

A LOT OF GRASSROOTS:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR VACANT LAND
IN THE SHRINKING CITY DETROIT

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POSSIBILITIES FOR VACANT LAND IN THE SHRINKING CITY DETROIT

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MÖJLIGHETER FÖR ÖVERGIVEN MARK I DEN KRYMPANDE STADEN DETROIT

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PREFACE

I had a desire to explore the mythical city of Detroit. It is a shrinking city and I could not imagine what to expect or what I would be experiencing there. For me as a Swedish landscape architect coming to Detroit, USA, I placed myself in a new context, both in terms of planning, politics and culture. I searched for potential in shrinking cities by meeting Detroiters, listening to their stories and by learning from them.

During the journey I have come to reflect on my role as a landscape architect and as an outsider coming to Detroit. For me Detroit represents something, to others, something else. This thesis is one of the many stories and it starts with the instruction by Jerry Herron found in *Stalking Detroit* (2001, p. 33) that I tried to adopt when entering the city: “*Forget what you think you know about this place.*”

Rebecka Rosén

May 7th, 2013

Malmö, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Shrinking cities are to be found all over the world with various reasons for shrinkage, all somewhat connected to globalization. Through a literature review of current research and connected to contemporary landscape architecture theory the phenomenon has been studied. This thesis presents why, where and how cities are shrinking. The focus is on the processes of deindustrialization and suburbanization operating in the United States of America.

Detroit is one of the most well known examples of a shrinking city, once the fastest growing city, now the fastest shrinking. It is used as a lens to understand the difficulties and potential of a shrinking city focusing on one of the effects: vacant land. A three months field study was conducted to explore and find an alternative approach to planning for shrinking cities and to find opportunities for the vacant land.

The grassroots movement has a strong base in Detroit. Vacant lots are transformed from bottom-up to urban farms, playgrounds, orchards, tree nurseries, pocket parks, art installations and more. This thesis seeks to demonstrate a possible positive transformation of a shrinking city by listening to these processes that are already happening.

The thesis have highlighted common considerations for stabilizing a shrinking city and make it livable for the remaining inhabitants, such as (a) leave the concept of growth, (b) see potential in the vacant land, (c) use both long-term planning and short-term action to guide the urban transformation, (d) recognize and identify what is already happening by using local knowledge, (e) both top-down and bottom-up efforts are necessary in the reorganizing process.

The thesis concludes with presenting a model of how landscape architects can support grassroots initiatives and mediate between them and the city officials.

Key words: Detroit, shrinking city, grassroots, landscape urbanism, vacant land, urban transformation, bottom-up perspective

CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION 10

BACKGROUND	13
THESIS STATEMENT	15
METHODOLOGY	17
DEFINITIONS	20

2. SUBJECT: SHRINKING CITIES 22

A “NEW” PHENOMENON	25
CAUSES: WHY ARE CITIES SHRINKING?	28
SCENE: WHERE ARE CITIES SHRINKING?	32
SYMPTOMS: HOW ARE CITIES SHRINKING?	35
CONCLUSION	38
<i>Thoughts on bike #1</i>	

3. POTENTIAL: URBAN TRANSFORMATION 42

ABANDONING GROWTH	45
VACANT LOTS AS A RESOURCE	48
WORKING WITH THIS TRANSFORMATION	51
CONCLUSION	63
<i>Thoughts on bike #2</i>	

4. PLACE: DETROIT 66

BEFORE INDUSTRIALIZATION	69
INDUSTRIALIZATION	70
DEINDUSTRIALIZATION	72
DETROIT TODAY	75
CONCLUSION	79
<i>Thoughts on bike #3</i>	

5. PROCESS: TRANSFORMING VACANT LOTS 82

FINDING PROJECTS	87
10+1 PRESENTED PROJECTS	89
1. THE HOLE	91
2. PATHWAYS TO PARKS	95
3. RECLAIM DETROIT	97
4. RIDE IT SCULPTURE PARK	101
5. BOB'S RUIN	103
6. BLOOMTOWN DETROIT	107
7. BROTHER NATURE PRODUCE	109
8. GEORGIA STREET COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE	113
9. EARTHWORKS URBAN FARM	117
10. THE HEIDELBERG PROJECT	123
+1. THE GREENING OF DETROIT	129
SUMMARY	135
CONCLUSION	137

6. DISCUSSION 140

THE INTRODUCED PHENOMENON	143
A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT IN A SHRINKING CITY	149
THE MODEL	151
<i>Final thoughts</i>	157

7. REFERENCES 158

LITERATURE	161
WEB	166
FIGURES	167
PHOTOS	168
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	169



INTRODUCTION



This is my master thesis in landscape architecture from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU, Alnarp. This thesis is a part of my journey to a greater understanding of the worldwide processes of globalization and industrialization and how those affect cities and its people. It is also a search for what my role as a landscape architect can be in collaboration with actions taken on grassroots level when there is a lack of planning and economy.

BACKGROUND

During my studies to become a landscape architect most focus has been on cities that are growing, both in terms of economy and population. That is also the condition that landscape architects usually work with. What I have come to understand due to my interest in post-industrial environments, not everything is growing and that there is another side of the coin, decline and shrinkage. Driving around Sweden you can find effects of shrinking populations in villages and towns. Abandoned factories, closed stores and empty houses. 59% of the municipalities in Sweden have decreased in population between 1996-2011 (Johansson, 2012).

I wanted to understand the flux of people with population loss, the phenomenon shrinking cities connected to global processes. Detroit is one of the most well known examples of a shrinking city, once the fastest growing city, and now the fastest shrinking city. Detroit is therefore the lens on which the phenomenon of shrinking cities is looked upon.

In order to deeply understand the problems and possibilities for a shrinking city, in particular the effects of vacant land I needed to experience and get surrounded by the city so I have conducted a field study in Detroit, this former heavy industrial city in transformation, the maximum exposure of a post-industrial city and a shrinking city. I had the chance to experience the city for three months. I wanted to learn from Detroit and to meet the Detroiters. Can there be positive aspects of shrinkage?

INTRODUCING DETROIT

America's prime example of a shrinking city is Detroit, Michigan. In the 1920s Detroit was a successful industrial city that gave birth to the modern automobile. Until the 1950s the city grew and was at that time America's fourth largest city with over 1.8 million inhabitants (Waldheim, Santos-Munné, 2001). Today the population has dropped to nearly 700,000 and the number continues to fall. There are many reasons for this extreme population drop, outdated and inflexible manufacturing, increased global competition, vanishing jobs, oil crises, economical crises, ethnical discrimination and suburbanization. Detroit is now infamous due to crime, low education, segregation, high unemployment and poverty wrapped in a declined city landscape. Abandoned houses are being demolished in a high speed, leaving vacant land. Today the city contains more than 52 square kilometers (20 square miles) vacant land (Detroit Future City, 2013).

In recent years another portrait of Detroit has been told through documentaries, Internet forums and newspaper articles. Detroit's many setbacks have generated creativity on many levels and a redefinition of the decline into new opportunities. These new voices focus on the grassroots movement with projects that together are building a new city characterized by community, collaboration and innovation. Several projects are focusing on finding new usage for the vacant land.

SOUP IN DETROIT

When I searched for an invitation to Detroit, I happened to find the organization Detroit Soup, which became my point of departure. Detroit Soup is a non-profit organization working with democratic crowd funding through micro-grants for creative projects in Detroit and have done so since April 2010.

By a public soup dinner, four project proposals are presented. The attending guests pay \$5 for the soup and get to vote on which project to fund with the money raised from the meal that night. I was inspired by Detroit Soup's way of connecting people to be able to do positive work in Detroit together and their innovative approach to crowdfunding, creating opportunities for ordinary people with visions for the city. After contacting the founder I got information about the winning projects and I started to investigate which ones that in some ways transformed vacant land. Quite a few projects sounded like they had people engaged in this process so I contacted them and arranged meetings with the people that replied. My path further wasn't clear when I entered the city.

THESIS STATEMENT

AIM

One of the reasons for choosing this subject for my master thesis is to personally gain a greater understanding of the profound structural changes in our society, globalization, industrialization and the automobile impact on city planning, and how they are all linked to the phenomenon of shrinking cities and how this phenomenon affects people. I want to gain knowledge about shrinking cities and if the phenomena can lead to something positive by searching for possibilities for the vacant land by conducting a field study in Detroit.

As an aspiring landscape architect I also want to gain knowledge and inspiration about unconventional aspects of planning, to learn from and to see opportunities to work with grassroots initiatives that I can use in my future career.

QUESTIONS

- One aspect of shrinking cities is vacant land, how does that affect a city?
- What happens with the vacant land in Detroit? What initiatives arise from there?
- Who takes initiatives on the vacant land in Detroit and why?
- What can a landscape architect contribute with to support voluntary initiatives when they arise?

GOALS

- Describe how vacant land in shrinking cities affects the city by studying the phenomenon in Detroit.
- Conduct a field study visiting grassroots projects in Detroit that are transforming vacant land, and describe what is happening there today.
- Discuss opportunities for the vacant land based on the field study and relevant literature to the subject.

LIMITATIONS

This thesis does not attempt to be comprehensive in the field of shrinking cities nor ways to work with them. The thesis is based on the field study in the city Detroit and other direct comparison with additional shrinking cities does not fit within the time frame. The situation with Swedish shrinking municipalities is for example quite different with depopulation of rural and semi-rural areas. However, the phenomenon of shrinking cities is discussed. It can be seen as an introduction and one way of working with them. The effects on shrinking cities are varied and this thesis focuses on the spatial city, on the vacant land and how that affects people. Other economical or social effects of shrinkage will not be presented.

Legal doctrine behind land use is complex and differs between states and countries. Since the context in United States is new to me, the essay will not focus on the legal aspects of land use or property taxation.

The thesis does not aim to be comprehensive in terms of grassroots projects in Detroit that make use of the vacant land, either geographically or to describe all types of new land use.

Bottom-up perspective and how it works in general planning will not be elaborated further.

DISPOSITION

The thesis consists of seven chapters and together they give answers to the questions asked. Every chapter ends with a short conclusion.

1. The first chapter is an introduction to what you are about to read and a thesis statement (that this is a part of).
2. Chapter two describes the phenomena of shrinking cities, why, where and how it happens.
3. Chapter three presents various approaches when working with shrinking cities and the urban transformation they are facing.
4. Chapter four give a background and theoretical research about Detroit and the city's history to be able to understand the city and what factors that shaped it.
5. Chapter five is my field study, which is written as an essay, informal and based on my own experiences and interactions with the people and environment in Detroit. It gives an image of the process that happening in Detroit today. Ten projects are visited and they are presented according to size, starting with the smallest project and ending by the project that is transforming the largest amount of vacant lots. At the end of every project a summary is presented in a bulleted list.

6. Chapter six consists of a final discussion that concludes the thesis and introduces a model for how city government, landscape architects and the remaining inhabitants' initiatives on grassroots level can work with transformation of vacant land in a shrinking city.
7. Chapter seven gives you the references for the theoretical research behind the thesis.

METHODOLOGY

Two main parts have formed this thesis; a field study in Detroit and a literature review. Together they gave understanding to the subject matter and made it possible to give answer to the questions asked. When in Detroit, the methods have been intertwined, after returning to Sweden the focus has been on the literature review and to create this final product.

FIELD STUDY

The city of Detroit is chosen to study the phenomenon of shrinking cities. The reasons for choosing Detroit are many. It was once the fastest shrinking city and you could say that Detroit is the prime example of a shrinking city with its vast scale and the extent of vacant land. Therefore it is a legitimate city to study to understand the phenomenon.

The field study lasted for three months (mid-August to mid-November, 2012) to have time to; orientate - both culturally and in the city, find relevant case projects to visit and to experience what it could be like to live in Detroit. Biking became the method for transportation in the city and to/from the studied case projects.

The field study has been done through a heuristic method where sightings, observations and interviews form the basis along with personal experiences (Somekh, Lewin, 2005). A heuristic method seemed relevant for such approach, an experience oriented method where the path is not definite from the start and the process is seen as an important part. A field diary has been kept, together with photographs, to be able to do a qualitative analysis and look for patterns in the projects that I have studied.

Sub methods for the field study are case studies and interviews.

Case study

Ten cases are studied and visited. These cases represent some of the Detroiters own projects that transform vacant land and have given it new usage and meaning. A few projects were found before departure, mainly through the organization Detroit Soup. Detroit Soup funds creative projects in Detroit through micro-grants. While in Detroit, the projects, contacts and tips guided me further. Together they seek to demonstrate a breadth of the new land use. Many projects present themselves on the Internet and especially on social forums such as Facebook where I have received direct updates and got connected to the web of initiatives that are going on in Detroit.

At the project sites my own observations and conversations with involved people have deepened my understanding and made it possible for me to describe them. The observations were open and some followed an active participation (Holme, Krohn Solvang, 1991).

To tell the stories about the visited case project, a narrative method has been used.

Potteiger and Purinton (1998) writes that stories are a fundamental way of communicating and that they offer the potential to be used in participatory and collaborative design methods. *“Narratives refer to both the story, what is told and the means of telling, implying both product and process, form and formation, structure and structuration.”* (Potteiger, Purinton, 1998, p. 3)

Photography has been used to document the case projects and a few photographs are chosen and presented in the thesis to represent the project.

Interview

Interviews have taken place when visiting the studied project sites. The interviews were semi-structured with some predetermined questions and allowed for the possibility of deviations (Weiss 1994). They were mostly qualitative with some questions that could be quantified. Due to the varied project sites, every interview situation has been unique. Some interviews were recorded, while notes were taken. Informal interviews took place when I participated in activities going on at the studied projects. Those conversations are written down as I remembered them from the field. The recorded interviews are transcribed, all interviews are analyzed and conclusions have been drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review have made it possible to understand the phenomenon of shrinking cities and connect the field study to relevant theory and research. Two research forums have served as the main base for the research about shrinking cities, The Shrinking Cities Group and the Shrinking Cities International Research Network. The phenomenon has been connected to contemporary landscape architecture theory, such as the emerging Landscape Urbanism.

The literature review consisted of books, scientific articles and newspaper articles. They are collected through previous research, university libraries and digital databases for scientific articles, mainly Web of Knowledge available from the SLU libraries. Documentary films have also served as a base for the background material.

DEFINITIONS

To better understand the thesis, some definitions of key terms follow:

GRASSROOTS

A locally oriented movement, commonly referred to as grassroots movement, or civil society, comprises of non governmental organizations, non profit groups, foundations, social service providers, neighborhood watch groups, religion based organizations and other private individuals acting on their own. (Snarr, 2005)

LOT

A lot, or parcel, is the legal boundaries of land property in real estate. In the United States of America, each lot has a zoning restriction referring to legal land-use, for example residential, commercial, industrial or green space.

SHRINKING CITY

There is a lack of a clear definition of the term shrinking city, which rather consist of a range of interpretations of the phenomena. In this thesis it is referred to as population loss.

The Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SciRN) defines a shrinking city as a densely populated area with a minimum of 10.000 residents that have faced population losses in large parts for more than two years and is undergoing economic transformations with some form of structural crisis (Pallagast, 2008).

In the Atlas of Shrinking Cities (2006) a shrinking city is referred to as: a city that have temporary or permanently lost a significant number of their inhabitants. Population losses are considered to be significant if they amount to a total of at least 10 % or more than 1% annually (Oswalt, Rieniets, 2006, p. 156).

VACANT LAND

Vacant land is a broad and imprecise term. The vacancy may result from its physical limitations, economic decisions for example to shut down an insufficient industrial facility or market considerations when holding land for speculative purposes. Vacant land can also include “raw dirt”, properties with abandoned structures, land with recently razed buildings

or contaminated land. The basis for a definition of the vacant land is that it is unused or abandoned. Vacant land range from land that never has been developed to land that once had structures on them (Bowman, Pagano 2004).

The National Vacant Properties Campaign defines vacant properties as vacant residential, commercial or industrial lots that threaten public safety or have been neglected by the owner that has failed to pay taxes (Schilling, Logan, 2008).

In this thesis, when referring to Detroit, vacant land is defined as land that has been left abandoned, that is to say, land that formerly was built upon and where the buildings now are razed. ■

2



SUBJECT: SHRINKING CITIES



This chapter gives a theoretical background to the phenomenon of shrinking cities, why, how and where it happens. The main focus is on the industrialized western world: United States and Europe after the Second World War. The phenomenon is most common here and most researched. The emphasis of this chapter is the spatial, physical city. The economical or social aspects are just briefly discussed since the different aspects are all related and depend on each other.

A “NEW” PHENOMENON

“Shrinking cities have been ignored, forgotten or considered taboo”¹

In the beginning of this century, for the first time more than half of the world's 6.1 billion people live in cities, and that number continues to grow. However, this growth doesn't involve all cities, a large part of the world's cities are shrinking and until now, shrinking cities have been considered unusual or exceptions (Rieniets, 2005a). Oswalt and Reinitz (2006) writes in *The Atlas of Shrinking Cities* that between 1950 and 2000 more than 350 large cities experienced, at least temporary, significant decline in population.² In the 1990s more than a quarter of the world's large cities shrank. Population prognoses suggest that the number of shrinking cities will increase. According to the United Nation's *World Population Prospects*, 40 countries will lose population by 2025, even though urban growth will dominate the global population pattern for the following decades (Rieniets, 2005b).

The acceptance of urban shrinkage is low despite the fact that it is not a new phenomenon and changes in demography and urban density occur quite regularly (Pallagst, 2008). Through history, phases of shrinkage and phases of growth were as much parts of the lives of cities.

The long history of shrinking cities have occurred in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Early Modern periods connected to epidemics, wars, fires, agricultural crises and the collapse of the Roman Empire

¹ Rieniets, 2005b, p. 1

² Large cities defined as cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants (Oswalt, Rieniets, 2006).

(Hollander et. al., 2009). Ancient Rome experienced long phases of shrinkage, other cities as Troy, Carthage and Pompeii disappeared completely. It was not until the industrialization started in Europe that cities were defined by phases of long and intensive growth. New modes of transportation and communication, made possible by fossil fuel, cities were able to grow far beyond their old boundaries (Rieniets, 2005b). Urban shrinkage in the twentieth century is completely different from the historical examples. In the twentieth century population loss took place over longer periods of time and in times of peace without external violence (Rieniets, 2005a).

Oswalt (2006, p. 12) writes that the term “shrinking cities” is problematic: *“First it seems to point to a phenomenon: the decline of the urban population and economic activity in certain areas. But behind this term are hidden various causes, processes, and effects that the words themselves do not reveal.”*

The design and restructuring of shrinking urban regions presents some of the most challenging tasks for Europe’s cities in the near future. It is risky to only plan for growth considering the low birthrates; population will decrease in many cities regardless of future economic development. The shrinking cities discourse is in different stages in Europe and USA, starting in Germany in the early 2000s and with current economic crisis in the USA, the discourse is now entering a broader public and academic debate there too (Pallagast, Wiechman, 2012).

RESEARCH CONNECTED TO SHRINKING CITIES

The term shrinking cities originated in Germany 1988, it is a translation from schrumpfende städte. It was Häussermann and Siebel, involved in the urban planning discourse in Germany, who defined shrinking cities as a new type of urban challenge. Yet it is not until recent years the debate was elaborated further (Pallagst, 2008). Most research about shrinking cities is from and about Germany but in recent years the discussion of the phenomenon started on an international level. Looking at three groundbreaking research projects, the Shrinking Cities Project and the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN) - looking at the phenomena internationally, and the International Building Exhibition (IBA) Urban Redevelopment 2010 - working experimentally in 19 German cities and towns, one can trace the origin of the discourse of shrinking cities.

The Shrinking Cities Project (2003-2005) was initiated by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation) due to

the large amount of shrinking cities in Germany. The aim was to broaden the perspective interdisciplinary, to reach an international audience and not only see shrinking cities as an economic, social and planning challenge, it is also a cultural change and challenge and that's were the focus on the research were. The goal was to pose new questions, enable new perspectives and formulate new approaches. The German architect Philip Oswalt was the chief curator for the project that consisted of architects, artists and activists, over 200 international authors contributed which resulted in tree books and an exhibition that travelled around the world for a few years. In the book *Shrinking Cities Volume 1: International Research* (2005), four cities are investigated further to point on this global phenomena; Halle-Leipzig (Germany), Manchester-Liverpool (Great Britain), Ivanovo (Russia) and Detroit (USA). Causes and dynamics of the shrinking process are looked upon together with living conditions and the cultural changes these cities are facing. *Shrinking Cities Volume 2: Interventions* (2006) discusses concepts and strategies for shrinking cities based on four themes; deconstructing, reevaluating, reorganizing and imagining. The *Atlas of Shrinking Cities* (2006) maps the global phenomena and causes of shrinking cities.

Another research forum is the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN) founded in 2004 at the Institute of Urban and Regional Development at the University of California, Berkeley. Today they have 30 members, interdisciplinary specialists, from five continents, 14 countries. Their research approach is theoretical and puts the phenomenon in a global context. Questions that are discussed draw attention to the origins, challenges and the need for strategies dealing with shrinking cities.

The IBA 2010 was initiated in 2002 in Saxony-Anhalt, a state in East Germany that has lost 17% of its population since 1989, and still continues to lose population. 19 cities and towns functioned as a laboratory for the city of tomorrow. In the eight years that the project was ongoing more than 100 innovative projects with exemplary approaches to designing shrinking cities was implemented. Scenarios to 2050 were discussed and comprehensive working principles and results are published in the book "Less is Future. 19 cities – 19 themes" (2010). However, the IBA 2010 research project is not investigated further in the thesis.

CAUSES: WHY ARE CITIES SHRINKING?

“We must first try to understand the specific, unique development of these [shrinking] cities in order to be able to intervene in appropriate ways” (Oswalt, 2005, p. 16).

Historically, phases of shrinkage were as much a part of the development of cities as phases of growth. It is not until the industrialization in Europe that cities were defined by growth (Oswalt, Rieniets, 2006). As well as the term shrinkage city has various definitions, so has the explanations of the origins of the phenomena. The common assumption is to associate shrinking cities as a symptom of crisis, an undesirable side effect of a failed economy and public policy (Rieniets, 2005b). The causes of shrinkage are many and complex but the common factor is that shrinking cities are significantly impacted by the forces of globalization (Pallagst, 2008).

GLOBALIZATION AS A MUTUAL FACTOR

Klaus Müller (2005) writes that to understand the dynamics of urban processes today there has to be an understanding of globalization that in general terms, is an expression for three worldwide trends. The three trends are: 1. Liberalization of trade in commodities, currencies and capita, 2. The technological revolution, 3. A new international division of labor.

The first trend, liberalization of trade in commodities, currencies and capita, was introduced in 1980s. It led to an undermining of the foundations for the old style national economies and presents a globalized market with transnational corporations. The second trend is the technological revolution with the World Wide Web as a medium. Now a virtual economy with cost efficient, decentralized and borderless communication together with “invisible” products with knowledge-based services, information and software became available. Fueled by the previous two trends the third trend leads to a new international division of labor that changes the geographic pattern of the world economy with new markets in particularly China, India and countries in Southeast Asia (Müller, 2005). The impact of globalization affects cities in different way depending on national, regional and local contexts and can show very

different characteristics (Pallagst, 2008).

ECONOMY, POLITICS AND MOBILITY

Rieniets (2005b) writes that the causes and characteristics of shrinking cities are as diverse as cities in general. There are both qualitative and quantitative effects of shrinkage where quantitative means drop in population often due to economic recession. The qualitative effects are social and economic patterns, lifestyle and cultural values. This cannot be said to follow a basic homogenous pattern.

The Shrinking Cities Project identifies four causes for shrinking cities worldwide: deindustrialization – a new distribution of industry and services with a global division of labor, suburbanization – the exodus of residents, industry/services and culture from the city center to the periphery, post-socialist transformations - the structural change of the socialist organizations of politics, society and economy, and demographic aging – an older population with fallen birthrates. However, the process of shrinking is complex and these causes are partly overlapping in specific cases (Oswalt, 2005, Prigge 2005). Deindustrialization and suburbanization are both connected to the shrinkage in Detroit and will be elaborated further later on. The reasons for post-socialist transformations and demographic aging are left out in this thesis. Other causes for shrinkage that are not elaborated further in this thesis are: natural disasters, wars and epidemics.

Deindustrialization

The term deindustrialization is coined to describe the economic change from a manufacturing to a service production. Sometimes it is referred to as post-industrial transformations. The story is reflected in the dereliction of contemporary industrial landscapes. *“Nowhere is dereliction more vivid than in old industrial areas, which are so clearly creatures of capital once at work, where underutilized and abandoned buildings stand as somber reminders of past prosperity now elusive.”* (Jakle, Wilson, 1992, p. 57). After the stock market crash in 1929 following with the Great Depression many of the industrial markets for commodities collapsed and the established trade routes started to change course as industries, capital and labor migrated to other regions. Old industrial regions had disadvantages with high cost for labor and property with a lack of available properties for new businesses. Later with the technological innovations business became more foot loose and industries moved out (Reckien, Martinez-Fernandez, 2011). *“Plant closings and related unemployment and underemployment*

translate eventually into communities with abandoned houses and empty storefronts. But nothing strikes a sense of pathos more than the ruined factory. Nothing seems so senseless as the neglected industrial plant rundown and abused. Perhaps it is its scale. Massive walls and towering stacks, and other paraphernalia of industrialism, speaks of technical and organizational sophistication. To see them derelict is to see failed dreams: prosperity gone awry, not just for the entrepreneur, but for the collective of dependent individuals.” (Jakle, Wilson, 1992, p. 86).

In the book *Derelict Landscapes – The wasting of America’s built environment* (Jakle, Wilson, 1992) starts the chapter about deindustrialization with linking this industrial dereliction to capitalism. Problems when working with a capitalist system arise with unregulated capital flow, when overproduction and underconsumption generates a declining profitability. Two global economic crises, in the 1930s and 1970s, were illustrations of this (Jakle, Wilson, 1992). In 1942 the economic theorist Joseph Schumpeter coined the term Creative Destruction that Schumpeter argues is the essential fact about capitalism (Schumpeter, 1950). In the capitalistic system the primary concern is not to maintain the well-being of an industry, enhance workers, improve products or pleasure costumers, it is to generate profit. Plants can generate both growth and decay in any given place and deindustrialization reflects a loss of comparative economic advantage (Jakle, Wilson, 1992).

Suburbanization

Suburbanization generally describes the process of sprawling urban settlements (figure 1 and 2) with relocation of population, business, industry, services and recreational facilities, a decentralization from a city core to outlying districts and beyond (Hesse, 2006). In the period between the two world wars people continued to work in the urban context but suburbanization and the mass production of automobiles made it possible for people to escape the cities’ noise, stink and danger each evening. After the Second World War the concept of space was turned upside down and suburbia was established as the prototype of western urban living (Eisinger, 2006). Often employment and population grows region-wide but it has shifted from the center to the periphery – leaving abandonment and poverty at the core (Fishman, 2005). Suburbanization is a characteristic of the twentieth century urban development in almost all industrialized countries. There is a notable difference though in European, Canadian, American, Asian or Australian cities due to temporal dynamics, origins, duration, cycles or its spatial-structural effects (for example the effects on

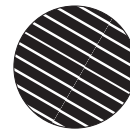


Figure 1: Traditional city

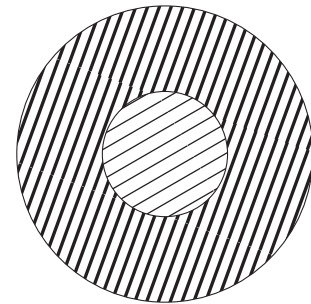


Figure 2: The same city after suburbanization.

Population density:

 high low

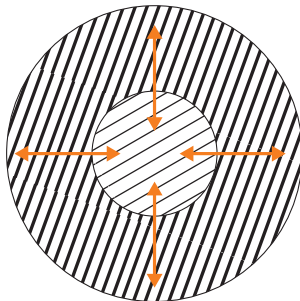


Figure 3: Suburbia was connected to a city core which it was dependent on.

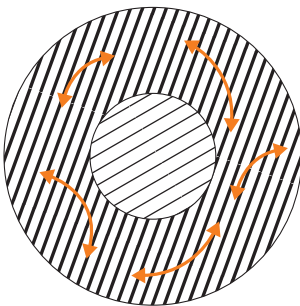


Figure 4: Technoburbia has detached itself from the old city core.

downtown) (Hesse, 2006).

The causes for suburbanization are complex, one prerequisite was the rapid growth that followed the industrialization. With that came the emergence of a middle class that could afford an own home and automobile and the massive expansion of the freeway network. Another cause was the demand for larger lot sizes, planners met this demand by releasing greenfield lots in outlying districts and creating appropriate traffic access. The suburbanization takes up a lot of land and with that follows higher cost for the public amenities, roads and sewer systems. Suburbanization has been negative judged but it is not suburbanization itself that is the problem, rather the attitudes, decisions and behavioral patterns of suburbanites. Suburban spaces have to become recognized as an existing element of urban regions (Hesse, 2006).

Suburbia has always been functionally dependent on an urban core. When suburbia grew, it strengthened the cultural and economic heart at the city core. The suburbs traditionally commuted to the core and served as a link between the countryside and this core (figure 3) (Hesse, 2006). Robert Fisherman, professor of architecture and urban planning at the University of Michigan, view the decentralization of housing, industry, specialized services and office jobs as the most important feature of American development after the Second World War. This has led to the breakaway of the urban periphery, away from a city core it no longer needs. *“This phenomenon, as remarkable as it is unique, is not suburbanization but a new city.”* (Fishman, 1987, p. 71) Fisherman hereby coins two new terms, *“technoburb”* and *“techno-city”*, in his book *“Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia”* (1987). The terms describe a new city, a decentralized city developed from suburbia. The technoburbs are peripheral zones and the techno-city is a whole metropolitan region. In technoburbia the residents look in their immediate surroundings for jobs and other needs (figure 4). This decentralization is made possible only through advanced communications technology (Fishman, 1987).

The structure of technoburbia goes against all planning rules: the waste of space with a single-family house with an own yard and the waste of energy with the built-in use of the personal automobile. The true public space is lacking or is truly commercialized (Fishman, 1987).

Decentralization has been a social and economic disaster for the old city and for the poor. It is also as a cultural disaster. The old city’s rich and diverse architecture decays and technoburbia is built up as a standardized sprawl, consuming both time and space. Too spread out to be efficient, too superficial to be a true culture. Technoburbia detach itself

from the city, physically, socially and economically and is profoundly antiurban as suburbia never has been. Suburbia has with this transformed urban ecology come to an end, the techno-city is still under construction (Fishman, 1987).

SCENE: WHERE ARE CITIES SHRINKING?

According to the Atlas of Shrinking Cities, shrinking cities can be found in a large part of the world (Oswalt, Rieniets, 2006). However, shrinking cities does not occur everywhere, most of them pool in certain areas like the American Rust Belt³, Japan and in particular, Europe (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012). In the 1970s there were more shrinking metropolises in the United States than growing ones (80:64). Other countries that were heavily affected by shrinkage were Great Britain (48), Germany (32), Italy (15), France (14) and Japan (10). Together in these six countries, on average, every third large city was shrinking, making up about 80 percent of all the large cities in the world. The phenomenon of shrinking cities was hitting wealthy and developed industrial countries (Oswalt, Rieniets, 2006). Japan is affected by demographic aging. It is the fastest aging and thereby the fastest shrinking society in the world with low birthrates and high life expectancy (Oswalt, 2005). That will not be elaborated further since the focus is on Europe, in particular Germany and the USA.

EUROPE

As noted earlier, urban shrinkage in Europe has occurred since the Late Antiquity. The fall of the Roman Empire, the plague and agricultural crises are all factors for shrinkage and have affected the urban fabric. With the industrialization, processes of urbanization started and created drastic changes in settlement patterns and changes in demographics from agrarian to urban creating larger agglomerations on the one hand and shrinking cities on the other hand. (Pallagst, 2008). Several of the cities that had become metropolises due to the industrial revolution were also the first to enter a phase of a long-lasting population loss. London, the world's largest city for more than a hundred years, has had persistent population loss since the beginning of the 1900s due to deindustrialization (Rieniets, 2005a). London lost an estimation of 66% of its manufacturing jobs between 1962 and 1982. Great Britain is the country that is most

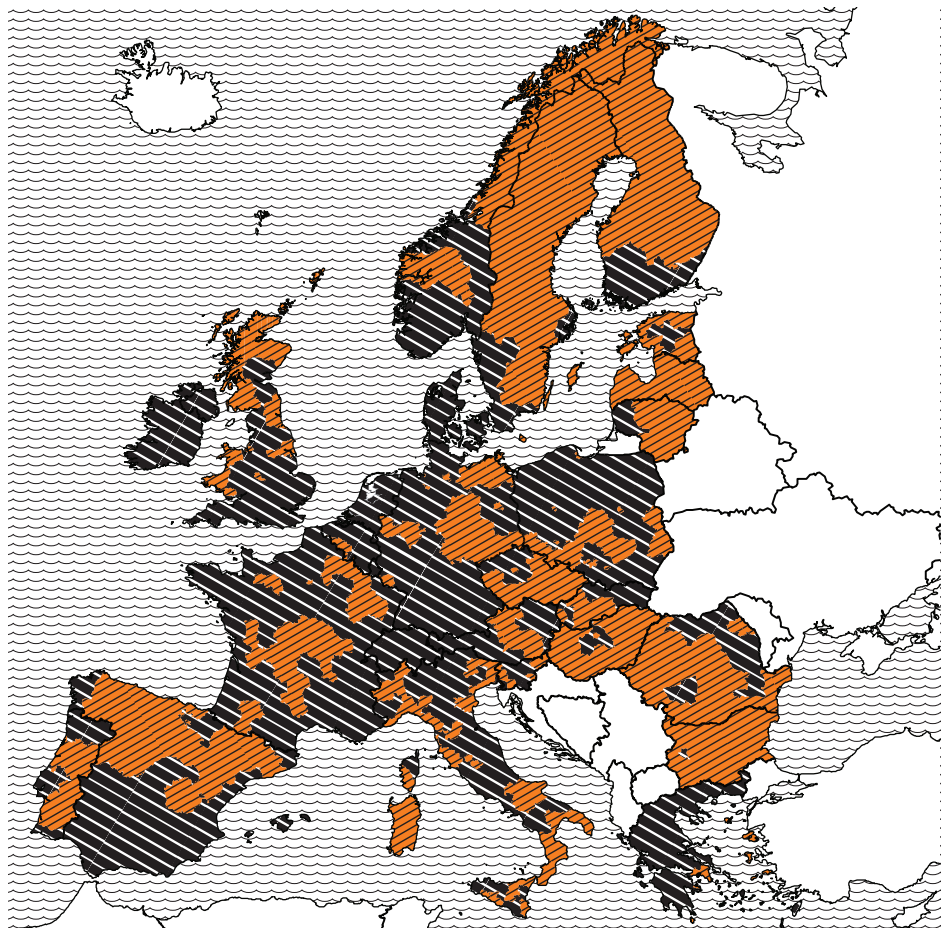
³ Also referred to as the American Manufacturing Belt that comprises the following metropolitan areas: Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Detroit, Milwaukee, New York City, and Chicago. With the declining industry, the iron and steel used in the manufacturing, figuratively rusted.

dramatically affected by deindustrialization. Between 1980 and 2000 Britain's twenty largest cities lost over 500 000 jobs (Munck, 2005).

Countries that are affected by shrinkage at the end of the century (figure 5) are countries with post-socialist transformations (especially Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and the eastern part of Germany) and the northern countries (especially Sweden and Finland) and some of the Southern European countries (especially Spain and Italy, due to demographic changes). The reasons for this shrinkage are complex, partly overlapping and differ from country to country (Pallagst, 2008).

Germany is one of the countries that are heavily affected by shrinking cities, and as mentioned earlier, it is also here that the phenomenon is mostly researched. The reasons are deindustrialization, demographic changes and post-socialist transformations. Deindustrialization has occurred in West Germany since the 1960s leading to shrinking cities. The entire steel-making region of the Ruhr shrunk (Hollander et. al. 2009). Later, fallen birthrates and the consequential effects of the reunification in 1990 drive the shrinkage (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012).

Figure 5: Population change 1996-1999 in Europe
Source: Pallagst, 2008, with data from Federal Office for Building and Planning



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Observations of shrinking cities in the USA usually starts in the post World War II era due to deindustrialization and suburbanization. The debate between shrinking cities in USA and Europe differ and in the USA urban decline is a term more frequently used which not necessarily take population losses for the entire city (urban and suburban areas) or regional shrinkage into consideration but addresses the consequences of urban sprawl (Pallagst, 2008).

In the 1950s the number of shrinking metropolises in the country went from 3 to 38 including the 12 largest cities (with the exception of Los Angeles). The reasons for this were the processes of deindustrialization and suburbanization that often occurred simultaneously (Oswalt, Rieniets, 2006). Six of the twenty biggest cities in the 60s, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, New Orleans, Pittsburg and Buffalo lost around 50% of their population compared to 2008, only eight gained population. Out of those eight cities, five has expanded their land area (Gallagher 2010). The 1960s and 1970s were decades of massive displacement and industrial facilities were closed, especially in the “manufacturing belt”. About 32-38 million jobs were lost in the 70s (Jakle, Wilson, 1992). The industries in the manufacturing belt were connected and the cities were dependent on Detroit because of its dominance in auto production, as the center of a regional web of industries vital to the nation’s economy. The adage went: *“When Detroit sneezed, other cities caught pneumonia”* (Sugrue,

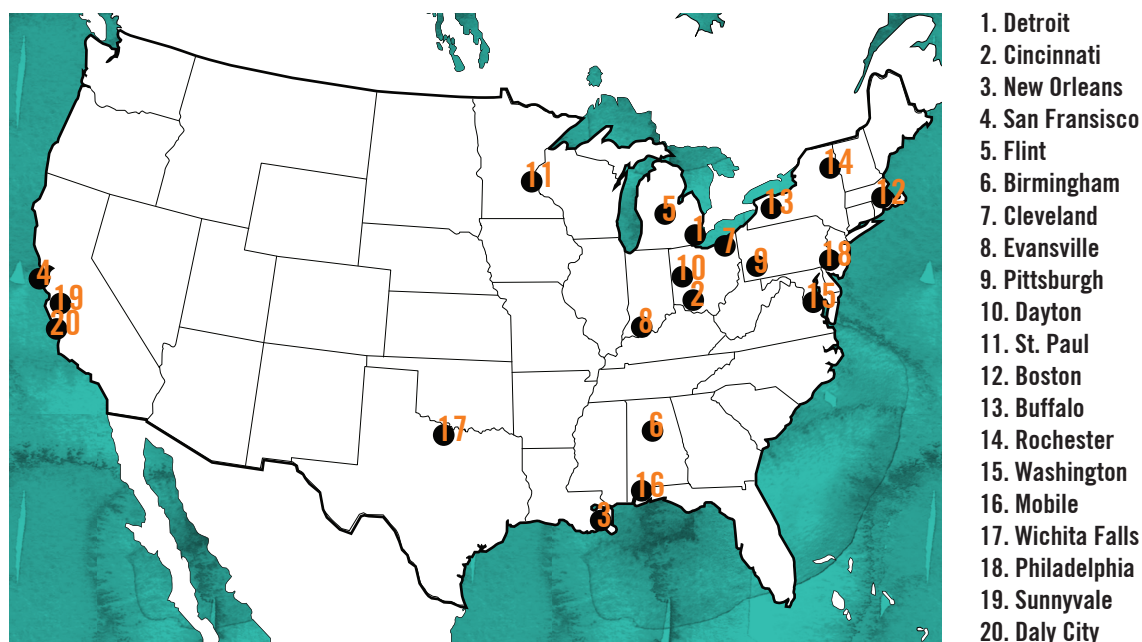


Figure 6: Shrinking cities between 2000-2004 with more than 100 000 inhabitants.
Source: Pallagst, 2008 based on US Census data.

1996, p. 13). However, the shrinkage is not restricted to the well-known post-industrial rust-belt cities, other areas are affected as well (figure 6) (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012).

Unlike Europe, shrinkage in the United States primary occurs in city centers, as a result of suburbanization. The shrinkage usually takes place in the core of the city while the suburban parts continue to grow. This pattern is found all over the country and is called “*doughnut effect*” or “*hollowing out*” (Pallagst, 2008). The physical problems are well known with derelict sites, vacancies and abandoned urban quarters. The social consequences - exclusion, poverty and homelessness – are happening in a much more dramatic extent in the USA compared to cities in Europe (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012). American planning tends to deal with revitalizing distressed city centers rather than looking at the larger scale. The city centers are where the pressure of problem is greatest but efforts of revitalization often create gentrified areas and do not target social needs for the poor (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012).

SYMPTOMS: HOW ARE CITIES SHRINKING?

Shrinking cities are characterized by economic decline and as a result, urban areas are in a process of transformation (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012). The shrinkage of cities does not necessary mean shrinkage of urban space. When cities are shrinking one could imagine that the physical urban space also shrinks, which is not necessary the case. In most cases shrinking cities are embedded in a growing region, the inner cities loses people but the peripheries are sprawling leaving fever people and activities spread out over a larger space (Rieniets, 2005b).

Buildings are left abandoned, the streets are empty and the infrastructure with roads and sewer systems are slowly decaying. Often are the abandoned buildings demolished and the demolition of houses are more frequent that the construction of new ones. (Holst Laursen, 2008). As industries leave and populations drop, nature begins to reassert itself. Resurgent nature may take the form of urban wilderness, forest, meadow, or succession areas (Hollander et al. 2005). Debilitated fabric of urban structures deteriorates the quality of life, and underused infrastructure and vacant buildings place an economic burden on both the public and

the private sector (Rieniets, 2005b).

The city's economic income has a spatial dimension, property tax (Bowman, Pagano, 2004). With fewer people the fiscal difficulties with reduced tax base are obvious. The infrastructure designed for a larger population still remains and the cost of maintaining roads, sewers, and transportation system is a problem. If the city expanded during the early 1900s, the infrastructure is probably also in need of repair and replacement. Another effect of population shrinkage is a reduction of population density, it is usually reduced by irregular gaps with vacant land in the city fabric. *"A city with population gaps no longer possesses a continuous urban fabric. Instead it becomes a series of disjointed areas separated by unplanned and vacant areas. Serving a discontinuous city is very expensive."* (Rybczynski, Linneman, 1999, p. 37)

ONE EFFECT: VACANT LAND

"A city's landmass, its territory, is one of the most fundamental characteristics. In many important ways, land - size and shape, location, physical features, quality and utilization - defines a city. Land is a resource that city governments regulate, manage, develop, and preserve. Vacant land has been terra incognita⁴, both literally and figuratively." (Bowman, Pagano, 2004, p. 35).

Vacant land is the most visible byproduct of urban shrinkage (Hollander et al. 2005). It comes with raze and clearance of abandoned structures. *"Urban withdrawal creates vacant spaces. Wastelands, forests and fields creep back into the city and increasingly determine its look and its structure. Typical landscapes thereby undergo change and absorb urban elements and functions"* (Oswalt, 2006, p. 143). Vacant land does not just affect the physical form of the city, it also sends a message about the image of the city. It can lead to both positive and negative reactions to the cityscape even though it is mostly familiar when introducing distress (Bowman, Pagano, 2004). Vacant land often has a negative undertone - abandoned, empty, dangerous, and has come to symbolize disinvestment, blight and decay (Jakle, Wilson, 1992). A surplus of blighted, vacant properties also makes it difficult to attract new investments (Rybczynski, Linneman, 1999).

Whiston Spirn (1990) writes that the characteristics of vacant land are extraordinary diverse in both physical character and social context even though it is often referred to as a monolithic problem with a monumental solution. The location, size, shape, physical condition and ownership are factors that influence the effects on the neighborhood, so does the

⁴ Unknown land

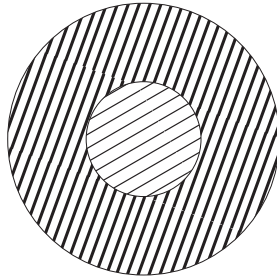


Figure 7: Doughnut effect as a shrinking pattern.

Population density: 
high low

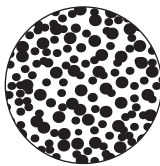


Figure 8: Perforation as a shrinking pattern. Black dots are smaller population clusters.

character of the surrounding neighborhood (Whiston, Spirn, 1990). There are clearly varying spatial patterns of this shrinkage on the city fabric. Two main patterns can be identified, the “doughnut effect”/hollowing out (figure 7) and a pattern of perforation (figure 8). The doughnut effect where the inner city becomes hollowed out compared to its outer suburbs that continues to grow, is mostly affecting cities in the United States. The perforation pattern, where the shrinkage occurs in different areas throughout the city, is more common in for example Eastern Germany (Hollander et al., 2009).

There is a wide range of challenges for cities presented by vacant land. Overabundance of land depresses prices and reduces revenues, to little limits development possibilities. The private ownership and contaminations can constrain the city’s options and make new uses difficult (Bowman, Pagano, 2004). Another challenge for shrinking cities is how to avoid illegal dumping of construction materials, tires, and other debris on vacant land. When the population in the neighborhoods is reduced it provides little informal oversight the way Jane Jacobs “eyes on the street” traditionally have helped maintain community standards and prevent illegal dumping (Hollander et al., 2005).

In the book *Terra Incognita* (2004) Bowman and Pagano present their extraordinary survey showing that 15 % of the land in American cities, with a population more than 50 000, is vacant.⁵ They believe that this is the ultimate urban resource. Another theory, written by the Spanish architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió, based on the term “terrain vague”, was coined in 1995 to describe empty, abandoned urban spaces. These spaces simulate the status of fascination, the most solvent sign with which to indicate what cities are and what our experience of them are. Terrain vague is a French expression and Solà-Morales writes that it is impossible to describe the meaning of the term in a single English word or phrase. *“The relationship between the absence of use, of activity, and the sense of freedom, of expectancy, is fundamental to understanding the evocative potential of the city’s terrains vagues. Void, absence, yet also promise, the space of possible, of expectation.”* (Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 120) Solà-Morales writes that they are un-habited, un-safe and un-productive, foreign to the urban system. *“Mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city, its negative image, as much a critique as a possible alternative.”* (Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 120) Solà-Morales (1995) state that the role of the architect is problematic in this situation. The role of the architect has always been colonization, the imposing of limits, order and form. *“The essence of architecture is to act as an instrument of organization, of rationalization and of productive efficiency capable of transforming*

⁵ The survey was conducted in 1997-98 and sent out to cities in USA with a population of 50 000 or more. 70 cities participated. The focus was not shrinking cities and the survey showed that growing cities had a higher percentage of vacant land.

the uncivilized into the cultivated, the fallow into the productive, the void into the built.” (Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 122) Solà-Morales claims that in order for architecture to act in the terrain vague, without becoming an aggressive instrument of power, is through attention to continuity, “not the continuity of the planned, efficient, and legitimated city but of the flows, the energies, the rhythms established by the passing of time and the loss of limits.” (Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 123)

CONCLUSION

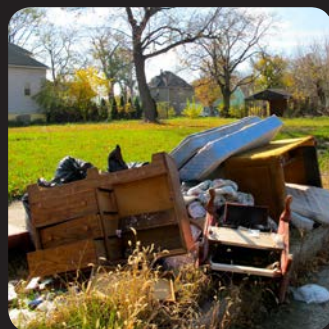
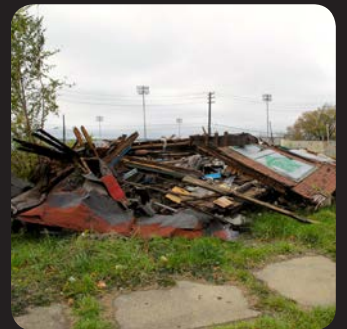
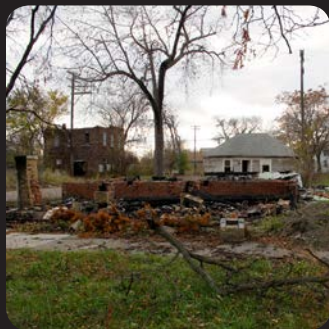
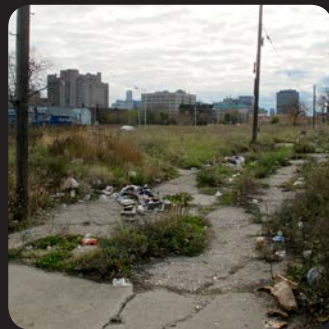
Shrinking cities are cities that lose population, which in the built environment leads to urban decline, abandoned buildings and vacant land. It is a global phenomenon and in the 1990s more than a quarter of the world's large cities shrank and population prognoses suggest that the number of shrinking cities will increase. Shrinking cities are to be found in a large part of the world. Industrialized countries are mostly affected and the shrinking cities pool in certain areas like the American Rustbelt, Japan and in particular, Europe.

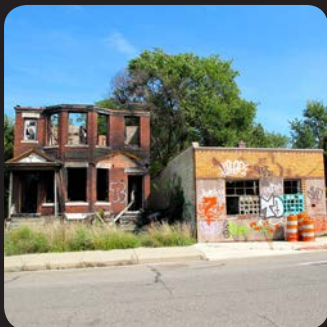
It is not a new phenomenon, throughout history phases of shrinkage were as much part of cities as phases of growth. The reasons for the shrinking were connected to wars, epidemics, fires and agricultural crises. However, the discourse is new, shrinking cities have been considered taboo. The term originated from Germany in 1988, but it is not until the beginning of this century the debate has reached an international discourse. Three research projects have been presented and two of them are used as a base for information in the thesis, the Shrinking Cities Project focusing on the cultural change shrinking cities are facing and the Shrinking Cities International Research Network with a more theoretical approach.

The shrinking of cities is a transformative process that has many causes. It is an unintentional phenomenon and an unplanned side effect of various transformative processes that lies beyond the spheres of architecture and urban planning. The forces of globalization are significantly impacting the cities shrinkage. The Shrinking Cities Project identifies four causes for shrinkage worldwide; deindustrialization, suburbanization, post-socialist transformations and demographic ageing. Two main patterns can be distinguished as a spatial effect of the shrinkage. The patterns are perforation and the doughnut effect. The perforation pattern where the shrinkage occurs in different areas throughout the city

is most common in for example East Germany. The doughnut effect leads to a hollowed out inner city compared to its outer suburbs that continue to grow. This is a result of suburbanization and is mostly affecting cities in the United States.

One of the most visible byproduct of shrinking cities is vacant land, land that previously was built upon but where abandoned buildings have been razed and due to lack of maintenance, wastelands, forests and fields are now reclaiming these grounds. The Spanish architect Solà-Morales theorization of the vacant land, the *terrain vagues* as he calls them, where these voids are to be seen as an opportunity, not a crisis. This is a new field for architects and planners, to act in the *terrain vague*, and traditional planning tools don't work here. Instead we should look at the continuity of the flows, energies and time of these *terrain vagues*. ■





Thoughts on bike #1

The scale is unbelievable. Both the city and the extent of its vacant land. The problem is greater than I expected. So much land with just neglect and abandonment. Burnt out houses, trees growing on fallen roofs, lots used as dumping grounds. The concrete sidewalks are being absorbed by vegetation and the wide roads are filled with cracks and shattered glass. In another way of thinking, the fields can also be beautiful. A pastoral landscape with tall grasses moving in the wind and glowing from the sunlight. Flowers creates changing colorful scenes together with a soundscape from the many crickets. But the thought that it used to be a city filled with people, stories and dreams makes the beauty disappear.

◀ Vacant lots typology

3



POTENTIAL: URBAN TRANSFORMATION



Based on current research this chapter highlights the possible paradigm shift for the planning field that traditionally have focused on growth with approaches to reframe the shrinkage of cities from a crisis into an opportunity. The focus is on vacant land as a resource, its potential spatial reconfiguration and how to work with it strategically. The research is ongoing and there are no easy solutions or one size fits all. Here is an attempt to present some of the research and visions for shrinking cities.

ABANDONING GROWTH

“Is shrinkage a problem to be solved or an opportunity not to be missed?”⁶

There are many approaches to shrinking cities since every situation is unique. Shrinking cities vary in size, extent of vacant land and causes for the shrinkage, which make them challenging to compare. What researchers can agree on is that we have to abandon the traditional planning for economic growth in shrinking cities.

The most typical response in order to regain population growth for shrinking cities is to aim for economic growth, a strategy that rarely leads to success anywhere. Planners are now in a unique position to challenge growth as the key doctrine of planning, explore nontraditional approaches and to reframe shrinking cities into an opportunity. Perhaps we are only moving from one kind of urbanism another. One key obstacle is the notion rather than empirical research, that healthy cities always grow and only unhealthy cities shrink. Shrinking cities might offer a paradigm shift in the planning field, from growth centered to a more careful and place-based approach to be able to create more livable cities (Hollander et. al., 2009).

In the USA the term “*smart growth*” is frequently used when talking about sustainable urban and regional development connecting economic, environmental and social requirements. It has to be noted that the center

² Martinez-Fernandez and Wu (2007) in German through (Hollander et. al, 2009, p. 12).

of the concept is growth, and an active discussion about urban, regional or metropolitan shrinkage, as is found in the European discourse, is missing (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012).

The photographer Camilo José Vergara, who has documented the decline in USA for four decades, suggests setting a side twelve-blocks with abandoned skyscrapers in Downtown Detroit. It would be a museum to memorialize the ruins, an American Acropolis, to illustrate the fallibility of the myth of endless growth (Popper, Popper, 2002).

PREVIOUS TIMES, DESIRED SHRINKAGE

Historically shrinkage has been desirable, the vision of a shrinking city with less population worked as a criticism against the industrial overpopulated metropolises. The two most well known examples of this are Ebenezer Howard's Garden City (1898) and Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City (1932). Howard predicted that 20% of the 6.6 million people that lived in London soon would live in decentralized garden cities, or New Towns, dotted in the edge of the region. There could they enjoy open space and good health. Even the people who stayed in London would benefit from the shrinkage (Fishman, 2005). In Broadacre City, agriculture and industry were interwoven with one another and every citizen had their own land. Both Howard and Wright were convinced that true democracy only could be achieved if everybody is a landowner (Lauinger, 2006). Fishman (2005) writes that Howard's utopian enthusiasm for the depopulation of central London reminds us that the shrinking city has been seen as positive development and a necessary countermovement to the overcrowded metropolis. What can be noted is that this form of shrinkage wasn't connected to an economical decline.

REFRAME THE PHENOMENON

When the notion of growth is abandoned there are many attempts to reframe shrinking cities with new terms. Pallagst and Wiechman (2012) hypothesize that planning for shrinking cities does not work if it assumes growth, instead they talk about a paradigm shift and argue for a new label on shrinking cities, "*shrinking smart*". The label would symbolize consensus, perspectives and chances for shrinking cities.

Johansson (2012) argues that we should be talking about development for shrinking cities instead of growth. Development doesn't need growth but instead a critical transformation of resources. The concept "*lean city*" works with this where the existing resources are economized, coordinated and distributed to find advantages that the city actually can

provide (Johansson, 2012).

Schilling and Logan writes about “*right-sizing*” shrinking cities. Their definition refers to stabilizing dysfunctional markets and distressed neighborhoods by aligning a city’s built environment with the needs of existing and foreseeable future populations by adjusting the amount of land available for development (Schilling, Logan, 2008).

In 2002 the two planners Popper and Popper talked about “*smart decline*” that in particular require thinking about who and what remains. Reorganizing, and perhaps elimination of some service might be necessary in order to provide different ones. Recognition is the first step, followed by an inventory and the consideration of the people that still are living in the shrinking city (Popper, Popper, 2002).

COOL TO SHRINK IN GERMANY

Ten year ago, shrinkage was a politically taboo in Germany and the trend was ignored but since the turn of the millennium there has been a shift and maybe for the first time in modern urban planning, planners separate from the illusion of new growth and seek to conduct a pragmatic deconstruction (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012). Pallagst and Wiechmann (2012) speculate that, at least in Germany, growth has come to an end as the dominant paradigm in planning with the new embracing of shrinking in the German planning discourse.

Johansson (2012) writes that in Germany, all the attention that has been paid to the phenomenon shrinking cities have led to the fact that today it is nearly cool to be a shrinking city. The country are working with a lot of different arrangements, first the wide governmental program that solve the remaining loans on already demolished buildings, restore the ground and renovate remaining buildings. In the beginning of 2000s there were about 1 million empty dwellings in East Germany, since then approximately 400 000 have been demolished. Other arrangements focus on maintaining social structures. A lot of work has been experimental and temporary solutions have been used as a test bed before permanent transformations (Johansson, 2012).

VACANT LAND AS A RESOURCE

Vacant land inherently stands for something undesirable but the research about shrinking cities shows that it could also be viewed as a resource. Whiston Spirn (1990) argues that vacant land represent an opportunity to reshape neighborhoods to remedy past mistakes, to resolve larger metropolitan problems, such as flooding and water quality, and addressing local social problems. *“At another level, these vacant lands also provide the chance for a person to have a small piece of ground, a place for enjoyment and self expression.”* (Whiston Spirn, 1990)

“The challenge for cities is to start thinking about vacant land as a resource and to take action that reflect this thinking. Vacant land can be a catalyst for achieving a vision, for building a city. It often provides a tabula rasa, a clean slate upon which new ideas can come to fruition” (Bowman, Pagano. 2004, p. 189)

“The terrain vague, as witnessed in Detroit, is the product of an erasure produced through a process of obsolescence and subsequent abandonment, but it is not a tabula rasa. The street grid, a lamp post, and an abandoned or functioning building, persists as significantly unstable vestiges.” (Daskalakis, Perez, 2001, p. 81)

Tabula rasa or not, an issue is, regardless of decommissioning and erasure of sites, there will still be vacancy. It is impossible to completely remove space. Corner suggests that, instead of “scaping” vacant land into a formal composition, the land should be “scraped” from its various remains: symbolic, material and political. *“The scraped ground then becomes an empty field of absence that accommodates multiple interpretations and possibilities.”* (Corner, 2001, p. 123)

CITY SCALE WITH GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

New planning efforts has emerged in recent years, among them is the application of the “green” criteria as a model for revitalization, in contrast to economic growth (Pallagst, Wiechmann, 2012). An abundance of vacant land together with the lack of a strong market creates exceptional opportunities to improve green space networks and natural systems in shrinking cities. They can reinvent themselves as more productive, sustainable and ecological. This will benefit existing residents and attract future development (Hollander et al., 2009).

Schilling and Logan (2008) argues that, because planners cannot control where vacancy and abandonment occur, a shrinking city need a

green infrastructure plan to connect its green assets and strategically guide resources and initiatives. Reclaiming green infrastructure is different from traditional planning for green infrastructure when you preserve open spaces and habitat for managing growth. In shrinking cities, former development has likely removed most of the original green and natural elements. A green infrastructure network for shrinking cities will involve the regeneration of vacant properties for new parks, community gardens, restored habitat, flood mitigation, storm water treatment sites and urban agriculture plots linked with existing green spaces. By replacing abandoned and vacant properties with green infrastructure converts surplus blighted land to green space. The success of this strategy can be measured by the stabilization of adjacent property values. It will also improve public health and provide new green-collar jobs (Schilling, Logan, 2008).

Many diverse stakeholders will be involved in developing a comprehensive green infrastructure network. The challenge for planners and policymakers is how to engage these stakeholders and to empower residents. Collaborative planning processes can identify a comprehensive greening plan with residents, the city's and stakeholders' interests. *"Public leaders in shrinking cities must embrace public participation as an important way to solve urban problems"* (Shilling, Logan, 2008, p. 461).

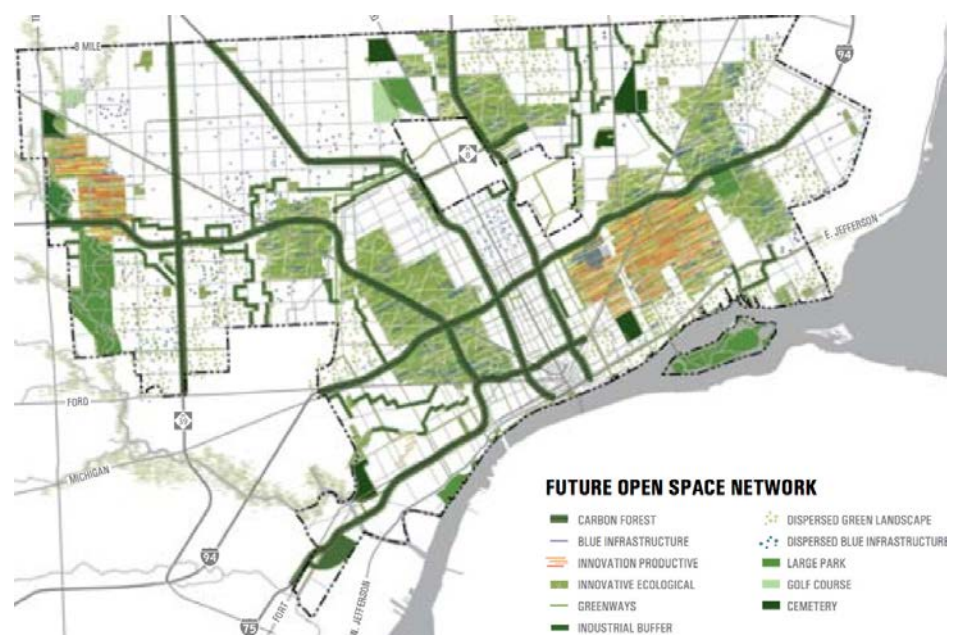


Figure 9: Proposed future open space network in Detroit. The network will consist of a series of interlinked elements. These will not only include traditional parks but a series of newly repurposed parks, blue and green infrastructure, and large scale landscape typologies.
Source: Detroit Future City, 2013

LOCAL SCALE AND INDIVIDUAL LOTS

Bowman and Pagano (2004) claims that if vacant land is accessible it may become a favorite gathering spot or a shortcut through an area. These potential public spaces supports life and can provide the common ground where members of a community interact. Vacant land often comes in small parcels, scattered in different blocks, and therefore has a weak development potential. In some cities, these left over parcels have been joined with service alleys to connected passageways. There is an immediate effect with this transformation, a disorganized area becomes a series of coherent, pleasing spaces (Bowman, Pagano, 2004).

Whiston Spirn (1990) writes about different types of vacant lots due to their location, size and impact. They all have limitations and opportunities for improvement and she refers to them as: missing tooth, corner lot, connector, vacant block, Swiss cheese and multiple contiguous vacant blocks (figure 10-14). She give examples for new usage for the lot/lots when reclaiming vacant land; private garden, community garden, meeting place, playlot, playground and ball court, playfield, outdoor workshop, outdoor market, parking lot, path, orchard, meadow, woodland, flood control and storm drainage and last holding vacant land for future use.

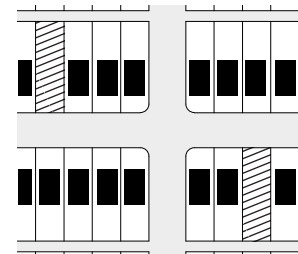


Figure 10: Plan of the vacant lot type missing tooth.

Vacant lots marked with a striped hatch. The buildings are black.

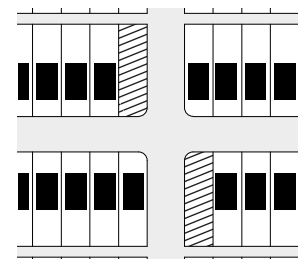


Figure 11: Corner lot

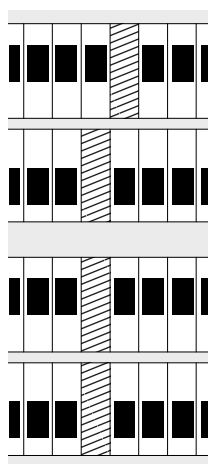


Figure 12: Connector

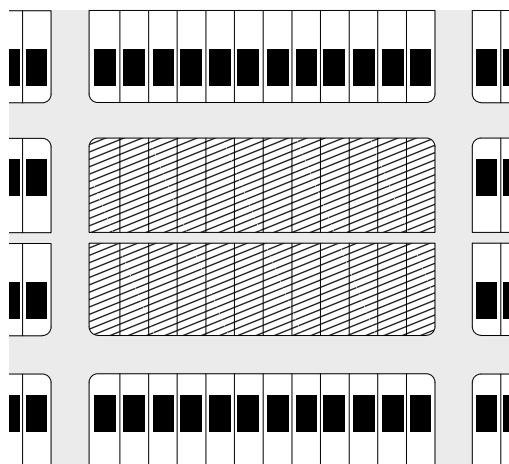


Figure 13: Vacant block

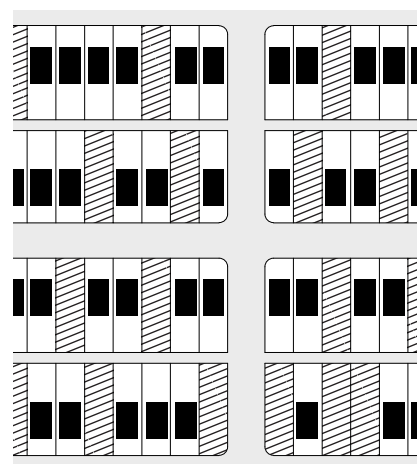


Figure 14: Swiss cheese

Urban agriculture, the production of agricultural goods within city limits, on vacant lots has arisen due to different circumstances. In Russia it is a result of the basic need to survive in USA it represent a living social utopia of small dedicated groups and in eastern Germany it serves as a beautification of fallow lots (Oswalt, 2005). Urban agriculture can also generate new social networks or the basis for local economies. (Oswalt, 2006).

WORKING WITH THIS **TRANSFORMATION**

Urban planning has little influence of the main forces of shrinkage, deindustrialization, suburbanization or demographical ageing. Oswalt argues that instead of passively capitulate, we must search for new ways to intervene in urban planning (Oswalt, 2006). Urban planning has never generated urban growth, but rather enables and controls it by means of planning. Planning can't stimulate the opposite process of shrinkage, either, nor can planning reverse it. However, it can guide the process to the best urban solutions possible (Rienets, 2005b). The planning profession and planning literature provide little guidance on how to shrink a city (Schilling, 2009). Planners must develop new policies and strategies to address the challenges shrinking cities present (Schilling, Logan, 2008).

As an emerging new practice, Landscape Urbanism seeks to understand the dynamics of the contemporary city. Landscape Urbanism is the conflation, integration and fluid exchange between (natural) environments and (engineered) infrastructural systems (Waldheim, 2006).

Landscape Urbanism look at the city as a dynamic and changeable process and it can be applied on both growth and shrinkage.

James Corner (2003) writes that Landscape Urbanism is an ethos, an attitude, a way of thinking and acting and that: "*The contemporary metropolis is out of control – and this is not a weakness but its strength.*" (Corner, 2003, p. 61) The city is a living ecology and Landscape Urbanism offers no remedies nor fixes. Instead it looks for opportunities to engage in the dynamics of the city on its own terms (Corner, 2003). Corner sees that the working method across a range of scales and players are lacking and deserve our outmost attention and research (Corner, 2006).

Waldheim writes that landscape urbanism emerge as a useful framework in the context of deindustrialization, for sites experiencing abandonment, toxicity and social pathologies left in the wake of industry as it decamped for more favorable locations (Waldheim, 2006). Waldheim highlights the leftover void spaces, terrain vagues, in these cities as potential commons. He advocates patience and slow growth in cultivating new urban form in these residual spaces (Shane, 2003).

Oswalt writes about the concept "*week planning*" where "*soft tools*" will be used. He claims that cultural development, forms of communication, and the rise of social networks and processes often shape

urban development more than construction itself does. (Oswalt, 2005). The book *Shrinking cities Volume 2: Interventions* discuss what kind of opportunities for cultural innovation and possibilities for creativity are opened up when the hope that the process of shrinkage is a short-term problem to be addressed through economic growth, are abandoned. This restructuring should be seen as an opportunity and there are, and must be, a whole spectrum of possibilities for actions, from individual to top-down political (Oswalt, 2006).

To further describe how to work with this transformation, I conclude and continue with the following three themes: Players, Operations and Landscape.

PLAYERS: CITY GOVERNMENT, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AND GRASSROOTS

“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” (Jane Jacobs, 1961, p. 238)

Spatial production belongs to a much wider group than architects. It must be understood as a part of an evolving sequence, with no fixed start or finish and that multiple agents contribute at various stages. *“The agent is one who effects change through the empowerment of others, allowing them to engage in their spatial environments previously unknown or unavailable to them, opening up new freedoms and potentials as a result of reconfigured social space.”* (Awan et. al. 2011, p. 32)

“The methods of Landscape Urbanism are operative, they prioritize things the way in which things work and in the way in which they are used. And like a landscape architect, the landscape urbanist always begins with the given” (Mostafavi, 2003, p. 7). This is a shift from an image-based planning to an operative method where participation by all citizens should be encouraged. *“Landscape urbanism will in the future, with its temporal and political characteristics, set the scene for democracy in action.”* (Mostafavi, 2003, p. 9)

City government

The transformation of vacant land requires the involvement of city government, they adopt ordinances regulating the management of vacant land, review and approve development plans, may design strategies for new usage or even hold the title to the land. The role of the government is extensive and a solution for one vacant lot is not a solution for all

vacant lots, just as a solution for one city is not a solution for every city. Although one approach can apply to all cities: know your vacant land. How much is it, where is it located and what are the characteristics of the land? (Bowman, Pagano. 2004)

The book *Terra incognita – Vacant Land and Urban Strategies* (2004) focus on the role for city officials in managing vacant land and making strategic decisions for it. Cities are constrained by three imperatives when making strategic decisions for use and reuse of the vacant land. The imperatives are fiscal, social and development. Bowman and Pagano's attention when it comes to vacant land is the varying dynamics of sales, property and income taxes and how the city officials can make strategic decisions. In short, the main arguments are: First, think of vacant land as an asset; second, take actions that will make it so. Even though the focus is on the city government the book state that in some cities, non-governmental and non-profit actors play a very important part, managing vacant land (Bowman, Pagano. 2004).

The zoning apparatus would need a complete reorientation to administer and interpret zoning regulations in a shrinking city. Perhaps the cities could create overlay zones with special rules and procedures to ensure compatibility and facilitate creative regeneration (Shilling, Logan, 2008).

Landscape architects/planners

Rienets (2005b) writes that planners are unprepared to the new task associated with planning for shrinking cities. There is a lack of suitable visions, adequate experience and established tools and methods. Instead there are new processes opening up with discussions and experimentation. Architects and planners are not in a position to deal with shrinking cities on a large scale. Rather they have to act as meditators, pioneers or instructors to demonstrate alternative urban practices, inspiring habitats to cope with the burden of their urban environment and to create their own solutions (Rienets, 2005b). There is no "great solution" and a productive approach to urban shrinkage can, accordingly to Oswalt (2005), only be successful if it is a part of a long process, one that utilizes diverse methods and forges new paths.

Corner (2001) claims that the living entities of the city must be more creatively engaged in the contemporary urbanism. He challenge the conventional role for the architect: *"The move away from "master plans" to more tactical, improvisational, and provincial projects marks a shift in attitude from that of architect as super-authority to architect as adaptive*

entrepreneur: a social manager of sets and stages that enable the city to perform in newly dynamic ways.” (Corner, 2001, p. 124)

Grassroots

A surplus of vacant land provides new possibilities. When the long-term options are replaced by temporary activities of interested parties who have little capital to spare they experiment with new uses and forms for cooperation, create social interactions and give cultural meaning to what was found there. Not every vacant space will find interested parties and the actions often have limited duration, but sometimes they represent seeds for longer-term developments (Oswalt, 2006).

The German landscape architect and urban researcher Klaus Overmeyer introduced the term space pioneers, to describe people who discover abandoned sites and reinvent them. *“Finding the right place is a question of recognizing a site’s potential. It isn’t the current state of a place that is decisive but, rather, how inspiring it is.”* (Overmeyer, 2007, p. 6)

Anne Whiston Spirn is the founding director of The West Philadelphia Landscape Project (WPLP) that started in 1987. Through the project six publications have been written as a framework for action. WPLP is a community development and research project. It is based upon the conviction that individuals, small groups, and local organizations all have a role in shaping the landscape of the city. Incremental improvements to the urban landscape made by these actors can have an enormous, cumulative effect on the city and how it looks and functions. The Landscape Plan seeks to identify, encourage and support these improvements, and to propose large-scale projects that can be accomplished only with neighborhood-wide agencies and citywide or regional public agencies (Whiston Spirn, 1991).

With less regulation and more help for grassroots experimentation new opportunities for urban regeneration may be provided (Hollander et al. 2005). Even though there is a limit of what individuals can accomplish the cumulative impact of these efforts can be enormous which is already evident in West Philadelphia where individuals and organizations have reclaimed vacant land. These examples demonstrate invention, energy and enterprise and when these projects are concentrated they can transform a whole neighborhood. The city could facilitate such initiatives. Some ingredients for success are described in Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development. The ingredients are lessons learnt from existing successful projects’ common features, such

as the importance of: key individuals, well-defined goals and objectives, community involvement, a visible and successful project, good design, ownership and control of land, collaboration and broad based resources (Whiston Spirn, 1991). The works of WPLP is ongoing and Whiston Spirn is now working on her new book called *Top-Down/Bottom-Up: Rebuilding the Landscape of Community*.

OPERATIONS: MODELS, TOOLS AND STAGES

“The emphasis on urban processes is not meant to exclude spatial form but rather seeks to conduct a dialectical understanding of how it relates to the processes that flow through, manifest, and sustain it.” (Corner, 2006, p. 28). This suggests shifting attention away from the object qualities of space to the systems that condition the distribution and density of urban form (Corner, 2006).

Two models

The two planners Schilling and Logan (2008) propose a new model to effectively right size shrinking cities with (a) instituting a green infrastructure program and plan; (b) creating a land bank to manage the effort; and (c) building community consensus through collaborative neighborhood planning.

Schilling and Logan conclude that academics, practitioners, and policy-makers should collaborate to (a) explore alternative urban designs and innovative planning and zoning approaches; (b) collect accurate data on the number and costs of vacant properties and potential savings; (c) craft statewide vacant property policy agendas; and (d) establish a policy network of shrinking cities to share information, collaboratively solve problems, and diffuse policy innovations.

Lea Holst Laursen, lector of architecture and urban planning at Aalborg University in Denmark, has developed another model for working with urban transformation, with or without growth. The model is a contribution to what planning and urban design can focus on, for discussion and a step in the direction of finding differentiated urban design tools. The model consist of four parts; strategic solutions, pragmatic solutions, multifunctional landscapes and soft tools.

She states that is important with planning initiatives that actively can guide the effort to strengthen and shape the development of territory. The political will is important and the city has to have a long term and holistic approach with this planning. It has to be acknowledged that it's not possible to save all urban territories, and that demolition is necessary.

Mapping of territories is essential. This strategic level can be considered as an overall policy that sets up rules, tools and initiatives that are to be implemented on the local micro level where community takes place. It is important to have laws and policies that are flexible in order for local networks and local people, that are key elements in a transformation of declining territories, to be able to act (Holst Laursen, 2008).

Holst Laursen highlight the use of landscape in the transformation process as a characteristic structure instead of just letting it take over. By exploiting the landscape's potential and resources it can lead to development of declining territories. *"The dichotomy of city versus countryside is no longer applicable, and with the physical deterioration in declining territories it seems more relevant to use the landscape progressively."* (Holst Laursen, 2008, p. 254)

The urban landscape approach can also create structure and identity, which is an attractor itself. The landscape element can contain physical, ecological, social and cultural aspects. *"When focusing on the landscape, it is often regarded as de-culturalizing a place, implying nature takes over and culture disappears. But, by working purposefully with the landscape, this can also be considered as an element shaping culture."* (Holst Laursen, 2008, p. 255)

Soft tools

Soft tools represent a category that uses the potential of a given place. It deals with existing qualities and resources of a local place. It also has a bottom-up approach to find alternative ways of thinking and to engage the local space pioneers. It acknowledges that local networks are important and that its people's ideas are important to focus on. Great investments are not necessary, instead, a synergy between different actors and existing resources can be created.

Soft tools have three important aspects. The first is the Event and the Temporary. Holst Laursen (2008, p. 258) writes that: *"One aspect of the soft tools is related to seeing possibilities in the small, the fragmented and the momentary. This emphasizes a temporary use of structures or the construction of event. An event or a temporary use of a place can contribute to boosting the energy of a place."* Vacant spaces can then become a laboratory for new unplanned cultures and economies.

The second aspect of soft tools is planning with focus on Reuse and Renovation where existing structures are transformed or reused for new and different purposes. *"By working with a transformation of existing structures, new and previously unseen possibilities are rendered visible,*

when the non-economical, cultural and moral resources are in focus. In cases like these, a thematic overview of the productive and constructive potentials of a society can render visible the positive dimensions and qualities of a declining city, which can bring the local actors and their capacity into play and thereby activate and develop the local resources.” (Holst Laursen, 2008, p. 259)

The third and last category of the soft tools is Space Pioneers of the local community. The space pioneers, mentioned earlier, are local actors who make a difference and their informality is not to be underestimated (Holst Laursen, 2008).

Guidance and inspiration

Two publications present strategies for transforming vacant land focused towards community groups and individuals; *The Cleveland's Vacant Land Pattern Book* (Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative and Neighborhood Progress, 2008) and *Reclaiming Vacant Lots – A Philadelphia Green Guide* (The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 2002).

Cleveland's Vacant Land Pattern Book provides inspiration, guidance and where to find resources. There are information on how vacant lots can be used as neighborhood connections, parks and green space, environmental strategies or residential expansion. Through four steps they guide the process to create a successful community land reuse project, 1. Identify vacant land, 2. Host a visioning session, 3. Hold a follow up meeting and plan details, 4. Carry out your plan and keep neighbors involved in the process.

Reclaiming Vacant Lots – A Philadelphia Green Guide present guidance through ownership, inventory, design, preparation and maintenance.

Long term planning and short term action

The planning often comes in in an already critical stage, when the process of decline has reached an advanced stage. Cities that are expecting to loose population need to be planned in advance, only then can shrinking cities be designed in the most effective and sustainable way. Rieniets (2005b) call it “*proactive planning*” and it has to include the following aspects: (a) long-term urban planning - adapting the urban fabric to the future needs of a shrinking city, (b) long-term planning of ownership structures - the ownership of plots and parcels is a major obstacle for reorganizing urban patterns, and (c) long-term financial planning - support urban restructuring, even if it cannot be financed by the surplus of growth.

Hollander et. al. (2009) talks about emerging research questions for shrinking cities; land use, environmental mitigation and ecological restoration, social equity, right-sizing infrastructure and density.

The first step to stabilize neighborhoods should be to address the blight and decay caused by vacant properties (Shilling, Logan, 2008). One simple approach to take control over vacant lots is through temporary usage where the city removes derelict structures and installs simple improvements, often just cut grass, some trees or a fence. This landscape beatification promotes stability and upholds adjacent property values (Hollander et al. 2009).

Another suggestion is to ban mowing. *“The city would become more sustainable simply by halting this activity; volunteers could be more effective change agents, and natural areas would thrive within the city, thereby boosting urban habitat, cleaning the air, and improving soil health. More importantly, there would be an overall reduction in the use of fossil fuels.”* (Clouse, 2010, p. 261)

LANDSCAPE: SPATIAL RECONFIGURATIONS

“Rather than a permanent construction, one must take American urbanism as an essentially temporary, provisional, and continuously revised articulation of property ownership, speculative development, and mobile capital.” (Waldheim, Santos-Munné, 2001, p. 108)

According to Hollander et al. (2009) there are two key spatial reconfigurations of settlement patterns in shrinking cities, De-densification and Urban islands. Urban islands concentrate development in some areas and vacating others. With de-densification, the vacancy is scattered, reducing the overall density of the city. If comparing them, de-densification is the easiest to implement. In many cities it is already underway with land use transformation already happening in Detroit, Youngstown and Cleveland (Hollander et al., 2009).

Other spatial reconfigurations could be De-annexation as suggested by Rybczynski and Linneman (1999) and Waldheim and Santos-Munné (2001), or to erase the whole city as Popper and Popper suggests in their proposal Buffalo Commons (Popper, Popper, 2002).

There are issues related to power when territory is reorganized. There will be winners (typically the power authority, as in the State) and losers (typically the lowest income groups) (Corner, 2001). Some of these presented spatial reconfigurations are strategic top-down approaches, others are bottom-up transformations.

De-Densification

The model de-densification encourages existing property owners to take title to surrounding vacant lots. Cities could facilitate this process in exchange for maintenance and encourage new land uses in creative, resourceful and innovative ways through relaxed land zoning codes and land use policies. In Detroit, Youngstown and Cleveland the low land values have made it possible for the city residents to acquire adjacent vacant lots. *“This appears to be a grassroots transformation of former densely-populated urban areas of a more suburban density”* (Hollander et al., 2009, p. 16).

Armbrorst et. al. (2008) call this process when entrepreneurial homeowners take, borrow or buy adjacent lots *“The New Suburbanism”*. They refer to these expanded lots as *“blots”*. This is happening throughout Detroit but not as intentional planning, instead as a bottom-up process. Many vacant lots are typically small, single-family lots next to occupied homes and have very low market value, theoretically they can be purchased for very little. Armbrorst et. al. found hundreds of blots from their research, a majority that was acquired through legal property purchase. This process of purchasing the city’s tax-foreclosed lots can be exceedingly difficult though.

“Might we as planners and policymakers learn from what people already are doing? Might an appropriate role for the planner be to identify, document and finally advocate for potential progressive practices that, like the New Suburbanism, that already exist but are underappreciated and have little legitimacy?” (Armbrorst et. al., 2008, p. 47) If the city made it easier for individuals to acquire adjacent lots, *“Detroit wouldn’t return to nature, it would return to the suburbs... This might not be such a bad thing.”* (Armbrorst et. al., 2008, p. 64)

Urban Islands

The model with urban islands had an early representation with the concept of Berlin as an *“Urban Archipelago”* envisioned by Oswald Mathias Ungers. Jasper Cepl writes in Oswald Mathias Ungers’s *Urban Archipelago for Shrinking Berlin* (2006), published in *Shrinking Cities Volume: II*, that the vision that Berlin would become a green urban archipelago is undoubtedly one of the most important planning concepts for the ideal city in the twentieth century. Oswald Mathias Ungers developed the vision in 1977 from the concept *“city within a city”*. In 1977 West Berlin was shrinking, the city had rebuilt it in a fragmented way and empty lots dotted the whole city. Ungers’s perspective was quite different. He wanted

to work with the forces of shrinkage, not against them, and he developed an image of how the city could look in the future. Unger was the first one who took the population decline seriously and looked for new concepts of urban planning to meet the challenge (Cepl, 2006).

Each island-in-the-city was to be different. These urban islands would be divided by green strips that would define the framework for the city and explaining the metaphor of the city as a green archipelago. According to Cepl, this is here that the weakness of the concept becomes clear since Unger couldn't identify the unnecessary structures that would be sacrificed. The green strips would gradually be retransformed to natural zones and pastures. They would also comprise motorway networks – linking the urban islands, supermarkets, drive in cinemas and other activities connected to the car.

Unger had no plan for how this destruction would take place, he had only envisioned the final stage: *“an ideal city that integrated the experience of the American city with its extensive highway networks and endless suburban spaces with the ideal forms of the European city with its dense public spaces.”* (Cepl, 2006, p. 194)

Cepl address the question how this concept can help us today? Unger's vision would fail since land cannot be as easily disposed as he suggest where one property owner's land suddenly is made worthless. *“The solution would be to take the entire city out of private hands.”* (Cepl, 2006, p. 195)

Urban islands are harder to implement than de-densification, it require extensive land use regulations and politically it is hard to distinguish viable from non-viable areas within the city. The benefit would be the preservation of development densities and physical characteristics traditionally considered to be urban (Hollander et al., 2009). In 1990s, the City Planning Commission in Detroit produced the Detroit Vacant Land Survey where the most blighted and vacated parts of the city were identified, the remaining residents were being relocated. The survey proposed the decommissioning and abandonment of these parts (Waldheim, Santos-Munné, 2001). This was plan was never implemented, the depopulated areas still had a substantial number of people, often poor, that didn't agree on the idea that their neighborhood were being decommissioned (Hollander et al., 2009).

A more politically sustainable approach is the reverse perspective with an asset-based strategy. Then municipal resources are being concentrated to the strongest parts of the city instead of closing of the weakest parts, examples of this are the Cleveland's Strategic Investment Initiative and Detroit's Next Neighborhood Initiative (Hollander et al., 2009).

Reurbanism

Fishman (2005) writes that to have any constructive response to the shrinking city it is necessary to understand the dynamics of the two very different urbanisms in the American metropolis, suburbanization and reurbanism. Reurbanism is argued to bring new life to shrinking cities. In the 1990s in USA there was a rediscovering of the traditional urbanism, pedestrian friendly and based on density, something that the suburbs never can provide (Fishman, 2005). Fishman calls this downtown revitalization with new office buildings, convention centers, entertainment centers and festivals, a giant stage set for conspicuous consumption for luxury urbanism. It did little to help the city but it did renew ties between the central city and its middle-class suburbs.

Pallagst (2009) argues that tendency in the United States is that the revitalization of shrinking cities focus on city centers, which not addresses the poor and gentrification follows.

De-annexion

Instead of using the most common political response for saving shrinking cities by raising the taxes, a self-destructive response, creating an even less attractive city to live and work in, Rybczynski and Linneman (1999) suggested a radical proposal the future for shrinking cities. It is not desirable but they saw no other solution for some shrinking cities than to sell parts of it to private developers. These parts would work as independent municipalities, which would have its own government and develop its own schools and services. A form of suburbia inside the city. De-annexion would generate at least three positive outcomes creating a smaller viable city. For the first, the sales of the land would generate much needed funding for maintaining the rest of the city. Second, the shrinking city wouldn't be responsible for that land. Third, the sold land will restore the urban fabric with new development (Rybczynski, Linneman, 1999).

Instead of creating suburbia in the de-annexion, Waldheim and Santos-Munné speculate on another process with their project Decamping Detroit (2001). It is presented the in the anthology *Stalking Detroit* and started as a response to the Detroit Vacant Land Survey. *“As Detroit decamps it constructs immense empty spaces, tracts of land that are essentially void spaces. These areas are not being “returned to nature”, but are curious landscapes of indeterminate status. In this context, landscape is the only medium capable of dealing with simultaneously decreasing densities and indeterminate futures.”* (Waldheim, Santos-Munné, 2001, p. 110).

They choreographed the process of vacating parts of the city with four steps; dislocation, erasure, absorption and infiltration. These decommissioned land from the city's legal control are called "Zones". These zones can be re-appropriated and continue as open-ended responses to individual or collective demands. Waldheim and Santos-Munné don't offer any masterplan for them, instead they speculate on the process of their decommissioning and staging scenarios of the vacancy. The market (agents outside the city with demand from the population of the metropolitan region for urban spectacles) could speculatively transform the zones into: Suburban Campgrounds, Pigeon and Falconry Range, Ex-Urban Survival Training Course, Experimental Agriculture Cooperative Homestead etc.

Erasure

The north-central area of the United States, the northern Great Plains, are heavily affected by population loss, here are the cities smaller to start with and agricultural land has been left abandoned (Fishman, 2005). In 1987, Frank and Deborah Popper (2002) proposed to use the Great Plains as a laboratory. The federal government would buy out the last remaining residents, the fences would be torn down, natural grasses replanted and native species restored with reintroducing buffalos. The name of this rebirth is the Buffalo Commons. To some extent this practice has happened and the buffalo population has increased on both private and public land (Popper, Popper, 2002)

CONCLUSION

Current research about shrinking cities move away from the notion that a shrinking city only can be saved by economic and population growth. There has to be a reframing of the shrinkage into an opportunity. Maybe we are just moving away from one urbanism to another? Whether the new phrase is for reframing shrinking cities is, there are a lot of parameters active in this transformative process. Here the focus has been on vacant land, seen as a resource. These spaces are prepared grounds, flexible and open. Meaningfully linked vacant lots can create a green infrastructure network citywide and on local scale provide a place for social activities and empowerment of your neighborhood.

A lot of players and interdisciplinary practices are involved in the transformation. Here, the focus has been on city government where the political will is crucial, landscape architects/planners and grassroots. Both top-down and bottom-up approaches are important and collaborative planning. There are a lot of challenges ahead when coordinating and engaging stakeholders for a green infrastructure. The role for architect has shifted, rather than authority with masterplans they now have to act as mediators, pioneers, inspirer and listen to the processes that are already happening. Local networks and people are key elements, policies and laws should be flexible to support their initiatives.

Landscape Urbanism can be seen as an operational method for shrinking cities, it seeks to understand the dynamics of the contemporary city. By exploiting the landscape's potential and resources rather than letting it take over, landscape can lead to development of declining territories and support culture. This kind of urbanism anticipates change, open-endedness and negotiation. Experimentation and research is necessary to find tools and methods. There is need for both long-term planning and short-term action.

Spatial reconfigurations are often happening in tandem without implicit direction or comprehensive planning. Whether it is urban islands or de-densification, the question of land ownership is complex. The historical examples argue that true democracy can only be found if everyone is a landowner. Other examples highlight that we might have to put all the land into the hands of the city in order to not create winners and losers when land is reconfigured. ■





Thoughts on bike #2

Every here and there the invasive growth on vacant lots in the neighborhoods has been tamed. The works of the hands of the Detroiters are visible. Lots previously occupied by buildings, are taken care of by committed neighbors. Colors are added, structures built, food grown and places to gather are created. Ongoing local and informal transformations. Innovative solutions and designs together with personal touches add a human scale to the city. Hand painted signs give names to the projects and describes what is going on. There is an energy and activity present. Here, the hope for a better future for the city is growing. Their city. A city very much alive.

3



PLACE DETROIT



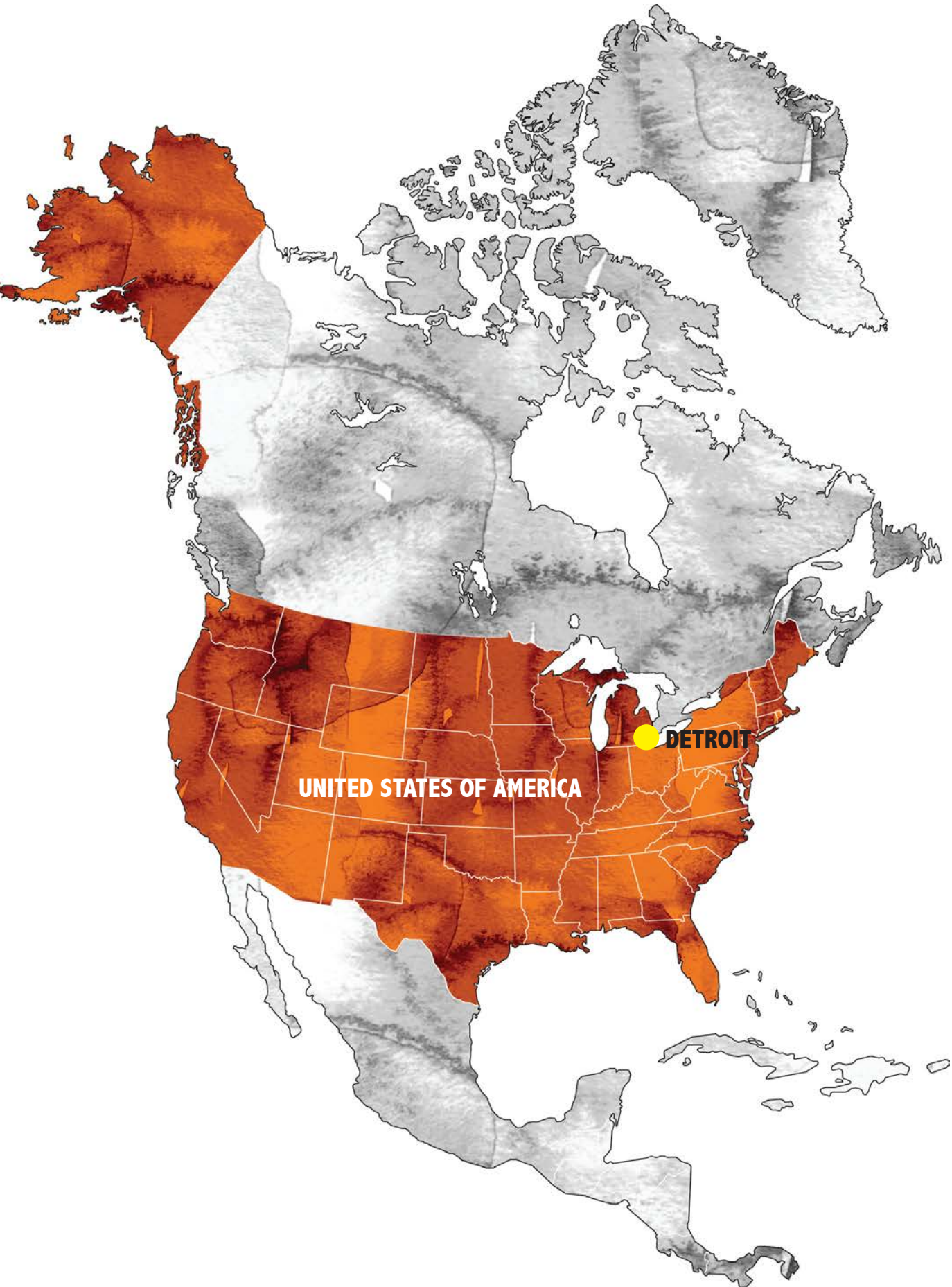


Figure 15: North America with the United States of America highlighted in orange. Detroit is situated in the northern mid-west of USA connected to the Great Lakes. Detroit is marked with a yellow dot.

This chapter presents some of the key factors that have shaped the city, focusing on its physical form and its vacant land, which is deeply intertwined to social and economic changes. It describes the city before, during and after the automobile industry.

BEFORE INDUSTRIALIZATION **(-1850)**

The modern history of Detroit starts with the colonization by the French in 1701, though the Native Americans were here much earlier (Martelle, 2012).

A FRENCH COLONY BY THE STRAIT

In 1701, the Frenchman Cadillac, an expert of the Great Lakes, was sent out by the king Louis XIV, on his canoe to find a better location for a military outpost and a place for trading furs with the native tribes. At the new location (figure 15) a wooden fort was built, the narrow strait (in French: dé troit) would be easy to defend and control passage. The location also contained a rich soil and dense forests full of eatable animals. The French settlers knew that they could not survive on hunting and trading so they began to establish private farms outside the fort. Long narrow ribbon farms, 90-270 meters wide, all connected to the river were streams served as joining roads. The remains of these farms are still shaping the city and the streets of today are in the border of the farms, named after the owner. Saint Antoine, Beaubien, Rivard and Chene are examples of farm owners whose name have survived in the streets (Martelle, 2012). Slavery was integral to the early settlers even though it never came close to the extent experienced in the Deep South. Detroit became British in 1760 (Martelle, 2012).

THE CITY LAYOUT

In 1805 a fire burnt down the whole city then consisting of about 200 buildings. Woodward, a judge part of the newly established territorial government, quickly took command over the rebuilding of this tabula rasa, without explicit authorization. He was inspired by the French-American architect's plan for Washington D.C. and formed a pattern built by "spokes and hubs" where streets would radiate from hubs, which were small parks. This new street layout still shape the downtown core with its radial streets following old Native American trails and the 43 kilometer long Woodward avenue as Detroit's spine from downtown to the northern suburbs. The plans wider implementation didn't last long and the more conventional grid system took over (Martelle, 2012). Detroit receives city status in 1815, then with 2000 inhabitants (Oswalt, 2005).

A CENTER FOR TRADE

The Erie Canal to connect the Great Lakes to the east coast and the Atlantic via New York was completed in 1825 with 80 locks and a 600 feet drop. The canal made the inner of USA more valuable for agriculture and later heavy industry with easier transportation. This led to make Detroit a major trade connection to the world and established an economic engine (Martelle, 2012).

INDUSTRIALIZATION

(1850-1950)

The industrialization starts around 1850s following a rapid growth of the city (Oswalt, 2005). Railroad lines to the West coast and streetcars were introduced in 1860s. Michigan became the nation's leading producer of timber, iron and ore with Detroit as the industrial engine. Detroit's industrialization started diverse with manufacturing of stoves, railroad cars, drugs, etc. This later became dominated by one single industry, the automobile industry starting in 1890s (Martelle, 2012).

FORD URBANISM

The Ford Motor Company was founded in 1903 and in 1908 the Model T was introduced (Oswalt, 2005). Ford saw the car as a machine that could revolutionize society, not as a luxury item like his early competitors. The key to Ford's success was that he also introduced the assembly line (Martelle, 2012). With the new scale of mass production, Ford turned the luxury car into a achievable commodity and gave the workers access to the results of their productive efforts. *"The system could reproduce its own markets a self-fulfilling prophecy of economic expansion. The material basis for modern mass-society and the "American Dream" were established."* (Schumacher, Rogner, 2001, p. 51).

A section of Woodward Avenue was the first street in the USA to become paved with asphalt (1909) (Oswalt, 2005). *"As the industry rose in the 1910s and 1920s, Detroit was the City of Tomorrow."* (Martelle, 2012, p. 226). The city's population tripled in the 1910s and 1920s with half a million new inhabitants in the 1920s alone. Also, by the end of the 1920s, Detroit had essentially become a one-industry city (Martelle, 2012). Detroit grew to its current size of 139 square miles in the 1920s

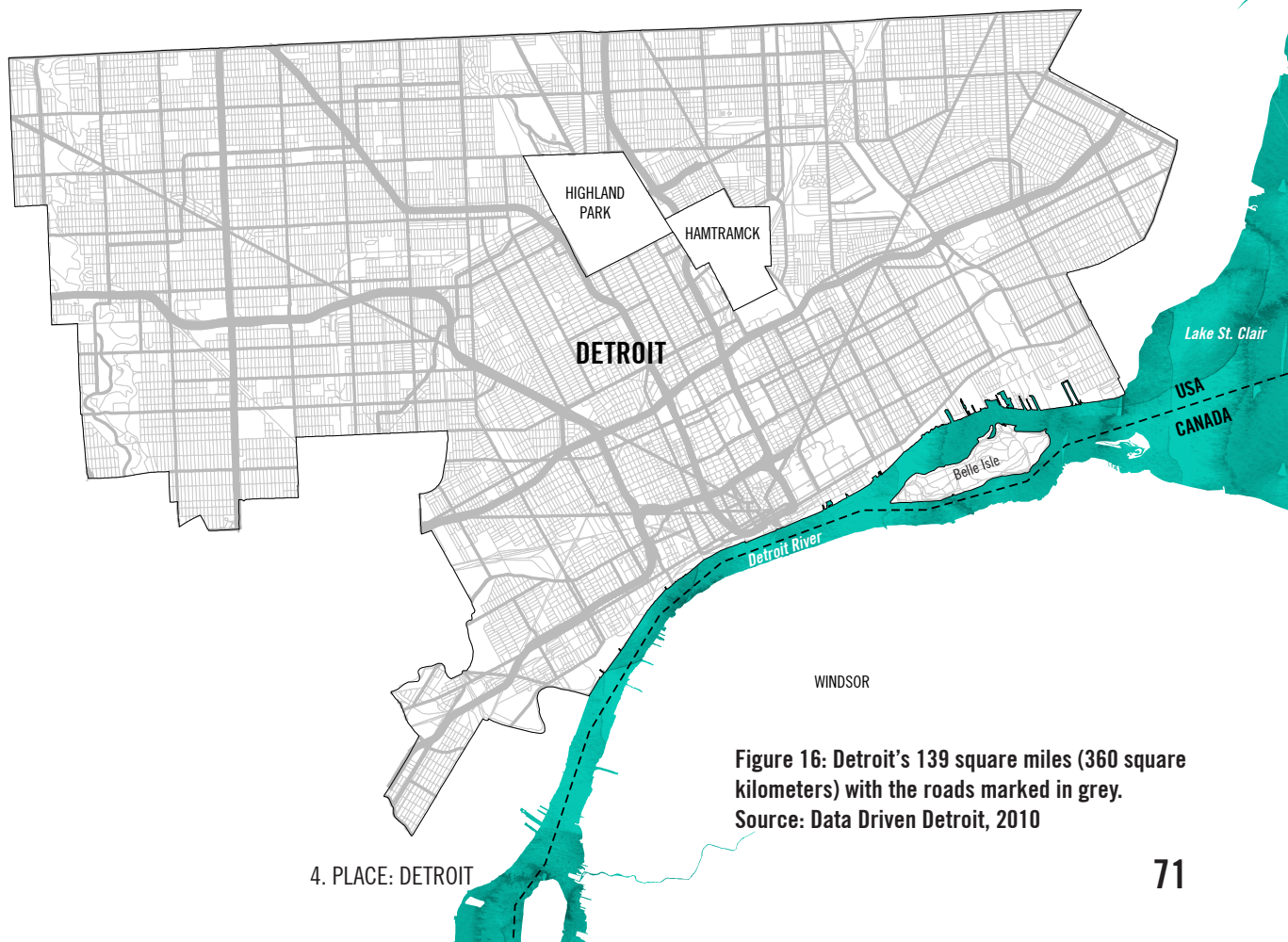


Figure 16: Detroit's 139 square miles (360 square kilometers) with the roads marked in grey.
Source: Data Driven Detroit, 2010

(figure 16) (Gallagher 2010). Manufacturing was clustered in the urban core in four or five story lofts connected to railroad lines (Fishman, 2005)

During the great depression, six months after the stock market collapsed in 1929, a third of Detroit's auto jobs had disappeared (Martelle, 2012).

In the 40s Detroit was the home to the highest paid blue-collar workers in the country. This is where the human labor and technology together made the United States the capital of capitalism and an icon of modernity (Sugrue, 1996). *"Henry Ford reasoned that a well-paid worker would be a motivated worker, and would become a consumer, feeding the cycle of production and consumption."* (Martelle, 2012, p. 73)

During the Second World War, Detroit's industries undertook a mayor transformation to be able produce war machines. The city was now the "Arsenal of Democracy" (Martelle, 2012).

In 1953 Detroit's population reaches its highpoint with well over 1.8 million inhabitants (Oswalt, 2005). It was then the nations forth-largest populated city (Martelle, 2012).

DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

(1950-2000)

After the Second Word War, *"Detroit had become a victim of its own success. The core city was overstuffed, and the factories themselves were being outdated."* (Martelle, 2012, p. 161).

DECENTRALIZATION

After the Second World War the multistory loft was replaced by vast single-story structures where the whole process of production could take place efficiently on a single level. Such factories needed cheap land and open space found at the region's edge (Fishman, 2005). Empty land in the rural areas was cheaper than prime land in Detroit and didn't have the extra cost of renovation or razing existing buildings (Martelle, 2012).

As the auto industry decentralized, nothing of significance replaced it (Martelle, 2012). Plants relocated with production to smaller towns and rural areas. This was supported by the American government and the federal highway construction that encouraged industrial growth in non-

urban areas (Sugrue, 1996). In 1956 the federal government promoted a shift from railroads to highways through the Interstate Highway Act. A 41.000 miles system of superhighways was built, it has been called “*the biggest public works program since the Pyramids.*” It was justified by the need for a fast evacuation if cities were hit by an atomic attack. The Interstate Highway Act represent a regional restricting encouraging decentralized economic growth by taking population and industry out of the “*overbuilt cities*”. (Fishman, 2005) The same year the streetcar system was closed down (Oswalt, 2005).

SUBURBAN EXODUS AND SEGREGATION

The same motoring that built the city also killed it. The car made it possible to commute freely and people started move to newly built suburbs already in the 1930s. (Jörnmark, von Hausswolff, 2011). In 1954, the first suburban shopping mall in the United States opens outside Detroit’s administrative borders (Oswalt, 2005). Metropolitan Detroit had no significant regional planning and it began “spreading like a stain”. And as the residents and businesses go, so does the tax base (Martelle, 2012).

With the Federal Housing Administration, a new system with loans and mortgages was created to finance the American dream house in the suburbs. The white middle and working class had the resources. Many of the hundreds of thousands houses built in the city between 1900s -1950s were small, designed in haste for the workers of the automobile plants. One of these new houses would measure about 90 square meters (1000 square foot) situated in a lot with the dimensions 9x37 meters (30x120 feet). Detroit filled up within the city borders in the 1950s. About the same time a new type of house evolved on the American scene. A house that today is at least 100% larger than the traditional house in Detroit and the lot size about 250% the size. The houses have air conditioning and attached garages (Gallagher, 2005).

The dwellings that were left in the city were occupied by blacks from the American South fleeing the apartheid-like conditions and the collapse of the cotton economy. Six million blacks migrated to the northern cities between 1940 and 1970 (Fishman, 2005). In the north they were greeted by racial discrimination and suffered disproportionally from the deindustrialization. Residential segregation was a fact and expanded into urban ghettos, Detroit became a deeply segregated metropolis (Sugrue, 1996).

URBAN CRISIS

Racism, criminals, corporate policies, failure of government to plan regionally, housing policies, banks, realtors – all play a critical role in Detroit's collapse (Martelle, 2012). There are a lot of factors that lead Detroit in what you could call an urban crisis. A common observation of the origins is the riot of 1967, which got worsened, with the election of Coleman Young as the city's first black mayor. Racially segregated housing with ghettoization for black people and "white flight" to the suburbs intensified Detroit's urban crisis. Other observations to the decline are the recession of 1966-67, the oil crisis in the 70s and the rise of European and Asian industrial power and it is certainly a consequence of the globalization and the crisis of Fordism. The various crises led the automobile industry to a free-fall and Detroit, site of the oldest and least competitive plants, was hit hardest (Schumacher, Rogner, 2001. Sugrue, 1996).

Sugrue argues in his book, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (2006, p. 5), that the origins of Detroit's urban crisis began even earlier and: "*emerged as the consequence of two of the most important, interrelated, and unresolved problems in American history: that capitalism generates economic inequality and that African Americans have disproportionately borne the impact of that inequality.*"

In the 1970s and 1980s Detroit became the Murder City with its peak in 1987 with 686 homicides or, about 63 per 100.000 inhabitants. Many of them were connected to drug culture (Martelle, 2012). The night before Halloween is called Devil's Night, a night filled with arson-related fires in buildings and streets, it reached its peak in 1984 (Oswalt, 2005).

Among other things, a lot of wrong priorities and investments together with the hope that the auto-industry will save the city has preceded Detroit's decline. In 1980 General Motors built the Poletown plant that was going to be a "rebirth" to the auto-industry. A big sacrifice of the urban fabric was needed and churches, business and homes were demolished (Neill, 2006). Besides from the land, city officials offered tax reductions but the new General Motors Poletown plant and the new Chrysler plant only employed a few thousand workers, most of the relocated from other plants (Sugrue, 1996). The industrial economic revival didn't follow (Neill, 2006). Martelle (2012) writes that the delusion that what once was can be again, is one of the most lethal ones. Because it cannot. "*Detroit's industrial past will never roar back to life; the national and global economies have undergone too drastic a transformation for it to be possible.*" (Martelle, 2012, p.235)

There have been attempt to revitalize the downtown area. In 1977 the Renaissance Center was built, seldom can a project have promised so much and delivered so little (Neill, 2006). Detroit Renaissance Center was developed on vacant land but it is isolated from its surroundings and not connected to adjacent areas (Pagano, Bowman, 2004). Other attempts to revitalize the downtown are casinos and sports stadiums but they have also failed (Schumacher, Rogner, 2001).

As Detroit suffered disinvestments and economic collapse, whites continued to flee from the city. By the end of the twentieth century, metropolitan Detroit had 86 municipalities, 45 townships and 89 school districts (Sugrue, 1996). Without access to reliable public transportation, the Detroiters lose the ability to work in the suburbs (Martelle, 2012). The suburbs weren't interested in a subway. Instead the elevated Peoplemover was built in 1980, endless circulating the downtown (Neill, 2006).

DETROIT TODAY **(2000-)**

Martelle writes in *Detroit – A biography* (2005, p. xii): *“It’s unclear when we look at Detroit today whether we’re seeing the last spasms of America’s past, or a harbinger of the nation’s urban future.”*

URBAN PRARIES

With the rescission in 2008, Detroit had 101000 vacant housing units, more than one in four of all available units. That was after years of steady demolition. Buildings were being abandoned faster than the city could tear them down (Martelle, 2012). Between 1978-1998, 9000 building permits for new homes and 108000 demolition permits were issued by the city (Solnit, 2007). The inner city is now overgrown with grass into quasi-idyllic pastoral scenes (Oswalt, 2005). *“As the city disappears, it leaves behind strange territories and fixes vast undifferentiated fields of vacancy absent of explicit purpose yet ripe with a sense of expectancy.”* (Daskalakis, Perez, 2001, p. 79). Of the 25 most populous cities in the United States, Detroit has the highest percentage of dwelling units that are detached, single-family houses (Armbrorst et. al., 2008). This removal of abandoned low-density houses lost to tax foreclosure together with the Devil’s Night, quickly generates a vast amount of vacant land, urban

prairies. Detroit consists of about 52 square kilometers (20 square miles) vacant land, it equals the size of Manhattan (Detroit Future City, 2012). *“Detroit will never be rebuilt as it was. It will be the first of many cities forced to become altogether something else.”* (Solnit, 2007, p. 70) One process that is going on in Detroit today is a bottom-up transformation of this land with various new usages. *“It may surprise people, however that a place so synonymous with urbanism is actually getting more and more agrarian. The definition of what a city is, is gradually being changed within the borders of Detroit”* (Vermeulen, 2010). For example, you can find many hundreds of community gardens and “blots” in Detroit today. This process will be further elaborated in the next chapter, 5. Process: Transforming Vacant Lots.

People are still moving out of the city. Even dead people. About three hundred bodies a year are exhumed from their graves at the cemeteries

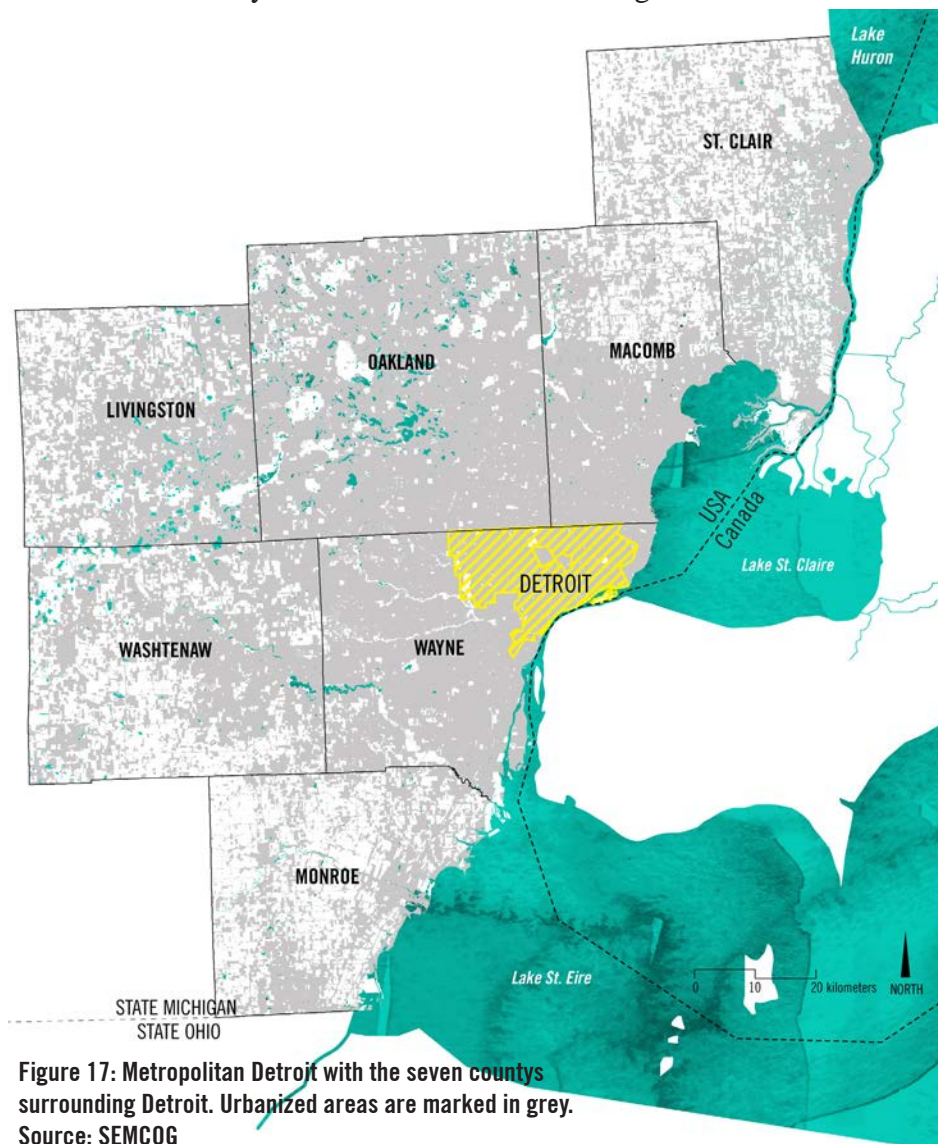


Figure 17: Metropolitan Detroit with the seven counties surrounding Detroit. Urbanized areas are marked in grey.
Source: SEMCOG

in Detroit and moved. Relatives who don't live in the city anymore don't think the city is good enough for their dead (Solnit, 2007). The inhabitants in Detroit the year 2011 were just above 700 000 (US Census Bureau).

“Interestingly, in this city whose name is synonymous with the auto industry, more than a fifth of households have no car.” (Solnit, 2007, p. 68) Detroit (together with New Orleans) is the poorest city in the nation (Shane, 2003). You could believe that the whole region are in crisis, yet metropolitan region of Detroit (figure 17) with almost 5 million people have grown steadily in population and wealth over the last half century, the same period that was so devastating for central Detroit (Fishman, 2005). Just northwest of Detroit, across 8 Mile Road (the city boarder that the rapper Eminem made famous) is suburban Orange County situated, the second richest county in the nation (Fishman, 2005). 8 mile is also a brutal racial division (Shane, 2003)

THE LEGALIZATION OF URBAN FARMS

Today it is illegal to start a farm on vacant land due to zoning laws. This is about to change and the City of Detroit's Planning Commission has, in collaboration with the people who are already farming in the city, proposed a new ordinance, the Urban Agriculture Ordinance. The ordinance will allow gardens, farms and other forms of agriculture within the city of Detroit.

The urban agriculture workgroup is not a top down approach and the workgroup have together formed the new ordinance. It consists of grassroots growers (Feedom Freedom), proposed large-scale agriculture projects (Hantz farm), community development organizations, environmental justice among others. The public is invited for three community hearings about the draft for the ordinance.

The Urban Agriculture Ordinance defines and list different types of gardens and attributes that will be legal when the ordinance is accepted, then it will be possible to finally buy land from the city to use for farming which is not the case today. The new legal uses will be; aquaculture, aquaponics, compost, farmers market, farm stand, greenhouse, hoophouse, hydroponics, rainwater catchment system, urban farm (over 1 acre/0,7 hectares), urban garden (under 1 acre/0,4 hectares, approx. 14 lots), orchard and tree farm. Prohibited products and uses are; farm animals (it will be in a following ordinance allowing for rabbits, chickens and bees), invasive trees and plants and grain crops (oats, wheat, rye - they attract rodents, cover crops are ok).

Next step is to deal with animals and to produce a best practice

manual. The urban agriculture workgroup will continue.

The Urban Agriculture Ordinance is there to support small-scale projects. The city don't have money, but it does have land and will sell the land to the ones that already uses it and some land will be set aside for community uses. Most of the existing farms will be legal, they will be dealt with case by case.

The Ordinance is now waiting for approval at the City Government. (City Planning Commission Detroit, 2012)

DETROIT FUTURE CITY

In the December 2012, the Detroit Future City was released, a long-term strategic framework plan for future decisions. It is a part of the Detroit Works Project that was introduced in 2010 by Mayor Dave Bing as a process to create a united vision for Detroit's future and to improve the quality of life and business in the city. Detroit Works Project is separated into two parts; Short Term Action and Long Term Planning to be able to both create action today while plan for tomorrow. With the Short Term Action the focus is on a few neighborhoods and to improve their city services.

The Long Term Planning has resulted in the framework Detroit Future City. Civic engagement and involving communities have been a big part of this work together with technical planning experts to identify important quality of life and business elements, how to turn liabilities into assets and already existing strengths. The framework includes strategies for economic growth, land use, city systems, neighborhoods and land and building assets. The implementation requires and involves the government, businesses and investors, neighborhood and community groups, philanthropic organizations, and other non-governmental organizations. It is the city's first plan to accept that Detroit will not regain its peak population.

Stoss Landscape Urbanism is one of the technical teams focusing on landscape, ecology, open space, and blue/green infrastructure. According to them, "*The plan positions landscape as 21st century infrastructure and looks to landscape as a catalyst to transform vacant land.*" (www.stoss.net) Detroit Future City presents a plan with future open space network with green/blue infrastructure (figure 9, page 49). This plan opens up for flexibility and new approaches to land use and zoning (Detroit Future City, 2012).

Jane Amidon (2013) writes in Topos that this approach is a fabrication of potentials rather than master plans, re-sourcing versus re-

solving. *“The big ideas of the Detroit Works Project include ecology as urbanism and identity; the spatialized applications include linking vacant lots and under-utilized zones into blue and green corridors for storm water management, habitat, recreation and academic research. The focus on resource distribution versus formal solutions allows flexibility in discussion of how things will turn out.”* (Amidon, 2013, p. 21)

CONCLUSION

Detroit’s history is complex with a lot of reinforcing parameters that have led to the urban prairies that we find in the city today.

Connected to the Great Lakes waterways the city has gone from a trading post to an industrial engine, the birthplace of the modern automobile to decline, segregation and vacant land.

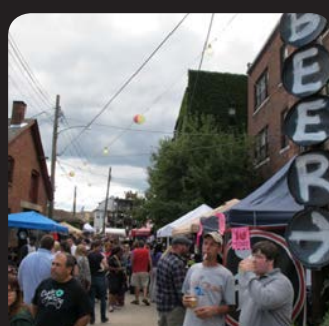
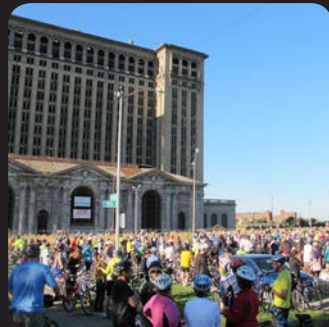
There are many reasons for Detroit’s transformations and the forces of globalization and decentralization have affected the once flourishing auto industry. With high paid workers and a great auto production pace. It was a total success but it also made the inhabitants mobile. Freeways were built, plants relocated outside the city together with shopping malls, offices and cheap land for suburban living. Suburbanization has a high impact on Detroit.

Segregation and tension between the blacks and whites has been present in the city. Riots, ghettoization and injustice had led to further divisions.

The city built by and for cars with an infrastructure for two million people, are now only used and taken care of by 700 000 of which many poor, without access to a car. The city was based on one industry, the automobile industry, and has relied on its comeback to save the city.

Without jobs or income, the houses are being abandoned and demolished at a high speed leaving vast tracts of land vacant in the middle of the city, redefining what a city can be.

Detroit has the opportunity to reinvent itself. The city officials is looking for new solutions, this is evident with the new framework Detroit Future City, which could be seen as the first attempt to implement Landscape Urbanism in an entire city, and with the Urban Agriculture Ordinance that will legalize urban farming. ■





Thoughts on bike #3

There is so many stories to tell about Detroit, other then the ones crisis, decay and vacancy.

*My Detroit is:
Festivals. Music. Jazz.
24h open diners.
Belle Isle Park.
Turquoise water.
Hidden beaches.
Concerts. Techno.
Sports celebrations.
Murals.*

*Spectacular architecture.
Explorations.
Great friendly people.
Art.
Recycling.
Bike culture.
Infinite flat roads.
Critical mass.
Tour de Troit.
Endless sunshine.
Smiling faces.
Collaboration.
Commitment.
Community.
Outdoor film screenings.
Bonfires.
Farmers markets.
Harvest parties.
Mind blowing...*

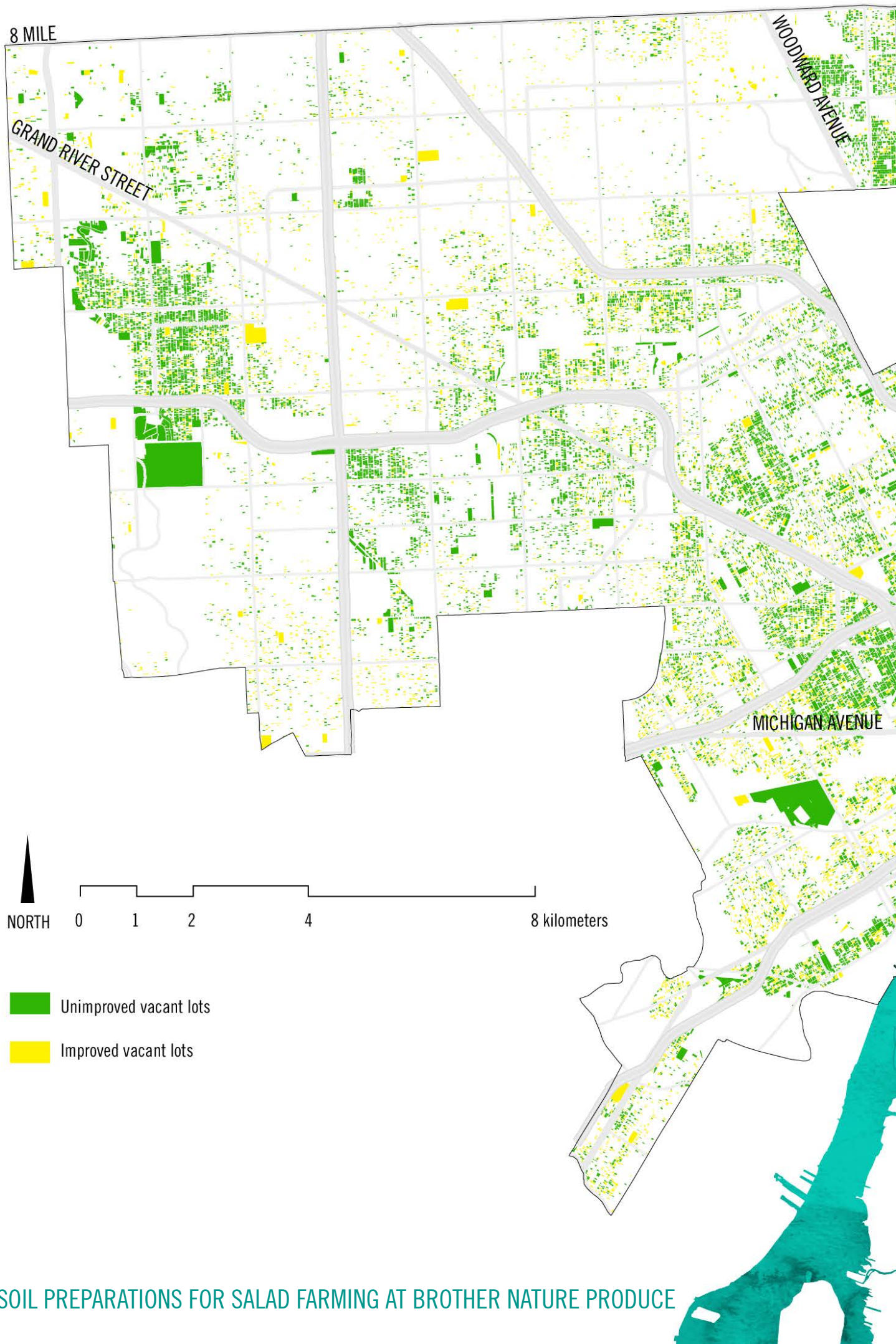
◀ A part of my own Detroit stories.

5



PROCESS: TRANSFORMING VACANT LOTS





8 MILE

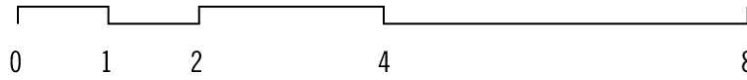
GRAND RIVER STREET

WOODWARD AVENUE

MICHIGAN AVENUE



NORTH



8 kilometers

Unimproved vacant lots

Improved vacant lots



Figure 18: This map shows vacant residential parcels/lots in Detroit (single-family houses, duplexes, and multi-family structures up to four units, industrial and commercial are not surveyed, except from commercial lots in residential neighborhoods). 343 849 parcels/lots are surveyed out of them are 27 % are vacant (20%, 67 843, are unimproved, 7%, 23 645 are improved) The designation of improved/unimproved parcels distinguishes residential vacant lots with permanent structural improvements on them. Lots are defined as improved if there is any semi-permanent feature aside from housing: gardens, water features, trees/landscaping, greenhouses/hoophouses, parking lots, fences etc. Temporary features such as furniture, signs of regular maintenance/mowing, or presence of debris do not indicate an improved lot. All residential vacant lots that are not improved are, conversely, unimproved.

Source: Detroit Residential Parcel Survey through Data Collaborative, a partnership between the Detroit Office of Foreclosure Prevention and Response (FPR), Community Legal Resources (CLR) and Data Driven Detroit (D3), 2010

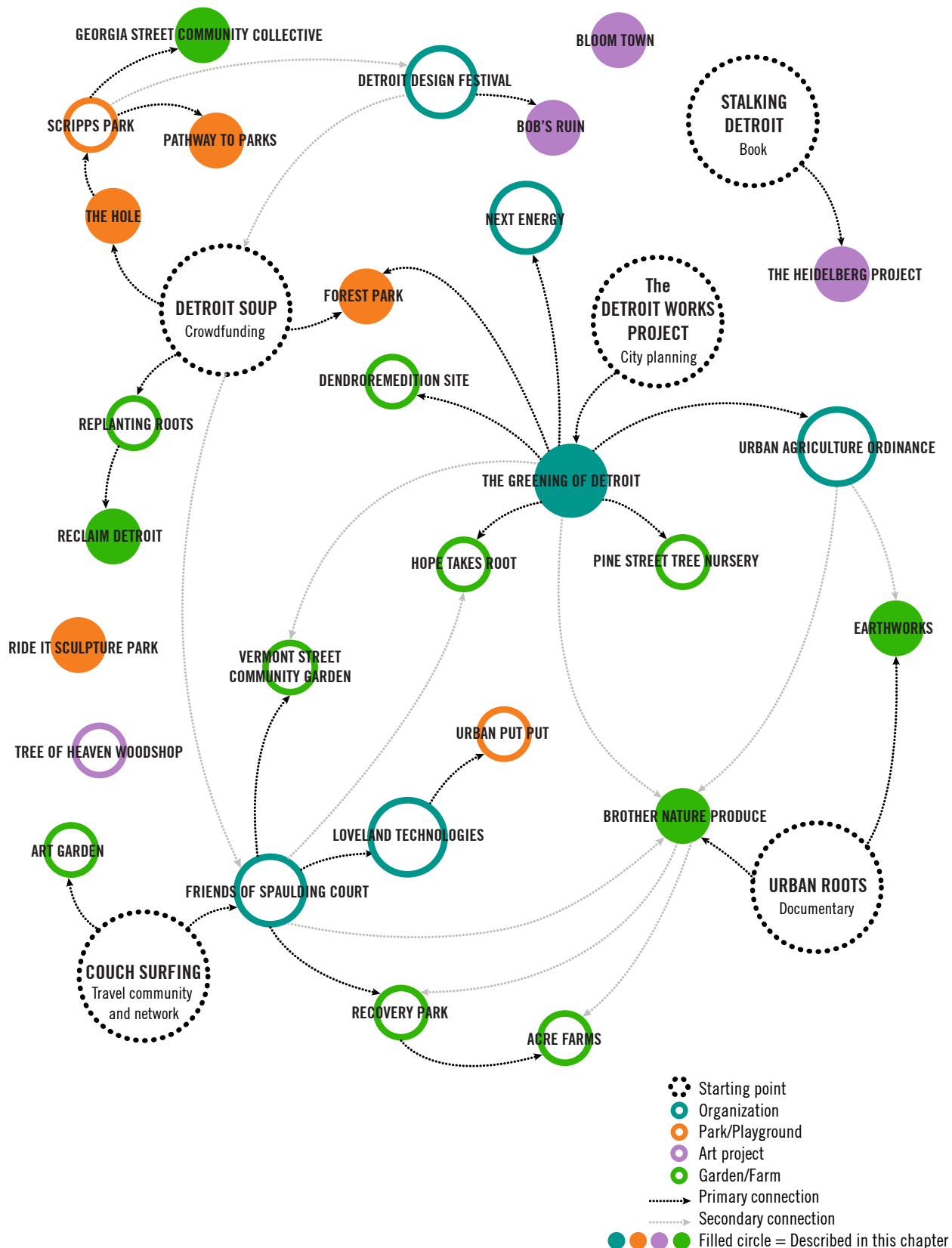


Figure 19: Diagram over project connections and how the projects lead me further. The color designations are my own interpretation of the projects main practice.

The following chapter presents the results from the field study. It describes ten initiatives and their projects, and one non-profit organization that have been visited. They are all involved in the process of transforming vacant lots in Detroit.

FINDING PROJECTS

The research started in Sweden and before I left to Detroit I had four main sources for finding information about projects transforming vacant land (figure 19). The leading one was through the first one that I found, the non-profit organization, *Detroit Soup*. Detroit Soup is working with democratic crowd funding through micro-grants for creative projects in Detroit. After contacting the founder, Amy, I got information about the winning projects and I started to investigate which ones that in some ways transformed vacant land. Quite a few projects sounded like they had people engaged in the appropriation of vacant land so I contacted them and tried to arrange meetings. The Hole started with a micro-grant from Detroit Soup.

The documentary *Urban Roots* about the urban agriculture movement was screened at the Eco Film Festival in Malmö in the fall of 2011. It gave me a lot of positive information about what is going on in Detroit and presented a few urban farms that I wanted to visit, Brother Nature Produce and Earthworks Urban Farm.

The book *Stalking Detroit* by Daskalakis et al. (2001) gave me theoretical knowledge about the city and different approaches to it. It also introduced me to The Heidelberg Project that I visited. During my Internet research I found a draft for the strategic framework for the city, Detroit Future City that Detroit Works Project were commissioned to work with. I planned to go to one of their open office meetings.

The community *Couchsurfing* not only helped me find places to stay, it also connected me to some projects and its people.

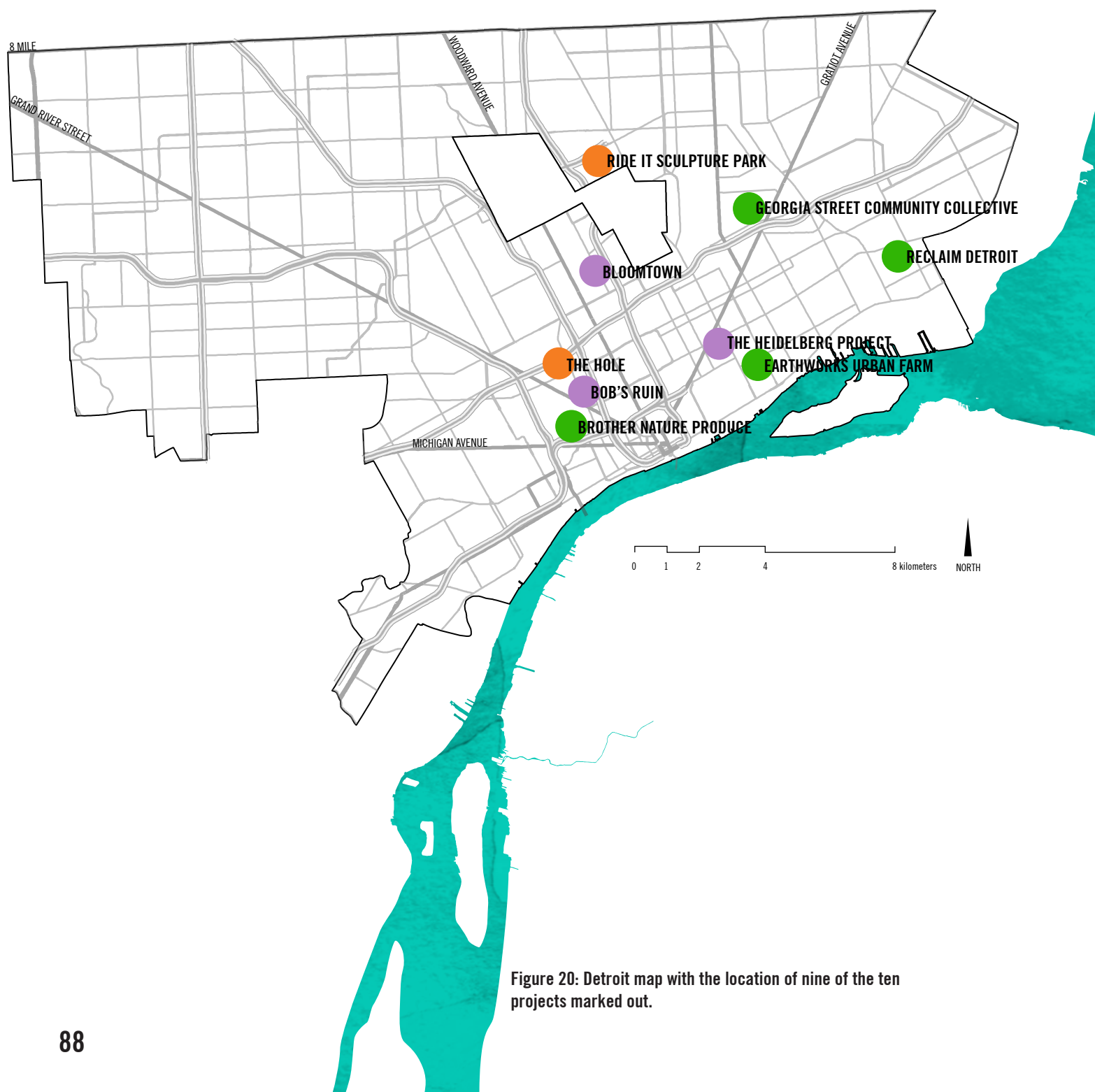


Figure 20: Detroit map with the location of nine of the ten projects marked out.

10+1 PRESENTED PROJECTS

I found more projects than I have the time to present. It is neither needed, nor derided to present everything in the format of this thesis. This field study does not attempt to be comprehensive and it would be close to impossible to follow my exact path. Other results would be found if my method for this field study is repeated. Ten projects are chosen (figure 20) and one non-profit organization, The Greening of Detroit, which is connected to many of the projects transforming vacant lots and the city officials.

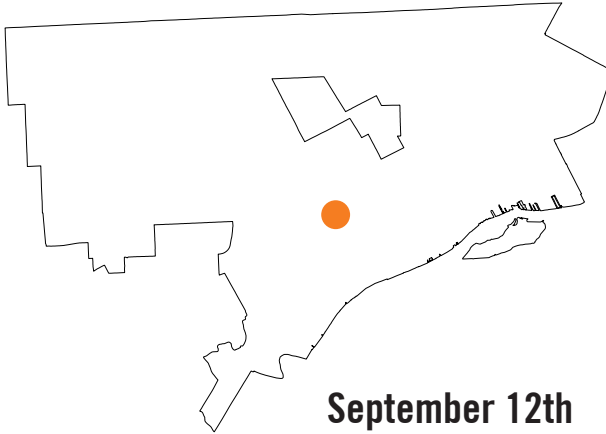
The projects try to represent a range of usage, motives and scale rather than depth. With eight of the projects I had the chance to conduct an interview with someone who initiated the project or works with it. The other two I just visited. All projects that I present here were found or heard about before I visited them.

The projects are described narratively following observations from my visit together with stories from the person I interviewed. The interviews aimed to answer the following questions: *How many lots are transformed? When did the project start? What was here before? What is the new usage? Why is the project situated here? What is the aim of the project? Who takes the initiative and why? What is the motivation? What is the project's vision?* Every project is summarized in a bulleted list.

Every project is presented with a map where in Detroit it is situated and a close up of the block/neighborhood with the arrangement of the transformed vacant lots. The legal boundaries are taken from the web page Site Control (www.sitecontrol.us), which provides information about lots in Detroit. The page is developed by Loveland Technologies. Among other things they work for transparency and cooperative ownership for the vacant land.

On the next pages these 10+1 projects are presented. In the end of this chapter there is a summary and a conclusion.





TIMEFRAME: 2010-2011
SCALE: 1 LOT
ADDRESS: 5165 AVERY STREET

September 12th

I meet up with Matt in his apartment in Woodbridge, about 10 minutes from his project site, for an interview. I heard about his project, the Hole, through *Detroit Soup* where Matt received a \$360 grant in August 2010 when he presented his visions for the renewal of a vacant lot by transforming it to a small pocket park. He found the lot when he studied geography and urban studies, which he recently finished at Wayne State University. He is originally from Tecumseh, a small city about 100 km south west of Detroit.

The lot was close to both his apartment and school. When Matt found it, it consisted of some overgrown play equipment and it was a perfect spot to hang out with his friends. It is quite hidden between single-family residential houses and it is more of a destination park, you wouldn't just pass by. Just north of The Hole, a six lane wide freeway cuts of Avery Street, the street where the lot is situated.

In the 70's, the house that occupied the lot, was burnt down and some play equipment was donated and added to create a small pocket park for the neighborhood that later was left abandoned.

Matt started the with the park renewal work right after the Soup grant together with his friends, some neighbor's and also with connections to the program "Summer in the city" where kids from the suburbs come to Detroit to do voluntary work. He organized two combined clean ups and celebrations every year, during May Day and Labor Day, for two years. Trees and shrubs were removed, the grass was cut and the play equipment was painted. A sign with the name of the park, The Hole was added close to the entrance. After the cleaning it was celebration time with music and barbeque involved. The vacant lot next to the park made it possible for the park to expand with a place for campfires. Matt and his friends got art donated from artists and the idea was to leave something permanent after every celebration to make the park better and better. Matt tells me that unfortunately there have been things vandalized and due to that, the art was removed. Instead, the art is surrounding us in the living room in his apartment where the interview takes place. He also tells me that he took a step back from the project this year to see what would happen, if the neighbors would continue the work and if there still would be celebrations

IT TAKES COMMITMENT TO TAME THE WILDERNESS



and clean ups, which turned out not to be the case.

The lot is owned by the City of Detroit, when I ask if they know about his project he tells me how it works here in Detroit, you don't ask for permission, you just do.

After the interview Matt drives us to the Hole in his truck. This is his first visit this season and the first thing we see is a burnt out house, the house closest to the park. The last time Matt was here people were living in that house. The park is very overgrown, spiny seed pods, burrs, got stuck on our clothes, and some play equipment has been stolen, but a new bench is added. We sit down for a few minutes, it is evident that it takes a lot of work to maintain a park. The growth is in many ways brutal.

Matt continues to tell me about his visions, and that he will continue the work with the park next year. His experiment with taking a step back is over. His heart is with this specific park and he wants to take care of it. One idea that Matt wants to develop is to connect the Hole to the *Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit* situated in the next block and the *Woodbridge Community Garden* close by through the back alleys and together with them organize special art events.

Summary

- When living in an apartment, a transformed lot can be a place to hang out with friends.
- Even a small lot demands a lot of maintenance.
- This is a destination park – you have to know about it to find it.
- Visions with linking the park to interesting sites nearby.



◀ Entrance to the Hole. Someone has removed the sign. ▶ Furthest in the park you can find a hidden bench, now partly overgrown.



**MOTIVATED BY THE DESIRE TO
MAKE DETROIT MORE WAKABLE**

2. PATHWAYS TO PARKS

BY KYLE

TIMEFRAME: 2012
SCALE: PATHS
ADDRESS: VARIOUS PLACES

September 22th

Biking around in Detroit looking over the endless overgrown fields I can't stop thinking that I would like to be able to walk across them. On some places you can see that it has happened, dirt paths, or desire paths, that have been created spontaneously by many feet wearing down the grass. Kyle has taken this a step further by transforming these paths to proper pathways. By using recycled bricks he construct pathways on vacant lots with the aim to make Detroit more walkable.

Kyle is a native Detroiter and a former student of Wayne State University where he studied geography and urban studies together with Matt from the project *The Hole*. Kyle's last project is situated in the neighborhood of Woodbridge in Scripps Park, a public park next to one of Detroit's public libraries. To the Detroit Design Festival one desire path has been transformed into a paved path, two checkerboards have been installed and some events take place. There is music and people are playing cricket. Quite a lot of people are enjoying the park today under the big old trees. The park also consists of a sensory garden and newly added benches built by Kyle, one made of a pair of stairs that two men are enjoying in a deep conversation. Kyle tell me about various deconstruction programs in Detroit where houses that are in a bad condition gets deconstructed instead of being demolished and the parts are later sold at architectural flee-markets.

Summary

- With easy improvements, Detroit can become more wakable.
- Using reclaimed materials.
- Listening to desires already visible on the vacant lots.



3.

RECLAIM DETROIT

BY SARA AND PAUL



TIMEFRAME: 2011-ongoing
 SCALE: 3 LOTS
 ADDRESS: 2526 NEWPORT STREET

September 7th

I am invited to a harvest party held by Reclaim Detroit. It is their first annual party and it will take place from Friday to Sunday, days filled with food, music and arts together with a construction of a new bio-shelter. After 50 minutes biking east through quite rough streets and by crossing a huge industrial site which used to be a creek, Connor Creek Industrial where Chrysler cars now are being manufactured, I finally find the garden in a neighborhood with many vacant lots.

Reclaim Detroit is an ongoing urban sustainability and permaculture experiment founded by Sara and Paul. They bought a cheap house that they have renovated and the two adjacent vacant lots. Their focus is to teach resourcefulness and that a high quality of life can be a reality within the borders of Detroit. Paul grew up in Detroit and Sara on a Michigan farm. They share their garden with the neighbors and the community, especially inviting children and elderly native to the area. With permaculture (sustainable agriculture that resembles self-sustaining ecosystems) they grow vegetables, herbs, lettuces, greens, roots and more. They try to plant as much biodiversity as possible.

Almost all constructions in their garden are made by reclaimed materials; the garden beds, the aquaponic pond with goldfishes, the fence, the chicken coop and the art pieces that hang in various places in the garden. Sara and Paul work with deconstruction, not demolition, and started to use things found nearby their house first. They have found and used tires, bricks, pieces of concrete, doors and various objects that are assembled to create art and constructions in the garden. Close things are valued higher than to just keep on searching for the best material. Eventually they want to expand their garden and have already done so in the alley where the stage, with homemade instruments for tonight's concerts, is situated. When they expand, they will eventually find other useful things and materials that they don't pick up now.

I am there quite early today, one of their first guest, so after receiving some homemade iced tea I help Derek, one of the neighbors, preparing the food by cutting cauliflower that he is going to fry on a stove in the garden.

VALUABLE FINDINGS CREATES A GROWING PLACE FOR THE NEIGHBORS



People start coming and the bonfire is lit but since I'm recommended not to bike back in the dark night, I get a ride home with two other guests leaving early. The leaving couple let me put my bike in the back of their truck and then drive me home. I missed the music and the food but I got to meet some friendly and very committed people.

Summary

- Building community by inviting and sharing a "private" garden with the neighbors.
- Growing a garden with permaculture as a method.
- Useful materials can be found locally, recycled and repurposed for new intentions.



◀ On the back of the house you can find the chicken coop and a pond, all made of reclaimed materials. ▶ Derek frying cauliflower.

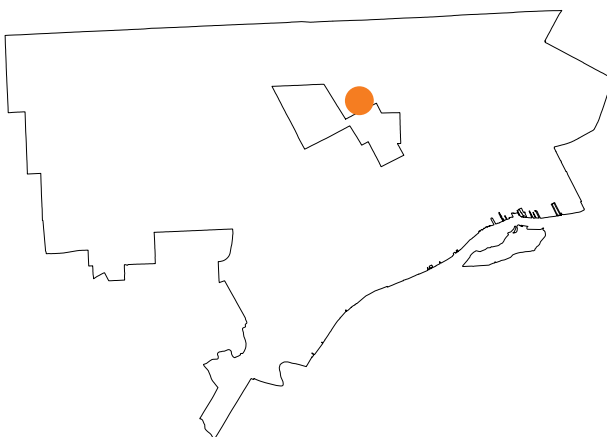


**RIDING ART TO
BUILD COMMUNITY**

4.

RIDE IT SCULPTURE PARK

BY MITCH AND GINA



TIMEFRAME: 2012-ongoing
SCALE: 4 lots
ADDRESS: 3414 E DAVISON STREET

October 5th

No one is using the skate park this Friday noon when I am there for a visit. The concrete is smoothly formed to ramps in various sizes, connected with a larger flat surface in the middle. The concrete on the ramps are colored red and have already got some tags. The construction is very massive and built with quality. The thing that strikes me the most are the old trees in the middle of the skatepark, the concrete is beautifully circulated around them to be able to save them inside the skatepark. A barbeque is inserted in the concrete structure and this seems like a great place for hanging out, at the edge of a block, seems to be the right place for this activity that can be quite noisy. The park is also somewhat supervised by the busy freeway slip road. It is situated on four vacant commercial lots just north of the city Hamtramck next to East Davison Freeway.

A found skateboard at the site let me try a few turns. One guy on a BMX bike rides by and shows me some tricks before heading east again without any chance for a conversation.

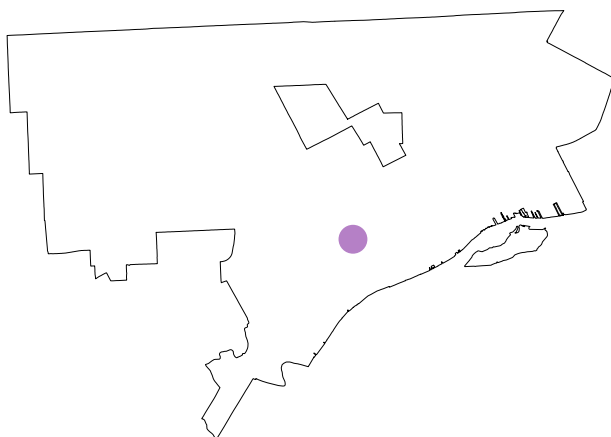
The project is meant to create new and positive use for the forgotten landscape of the city and to create a meeting place for the neighborhood. The first phase of the park was built this summer, later phases will make the park expand in the neighborhood through the back alleys and one of the vacant houses will serve as a mini indoor park. A lot of people are involved in the project, both local and national artists and skateboard industry professionals together with the teens in the neighborhood. A lot of both local and international sponsors have made the project possible and through crowd funding, phase two will start being constructed in spring 2013.

Ride It Sculpture Park is a project within the network of *Power House Productions*, a non-profit organization focusing on neighborhood stabilization through art and culture. It was founded in 2009 by the married couple, the architect Gina and the artist Mitch, who didn't have time to meet me. Already in 2007, they started to investigate new models of contemporary art and architectural practice, seeking to experiment within their community. Since 2008 the test site in Hamtramck, the Power House, was initiated, a place for conversations and to test ideas. The Power House has two functions for investigating off-grid power production. First it creates its own energy by using solar and wind power, second it implies a control of your own neighborhood with an example of self-reliance and sustainability by creating local power grids. Ride It Sculpture Park is situated close to the Power House.

Summary

- Investments are made possible through sponsors and crowd funding.
- The project involves both international professionals and local teens.
- The founding artists are working with various community building projects in the same area.





TIMEFRAME: 1987-ONGOING

SCALE: 5 LOTS

ADDRESS: 3951 LINCOLN STREET

25th of September

Bob greets me at his porch and invites me in to his big red brick house built in 1982. It is situated in the neighborhood of Woodbridge and he has lived there the last 25 years. Bob is a 60 year old native Detroit.

Bob's house is one of the houses left on his side of the block. There used to be about six. One of the neighbor houses that was there when he moved in was burnt down to get rid of the drug dealers who occupied the house. After that the city dumped a lot of debris, waste material from other houses on the lot next to his. Not a nice neighbor so Bob bought the lots next to him from the city for \$750. Not to do so much work, but at least it was his junk now, today it is covered by vegetation and creating a little forest. The lot closest to the intersection of the streets the city wanted to keep, they cut the grass (and take care of the sidewalk) and the plan is to build new houses in the future. There is a development plan but not enough money.

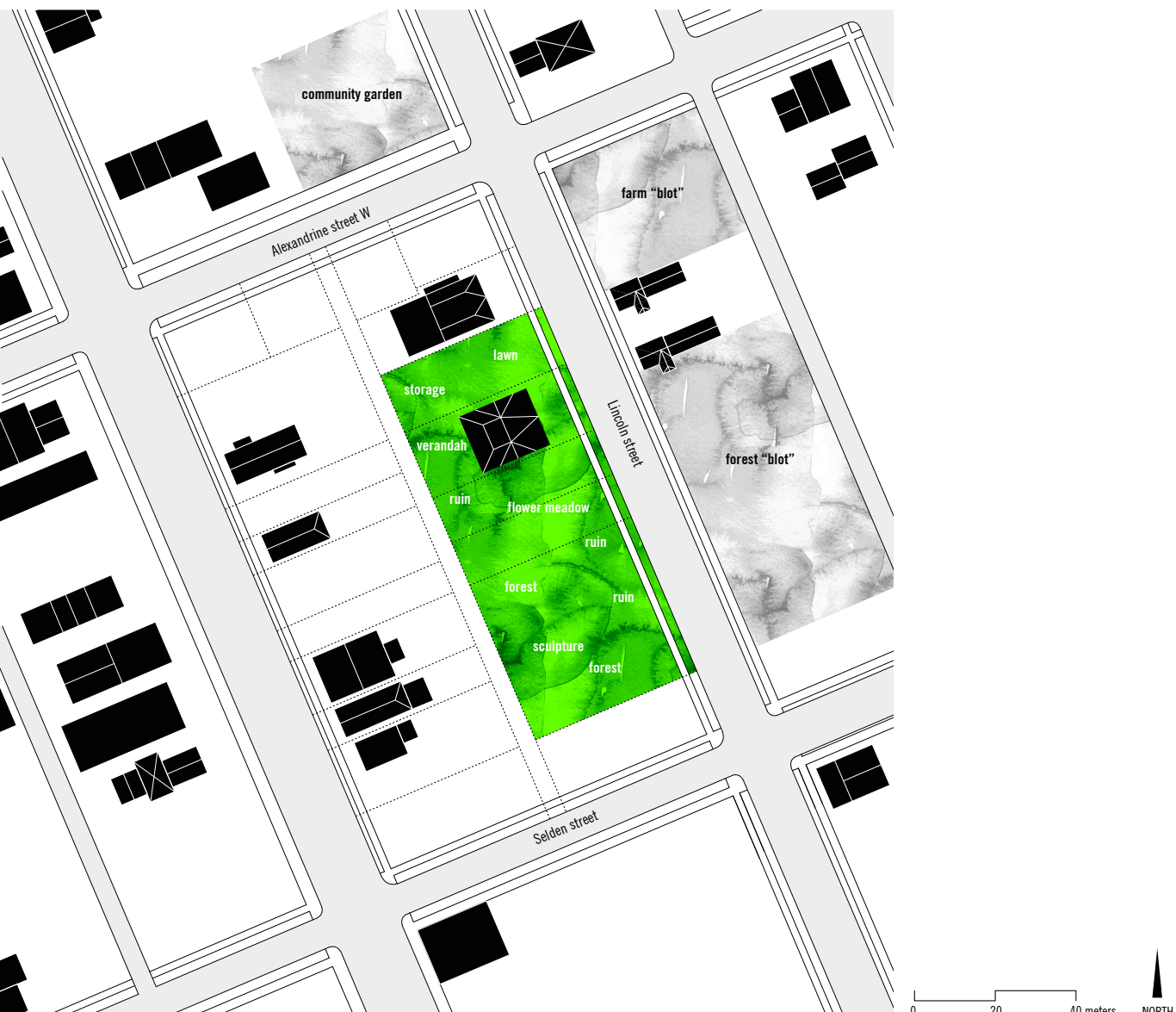
When he and his former wife bought the house for \$1, he could never have imagined all the work that had to (and still has to) be done, if he would have known, he tells me, he probably wouldn't have bought the house. The house used to be two units but in the 30's it got transformed to small apartments. When Bob and the wife started their work with the house it was abandoned and burnt out. The roof was leaking and it turned out that they saved the walls from falling down just in time. In one room the floor fell down and created a big space from the second floor down to the basement. That's where Bob now have his studio, mostly painting naked fat people. Inspiration is found everywhere he says.

The house has a lot of stories, is a collection of parts from other houses found on demolition sites. The living room has four found columns decorating the space together with a lot of art on the walls. The stories also consist of scars, from the metal scrappers that stripped the house. There is, for example, a hole in the stairs where the hand reeling used to be, and the beams in the ceiling are black from previous fires. The biggest challenge for Bob is money. He has already put in about \$150,000 and more is needed.

WHAT IS REAL AND WHAT IS JUST A JOKE?

Bob knows the few neighbors along the way too wide street where streetcars used to run. The closest neighbor across the street also own a few lots. They have their own little forest and used to have a pool in a foundation from a former house but it started to leak. On the street there is also a young couple living that newly moved in and a house with squatters, they don't do any harm Bob says.

We enter the garden. The grass is nicely cut closest to the house, some areas are left to create prairies for the butterflies. A stone path is leading the way to the back alley, now closed and not used anymore. Bob has a big storage with collected stones from demolished houses and churches, some of which he as used to build a verandah. The newest addition to the garden is his ruin, or sunken garden, made of stones from a former church. It is planted with ornamental cannas with dark tropical



leaves. Vegetables is not an option, it is too much work.

When I ask if he uses his garden a lot he says; *“No, it mostly remind me about all the work that has to be done. The dogs use it, and the pheasants and rabbits enjoy his little forest where the nature did most of the work.”*

The part furthest away from his house is the little self-sown forest. On the hard packed debris poplars and elm and ivy have been able to grow wild. The ground is covered with ivy. Under the vegetation has the wood that was dumped here have rotten, the concrete remains which has created topography in the other so flat terrain of Detroit. Here and there you can find stone statues and Bob likes to create follies, fool people of what used to be there. On some places, Bob have arranged the concrete and brick remains so that it looks like the foundation of the house that once was here. But it is just a joke.

Summary

- Expanding your property on adjacent vacant lots to have control over them.
- Invading plants can serve as a wildlife habitat.
- Having fun while dealing with Detroit’s issues.



Bob outside his forest.



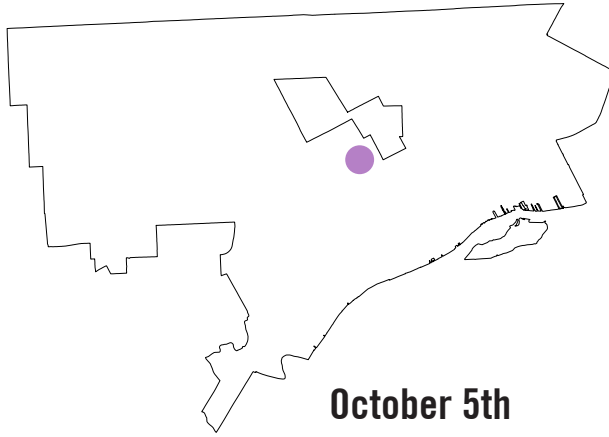
One of the fake ruins in the forest.

TEMPORARY INITIATIVES VS. LONG TERM COMMITMENT?



6. BLOOMTOWN DETROIT

BY ARCHITECTURE STUDENT



TIMEFRAME: 2010-?
SCALE: 6 LOTS
ADDRESS: OAKLAND STREET

October 5th

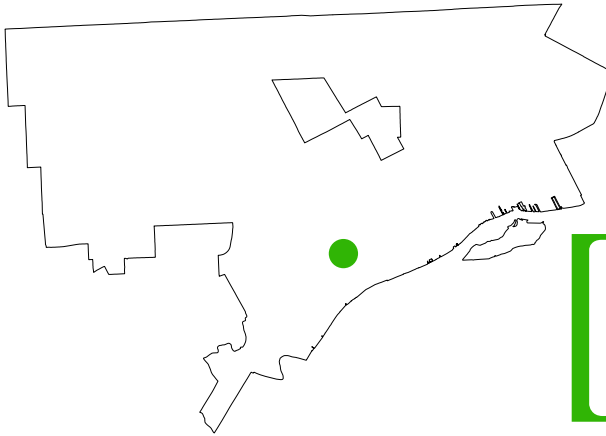
When I found the webpage for the project Bloomtown Detroit it caught my attention with a beautiful concept and photos. The project started 2010 by an architect student from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She had visited Detroit a lot of times and the project was meant to remember the once thriving American city and celebrate its rebirth. Bloomtown wanted to combine architecture and art seeking to engage individuals in many capacities, to inspire change and to raise awareness of your surroundings. Six vacant lots along Oakland Street were transformed to colorful flower gardens changing with the seasons, designed like the floor plan of the razed house that once occupied the lot. They were meant to be places for both calm and activity nodes of the neighborhood. I contacted the person behind the project. No answer but one day I happened to find it, it is situated on one of my regular bike routes.

Biking by the lots today, two years after the project started, it looks just like all the other vacant lots. Only the faded purple Bloomtown signs are telling another story but no other vegetation than the surrounding lots are to be found. After reading about the project it didn't seem like the project was meant to be temporary. The project started as an idea and wasn't commissioned by anyone, it was made possible with sponsors. I'm wondering about the process of the project and if the neighbors participated in it. What did the project mean to them when it had its blooming period and what do they think about it now? Were the neighbors interested in taking over the maintenance? To establish the project locally could be the difference between a cool project and to contribute with something meaningful. Now the project is left abandoned and the neighbors are left with the neglect, even though it is a minor neglect compared to other issues in the city. Maybe this neglect is worse than just a vacant lot? The project gave hope and now it is slowly fading with the project itself.

Summary

- Local anchoring is important for a project's survival.
- Remove temporary projects after the project has served its purpose.





TIMEFRAME: 2003-ONGOING
SCALE: 12 LOTS/1 ACRE
ADDRESS: 2913 ROSA PARKS BOULEVARD

September 17th

When I contacted Greg for an interview and he said that interviews are best held in the farm connected to the work so this day, I'm there to volunteer in the farm. The farm is situated in Corktown, a neighborhood with more than 60% vacant lots. Greg started his urban farm in 2003, it has expanded it since then. Greg wanted to see if he could make a living of farming, something he found possible. He also wants to make fresh produce more accessible and have a local control over the food system. Greg has an academic background and used to work as an English middle school teacher.

The farm is organic, non-GMO, mostly growing herbs, salads and edible flowers but also beans, tomatoes and chard. Every Wednesday someone from Brother Nature Produce is present at the Wayne State University market selling fresh salad picked the same day as it is served. On Saturday's it is Eastern Market where people from all over Metro Detroit come to buy local produce. They also sell produce through Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) where 30 people come each week during the half-year season to pick up local fresh produce at the farm together with a dish that Greg has prepared.

Olivia, Greg's wife, is also involved in the farm. They both work at the farm and they have had a lot of volunteers throughout the years. Today I meet Stephanie at the farm. She has moved from the suburbs and lives with Greg and Olivia since a few months back to work with the farm 40 hours a week. Ty, a neighbor (Spaulding Court) and an employee of the soon-to-be-urban-farm (Recovery Park) is also there to help today.

On today's work list there is improvement of the soil. Lifting, removing stones, branches and other things such as pieces of plastic, glass or porcelain. The small pieces of plastic, glass and bricks tells about the sites former usage, there used to be a house here. Questions as how the soil and ground can be used for farming after a house has packed the soil arise. Greg have done a lot of soil testing and also added a new layer

CITY FARMER AS A FULLTIME JOB

of soil. To improve the soil even more Greg started a compost business with a friend. Additions to the compost are collected from the local beer breweries and coffee shops.

When working to add compost to the soil, at a few places, the pitchfork hits a hard surface two feet under the soil's surface. It is probably some remaining pieces of the former concrete ground of the house that used to be here.

There is a lot of work with the soil before we finally put in the seeds of the salad mizuna of the mustard family. Stephanie and me talk about education, country life in the city and the future for Detroit over the sowing. Is farming the solution? She doesn't think that most of the people living here now are interested in becoming farmers and to import farmers would be hard, and probably not right?



27th September

A few weeks later I'm back to do some work in the farm and to deepen our conversation. Today it is time to harvest for the CSA, Brother Nature Produce is one of three CSA present in Detroit. Stephanie and me harvest salad, green and purple beans, rainbow Swiss chard, green zebra tomatoes, kale and herbs such as thyme, rosemary, Lemon verbena, sage and cilantro. Greg is in the kitchen preparing the dish, a hot sauce with beet, ginger, cilantro and onion that goes with the CSA this week.

Over the harvest Stephanie and me talks about the proposed Urban Agriculture Ordinance that was presented by the Detroit City Planning Committee this Monday, a meeting we both went to. We agreed on the meeting's positive atmosphere and that the city planners are working together with the farmers trying to legalize farming in the city. We talk about the right to the city based on a comment made by a woman at

the meeting. The woman had the opinion that only native Detroiters and people who have lived here at least 18 years would get the permission to start a farm. There is a worry that after the new zoning laws have passed that big corporations will come here and buy a lot of cheap land. We both have heard various comments, both positive and negative, on being foreigners coming to Detroit. Are we a part of an unwanted gentrification process or does the city need all new inhabitants it could attract? The question is too complex to solve right now and I leave the farm with a bag full of vegetables and herbs together with new questions.

Summary

- Urban farming can serve as an economic income.
- Provide healthy, fresh and local produce to Detroiters through community shared agriculture and farmers markets.
- Soil testing and soil improvements are required to grow healthy food.
- Working together with other people to create compost.



Ty operating the farm's tractor.



Respect
This
Space!!

Garlic

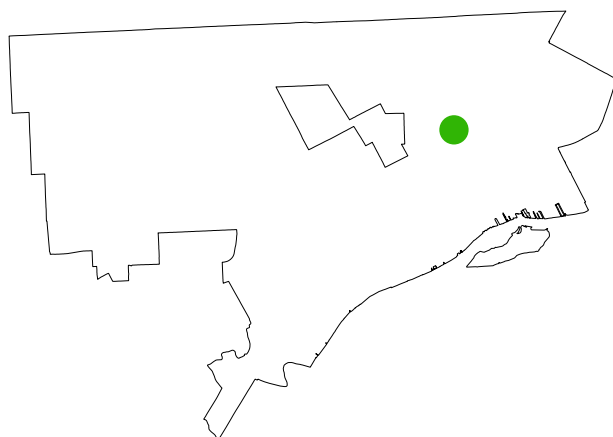
Peace

CARROTS

CABBAGE

8. GEORGIA STREET COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

BY MARK



TIMEFRAME: 1997-ONGOING
SCALE: 20 LOTS
ADDRESS: 1264 MELDRUM STREET

October 25th

Mark greets me on Georgia Street in front of the neighborhoods community house that he founded. Mark is a native Detroit and he grew up in this neighborhood, today he is 40 years old. His mother and grandmother still lives here too. We start talking about how his project, Georgia Street Community Collective (GSCC), started. In 2008 Mark got laid off from his work as an environmental technician. He came home and was provoked by the garbage on the empty lots next to his house and started to clean them. When they were cleaned he got inspired to do something more and he got the idea to start a garden. Today the project consists of a total of 20 lots, all of them owned by the city but GSCC try to save money to be able to purchase the lots. In the garden Mark grow vegetables together with the kids in the neighborhood. Everyone is invited to pick whatever he or she need. He also planted an orchard and created a gathering place with a fireside encircled of wooden colorful furniture and a wall for outdoor film screenings. Closest to the community house, is where the animals live. Mark started to have some chickens to get manure for the garden, he didn't get roosters until he talked to his neighbors. Today the animal farm consists of 5 ducks, 30+chickens and roosters and two goats, a mum and her child. The dad goat got killed by wild dogs, which made Mark build more safe cages for the animals made of pallets and chicken wire.

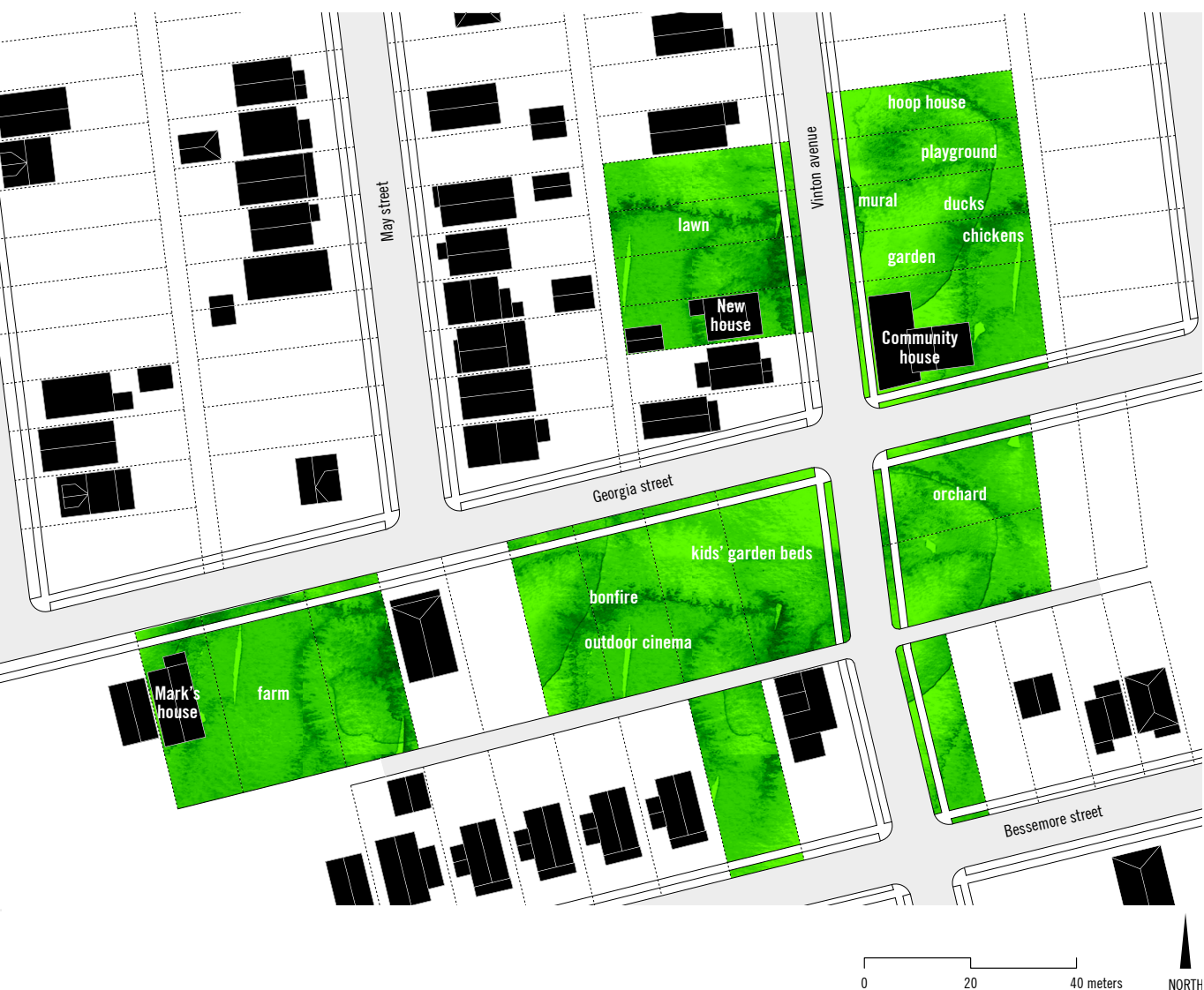
GSCC also consists of a playground with a little house with a slide, some swings and a small hoop house. Mark tells me about one of his visions: *"I want to grow every day of the year."* To be able to do so, Mark needs a heated greenhouse with lights. And also some help. Even though the neighbors appreciate, respect and look after the garden they don't commit to any work. The biggest challenge for the whole project is to get the neighbors to help. Every start of the season Mark has volunteers to help, for example college students and the kids from the neighborhood.

Mark bought the community house for \$1. After a lot of renovations this is a place where the neighbors gather, watch sports, do educational cooking and throw parties. There is also a library and a room with six computers, which are very popular for the kids, so popular that the

community collective will expand the amount of computers. They recently bought the house on the opposite side of the street for a good price. In that house there will be more space for an additional computer lab, a wardrobe with donated clothes and upstairs sleeping conveniences will be provided. A lot of work has to be done though. Today there are no doors, windows or bathroom and kitchen facilities. The plumbing is stolen and everywhere the paint is falling of.

I ask Mark about his motivation. The answer is that there are so many but it all started with cleaning up the trash, to be able to live in an environment without garbage outside the house. Mark also wants to see his neighbors happy. *“I like when they come by saying that I’m doing a good job. I like when they say thank you for the food. I like to see the smiles on the kids’ faces when they are coming after school. I guess to put all that under one umbrella would be to say that I want to see my city do better and this to me, is me doing my part. And when I leave here nobody can say that Mark didn’t do something.”*

One goal for GSCC is to inspire the kids and when they get a bit older they can do the same thing. Mark remembers Mr. Turner who



I DIDN'T GET ROOSTERS UNTIL I TALKED TO MY NEIGHBORS"

and in the end they were able to get him buried. I would say that if it weren't for the garden that probably wouldn't have happened, because then we wouldn't be out talking to each other."

Since Mark grew up in the neighborhood he has seen it change a lot. The street was full of houses. *"I remember the bakery, an Italian bakery*

on the corner where the garden is now. That bakery would serve the churches with bread and sweets. This used to be a catholic church. We didn't have a lot of vacant lots when I was a kid, just a couple that we used to play on but yeah, it has changed a lot." Many people are still living on the block, most of the people have been here 15 years or more. An exception to this was a man from California. He bought Mark's grandmothers old house not so long ago. He wanted to start a permaculture farm and to partner up with Mark. Mark tells me that this man didn't make as much money on the farm as he was hoping for so he left the house and moved back to California. Now Mark view this now abandoned house every day. It is situated on the other side of the street where he lives, and it is getting more and more blighted. Time will tell if it will become another vacant lot.

Summary

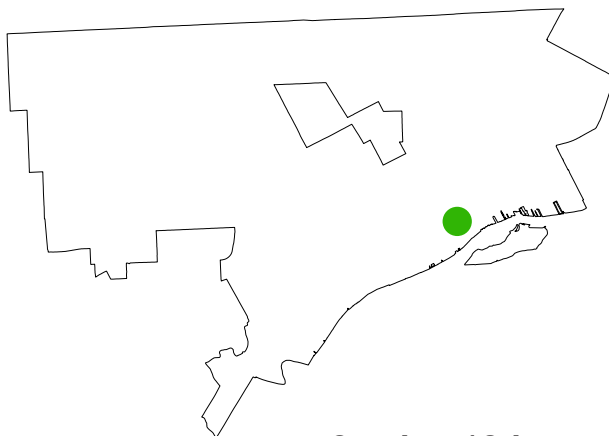
- Transforming vacant lots let you take control over the neglect of your neighborhood.
- Positive impact and education for the kids can inspire and motivate them to be a part of a positive change for the city.
- A public place to gather and talk can build community and connect people.



Mark and his turkey.



BY CAPUCHIN SOUP KITCHEN



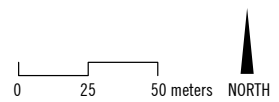
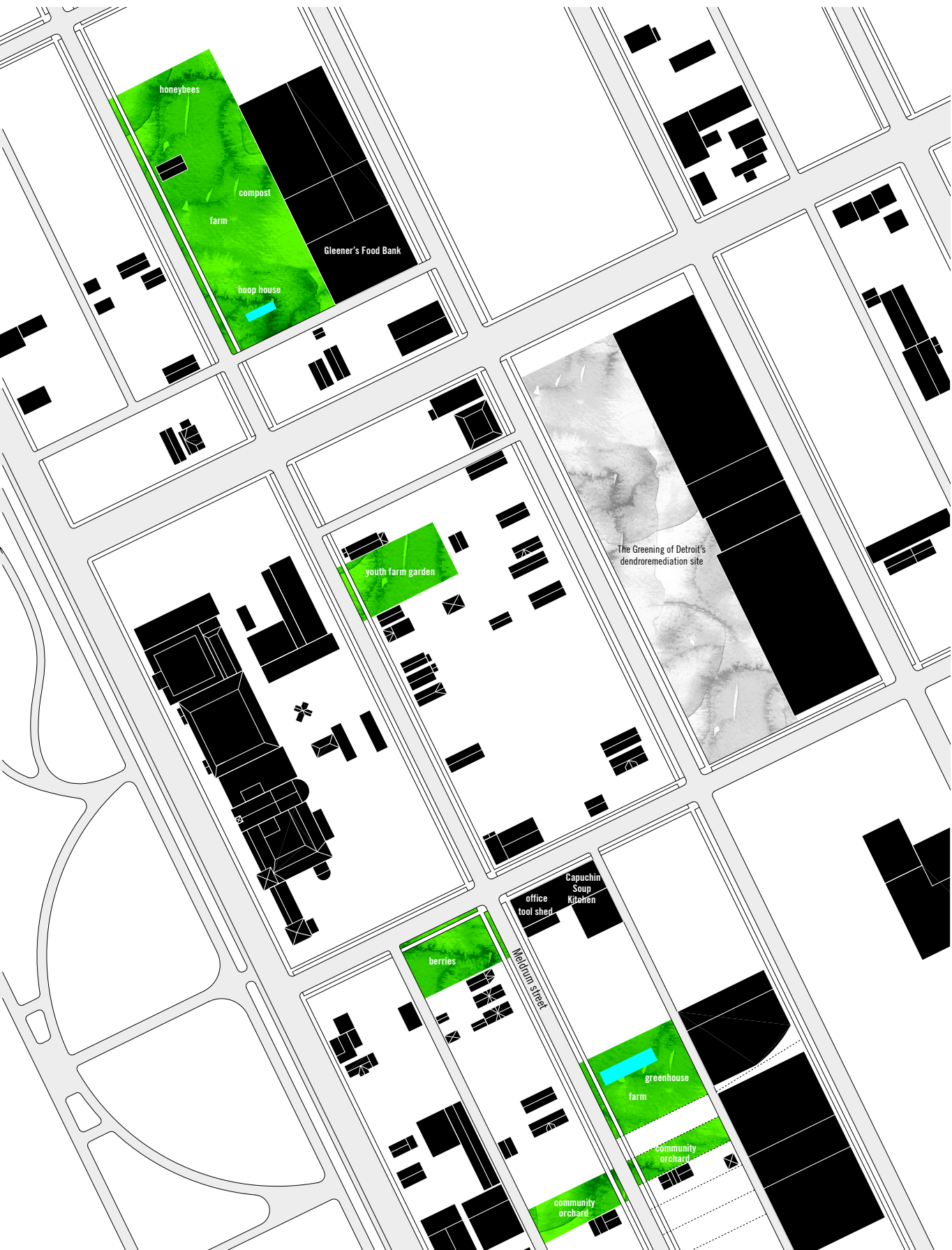
TIMEFRAME: 1997-ONGOING
SCALE: 20 LOTS
ADDRESS: 1264 MELDRUM STREET

October 10th

Many people that I have met in Detroit have told me about Earthworks Urban Farm as an interesting project worth visiting. It also appeared in the documentary *Urban Roots* that I saw prior to my departure to Detroit. This Wednesday morning, a little late, somewhat due to a flat tire on my bike, I manage to localize the farm and the volunteers of today.

The farm started in 1997 by the friar Brother Rick who worked with the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, a human service organization that, since 1929, feed the hungry and take care of the poor. Brother Rick started farming on a small lot to connect the food that they serve with the land that the food comes from. The farm has grown since then and now consists of 20 lots divided into seven gardens within a two blocks radius from the headquarters in the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. Today it is one of the bigger farms in Detroit and Earthworks work to promote sustainable agricultural practices together with nutrition and care for the earth. They strive for peace, respect and harmony between neighbor and nature. It is a work of social justice as well as getting more connected to the food we eat. About 90% of the produce go to the kitchen but that is not enough for the about 800 meals per day that they serve, both breakfast and lunch, five days a week. A lot of donations and sponsors help the soup kitchen survive to feed hungry Detroiters.

Every Wednesday and Saturday they have volunteer days from 9-12 and that's why I am there today. I immediately got invited to help preparing the garlic to be planted. We peel the garlic from last year, prepare the soil, measure the distance between the cloves, make rows, holes and put the cloves in the ground. The final step is to cover it with a few centimeters of haulms. Over the garlic peeling I talk to Shane who works at Earthworks as an outreach coordinator. He is a native Detroiters and grew up just a few blocks from the farm. I ask if there are any plans to expand the farm further and he replies: *"Not really. We want the participating volunteers to be able to start their own farms and don't be dependent on us. We want to create a market where we collaborate instead of compete."* When I tell him about my thesis and the search for possibilities for the vacant land



“WE TRY TO COLLABORATE INSTEAD OF COMPETE”

he makes a comment on the term vacant. *“Who is the land vacant for? We are just referring to that since we want to build houses everywhere. That’s the norm we humans have created. But the trees and shrubs north of this farm is a well functioning ecosystem and not vacant at all.”*

There is a French film team at the farm today, one female reporter and a cameraman try to capture the work at the farm. They are very straightforward and ask if the volunteers think that farming really is a good idea. Kelly who has been a part of the nine months training program and now have more responsibilities at the farm, replies yes, and that she wants to start her own farm in the near future. The cameraman makes her put garlic cloves on the camera lens, apparently a nice way of fading the scene. I ask Patrick, the program manager, if they get tired of all the people that want to do interviews, documentaries or take photos. *“No, I take photos all the time myself”*, Patrick answers.

Right before 12 pm it is time to wrap things up. The wheelbarrows gets filled with used tools, remaining garlic cloves and the harvest of today and the volunteers start walking the five minutes walk back to the tool shed and Soup Kitchen to get ready for the lunch. A guy spontaneously starts singing and clapping his hands: *“It’s time to circle up... Clap clap... Time to circle up.”* A circle start to take shape on the parking lot with the volunteers of today, dancing and clapping. Standing in the circle we share what we have done during the day; harvesting sweet potatoes, potatoes, green beans and garlic planting. Kelly reads a text that she wrote about the right to healthy food, otherwise it is quite silent in the circle today. Perhaps because of the cameraman that is bumping in to us while getting the perfect shot.

When I leave after the lunch consisting of a white bean soup, a tomato salad, sandwich, crackers and cookies together with a glass of milk, I see two guys fixing their bikes on the parking lot. It turns out that they have a bike repairing shop in a container there on Wednesday afternoons and they happily help me get my tire fixed so I can bike the approximately five kilometers back to the house where I live.

October 31th: Talking about the bigger picture

A few weeks later I am back at the farm for an interview with the farm and program manager, Patrick, to understand more about the work at Earthworks. The interview is taking place inside the greenhouse. Patrick has worked with Earthworks for nine years and been in Detroit for ten. He started as a volunteer and has had his current position for four years where he manages the day to day farming and program activities, manages the staff and finds funding and partnerships.

I ask about how you can engage with Earthworks. Patrick replies that there is multiple ways to engage in the farm, there is no size fits all. One scenario is to volunteer and there are various ways and reasons to volunteer. Some people come for just one day, others are more regular volunteers and they come to give back to the community, want education or some have a court ordered community service they have to do. If people are interested they can apply for a one-year long residency where they work at the farm 24 hours a week and get paid. The people that Earthworks try to recruit for those positions are predominately people from the neighborhood, coming to the soup kitchen or emerging leaders of Detroit. The overlap between volunteers and people coming to the soup kitchen are pretty minimal and Patrick tell me that they have spent a lot of time trying to recruit people and to engage them but that haven't given that much result yet. *"I would say that the majority of people are relatively affluent and often comes from the suburbs. And then we have a group of, maybe a handful of people, that come from the soup kitchen to volunteer. It is a smaller percentage but those who come from the kitchen are also some of the most consistent. They are the one that come every single week."*

I ask Patrick too about future expansions for the farm and he answers that they are really interested in managing what they have as well as possible. *"We try to make what we have here better, and more well managed more productive than acquire more piece of land. It is more about the quality than quantity. That's not to say that we aren't interested in expanding."* They got an offer by the community partner who runs Gleaners Food Bank down the street who wants to build



Making straight rows with the appropriate distance for garlic cloves.

garden beds to be able to hold workshops. Gleaners collect and distribute food to those who need and the workshops would mostly be mostly for people that are running soup kitchens and pantries to teach them about starting community gardens, using fresh food in their kitchen. Gleaners asked Earthworks if they could take care of this and to teach those classes. *“So that’s an example of an expansion but it is not like looking for huge amounts of land, that is not our priority. Part of it is to develop community capacity.”* Patrick gives another example. Earthworks are looking at building another greenhouse to be able to provide a requested space for people who don’t have the means or space to put up their own. Besides of providing space, they also provide plug seedlings from their existing greenhouses. Gleaners Food Bank also approached Earthworks to take care of their land that now is Earthworks biggest garden. Earthworks own a few lots themselves, other owners are various individuals and one is owned by the city. They are working on the paperwork to acquire it.

When I ask Patrick about the biggest challenges for the farm he tell me that they are mostly minor ones. *“I think we are really fortunate of the amount of support that we get.”*

We continue to talk about farming in a bigger perspective, could that be a solution for the vacant lots Detroit? He starts by saying: *“Well I moved to a city because I wanted to live in a city. I don’t want Detroit just be farmland.”* He continues to explain that he would like to see what you find in other cities, a decent public transportation system, walkable neighborhoods with shops, laundromats, drugstores etc. Patrick is certainly interested in having market gardens tucked into neighborhoods that can support them. He follow up by talking about the big impact a large scale farm would have when farms and properties become 200-400 acres of land, especially if they are single person owned. *“I don’t think that they really have the ability to embrace community needs and to be reactive. I’m really interested in smaller more intensively farmed parcels. I mean I think that there is something to be gained for profit venture but for me really the most important thing is for people to be able to grow food for their own consumption and not necessary to be making money.”*

Patrick has noticed a gentrification process of Detroit and that concerns him, even though most people think it is ridiculous and difficult to imagine that that could happen to Detroit but more neighborhood that used to be considered worthless, have become valuable. *“The point when you start farming for money and when it has economic value, this change the way that people interpret the work, oh, it has economic value, that’s what it’s worth. Then it looses sight of all the much more important things to me. And that’s about community building, that’s about new generations learning, that’s about culture sharing, that’s about people having relationships with lands and that gets lost when all you put on it is economic value. Those are the things that I’m interested in, the things that you can’t put a price on.”*

The interview ends with my question, if he is planning to stay here in Detroit. *“I’m not planning on going anywhere. Where else is there to go?”* Two people knock on the door to the greenhouse. It’s time for Patrick’s next interview.

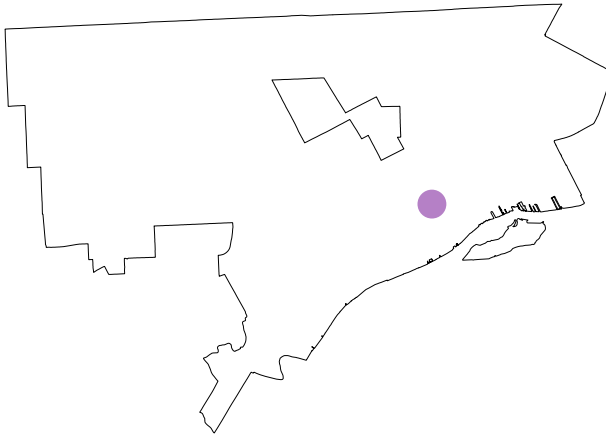
Summary

- Farming as education and support for people to start their own farms.
- Food justice and spreading knowledge about the right and possibility to eat healthy food.
- Media attention on “the farming movement in Detroit”.
- The impact of farming on the neighborhoods based on the scale of the farms.
- Growing for profit vs. community farms and gardens.



POLICE
TRAINING IN
PROGRESS

BY TYREE



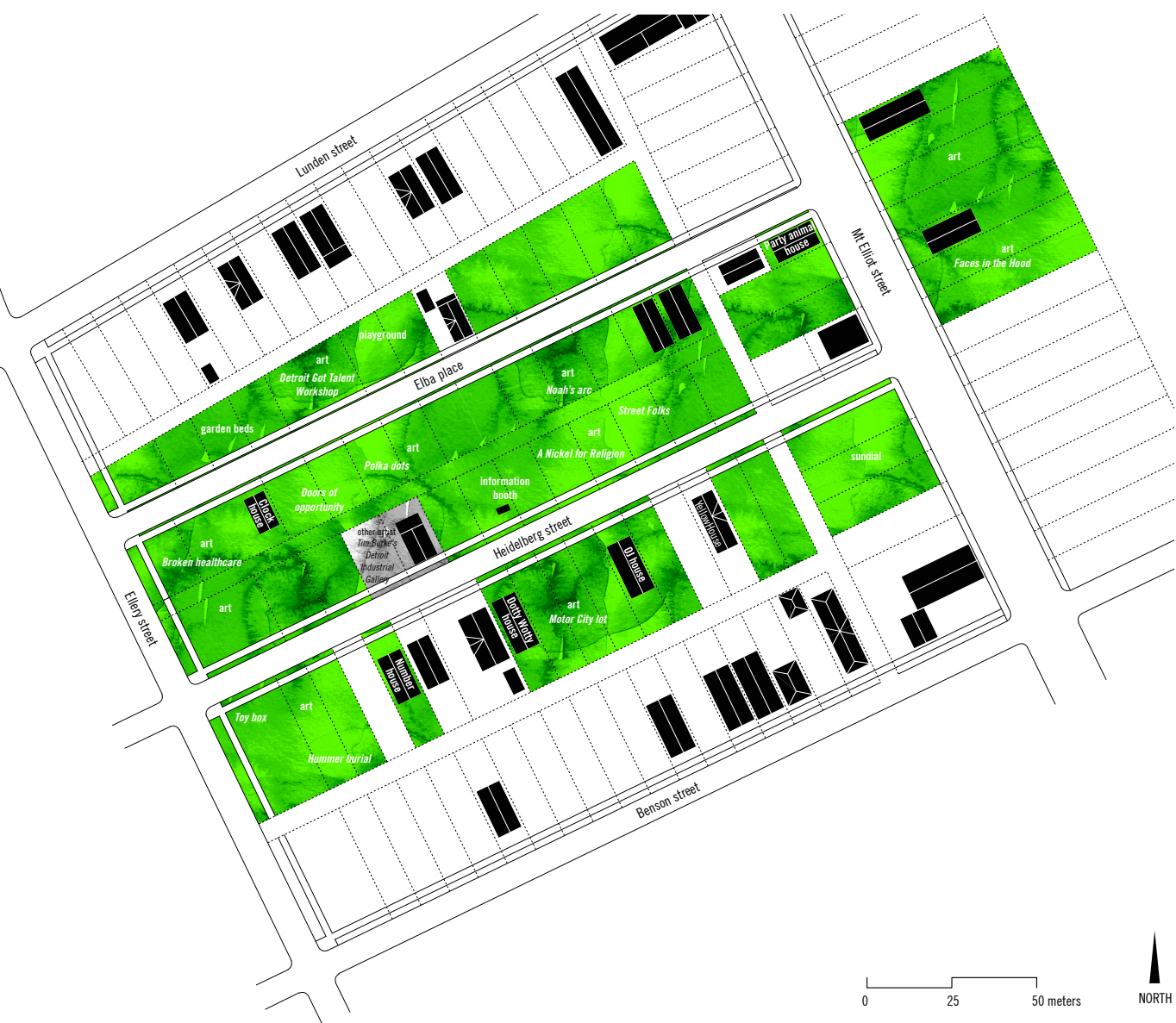
TIMEFRAME: 1987-ongoing
 SCALE: 53 LOTS + 9 HOUSES
 ADDRESS: 3600 HEIDELBERG STREET

September 9th

Biking on the storied Heidelberg Street, the first thing I see is a pale green house covered with stuffed animals nailed on the façade. Their colors have faded in the sun. The asphalt on the Heidelberg Street is filled with red, blue, pink, yellow, white, green dots in various sizes and the sidewalks are painted with faces, most of them smiling. Another house on the street is completely covered with objects, shopping trolleys, car toys, dolls, painted boards with shoes, street signs, tires, clocks and more. The next house is dotted and the one after that filled with painted numbers.

There are quite a few “normal” houses on the street too. One with a lady on the porch, she holler that I should come and sign her guestbook. For a donation I got to sign it, the guestbook is her yellow house. The money raised will go to a renovation of the house and she shows me a newly installed garden bed near the entrance. I get a felt pen, a ladder and I can choose wherever I want to write on the house. The porch is almost covered with names belonging to people visiting from all over the world. After I’m done I get a yellow post-it with “*YellowHouse Guestbook on Facebook*”, there, each day all the new names will be uploaded as photos.

The trunks on the street trees are packed with things and from the branches, there are pairs of shoes hanging. On the empty lots surrounding the houses the grass is nicely cut and the lawn works as an art display. Here you can find buried cars, doors, painted engine hoods, boards painted with taxis and watches, piles with furniture, oil drums and shoes. In the middle there is a boat bursting with stuffed animals. It is possible to easily walk around and across the lots, that’s not very usual in the city. Doing that, surrounded by an explosion of colors and various objects compiled in several ways - you could call it garbage, you could call it art - is quite overwhelming and nothing like I’ve experienced before. It is an interesting way of using salvaged objects but it also hard to grasp the extent of this transformation. Art in a new context with people living in it. Questions arise. Is this a good way to approach the blight of the city? I wonder how is it to live on this street and what all these assembled things represent as art?



November 9th

The Heidelberg Project (HP) started in 1986 by the artist Tyree Guyton who grew up on the street. It is an ongoing outdoor community art environment and today it is one of the most visited cultural tourist attractions in Detroit.

Tyree experienced the riots in 1967 and by his grandfather he got inspired to use his brush. He eventually responded to the blight in his impoverished neighborhood by starting to appropriate abandoned houses with art. One of the aim for the project is to use art as a medicine, healing and as a catalyst for change. The mission is to inspire people to appreciate and use artistic expressions to enrich their daily lives and improve their community. By working with the children in the neighborhood, educate them in art, community and environment they get another perspective on the blight they see every day. There can be positive change.

In the middle of November I have arranged a guided tour and interview to get a deeper understanding of the art at the street. My guide Milana is the program coordinator for HP that now has become a non-profit organization with seven staff members. Milana is originally from the suburbs and after receiving her Bachelor of Fine Arts she moved to Detroit and have worked with the project for a bit more than a year.

We start the tour next to her favorite project on the street, The Number House. *“The family who lived here had been here for many generations and, like a lot of the neighbors, didn’t really understand what the project was about but really wanted to be a part of it in some capacity. The mother went to Tyree and said we want to be a part of this can you paint our house. And Tyree painted numbers all over it, and this is actually how the kids in the house learned how to count many years ago. Last year the mother in the house passed away and the children gave us the house and now we put art shows in it.”*

“Tyree uses a lot of simple symbolism, makes us think of what is the best use of our time, where are we going? He is very active and I think he works in the night too, these planks just got up and things have always changed when you get here.”

The inspiration for the colored dots, an ongoing theme for the whole project, came from jellybeans, all similar yet different, like people, and are a celebration of color and diversity.

On one lot is a pile of oil drums to memorize oil spill, how we use too much oil. The “Motor city lot” with cars, is again questioning where we are going and what we are doing. This came to piece when the government was bailing auto companies out of bankruptcy. A cabinet filled with shoes with a cash machine are questioning religion, what role does it play? In Detroit there are more churches than schools and a lot of time you gave them your last nickel, it’s a big business. The doors on the lots are doors of opportunities. It makes you think about what doors are open to you, what should you, and can you open? Very simple symbolism and meaning together with opportunity for yourself to interpret the work the way you want. There are no explaining signs, but every weekend there is a small information booth open for the visitors. There you can find info and some merchandise.

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Milana’s first project for HP was for their 25th anniversary (2011), she organized 25 of Tyree’s car hoods with painted faces, *“Faces in the hood”*, together with questions and quotes, for example *“Home is where the art is.”* They were placed all over the city. 25 years ago the project was very different, all these lots had houses on them and it was hard to walk on the sidewalk because of all the objects. Two times (1991 and 1999) were parts of it demolished by the city due to complaints and a lack of understanding towards the project. The project has now gained more acceptance and the neighbors are more involved. The woman who lives in the YellowHouse was originally not supportive. Now she has changed her mind and makes a profit on being involved.

HP owns some of the lots themselves now, just a couple of weeks ago they expanded with four lots for about 3000 dollars. Many of the appropriated lots are still owned by the city.

As we walk around the project I understand that there are a lot of different artists involved.

Milana tell me that HP often partner up with outside organizations and schools. *“Tyree want it to be more community curated and he can’t do everything anymore and it gets more interesting to invite others to do pieces of work to the project. More of a conversation.”* The buried car painted in pink with planted flowers is made by a woman advocacy group that approached HP a few years ago and the piece have stayed. They wanted to give this Hummer a proper burial, a celebration that the manufacturer finally took it off the assembly line and stopped making it. The piece reflects sustainability, being green and stop driving huge cars like this. Another art piece is made by Wayne State Medical students a couple of years ago. It consists of a desk with lined up empty chairs, commenting the broken health care system in the United States. Another group of students made a toy box. *“This piece is from some students from Detroit, they contacted me and wanted to bring a project here. It used to be very big, covered in toys, and it used to be next to the number house. The kids from the neighborhood would just come and play with it and put the toys back. It’s like a toy box, very sweet. We have about 15 kids on the block. There used to be a sign, but the thing with being an outdoor art project is that things fall off. But I’m glad it is still here. It is hard when people are bringing pieces to us and who upkeeps them? A lot of things are falling apart and need to be replaced and things like that. We take down a lot of stuff.”* Every year they have to repaint everything and they just put more animals on the Party Animal House. Since it is outdoor art, often with things made for interior use, things fall apart and the exhibition is always rotating. The decay is not essential for the art.

One neighbor was sick of people walking through his property but he also wanted to be a part of the project. He started to collect tires and made an artistic interpretation of a fence by weaving with tires. HP is realizing more and more that they have to give back to the neighbors who have been here forever and has come to support them. They have to deal with living in a neighborhood that no one ever would visit and now they



My guide Milana and the art piece “Toy box”, made by students.



The sundial made by reclaimed bricks and bottles.

get hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. There is for example a scholarship fund they can apply to and every second year HP have a festival for the neighborhood, Detroit Got Talent. It is kind of a thank you to the neighbors. About 2000 people came for the festival this year. Milana had a workshop at the festival that invited the visitors. On colorful branches you could hang painted CDs and there were a lot of stories and artistic expression. People are excited to be a part of the project even how small it is.

We are approaching the Obstruction of Justice House (1994), one of the original houses. It highlights the injustice of the Simpson trial. This house is completely covered with various things attached to both the facade and the roof. On the top there is an old Mickey Mouse overlooking the street. All the houses, trees and sidewalks used to have this amount of objects attached to them back in the days.

There is music coming from the house. *“Tyree always listen to classical music when he does his art. It is important to him, it speaks to him and he loves it.”* The classical music is blended with a police siren. It is time to end the interview, Milana have to continue working. A fundraiser will take place on Friday and there is still a lot of work to do. We bike by the combined studio of Tyree and the office of Milana. He works approximately half of the time in the studio. This evening he is out

working with one of his latest projects, an installation on an abandoned building next to the studio/office. He asks us *“What is art today?”* After a long and complex answer by me, trying to sound somewhat smart talking to this great artist and reflecting what I have seen today, I ask him the same question and he replies simply: *“You, me and everything around us.”*

Summary

- Create a conversation through art and use it as medicine and a catalyst for change.
- Great importance of involving neighbors and letting them understand the project.
- Understanding art can make you appreciate it more, it is not just about saving junk.
- An ongoing and evolving process, the erasure by the city government didn't end the project.



The Dotty Wotty House



September 6th: The membership bus tour

The Greening of Detroit (GD) started their work in 1989 with the mission to provide “*sustainable growth of a healthy urban community through trees, green spaces, food, education, training and job opportunities.*” It is a non-profit organization supported by private funding and sponsors and they work in collaboration with the City of Detroit, landowners, block clubs and neighborhood organizations to repurpose vacant land and how that could satisfy many of the residents’ needs.

Today GD’s members, who contribute with funding to their work, are invited to a bus tour to see some of GD’s work in reality and how valuable the contributions are. About 40 people have showed up for the two-hour tour where we get to see a variation of their work on many locations around the city. Their work is divided into three areas; Urban Agriculture and Open Space, Green Infrastructure and Education.

The first stop on the tour is the neighborhood Corktown where more than 60% is vacant land. It is here GD has their office. The focus of the tour in this neighborhood is urban agriculture and open space. The Open Space Program is working with community members to support existing gardens and to plan new green projects on the vacant lots to make them productive and beautiful community spaces. The first guide Ashley, the director for the Urban Agriculture and Open Space Program, talks about a food movement and a green revolution in Detroit. She says that 50% of the vegetables needed in Detroit could be produced here. Five different projects are presented on urban agriculture and open space.

First we take a look at the Pine Street Tree Nursery where over 200 trees were planted 2010. It is a temporary nursery and these young trees will later be transplanted throughout the community as street trees. Altogether GD have planted over 70 000 trees and are aiming for a 40% tree canopy in the city. One reason for planting trees is to mitigate the storm water runoff to the Great Lakes ecosystem. With the trees, less contaminations and pollutants go directly to the Lake Erie since the water filtrate through the trees and the soil.

Vermont Street Community Garden is a new community garden planted this year with the youths in the neighborhood. Every Sunday they have a potluck.

Hope Takes Root is a community garden that started in 1995. It has a permaculture plot, honey bees, hoops garden and they collect rainwater to use in the garden.

Greg from Brother Nature Produce introduces us to his farm and to Grown in Detroit, a cooperative that supports small local growers that he is connected to. Before we drive from Corktown we take a quick look at the Corktown Community Orchard with 14 pear, plum and peach trees together with hazelnut shrubs.

GROWING TOMORROWS' DETROIT

Our next stop is Downtown, where 30-40% of the land is vacant. The gardens we take a look at here are all connected to DG's education program. The Plum Street Market Garden is situated on land owned by MGM Grand Casino. One model to

do an urban farm is to do it in partnership, like here with MGM Grand Casino. In 2008 GD established the Youth Growing Detroit program to foster the youth of Detroit to be stakeholders in the local food movement. This farm engages the city youth as the gardens primary growers and entrepreneurs with guidance from GD's staff. Together they will be ready to take on the leadership of the new generation of city growers and entrepreneurs. This garden has more of an exclusive design with steel and stone, an idea to reflect the city in the choice of material.

In the neighborhood Eastern Market, in cooperation with the Eastern Market Corporation, the Detroit Market Garden is located. This 2,5 acre garden have only been in use for a few months and is GD's first production oriented garden. It will serve as urban farm training, production and processing location, increasing the amount of produce available for sale in Detroit by 35 000 pounds annually. The garden will be connected to its surroundings with a new greenway from Mack Avenue to Gratiot Street on an old railroad.

The bus tour continues, this time a bit further east to look at other aspects of greening that organization does, green infrastructure. The landscape architect Dean tells us more about this when we arrive at American Dismantlers and Recycling Inc. Dendroremediation site. The soil at this site contains a lot of contaminations, it used to be a railroad here. To remove the contaminations and at the same time increase the property value, a temporary forest is planted. The chosen trees are aspen,

cottonwood and willows; they have the ability to remove contaminants. This is a pilot project and the research has just begun to improve the city's ecosystem by dendroremediation, cleaning the soil with vegetation.

Back on the bus Devon talks about GD's Work Force Development. It is a youth program where students work and grow commitment to their city. After a eight weeks training program a lot of them are employed as landscapers. We drive by the Elisabeth Gordon Sachs Park. It is a park on public lands that the Greening plans and maintains to continue a good relationship with the City of Detroit.

On the way back to the office we are reminded that we can buy trees very cheep and start planting our own backyards. A few minutes long film about the Greening of Detroit is shown on the TV screens as we approach Downtown again. Vegetables from the film are reflected in the windows and projected on the skyscrapers. Today's hosts thank us all for joining the tour and for contributing to their work. I think we are all convinced that our money has reached the right pockets.



Plum Street Market Garden on land owned by MGM Grand Casino in downtown.

November 10th: Forest Park tree planting

This Saturday morning in early November I'm volunteering with The Greening of Detroit to plant trees in Forest Park. A fifth grade class in the school adjacent to the park received a grant from Detroit Soup in April for their project "*Be the change in Detroit: Forest Park Beautification Project*" to fix and clean up the same park. Today the park is clean and colorful but without any trees. It consists of a small baseball court, a pavilion and cut grass. Over hundred volunteers are here today ready to plant the park with trees. Families with their children, people from the suburbs, school classes and more.

The trees are placed on the lawn in a grid where they should be planted. About 250 donated trees will be planted today, hackberry, red maple and magnolia. The trees are fungus resistant and planted in the park mostly because of storm water problems in the neighborhood. All the shovels, pickaxes wheelbarrows and buckets are neatly organized on the ground ready to ease the tree planting. The volunteers get divided into four groups, I'm in the mixed group with people coming by oneself, as couples or families. The other three groups are school classes or organizations. Two people are needed to plant one tree so I get paired up with Courtney standing next to me. She is a social worker from Ohio and moved to the Detroit suburbs with her husband. Together we grab our tools and choose a tree in the area our group has been assigned to.



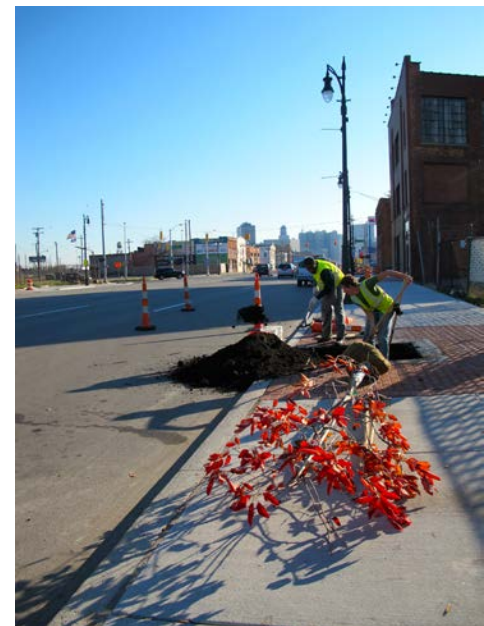
◀ The membership bustour's stop at Plum Street market Garden. ▶ Tree planting instructions by Dean at Forest Park.

What we immediately realize is that the soil is a very hard packed clay. It is very tough to dig the necessary hole for the red maple (*Acer rubrum* ‘Brandywine’) that we are planting. The shovel hits something hard again. This time it is a piece of concrete and some tarp. The thoughts wander and I really question if the tree will survive here. I do my best to remove pieces of bricks, concrete and some unidentified melted plastic. We fill the hole with new soil and mulch and add some water before we move on to the next tree. We manage to plant four trees on three hours.

I ask the people from GP about the history of the place but no one knows. It has a name, even though Forest Park doesn’t really represent the appearance of the park, soon it will. It doesn’t look like previous vacant lots where there used to be houses but the remains in the ground tell another story.

Summary

- A Non-Profit Organization that works between the small-scale initiatives and the city planning officials.
- Vacant lots are used for urban agriculture, open space, green infrastructure and dendroremediation.
- Provide education and jobs.
- Organize volunteer days with support from people, both from Detroit and its suburbs.



◀ ▲ Tree planting in Forest Park. ▶ Tree planting along Michigan Avenue.

SUMMARY

	SIZE	YEAR	WHAT
1. THE HOLE	1 lot	2010-2011	Playground, art, bonfire - public
2. PATHWAYS TO PARKS	? lots	2012	Pathways - public
3. RECLAIM DETROIT	3 lots	2011-ongoing	Raised garden beds, chicken coop, art, music stage, aquaponics pond - public
4. RIDE IT SCULPTURE PARK	4 lots	2012-ongoing	Skateboard ramps, place for barbeque - public
5. BOB'S RUIN	5 lots	1987-ongoing	Ruins, sculptures, meadows, "forest", storage - private
6. BLOOMTOWN DETROIT	6 lots	2010-?	Flower installation, place to rest - public
7. BROTHER NATURE PRODUCE	12 lots	2003-ongoing	Salad and herb farm, greenhouses, compost - private
8. GEORGIA STREET COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE	20 lots	2008-ongoing	Community garden, outdoor cinema, animal farm, orchard - public
9. EARTHWORKS URBAN FARM	20 lots	1997-ongoing	Greenhouses, farm, orchard, bee hives, compost - semiprivate
10. THE HEIDELBERG PROJECT	51 (+9 with houses)	1986-ongoing	Art, sculptures, playground - public

WHY	WHO	WHERE
A place to hang out	Student in Detroit, from Michigan	Hidden but quite close to the initiative taker's apartment
Make Detroit more walkable	Student in Detroit, Native Detroiters	Various lots around the city
Teach resourcefulness, Create high quality of life within the borders of Detroit, Build community	Couple from Detroit/Michigan	Adjacent to home, expanded property, blot
Build community, Neighborhood stabilization through art and architecture	Couple from Ohio/Detroit	In the same neighborhood as the initiative takers live, contiguous
Take control over surroundings	Lived in Detroit for 40 years Artist/Home repairs	Adjacent to home, expanded property, blot
Inspire change, raise awareness of surrounding	Student outside Detroit	Scattered along one street
Local control of food system, be able to survive on one acre of land	Academic	Adjacent to home, expanded property,
Take control over neighborhood, inspire youths, create a place for the neighbors	Native Detroiters	Close to home, connected to community building
Food justice, teach about healthy food and how you can start your own farm, feed the poor	Started with one friar, volunteers, employees	Along one street in the same neighborhood as the soup kitchen
Take control over neighborhood, inspire youths, use art as a medicine and catalyst for change	Native Detroiters	Adjacent to home

CONCLUSION

There is a vast amount of vacant land in Detroit, somewhat 50 square kilometers (20 square miles). The vacant lots influence a lot of people, so does the transformed ones. Depending of what you mean by transforming them this number varies and it is also hard to keep it updated. The transformations have various time frames and some are temporary and others have a longer vision and an aim to remain.

In this chapter ten initiatives/projects and one non-profit organization transforming and repurposing vacant lots have been presented to give a glimpse of what this transformation can mean. Here are some insights and lessons learned.

WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH VACANT LAND IN DETROIT?

Transformations in Detroit have converted vacant lots into urban farms, community gardens, orchards, outdoor art exhibitions, places for play and sports etc. The presented projects give a meaning for the initiative taker, at the same time it provides some kind of benefits for the neighbors. It can be a public place, food, activity or beautification in different forms. Some projects are public and some are private but the boundaries between them are somewhat diffuse. None of them are fenced in and they all give a welcoming feeling.

It is important to involve the neighbors, have their support by letting them understand what is going on in their neighborhood, something that became highly visible in the Heidelberg Project.

The projects vary in size but are all small scale and adapted to a city scale and context. The gardens and farms have different ownership and work solutions. Most of them are not commercial with any focus on making money, only one that I visited, Brother Nature Produce serves as a base for income, and then just to be able to survive on the work, not to gain profit. At Earthworks Urban Farm a few people are employed and get a salary.

Today is illegal to buy lots for other use than what it is zoned for, residential, commercial and industrial usage. This makes it difficult to legally use and buy land for other objectives than a building. Since it has been illegal to farm in the city, and still is there is not as much farming in the city as it could be. The new proposed urban agriculture ordinance that will allow for people to buy land to use for farming has not yet passed but

is in the process of being approved. There is a fear that big corporations based outside the city will take over to gain profit.

A few projects use local cycles, animals to provide manure, collecting compost from local business that can fertilize and improve the soil for growing vegetables. All farming are organic. Earthworks also distribute plug seedlings to growers. To use recycled materials for new constructions are common finding the resources needed nearby.

WHY DO THESE INITIATIVES TAKE PLACE?

The initiatives behind the projects that I have studied have various reasons for transforming vacant lots. The transformed lots in Detroit can at a first look seem quite similar. Many of them have vegetables growing, some functional construction made of recycled materials colorfully painted and a sculpture or art piece. These lots are in fact very diverse and their containment has a high complexity.

The ones that I visited are all organized in different ways with diverse motives. Some of the reasons and motives for transforming vacant lots are to take control over your neglected neighborhood, education and support for people to start their own farms, food justice and spreading knowledge about the right and possibility to eat healthy food, inspire youths to be a part of a positive change for the city, create a conversation through art and at the same time use the art as medicine and a catalyst for change. The one motive that joins them is to make Detroit a better city to live in. A lot of projects are connected and that is also how I found out about them. There is a lot of space and no need for competition between initiatives, if you do something good, people will support you, not necessary work with you but at least spread the word.

Many of the projects started smaller and have expanded today. The people that I interviewed talk about visions and almost all projects that I have visited have some kind of plan to expand further, or maintain what they already have better. It is a lot of work to take care of even the smallest lot. Transform vacant land takes time and long-term commitment is crucial to make a difference.

WHO ARE TAKING THESE INITIATIVES?

The people that I have interviewed, are all living in Detroit. Some are native and others are from the suburbs, Michigan or other parts of the United States.

It is important with a key initiative taker responsible for the project

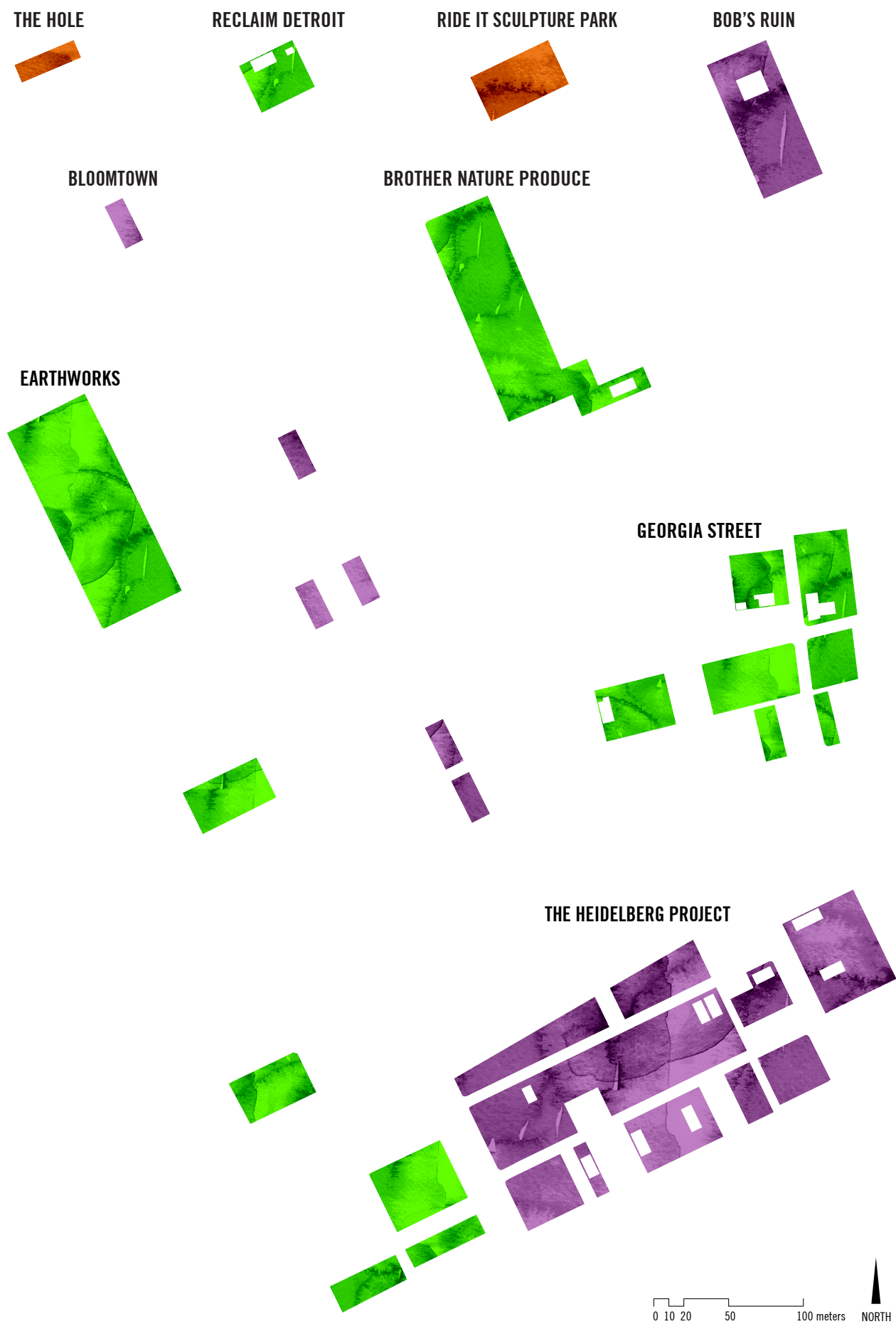


Figure 21: The projects plan layout compared in the same scale.

and that it has support from the neighboring community. The initiative takers come from various backgrounds and I have met students, academics, activists, urban farmers, unemployed, artists, architects etc.

Some of them have their project as a full time engagement and a few can generate income from the project. Funding for the transformations are sometimes made possible through private sponsors and foundations, or with the democratic model of crowd funding through Detroit Soup or Kickstarter.

It is only possible to speculate about the project Bloomtown that looked abandoned when I visited it. I believe it was hard to establish the project locally when the initiative taker studied (and presumably lived?) outside Detroit (in Ann Arbor). I suppose that long-term commitment, connections and interest from the neighbors was lacking.

WHERE DO THESE INITIATIVES ARISE?

Nine out of the ten projects are situated on residential zoned lots, only Ride It Sculpture Park is on former commercial lots. In most cases the projects are initiated and taken care of by someone living next to the lots. Many vacant lots attract dumping and if you happen to live next to a vacant lot you can take control over the neglect of your neighborhood by appropriating it.

It shows that people care for their city. When you choose a lot adjacent to your own house you are also able to keep your eyes on it. The feeling that I got is that these projects are very respected and not vandalized. Only one of the projects that I visited, the Hole has had something vandalized.

The ownership of transformed lots varies and the accumulation of lots for one project seems quite random and is based on which properties that became available. Some projects are concentrated to one block, others spread out over multiple blocks and two are more scattered in the neighborhood. Some lots are owned by the initiative taker, others are borrowed from private owners or from the city. With these ten projects it is not possible to distinguish potential in preferable locations (figure 21) such as Wiston Spirn's definition of lots, missing tooth, corner lot, connector, vacant block, Swiss cheese and multiple contiguous vacant blocks. What can be said is that the most fruitful projects are in approximation of where the initiative taker lives, sometimes also connected to a community building or similar.

In the neighborhoods where the projects are situated there are many more vacant lots than the ones that has been transformed. Sometimes there are other transformative projects close by, or just someone that cuts the grass. ■

6



DISCUSSION



This chapter conclude and discuss the thesis results on a more general level by zooming out and reflect on the phenomenon of shrinking cities and what the findings in Detroit can add to a wider discourse. A Model for working with transforming vacant lots is presented in the end of this chapter.

THE INTRODUCED PHENOMENON

Cities that lose population is a worldwide phenomenon, even though it is quite unknown and most people are not affected by it. However, this might come to change since the fast changes in our society are hard to predict.

Cities are growing at a high speed and a side effect of this growth is that others are shrinking and rural areas become depopulated. You can only speculate that this phenomenon will spread out and become greater. Detroit is an extreme case of shrinkage and as Martelle (2005) speculates: *“It’s unclear when we look at Detroit today whether we’re seeing the last spasms of America’s past, or a harbinger of the nation’s urban future.”*

It is difficult to aim for, and hard to predict a consistent growth of both economy and people even though that it is the desired conventional path for cities. Fluctuations are a natural state of cities and when phases of shrinkage come, there is little that can stop it. The causes are interrelated and in a global world, hard to depict before their occurrence. A response to shrinking cities is rather to embrace it and work with the new conditions that follow. This thesis has, from current research, noted that the first step when planning for shrinking cities is to move away from the notion that a shrinking city is in crisis and that the only way to save it is by growth. This shift has already started to happen, especially in Germany, where it now almost is cool to shrink.

The current land use legislations regarding planning and building has a starting point in the concept of growth which are irrelevant in shrinking cities. These cities don’t need plans according to current

legislations related to growth, instead they need flexible approaches to zoning and a process for transformation of vacant land.

The discourse of shrinking cities is relatively new and much of today's work with shrinking cities is experimental. There are forums that try to widen the perspective, to share knowledge and at the same time acknowledge that there is no one size fits all, the phenomenon and its solutions are as diverse as cities themselves. The thesis have highlighted common considerations for stabilizing the city and make it livable for the remaining inhabitants, such as (a) leave the concept of growth, (b) see potential in the vacant land, (c) use both long-term planning and short-term action to guide the urban transformation, (d) recognize and identify what is already happening by using local knowledge, (e) both top-down and bottom-up efforts are necessary in the reorganizing process.

EFFECTS OF VACANT LAND ON A CITY

Vacant land is one result of a shrinking city and it has a high impact on the remaining city and its residents. The first considerations of vacant land are often negative. The term vacant is referring to an undesired and unintentional existence in the city. Vacant land materializes when people have left their homes for various reasons, disability to afford the property taxes or an escape to a more prosperous city or suburb. When the homes are abandoned the declining process starts and the houses becomes unlivable very fast and then the only solution left, is demolition. Abandoned houses and vacant lots are both a financial burden for the city and an eyesore for its inhabitants. They also start a negative spiral leading to further loss of property value and decline. People tend to try to leave a neighborhood that has showed signs of distress, vacant lots are one indicator of this.

Vacant land makes the urban fabric fragmented; distances grow and the population density decreases leaving no base for public transportation. Property values are lost and with fewer people there is less tax base for maintaining public parks, roads, sewer system, waste management, street lighting and accumulated vacant land. Much of the vacant land is used as dumping grounds and the soil is often polluted. Vacant land is one important aspect to work with to be able to make shrinking cities more desirable to live in.

However, as this thesis has stated, there are positive aspects of the vacant land as well. The city has the opportunity to reinvent itself. Many shrinking cities expanded very fast during the rise of industrialization and have built over old creeks and eliminated ecosystems. Vacant land can be used for restoring ecosystems with wildlife, day lighting buried

streams and creeks, potential public space or as a productive landscape with energy or urban agriculture. As Holst Laursen (2008) claims, if the landscape is intentionally used as a characteristic structure instead of just let it take over, it can develop declining territories and provide identity and culture.

Another aspect of vacant land they can also be a prepared ground and a place for imagination, a *terrain vague* as stated by Solà-Morales (1995). As in the case of Detroit, the city is broke, but it has a lot of unused land. This land can provide benefits for remaining inhabitants if they can see and find its potential. It could for example be a possible expansion of their property or to be used as public place for the neighborhood to gather. As shown from the field study, this process is happening throughout Detroit.

LEARNING FROM DETROIT

Detroit was a total success, the American Dream citified, but what built the city [the automobile] also made it disposable. There are a lot of previous mistakes to learn from in terms of planning, but there are also a lot to learn from in the processes that are going on in the city today. Detroit has the potential to become a resilient green city with a combination of contributions from city officials to the inhabitants' own initiatives. As well as other cities can learn from Detroit, Detroit has to learn from, and listen to the Detroiters.

This thesis has presented ten projects working with the transformation of vacant lots. These initiatives let the inhabitants take control of their surroundings and make them have a part in shaping their urban future. The transformed lots add a human scale to the vast meadows and abandoned fields. The new usages are varied and with the transformative act with people working outdoors, it creates an activity that can inspire others to join or, to act on their own. The transformed lots can also give hope and a sense of safety. They show that someone is still present in Detroit, taking care of the city.

People have found the rich soil again, even though it is heavily polluted. Many lots are used for urban agriculture with need for a lot of soil improvements. Detroit is sometimes referred to as a food desert, there are just a few supermarkets, mostly concentrated to Midtown, and it is hard to find fresh produce through out the city. The urban farming makes it possible to find healthy food within the city borders. But growing vegetables is not just growing vegetables. The act of doing it is perhaps as valuable as the food you get. The act of urban farming can provide education and create a base for networks, community and sometimes

local economy. Compared to previous times, these efforts are small scale and don't depend on one industry or large companies.

These initiatives transforming vacant lots are a positive feature for the remaining inhabitants and should be nourished by the city officials. Armbrorst et. al. (2008) argues that planners should listen to Detroit and the bottom up process that is already happening. The people who stay are a valuable asset.

There are also a few people moving in. The city has attracted a lot of young entrepreneurs that see potential in Detroit. The owner of a popular coffee shop that gathers creative people in the city said: *"I have lived in San Francisco, New York and Sydney. I could never have started this business there. Those cities don't care, they don't need it."* Not only young people are intrigued by the city. Paul is newly retired and recently moved to Detroit from the suburbs, *"When you are bored, move to Detroit. Do something."* Now he is involved in starting an urban farm.

There is a distinction between the people who come here voluntary with a vision and a commitment, and those who cannot leave since there is no value if they sell their house. Gentrification is something to be observant to. The city needs people who want to live in Detroit, but there entrance must be beneficial to the people who cannot leave too and not forget about their needs.

The accumulation of vacant land that Detroit is going through is happening on a large scale, mostly unmanaged throughout the whole city. Here, many landscapes are acting on their own, creating new types of ecosystems with introduced wildlife. These landscapes can take care of themselves but without guidance, they will take over.

There has been a lack of guidance of vacant land and zoning flexibility (even though the city won't ban any of the existing farms but they are illegal). When the Planning Commission in Detroit presented their Vacant Land Survey in the 1990s with parts of the city that should be completely vacated it was protested against and never implemented. If parts of the city have to be vacated it has to happen in dialogue with, and in consideration of, the people living in those neighborhoods and without creating winners and losers when land is reconfigured.

The city has learned from previous mistakes. Lately there have been mayor improvements of developing a vision for an intentional green infrastructure with the Detroit Future City and the proposed new ordinance that will legalize urban farms. The extensive strategic framework, Detroit Future City, is both a vision and a process and a blend of technical and community expertise. The city officials initiate it and with input from, and conversation with, a large part of the city's inhabitants, the framework was

completed by the work group were landscape architects were included.

The thesis has also introduced The Greening of Detroit, a non-profit organization that partners up with the City of Detroit and assist neighborhood groups with their efforts to improve the ecosystems in Detroit through tree planting projects, strategic landscapes (storm water retention and dendroremidation), urban agriculture, education and green jobs. They were involved in the development of the framework as well.

In the framework, landscape urbanism is taken to practice. The framework has developed land use typologies to discuss around and use landscape as transformative infrastructure (for city systems), neighborhoods (small scale) and as recreational- and ecological networks. It suggests various scenarios for vacant land reuse and to keep the conversation going from top-down and bottom-up. Time will tell how the implementation will proceed.

The thesis has argued for the importance of initiatives taken on grassroots level by individuals and organizations when it comes to vacant land and its transformation. Local key individuals and local networks are vital elements in this transformative process and it is important to have laws and policies that are flexible in relation to these actors' needs. With less regulation and more help for grassroots experimentation new opportunities for urban regeneration may be provided. If landscape architects should listen to the processes that are already happening in a shrinking city to be able to engage in it on the city's terms, we should facilitate and support these voluntary initiatives and by that, incrementally aggregate them to a better whole.

THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT IN A SHRINKING CITY

The causes for, and much of the issues when working with, shrinking cities are outside the field of the landscape architect's/planner's professional role and expertise. The planners are left with the physical effects and can with their knowledge together with city officials, organizations and the remaining residents help maintaining the population steady by creating a city where quality of life can be achieved.

My initial idea for this thesis was to make a design proposal for the transformation of a few vacant lots. First I wanted to visit already ongoing transformations on grassroots level and perhaps partner up with one of these existing projects. After conducting my field study, the experiences revealed that the residents in the city don't really need temporary transformations from outsiders in their neighborhoods. What is needed is collaboration between players and facilitation to make the bottom-up initiatives easier. Instead of transforming a vacant lot with a spatial design I will design a process, a Model for the city government, landscape architects and grassroots working with transforming vacant lots in shrinking cities. The Model is found in the end of this chapter.

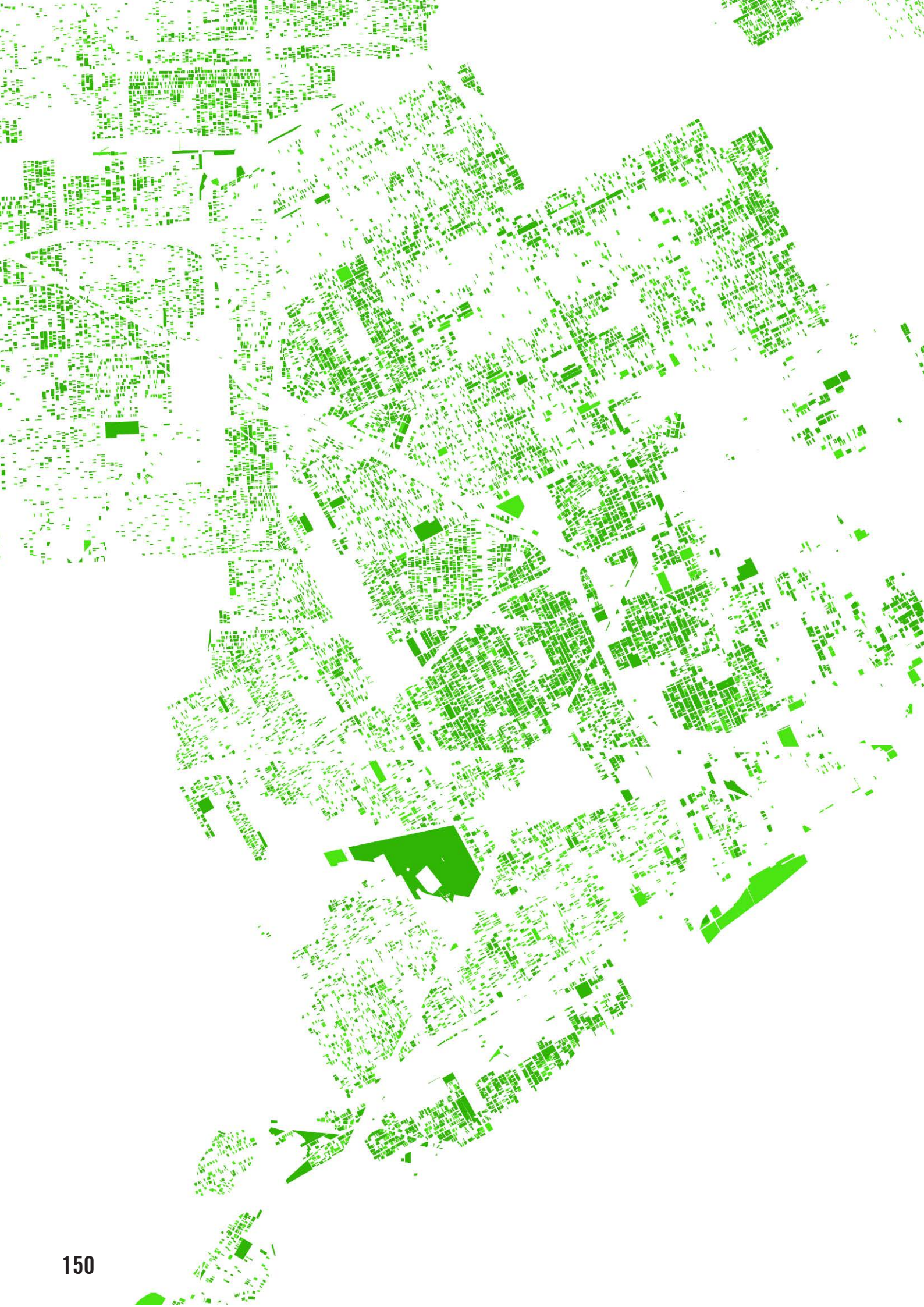
A NOMADIC ROLE

The landscape architect can have a nomadic role and their work situation can be found within the city government, private companies or connected to the grassroots movement. It is the expertise of the landscape architect that is essential, not where the landscape architect is situated. The landscape architect can both be an observer and a process leader.

The landscape architect's field of expertise comprises of; working in different scales, to zoom out and in to find coherence, context and links for ecology, movements and people. The landscape and its systems, both technical, man-made infrastructural and the natural ecological are constructions of landscape architecture. The landscape architect is trained in spatial design, the relationships and links between urban spaces and the ability to interpret the users desires into spatiality. To understand peoples' needs and facilitate their participation in the processes of creating spaces for living. Time and processes are crucial parts in the work of a landscape architect, the work is never finished and the different stages have different qualities.

When handling a shrinking city it is important that both long-term planning and short-term actions are involved. In both cases, it is necessary to look at what is already taking place in the particular shrinking city. One role could be to identify, document and finally advocate for already ongoing practices. As the research has showed, there is no one size fits all.

Landscape urbanism as an emerging practice, is relevant for cities that are undergoing major transformations. Mostafavi (2003, p. 7) claimed: *“the landscape architect or planner, as the landscape urbanist, always begins with the given.”* He saw the terrain as opportunities and as a new field for landscape architects and planners where it is necessary to pay attention to the continuity of *flows, energies and rhythms*.



An aerial photograph of a city, likely New York City, showing a dense grid of streets and buildings. Overlaid on the map are various colored shapes: a large green area in the upper left, a blue area in the upper right, and several smaller green and blue patches scattered throughout the city grid. The title 'THE MODEL' is centered over the map.

THE MODEL

Landscape architects cannot control where vacancy occurs in a shrinking city, what they can do is to guide the process towards an intentional urban transformation and to the best urban solutions possible. By using vacant land purposefully in the transformation process as a characteristic structure instead of just letting it take over, declining territories can be developed and identity, structure and culture can be created. It is an opportunity to engage in the dynamics of the city.

One can see the urban transformation from two perspectives depending on the scale of the vacant land, the timeframe and involved players. One perspective is from the city officials, top-down, with focus on the whole city. This corresponds to a long-term perspective with holistic visions concentrating functions and resources. The other perspective is on the individual scale, bottom-up, where the citizens starts transforming vacant lots in their surroundings. Both perspectives are as important. Experimentation and research is necessary to find tools and methods for both perspectives.

Instead of transforming a vacant lot with a spatial design I will hereby design a process, a model for a collaborative planning between the city government, landscape architects and grassroots working with transforming vacant lots in shrinking cities. The Model has been generated with experiences from the field study combined with the outcome from the literature review.

The Model has two articulated and different scenarios even though they both are leading in the same direction, to make use of the vacant land. The two scenarios are Top-Down and Bottom-Up. The scenarios consist of the same phases but initiated and conducted by various players. The scenarios are simplified and others scenarios are possible as well. The main focus is on the synergy effects that happen when the two scenarios intersect. Here, the landscape architect can play an important part guiding the process.

On the next spread, a process diagram with description of the players, the phases and its actions, are described followed by the connective tools that the landscape architects can use to facilitate this process.

PROCESS DIAGRAM:

Two intertwined scenarios for transforming vacant lots in a shrinking city.

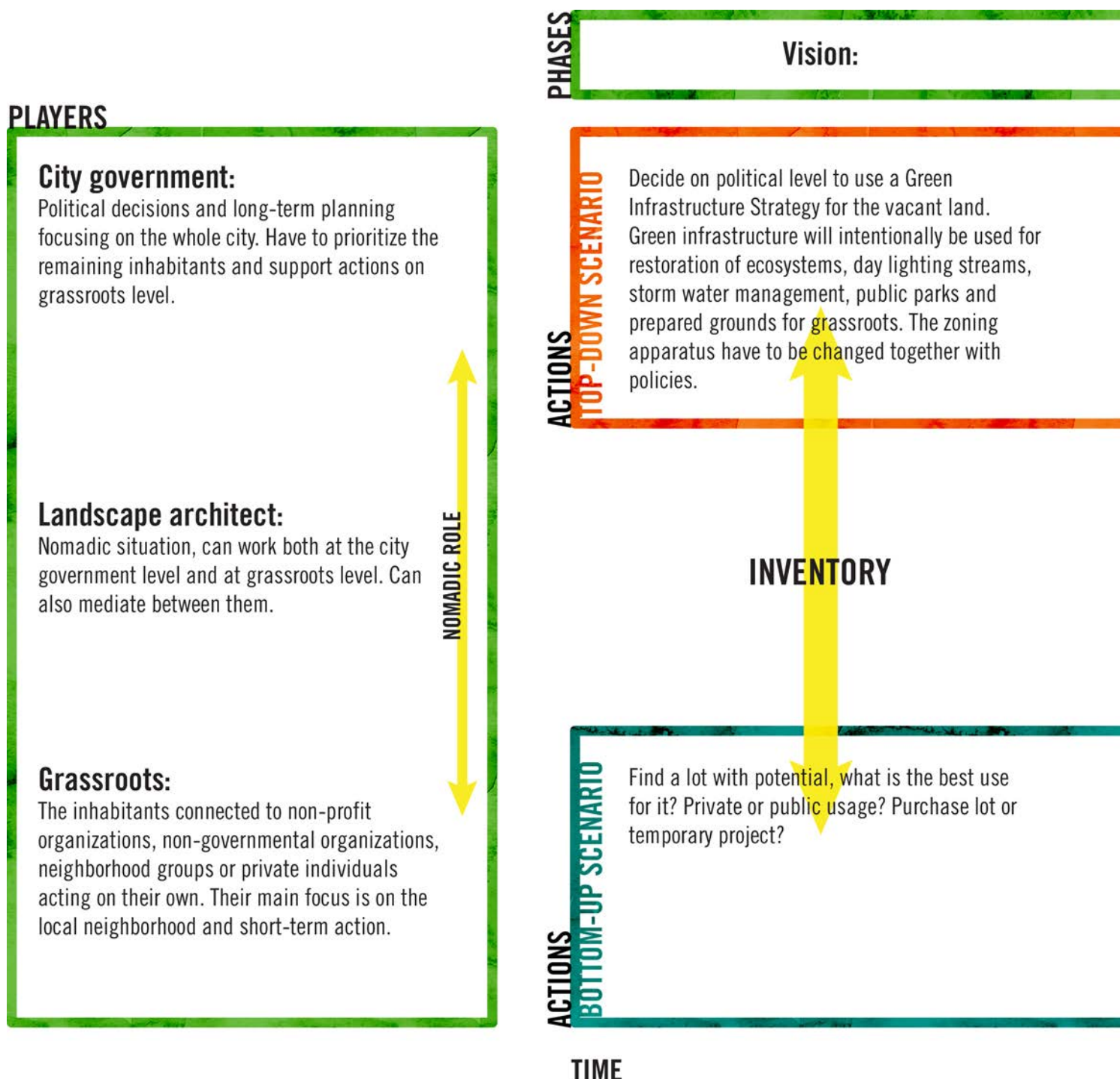


Figure 22: Diagram over the Model's process.

Programme:

Transformation:

Find strategic places for distinctive greening strategies, plan with flexible and smaller scale in the neighborhoods, it is still a city. Distinguish where potential new buildings can not be placed and where productive large scale landscapes can work best. Concentrate the city's remaining resources to be able to stabilize some neighborhoods. Develop a timeframe. Initiate an "Adopt a lot" policy that reaches out to grassroots.

Put the theory into practice. Prepare the ground for future usage, heal the land with soil remediation. Employ and educate people living in the city with green-collar jobs. Offer lots to grassroots and homeowners.

DIALOGUE

NETWORK

Define the project with goals and objectives. Consider aspects of: key individuals, neighbor involvement, community orientation, function and design, maintenance, management, timeframe, site assessments, location and surroundings and reusable materials close by.

Start digging! Keep the neighbors updated and involved. Collaborate. Spread knowledge and outcomes.

CONNECTIVE TOOLS

This Model presents three soft tools that the landscape architect will use to guide the process: *Inventory*, *Dialogue* and *Network*. Here, the tools are explained and what the city government and grassroots will gain by the involvement of all players. Further investigations have to be made to find various implementations.

Inventory:

Through the Vision phase there have to be knowledge about the current situation of the land to be able to handle the new ideas. An *Inventory* has to be made and areas have to be recognized and mapped. The mapping of territories has to happen on both a strategic and a local level together with the residents. They are the experts of their neighborhood.

With the recognition and identification of processes from bottom-up that are already happening in a shrinking city, it is possible to find potential on a given place. This can advocate the process and lead to further development and implementation of what is already working, on a wider scale throughout the city.

The landscape architect will collect the data consisting of attention to the inhabitants' stories, an inventory of the condition of vacant lots, ownership, functioning ecosystem/wildlife, storm water problems, soil pollution etc. The gathered data will be categorized, analyzed and mapped.

The city government get to know the city's land, knowledge about site assessments, find out what is occurring today, engagement in the community and find local key individuals. They are responsible for the distribution (digitally available), updating and transparency of the gathered information.

The grassroots are sharing their stories about their neighborhoods. By participating, they get to know about ownership of lots in their surroundings and how they can reclaim them. Their efforts will be recognized and supported.

Dialogue:

Through the Programme phase, *Dialogue* is used to coordinate the best urban solution possible and to build community consensus through collaborative planning.

When developing a comprehensive green infrastructure network to reconfigure the city spatially, many different players/stakeholders will be involved. The challenge for planners will be to involve them, equilibrate various interests and to empower residents with this collaborative

planning, including public participation. The dialogue has to reach out to the variety of the inhabitants, not just active grassroots and to hear multiple voices and offer several ways to engage in the dialogue.

The green infrastructure will consist of former vacant land turned into new parks, community gardens, restored habitat, reforestation, flood mitigation, day lighting stream, storm water treatment sites and urban agriculture plots linked with existing green spaces. This structure could also be used for movements by foot or by bike and break the concrete grid, established to serve cars. It has to be decided what will happen, where and when it will happen allowing certain flexibility.

With the mapped inventory, it is possible to analyze the data and talk about possible futures for the vacant land. Through the dialogue, it would be possible to distinguish where the different landscape typologies can happen and where to concentrate resources. It is impossible for a city with financial difficulties to provide necessary services throughout the whole city when the density is too low. It has to be acknowledged that it's not possible to save all urban territories.

The landscape architect will structure the dialogue[s], equilibrate various interests focusing on the public good, assemble initiatives, guide them and put them in relation to each other so that in the end they will be a part of a over all structure and strategy.

The city government can offer a "House swap", a possible relocation with the alternative to live in a more stabilized neighborhood in the city. The benefits of moving have to be presented and highlighted in contrast to staying, due to nostalgic reasons.

The grassroots would through this phase get legal access to the land, with ownership or contract with a possible time limit. Their efforts would be coordinated into the green infrastructure strategy that they are developing with the city officials. In collaboration with a landscape architect they could also get technical expertise with construction, soil rehabilitation, storm water, plants, management, etc. or interpretation of the desired outcomes into a spatial design.

Network:

In the Transformation phase, *Networks* are important to keep the conversation ongoing between city government and grassroots as well as between grassroots initiatives. You can't make the transformation on your own. The landscape architect could facilitate these networks, locally, citywide and digital on the web. This could lead to information and knowledge sharing, connecting grassroots with sponsors and funding

opportunities and city government with local driving forces.

By connecting grassroots initiatives, it can lead to coordination of experiences, tools, collecting and distribution of compost, sharing seeds etc. A network could for example generate, or be generated from: happenings, eating democratic soup, farmers markets or cooperative farming, digital platforms and social media.

Networks would also be important between shrinking cities, on both a national and global scale.

REFLECTION

This is a simplified model and its scenarios, there are more aspects to consider and investigate. The aim was to find ways for how the landscape architect can engage in the process happening on grassroots level by using the suggested soft tools. The landscape architect would then engage as a process mediator, observing and analyzing, balancing various interests rather than as an authority with a static masterplan.

To refer to Solà Morales (1995) once more, this Model is one interpretation of the landscape architect acting on *terrain vague*. Through the *Inventory*, the *Energy* that the landscape possesses together with the energy of the grassroots initiatives is found. Through *Dialogue*, the *Flows* of green and blue infrastructure, ecosystems, movements, animals and people are analyzed, distinguished and launched.

With the *Network*, the *Rhythm* gets established. The rhythm of evaluations, improvements, collaborations, seasons and time. ■

Final thoughts

I have come to understand that shrinking cities is a truly multifaceted phenomenon. I did put myself in a situation I knew little about and Detroit showed me its complexity with layers of history, stories, planning ideals and decisions. The vacant land is neither an empty canvas nor a tabula rasa. Detroit is truly something special. Somehow I knew it and now I really know it.

It takes time to approach and understand a city. After three months in Detroit, I know a part of the city and its people. I find my way around and my boundaries and territories have expanded through my explorations while biking.

One of my initial thoughts was to use Detroit Soup as a platform for making my own project proposal. To present an idea and hopefully be able to transform a vacant lot to some kind of pocket park, somewhere in Detroit. In the city I was searching for the missing piece for my thesis, the project that could lead me to the answers to the questions that I did not know yet. The more people I talked to and the more projects I visited, more complexity was gained. I did question my role as a landscape architect and as an outsider coming to Detroit.

After experiencing Detroit and connecting my research to theory I know that another temporary pocket park is not what the city need. It needs long-term commitment connected to a process, not a design solution.

I conclude with a question that has followed me during my work. Larry, the street musician, asked it when I invited him for a soda. The city is his instrument and he uses his worn drumsticks to create a sound for Detroit.

“Did you choose Detroit or did Detroit choose you?”

Yet, I do not know the answer to his question.

I’m looking forward to my return.



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Detroit SOUP: www.detroitsoup.org

The Heidelberg Project: www.heidelberg.org

Bloomtown Detroit: www.bloomtown.org

Earthworks Urban Farm: www.cskdetroit.org/EWG/

The Greening of Detroit: www.greeningofdetroit.com

Detroit Works Project: www.detroitworksproject.com

Ride It Sculpture Park: www.rideitsculpturepark.com

OTHER

Data Driven Detroit: www.datadrivendetroit.org

Loveland Technologies: www.makeloveland.com

Next Neighborhood Initiative: <http://ndni.peoplemovers.com>

Project Shrinking Cities: www.shrinkingcities.com

West Philadelphia Landscape Project: www.wplp.net

Shrinking Cities International Research Network: <https://sites.google.com/site/shrinkingcitiesnetwork/>

National Vacant Properties Campaign: www.communityprogress.net

FIGURES

Figure 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22: Made by author

Figure 5: Pallagst, Karina M. 2008. *Shrinking cities – Planning Challenges from an International Perspective*. p. 9. In *Cities growing smaller*, edited by Rugare, Steven. Schwarz, Terry. Kent State University.
Graphic modifications by author

Figure 6: Pallagst, Karina M. 2008. *Shrinking cities – Planning Challenges from an International Perspective*. p. 11. In *Cities growing smaller*, edited by Rugare, Steven. Schwarz, Terry. Kent State University.
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Figure 9: *Detroit Future City*. 2012. Available: <http://detroitworksproject.com/the-framework/> (11-04-13)

Figure 16, 18: Map from Data Driven Detroit 2010.
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Figure 17: Map from SEMCOG, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, 2010. Available: www.semco.org/Data_and_Maps.aspx (27-04-13)
Graphic modifications by author.

The maps found in Chapter 5 are produced by the author. Their base is generated from www.sitecontrol.us together with Google Maps.

PHOTOS

All photos are taken by the author.

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