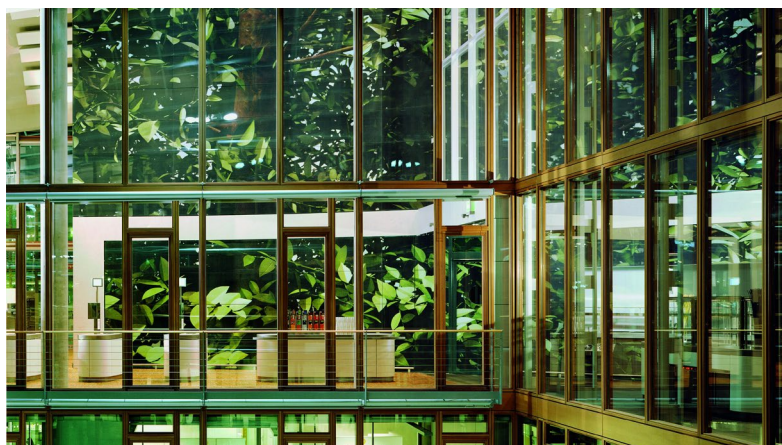


Figure 7. Thomas Demand, *Forest*, Lufthansa Aviation Center, Germany, 2007

Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, known for their installations that take a critical stance toward the ideological structure of the gallery space, are also among the artists who created work for Lufthansa Aviation Center. In this project, the duo focused on Lufthansa’s official and orderly image, humorously merging airport gates and playing with their functionality. The artists’ use of the airport’s glass architecture created a subtle social relationship related to notions of ‘entry’ and ‘exit’.

The gates designed by these two artists are identical in design and material to those found in the airport, yet they are non-functional. Door handles on both sides, security chains between adjacent doors, or doors leading to other doors all resemble functional structures—but in reality, they signify a form of social coding governed by strict access rules.



Figure 8. Michael Elmgreen ve Ingar Dragset, Doors, Lufthansa Aviation Center, Germany, 2007

CONCLUSION

The fact that public space is no longer created solely through built environments has become one of the important topics of discussion today. Media has led to the emergence of a new kind of public space that merges with physical space. For a long time now, the museum has ceased to be the place where the public comes face to face with art. The practices of ‘intervention’ and ‘site-specific art,’ first attempted in Europe and America during the 1960s and 1970s, have broken down the dogmas created by self-reference and aesthetic autonomy. Today, there is an ongoing artistic interest in the functional relationship between the exhibition space and the publicness of that space. At this point, art seeks to avoid its traditional connection with representation. Concepts such as the relationship between art and advertising, and between art and social or political work, are now being questioned. Space is no longer understood merely as a constructed area, but also as a place considered through urban, social, and political concepts.

The value created by the artwork within a space is not approached as an artistic intervention belonging solely to the ‘work’, but rather as something that has the power to disrupt, revitalize, or reinterpret a functional relationship. Art presented within a space serves as an invitation to engage with public discourse and can be situated within a communicative context.

In light of all these examples, it can be said that collaborative work between the artist and the architect yields productive results when they are able to use each other's language and engage with one another's ideas. At this point, rather than artists becoming architects or architects acting as if they were artists, what gains significance is the idea of transcending the predefined roles and limitations imposed by their respective identities in order to create more comprehensive public works.

NOTES

- ¹ Ossian Ward, 'Scaling Up', *Art in America*, 2012, (<https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/scaling-up-62933/>)
- ² Jes Fernie, 'Concrete Relationships: Artists and Architects in Collaboration', *Architectural Design*, Wiley Academy, London, 2003 104
- ³ Christian Bjone, *Art+Architecture*, (Birkhauser Verlag AG, Germany, 2009), 148
- ⁴ Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, (Harvard, 1942), 401- 403
- ⁵ Christian Bjone, *Art+Architecture*, (Birkhauser Verlag AG, Germany, 2009), 148
- ⁶ <https://www.matejandravogrincic.com/exhibitions>
- ⁷ Hal Foster, *Design and Crime*, (Verso Books, London, 2002) 27-42
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“THE HEROIC CITY, THE HEROIC PEOPLE”: THE LEGACY OF THE 1954 YANGTZE RIVER FLOOD IN WUHAN

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INTRODUCTION

On February 25, 2020, *Remin ribao* published a front-page article titled “The Heroic City, the Heroic People: Dedicated to the People of Wuhan Fighting the Epidemic.” The piece highlighted how, during the critical phase of the COVID-19 outbreak, individuals from all sectors of Wuhan society came together—volunteering, supporting one another, and uniting in the collective effort to combat the virus. The article quoted President Xi Jinping’s commendation of Wuhan as “a city of heroes” and expressed confidence that its people would ultimately secure a decisive victory over the pandemic.¹

What stands out in the article is Xi’s additional remark: “Throughout history, the people of Wuhan have never been defeated by hardship or adversity.” This statement not only commends the city’s present-day resilience but also casts Wuhan’s identity within a broader historical narrative, reinforcing its image as inherently heroic. This theme is further echoed in a *Changjiang ribao* article published on December 23, 2021, titled “Tempered: A heroic city and its people etched in history.” The piece highlights key historical moments that sustain Wuhan’s longstanding heroic image—such as its role as the birthplace of the 1911 Xinhai Revolution that overthrew the Qing empire, the significance of the Battle of Wuhan during the Second Sino-Japanese War, and the city’s enduring struggle with the recurring floods of the Yangtze River, particularly the devastating floods of 1954 and 1998.²

Among these events, the 1954 Yangtze River flood—as the first major natural disaster following the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—emerges as a foundational episode in shaping Wuhan’s heroic legacy. This paper explores how the flood contributed to the construction and reconstruction of Wuhan as a “heroic city,” tracing this evolving narrative from the socialist era of the 1950s to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over time, Wuhan’s heroic identity has developed in tandem with transformations in the city’s urban landscape, including the construction of the Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge in the 1950s, the erection of the 1954 Flood Monument in 1969, and the renovation of riverside parks beginning in the 1980s. Simultaneously, shifts in the narrative of Wuhan’s heroism reflect broader changes in how the relationship between humans and nature has been conceptualized and represented from the mid-twentieth century to the present.

HEROIC RIVER CROSSING: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WUHAN YANGTZE RIVER BRIDGE (1955-1957)

The 1954 Yangtze River flood, which lasted from May to September, was one of the most devastating floods of the twentieth century. It severely impacted provinces along the middle and lower reaches of the river, inundating an estimated 41,665 square miles of land and affecting more than thirty million

people.³ Hubei Province was at the epicenter of the disaster, with approximately ten million residents displaced and forced to become disaster refugees.

On September 26, 1954, after the floodwaters had receded, Chairman Mao Zedong penned an inscription commemorating that year's flood-fighting efforts. The inscription praised the strength and bravery of the people of Wuhan and expressed Mao's hope that Wuhan could serve as a model for confronting future floods of similar magnitude. In the days that followed, this narrative of triumph and heroism gained widespread traction, circulated by major state media outlets across the country. Through this process, the heroism displayed by the people of Wuhan was elevated into a powerful political narrative—crafted as a symbol of national strength, collective discipline, and socialist victory over the forces of nature.

This narrative was materially embodied in the construction of the Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge. Long recognized as a key transportation hub connecting northern and southern China, Wuhan historically relied on river shipping to ferry people and goods across the Yangtze. As early as the first session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1950, a proposal to build a bridge over the Yangtze at Wuhan had already been endorsed. In 1952, the Ministry of Railways established a design bureau to carry out surveys and drilling, and in March 1953, the Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge Engineering Bureau was formally established.⁴ The catastrophic flood of 1954 accelerated this ambitious infrastructure project. Construction officially began in September 1955, with the goal of ensuring uninterrupted north-south transportation. At the same time, the bridge came to represent a heroic overcoming of nature—a physical and symbolic extension of Wuhan's image as a “heroic city.” Soldiers from the People's Liberation Army, students and faculty from local universities, and skilled workers from across the country came together to contribute to the project. On October 15, 1957, the Bridge was officially opened to traffic. It was the first combined railway and highway bridge built across the Yangtze, spanning approximately 1,670 meters in total, with the main bridge measuring around 1,155 meters.⁵

During its construction, in May 1956, Chairman Mao visited the site and swam across the Yangtze River for the first time. On May 31, June 2, and June 3 of 1956, he swam three times across the bridge piers. That act inspired his well-known poem “*Swimming*”, in which he imagined a future in which the Yangtze River would no longer divide the nation, but instead be overcome by human will and technological strength.⁶ In this context, the bridge became more than just a feat of engineering—it stood as a symbol of national unity, resilience, and modernization. From that point forward, Wuhan's identity as a “heroic city” was no longer defined solely by its survival of the 1954 disaster. Rather, it came to embody the transformation of hardship into national pride and collective achievement, made tangible through the successful completion of the Yangtze River Bridge.

SHAPING THE HEROIC MEMORY: THE BUILDING OF THE 1954 FLOOD MONUMENT (1969)

In January 1968, amid the tumultuous context of the Cultural Revolution, the Hubei Revolutionary Committee was formally established. Shortly thereafter, two major “Red Ocean” construction projects were launched, aimed at reshaping urban space through revolutionary symbolism and affirming loyalty to Chairman Mao. One project involved erecting a monumental Mao statue on Gui Mountain using fluorescent paint, ensuring its visibility day and night to all Wuhan residents. The other project focused on the creation of the 1954 Flood Monument, located in Riverside Park directly in front of the Wuhan government building.⁷ This monument was designed to commemorate the people's triumph over the devastating 1954 flood and to further solidify Wuhan's image as a “heroic city” in revolutionary narrative.

As recounted by Yuan Peihuang, the leader of the design team, the guiding principle behind the 1954 Flood Monument was to emulate the symbolic and architectural gravitas of the Monument to the People’s Heroes in Tiananmen Square.⁸ Situated along Beijing’s hallowed central north–south axis, the Monument to the People’s Heroes is a towering granite obelisk constructed to honor those who sacrificed their lives in the creation of the new Communist state. Since the 1950s, it had served as a model for monumental commemoration, inspiring the construction of similar structures throughout the country.⁹ Echoing its nationalistic symbolism, the 1954 Flood Monument was designed with a comparable three-tiered structure—comprising a raised platform, a main body, and a top element—framed by broad steps and guardrails on all four sides. Atop the monument sits a solid red five-pointed star, encircled by twenty red flags, symbolically marking the 20th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1969. Completed between March and October 1969, the monument faces the Yangtze River and features a prominent portrait of Chairman Mao, alongside his inscription praising the Wuhan people’s triumph over the 1954 flood. On the reverse side is Mao’s poem “*Swimming*,” written after his first swim across the Yangtze in 1956, reinforcing the theme of mastery over nature through revolutionary spirit – as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The 1954 Flood Monument.

Two large relief sculptures were installed on either side of the base of the 1954 Flood Monument, depicting scenes from the disaster and the heroic response of Wuhan’s citizens. Together, the reliefs portray a total of fifty figures who embody the idealized “heroic people” of the socialist era and construct a particular vision of what it meant for Wuhan to be a “heroic city”. This official narrative is structured around four key representational strategies. First, the reliefs emphasize leadership under Chairman Mao as central to the flood response. In both scenes, *The Quotations from Chairman Mao*—the iconic Little Red Book—serves as a focal point. In the relief “Seizing Every Second”, a male soldier holds the book aloft, rallying the masses into action – as illustrated in Figure 2. In another relief “Unity is Strength”, a central figure raises a plaque inscribed with the slogan: “Be determined, fear no sacrifice, overcome all difficulties, and strive for victory” – as illustrated in Figure 3. This framing transforms

the flood response from a civil emergency into a revolutionary campaign driven by Maoist ideology and political loyalty.



Figure 2. The Relief “Seizing Every Second” on the 1954 Flood Monument.



Figure 3. The Relief “Unity is Strength” on the 1954 Flood Monument.

Second, the reliefs present a vision of collective male heroism. While the figures depicted are not emperors or high-ranking officials but ordinary workers, soldiers, and peasants—an important reflection of socialist values—the overwhelming majority are young men. Only two women appear, and there is no representation of the elderly. This visual erasure stands in stark contrast to archival records, which reveal that women and older citizens played integral roles in the flood response. On the construction sites, women helped transport soil, collect stones, and deliver public announcements. In refugee camps, both women and elders engaged in fishing, auxiliary production, and crucial public health efforts—distributing medicinal herbs, purifying water, and promoting hygiene practices.¹⁰ Yet these contributions are absent from the official narrative, suggesting a narrow, gendered conception of heroism—one that privileges masculine strength and ideological fervor over communal resilience and care work.

Third, the narrative overemphasizes triumph while omitting suffering. The reliefs depict a seamless story of victory, devoid of any signs of pain, fear, or loss. However, statistical records compiled in 1998 indicate that in Hubei Province alone, the 1954 flood affected around ten million people and claimed more than 30,000 lives.¹¹ Many victims perished from drowning, starvation, or epidemics such as schistosomiasis (snail fever), malaria, gastroenteritis, and dysentery. None of this human cost is acknowledged in the visual record.

Taken together, these reliefs reveal how the image of a “heroic city” was constructed visually and politically. Rather than reflecting the complex lived realities of disaster, the monument presents an idealized version of history that aligns with state ideology and revolutionary aesthetics. Stylistically, the reliefs are exemplary of the socialist realist mode, which had dominated Chinese public art since the 1950s under the influence of Soviet models. This artistic approach sought not to represent everyday life realistically, but to elevate it—to transform ordinary labor and suffering into heroic, inspirational scenes. Themes such as collectivism, productive labor, devotion to leadership, and an unwavering

optimism for the future all converge in these reliefs, contributing to the mythologization of Wuhan as a “heroic city.”

HEROIC SPACE REBUILDING: THE RENOVATION OF RIVERSIDE PARK

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, the official narrative commemorating the 1954 flood began to evolve. While revolutionary heroism remained central, it gradually came to incorporate two new, interrelated themes: ecological sustainability and economic modernization. As early as 1982, the Wuhan municipal government began prioritizing the regulation of its riverbanks. With technical guidance from the Yangtze River Water Resources Commission, initial interventions targeted the Hankou riverbank—a vast area on the north bank of the Yangtze River, covering approximately 1.6 million square meters. Historically, this area functioned as a key commercial hub throughout the twentieth century, home to busy docks that facilitated the movement of goods and people. After 1949, the Hankou docks retained their importance as logistical arteries linking multiple regions. At the same time, the area had become a dense patchwork of aging warehouses, shipyards, small workshops, modest exhibition spaces, public swimming pools, and makeshift housing. Over 300 households—housing roughly 1,100 residents—lived in improvised dwellings, many constructed from linoleum panel walls and lacking formal building permits.¹² Despite its strategic location, the riverbank had fallen into physical decline and infrastructural disrepair.

Concrete steps toward renovation were not taken until after the catastrophic flood of 1998. The disaster acted as a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities posed by outdated flood defences and poor urban planning. In response, the Wuhan government convened a series of expert consultations in early 2001, inviting water management professionals from the Ministry of Water Resources and the National Flood Control Office to evaluate the feasibility of a comprehensive renovation project. The goals of this new initiative extended far beyond traditional flood control. They reflected an emergent vision of sustainable urban development that emphasized environmental protection, the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature, and the aesthetic revitalization of the city.¹³

The redevelopment of Wuhan’s riverside space unfolded in three major phases between 2001 and 2019.¹⁴ Central to the project was the construction of reinforced embankments—measuring 28.8 meters in height and averaging 160 meters in width—that combined functionality with aesthetics.¹⁵ Alongside these core flood control measures, the initiative integrated a variety of public amenities, including a sightseeing platform, landscaped greenbelts, public squares, and sports facilities. Restaurants and beverage kiosks were also installed, supported by upgraded power and drainage systems. The overarching goal was to create an ecological corridor that seamlessly blended flood resilience with urban beautification, tourism infrastructure, athletic spaces, and recreational opportunities.

A key focal point of the redevelopment was the site of the 1954 Flood Monument. As part of the park’s transformation, the area surrounding the monument was reimagined into a symbolic space that merged historical memory with contemporary values. Two major additions reinforced this new identity: the Yangtze River Crossing Museum and the restored “W506” traffic boat—the very vessel on which Chairman Mao stood during his final river swim in 1966. Together, the monument, the boat, and the museum compose a new “heroic space,” reframing the legacy of the 1954 flood within a broader narrative of ecological awareness and urban renewal.

Completed in 2017, the Yangtze River Crossing Museum is situated directly across from the monument – as illustrated in Figure 4. The museum leads visitors through a chronological and thematic journey—from the historical struggle to conquer and regulate the Yangtze River to more recent efforts to coexist with nature and promote sustainable development. The exhibits highlight the annual Wuhan cross-river swimming competition, along with personal memorabilia donated by “heroic” Wuhan residents—

ranging from commemorative medals to everyday items such as washbasins, mugs, and towels. At the museum's apex, the narrative pivots toward environmental consciousness, highlighting rare and protected species of fish, insects, and plants native to the Yangtze River basin. Adjacent to the museum, the restored W506 boat serves as an interactive historical artifact. Visitors are invited to board the vessel, climb to its decks, and even recreate the iconic image of Mao gazing out over the river during his 1966 swim. This convergence of revolutionary symbolism, environmental sustainability, and commercial revitalization reflects a broader shift in post-Mao China. In contemporary Wuhan, narratives of heroism are no longer defined solely by ideological struggle or collective sacrifice. Instead, they are increasingly reimagined to serve multiple purposes: preserving historical memory, promoting ecological values, and contributing to a vision of market-oriented urban development.



Figure 4. *The Yangtze River Crossing Museum.*

CONCLUSION

When President Xi praised Wuhan as a “heroic city” with “heroic people” during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to recognize that this heroic identity is not an inherent or fixed quality, but rather a product of continual reconstruction shaped by historical events and evolving political narratives. In this paper, the construction of Wuhan’s heroic identity has unfolded in multiple stages—initially through the narrative of conquering nature and advancing state-led modernization, exemplified by the completion of the Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge; later through the revolutionary fervor embedded in the design and symbolism of the 1954 Flood Monument during the Mao era; and more recently, through the redevelopment of riverside spaces that integrate historical memory with ecological consciousness and market-driven urban aesthetics. A comparison between the 1954 Yangtze River flood and the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a broader pattern in state narratives: heroism in official discourse often crystallizes in the wake of catastrophe. In both instances, disaster is not merely portrayed as a moment of crisis but is mobilized as a generative force—one that transforms collective suffering into a narrative of resilience and triumph. This reframing serves to legitimize political authority while reinforcing the state’s capacity to shape, and continually reshape, the city’s identity in alignment with evolving political, ideological, and developmental priorities.

NOTES

¹ “Yingxiong de chengshi, yingxiong de renmin” 英雄的城市，英雄的人民 [Heroic city, heroic people], Renmin ribao 人民日报, February 25, 2020.

² Gao Meng and Zheng Ruke 高萌, 郑汝可, “Cuilian: yingxiong chengshi yingxiong renmin zairu shice” 淬炼: 英雄城市英雄人民载入史册 [Tempered: A heroic city and its people etched in history], Changjiang ribao 长江日报, December 23, 2021.

³ Xia Mingfang and Kang Peizhu 夏明方, 康沛竹, eds., *Ershi shiji Zhongguo zaibian tushi* 二十世纪中国灾变图史 [Twentieth-Century Chinese Disaster Historical Picture] (Fuzhou: Fujian jiao yu chu ban she, 2001), 1-6.

⁴ Fang, Chengzuo 方城作, *Bainian dangshi zhong de Hubei yinji* 百年党史中的湖北印迹 [Hubei's Imprints in the Party's Century-long History] (Wuhan: Hubei ren min chu ban she, 2023), 97-99.

⁵ Wuhan difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 武汉地方志编纂委员会 [Wuhan Local Chronicles Compilation Committee] ed., *Wuhanshi zhi: junshi zhi* 武汉市志: 军事志 [Wuhan Gazetteer: Military Chronicles] (Wuhan: Wuhan da xue chu ban she, 1992), 343.

⁶ Liu Jizeng, Mao Lei, and Yuan Jicheng 刘继增, 毛磊, 袁继成, eds., *Mao Zedong zai Hubei* 毛泽东在湖北 [Chairman Mao in Hubei] (Wuhan: Hubei ren min chu ban she, 1993), 114-117.

⁷ Lu Genfa 鲁根发, “1954 nian hongshui tici jinianbei xuanzhi beihou de gushi” 1954年洪水题词纪念碑选址背后的故事 [The Story Behind the Site Selection for the 1954 Flood Monument], Hubei wenshi 湖北文史 2 (2013): 17.

⁸ Li Xu and Wan Jianhui 李煦, 万建辉, “1954nian fangxun de shengli biaoming: Wuhan ‘jingdezhun renhe kaoyan’” 1954年防汛的胜利表明: 武汉“经得住任何考验” [The victory in the 1954 flood control efforts proved that Wuhan “could withstand any test”], Changjiang ribao 长江日报, July 17, 2020.

⁹ For a survey of China's monuments, see Liu Guofu and Wei Jingfu 刘国福, 卫景福, eds., *Guohun dian* 国魂典 [Dictionary of national souls] (Changchun: Jinin remin chubanshe, 1993).

¹⁰ For more information, see Hubei renmin chubanshe 湖北人民出版社 [Hubei People's Press], ed., *He hongshui bodou de Wuhan renmin* 和洪水搏斗的武汉人民 [Wuhan People Fight with Flood] (Wuhan: Hubei ren min chu ban she, 1955), 6-10; Wuhan shi fangxun zong zhihui fangxun gongzuo gaikuang bianshen weiyuanhui 武汉市防汛总指挥部防汛工作概况编审委员会 [General Working information Editorial Review Board of General Working Information in Wuhan Flood-control Headquarter], ed., *Dang lingdao renmin zhansheng hongshui* 党领导人民战胜洪水 [Party Leads People to Control Flood] (Wuhan: Hubei ren min chu ban she, 1954): 36, 58-61, 72; “Jiayu, Hanyang deng xian funü canjia huzhu hezuo zuzhi jiji kaizhan shengchan zijiu yundong” 嘉鱼、汉阳等县妇女参加互助合作组积极开展生产自救运动 [Women in Jiayu, Hanyang, and other counties participated in mutual aid and cooperative organizations to launch production self-help movements], Hubei ribao 湖北日报, October 26, 1954.

¹¹ Hubei sheng dang'an guan 湖北省档案馆 [Hubei Archives], ed., *Hubei sheng 1954 nian fangxun kanghong dangan xuanbian* 湖北省1954年防汛抗洪档案选编 [Selected Work in the Archives of Hubei 1954 Flood Control]. (Wuhan: Hubei dang'an guan, 1998), 221.

¹² Wu Shiwei 吴世伟, “Hankou jiangtan yiqi gongcheng huigu” 汉口江滩一期工程回顾 [Hankou Riverside phase one project retrospective], Wuhan wenshi ziliao 武汉文史资料5 (2022): 56.

¹³ Wu, 57.

¹⁴ Liu Dongcai 刘东才, “Wuhan jiangtan jianshe jishi” 武汉江滩建设纪实 [Wuhan Riverside construction chronicle], Wuhan wenshi ziliao 武汉文史资料 4 (2012): 23-24.

¹⁵ Wu, "Hankou," 57.

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THE DIMINISHING FOODSCAPE: STREET VENDING AMID THE DRIFTING URBAN MORPHOLOGY & SOCIO-SPATIAL PLANNING

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INTRODUCTION

Street vending in Bangkok has long been a central element of the city's urban fabric. For residents, it ensures affordability and accessibility in the face of rising living expenses; for visitors, it projects the city's global image as a food capital. However, local street food culture has recently, in the past decade, come under increasing threat from planning policies that prioritise spatial order over lived informality, often involving Singapore's hawker centre model as a blueprint. While the initial setting embraces the ephemerality of street life, where vendors walk alongside pedestrians, a shift towards more permanent structures raises questions about the future of the city's gastronomical culture and identity. This transformation not only threatens to erase the vibrant tapestry of culinary diversity but also undermines the spontaneous interactions that define urban life. As communities grapple with these changes, it becomes vital to seek a balance between modernisation and the preservation of local flavours, which defines the essence of street food culture.

This short article enquires into the transformation of street vending in Bangkok's Silom district between 2015 and 2025, drawing on fieldwork interaction and urban morphological analysis. It enquires onto how vendors and pedestrians co-construct street life at eye level, how urban planning policies have shaped this fragile ecosystem, and how broader economic, demographic, and technological changes (from urban decentralisation to the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of delivery platforms) have altered its future trajectory. The paper argues the decline of street vending is not only a matter of governance but also a reconfiguration of Bangkok's urban identity, civic life, and gastronomical security. The findings suggest a complex interplay between policy interventions and grassroots adaptations by vendors. As the traditional street food practice face challenges, the research highlights its resilience and innovation of these vendors in navigating a rapidly evolving urban environ.

Background

"People walk in the city." This simple yet profound statement, often repeated by street vendors during fieldwork interaction, offers a starting point for understanding Bangkok's civic life. To a certain extent, walking is not merely a matter of transportation but the social practice whereby individuals encounter one another, consume affordable food, and participate in the city's informal economy. In Bangkok, as in many Southeast Asian cities, walking and eating are inseparable acts, interweaving together the rhythms of everyday urbanism. To a certain extent, street vendors have historically been the lifeblood

of Bangkok's streets. Their 'street activities' serve office workers, residents, and the passers-by with affordable meals, sustaining livelihoods and shaping the sensory identity of the city. For international visitors, street food is both a culinary attraction and an embodiment of Bangkok's vibrant urbanism, one which paints the image of the city.¹ Nevertheless, this celebrated informality sits uneasily with planning authorities, who increasingly favour more controlled, formalised foodscapes inspired by Singapore's hawker centres.²

This study examines the changing landscape of street vending in Silom—Bangkok's former central business district (CBD)—across a ten-year period (2015–2025). Drawing on three stages of fieldwork (2015, 2020, and 2025), combined with photographic surveys, spatial analysis, and vendor testimony, it traces the rise and decline of street food networks against the backdrop of urban decentralisation, a socio-economic crisis, and technological disruption. The overarching research question is: How do changing planning policies, economic dynamics, and socio-spatial practices affect the survival of street vending in Bangkok, and what are the implications for civic life, food security, and urban identity?

Walking in Bangkok entails the continuous negotiation between the walker and the street; it inhabits the porous public spaces, weaving between cars, motorcycles, vendors, and pedestrians.³ For many, walking is simultaneously a necessity (to reach affordable food, work, or transport) and a cultural performance that embodies Bangkok's civic identity. For some others, walking allows for the explorative (yet performative) act of being one with the cityscape. In this manner, street vendors are integral to this pedestrian economy; they 'walk' with the city's inhabitants, shifting locations and routines in rhythm with workers, commuters, and residents. Their presence animates the eye-level street life, transforming what is otherwise an anonymous sidewalk into the 'place' of encounter, negotiation, and exchange.⁴ Yet, street vending also generates contestation. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that vendors occupy sidewalks intended for pedestrians, sometimes obstructing movement or monopolising public amenities such as drainage or electricity access. This tension—between street vending as cultural heritage and as civic obstruction—has long shaped debates in Bangkok's urban politics.⁵

INFORMALITY AND URBAN GOVERNANCE

Urban informality, defined by Ananya Roy as a mode of urbanisation produced through selective regulation,⁶ is not merely the absence of rules but a patterned form of governance. Bangkok exemplifies this dynamic. Municipal regulations technically prohibit vending on sidewalks (as pedestrian obstruction), on roadways (as a traffic violation), or on private property (as trespass). Therefore, vendors exist in a legal grey zone (tolerated but never formally recognised); this precarious position leaves them vulnerable to periodic crackdowns by the municipality officer, often justified by discourses of cleanliness, order, and modernisation.⁷ Such measures underline the tension among informal economies, the state authority, and the pedestrian's lived experience. As the street vendors navigate the urban life's complexities and drama, this ongoing struggle reflects broader themes of social inequality and the resilience of communities adapting to the ever-changing regulatory landscape. Moreover, unlike cities such as London, where a centralised agency (e.g., Transport for London) oversees streets holistically, Bangkok's governance is fragmented.⁸ The Metropolitan Police, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), and Department of Public Works all exercise overlapping jurisdictions, often without coordination. This fragmented authority contributes to regulatory inconsistency, impacting vendors' capacity to negotiate long-term business stability, which directly influence on the pedestrian experience. Overall, a lack of unified administration complicates the operational environment for vendors while also impeding the city's capacity for equitable urban growth. This diversity of governing forms fosters an atmosphere in which competing interests can hinder progress. As a result, local communities may find it challenging to advocate for their needs, leading to further marginalisation and disconnection from the decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. Addressing these

issues requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders to harmonise policies and create a more integrated approach to urban management.

METHODOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING THE STREET ‘LANGUAGE’

This study builds upon the fieldwork conducted in Bangkok’s Silom district in 2015, 2020, and 2025. Methods include photographic and cartographic surveys of sidewalks, alleys, and intersections where vendors congregated; participant observation (including walking routes alongside vendors and customers); and semi-structured interviews with vendors, office workers, and municipal officers. A comparative analysis of Google Street View imagery from 2015 to 2025 was conducted to track spatial changes. This mixed-methods approach allows for the empirical analysis of both the material practices of vending and the symbolic discourses surrounding it.⁹

CASE STUDY: SILOM DISTRICT

The findings from this case study reveal significant transformations in the spatial dynamics of street vending, highlighting the evolving relationship between informal economies and urban planning. To a certain extent, these changes underscore the need for policy adjustments that recognise the contributions of street vendors to the local economy while addressing concerns about public spaces and pedestrian accessibility.

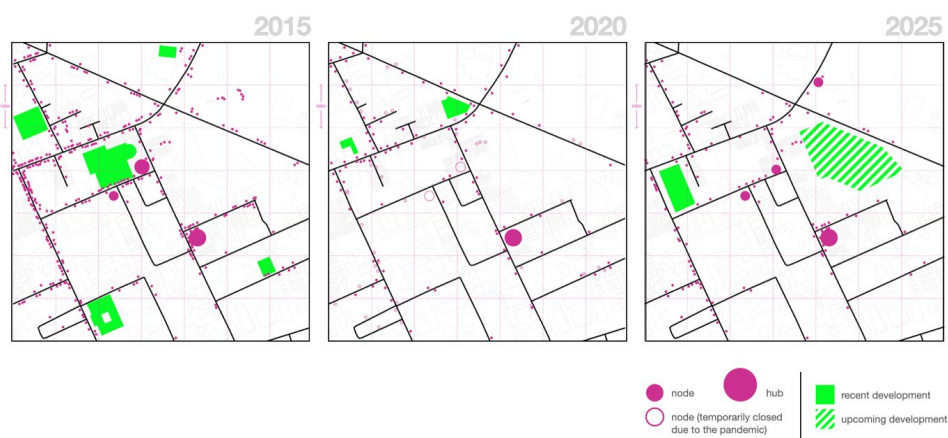


Figure 1. Settlement, space, and the vendor’s impact to the area, studied across 2015-2025.

2015: Vibrant but Precarious

In 2015, Silom was already undergoing transformation. Rising rents forced small and medium-sized businesses to the city’s outskirts, while towering towers represented economic segregation. Street sellers prospered in alleyways and side streets, serving to local people, factory workers, and office employees away from the main street.¹⁰ These informal marketplaces not only provided affordable food and supplies, but they also helped to develop a feeling of community amid a changing environment. As urban planners battled with the dual problem of development and preservation, street vendors’ persistence served as a reminder of their critical position in the city’s social and economic fabric.

Street vendors, in this example, street sellers frequently rely on famous street corners to attract clients, especially workers and office personnel who may be away from the main street. These vibrant hubs not only provide essential goods and services but also create a lively atmosphere that enhances the urban experience. On the other hand, the main street still paints the ‘image’ of a bustling metropolis, often featuring larger establishments and well-known brands that draw in tourists and residents alike. This

juxtaposition highlights the diverse nature of urban life, where both street vendors and mainstream businesses contribute to the city's unique character and economic vitality. As cities evolve, recognising and supporting the contributions of street vendors will be crucial in maintaining the unique character and diversity of urban life. For example, one observed vendor operated a cook-to-order cart from 6am to 1pm, attracting commuters en route to public transport. In any case, her stall exemplified temporary, mobile use of space: set up in the morning, dismantled by afternoon. Others, however, built semi-permanent extensions onto sidewalks, obstructing pedestrian movement; this spatial behaviour raises governance concerns. This mixture of the vendor's settlement behaviour thus, undeniably raises the question among policy planners of who has to find the acceptable balance between retaining the street image and enforcing the spatial order.

2020: Global Pandemic vs. Local Policy Pressure

The Covid-19 pandemic drastically altered Silom's street life; with many companies adopting remote work, pedestrian flows dwindled, and vendors faced sharp declines in customers. Moreover, social distancing regulations imposed by the then-junta-appointed mayor further constrained operations, forcing many stalls to close or relocate.¹¹ The situation in the 2020 Silom raises a number of intriguing yet often hidden issues of Silom as a district: that an overwhelming percentage of the local amenity (be it open space, streetscape, or transport infrastructure) is heavily invested to accommodate the 'visitors' in the area, with much less benefit for the local residents themselves. In the instance of street vending, the lack of everyday office workers and visitors caused a major drop in business. This reliance on temporary populations demonstrates the significance of a more balanced approach to urban design, which meets the requirements of both residents and visitors.

As a result, local authorities were compelled to reconsider their policies regarding street vendors, aiming to support economic recovery while ensuring public safety. This period of adjustment highlighted the need for flexible governance that could adapt quickly to changing circumstances while still prioritising the needs of both vendors and pedestrians. Around the same period of time, some property owners used the lull to renovate facades, signalling a gentrification trajectory that excluded informal vendors. As the drastic nationwide lockdown protocol came into effect, many community leaders began to advocate for a more inclusive approach to urban planning, emphasising the importance of integrating the live fabric (e.g., street life and the lived experience) into the revitalisation efforts, which at times were primarily focused on infrastructure. Essentially, this shift in perspective opened up the conversation on several topics about civic governance, which played out in the televised debate toward the 2021 mayoral election, raising the locals' awareness of the importance of not only preserving the vibrant culture of street commerce but also ensuring that the voices of those often sidelined in development discussions were heard and valued.

2025: Decline and Digital Disruption

By 2025, vendor numbers in Silom had dropped sharply. Contributing factors included pandemic aftershocks and remote work, which reduced foot traffic. Food delivery platforms, whose rapid post-pandemic expansion shifted consumption from sidewalks to screens.¹² Sidewalks, and subsequently street life, are getting drier, and thus leave a bigger gap to fill in providing affordable food for the office workers. Planning policies increasingly drove vendors into alleys or eliminated them entirely to make space for commercial or recreational enterprises. Essentially, the cumulative effect has been a hollowing out of Silom's once-vibrant foodscape, with broader implications for affordability, food security, and civic life.

DICUSSION: STREET ORDER VS. FOOD SECURITY

Overall, this study asks for the balancing between civic planning and the question of spatial order. As a group of agents driving the district's gastronomical infrastructure at street level, the street vendors play multiple roles when it comes to the urban life dynamic; in a way, their presence enhances the local economy, creating a vibrant atmosphere that attracts both residents and visitors alike. Thus, balancing their network settlement with those of food security is essential for fostering a sustainable urban environment. On the one hand, these sellers provide not only cultural vibrancy but also essential nutrition for office workers and low-income residents. Consequently, their decline risks exacerbating urban inequalities, as affordable meals are replaced by more expensive, formalised options.¹³ While there have been multiple administrative attempts to alter or relocate their settlement, it is evident that any changes enforced onto the vending network (be it the proposed relocation, spatial order tightening, or the total removal in some areas) have a drastic impact not only on the sellers' business but also on the experience of those of the passersby, who expect to purchase the affordable foods on their daily commute. It is also essential to note that the informal economy is a vital foundation of the local district-level economy, whose street-side platform for business is not only the 'face' but also the 'drive' of their daily life. The planning policy to relocate these vendors, therefore, would not only affect the sellers but also the consumers, whose paths would understandably change to retain affordability of their daily life. On the other hand, however, the push toward Singapore-style hawker centres reflects a desire for cleanliness and spatial order, which undeniably is an ongoing issue in a growing city like Bangkok. With the rising number of population and thus street users, the vendor's settlement on the sidewalk is only an obstruction of the pedestrian walkway. Moreover, as the nature of street vendors is informal, there is little to no official route for them to be held accountable for their actions. Over time, some vendors took the liberty to claim certain sidewalk space (as they have been in operation for years), creating tensions not only between them and the officers but also among the sellers themselves, as the prime location (e.g., a certain street corner or the space beside an office tower's entrance) provides more exposure to potential buyers. Some vendors build their shop as a semi-permanent structure to claim the ownership of the space, even when the shop is not in operation. On a separate note, as some stalls become fixed to a certain location, issues arise with the public amenity of the sidewalk, which initially was not built to sustain food selling (e.g., drainage, water supply, and sanitation). Yet, while these issues may put the vendors at a disadvantage in the debate on their street-side presence, any proposal of their total removal would only show the official's neglecting the social dynamics of the urban informality the city is known for.¹⁴ Street vendors have their characteristics unique to their continuing presence on the street itself. Some purchases are transactional (e.g., an office worker's lunchtime), while some others are accidental encounters; this unpredictability of the foodscape contributes to the charm of the city known internationally for its availability and affordability. Unlike Bangkok's dispersed vending networks, hawker centres centralise activity, reducing accessibility for pedestrians who rely on the immediacy of sidewalk food. In retaining the urban identity and the internationally celebrated image, Bangkok's global identity is tied to street food. Tourists seek it out as an authentic experience, while locals celebrate it as part of everyday life. The erosion of vending networks thus undermines not only livelihoods but also the symbolic image of the city.¹⁵ To a certain extent, the rise of digital platforms (e.g., food delivery services) illustrates a new form of urban informality—digital rather than spatial.¹⁶ They restructure vendor–customer relations, extend geographic reach, and shift the meaning of walking in the city. Nevertheless, they also intensify precarity, as small vendors struggle with platform fees and loss of direct street-level presence.

Overall, the story of Silom's street vending in the past decade reflects broader tensions in Bangkok's urban development. Street vendors embody both the resilience and vulnerability of informal urbanism: they animate the city's civic life and provide affordable food, yet they face continual displacement by

policies prioritising order, gentrification, and technological substitution. This duality highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing economic vitality with urban planning ideals. As cities evolve, finding strategies that support both the livelihoods of these vendors, and the aspirations of urban development will be critical to creating and fostering inclusive environments. However, the key takeaway is the profound connection among walking, vending, and urban governance. To walk in Bangkok is to engage with its informal foodscape; to eat street food is to participate in its civic identity. As Bangkok moves forward, the challenge is to recognise street vending not as an obstruction but as infrastructure—a vital, if fragile, element of urban life that sustains both bodies and identities. This recognition, however, requires a shift in policy and public perception, embracing the vibrancy (yet the contradiction) that street vendors contribute to the city. Incorporating informal economy with planning can help Bangkok become a more dynamic community and tradition.

CONCLUSION

This article advocates for planning policy to move beyond the binary of order vs informality and, instead, promote the inclusive governance and recognising the significance of everyday activities (such as walking, vending, and dining) that contribute to the civic living experience. This strategy embraces a more robust interaction between the government, vendors, and the community, creating an atmosphere in which many voices contribute to the growing narrative of urban space. By respecting these informal economies, cities like Bangkok can create a more resilient and vibrant public sphere that represents the actual nature of its residents. Possible further study includes the exploration of how these informal practices influence social cohesion and cultural identity within urban settings. Additionally, examining the impact of policy changes on the livelihoods of vendors could offer helpful information regarding the balance between regulation and community engagement.

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- ¹ Kisanphol Wattanawanyoo. "Bangkok's Changing Foodscape: Mob Urbanism and the Mob(ile) Foodscape." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 25, no. 5 (2024): 701–11.
- ² J. Catherine Henderson. "Food and Culture: In Search of a Singapore Cuisine." *British Food Journal* 116, no. 6 (2014): 904–17.
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- ⁴ Jan Gehl, *Cities for People* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2010), 67.
- ⁵ Susan Parham. "Exploring Food and Urbanism." *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 13, no. 1 (2020): 1–12.
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- ⁷ Kathrin Wunsch, Korbinian Kienberger, and Claudia Niessner. 2022. "Changes in Physical Activity Patterns Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 4: 2250.
- ⁸ Matthew Gandy, *The Fabric of Space: Water, Modernity, and the Urban Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 192.
- ⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6–7.
- ¹⁰ Ross King, *Reading Bangkok* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 89.
- ¹¹ William Case. *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization*. (Routledge, 2015)
- ¹² Maya Safira and Makoto Chikaraishi. "The impact of online food delivery service on eating-out behavior: a case of Multi-Service Transport Platforms (MSTPs) in Indonesia." *Transportation* 50, no. 6 (2023): 2253-2271.
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- ¹⁴ Chua Beng Huat, "Singapore as Model: Planning Innovations, Knowledge Experts," in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, ed. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 29–54.
- ¹⁵ Tim Bunnell, *From World City to the World in One City: Liverpool through Malay Lives* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 167.
- ¹⁶ Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Seeing Like a City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 211.

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STRATEGIES FOR URBAN REGENERATION THROUGH MUSIC AND CULTURAL INTERVENTIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE

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INTRODUCTION

This research examines the potential of music and cultural actions as drivers of urban regeneration, with a particular focus on open-air public spaces. Traditional musical infrastructures such as concert halls or opera houses —conceived as enclosed and often exclusive venues— are increasingly disconnected from contemporary listening practices and the everyday dynamics of urban life. In contrast, the city demands more open, inclusive, and socially active environments where culture can be experienced collectively and informally.

Music, due to its universal and immediate nature, emerges as a powerful catalyst for revitalization and social cohesion. Yet, spatial design on its own may not be sufficient on its own; rather, sustainable activation of public spaces requires cultural programming and organizational management that respond to local contexts. In this framework, the research introduces the concept of parasitic architecture: lightweight, reversible, and adaptable interventions that temporarily attach to existing structures, providing the infrastructure necessary for cultural activation.

These strategies allow underused or degraded spaces to be transformed into dynamic cultural nodes, fostering participation, accessibility, and identity-building. Ultimately, the project proposes understanding music not merely as artistic expression but as an architectural and urban strategy capable of redefining public space and reinforcing the relationship between citizens and their environment.

From Enclosures to Public Livability

Urban livability is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional concept that encompasses environmental quality, cultural vitality, social inclusion, and spatial justice. It reflects not only the physical conditions of cities but also the capacity of urban environments to foster wellbeing, identity, and cohesion among their inhabitants.¹ Within this framework, culture—and particularly music—plays a decisive yet often underestimated role in shaping how people experience and inhabit public space.

Historically, music has been embedded in architectural typologies that were conceived as exclusive cultural enclosures: concert halls, opera houses, and auditoriums. These spaces were designed with highly controlled acoustic conditions and optimized listening experiences, but they were also socially restrictive and often disconnected from everyday urban life. Their monumental scale, economic barriers, and formality of use often contributed to reinforcing cultural elitism, limiting accessibility for

large segments of the population. As a result, musical architecture became both a symbol of cultural prestige and a manifestation of exclusion.

In the 21st century, however, cities are undergoing profound transformations—rapid urbanization, migration flows, economic restructuring, and cultural diversification—that demand new cultural infrastructures and practices. Listening habits have expanded beyond traditional venues, embracing informal, participatory, and collective experiences. The city itself has become a stage where music is increasingly integrated into parks, squares, transitional zones, and even transport hubs. In these contexts, music is no longer limited to artistic performance but emerges as an instrument for fostering inclusion, enhancing resilience, and activating underused or degraded spaces.

This research proposes to rethink the role of music not merely as an art form but as a strategic tool for urban regeneration and social sustainability. Through the integration of music into the public sphere, new opportunities arise for strengthening community ties, promoting cultural diversity, and reinforcing the perception of safety and vitality in urban environments. Yet, it must be emphasized that spatial design on its own is insufficient. Cultural programming, organizational management, and participatory planning are essential components to ensure continuity and impact.

Within this conceptual shift, the notion of parasitic architecture is introduced as a tactical strategy for activating public space. Defined as lightweight, adaptable, and reversible interventions temporarily attached to existing urban structures, parasitic architecture enables the flexible deployment of cultural infrastructure. Rather than relying on monumental, permanent constructions, this approach advocates for agile, low-cost, and socially inclusive interventions that can test new uses of space, engage local communities, and build cultural ecosystems.

The challenge, then, is to design cultural strategies that integrate music into everyday urban life while addressing broader issues of accessibility, resilience, and participation. This introduction frames the research within the discourse of livability, establishing the theoretical foundation for exploring how music and cultural interventions can redefine the relationship between citizens and their environments.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: MUSICAL ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN IDENTITY

The architectural history of music venues reveals a long-standing tension between acoustic excellence and urban integration. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, cultural prestige was associated with monumental concert halls and opera houses, often conceived as temples of art rather than as extensions of the urban fabric. These buildings provided controlled acoustic environments that maximized reverberation, intelligibility, and clarity of sound. Yet, they frequently did so at the cost of social inclusivity and spatial openness. Access was often limited to privileged groups, and the buildings themselves acted as self-contained cultural enclaves, with little connection to the surrounding city.

The archetype of the nineteenth-century shoebox hall –Figure 1– represents this model. Characterized by rectangular geometries, high ceilings, and parallel walls, it generated abundant lateral reflections and a rich reverberant field, conditions widely celebrated by acousticians.² Spaces like the Boston Symphony Hall became benchmarks for orchestral music, but they also symbolized a cultural model that was formal, exclusive, and spatially detached. These halls prioritized the listening experience within their interiors but offered minimal opportunities for public interaction beyond the walls of the building.

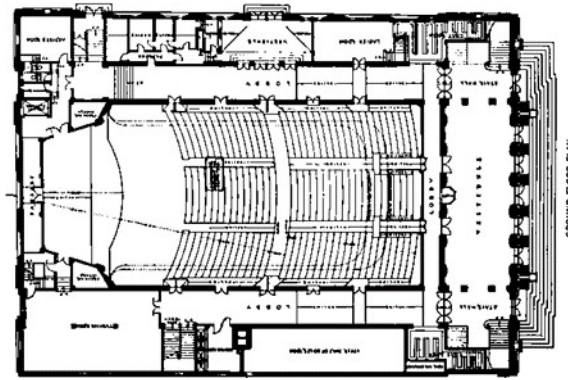


Figure 1. Ground floor plan of the Boston Symphony Hall (1900), example of the 'shoe box' model³.

By the mid-twentieth century, however, a process of architectural experimentation began to disrupt this paradigm. Hans Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonie (1963) –Figure 2– represented a significant break from the orthodoxy of the shoebox model. Designed as a vineyard-style auditorium, it distributed the audience around a central stage in terraced platforms, creating a more immersive and democratic visual and acoustic experience.⁴ Although the hall retained its status as a cultural icon, the design reflected broader shifts in modern architecture towards openness, experimentation, and user participation.

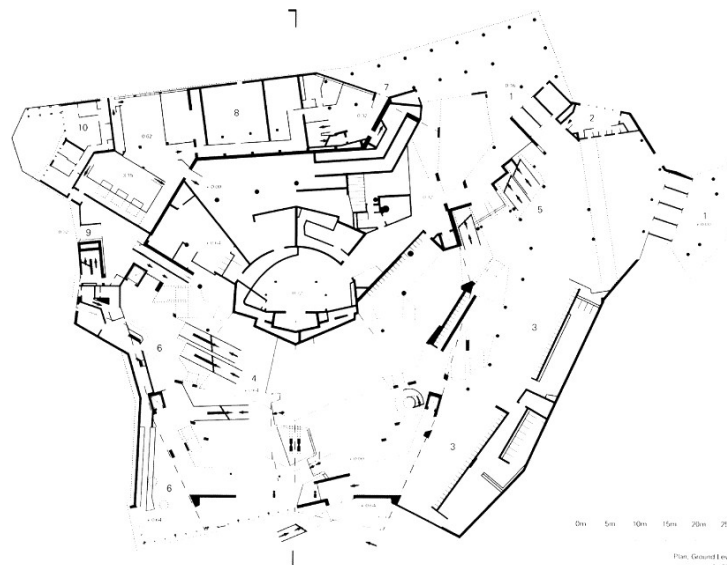


Figure 2. Ground floor plan of the Berlin Philharmonie, Hans Scharoun 1963. The layout illustrates the decentralization.⁵

At the same time, Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House (1973) demonstrated the potential of cultural infrastructure to act as an urban symbol as well as a performance space. Its foyers, terraces, and promenades were conceived not only as circulation areas but as semi-public spaces integrated into the maritime landscape of Sydney Harbour. Even for those who never attended a performance, the building offered opportunities for social interaction, leisure, and collective identity. This dual function— iconic architecture and public space—represented a departure from the closed typologies of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, both the Philharmonie and the Opera House illustrate a paradox: while they expanded the architectural vocabulary of cultural venues, they often remained spatially and socially exclusive. Their

prestige derived in part from their separation from everyday life, reinforcing the divide between institutionalized cultural consumption and informal urban experience.

In recent decades, a more radical rethinking has emerged. Hybrid typologies and outdoor cultural spaces have increasingly blurred the boundaries between architecture and the city. Historical precedents such as the nineteenth-century bandstands, the German Naturtheaters –Figure 3–, and early twentieth-century amphitheaters already pointed toward the integration of music into open landscapes and public parks. Today, this tradition has been revitalized by contemporary projects such as Frank Gehry’s Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, Chicago (2004). Here, advanced electroacoustic systems replicate the intimacy of a concert hall in an outdoor environment, allowing music to permeate freely accessible public space. Such interventions merge cultural programming with everyday urban life, transforming concerts into shared civic rituals.



*Figure 3. View of the Naturtheater Reutlingen.*⁶



*Figure 4. Aerial view of the Filene Center at Wolf Trap National Park by The Architects Collaborative.*⁷

This trajectory demonstrates that the architecture of music cannot be understood merely as a matter of acoustic optimization. It is deeply connected to broader debates on urban identity, cultural participation, and social justice. As cities grapple with challenges of deindustrialization, demographic shifts, and

growing cultural diversity, the integration of music into public space represents not only an architectural or acoustic innovation, but also a redefinition of the social role of culture in the urban realm.

MUSIC AS A DRIVER OF LIVABILITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

The role of music in cities extends far beyond its artistic dimension. Its universal character and capacity for immediate emotional impact make it a powerful driver of livability, capable of shaping how people experience and value urban environments. Unlike other cultural expressions that often require dedicated infrastructures or specialized audiences, music is inherently flexible: it can be staged in formal auditoriums, informal street performances, or large-scale open-air festivals. This adaptability positions music as a particularly effective medium for revitalizing public space and fostering social cohesion.

From a social perspective, music strengthens collective identity and solidarity. As Putnam argues, shared cultural practices are fundamental to building social capital.⁸ A concert in a public square, a local festival, or an improvised performance in a neighborhood park creates opportunities for interaction among diverse groups, reinforcing trust and reducing social distance. These practices transform anonymous urban spaces into places of belonging, where citizens recognize themselves as part of a larger community.

At the same time, music contributes to urban safety and vitality. Jane Jacobs emphasized the importance of “eyes on the street”⁹ for generating perceptions of security and fostering active urban life. Cultural programming in public spaces attracts people, generates constant flows, and prevents the abandonment and degradation that often accompany urban neglect. A lively square animated by music is not only an artistic venue but also a safer and more inclusive place.

Economically, music is a driver of what Howkins describes as the “creative economy”.¹⁰ Public concerts, festivals, and cultural events stimulate local businesses, attract tourism, and generate opportunities for entrepreneurship. They also create employment in cultural production, logistics, hospitality, and event management, demonstrating how cultural interventions can feed into broader processes of urban regeneration and prosperity.

Equally significant is the role of music in promoting diversity and representation. Public spaces activated by music become stages where multiple cultural identities can coexist and interact. Migrant communities, minority groups, and emerging artists find in these spaces opportunities to make their voices heard, contributing to a more inclusive and plural cultural landscape. This visibility reinforces social justice by democratizing access to cultural expression and recognizing identities that have historically been marginalized.

Finally, music can contribute to the revalorization of heritage. By programming concerts in historic buildings, abandoned factories, or underused monuments, music reactivates spaces that would otherwise remain forgotten. Such interventions not only generate cultural value but also strengthen the symbolic and historical ties between citizens and their built environment.

However, these benefits are not automatic. To function as a catalyst for livability, music-based interventions must be continuous, inclusive, and context-sensitive. Sporadic events can generate visibility but rarely produce long-term change. Sustainable impact requires integrated cultural ecosystems in which programming, spatial design, and governance mechanisms reinforce one another. This implies involving local communities in decision-making, ensuring accessible formats, and aligning cultural strategies with broader urban objectives such as resilience, equity, and sustainability.

In this sense, music emerges as a strategic instrument of cultural urbanism. It is not simply an ephemeral activity but a structuring element that shapes flows, organizes encounters, and redefines the meaning of place. When properly integrated into urban planning, music has the potential to transform degraded or underused areas into vibrant cultural nodes, fostering both the physical regeneration of space and the social cohesion of communities.

PARASITIC ARCHITECTURE AND TACTICAL URBANISM

The concept of parasitic architecture offers a flexible and sustainable model for activating public spaces through cultural programming. Unlike monumental cultural facilities that demand vast financial resources and long-term commitments, parasitic interventions are conceived as lightweight, adaptable, and reversible structures that can temporarily attach to existing urban elements. Their tactical nature allows them to transform underused areas into cultural stages without permanently altering the built fabric.

These interventions are particularly relevant in contexts of urban uncertainty and rapid change. Many contemporary cities face fluctuating demographics, cycles of investment and disinvestment, and uneven access to cultural infrastructures. Permanent facilities often struggle to adapt to these dynamics, while parasitic architecture provides agile responses that can be scaled, relocated, or dismantled as needed. By occupying residual spaces, abandoned buildings, or transitional zones, these interventions reclaim areas that would otherwise remain invisible or inactive, turning them into nodes of cultural life.

Several typologies exemplify the versatility of parasitic architecture. Temporary stages can be deployed in squares, streets closed to traffic, or neighborhood parks, creating focal points for musical performances while structuring the surrounding audience space. Modular acoustic panels, such as Wenger’s Legacy Classic Shell,¹¹ provide adaptable solutions to improve sound projection in outdoor contexts, enhancing the acoustic quality of performances without requiring permanent constructions. Mobile acoustic shells like the Soundforms project by Flanagan Lawrence –Figure 5– illustrate the capacity to replicate concert hall conditions in open-air settings, combining high-quality sound with rapid deployment. Perhaps the most experimental are inflatable structures, such as the Ark Nova pavilion by Arata Isozaki and Anish Kapoor –Figure 6–, which offers a transportable auditorium for 500 people, entirely supported by pneumatic technology and designed for ephemeral cultural programming.



Figure 5. Soundforms mobile acoustic shell.¹²



Figure 6. Aerial view of the Ark Nova transportable performance venue.¹³

The strength of these interventions lies not only in their material flexibility but also in their capacity to catalyze new social dynamics. By reducing financial and technical barriers, parasitic architecture democratizes access to cultural experiences, allowing smaller communities or local administrations to host events that would otherwise be unfeasible. Moreover, their temporary and reversible character minimizes environmental impact, aligning with the principles of sustainable design. They consume fewer resources, generate less construction waste, and allow experimentation without the risks associated with permanent large-scale projects.

This approach resonates with the logic of tactical urbanism,¹⁴ which advocates for small-scale, low-cost interventions designed to test ideas, activate spaces, and generate long-term cultural and social benefits. Parasitic architecture, as a form of cultural tactical urbanism, enables cities to explore new uses of public space in a provisional yet meaningful way. A square temporarily transformed into a concert venue, or a heritage site activated by an inflatable pavilion, can shift public perceptions, attract new flows of users, and build momentum for more permanent transformations.

Beyond their immediate function, these structures contribute to a broader rethinking of how culture is embedded in urban life. Instead of being centralized in iconic institutions, cultural experiences become dispersed, mobile, and accessible, capable of adapting to the diverse rhythms of the city. In doing so, parasitic architecture challenges traditional hierarchies of cultural consumption and supports a more distributed, participatory model of cultural production.

In sum, parasitic architecture embodies the principles of adaptability, inclusivity, and sustainability that contemporary urban regeneration demands. By providing the tools to activate underused spaces through music and cultural interventions, it opens pathways toward a more flexible and socially just form of urban livability.

PARTICIPATION, ACCESSIBILITY AND REPRESENTATION

For music-based interventions to serve as genuine tools of urban regeneration, they must go beyond the mere provision of cultural infrastructure and directly address the principles of participation, accessibility, and representation. A livable city is not only one that offers spaces for culture but one in which citizens are actively involved in shaping, experiencing, and identifying with those cultural practices.

Participation is fundamental to ensuring that interventions reflect local needs and aspirations. Processes of co-design and co-management allow residents to contribute to decisions about where, how, and for

whom cultural activities are organized. This collaborative approach strengthens community ownership, increases the legitimacy of projects, and builds long-term commitment to their maintenance and success. Participation also fosters civic pride: when communities see themselves as active agents in the transformation of space, they are more likely to value and care for the results.

Accessibility must be understood as a multidimensional condition. At the physical level, interventions must ensure universal design principles, creating barrier-free environments that can be enjoyed by people with reduced mobility, sensory impairments, or other specific needs. Economically, accessibility implies offering cultural experiences at low or no cost, ensuring that financial limitations do not become barriers to participation. From a cultural standpoint, accessibility requires programs that address diverse audiences, including groups traditionally excluded from mainstream cultural production. By breaking down these barriers, music-based interventions can function as inclusive platforms for the entire urban community.

Representation relates to whose voices, identities, and expressions are visible in public cultural life. Urban spaces activated through music provide opportunities for showcasing diversity, enabling different communities—migrant groups, minorities, emerging artists, or grassroots movements—to share their practices and contribute to the collective cultural landscape. Such visibility is not merely symbolic: it contributes to social justice by challenging hierarchies of representation and recognizing forms of cultural capital that are often undervalued in institutional contexts.

The intersection of participation, accessibility, and representation transforms cultural interventions into instruments of empowerment. For instance, a parasitic structure deployed in a peripheral neighborhood can host performances by local musicians, co-organized with residents, and freely accessible to the public. Such an intervention not only brings cultural life closer to marginalized areas but also validates their creative production, reinforcing identity and reducing inequalities between urban centers and peripheries.

Moreover, embedding music into everyday spaces—markets, bus stations, school courtyards, or abandoned industrial sites—broadens the reach of cultural participation and challenges the notion that culture belongs exclusively to formal institutions. These interventions normalize cultural expression as part of daily urban routines, reinforcing the role of public space as a commons where multiple identities intersect.

Ultimately, strategies that prioritize participation, accessibility, and representation contribute to more resilient and cohesive cities. They shift the focus from iconic cultural landmarks to distributed, community-centered interventions that reflect the diversity of urban society. In doing so, they align cultural programming with broader objectives of equity, inclusion, and social sustainability, ensuring that music-based regeneration is not only aesthetically successful but also socially transformative.

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

This research highlights the transformative potential of music and cultural interventions as catalysts for urban regeneration, framing them not only as artistic practices but as strategic tools for enhancing urban livability. The analysis has shown that traditional cultural infrastructures—concert halls, opera houses, and monumental auditoriums—while essential for certain traditions, have become increasingly disconnected from the realities of contemporary urban life. In contrast, open, inclusive, and participatory formats better reflect current listening practices and social needs, positioning public space as a key arena for cultural innovation.

The introduction of parasitic architecture has been presented as a tactical strategy capable of addressing this shift. By deploying lightweight, adaptable, and reversible structures, parasitic interventions provide a means to activate underused or degraded urban areas with minimal economic and environmental costs. These temporary installations allow for experimentation, rapid implementation, and community-driven

cultural programming, aligning closely with the principles of tactical urbanism. They demonstrate that cultural infrastructures need not be permanent or monumental to generate lasting social and spatial impacts.

The broader implications of these strategies extend into multiple dimensions of urban life. Socially, they strengthen cohesion by creating spaces for interaction and collective experiences. Culturally, they promote diversity and representation by opening platforms for voices that are often excluded from institutional contexts. Economically, they contribute to the creative economy, supporting local businesses, tourism, and employment. From a sustainability perspective, their temporary and reversible character reduces resource consumption and environmental impact, making them more compatible with contemporary urban challenges.

At the same time, the research underlines that the success of music-based interventions depends on governance, programming, and community engagement. Spatial design alone is insufficient. Long-term impact requires inclusive planning processes, continuous cultural programming, and participatory management models that embed these interventions into the everyday life of the city. Only through this holistic approach can music move from being an occasional event to becoming a structuring force for urban regeneration.

Looking ahead, future research should focus on the implementation and evaluation of pilot projects that apply these principles in real urban contexts. Comparative studies across different cities and neighborhoods will be crucial to assess the social, acoustic, and economic impacts of parasitic cultural interventions. Particular attention should be given to how these projects influence perceptions of safety, belonging, and identity, as well as their potential to catalyze broader urban transformations.

When combined with innovative architectural strategies such as parasitic structures, music becomes a vehicle for participation, accessibility, and resilience. This approach moves cultural production away from exclusive enclosures and towards a distributed, community-centered model of cultural urbanism. By embedding music into the everyday rhythms of the city, it is possible to create environments that are not only more livable but also more just, inclusive, and sustainable.

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IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS AND EXPECTED SUPPORT BY CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL POLICY - CASE STUDY FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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INTRODUCTION

Culture and Creative Industry (CCI) is a growing field of activities whose impact is not only visible in culture and creativity itself, but also in the economic field,¹ in the creation and development of jobs² and in the promotion of innovation,³ or in developing local identities⁴ and addressing social issues.⁵ The functioning of CCIs also seems to show positive impacts in situations of warfare.⁶ In light of the above, it is clear that CCIs play a substantial role in an area that has been increasingly mentioned and emphasized in recent years, that of sustainability. Not only the content of the individual activities (e.g. pro-environmental or pro-sustainable cultural activities) but also the form of their implementation is important. In this way, CCI actors can strongly influence not only the achievement of sustainability but also attitudes towards sustainability. Karttunen and Koskela⁷ also emphasise the topic of sustainability and point out the importance of local authorities' approach to CCI actors. Understandably, however, CCI actors are not only the focus of local policies. Escalona-Orcao et al.⁸ even point out that the notion of CCIs as promoters of "*smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth of a territory*" has become established at EU level. In our paper, we focus on an area that Wahba and Chun⁹ identify as crucial to "*stimulate the development and growth of CCIs*". This is the area of support, incentives, and regulation formation for CCIs by local governments, or regional authorities (hereafter RA), which have a considerable influence on the form of actors' operations.¹⁰ We view this process through the lens of cultural policy, more specifically, through the prism of the policy process and the Stage heuristic model of public policymaking. We understand cultural policy as a set of activities that relate to the arts, but also to the people and their roots that manifest themselves in the cultural and creative sphere. These activities include both non-profit and for-profit activities.¹¹

The theoretical context of our study was the implicit¹² policy framework. More specifically, the identified difficulties and expectations that are experienced in the context of the real impacts of cultural policies articulated by RA. Thus, in terms of The Stage Heuristic Model,¹³ we observe the first stage of the policymaking process, namely problem identification and definition. The practical context was that the qualitative study was a follow-up to the quantitative part of the project aimed at obtaining the kind of data that would enable the RA to develop a sustainable and applicable plan of support for CCIs within the cultural policy framework. We asked the question: What problems and needs do CCI practitioners identify concerning the cultural policy of the RA?

METHODOLOGY

Given the research question and the described context, we chose the methodological framework of qualitative evaluation analysis, specifically needs analysis.¹⁴ Because we needed to map as wide a range of issues and needs as possible, the method of data generation chosen was focus groups. Thus, the research was not designed as a so-called in-depth study. To reflect on the ethical aspects of the research, we used the criteria of promoting autonomy, fair treatment, and ensuring the development or elimination of potential harm.¹⁵ The PRICE model was used to test the achievement of data saturation.¹⁶

Data generation and analysis

Focus groups (FGs)¹⁷ were conducted in a room equipped for audio and video recording during November 2024 (320 minutes in total). Prior to the commencement of each FG, informed consents were signed with participants to participate in the research being conducted. Operationalization of the Question Road was implemented based on the findings of the quantitative part of the study.¹⁸ The first questions were directed towards introducing themselves to each other and briefly introducing the expected needs from the RA. Subsequent questions were directed to the circumstances and appropriateness of RA support. The record of the groups was transcribed verbatim (75 pages of text). We used a thematic analysis framework to analyse the data.¹⁹ The Atlas.ti software (ver. 7.5.18) was used as the technical support for the coding process. Specific excerpts from the FG are referred to in the text by the focus group number where they were heard.

Communication partners

The FGs involved 23 representatives of different CCI actors (21 men). The range of experience within CCI ranged from 4 to 36 years. The communication partners represented the sectors of publishing, architecture, design, cultural production (concerts, festivals, theatres), marketing, advertising, branding, event catering, conference delivery, and the film industry. Represented were both those who carry out activities within CCI themselves and representatives of the management of larger companies.

RESULTS

The identified problems and needs can be described through the Circular Problems-Needs Model (CPNM). At the center of this model (see Figure 1) are the difficulties and subsequent needs that relate to the knowledge of RA officials related to CCI's areas of expertise. The knowledge is critical to the FG communication partner because it may discourage CCI actors from further collaboration with RAs. Thus, as one communication partner noted, without confidence in the RAs related to their knowledge of CCI issues, contacts are experienced as "irritation" that stems from the decision-making and writing of grant titles and support opportunities, "as unqualified in layman's terms". The repetition of this experience has led to the communication partner in question "abandoning" further attempts to cooperate with the RA (FG2). Thus, poor knowledge of CCI issues on the part of the RA can lead to the RA becoming an irrelevant partner for CCI actors to work with.

This area is then followed by the identified difficulties and needs in the area of interaction between the RA and the CCI actors (labelled as Interaction in Figure 1), in the area of the CCI actors themselves (CCI actors), and difficulties and needs related to the place of implementation of CCI activities (Space). As the names suggest, the Interaction area touches on the area of communication, not only directly between CCI actors and RA officials, but also indirectly in the form of the application process. The main issues are the difficulty of not distinguishing between commercial and non-commercial activities by the RA and the absence of networking between CCI actors. In Space, the needs are named as supporting the cultivation of the environment towards openness towards CCI.

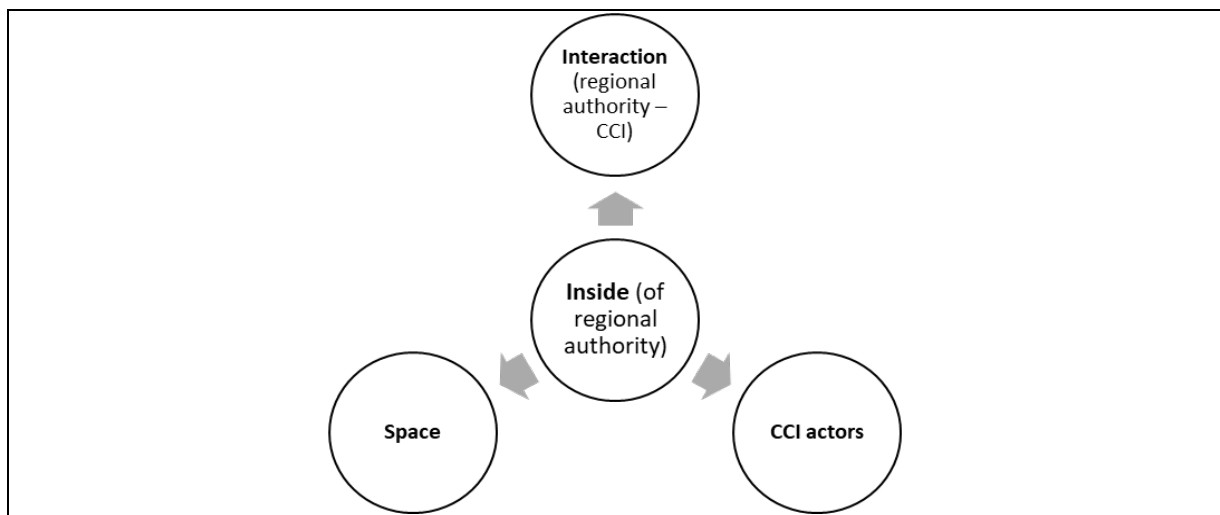


Figure 1. Circular Problems-Needs Model

Inside the Regional Authority

As this category has emerged as central, we will pay more attention to it in the text. Within the FG, communication partners repeatedly mentioned that a very fundamental difficulty is the disparity between the knowledge and expertise of CCI actors and RA officials. This difficulty is illustrated by one of the communication partners using a specific example to describe the perception of public space by RA officials. He points out that it is not the case that "everybody is not describing the topic of the public space correctly. For many municipalities (...) it's a place where some technical services meet." Less recognized is "that there are many more of those functions." It is therefore essential that the educational profile of RA officials is composed "even from other perspectives than the legal, bureaucratic ones" (FG1). In doing so, the RA is not expected to "be one step ahead" because this is, in the eyes of CCI actors, "our business" (FG2). In other words, an enlightened and qualified RA officer is expected to have a good basic understanding of the current state of the area of CCI that he or she is responsible for within his or her area of competence.

The existence of educated RA officials is seen by communication partners as essential and as something that should be completely automatic. Similar to "I don't pour fuel oil into the river, because it's wrong". In the same way that it is quite clear that some behaviours are ecologically inadequate, it should also be clear to RA officials that some decisions are in direct conflict with the possibility of carrying out some of the larger cultural activities: 'I'm not going to build pillars on the only piece of land I have to put on a concert there' (FG3). What is fundamental, then, is that 'there are quality people inside that structure' of the RA (FG1).

Education could then also help in distinguishing between commercial and non-commercial activities within CCI. Communication partners refer to "art stuff" as non-commercial activity, which does not generate profit, because it is intended "for a narrow group of people, but it is a valuable culture" (FG4). Identifying a narrow group of people may not be difficult even in terms of bureaucratic procedures for assessing activities. However, determining what is and what is not a 'valuable culture' relies on the skill and ability to identify what is a 'utility' that 'should be a public service'. An example of this is the reacculturation of "screenings for children who are socially disadvantaged and who have never been to a cinema in their life" (FG4). Commercial activities should be supported rather symbolically, while non-commercial ones should be supported with "easily the ninety-five percent" of the budget (FG4). Thus, the emphasis is on personal responsibility for those CCI activities that can be seen as profitable and outside the public service.

The current state of affairs, where knowledge of legislation and bureaucratic procedures is prioritised at the RA level, leads to a strategy that can be described as 'educate your civil servant'. The process of education consists of repeated visits, communication and explanation of the essential aspects of working within a given CCI area. The official thus educated serves as a kind of point of interface between the RA and the CCI actors. He or she then acts as an 'enlightened' RA who can eventually 'enlighten the colleagues around him or her' (FG1). The problem with this stratagem, however, is that the moment a position in the RA structure "changes the person I have been working on for three years", then "the whole marathon starts all over again" (FG3). The whole process starts all over again because the vacant position is filled by an official "who looks at it again in a classical way" (FG1), here in the context of legal and bureaucratic procedures.

Other parts of the model

The area Inside of the RA is closely related to other areas of the model described. Communication partners mentioned not only internships abroad, but also "visits to those locations" at the time when CCI activities are taking place at those locations, as one of the models for educating RA officials. What is important is that the official sees the activity at the time of implementation. Thus, it is not enough "to go to someone's office" (FG4). This activity falls into the area identified in the model as **Interaction**. In addition to this, the area of communication on grant applications for public contracts and other types of support can also be included. These are often seen as a "big challenge" (FG1) or a "very challenging" (FG2) process. Thus, an educated official could interact with a particular CCI actor in a more flexible way to respond to a misunderstanding of the procurement, i.e. a situation where CCI actors "do not 'get it'. I have no idea what you want me to do here" (FG1). Ongoing communication of needs to implement CCI activities could also be placed under the same theme (Interaction). RA officials, according to communication partners, could ask about needs to implement larger activities. They could ask questions about "what do you want here so that there can be events that attract five thousand people. And you say, yes, five thousand people need this" (FG3).

The anticipated needs of RA activities that would go directly to the operation of the CCI (**CCI actors** in the model) are not only related to the funding mentioned above, which would be distributed according to whether or not it is a commercial activity. Other expected needs relate to training in the areas of social networks, information technology, innovation management, or AI, which, however, are to have the character of support, where the expert "who will implement it in that particular organization" is paid. The ideal course of training should aim for an outcome in which the subject matter expert "has done it with you and you have implemented it, and now you know what to do" (FG1). The final sub-theme discussed was the area of "meeting (...) also maybe with other professions because it can be very informative" (FG3). This networking between CCI actors can have a positive impact in minimizing situations where activities "overlap, it's side by side" (FG4).

The expected interventions in the environment in which CCI actors operate (denoted as **Space** in the model) can be divided into two subtopics: cultivating the environment and paying for advertising in the wider county. Cultivation of the environment is a relatively wide range of possible activities going from daring the RA to allow "a new beautiful element to come into those historic districts" (FG1), to the area of building spaces that can be used for cultural purposes and there will be no "not trying to soundproof" the buildings in question, so "there are no acoustics" (FG3), to supporting "secondary education, higher education" (FG2). Similarly, it can be useful to create an environment for "corporate resettlement" to bring in and retain "talent to develop here in the region" (FG3). The second sub-theme is then to support the promotion of CCI actors. This could be achieved both by "advertising" that could "bring people to the region" (FG4) and by active presentation of the CCI that could be carried out by the RA. RA officials could "promote CCI actors when they go to different fairs" (FG3).

INTERPRETATIONS

To summarize the key findings, they could be formulated in the following four points:

- Basic knowledge of the professional issues of CCI that RA officials would possess is essential and crucial.
- It is also necessary to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial CCI activities.
- In the case of commercial activities, the CCI actors themselves are expected to be responsible for their implementation.
- The education of RA officials can support the quality of ongoing communication, which is also essential for the functioning of CCI.

The theses can be understood in the context of the neoliberal state model,²⁰ which, however, in addition to the CCI's personal responsibility and acceptance of the market as a mechanism of responsiveness, also emphasises knowledge as "the basis for governance processes".²¹ Emphasising individual responsibility and the knowledge base of RA officials at the same time can be seen as a kind of balancing tool between bottom-up and top-down approaches to cultural policy.²² The bottom-up process has an impact not on the decision-making process as such, or directly on the creation of the cultural policy vision, but precisely on the level of knowledge of the different CCI areas that can be fostered through internships and communication by the different CCI actors. Essentially, communication partners seek a form of strategic RA interventions that will be expertly managed²³ and allow for the promotion of greater understanding within the collaborative.²⁴ Basic expertise is seen as an essential feature of collaboration, information sharing and "idea generation".²⁵ Moreover, interactions between CCI and RA enhanced by knowledge-based competencies could also help with the engagement of CCI actors in ostensive projects that can influence the shape of the city and life in it, which are not primarily focused on CCI.²⁶

In the context of the Stage heuristic model of public policymaking,²⁷ fostering contact with CCI actors and their activities, as well as fostering knowledge of CCI expertise, can accelerate the process of identifying and defining problems, as well as the process of agenda setting. Indeed, if RAs allow their officials to have continuous contact with CCIs on their activities and learning in their respective areas, this will also mean that individual RA officials can serve as a bridge of understanding between CCAs and those actors in RAs who are responsible for policy formulation and thus agenda setting. Equally, the processes of policy formulation, legitimation as well as evaluation can then be influenced. Thus, through the prism of Street-level bureaucracy theory, RA officials may not only influence the application of specific policies,²⁸ but they also have the potential to influence their formulation by gradually familiarizing themselves with the issues of the various CCI disciplines and passing them on to those involved in policy formulation.

LIMITATIONS

A clear limitation of our findings is the fact that the research was conducted using a qualitative strategy. This limits the ability to generalize the data to any other contexts. It also means that the CPNM model presented is only an initial understanding of the problems and needs of CCI. It is also significant that representatives of CCI actors who have a direct influence on the decision-making and management of the companies, associations and organisations in question were invited to the FGs. Although many of them described direct contact with lived practice (i.e. not only dealing with RAs), their description of problems and needs should be seen as in the context of the management of the organisations.

CONCLUSION

The growing importance and impact of CCI have long been the subject of research and theory-driven academic activities. Our research, although primarily motivated by the formulation of findings that will help a particular RA to develop a strategy to promote CCI, points to the crucial importance of RAs employing officials at the points of contact between them and CCI actors who, in addition to their knowledge of legislation and bureaucratic procedures, also possess knowledge of the fields with whose actors they come into contact.

NOTES

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CREATING EMOTIONS TO ENCOUNTER CULTURAL HERITAGE SUPPORTED BY A NEUROSCIENTIFIC APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

In our cities, tourism is focused not only on outdoor monuments and landscapes, but also on indoor environments (first and foremost, museums: but they're certainly not the only ones): actually, there is no sharp-edged line between the two, as both contribute to the strong impact of cultural tourism, that in turn generates an intolerable pressure on our cities.

Some solutions have been proposed, included the VR implementation, but the question is: can virtual reality relieve this pressure?

On the other side, many difficulties could make access to places of cultural interest difficult or impossible: from the accessibility matter to global emergencies, security risks, economic or social difficulties.

In many cases, keeping museums open, or letting tourists visit sites of relevant interest is highly inadvisable or even impossible. Then, Virtual Reality is emerging in the cultural heritage sector, offering unprecedented opportunities for inclusion and keeping Heritage accessible to a wider range of users,¹ but the question again is: can virtual reality replace real experiences?

The answer to both questions, of course, is no. However, VR solutions simply re-proposing things as they are in physical reality would not fully exploit all their potential. The possibility to manipulate the environment in which the cultural encounter takes place is an important point in favor of VR: Actually, while real museums have to choose between possible layouts, which do not necessarily meet the sensibilities of all visitors, virtual ones can offer a set of different presentations and/or interpretations which can be targeted and offer multifaceted presentations of the same object (without replacing the real experience, but balancing the limits of a physical arrangement).

Supported by the psychological sciences, the Authors tested the impact of different possible settings by monitoring the emotional and cognitive reactions of a sample of respondents, finding differences and constants depending on age, gender and cultural background. The paper illustrates the results of this experimental study carried out in virtual museum environments: in this way, the complexity and the richness of cultural finds can be preserved in difficult times.

The role of emotions in cultural encounters

The core of the research is on the role of emotions in cultural encounters.

Despite the so-called affective turn in humanities, and the partial rediscovery of emotions in the last decades, they are still under evaluated while they significantly influence all experiences, included the cultural ones. In this case, they can support memorization, trigger reflection and create empathic responses.

What exactly emotions are is not yet definitively defined, because they are both conscious and unconscious (that is, bodily) processes. Their origin is of a chemical nature, not under the control of the by conscious thought: only at a second stage they are processed by the mind to become feelings that we are aware of and able to recognize. Then, this project was carried out in collaboration with Neuroscientists.

In order to understand how people respond to spatial attributes, and to test the different emotions triggered by different settings in museums, some experiments have been carried out: the Authors, via Neuroscience' Method, tested the impact of different, possible settings by monitoring the emotional and cognitive reactions of a sample of respondents.

The results can be very inspiring to create a set of (virtual) solutions for different people, in relation with cultural content. The main question is: do the properties of space affect the encounter with the displayed objects? The hypothesis, of course, is yes. But, putting in practice, it might be somewhat weird to state that we can communicate a story, or rather, the emotions linked to a story, with lines, materials, lights, colors, textures.

An experiment to understand the effect of different interior settings

A museum room, presenting an object in a certain atmosphere, generates an emotional, spontaneous response in visitors: in terms of valence and arousal.²

In this experiment the same space to display the same objects was modified according to several versions, to respond to the tastes and perceptual understandings of different people, increase the quality of spatial experience and the appreciation of cultural contents.

The question is: do the properties of space vary the attitude that people have towards a given environment and therefore their encounter with the displayed objects? The hypothesis is ye

The research team studied different design solutions to display two archeological pieces

Starting from the stories of two people as reported in Roman tombstones, it was discussed what was the best way to present them, changing spatial attributes such as light, color, material and graphics.

The first piece is a funerary mask which, as the accompanying tombstone recalls, was commissioned by the mother of the depicted girl (Claudia Victoria), who died aged eleven, to always remember her face. The second item is an epitaph recalling a goldsmith (Lucifer), his passion for his work and his ability to create light.

Based on the assumption that different design solutions create different emotional effects, the research team altered some spatial attributes such shapes, colors, surfaces, openings, textures, graphic elements, and of course light, aiming to reveal visitor's conscious emotional responses and their preferences. A very simple room was designed to display the pieces, starting from a spatial baseline as neutral as possible, on which to make further modifications: a room with a length of 4 m, a width of 3.5 m and a height of 4.5 m; wall surfaces finished in white plaster; floor element finished in concrete; ceiling element finished in white plaster. To develop display solutions specifically designed for each piece and its story, the two archaeological pieces were studied separately. Starting from the stories of Claudia Victoria and Lucifer as reported in Roman tombstones, it was discussed what was the best way to represent them. The proposed alterations were chosen to be in harmony with the history of the works

and to arouse specific emotional states. In some cases, the alterations have been proposed in combination, in other cases a single alteration has been used (fig.2).

The related research question was: can you communicate a story, or rather, the emotions linked to a story, with lines, materials, lights, colors (Figure1)? If yes, knowing the story and not knowing it, can lead to a different emotional responses? Which spatial settings obtain greater involvement in relation to the disposed object³?

The experimental protocol was thus designed splitting the sample in two groups: the first one received the information/story related to the objects, so that it affected their evaluation of the display from an emotional perspective; the second one did not receive any previous information/story about the objects, so that they expressed a judgment mainly of aesthetic nature (fig.1)

The different settings sequence (fig. 2, fig.3) was presented online, asking to choose an emotional state from a predetermined list. It was aimed to understand whether the expected emotional state for each alteration reflected the emotional state actually chosen by the interviewees.

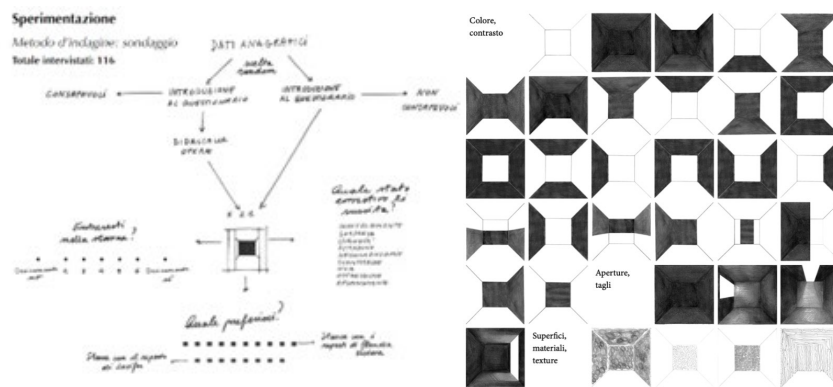


Figure 1. Concept: study of elements to modify for interior settings such as shapes, colors, surfaces, openings (right)

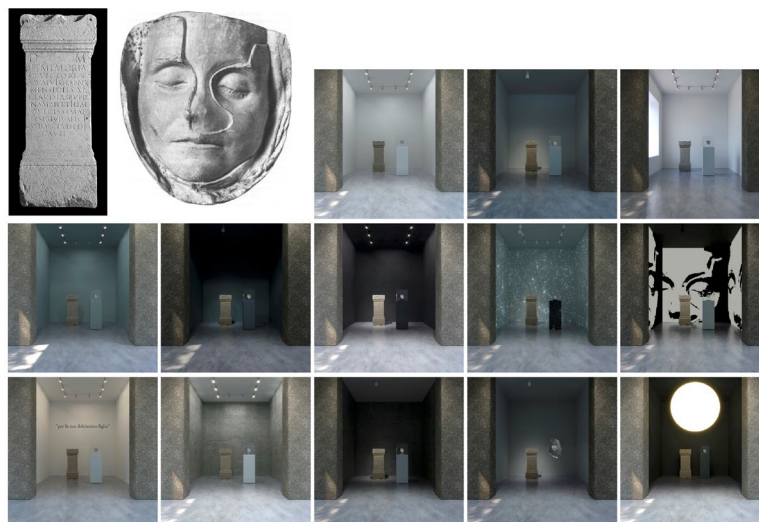


Figure 2. Different settings created for the epigraph and plaster cast of Claudia Vittoria situated on the top left part, with alterations of light, surface treatment, graphic elements and volumetric articulation.

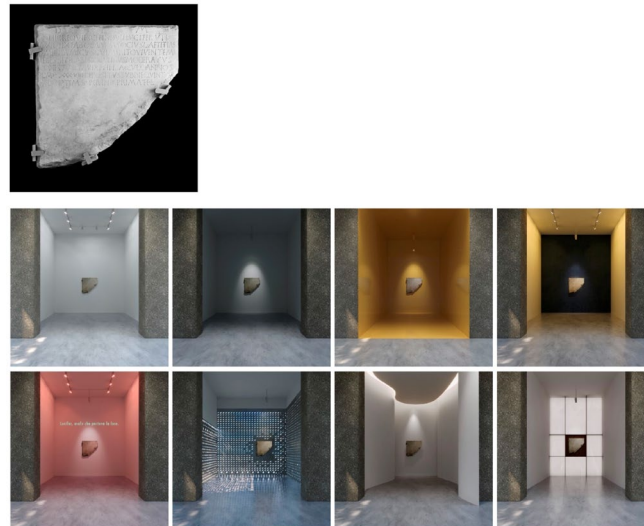


Figure 3. Different settings created for the epigraph of Lucifer situated on the top left part, with alterations of light, surface treatment, graphic elements and volumetric articulation.

For each image two questions were asked. The first question was «Would you like to enter the room?». The answers, expressing a motor response, were given on a seven-point Likert scale. The second question was: «What emotional state does the image arouse?» Respondents could choose between nine emotional states, four of which were positive: involvement, surprise, curiosity, attraction, four negative: disinterest, boredom, oppression, rejection and one neutral: no emotion. The choice of emotional states was dictated by the need to find emotions or moods that were relevant to the museum sphere for the interviewees.

At the end of the questionnaire, all the images were proposed again, all together but separately for the two pieces: thirteen images related to Claudia Victoria’s findings and eight images related to the Lucifer epitaph. For both groups it was asked: «which do you prefer?» Then, respondents were asked to select one of the images.

The results of the experiment

The results are summarized in figures 4-8, which, for the sake of brevity, only report the case of Claudia Victoria findings).

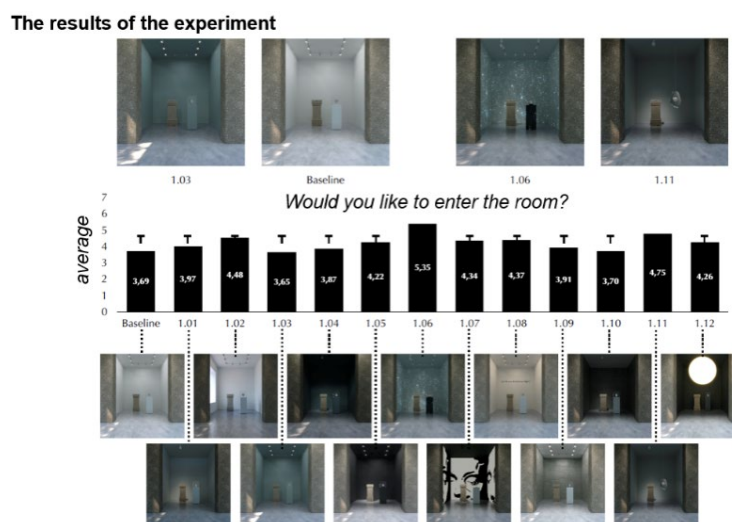


Figure 4. Claudia Victoria’s results

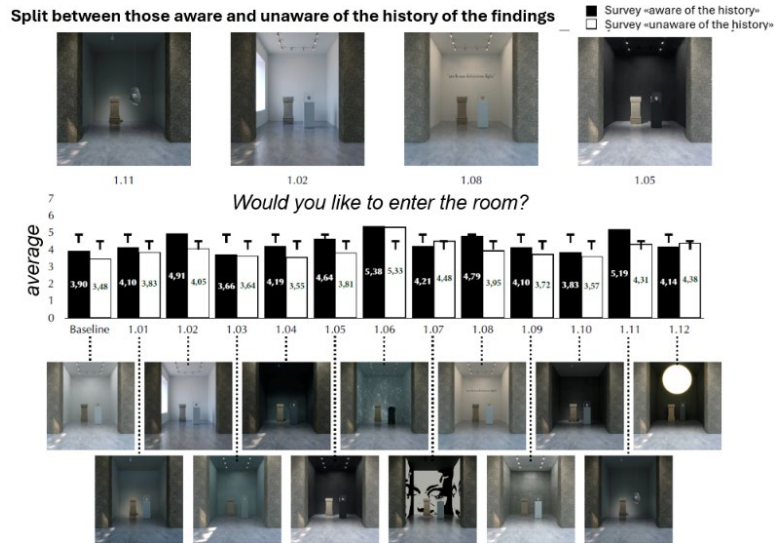


Figure 5. Claudia Victoria's results, split between those aware and unaware of its history

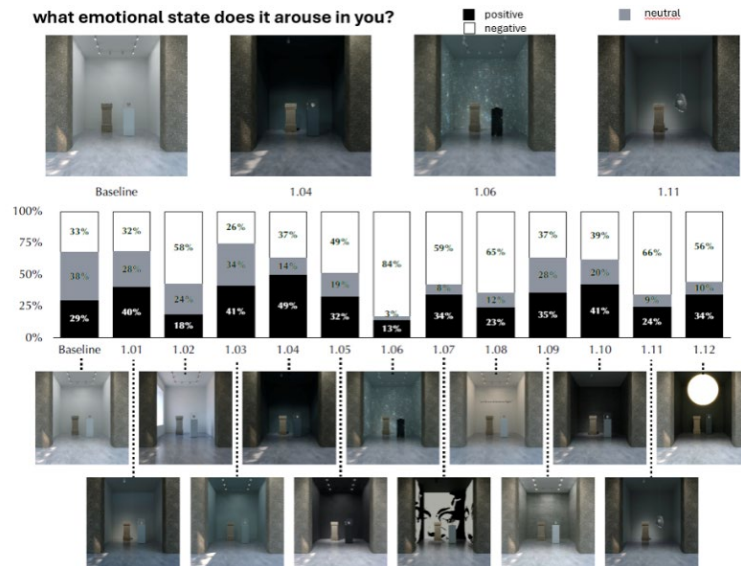
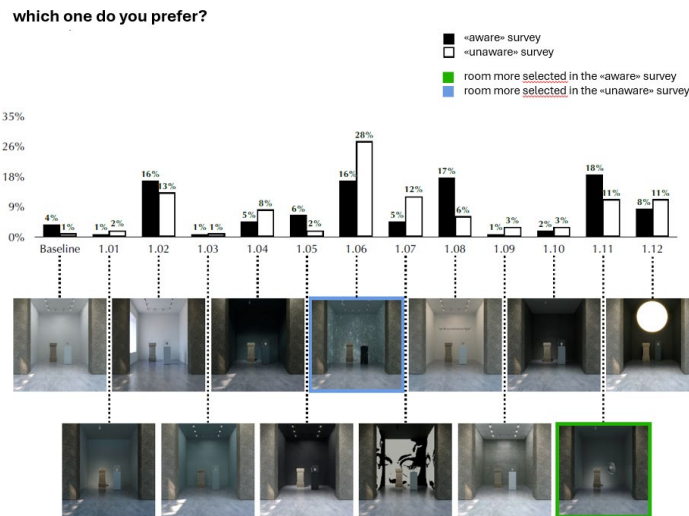
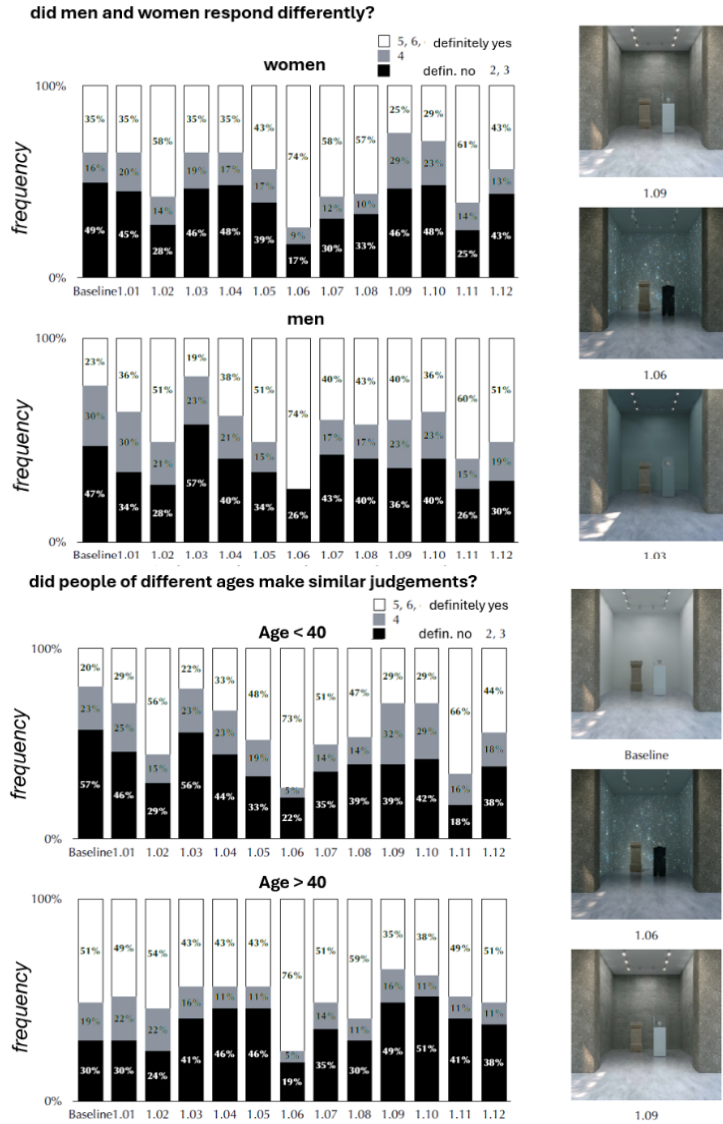


Figure 6. Claudia Victoria's results, referred to emotional states



Comparing the answers of the first question ("Would you like to enter the room?") with the answers of the second one ("What emotional state does the image arouse?") it is clearly seen that there exists a direct correlation between them. Who choose to enter the room express positive emotional states and who express a low willingness to enter, express negative emotional states or no emotion.

Regarding the answers to the question "which one do you prefer?" the preferences show significant differences, and this finding proves that interior setting has a great impact on pleasantness and appreciation. The statistical analysis showed that the least-liked category for Claudia Victoria's findings was the alteration of the surface treatment and the most liked category was the alterations of lighting design. While the solutions without a particular contrast regarding colour, material and light get lower votes (e.g. baseline), solutions with elements that represent higher contrast especially regarding lighting design/concept get higher votes (e.g. room with lighting concept interpreting a sky full of stars) (Figure 4).

If we compare the answers of Claudia Victoria's finding with Lucifer's finding, the latter were given higher average votes. Also among the spatial alternatives created for the finding of Lucifer, the baseline received lower votes while alterations of light with higher contrast get higher votes. Volumetric alterations such as the alternative with curved lines received higher votes, too (Figure 9).

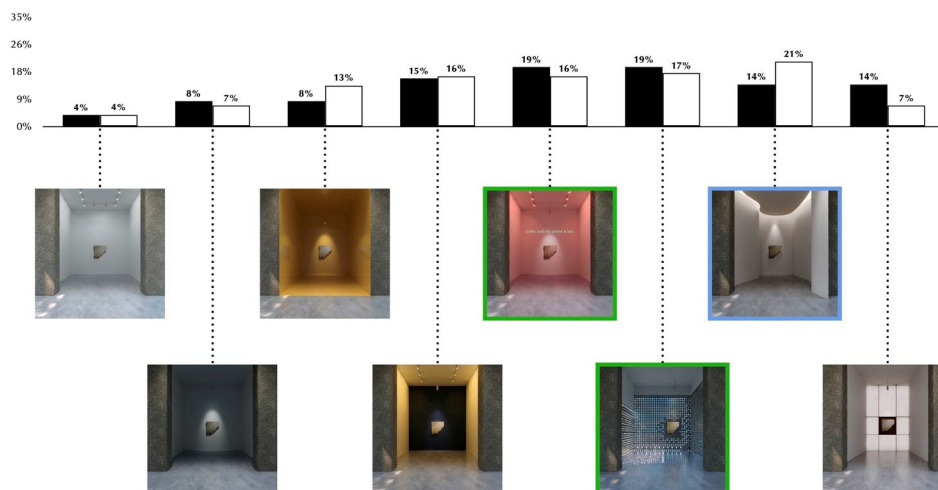


Figure 9. Preferences for different settings created for the second piece (epigraph of Lucifer).

There are no statistically significant differences between the responses to the conscious questionnaire and the responses to the unconscious questionnaire, but the trends are clearly different, as shown in fig.... It can be noted that when the setting expressly refers to history of objects, to be aware or not of it significantly changes the preferences.

The same can be stated regarding the differences of gender: there are no statistically significant differences, however it can be observed that in general males seem to have a greater tendency to express negative judgments, while females seem to have a greater tendency to express positive judgments.

Regarding «age groups» factor, there are many similarities between the different groups. It can nevertheless be inferred that the baseline is the room where under 40s would enter least, while over 40s would enter to a large extent; instead, there is convergence on the room that neither group would like to enter. Moreover, young people seem less inclined to get involved than older people, and they express less positive judgements

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

This study needs to be framed in a wider context, which involves communicating cultural heritage on the one hand, and the possibility of enjoying it in different ways, tailored to different audiences, thanks to virtual solutions.

It was an opportunity for two kinds of reflections: concerning the multiplicity of solutions for displaying the same objects (expose the same object (and, by extension, also more complex cultural systems) and the multiplicity of visitors' reactions and preferences.

Visitors, as we know, are not all the same (in terms of background, age, inclinations and interests, gender, memories, beliefs), so resorting to different displays can be a way of conveying the values and meanings of a cultural heritage to different sensibilities.⁴

In particular, if physical access is inadvisable or impossible, the virtual visit can balance its lower degree of sensorial involvement with a multi-layered reading, which allows one to appreciate in one case the aesthetic values, in the other the emotional ones; in one case the narrative contents, in the other the informative ones, in an experience that is difficult to replace.



Figure 10. Ecological experimentations in the frame of META-MUSEUM European project (left) and Neuromuseum national project (right, performed via VR environment)

After this study, further experiments were carried out by the research team in ecological conditions (i.e. not in the laboratory or online, but directly in museums), with wearable devices measuring neurophysiological parameters, to monitor the participants' bodily reactions to cultural stimuli,⁵ as depicted in fig 10, showing the measurement of brain waves and emotional parameters via a casque and a “bracelet” with finger rings, during a cultural experience (physical and virtual).

All these experimentations pave the way for many other experiments in interior as well as exterior spaces (such as archeological digs and sites). They can significantly contribute to understand and interpret the so called “genius loci”, and they can be an innovative support for addressing the “dissonant” heritage, where the emotional side is conflictual and sometimes traumatic.

Finally, this approach makes it possible to communicate the heritage in a more conscious way, putting the user at the centre. This is indeed a way of preserving the complexity and the richness of cultural finds, in difficult times.

NOTES

¹ Michela Benente and Valeria Minucciani, “Inclusive Museums: From Physical Accessibility to Cultural Appropriation”, in Proceedings of the International Conference AHFE 2020, AISC 1202, edited by Giuseppe di Bucchianico (Heidelberg: Springer, 2020), 189-195

² Elisabetta Canepa, Architecture IS Atmosphere (Roma: Mimesis International, 2022)

³ Carlos Martí Arís. *Las variaciones de la identidad. Ensayo sobre el tipo en arquitectura* (Demarcación de Barcelona del Colegio de Arquitectos de Cataluña, 1993 / Fundacion Caja De Arquitectos, 2014)

⁴ Jean-Michel Tobelem, *La culture pour tous. Des solutions pour la démocratisation?* (Paris: Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 2016)

⁵ As part of the national project Neuromuseum, (funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research and coordinated by Valeria Minucciani), and the international project Meta-Museum (funded by Europe, in the frame of Horizon Europe Program, coordinated by Valeria Minucciani)

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