City Re-Making Approaches in Contemporary Urbanism

“Re-Urbanism” as a Strategy for the Revitalization of Detroit and Declining Cities

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Abstract

Many cities today are experiencing extreme widespread urban decline, at a time when urban growth and revitalization are prioritized on the agenda. This dissertation examines a number of prominent urban revitalization strategies for declining cities, specifically highlighting the emblematic case of Detroit as a research subject. That city offers many lessons as the epitome of both urban decline and urban revitalization, as evidenced through the media narratives surrounding the “rebirth of Detroit” and its positive improvements over recent years. Through this and other case studies, the dissertation investigates different approaches in the leading contemporary paradigms of urbanism, including the role of place-based and heritage-based strategies for the declining city, and their different structural approaches. These include differences sought in both city structure, and in the collaborative structure of revitalizing institutions. From there, the dissertation draws key lessons together into a synthesis approach called “Re-Urbanism” – an advancement of a model originally developed by Robert Fishman. The model describes strategic partnerships between local government entities, private business leaders, private charitable foundations, small scale grass roots activism, and local entrepreneurship, all aimed at making place-based, heritage-based structural reconnections within the city itself. The dissertation concludes with specific policy and practice recommendations, as well as ideas for further research.

Keywords: Re-Urbanism, urban decline, urban revitalization, Placemaking, Detroit, urbanism, public space, Landscape Urbanism
Sammanfattning på Svenska

Titel
Stadsomvandlingsinriktningar inom samtida stadsbyggande: "Re-Urbanism" som en stadsutvecklingsstrategi för att återuppliva Detroit och andra städer på tillbakagång

Sammanfattning
Preface and Acknowledgements

Growing up in a small town in Michigan, with a lot of beautiful nature, and not-so-beautiful suburbia nearby, I eventually developed a wanderlust to explore the world beyond. That led me on my first trip to Europe, for a semester in Prague during my undergraduate studies where I studied and fell in love with the architecture and culture of the continent. After my undergraduate studies I soon returned to study for a year in Kraków, spent a lot of time traveling Europe and decided it was where I wanted to be for a longer period. This led me to search for masters programs in Europe, and I found myself in Stockholm at KTH for two years studying urban planning and urban design. I realize through this chain of decisions and opportunities that I never would have arrived to the next place without the preceding place, and that makes me excited for what may come next after the conclusion of my PhD studies.

As much as working towards this research degree has at times felt like a vast independent study, sometimes in a bubble, and often a lonely endeavor, there are so many individuals along the way who have supported and guided me, so I want to take a moment to thank as many as I can think of here. But where to start in thanking the many people who make life what it is?

I start with my parents, who have always encouraged exploration, independence, and education since a young age, and who have always been there for me and supported me in more ways than I could ever count. They even supported my desire to explore places far away from home, though it meant leaving home, and as it turned out, for a very long time. But I’ve grown accustomed to living away from my original home and appreciate and value all of the opportunities I’ve had to travel and meet interesting people and make lasting friends along the way, choosing to follow this path has allowed for all of that and more.

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I spent the winter of 2014 in Detroit learning and observing my project area and potential case sites. Thank you to my brother and best friend, Kyle, for a house to share in Detroit during that frigid and memorable winter of 2014. And thanks to Kevin Robishaw and David Hall who later found me at a lecture for the Detroit School of Urban Studies, for inviting me to share not only a house in Woodbridge, but also many discussions about life and the city, this aspect especially includes my friend Rebekka Parker who helped introduce me to Detroit and find my way there.

I’m very grateful to have been involved in the Masters of Urbanism Studies program that I worked closely with as assistant director over these years, and especially to the students of all the past four generations, for providing me with an educational distraction from my PhD project, inspiration, and a purpose to travel for. And to my friend Professor Alexis Pontvik, with whom I traveled on study trips with the Urbanism students to Italy - thanks for being an insightful travel companion who taught me so much about architecture and urbanism; I will always look at piazzas, columns, and Brunelleschi differently because of you.

Thanks to all of my colleagues and friends in the Urban Form and Human Behaviour research group who shared part of this journey with me, including Sofie Rådestad and Kyle Farrell, and to all of my fellow PhD students, who I shared these buildings and corridors with over the years. Thanks to Rosa Danenberg, my friend and collaborator on the masters program, and a special thanks to three friends I shared an office space and many hours with, Eli Karimnia, Åsa Callmer, and Naomi Lipke. To my friend and first PhD colleague, Hélène Littke who welcomed me when I first arrived to Stockholm for this endeavor, and who taught me a useful mantra for moving beyond things that can’t immediately be dealt with: “that’s a later problem”.

In conclusion, thank you to all of the people who have helped me and taught me along the way, not only about my field of interest and research, but also about life… Tack så mycket!

Ryan Locke
Stockholm, April 2019
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1. Introduction and Research Focus

“Wherever men live together, there exists a web of human relationships which is, as it were, woven by the deeds and words of innumerable persons, by the living as well as by the dead. Every deed and every new beginning falls into an already existing web, where it nevertheless somehow starts a new process that will affect many others…”

- Hannah Arendt

In an age of rapid social, cultural, and economic globalization, the world is currently experiencing a historically unprecedented rate of urbanization (UN-DESA, 2014). New geographic patterns are emerging as the result of rapid rural migrations, new economic opportunities, and enhanced mobility of populations (Soja, 2000; Glaeser, 2011). As a result, cities have dramatically expanded spatially, resulting in urban transformations and structural changes, and often resulting in low-density ‘sprawl’ development. There is no shortage of reports on the predicted future growth of the global population to take place mainly in urbanized areas.

At the same time, as cities face the complex challenges of the 21st century, including deindustrialization and ongoing global economic crises such as the 2009 Great Recession in the United States (Kapp, 2017), development goals are often predicated on guaranteed growth in metropolitan regions (Wiechmann and Pallagst 2012). Shrinking cities and declining areas pose a different problem to traditional growth models – how to grow while shrinking? The causes of large-scale historic urban decline and ‘shrinking cities’, a global phenomenon that is especially prevalent in post-industrial cities in Europe and the USA, where manufacturing losses have not been replaced (Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2012), are defined by employment decline, subsequent population decline, and the resulting economic downturn sustained over a four to five-decade period (Reckien and Martinez-Fernandez, 2011). Many such ‘shrinking cities’ have experienced harsh economic, social and spatial structural changes as the result of economic and cultural globalization, de-industrialization, a diminishing public sector, increased mobility, and tough national and international economic competition.

To address these large-scale structural changes, a number of models of reform have been advanced within urban planning and design. Some point to historic models of urbanism that have been superseded by modern urban development but are once again advanced as viable solutions for contemporary social, economic, and environmental problems, where it is argued that modern planning and design have failed. These ideas have been reflected in the recent “New Urban Agenda” outcome agreement of the United Nations’ Habitat III conference, proposing more compact,
inter-connected, and walkable networks of public spaces that are more characteristic of historic urban fabrics and patterns (UN General Assembly, 2016). Other reformers point to the need to address large-scale historic urban decline and ‘shrinking cities’. It is important to recognize, however, that shrinking cities are not only shrinking, they are often growing at the same time in their sprawling peripheries, creating ‘urban archipelagos’, where growth and revitalization occur parallel to extreme ongoing decline.

Perhaps nowhere are the contemporary challenges of urbanism more clearly on display than in the city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, where for decades, the forces of decline, abandonment, and decay have taken a toll on the physical structures and urban fabric of Detroit’s urban core and beyond. The causes of the city’s decline follow the global trend but also include some local factors: federal policies, racial tensions, municipal mismanagement, economic over-specialization around automobile manufacturing and subsequent economic stagnation, these have been well described in previous research (see for example, Sugrue, 1996; Ryan, 2008; Galster, 2012; Neill, 2015).

The deindustrialization of urban landscapes across the globe has brought both a decrease and increase in negative qualities to cities. Heavy industrial pollution and the array of ills associated with urban industry may decline, while side-effects such as crime and unemployment increase. Detroit and other cities lagging economically from the effect of the loss of traditional capital investment are then left to grapple with the question of how to attract people to live in a place that could be deemed unattractive for a myriad of related reasons. These cities must find strategies to capitalize upon their inherent qualities and their own distinctive local identity; both to remain economically competitive with other cities, and also to improve the local quality of life. At the same time that decline has occurred, in recent years many urban areas have experienced creative new efforts at revitalizing the city which represent a break from past traditions of urban renewal. Such efforts are manifested in changes that affect the public realm, transportation, housing opportunities, and social relations, with broad implications for residents and future residents. This thesis will explore what those responsive strategies and approaches are.

**Research Focus**

As a result of all of these concerns, then, this research takes up the conditions of a city experiencing extreme widespread urban decline at a time when growth and urban revitalization are on the agenda and widely discussed in urban planning policy, theory, and in popular media. The focus of this thesis is on urban revitalization strategies for declining cities, specifically highlighting the emblematic case of Detroit as the key example of a city dealing with both urban decline and revitalization, simultaneously. Detroit is at once the epitome of urban decline and
urban revitalization as evidenced through the media narratives surrounding the “rebirth of Detroit”, and touting many positive improvements over recent years. As the title suggests, this thesis proposes drawing together various city ‘re-making’ approaches in contemporary urbanism theories and practices, with a focus on challenges for re-creating ‘place’ in the context of declining cities, and presents a new synthesis model that I term, “Re-Urbanism”, as an urban strategy for the revitalization of Detroit and other declining cities.

1.1 Identifying the Research Problem

There have been many attempts at revitalizing urban areas in the United States over the last several decades, including urban renewal and public housing solutions in the post-World War II era, extensive suburban development as a reaction to urban conditions of the time, and hopeful ‘magic-bullet’ architectural projects such as the construction of sports stadiums, conference hotels, casinos, and mega-complexes; much of these were based on Modernist traditions and paradigms. Towards the start of the 21st century, the efforts of New Urbanism, Smart Growth, and sustainable cities agendas acted as reactionaries to sprawl and aimed to change the patterns of sprawl to re-introduce urban areas as attractive places to live in the United States. Declining cities in the U.S. and elsewhere today are in need of fresh urban revitalization strategies. In recent years, many municipal governments with depleted budgets for public projects, have looked to a loosely defined and vaguely understood term and concept – ‘Placemaking’. Many formulas exist for creating lively public spaces, but placemaking has come to the stage as a new strategy for urban revitalization at local and regional scales. Located at the crossroads of urban planning, community building, and economic development, placemaking is said to act as a catalyst for improving the quality of urban environments; an approach that acknowledges that cities can’t build their way out of urban problems and offers a potentially more local solution to urban revitalization through place-based, place-led interventions. Following a long history of de-urbanization, efforts in Detroit are working towards re-urbanization as the latest attempt at revitalization, and this has included concentrated efforts at ‘re-making’ places. Less commonly discussed is the role that urban heritage plays in contemporary urban revitalization which this thesis addresses.

As Dolores Hayden writes, “the history of economic development explains the physical shape of the city over time” (1988, p. 48), and the same is true of the history of economic downturn in shaping the physical environment. To study the urban history of Detroit is to study a place of dramatic incline, followed by immediate decline, and now experiencing another type of moment in its history, which is a blend of decline and growth. It is to study a history of loss; loss of economy and jobs, loss of population and people who inhabited the spaces of the city, loss of buildings
and physical elements that create public realms, and the eventual loss of ‘place’ and of history, leading to an ‘empty city’ condition. The starting point of this research was the observation of this urban decay which contributes to a completely broken down public realm where Detroit’s urban form, physical structures, and public places have deteriorated to an extreme point, often to the point of disappearance, at a time of promised renewal. The combination of ‘placelessness’ as a result of urban decline paired with a renewed interest in living in the city, leads to the problem of how to ‘re-make’ cities, and how to re-create ‘place’, and which approaches offer the most hopeful solutions. The specific problem that this study addresses is that the conditions of urban decline in U.S. cities has led to a condition of ‘placelessness’, that is – the loss of ‘place’ through the loss of built form and the social inhabitants within. Relph (1976) describes ‘placelessness’ as “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place” (1976, preface), or as Arefi (1999) puts it:

“modernism disrupts the emotional attachment to place, adopting policies such as urban renewal and highway construction projects that led to the demolition of many old neighborhoods has contributed to the loss of a common good: sense of place – places are constantly in tension between what they are, what they ought to become and what the mediations of global capital and power make of them”.

-Mahyar Arefi, 1999

This topic is timely and urgent because of the potential opportunity to remake and reshape urban areas that have experienced decades of disinvestment at a time when cities are experiencing the opportunities and challenges presented by a broader shift in demographics, including a return to city living following a long period of urban exodus and untamed suburban sprawl that has contributed to a hollowed-out urban core.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This work is concerned with, the challenges of re-urbanizing declining city areas, and the revitalization of place in a post-industrial declining city, and explores the strategies and models that could be the most effective in addressing this. The thesis explores the paradox of the simultaneous decline and revitalization in cities like Detroit, and their inequitable distribution. I investigate the strategies that are proving effective for revitalization including place-based and ‘heritage-led’ approaches, and how they might be applied more effectively and more equitably over larger areas. Following the research problem, the research is structured into an overall research aim describing the main purpose and aspiration of this study, followed by five research objectives in the form of research questions that correspond to each of the research articles (I-V) to support the aim.
Based on the research problem, the overall aim of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of how declining cities utilize place-led, or place-based approaches to dealing with urban decline in their urban revitalization approaches, and to understand how different key urbanism paradigms could be integrated into an effective new synthesis (which as I discuss in the conclusion, I call the “Re-Urbanism” paradigm).

The objective of this study is to identify the contributions of key contemporary urbanism paradigms, and evaluate their responses to urban decline and their approaches to urban renewal, using place-led and heritage approaches to recreate ‘place’ in a post-decline context. The research questions follow in the next section.

1.3 Research Questions

This section explains the questions that my research attempts to answer. The research was guided by one overall question, which was addressed through the five peer-reviewed scientific articles. The overriding question addressed in this work is:

How do different urban design and planning paradigms approach revitalizing a declining city, and what can be learned from their successes and shortcomings to inform a more effective next-generation paradigm? In particular, what lessons do place-based and heritage-led approaches have for the regeneration of Detroit and other distressed cities?

This is an urgent question for the many post-industrial cities that are seeking strategies to attract new residents and to enable existing residents to improve their prosperity, health, and quality of life.

The overall research question is addressed through the following five research questions that reflect each of the five scientific articles compiled in this dissertation:

**RQ1, Article I:** Can certain claims of Landscape Urbanism that deal with social equity, ecological restoration, urban form, and justice, be applied through replication of a Mid-century Modern green urban space as a revived solution for declining cities? Are there fundamental lessons of urban form and structural re-connection (or their absence) to be drawn?

**RQ2, Article II:** How have Sustainable and New Urbanist approaches employed in the HOPE VI program offered place-led, structural solutions for declining and distressed neighborhoods in the USA? What lessons can be drawn for future institutional collaborations, and for future changes in urban structure? And what
lessons from the HOPE VI program in the USA can be transferred to European suburbs experiencing similar conditions?

RQ3, Article III: What can be learned from The High Line in New York City for other projects in other cities looking for strategies for urban revitalization? How can Landscape Urbanist, nature-led design interventions combine with structural re-connections of the urban fabric to create true public places in the context of decline?

RQ4, Article IV: How can urban heritage be understood and examined as infrastructure and a supportive framework for urban planning and urban design in the context of urban decline and structural change? What role could heritage play in the re-weaving of fragmented urban fabric in Detroit?

RQ5, Article V: How can different approaches be combined and synthesized to deal effectively with urban revitalization? Does the concept of “Re-Urbanism”, introduced by Robert Fishman, bring together a number of other successful elements into a useful new approach? What new additions are required for the current context?

1.4 Research Approach and Methodology

Research into the processes of urban planning and design is interdisciplinary and falls within the field of applied social sciences, and in this thesis is primarily conducted through a qualitative approach. The core of this qualitative research is based on a mixed-methods approach through an explorative study with elements of grounded theory, and elements of case study methodology in the paradigmatic case of Article III. The mixed-methods approach relies on triangulation of methods for collecting data and sources. The methods of the research are further described in Chapter Four, including an overview of the methods for data collection; in addition, each published article also presents an overview of this. The rationale for the selection of each case is described in Chapter Five within each article’s summary.

1.5 Delimitations and Contextualization of the Study

One of the key delimitations of this research study is the focus on declining cities and urban revitalization projects in the context of American (USA) cities. The main focus was on Detroit, but also included districts and projects in New Orleans, Chicago, Boston, and New York City. In the context of decline, many approaches to revitalization have been focused on urban form and urban public space, as reflected through the cases. Of these other cities, the cases from Boston and Chicago both focus on areas that were declining and undergoing urban revitalization attempts through
the HOPE VI program. New Orleans may be the most similar in sharing features of urban decline with Detroit, and New York City may be the most dissimilar in that Manhattan is not declining today, as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, however, the case of The High Line in Article III focuses on revitalizing a piece of abandoned or left-over infrastructure located in an area known as Hudson Yards, which is currently undergoing the type of district redevelopment discussed in Article V.

The choice of Detroit as the main focus area served the purpose of examining the key emblematic case of urban decline in the USA. The study of Detroit excluded the metropolitan region and was limited to the city boundaries with a focus on the central areas, also known as the “Greater Downtown” area which Doucet (2016) called the “geography of renaissance” and was quantified as 7.2 square miles in a report by a team of stakeholders including the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (Mahoney et al. 2017). All of the cases in this study are located in urban settings; therefore the subject of inquiry is the city and interventions in the built environment.

Urban design, is a broad field which by nature of being interdisciplinary, incorporates theories and views of many different social science disciplines such as architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, urban studies, urban sociology, environmental psychology, anthropology, and public health studies related to urban environments. A key delimitation is that this work focuses on practice and theory in urban planning and design. Another delimitation related to the methods was the decision to not focus on surveys and structured interviews, instead opting for unstructured interviews including ‘verbal observations’ as described in Chapter Four.

The research focus of this thesis has been conducted within the doctoral program in Planning and Decision Analysis, with a specialization in Urban and Regional Studies, at the Division of Urban and Regional Studies within the School of Architecture and the Built Environment at The Royal Institute of Technology (KTH). Within this environment, this research study was located within the platform on Urban Environments and Social Life as part of the Civitas Athenaeum Laboratory (CAL), and within the Urban Form and Human Behavior research project, now positioned within the Centre for the Future of Places (CFP). This research study relates directly to the Urban Form and Human Behaviour research project by contributing to the primary aim of “understanding how urban form and the dynamic processes that compose our cities and places shape the urban experience”, and worked with project objectives to contribute to the knowledge base for urban design decisions by developing methods and theoretical frameworks through qualitative investigation and analysis of urban structures from both normative and explorative perspectives (Centre for the Future of Places, 2019).
1.6 Organization of the Study: “Re-Urbanism” as an Emergent Unifying Theme

The general structure of this research study consists of this introductory essay, to provide an overview of the study and to synthesize the research articles and the relation of each article to the others. As this introductory essay describes, the relation of the articles to one another became clearer to me as my research progressed. A unifying theme emerged, which I identified in the final paper as the "Re-Urbanism" paradigm. It represents a synthesis of the findings within the different papers, and a kind of narrative thread between them. The details of these findings and their relation to Re-Urbanism are described further below.

This cover essay begins with Chapter One, presenting the overall background, problematizing the research, and outlining the research aims and objectives guiding the overriding research question, and the specific research questions. Chapter Two presents the theoretical approach through discussions of shrinking cities and urban decline, contrasted with urban renewal and revitalization, and followed by theories on place and space, placemaking and heritage, key paradigms in contemporary urbanism discourse, and the issue of gentrification in relation to revitalization. Chapter Three provides a description of the background of the main case of Detroit, charting the course of rise, decline, rebirth and challenges. Chapter Four describes the research approach and methodology used in this study. Chapter Five provides a summary and overview of each of the five research articles. Chapter Six discusses the results of the study, presents the main contribution of the work to the research community, and overall conclusions and policy recommendations.

Following the references in Chapter Seven, the five scientific research articles that make up the body of this work, are published in full. While each of these articles are connected in this research study by examining different approaches to dealing with urban decline and placemaking through the lenses of the key paradigms: New Urbanism, Landscape Urbanism, Heritage Urbanism, and Re-Urbanism; at the same time they act as a stand-alone contribution into the field of urban planning and urban design literature, each contributing specific elements to the overall study.

The duality of urban decline and urban revitalization as seen in Detroit and other U.S based cases could be approached through improved integration of knowledge from different paradigms in urbanism practices and theories, and centered on place and heritage as an infrastructure in the making and re-making of cities. The thesis also presents policy recommendations as well as ideas for further research. The findings offered on the final research results will be relevant to researchers focusing on placemaking and urban revitalization.
2. Theoretical Approach: Key Concepts in Decline and Revitalization

In order to situate this research with the many themes discussed in the articles, this chapter provides an overview of those key themes and concepts, and connects to previous research in order to provide the reader with background on terms used later in the thesis and articles. The first section deals with what are referred to as “negative trajectory terms”, terms commonly used to describe a downward spiral that cities take in opposition to growth paradigms. These words usually begin with the prefix of ‘urban’ and include: ‘decline’, ‘shrinkage’, ‘abandonment’, and ‘blight’. There is an order to the process, a city first shrinks due to economic decline, which leads to population decline, this in turn has many effects on the built urban environment including: abandonment, blight, decay, and erasure. The second section deals with what are referred to as “upward trajectory” terms, commonly used to describe attempts at reversing decline through improvement strategies, such as ‘renewal’, ‘revitalization’, and ‘regeneration’, these words generally come with the prefix of ‘urban’ also. The third section deals with the relevance of concepts of ‘space’ and ‘place’, while the fourth section deals with ‘placemaking’ and ‘heritage’. The fifth section presents key paradigms in contemporary urbanism that were analyzed and used as lenses to study the revitalization efforts in cities throughout the cases used in the research articles. The sixth section deals with gentrification as an issue embedded in urban transformations such as those described in the research articles.

2.1 Shrinking Cities and Urban Decline

Cities rise and fall according to and in harmony with global forces that are far beyond their own control and making, and involve global and economic restructuring processes and pressures symptomatic of a structural crisis (Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2012; Martinez-Fernandez et al, 2012a). Shrinking cities are a global trend that many authors have written on within the global perspective including the global south, Asia, Europe, and the Americas (Oswalt and Rientiz, 2006; Audirac, 2010; Richardson and Nam, 2014). Architect Philipp Oswalt popularized the term “shrinking city” by documenting global urban shrinkage through the ‘Shrinking Cities’ project, an edited volume that included accounts from cities ranging from Halle and Leipzig in Germany, to Manchester and Liverpool in the U.K., to Ivanovo, Russia, and including Detroit (Oswalt, 2005; Ryan, 2012, p. 36). The focus of shrinkage and decline in this research is primarily on Detroit, located in the American ‘Rust-Belt’, a geographic area referring to the former manufacturing centers of the U.S. in the upper-Midwest and north-east regions. Rust Belt cities such as Detroit, and neighboring Cleveland, Youngstown, Toledo, Erie, Pittsburgh, and St.
Louis, and over to Newark, Philadelphia, and even New York City of the 1960s to 1970s, all faced serious challenges from deindustrialization that resulted in population decline. While Detroit is not alone, it has become the biggest and most well-known example of urban decline in the United States and perhaps internationally.

Reckien and Martinez-Fernandez define shrinking cities as “urban areas (cities and towns) or regions (system of towns) that over the past 40-50 years have experienced population loss, employment decline or/and protracted economic downturn until very recently” (2011, p. 1375). Shrinking cities are the result of unplanned and unintended economic restructuring, including deindustrialization, which has led to economic decline, resulting in loss of employment followed by the out-migration of those who can as a result no longer find economic opportunities, and resulting in a loss of a city’s tax base. A significant body of literature exists on the causes and consequences of urban decline; an important differentiation to make is between the causes and the symptoms, such as urban abandonment, decay, and blight (Martinez-Fernandez et al, 2012a). Cities and urban areas that have experienced widespread shrinkage are left with redundant urban spaces, excesses of buildings and infrastructure that were no longer needed, inhabited or cared for, and in some cases properties were completely abandoned, left to the forces of destruction such as by fire or demolition – resulting in vacant land. Németh and Langhorst (2014) define vacant land as long term unused or abandoned land, with or without derelict structures, and classify it into three categories: remnant parcels, reserve parcels, and “temporarily obsolete, abandoned or derelict sites” (2014, p. 144). Shifting urban conditions such as the imposition of urban freeways into an organic street pattern and the subsequent ‘dieback’ effect (Jacobs, 1961), are factors contributing to increases in vacant land (Németh and Langhorst, 2014).

While growth has long been the unchallenged planning paradigm, now planning scholars are undergoing a “paradigm shift away from traditional theories of urban growth” that can aid cities in “shrinking smart” and to new options for “planning for urban life that would focus on quality of space and slower and smarter growth” (Wiechmann and Pallagst 2012; Martinez-Fernandez et al, 2012a). Several authors have stated the duality of growth and shrinkage. Oswalt (2005) has said that “the process of shrinkage is not simply a reversal of growth”; the opposite trends of growth and shrinkage can run parallel” (2005, p. 12). Pallagst et al. (2013) have said that cities in the U.S. must “plan for both redevelopment in shrinking areas and growth-related development at the same time” (2013, p. 59), and Reckien and Martinez-Fernandez have pointed to the importance of planning for growth while also planning for shrinkage (2011, p. 1390). The phenomenon of shrinking cities calls into question the primary purpose of cities in the first place, which often result as agglomerations of population centered on an area for economic purposes (Soja, 2000, pp. 24-27). What then is a city to do if no longer able to entice large populations with
the promise of jobs that offered the standard of living that attracted so many to Detroit in the first half of the twentieth century? And, what to do with cities faced with ageing infrastructure, dilapidated housing stock, social problems? Shrinking and declining cities are not a new phenomenon, and the urban renewal efforts of the mid-twentieth century attempted to deal with the early effects of it in the United States as described in the next section.

2.2 Urban Renewal and Urban Revitalization

Starting with urban renewal, similar terms, also with the prefix of ‘urban’, such as ‘revitalization’, are used to describe attempted efforts to reverse declining fortunes of urban areas, whether it involved the transformation of housing quarters from pre-1940s, main-street business districts, or former public housing areas during the HOPE VI era (1990s-2000s), and later, entire central cities such as in the case of Detroit highlighted in articles IV and V.

The term “urban renewal” is often used in literature as something a city has endured, suffered from, or has had a devastating effect on residents, the efforts of urban renewal often focused on the downtown core and adjacent areas (further described in Chapter Three). The period of Urban Renewal in the United States, is generally considered as having begun with the arrival of the federal Housing Act of 1949, and the Interstate Highway Act of 1956. Hyra (2012) divides the urban renewal history of the United States into two eras, “old urban renewal” spanning 1949-1974, and the “new urban renewal” spanning 1992-2007; articles in this thesis deal with both of these eras. Institutional racism in 1950s paved the way to the planning and construction urban renewal projects such as the case described in Article I, where the majority of the planning and the majority of the wealth generated by the new developments was done by and for white leaders and owners (Hyra, 2012, pp. 503-504). The urban renewal programs of the era did little to address the poverty of local residents and rather shifted the poverty from one area of the city to another area (Hyra, 2012). Brent Ryan in Design After Decline (2012) reviews urban renewal policies and their impacts in the cases of Detroit and Philadelphia, showing how modernism succeeded at clearing ‘slums’ but failed at community rebuilding. The planning agenda of the mid-twentieth century displaced people, without the basic infrastructure needed to properly relocate previous residents, dissolving of community through forced displacement and often affected minority groups, destruction of walkable urban fabric and replacement with auto-centric urban plans often designed with the aim to relieve traffic congestion and replace slums with developments capable of returning higher tax benefits to municipalities (Ryan, 2012).

After considerable witnessing of the destruction of urban renewal, urban revitalization, is generally recognized as starting in the 1970s and forward, in the U.S.
Birch describes renewal as a “local affair undertaken primarily at the municipal level, with the state and federal governments offering direct and indirect financial support, a complex mixture of public, nonprofit and private groups accomplish it” (Birch, 2009, p. 315). What was often missing in the urban renewal and revitalization agendas was a focus on place and people, where up until the 1990s, this discussion in planning was limited to issues such as historic preservation and sprawl (Ryan, 2012).

2.3 Theories of Space and Place

The complexity of space and place issues within current structural change of urban economies, including cities and towns facing the complex challenges of deindustrialization and global economic crisis, calls for a wider definition of ‘placemaking’, which has been considered as a new strategy for urban improvement at the local scale. In urban management, a fundamental task is to understand structural change in society and its consequences and meanings, and to use that knowledge to positively shape present and future urban structures. Hence, it is also a question of seeing how place and identity are important parts and elements in the overall urban management. In order to do that, we need to better understand the intricate relation between ‘space’ and ‘place’ within interdisciplinary definitions.

We can look at space as an overall system of places. Places are aggregates of permanent features connected by causal relations that are independent of the subject and are arranged in space and time (Norberg-Schulz, 1988). Following on Tuan’s arguments, space can be viewed as movement and place is a residuum and a comfort of local and anchored malleability (Tuan, 1977). Place becomes synonymous with identification and is an ordering of understanding and experience (Norberg-Schulz, 1983; Relph, 1976). Spaces are scenes of existence, and may seem to be simple divisions between our ambient surroundings and the places people have created over time. Places become an ambient of collective memory (history, culture, personality) and dynamical interaction (people and processes) where spatial, social and psychological (cognitive) aspects play a pivotal role in shaping and assembling something that becomes a place. Spaces and places are created both by social relations and actions as well as by physical structures.

Three main constructs accounting for the psychology of place are indicated in environmental psychology; namely, ‘place attachment’, ‘place identity’ and ‘sense of place’ (Steele, 1981; Hummon, 1992; Inalhand and Finch, 2004; Williams, 2004; Manzo and Perkins, 2006). The concept of ‘place’ is closely connected with human actions and the sense of time directly affects the sense of place. If time is conceived as flow or movement, then we can look at the ‘place’ as ‘pause’, where quality and intensity of experience matters more than simple duration (Tuan, 1977). Place attachment occurs the moment a person distinguishes a place from a space (Altman and Low, 1992). We
can then say that relationship between space and place, or the creation of sense of place, can only be accomplished when space feels thoroughly familiar to us, and then and only then it becomes a place. In that context the distinctive atmosphere or pervading spirit of a place (genius loci) becomes important with profound implications for place-making (Norberg-Schulz 1983), regardless if the ‘place-making’ is deliberate or resulting from processes of economic, social and spatial structural change. Genius loci is representing the sense people have of a place as a sum of all physical, symbolic and other values in nature and the human environment (Assi, 2008).

It is suggested that these complex theoretical concepts and tensions among them, have become confused, and that genius loci arises most particularly from the experiences of those using places rather than from deliberate ‘place-making’ (Jivén and Larkham, 2003). Sense of place then, is that ‘something’ which we create over the course of time, resulting from habits, customs, and recurring events in those places (Jackson, 1984). Kevin Lynch (1984) correlates sense of place with identity where that sense of place is the extent to which an individual person can discern or recall a place as being distinct from other places and possesses a character of its own, an attribute closely knitted to the feeling of identity.

Concerning the theory of place, three key aspects of place are fundamental to identity. The first is attachment and sense, namely, physical form and space. The second is functional activities, and the third is psychological (emotion/cognition) through the meanings we attribute to places. Identity and the sense of place in any town or city represent a specific and concrete segment of the spatial continuum filled with meaning and history. A sense of place entails both a positive affirmation of identity and a regressive closure to what lies beyond the divide of the known and unknown (the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’). ‘Space’ becomes a ‘place’ when community, its individuals and all people who give form, name and history to space, seize upon its abstract and open-ended formlessness. Place is a historically relative human creation that defines itself against an alien exterior space: transformation, nature, foreign culture or something else unknown (Carter, Donald & Squires, 1993).

In Relph’s thinking, identity of place takes an important role as we must then admit identification with place (Relph, 1976). It makes a two-fold understanding and acceptance in the belief of a power of place. Firstly, places are those anchors defined by unique locations, landscapes, and communities inhabiting them as well the histories and narratives accumulated there. This directly links to the second issue; that those same communities and people inhabiting those places must concentrate their experiences, intentions, everyday modes of habitual existence onto particular localized settings – on places. When those two strands meet and merge, we become to encounter places of identity and spatial continuum. Canter (1997), proposed four aspects of place: functional differentiation, place objectives, scale of interaction, and
aspects of design. An extremely important variable was added to that by Knez (2005), namely one of ‘climate’, nested in all places; not only constituting objectively a place but also subjectively influencing the way people experience and remember a place. Canter stated that place is a complex compound of actions, conceptions and the physical environment, and his visualization of ‘place-ness’ formed when actions, conceptions, and physical attributes were inter-related (1977).

The dialectic relation between space and place manifests itself with particular intensity in towns and cities where in the past it was meaningful to describe the human everyday environment in terms of stable places, such as market places, work places, transportation nodes, neighborhoods, or houses (Castells, 2005). As that intensity of use dwindles, such as in the case of Detroit where population decline resulted in places becoming less used and inhabited, the identity of place also declines due to changing conditions which make the primary purpose less relevant (Relph, 1976). Stedman writes that “the physical landscape may change to such a degree that preferred meanings become untenable or are maintained only through active effort” (Stedman, 2003, p. 683). This relates to the fragility of ‘sense of place’ and the risk of a town, city, or urban area experiencing the loss of place. Despite perceiving a sense of ‘placelessness’ in observing the Detroit urban landscape in this research study, Jackson (1986) reminds us that each place is unlike any other, and individualized by a “social uniqueness” – not by the built forms but by the social patterns of use, rhythms and routines that contribute to creating community. Many places within this ‘empty’ Detroit landscape appear empty but are still used in some capacity. Approaches to re-making ‘place’ and the many aspects connected to it, including meaning, identity, and sense of, have been associated with the practice of placemaking as defined and discussed in the following section and in Chapter Three.

2.4 Placemaking and Heritage

This section begins with an introduction and a brief review on selected theories, and will then identify and define placemaking according to different perspectives. There is an ongoing debate about how much built form affects social outcomes. The modernist tradition sought to rationalize planning and make order out of chaos, and planners have historically worked with very lofty goals and planning agendas endorsed by the state. In modernist planning versions, the planner is a professional who can know and understand what is the ‘public interest’ and administer the solution and those who write their histories have often viewed them as historic reformers (Sandercock, 1998, pp. 2-4). Emily Talen acknowledges that with the given history of “physical solutions cast as cure-alls throughout much of planning’s history”, that critics have reason to be skeptical with “place remedies” (Talen, 2006, p. 241). Talen recognizes two types of urban design as, one that is architecture oriented, concerned with concepts, textures, surfaces, big clients with deep pockets,
and another which is community based, process oriented, and with a focus on the social aspects of places (Talen, 2009).

Placemaking is a term encompassing many meanings and various definitions, and the interventions and projects use different methods and means depending on the context, but generally they all include an emphasis on citizen participation in the planning process. Placemaking comes out of a tradition of looking at what people need and want in their public spaces. Originating largely from Whyte’s (1980) classical study on *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, and has been promoted as a community oriented process and empowerment tool by the non-profit advocacy Project for Public Spaces (Madden and Schwartz, 1999). Placemaking represents a turn away from what Fainstein calls a “formalist physical solution to urban decay” (2000, p. 452) by seeking not to erase past mistakes through razing buildings and raising new structures, but by working with citizens and stakeholders to find solutions for what they need and how they wish to use public space, rather than prescribing to them what they need from above. Placemaking is also a turn away from that image of the professional planner and opens up to non-professionals and to local citizens, including marginalized groups. Where Sandercock (1998) faults the traditional planning profession and history with focusing too little on people of diverse backgrounds, placemaking emphasizes a focus on the people who actually live and use a space, as it redefines planning away from the typical modernist version and does what Sandercock calls “the community-building tradition – what we might call planning from below” (1998, p. 9). Placemaking incorporates a blend of professionals working with grass roots organizations at citizen participation levels, involving citizens in visioning what they want their communities and spaces to look like, and makes “planning a field of practice, of action” (Sandercock, 1998, p. 3). The practice and process of placemaking connects to theories that emphasize public input and citizen participation rather than prescribing public spaces that don’t match with locals needs.

Carmona et al. (2010, pp. 7-8) identified placemaking as a third tradition in urban design thought which is simultaneously concerned with the product oriented ‘hard city’ of buildings and space and the process oriented ‘soft city’ of people and activities. According to Schneekloth and Shibley “we live in a culture that has lost its ability to make places” (2000, p. 130) and advocated for the “Practice of Placemaking” as one that moves beyond expert culture and is a participatory practice involving citizens alongside expert knowledge. Placemaking is rooted in the idea of “cracking through the ‘silo effect’ of disintegrated problem solving by specialists” (Brain, 2005, p. 234) and can be used in planning and design as a tool that works to reverse and repair the mistakes of modernist rational planning which sought to separate everything from people to land to functions, into separate containers.
Managing the different meanings of placemaking, as Fields writes, “requires delicately balancing the perceived meaning of the place in the past with emerging visions for the future roles of the place” (Fields, 2015, p. 42).

There is a robust idea in current urban debates that investment in the public realm leads to improvements in the local economy. Attempts to enhance the urban quality of life by adding activities, markets, and upgrades to public spaces also runs the risk of becoming only “window dressing” on urban issues and encouraging gentrification. Placemaking has been faulted with encouraging what Harvey calls “urban life as a commodity,” where community is sold as a “boutique lifestyle to fulfill urban dreams” (Harvey, 2008, p. 31). Still, examples abound of placemaking as a tool for the transformation of the physical space in an effort to increase sense of place and community, which should strive to include diversity as promoted by Jane Jacobs (1961) who “connected city design to diversity directly” and accommodation of the needs of multiple publics (Talen, 2006, p. 237). Friedmann (1998) notes that the role of planners has shifted due to the “partial retreat of the state from its traditional responsibilities,” along with the newer role of civil society, and that the new “emerging form of planning is more entrepreneurial”, which we see reflected in the work of ‘placemakers’ who seek cost effective solutions to encouraging distinctive livable cities and communities (1998, p. 252). As a strategy, this has noticeably come to the forefront of the effort to revitalize declining Detroit, although not without criticism; Montgomery (2016) relates the emergence of the placemaking trend with increased privatization of public space and uneven revitalization in Detroit.

**Urban Heritage and Place**

Ashworth (1997) distinguishes ‘heritage’ from preservation or conservation, where heritage is a term “describing almost anything inherited from the past or destined for the future” (1997, p. 93) and says there are many options for the development of heritage, depending upon “a particular time, place and society” (1997, p. 95). Urban heritage is increasingly expected to contribute to future urban development, not least in declining cities (Newman, 2016). This increased interest can be regarded as a response to changing prerequisites for urban development during the last few decades that challenge contemporary heritage management and traditional ways of working with heritage issues.

The Washington Charter (1987) identified urban form and functions as qualities that contribute to authenticity, but was largely focused on conservation and preservation. The Vienna Memorandum (2005) went beyond traditional definitions of “historic centers” and included the significance of “the broader territorial and landscape context” and focused on the integration of contemporary architecture and urban development with existing historic patterns and context. This was an important step forward because it recognized that historic typologies and morphologies in cities are
the result of an evolutionary and gradual process, forming an interconnected and interrelated landscape.

Newman (2016) criticized development in the postwar era for failing to connect urban design to surrounding historic buildings, resulting in a need for more “place-based…or heritage-based” approaches (2016, p. 388). In a marked shift from earlier urban renewal efforts, public space today is considered a driver in revitalizing cities. Lynch (1960) highlighted the relationship between urban form and place, and traditionally, public space is shaped by the surrounding buildings which play a vital role in placemaking (Relph, 1976). In the case of Detroit, urban decay has led to a scenario where both buildings and the surrounding places have been lost over time, and despite the efforts of historic preservationists this continues. In 2017, the ‘Journal of Urban Design’ featured a special issue asking “how urban heritage is used as a mechanism to achieve urban regeneration”, and presented the use of heritage in regeneration as a global phenomenon linked to the processes of ‘place-making’ (Pendlebury and Porfyriou, 2017). In line with this, Article IV in this thesis asked “how can a vibrant public realm be created in a declining city with a severely deteriorated urban fabric? And how can heritage contribute to that?” A focus on heritage in urban planning and design is presented and discussed in Article IV as another option or approach in urbanism. In the next section, prominent paradigms and models in contemporary urbanism are discussed.

2.5 Key Paradigms in Contemporary Urbanism Discourse

Throughout the last three decades a number of normative design models have emerged to claim leadership in the practice of urban planning and design. These design models, and the movements behind them have already begun to have a notable impact on the form of our built urban environments, as discussed in Article II where HOPE VI projects implemented design principles of New Urbanism, and in Article III where one of Landscape Urbanisms’ most high-profile projects, The High Line has served as a global inspiration. The specific ideals dominating today’s urban planning and design discourse have been examined and defined in various ways, such as territories of urban design (Krieger, 2006), urban design force fields (Fraker, 2007), integrated paradigms in urbanism (Kelbaugh, 2008a and 2008b), typologies of urban design (Cuthbert, 2006), “60 newest urbanisms” (Barnett, 2011), “five ideals in urban planning and design” (Haas and Olsson, 2014a) as well as others. This study builds upon these classifications and from the particular example of Detroit, these distinct design movements and models can be identified on the ground and presented in this section.

New Urbanism appeared first among the most recent group of urban design movements, with origins in California’s “Local Government Commission” created by
then-governor Jerry Brown, and focused on sustainable urban development. In 1991 the LGC convened a group of architects and urban designers, forming what would later become the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) (Mehaffy, 2017). The “New Urbanism” (articulated in a “charter” of 27 points) is focused on walkable mixed use, multi-modal transportation, an intimate connection of buildings and public space, historic regeneration, public involvement, and a supportive physical framework for sustainable growth (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2017). In key respects, the CNU Charter was a point-for-point reversal of the older Charter of Athens, the highly influential 20th Century doctrine developed by the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, or CIAM (Mehaffy 2017, pp. 160-162). Krieger (2009, p. 122) notes that it is the “American New Urbanists” who have most clearly articulated the goal of “making new places as worthy as those made by their time-honoured predecessors”, albeit with mixed results which have been often criticized as historical pastiche. New Urbanism has also played a significant role in influencing the U.S. government’s housing policy through the HOPE VI program that replaced modernist public housing areas with mixed-income, mixed-use developments based on previous scales and patterns of urban fabric (Fishman, cited in Haas, 2008, p. 297).

**Landscape Urbanism** is a self-described alternative to the “hegemony” of New Urbanism and in particular, a refutation of the idea that buildings and streets have an intimate relation to a mixed public space. Charles Waldheim described the emergence of Landscape Urbanism as “a disciplinary realignment in which landscape supplants architecture’s historical role as the basic building block of urban design” (Waldheim, 2012). In that respect, it is a regression to the older CIAM model of urbanism embodied in the Charter of Athens of 1933, which proclaimed the dominance of large “verdant” areas in which buildings are placed fluidly. Layered onto that ideology is also a new ecological sensibility which recognizes the natural landscape as the starting point in the design of cities and with a distinct emphasis on horizontal surfaces and modes of representation. While the most famous project put forth by those practicing this paradigm or ideal is The High Line in New York City, Landscape Urbanists have a self-declared interest in the urban abandonment of deindustrialized Post-Fordist cities, such as Detroit.

**Everyday Urbanism** could be described as vernacular spatiality with a bottom-up approach and was a concept introduced in the 1999 publication of the same name, edited by Margaret Crawford, John Kaliski, and John Leighton Chase. In the introduction of that book, Crawford positioned it “between philosophy and common sense” and explained the influences from key texts such as “Urbanism as a Way of Life” by Louis Wirth (1938), a plethora of references from Henri Lefebvre, and Michel de Certeau’s (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, all sharing in common the emphasis on everyday life. More than any of the other paradigms and ideals listed here, this one focuses on the lived and shared human experience of urban life rather than on the design of architecture or public space. Everyday Urbanism looks at the urban
condition as it is and embraces the ordinary. While it is a self-declared non-design practice, it is a practice rooted in the conditions created by urban life in the built environment. While avoiding the work of utopian design ideals, the practice could be described as involved in observing and researching the urban environment in order to advocate for and to inform urban planning and design processes and politics. Kelbaugh called it “admirably committed to social equity, but sets its goals too low for urban formal coherence, and places too much design hope in the ordinary” (2006, p. 46). In regards to the relevance of this approach to shrinking cities, which takes action in ways such as improving vacant lots or through artistic interventions, Ryan (2012) wrote that Everyday Urbanism could describe “urban complexity, but it could not prescribe an urban future” and denies design a role in “shaping the future of the city at a scale larger than the individual property owner” (2012, pp. 187-188).

**DIY/Tactical Urbanism** is often associated with other terms and activities describing bottom-up projects or interventions such as guerrilla urbanism, guerrilla gardening, Park(ing) Day, open streets, insurgent practices, pop-up urbanism and more. The urban planning focused website Planetizen recognized “tactical urbanism” as one of the top planning trends of 2012 (Nettler, 2012), and the US pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 2012 focused on this within the theme of Spontaneous Interventions (Urban Design Forum, 2012). Lydon and Garcia’s (2015) publication *Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Action, Long-Term Change* defines this as “an approach to neighborhood building and activation using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions and policies” which are adopted by a variety of actors including “governments, businesses and nonprofits, citizen groups, and individuals,” based on “open and iterative development processes, the efficient use of resources, and the creative potential unleashed by social interaction” (Lydon, 2015, p. 2). Spataro writes that “these design strategies re-imagine under-utilized urban space for the purpose of human-scaled interaction and conviviality” (2016, p. 185). All of these interventions share a common agenda of promoting people-centered places and gaining the ear of decision makers by demonstrating through non-traditional urban design tactics how improvements in the public realm would be utilized and appreciated by citizens. Campo (2014) has examined the role of DIY practices for declining cities as a potential catalyst for growth and a response to decline where market oriented solutions have not yet become feasible.

**Re-Urbanism** is a term stemming from academic urban design discourse, first coined by Robert Fishman in 2005 in his piece, the “Fifth Migration” to describe the ongoing reurbanization of declining central city districts across the USA. Where the “Fourth Migration” described by Mumford in 1925 explained the decentralization of cities in the last half of the 20th century, the Fifth Migration, explained the opposite trend at the start of the 21st century. Fishman (2005) called “Re-Urbanism” (his spelling) “the resurgence of urbanism” and related it to the New Urbanist reform movement that began in the early 1990s. In that time, many new opportunities had arisen in the
center of cities which had seen a lack of development for decades, in favor of suburban developments which in Fishman’s words, could not “hope to reproduce the social dynamism of...reurbanized neighborhoods” in the urban core (cited in Haas, 2008, p. 296). Kelbaugh has called it “market urbanism”, “old urbanism, or simply urbanism” and describes Re-Urbanism as “the positive redevelopment and revitalization of American cities that is now happening piecemeal – the loft conversions, the in-town malls, the art museums, the concert halls, and sports arenas” (2005, p. 9).

Re-Urbanism is in some ways the broadest movement of those discussed in this chapter, if it can be considered a movement, encompassing many of the features of the others, and existing without any defined organization or movement. In essence it is simply an adaptation to the existing urban forms, which Haas and Olsson (2014a) called “contemporary urban design and architecture with historical precedents”. Fishman describes the weakness of Re-Urbanism as “the continuing dependence of new urban immigrant and black economies on satisfying the luxury demand generated by a globalized downtown core” which he relates to the “missing middle range of good jobs” that need to be part of the strategy of a city’s economy to avoid the trap of the “creative class” and global economy creating too many jobs at two ends of the spectrum, thus causing neighborhoods that are economically diverse to further segregate into rich and poor (Fishman cited in Haas, 2008, p. 297).

2.6 Gentrification

The term “gentrification” came about in 1964, coined by British sociologist Ruth Glass, who defined it as a process where one class is “invaded” by a class with more buying power, and that once the process starts, “it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed” (Glass, 1964, p. xviii). The term has grown since then into a large area of scholarly research of its own, and is often situated in proximity to similar terms such as urban regeneration, revitalization, renewal, re-invasion, and ‘back-to-the-city movement’ (London and Palen, 1984, p. 6). London and Palen (1984) listed five explanations for gentrification, which they likened with “reinvasion”, playing off of Park and Burgess’s (1925) invasion and succession cycles (1984, p. 8). Those five explanations pointed to: “(1) demographic-ecological, (2) sociocultural, (3) political-economic, (4) community networks, and (5) social movements” (London and Palen, 1984, p. 14). Theories abound on the cause and effect of gentrification, ranging from Neil Smith’s (1986) production side theory that points to economic and capital restructuring of space, to David Ley’s (1994) consumption side theory that points to an influx and “geography of a new cultural class” into the city (1994, p. 68), to theories surrounding globalization and the new economy (Sassen, 1995; Smith, 2002). A more contemporary notion of gentrification comes from Richard Florida’s
The Rise of the Creative Class (2002) that points to an influx of young mobile creative professionals and artists attracted by lower housing costs, which has been blamed for shifting poverty out of the revitalizing urban cores and into the suburbs.

In the U.S. context, early gentrification processes resulted from the abandonment of the inner cities by a certain economic and social class, and is typically thought of as a real-estate development process involving undervalued, underutilized and even semi-abandoned urban areas being reused and converted into new purposes by an outside social class. Smith (1979) associated the cyclical process of investment into the built environment as a “major vehicle for capital accumulation” with a fundamental restructuring of urban space, and argued that while gentrification is a movement about returning to the city, it’s not necessarily a return of people as much as it is a return of capital (1979, p. 547). Smith also predicted that gentrification would cause an inversion in American cities pushing the working class and poor out to aging suburbs as the “back to the city movement” brought back the middle to upper class (1979, p. 547).

In “New Globalism, New Urbanism,” Smith (2002) describes waves of gentrification, each embodying different characteristics and the result of various conditions. Dating back to the 1950s, he calls this first wave “sporadic”, while the second wave from the 1970s-1980s resulted from “urban and economic restructuring,” and the third wave from the 1990s is described as “gentrification generalized” (Smith, 2002, p. 440). Smith (2002) points out that this “third-wave” gentrification has focused on bringing the middle-class back to the city through more than only providing housing options, but that it has “evolved into a vehicle for transforming whole areas into new landscape complexes that pioneer a comprehensive class-inflected urban remake” (2002, p. 443) including new “cultural facilities, open space, complexes of recreation and pleasure” (2002, p. 443). This description fits well into the context of The High Line in Article III, in which gentrification is not mainly about housing areas as it is in Article II, but more about bringing in attractive urban amenities to spur further reinvestment in the city. In the context of Article III, gentrification processes are less a result of more affluent people moving into the area, then they are the result of a new “object” transforming the area and attracting more people, The High Line itself is the “gentrifier”, which speaks caution to other towns and cities who have similar infrastructure and inspires them to seek the same results. This is also relevant to Article V which describes the transformation of entire area from a dilapidated central district to a plan for a new district built around a sports arena.

Today’s prevailing term to soften the emotiveness of “gentrification” has become “urban regeneration” which emerged in Europe as an attempt to “incorporate gentrification into the heart of transnational urban policies” (Smith, 2002, p. 444). This describes it as essentially becoming a more advanced and coordinated style of gentrification, and Smith notes that urban regeneration constitutes the “next wave of
The process of gentrification has transformed from the first wave, small scale individuals that moved into neighborhoods, and has undergone decades of warping into something more global; turning into a “competitive urban strategy within the global economy” (Smith, 2002, p. 446).

Gentrification has long been a term capable of evoking multiple meanings depending on the stakeholder and the point of view. For the poor and disadvantaged it can mean economic eviction from a place long called home. Opponents of gentrification proclaim inequality and injustices and criticize the process for displacing the impoverished long-term residents of a community, as has been debated in various U.S. housing projects under HOPE VI redevelopments, where subsidized housing units were torn down and replaced with mixed-income housing, considered “affordable” by market standards (Locke and Haas, 2016). For real estate developers and institutions involved in financing urban projects it can spell huge financial gains. While for those seeking a lifestyle change, it may mean living in a trendy city condo within walking distance access to cafes and parks among other urban amenities. For some it is a natural evolution of a transforming city.

Those who claim that the city has a right to renew itself and improve over time do not fault gentrification processes for the transformation of neighborhoods. Author James H. Kunstler (2003) highlights some of the tricky aspects of the gentrification discussion, by asking how a city can expect to generate over time if reviving devalued property is prohibited, and notes that “the anti-gentrification forces overlook the salient characteristic of cities: that they are dynamic organisms continually undergoing cycles of change, of decay and renewal” (2003, p. 222). Matthew Carmona writes that London’s public spaces that have been regenerated “simply reflect the changing nature of the city, change that in recent times has manifested itself socially, economically, and culturally, as well as physically” (Carmona and Wunderlich, 2013, cited in Littke et al. 2016). The question of what happens to lower income residents when they are priced out by an influx of newcomers, and what can be done to address this is an important one which is always in the background of discussions on urban revitalization, but it is not the focus of this research study and constitutes an entire area of study.

Together, the five articles in this thesis all relate to this combination of the described theory in this chapter on urban decline and renewal, space and place, placemaking, the role of heritage in place, key paradigms in urban planning and design, gentrification, and urban morphology. In the following chapter, the focus of this research study is narrowed more specifically to the emblematic case of Detroit.
3. Urban Decline and Revitalization: The Case of Detroit

Before becoming the booming Motor City, and before transitioning to the rusting poster child of ‘shrinking cities’, popularized by images of Detroit decaying into the landscape; the terrain that would become Detroit was a flat, marshy, thickly forested plain extending from the river. But it was not an empty land; local native tribes lived on the lands before the French established a fort there in 1701 under Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, for who the GM luxury brand would later be named for, and before the English who ousted the French by 1760. Detroit, or Détroit, was named by the French, meaning “strait” or “narrrows”, and its geography well positioned it for what it would become; first as the crossroads of trade in the frontier outpost lands of the New World, and a militarily strategic position with a vast territory of fertile farmlands and woodlands to the north, west, south, and later a border city well positioned for shipping (Solnit, 2007; Galster, 2012, pp. 46-48). By 1805, Detroit had its first major disaster when the small outpost town of 300 wooden structures and 500 residents burned to the ground in the great fire of 1805. Out of this came the city’s motto: “We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes” which would later be seen as prophetic words for a city that would cyclically rise and fall, and rise again over the next two hundred plus years (Herron, 2007).

Detroit within Broader US Demographic Trends

As described in Chapter Two, one of the key features of a shrinking city is a shrinking population. The histories of Detroit, and of the industrial heartland of the upper Midwest and Northeast of the United States are intertwined and representative of broader national demographic trends over decades. For decades before the growth surrounding the auto industry exploded, Detroit was a medium sized city at best. In 1880 it ranked 18th in the nation at 116,000 people; it was similar in size to Louisville, Kentucky, or Providence, Rhode Island. Perhaps even more dramatic than the decline, are the numbers behind the rise of Detroit. Every decade between the 1820 census and the 1950 census, Detroit grew from a city of 1,500 people, to its apex of 1.849 million inhabitants in 1950 (Gavrilovich and McGraw, 2000). At the launch of the automobile era, from 1910 to 1920 the city population more than doubled in one decade alone, from 465,766 persons to 993,678, an increase of 113 percent (SEMCOG, 2018?). In the 1940 census, at the start of World War Two, Detroit was the fourth most populous of U.S. cities, behind New York City, Chicago and Philadelphia, placing it in the company of the most important cities in the nation (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998).

Detroit, as many other Midwestern and Northeastern U.S. cities with a manufacturing base, grew rapidly between 1880 and 1950, and shrunk rapidly
between 1950 and 2010. If population statistics can serve as a type of economic vitality indicator, the period of 1940 to 1960 could be considered the golden ‘age of urban America’, with all the five most populous cities: New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Detroit adding population into the 1950s. In the late 1960s, many major U.S. cities including Detroit would see race riots as evidence of the growing urban crisis (Soja, 2000; Sugrue, 1996). In the era of 1970 to 1990, most major Midwest and Northeast U.S. cities would experience dramatic population shrinkage, including New York City which narrowly avoided bankruptcy in October of 1975, something that Detroit would be unable to avoid by July of 2013.

The population has dropped dramatically even in the last 20 or so years. As recently as 1995, Detroit was still a city of one million inhabitants, but by the 2017 population estimate the number had dropped to 673,104 inhabitants; a staggering decrease of 32.7 percent in only 22 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, n.d.). There was a significant and noteworthy period of acceleration in the declining population statistics, and it corresponds to the financial crisis of 2007-08, when many were affected by further unemployment and a mortgage crisis that caused many to lose their homes. In 2007 Detroit numbered 848,438, by the time the city declared bankruptcy in 2013, the population had shrunk by 18.6 percent to 690,845, in just 6 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, n.d.). Even between the 2010 U.S. Census and the 2017 estimates, Detroit led the nation in decline with negative 5.7 percent. Between 2010 and 2019 Detroit fell from the 18th most populous city to the 23rd position. In total, the city lost 1,135,791 inhabitants from peak population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, n.d.). Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan blamed the continued population loss in part on schools and education: “At this point it’s about the schools,… We have got to create a city where families want to raise their children and have them go to the schools … There are a whole number of pieces that have gotten better but at the end of the day, I think the ultimate report card is the population going up or going down and our report card isn’t good enough” (MacDonald and Terry, 2018). However, the reality is much more complex than that.

At the same time that Detroit was de-populating, the demographics of race were inversing, where at the start of the twentieth century 1.4 percent of the population consisted of African-Americans, and by the end of the twentieth century and into the current time, Detroit has become what Massey called a “hypersegregated” area representing a “de facto apartheid in the United States” (Massey, 2004) with an inner city population made up of nearly 80 percent African American. Outside the city limits, Metropolitan Detroit comprises 67 percent white residents, and 22 percent African American residents (Gavrilovich and McGraw, 2000; Detroit Future City, 2017). Schulz et al. (2002) further describe the demographic trends through racial and spatial relations related to public health and note that between 1970 and 1980, 51 percent of the white population moved out of the city, at the same time, high-poverty census tracts in the city increased dramatically while 75 percent of manufacturing jobs were lost between 1972 and 1992.
The population growth and shrinkage of Detroit is an extreme representation, but not an isolated case, other cities such as Cleveland and Pittsburgh that share many geographical, political, and economic characteristics with Detroit have also experienced extreme levels of depopulation, representing broader demographic trends of the United States in the 20th and start of the 21st centuries. The question of “what happened to Detroit, and why?” cannot be answered by looking at this city alone, but rather by analyzing and understanding these broader regional and global trends that Detroit is subject to.

Early Signs of Urban Decline

The decline of Detroit and the continual loss of urban fabric and built forms have long been in motion; this is evidenced visually through observations of aerial imagery dating back to 1949 used in this research study. A survey of aerial imagery and street level photographs from Detroit in the 1940s provides perspective on the density and interconnected urban form patterns that supported a lively street life representing a peak growth city. A closer look at the urban core in that same time reveals space allotted to parking automobiles and increasingly empty patches in the urban fabric. Urban decline in the form of hollowing out of the city core by increased land use dedicated to accommodate the automobile had begun by the 1920s and was advanced by the late 1930s, according to Conrad Kickert (2016), “even in its decades of fastest growth, downtown Detroit had already planted the seeds of its decline” (2016, p. 62).

In the early 1940s, as the first signs of urban decline began to appear, municipal leaders in Detroit were beginning efforts to fight blight, and to rebuild or redevelop affected areas both in the core and outside the core in order to recreate the prosperous city of before. According to Thomas (1997), this included early efforts to address the problems of “deteriorating community facilities, loss of the middle class, downtown decline, clogged streets, industrial exodus, inadequate housing, and racial conflict” (1997, p. 17). Aelbrecht (2015) argues that the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Council of Detroit, set up in 1939 as a private nonprofit group played a crucial role in making early urban renewal possible in the post-war years. This was done through early use of photography among other media and publications means to convince Detroiters to “perceive the city as a declining body, where blight threatened the city”, influencing public opinion to support urban renewal programs (2015, pp. 308-313). One of the facts that the Citizens’ Action Council highlighted was that Detroit’s central business district was dying, evidenced by the decline of property values, which fell by 40 percent between 1930 and 1940 (Aelbrecht, 2015, p. 311). Already by 1945 it was calculated that in the years following the war production boom, there would be 300,000 fewer jobs in Detroit (Thomas, 1997). These early 1940s discussions about how to stop the advancement of urban decline and
decay seen in the many blighted properties in and around downtown, which threatened nearby commercial and residential property values represent the origins of the first wave of focused urban renewal carried out throughout the post-war era.

3.1 Urban Renewal and Revitalization Efforts: post-war to pre-bankruptcy

“All over the country civic leaders and planners are preparing a series of redevelopment projects that will set the character of the center of our cities for generations to come. Great tracts, many blocks wide, are being razed; only a few cities have their new downtown projects already under construction; but almost every big city is getting ready to build, and the plans will soon be set. What will the projects look like? They will be spacious, parklike, and uncrowded. They will feature long green vistas. They will be stable and symmetrical and orderly. They will be clean, impressive, and monumental. They will have all the attributes of a well-kept, dignified cemetery. And each project will look very much like the next one”

–Jane Jacobs, 1958

Urban Renewal Landscape of Detroit

Aelbrecht (2015) presents two cycles of decline and renaissance in the urban redevelopment in Detroit. The first is the era of urban renewal during the 1940s to 1960s, followed by the city-center renaissance from the 1970s to 1990s during the Mayor Coleman Young years. Both eras aimed solutions at reversing the inevitable decline and made an incredible impact on the built form and structure of Detroit.

68 percent of new Detroit residents between 1940 and 1950 were African Americans, yet despite the extreme demand for housing evidenced through the documented protests and actions, only 9 percent of the overall housing in Detroit in 1947 was available to them (Sugrue, 1996, pp. 42-43). In Origins of the Urban Crisis (1996), Thomas Sugrue explains the complexity surrounding the racial housing segregation that African Americans faced in pre-Civil Rights Detroit, in which they were “systematically shut out of the private real estate market” and limited to the least desirable parts of the city (Sugrue, 1996, p. 34). Sugrue’s book provides a full account of the process of “black occupancy, impoverishment, disinvestment, and decline” in Detroit (Sugrue, 1996, p. 36), which set into motion a process of extreme deterioration that could not be reversed and only provided further evidence to city officials for the need of implementing urban renewal.
The first urban renewal era led by the Modernist planning model and paradigm brought major reconfigurations to the downtown and inner-city. In *Redevelopment and Race*, Thomas (1997) outlines the key strategies of urban renewal in Detroit which were part of the Detroit Plan of 1947 and consisted of eliminating blight through slum clearance and redevelopment of inner city land for both residential and industrial purposes. The Federal Housing Act of 1949 would provide funding for those plans (Thomas, 1997). The economic redevelopment strategy included housing but also aimed to save and improve the central business district while fighting industrial decline by converting mixed-use residential and commercial neighborhoods to new inner-city industrial land. The construction of expressways and parking facilities was a large component common with all of these urban renewal efforts. Demolition of the existing urban fabric, both social and physical was the foundation of this period of renewal. Mumford (1961), writing at the time this was taking place across the U.S., said that cities were being destroyed for the “worship of speed and space” and that through extensive creation of urban expressways and parking facilities, “we have sold our urban birthright for a sorry mess of motor cars” and that traffic engineers and city planners had “helped to destroy the living tissue of the city and to limit the possibilities of creating a larger urban organism on a regional scale” (Mumford, 1961, p. 510). This accurately describes what would come to pass in Detroit and other U.S. cities.

In Detroit one of the public housing projects that was notorious for its concentration of poverty was the Brewster Homes located just to the north west of middle-to-upper-income designated Lafayette Park; separated on the other side of the highway and built on top of the former Black Bottom neighborhood. The name Black Bottom refers to the dark fertile river bottom soil originally found there, and it would later become Detroit’s oldest and primary African American neighborhood. This was largely due to the practice of Red-Lining and segregation at a time of in-migration primarily from the southern US states to the automotive oriented factories of Detroit that Sugrue described (1996). This district was entirely destroyed under the residential strategy that aimed to eliminate blight and introduce suburban typologies such as those discussed in Article I, at Lafayette Park, within the larger Gratiot project area, as part of the largest urban renewal scheme in the U.S. at the time.

These early large scale urban renewal programs of the 1950s disproportionately affected African Americans as Detroit’s highway engineers had little regard for the black neighborhoods in comparison to middle-class white areas and did not provide adequate relocation assistance, if any was provided at all (Sugrue 1996, pp. 47-48; Hyra, 2012). The displacements of this era also resulted in the destruction of small businesses due to low relocation assistance, causing negative impacts on community life where small businesses owners acted as “informal mechanisms of community linkage and control” (Thomas 1997, p. 62), and provided the kinds of benefits that Jane Jacobs famously described in 1961.
The economic development strategy that focused on both the central business district and the industrial core also relied on demolitions to clear land for redevelopment. The center saw renewal through the form of large scale building projects that many major cities employed at the time, consisting of: government buildings (City-County Building, 1954), convention centers (Cobo Hall, 1960), sports stadiums (Joe Louis Arena, 1979), hotels (Hotel Pontchartrain, 1965), office towers, (One Woodward Avenue, 1962 and Detroit Bank and Trust Tower, 1963), and a waterfront public plaza (Hart Plaza, 1975). The separation of land uses through creation of districts such as an “eds and meds” center in Midtown, and the West Side Industrial Park (1966) built atop a section of the Corktown neighborhood was also a key part of the formula.

All over the core of the city, Detroit was trying to build its way out of decline, sweeping away the decay in favor of creating ‘tabula rasa’ construction sites to spur the economy and project the image of progress, but these also had an effect as described by Brent Ryan: “tabula rasa urban renewal projects like Lafayette Park denied the validity of the existing city” (Ryan, 2012, p. xiii). Housing of the time shifted to a fortress mentality, such as the case of Lafayette Park, an example of what Oscar Newman (1972) termed “defensible space design”. According to Ryan (2012), “Midcentury redevelopment set a precedent of substantial displacement and destruction that arguably contributed to the city’s precipitous decline in the 1970s and 1980s” (Ryan, 2012, p. xii). In the 1960s, models shifted towards stressing both physical and social planning, incorporating citizen participation through the Community Renewal Plan (CRP) in 1965, and the Federal Model Cities from 1968-1975. In the decades that Detroit was under the leadership of Mayor Coleman Young, the city focused on downtown renewal and largely neglected neighborhood redevelopment as federal and private funding disappeared (Thomas, 1997; Aelbrecht, 2015).

**Urban Fortress: The Renaissance Center**

In the 1970s the city focused on redeveloping the riverfront and central business district, Mayor Coleman Young promised: “revitalize the riverfront... and I guarantee you’ll revitalize the whole city” (Thomas, 1997). One of the most famous developments of this time was the Renaissance Center, an example of ‘architecture of fear’ (Ellin, 1997), completed in 1977 and criticized by William H. Whyte (1980) as a megastructure representing an escape from street life through self-containment. It was a typology that was appearing in American cities that was detached and segregated from the city, representing in the words of Whyte: “wholly internalized environments, with their own life-support systems. Their enclosing walls are blank, windowless, and to the street they turn an almost solid face of concrete or brick” (1980, p. 86). The Renaissance Center followed the inward turn that Mike Davis
described as “The Destruction of Public Space”, where “the public spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity” (in Sorkin, 1992, p. 155). For Davis these megastructures represent a decline in democratic space in the city center and are exemplary of what Davis calls the “architectural privatization of the physical public sphere” and the opposite of the reformist “Olmstedian vision of public space in America” that aimed to mix classes and ethnicities (in Sorkin, 1992, p. 156).

Built in an era of increasingly privatized public space, this typology produced what Sorkin called a “non-place urban realm that provides the bare functions of a city, while doing away with the vital, not quite disciplined formal and social mix that gives cities life” (Sorkin, 1992, xii). The Renaissance Center stands as a commercial expression of the urban fortress mentality of this era, embodying a complete rejection of the city and disconnecting from it; a place to drive into and out of with no requirement to interact with the city. This came at the same time as elevated protected walkways, or ‘skyways’ designed to take the selected pedestrians off of the dangerous and cold public streets. The People Mover, an elevated single track rail that circulated the central business district and riverfront era was also constructed in this time (in 1987). These expressions were rejections of the city, and a capitulation to the problems and ills of American cities in the late twentieth century. Essayist and writer Rebecca Solnit described Detroit as a city that “has become a fortress of urban poverty surrounded by suburban affluence” (Solnit 2007, p. 67). In the same time period, much of commercial metropolitan Detroit beyond 8-mile would become a version of Garreau’s ex-urban “edge city” (1992).

**Urban Redevelopment: 1990s to pre-bankruptcy**

Wiping out established neighborhoods through slum clearance alongside the construction of the Interstate highway systems through and around the city center, and the construction of public housing atop former neighborhoods were all hallmarks of the urban renewal era (Ryan, 2008). Urban renewal was funded up to 90 percent by the federal government, and while the major projects identified in previous sections slowed by the 1970s, similarly large development activities picked up again in the period of the late 1990s with the construction of suburban style housing and commercial areas, sports stadiums, casinos and their associated parking needs (Ryan, 2008).

Thomas (1997) described the disintegration of planning amid growing public distrust of urban renewal that resulted, especially following the civil unrest in the summer of 1967, and Brent Ryan described the void left in urban planning and development in Detroit (and other cities) in the wake of urban renewal:
“the professional, political, aesthetic, and theoretical unity that had motivated Modernism had withered away, and in its place was a growing desolation, filled haphazardly and modestly by rebuilding strategies that were mostly not formal strategies, by planning departments that had lost the ability to plan; by real estate developers who quite sensibly wished to maximize profits; and by communities, most of them racial minorities, that sensed the scale of their problems but that had a collective memory of urban renewal and feared insensitive outside interference”

-Ryan, 2012, p. xi

In the post-renewal age, after the disintegration of planning which left Detroit without the key pieces of centralized urban design policy, the city focused on “attracting developers to build market-rate housing with the aid of city subsidies” (Ryan, 2012, p. xii). What resulted, according to Ryan (2012) was the suburbanization of inner-city Detroit. This type of development mirrored suburban style developments, but now located in the urban core: cul-de-sacs, strip malls, and apartment complexes crudely dropped into the landscape following no principled forms or codes of traditional urbanism, and without the lofty optimistic ambitions of the modernist era (Ryan, 2012). These new ad-hoc developments that were being built within the city, never sought to reconnect with the urban fabric, and instead “suburbanized the inner city” (Ryan, 2012). One contested exception was the goals of the federal HOPE VI program, which aimed to “transform public housing communities from islands of despair and poverty into a vital and integral part of larger neighborhoods” (Wyly and Hammel 1999, p. 741).

In the 1990s, Detroit and other declining cities in the U.S. saw modest redevelopment activity in the inner-city housing markets, driven by the combination of available vacant land and low property values (Ryan, 2006). Wyly and Hammel (1999) investigated the distribution of mortgage lending between 1992 and 1997, in understanding the “reinvestment in gentrified neighborhoods” or “market-driven revival of certain inner-city neighborhoods” (1999, p. 715). This was a sign of economic recovery in the 1990s that focused on the urban core where capital investment in Detroit had surged, increasing 133 percent in one year between 1996 and 1997, but was still relatively weak compared to other cities in their study (e.g. Boston and Philadelphia) (Wyly and Hammel, 1999, p. 735). By these measures, reinvestment was under way in Detroit in the late 1990s evidenced by $5.74 billion in “new public and private development planned or under construction, including the new stadia for the Tigers and Lions, General Motors’ takeover and proposed facelift of the Renaissance Center to accommodate 9,000 workers, and Chyrsler’s expansion plans for six plants throughout the city” (Wyly and Hammel, 1999, p. 737). The city saw a modest revival centered on the Super Bowl in 2006 through a campaign to “clean up” the parts of the city that would be seen by visitors. This amounted to mainly a tidying effort, including the demolition of several buildings to make way for parking around Ford Field, and removal of homeless people from the visiting
public’s view, masking the true state of conditions in Detroit for the sake of a one-time sporting event (Babiak and Wolfe, 2006; Trendafilova et al., 2012).

In the period between Modernist urban renewal and prior to the market crash of 2007, Detroit had “achieved little redevelopment success outside of those few areas where developers were willing to build” (Ryan, 2012, p. xiii). Construction of housing was rare in the city center after this era and most of the housing left was pre-WWII constructions. Detroit’s housing type today is overwhelming single-family detached housing units, making up 73 percent of city housing, most of which have been built in the years before 1950, and in total, 92 percent built before 1980 (Detroit Future City, 2017). The projects of urban renewal resulted from a failed agenda; one that HOPE VI aimed to reverse, with mixed results, this is further discussed in Article II. The urban redevelopment efforts of the 1990s only increased the ruptures in the urban fabric caused by the 1950s era renewal, and contributed to an inner-city suburbanization that further destroyed street networks and existing street-block patterns (Ryan, 2006). June Manning Thomas (1997) described how the efforts towards an urban growth paradigm of several mayors failed by fighting against the inevitable tide of market forces. Despite the rebuilding efforts of both eras, Detroit’s decline continued into present day.

3.2 Decline and Aftermath

Detroit boomed throughout the first half of the twentieth century to become known as the “arsenal of democracy” and a national economic engine, and spent the second half of the twentieth century declining; slowly at first, and then rapidly. In her book Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit, June Manning Thomas opens by asking “what went wrong”? and “how could a city that for so many years enjoyed livable neighborhoods, healthy commercial strips, a bustling downtown, and beautiful parks turn into what exists today?” (2013, p. 1). The decline of Detroit, as told through Thomas Sugrue’s “The Origins of the Urban Crisis” (1996), provides the thesis that the roots of the urban crisis in Detroit were planted long before recent times, and that a complex mixture of racial discrimination and violence, along with severe deindustrialization reshaped the landscape of the city. Detroit’s decline in the late twentieth century and economic collapse has been attributed to the over-reliance on one industry, the production of automobiles, and the disappearance of associated employment in the automobile manufacturing sector (Eisinger, 2014; Sugrue, 1996; Tabb, 2015). Other factors such as decentralization through federal incentives for freeway building and single family house construction outside the city, as well as mismanaged urban governance and disinvestment in cities, all played heavy roles in the undoing of the city (Galster, 2012).
The economic collapse led to depopulation trends which further exacerbated the loss of tax base, resulting in reduced city services, increases in crime, and increased abandonment of the physical environment. The global financial and housing foreclosure crisis beginning in 2007 impacted Detroit in an exaggerated way where bad mortgage practices lead to massive defaults in the residential sector and the abandonment of properties intensified (Rugh and Massey, 2010). The culmination of this prolonged crisis came in 2013 with the largest municipal bankruptcy in the history of the United States. Ledoux et al. (2017) described systematic disinvestment in Detroit, and the causes of the contemporary fiscal crisis and bankruptcy have been well documented (McDonald, 2014; Neill, 2015; Schindler 2016). Farley (2015) summarized it as the result of the collapse of the municipal tax base in the decades following World War Two, where from 1950 into the period of 2007 – 2013, the population fell by 63 percent, the number of occupied housing units fell by 49 percent, employment numbers fell by 74 percent, and the number of manufacturing firms, retail stores, and wholesale businesses all fell by 88 percent. Tabb (2014) argued that the “tax shortfall produced by the financial collapse led to the initiation of Detroit’s bankruptcy” rather than the legacy costs which are often cited as part of the key financial burden of the city (Tabb, 2014, p. 92).

The extreme decline in population also meant that density in Detroit dropped by 48 percent between 1950 and 2000 and total existing housing units declined by 30 percent (Ryan, 2012, pp. 44-46). The vacancy is staggering when revealed through quantitative data: 24 square miles of vacant land, more than 120,000 parcels, 60 percent of which are now publicly owned (Detroit Future City, 2017). Vacant houses in Detroit doubled between 2000 and 2010, with numbers projecting a 30 percent vacancy rate in total housing units; these numbers are shifting with ongoing demolitions of vacant units across the city, but the presence of abandoned buildings is seen in most districts (Detroit Future City, 2017). The Detroit Blight Removal Task Force defined 78,506 structures that were already met the definition of ‘blight’ or soon would. Since 2014, 11,817 structures have been demolished; that number is certainly higher today and climbing (Detroit Future City, 2017). Lima and Eischeid (2017) point out that declining cities with high vacancies and urban voids deal with an image and identity problem which “further reinforces the negative feedback cycle of additional out-migration” (2017, p. 693).

In the aftermath of urban decline and abandonment, Detroit became famous for negative monikers widely circulated in media narratives. Widespread urban decline has left Detroit with a landscape of emptiness and vacancy resulting from the demolition of the majority of older buildings (Ryan, 2006). Despite the many abandoned spaces, Detroit is not empty; it is full of physical leftovers from when it was a city with a different population numbering twice as high as today. The residential neighborhoods vary in character, but most all share the common feature of blighted vacant properties, standing shells, or recently razed ruins turned to
vacant lots; some to a higher degree of vacancy, and some to a higher degree of occupancy. Essayist and writer Rebecca Solnit describes a third of Detroit’s land, “forty square miles” as “evolved past decrepitude into vacancy and prairie – an urban void nearly the size of San Francisco” (Solnit, 2007). Today some sections of the city resemble rural lands; it’s not only the far outlying districts but also near to the core. Pheasants, a bird common to prairies and grasslands are often seen walking the empty sections of the city. From above, viewing Detroit through the lens of satellite imagery, the urban grid at times fades away, entire blocks demolished and returned to green, sidewalks and former alleyways barely visible, all evidence of a severe urban crisis.

3.3 Signs of Re-Birth and Challenges for Revitalization

In 1990, Detroit’s City Planning Commission produced the Detroit Vacant Land Survey, which calculated percentages of vacant land represented on maps with blacked out parcels. Charles Waldheim called it “a remarkable and virtually unprecedented report” for the way that it acknowledged the processes of urban decline that Detroit was facing and for the implications suggested by decommissioning land (Waldheim 2016, pp. 90-91). According to Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2012), the survey “aimed at relocating residents, demolishing buildings, and shutting down city services in order to save costs” (2012b, p. 44), but failed as a top-down planning exercise lacking in considering the citizens left in those neighborhoods. It was the first in a line of reports and suggestions to close down tracts of the city that were not completely abandoned in an effort to shrink, or ‘right-size’ the city. In 2010, Mayor Bing and the Kresge Foundation launched The Detroit Works Project/Detroit Future City (DWP/DFC) as a joint public-philanthropic endeavor to “right-size” the city and in an effort to re-vision land-use and the future of Detroit, this would have mixed reactions also (Clement and Kanai, 2015).

At the same time that decline has been ongoing, in recent years (2014-2018), a major, but often uneven urban revitalization has been taking hold in the core (Reese et al., 2017). Certain areas of Detroit have experienced creative new efforts at revitalizing the city which represents a break from past traditions of urban renewal. Including focused changes that affect the public realm, landscape, transportation, commercial activities, housing opportunities and social relations. Many developments are supported by partnerships between government subsidies and private sector business and investors, resulting in increased corporate investment for large district building projects including the construction of a new arena discussed in Article V (15x15 Initiative, 2015). These types of partnerships and efforts often include collaborations by what Moskowitz calls Detroit’s “anchor institutions”, made up of companies owned by Dan Gilbert, Quicken and Rock Ventures, as well as the Kresge Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Detroit Institute of Arts (Moskowitz,
Other incentives have been aimed at creating an influx of new residents to live in the downtown and central areas (Live Midtown, 2010). Market-based solutions for the city have also been criticized as being promoted by neoliberal ideology that emphasizes redevelopment of the core while forgetting the districts beyond (Kinder, 2014; Montgomery, 2016).

Many researchers have pointed out the opportunities that exist within a shrinking city and Hayden (1988) wrote about turning “adversity into opportunity” by recognizing the potential of underutilized vacant sites in the city and the role that designers and artists could play (1988, p. 48). There are many examples of landscape responses to excessive vacant land in Detroit. White (2011) describes “urban gardening as resistance” in Detroit where activists repurpose vacant land into a space for education, local food production, and in doing so contribute to building a sense of community while improving security. Németh and Langhorst (2014) present examples of temporary responses to vacant land as holding potential to “render visible the role of the neighborhood resident as co-author of the spaces and places they inhabit and as empowered participants in the urban development processes” (2014, p. 149). These examples include community gardens, urban agriculture projects, and adaptive reuse of buildings and lots for business ventures. Németh and Langhorst (2014) point out that while having the power to create “place” in communities, successful temporary uses of vacant land that graduate to becoming a local asset have both the capacity to “empower marginalized individuals, groups and communities” and to create tensions through demonstrating the potential for accommodating more profitable uses (2014, p. 147).

Recently, tactics of revitalizing public space have gained attention, among them, ‘placemaking’ has risen to the forefront as a buzzword signifying change and improvement. Placemaking projects tend to transcend scales from bottom-up to top-down initiatives, with funding from the public and private sectors and focus on reviving the public realm through the rehabilitation of existing public spaces and the creation of new public places. The most prominent example of this in Detroit is found in the downtown where previously underutilized public spaces such as Campus Martius, Cadillac Square, Capitol Park, and Grand Circus Park have been reinvented in conjunction with practitioners, citizens, and public and private initiatives (Opportunity Detroit, 2013; Project for Public Spaces, 2013). Placemaking is also done at the neighborhood scale in conjunction with non-profit advocacy and practitioner groups and tends to focus on vacant and underutilized spaces such as vacant lots, alleyways, and around available buildings, generally through grants and with the aim at improving and creating community spaces (CDAD, n.d.?). In the absence of non-profit, public sector, or government funding, and in response to the lack of services provided by the city, placemaking practices can also be viewed as citizen-led neighborhood activities aimed at improving the local living environment through what Kinder (2014) calls “self-provisioning practices” and “guerilla-style spatial
interventions”. This version of placemaking falls into line with how Schneekloth and Shibley (2000) describe it, as an “activity of making and maintaining the world” as a “practice to be shared with many people within and outside the expert culture” (2000, p. 133).

Place-based efforts aimed are also aimed at improving streetscapes for pedestrians. The severely interrupted urban fabric previously described has had dire consequences for pedestrians and cyclists in Detroit. The city had the highest per-capita rates of pedestrian deaths in large U.S. cities in 2017, disproportionately affecting low-income communities (Lawrence, 2019 Detroit Free Press). A recent effort related to this crisis and an example of Detroit investing in public space upgrades is the Streetscape Design program, putting $80-$125 million in bonds to improve 23 streetscapes and commercial corridors throughout the city to make them more attractive and pedestrian friendly, as well as part of a “framework strategies to boost neighborhood and economic development” (City of Detroit, 2019?; Mondry, 2019). The funding focuses on improving the quality of urban life by providing amenities such as bike lanes, district branding, improved and wider sidewalks to “allow for outdoor café seating”, and also landscaping (City of Detroit, 2019?). The city has progressed from 13 miles of bike trails in 2007 to over 240 miles of bike lanes and trails today through a cooperation between the non-profit advocacy group Detroit Greenways Coalition and the City of Detroit, helping to expand public space infrastructure into the neighborhoods (Detroit Greenways Coalition, 2019?).

Other indicators of revitalization include over 12,000 blighted structures have been removed, and municipal services have increased, including much improved response times for public safety, and evidenced in part by the addition of 65,000 streetlights, when only a few years ago most Detroit streets were not properly lit (Detroit Future City, 2017). According to The Detroit News, signs of Detroit rebounding in 2017 included 3,000 more occupied homes, increased building permits for single-family homes, 60 building permits for condos, and 911 permits for multi-family structures (Macdonald and Terry, 2018). The population decline rates have also slowed, and the economy has rebounded somewhat. A recent report on economic growth shows that overall economic growth in the city from 2001 to 2009 was negative 14.6 percent, and from 2009 to 2016 it was positive 20.6 percent, making a net growth of 3 percent between 2001 and 2016 despite population decline (Bridge MI, 2018). Further economic indicators include signs of increased jobs growth; from 2001 to 2009, the numbers were negative 21 percent, and from 2009 to 2016 job growth increased by 18.1 percent. During these periods, wage growth shifted from minus 7.6 percent in the period of 2001 to 2009 to positive 5.9 percent during the period of 2009 to 2016 (Bridge MI, 2018).

These responses to decline have occurred at many scales from top to bottom and vice-versa, where actors at a variety of levels are working to remake the city. This
represents a wide range of efforts, from the city itself to the Detroit Future City framework (Detroit Works, 2012), to the well-known actions of powerful individuals like Dan Gilbert and the Illitch Family, to the numerous dedicated citizens and visitors who are taking actions big and small. This complex mixture of grass roots activists, artists, gardeners, entrepreneurs, local business people, powerful billionaire developers, combined with structural changes in the city government, and the actions of non-profit foundations have together and often disjointedly, developed a new model of urban revitalization. There is no one solution to Detroit’s urban crisis but what is different today than in previous decades is that this urban revitalization machine has come together through a coalition of actors. In the words of writer Rebecca Solnit, “Detroit will never be rebuilt as it was. It will be the first of many cities forced to become altogether something else” (2007, p. 70).

Challenges for Revitalization

The urban revitalization of 21st century Detroit is markedly different from mid-century Modernist urban renewal, but there are similarities that cause concern: rising inequality, displacement, gentrification, sky-rocketing rent rates, racial and class tensions, and corporate dominance over the process, increase the risk of Detroit becoming a “company town”, a situation where private individuals have too much power in determining the future shape and development processes. Doucet and Smit (2016) discuss this as the “production of inequality” and “islands of prosperity” that occur in this process (2016, p. 652). With high percentages of single-family housing, approximately half of the housing units are owner occupied, while the other half are renter occupied. Detroit has long been projected as a ‘cheap’ city, from an outsider’s perspective this may have been true in past years, but it is reported that the average rent is $750 a month and 37% of renters are spending more than 50 percent on housing costs (Detroit Future City, 2017). While still at the low end of the national spectrum, rental rates have increased at some of the highest levels in the U.S. by more than 15 percent between 2018 and 2019, further displacing long-time residents (Chen, 2019). Of 365,528 housing units in the city, only around 9.5 percent (35,000 units) are in some way subsidized (Detroit Future City, 2017). The uneven distribution of revitalization efforts has produced tensions between those who have lived their lives in areas that have long been ignored and those who are arriving and attracted to the new urban developments and amenities. Still, the dramatic changes on the surface in the center of Detroit cannot be ignored and may one day be seen as the starting point for a broader transformation of the city.
4. Research Design and Methodology

Research in applied social sciences such as urban planning and urban design is the systematic, rigorous investigation of a situation or problem, or of an (urban) phenomenon geared to generate new knowledge or validate existing knowledge within the field, and according to Snyder (1984), it is the “systematic inquiry directed towards the creation of knowledge” (cited in Groat and Wang, 2013, p. 26). However, another parallel concern in this field has to do with the discovery and definition of problems rather than with matters of research design by which hypotheses derived from these problems may be put to test. Dovey and Pafka (2016) describe urban design as a broad interdisciplinary field and refute Marshall’s (2012) position that urban design theory is pseudo-science because it is untestable. They argue that knowledge production in urban design cannot be reduced to science and is “proto-science rather than pseudo-science” and is “linked to the sciences of probability, adaptation and complexity” (Dovey and Pafka, 2016, p. 7).

Research design is an overall plan of how to obtain answers to questions being studied and handle some of the difficulties encountered in the research process. Research design describes the strategies that the investigator adopts to develop information that is accurate, objective and interpretable, the purpose of which is to create a framework for collecting and analyzing data (Bryman, 2012). Groat and Wang (2013) describe research design as an action plan to move from research questions to “results or knowledge derived from the research” (2013, p. 10), this means it is a set of flexible guidelines designed to keep the investigator moving in the right direction (Polit and Hungler, 1999; Creswell, 2014). The process used to collect information and data for the purpose of doing research is what we call methodology and it includes research techniques for data collection of both present and historical information, this is further explained in section 4.4 below (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008; Creswell, 2014).

4.1 Exploration in Qualitative Research

This thesis takes the starting point in Exploratory Research, which is research conducted for a problem that has been defined by the researcher to gain additional inputs into the phenomenon under study. It often occurs before we know enough to make conceptual distinctions or to posit explanatory relationships, and is used when the topic or issue is new and when data is difficult to collect (Stebbins, 2001). Exploratory research, not unlike Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) develops concepts more clearly, firmly establishes priorities, develops stable operational definitions and improves the final research design. This in turn helps the researcher
to determine the best possible research design, including appropriate and doable data-collection method (empirical studies), and selection of subjects or objects. It also draws definitive conclusions with the selective subjects or objects. Given its fundamental nature, exploratory research often concludes that a perceived problem does actually exist but can be added on to conclude a protocol or remedial action (Shields and Rangarajan, 2013). The objective of exploratory research is to gather preliminary information that will help define problems and suggest hypotheses (Stebbins, 2001). Exploratory research can be linked with the conceptual framework working hypothesis. Skeptics, however, have questioned its usefulness and necessity in situations where prior analysis could be conducted instead (Shields and Tajalli, 2006). This type of research is also at times referred to as a grounded theory approach to qualitative research, and is an attempt to unearth a theory from the data itself rather than from a predisposed hypothesis, in that respect, it is an inductive approach. Simplified, grounded theory is a systematic generation of theory from data, an inductive methodology and a process that is systematically done (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It has the capability to produce theory from data, theories, which are empirically grounded in data from which they arise (Glaser, 1998). So, grounded theory, as exploratory research is a strategy of qualitative inquiry, comprising the skills, assumptions and practices used by the researcher when moving from a paradigm and research design to the collection of materials and generation of theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

A combined exploratory and qualitative approach was used in this study on urban decline and urban revitalization for a variety of reasons. Firstly, this research concerns urban settings in a very specific and complex declining stage as well as the stage of revitalization. Secondly, the goal is to gain a better understanding of the complex realities posed in the aftermath of urban decline in Detroit and other contexts. Thirdly, a qualitative research approach provides a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena than an examination of pure quantitative data (Silverman, 2000). Quantitative research on the other hand, is an investigation in which the researcher attempts to understand some larger reality by isolating and measuring components of that reality, often without regard to the context, and as such, was only employed in this study to review and present demographic data, as well as data used to describe urban decline and revitalization indicators. In the Detroit setting of decline and revitalization, qualitative research gains importance as it becomes an investigation in which the researcher attempts to understand some larger reality by examining it in a holistic way, or by examining components of that reality within their contextual setting as well as humanizing problems and data (Creswell, 2007).

The holistic approach that qualitative inquiry offers is an important aspect. The researcher seeks a ‘complete’ picture of a complex case and there may be no attempt to isolate specific variables or to answer specific questions. But if specific questions are asked, the answers are sought within the context in which the phenomena
naturally occur (Berg 1995; Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Silverman 2000). Part of the overall goal of this research, with the aid of explorative research defined in grounded theory, was to examine complex phenomena of decline and revitalization and to define or identify the reality within. To be meaningful, inquiry must be holistic and contextual, especially when the area we were dealing with remains largely ignored from an integrated perspective, with studies in the field tending to concentrate largely in segmented experiential factors.

4.2 Observational Integration: Intuition and Imagination

Science is supposed to be a rational activity guided by careful analysis, without undue influence of instinct or foreknowledge or any type of preconceived notions. At the same time, it is useful to keep this in perspective a bit and have an open mind, as well as reflect on what the role of intuition might be for scientists. It relies on a foundation that is made of seven elements of study: Imagination, Intuition, Observation, Insight, Introspection, Inference, and Supposition (Beveridge, 1957; Duch, 2007; Gelfert, 2014; Schwitzgebel, 2016; Kriegel, 2016; and Dorsch, 2016). There are researchers who contend that the word ‘intuition’ is often misunderstood or misused to mean instinct, truth, belief, meaning but rather realms of greater knowledge and other subjects, whereas others contend that faculties such as instinct, belief and intuition are factually related. So, while rational arguments remain at the core of the scientific method (especially for deductive analyses), to operate as a scientist on a day-to-day basis, it is very beneficial to also listen to one’s intuition (Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2004). When scoping the research horizons for the ‘next big thing’, this is rarely going to be only about a rational analysis. It’s also about what happens before formal (rational) science starts: we all have to think about which questions are worth asking. Reading the scientific landscape, in turn, is not just about reading arguments, but also about reading the people behind those arguments, their power relationships and their agendas. Intuition can be extremely helpful for understanding “where things are at” (Beveridge, 1957).

The majority of science these days is deductive and hypothesis-testing oriented. However, at times, and especially when trying to understand complex phenomena, it will be necessary to build new theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998; and Shepherd and Suddaby, 2016). This needs to be based on rational arguments to be defensible, but very likely draws on more than just a couple of reasoned chains of arguments. Most likely, building new theory comes from assembling many experiences in a way that is collectively useful or interesting – rather than singling out individual chains of reasoning. Intuition can help in navigating through conflicting opinions. It takes intuition about people and places to navigate through complex situations and make sense of it all (Beveridge, 1957). Often, it is different truths being more or less salient to different scientists that lead to nuances (or even
big differences) in their worldviews. This phenomenon can best be understood by
drawing on an overall perspective on people in science, based on intuition as well as
by facts (Platt and Baker, 1969; Beveridge, 1957). Intuition helps with inductive
analysis and when studying complex phenomenon, which is a general result that has
been observed reliably in systematic empirical research. In essence, it is an
established answer to a research question (Brown, S.C et al, 2002).

Imagination is also “possibility thinking”, implying thinking of things as possibly
being other than they are, or both ‘what they are’ and something else simultaneously
(Beveridge, 1957). It is clearly linked to the capacity for metaphor, in which we draw
selectively on knowledge in one domain to illuminate our thinking about an
apparently unrelated domain (Platt and Baker, 1969). Imagination can involve visual
imagery, as its etymology implies, but it can equally involve any other kind of
feature from the worlds of direct bodily experience, including sound, taste, smell,
touch, movement, effort, and change, and of socially mediated experience, including
activities, narratives, personalities, and relationships (Beveridge, 1957). Imagination
is also clearly tied to the emotions in the same way as our sense of aesthetics.
Researchers are dependent on imagination for the pursuit of insight and
understanding, they are continually confronted with the processes and outcomes of
imagination in the ways in which people order and make sense of the world, and
they must struggle against the tendency of the imagination to become channeled and
restricted over time (Beveridge, 1957; Warnock, 1978; Greene, 1995; Given, 2008).

4.3 Observation of Urban Conditions

Coming to terms with complexity and intensity is the key to understanding a city, and
what each of us sees and understands depends on our own experience: where we
come from, personally and professionally, and our individual backgrounds.
Observation can tell more about the observer than about the environment being
observed. It reflects the values, beliefs, and worldviews of the witness. We see
through the lens of our interests and understandings. We recognize patterns that
match what we have seen before. Much of the logic of urban planning and urban
design thinking is neither deductive nor inductive but what Peirce originally defined
as ‘abduction’ (Douven, 2011). The logic of abduction is a form of inference where a
set of observations leads to a conjecture that explains them. It is a form of reasoning
backwards from effect to cause by educated guesswork (Walton, 2014). The logic of
abduction in urban design is done by observing the ways a city functions, and
engaging in educated guesswork about these functions (Pafka and Dovey, 2016).

Gillham (2000) describes observation as three simple elements: watching, listening,
and sometimes asking questions. The type of observations conducted in all of the
cases and articles according to Gillham’s classification was a mixture of participant
and detached observations, where participant observations are qualitative and descriptive, and build up a picture of what is on the surface, including personal impressions and are organized with field notes. Detached structured observations are analytical and quantitative, “watching from the outside” and counting and classifying what you observed.

Public life studies have been useful for documenting the relationships between the design of the built environment and human behavior, in order to inform decision-making and design processes to improve places for people (Gehl, 2013). These types of studies enrich our understanding of city life, particularly the quality, performance, and the success of a place as well as the needs of people. Such studies assist with documenting existing conditions, identifying issues, developing solutions, and evaluating the impacts of design interventions. City life is transitory by nature, with people moving and conditions changing constantly, which makes observing people in public space a complex practice. There are extensive variables, such as architecture and design, weather, noise, smell, light, and shade as well as the number, location, and types of people using the space.

Dovey and Pafka (2016) review a set of foundational theories in urban design including Sitte, Cullen, Cerdà, Lynch, Jacobs, and Alexander who they link through providing seminal texts and theories on urbanism which all share a common lack of testable empirical science, but are based on “detailed observations of real cities” (2016, p. 7). In addition, they point out that urban design knowledge emerges – by detailed and protracted observation of a particular range of cities” (Dovey and Pafka, 2016, p. 8) and that no two cities are the same, which is to say that there are no universal cities to study.

Observing and thinking more visually can enhance our ability to understand and contrast differing points of view about the cities we want and better equip us to intelligently discuss, rather than provide a visceral response to inevitable changes in the urban landscape. In the changing city of today, one can speculate on how the tradition of “looking around and collecting data” (observation of urbanism) can make a difference, or how compiling visual images, taking notes, doing urban diaries might change our cities for the better, especially places like Detroit. A historical, interdisciplinary tradition of urban observation, with the modern-day “urban diary”, is an experiential method of documenting city life and form. Through evocative photography, use of smartphone apps, and other cutting-edge tools, we can explore and document the urban spaces, structures and human activities around them, and when put to use, this can also be aimed at informing better, and more equitable, plans, policies and political decisions, in summary, observation can be used to influence effective city planning and development outcomes (Wolfe, 2017).
The role of observation in the realm of urban planning and design could be summarized by the words of American urbanist, Andrés Duany:

“The best skills for an urban planner are difficult to learn from books and photographs, in the manner that architecture can be learned. Urbanism can be learned only by experiencing places, by visiting them and spending days there observing how people use their environments day and night, and then figuring out what makes things work. This involves not just looking, but measuring and really thinking about, for example, work hours, locations of schools, and so on. The list of relevant factors is literally endless. There is nothing remotely as important as travel for an urban planner’s education. The only thing that needs to be learned is how to see—to really understand—not just look, and to be intelligently critical about what works and what doesn’t.”

-Andrés Duany, 2013

4.4 Methods for Data Collection

In addition to the role of urban observations, as described in the section above and below, exploratory qualitative research in this thesis relied on the use of multiple tactics that are appropriate to each research question and particular to each context in the articles, amounting to ‘triangulation’ (Groat and Wang, 2013). Limited quantitative analysis of data relating to shifting population and demographics, housing data, and real estate values was utilized. This combined strategy, mixed-methods approach to data collection is explained in the section below.

Observation

Groat and Wang (2013) describe one aspect of qualitative research which is rooted in “first-hand encounters with a specific and defined context” (2013, p. 222), and prolonged contact with the subject of study in conducting fieldwork in order to fully understand the culture and context. This was the case for the research conducted in all of the articles, but especially in Detroit where detailed observations were carried out between 2012 and 2017. Field observations were made in all of the cases, with the purpose of experiencing firsthand the environments. In the example of Article I, both types of observation described by Gillham (2000), participant and detached, were employed in building up the understanding of Lafayette Park. Information was gathered on patterns of use in public space, types of commercial activities and services at the sites, accessibility, walkability, and public transportation options; this was converted into annotated maps. A strong component of urban observations is the use of visual methods which have long been a research tool in social sciences.
(Chenoweth, 1984). Visual information for articles I, IV, and V, was gathered from aerial photographs from the DTE Aerial Photo Collection and SEMCOG aerial imagery as well as from Sanborn fire insurance maps. In each article, a photographic survey included extensive documentation of case sites and photo analysis methods to highlight changing urban conditions.

**Literature Review and Document Analysis**

The research process begins with the unveiling of significant themes and issues that people are most concerned about described in narratives and available literature. A literature review and document analysis formed the starting point of all the articles.

In order to synthesize existing definitions and popular paradigms in urban planning and design, this study conducted a review of literature including academic papers, print books, popular material related to practice, important blogs focused on issues of interest, archival records and policy documents; the latter two could possibly be related to only Detroit for the purposes of this study. Thematic analysis of literature (Creswell, 2014) included the review and analysis of media reporting that followed the trajectory of Detroit, specifically focusing on urban development during the period of study and aided in filling the gaps in academic literature due to the differences in publication speed between media online and print sources compared to academic journal publishing times. This included analysis of articles from main sources of media coverage of Detroit including: the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Detroit News*, *Crain’s Detroit Business Journal*, and *Curbed-Detroit*. In addition, public documents and data from city agencies, nonprofit organizations, foundations and intermediaries, including data collected first-hand at conferences and events, was compiled and analyzed. This type of data provides a nuanced understanding of the issues discussed in this thesis. Elements of the historical approach were used to access evidence from the past and to critically examine past events to gain insights for future planning (Given, 2008).

**Dialogue and Unstructured Interviews**

During the past decades, qualitative research interviewing has become a sensitive and powerful method for investigating subjects’ private and public lives. Research interviews are sometimes referred to as dialogue, a concept that has become popular in political, managerial, and educational contexts (Kvale, 2006). The method of *dialogues*, that was used in this thesis instead of formal interviews refers to the mutual exchange of experience, ideas and opinions between two or more parties; i.e., *a conversation* rooted in the topic of study. Dialogue is two-way or multi-way communication which presumes the opportunity to reply on several occasions in order to enhance a line of reasoning. The dialogues were performed with key
stakeholders involved in creating and promoting placemaking as a component of urban revitalization in the context of Detroit. Qualitative approaches, such as informal discussions with some of the key actors in urban development in Detroit and other informal approaches through dialogues, participating and attending round tables, debates, and at public meetings and events attended between 2013-2016 focusing on Detroit, aided in the unveiling of significant themes and issues that people are most concerned about, described in narratives and unstructured conversations. Gillham (2000) describes this type of interviewing as ‘listening in’ which is clarified through ‘observation’ (2000, p. 59). Gillham (2000) provides a spectrum of examples of interviewing ranging from structured to unstructured (Figure 1), the type of interviewing conducted in collecting data overall in this project fits on the ‘open-ended’ to ‘verbal observation’ as described here. In the case of Article II, unstructured interviews and dialogues were conducted with residents, stakeholders and architecture firms involved in the identified HOPE VI projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstructured</th>
<th>Semi-structured</th>
<th>Structured</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to other people's conversation; a kind of verbal observation</td>
<td>'Open-ended' interviews; just a few key open questions, e.g. 'elite interviewing'</td>
<td>Recording schedules in effect, verbally administered questionnaires</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using 'natural' conversation to ask research questions</td>
<td>Interviews, i.e. open and closed questions</td>
<td>Semi-structured questionnaires; multiple choice and open questions</td>
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<td>Structured questionnaires: simple, specific, closed questions</td>
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Figure 1. The Verbal Data Dimension, Gillham, 2000.

**Triangulation**

The use of multiple sources of data contributed to building up a chain of evidence related to the research questions, ensuring that the study demonstrates linkage between the research procedures used and the concepts under study, which is to construct validity. The use of various methods for gathering data (*cross-checking the findings*) in explorative research also enables *triangulation*. Researchers can triangulate in different ways: by data source, by specific methods, or by data types (Huberman and Miles, 1994). Triangulation is widely used as a multiple data-gathering technique to investigate the same phenomenon. Method triangulation helps to enhance validity and reduce possible bias (Patton, 2001). Contrary to popular belief, explorative research and grounded theory research are not just a pure theoretical inquiry but instead require an understanding of related theory and empirical work in order to enhance theoretical sensitivity (Locke, 2001). The theory becomes the result, which can give way to making concepts more precise (Johansson, 2002). Some see triangulation as a method for corroborating findings and as a test for validity. This, however, is rather controversial (Denzin, 1978) and assumes that a weakness in one method will be compensated for by another method. Rather than seeing triangulation as a method for validation or verification, qualitative researchers generally use this technique to ensure that an account is rich, robust, comprehensive
and well-developed (Creswell, 1998). This study relied on triangulation to provide multiple sources of evidence with converging data. This included combining document analysis, archival records, unstructured interviews, direct and/or participant observations described in the sections above (Yin, 1984).

Each article in this thesis started with a detailed literature review and employed combinations (triangulation) of the research approaches and methods described in the sections above, refer directly to the articles for those complete descriptions, and see Table 1 for a summary of methods of data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Direct Observations</th>
<th>Interviews: Verbal Observation and Dialogues</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
<th>Visual Mapping</th>
<th>Photographic Documentation</th>
<th>Quantitative Analysis</th>
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Table 1. Methods of Data Collection
5. Summary of Articles

As noted, all five articles investigated and explored key urbanism paradigms identified in Detroit and other cities, and evaluated their successes and failures in specific cases and contexts. Each article examined in particular how different paradigms dealt with urban decline and revitalization, with a focus on place-based and heritage-led approaches, and utilizing landscape based approaches as a counterpoint. Drawing on the conclusions of each paper, I identify the restoration of urban fabric through a combination of successful applications of these two approaches, as the over-arching imperative identified in the research, and the basis of a promising new synthesis paradigm. In the last article, I take up Robert Fishman’s “Re-Urbanism” as a suitable framework to further develop this synthesis and way forward in the work of making, or “re-making” cities.

Article I begins by investigating Landscape Urbanism and the relevance of its claims to the future of urbanism in declining cities. Article II investigating the urban transformation of Modernist public housing districts into mixed-use neighborhoods based on New Urbanist principles employed through the HOPE VI program and looks at how place is re-created through changing urban forms, and if any of these lessons can be transferred. Article III goes further into investigating another leading urbanism paradigm, Landscape Urbanism and its approach to creating place through revitalizing a piece of remnant infrastructure from the industrial age in New York City, the High Line project. The High Line in New York City has influenced many other projects in other cities looking for strategies for urban revitalization, in this case, it is nature led repair rather than the type of traditional urbanism tissue repair put forth by the New Urbanism. Article IV builds on the previous articles and proposes a new approach to urbanism and revitalization which integrates the best aspects of different urbanism paradigms around the focus on urban heritage as a public infrastructure to re-make the city upon. Article V continues with a proposal of integrating paradigms through defining the Re-Urbanism paradigm, which suggests that urban planning and design could borrow from the best practices of different paradigms in future urban (re)development. The combined cases will highlight efforts undertaken to create ‘place’ in declining contexts. The following articles are referred to in text by their Roman numeral.
5.1 Article I


Article I focused exclusively on the case of Lafayette Park, a Modernist housing development in central Detroit and the largest urban renewal scheme ever implemented in the US. It was selected for two reasons: firstly because it has been acclaimed by prominent Landscape Urbanist theorists as a model to revisit for future urban development (Waldhiem, 2016), and secondly because it represents the opposite of what I present in Chapter Six as “Re-Urbanism”. For a full description of the case site, see pages 39-41 in Article I.

The claims made for Landscape Urbanism have been difficult to evaluate, since they rely heavily on theoretical and aspirational arguments, and new projects to date have offered little post-occupancy evidence. However, more specific claims have also been made about Lafayette Park as a proposed precedent for Landscape Urbanism, and these offer a more substantial evidence base for the evaluation of claims. Here I take the claimed precedent of Detroit's Lafayette Park, and evaluated the stated claims for its performance on social, economic and ecological criteria, in light of the available evidence.

The mixed-methods approach consisted of a combination of case-study methods and observational methods. Document analysis and archival research combined contemporary and historical literature on the case, as well as statistical analysis of demographic data. Direct observations and site visits were carried out by the authors between 2015 and 2016. These included photographic documentation of the architecture, landscape, connections to adjacent areas, transportation modes, land use, and documentation of commercial activities at the site. The “Specific claims and methodology” section of the article fully explains the methods used (pp. 38-39 in the article).

The case of Lafayette Park in this thesis represents an example of the effects that Modernist urban renewal has had on the contemporary urban fabric and challenges the notion that returning to this type of suburban structural pattern could benefit urban development of city centers in the future. I conclude with an assessment of broader claims for Landscape Urbanism in light of the evidence found at Lafayette Park. This article also critically evaluates the lack of “place” in the Landscape Urbanist agenda. Key themes in Article I include: Landscape Urbanism, Lafayette Park, Detroit, and Modernist urban renewal.
5.2 Article II


Article II focused on a selection of cities where Modernist planned public housing developments were demolished and rebuilt according to design principles from the Congress for New Urbanism, largely through federal HOPE VI grant funding. These cities included: Boston, New Orleans, and Chicago. While none of these three cities meet the definition of urban decline as a whole, the previous housing project areas analyzed at the district and neighborhood level were well known for the concentration of poverty, and economic, social, and racial segregation, as well as high levels of crime. The cases are further described in pages 6-13 in the article.

In the United States, demolition and rebuilding anew has altered the urban form and arguably produced overall improved living environments. The transformation of the urban fabric from Modernist, inward facing typologies to mixed-use redevelopments that attempted to reconnect to the existing and historic urban fabric presented a rich opportunity to understand how New Urbanist principles approached urban renewal, or revitalization at this scale.

This article used a qualitative mixed-methods approach to the analysis, based on site visits, visual documentation, interviews, and analysis of documents and other reports, as well as scientific articles. Unstructured interviews and ‘open-ended interviews’ were used with architects and community organizers, while using ‘natural’ conversation to ask research questions in interviewing citizens of the areas of observations.

Few studies exist concerning transferability of ideas and lessons learned from the American HOPE VI efforts into a European context. Applying Sustainable Urbanism concepts to European housing areas could be a way forward, where the findings of the article give some ideas towards the complex issue of analyzing and coming up with solutions for the urban renewal of isolated and distressed housing areas in European cities. The article then proposed a meaningful set of strategies based on the Futurescape method. The article concluded with a concentrated and constructive critique of HOPE VI efforts. Overall, the key themes were: Sustainable Urbanism, Revitalization, Urban form, the HOPE VI grant program, and modernist Social Housing.
5.3 Article III


Article III focused exclusively on the case of The High Line in New York City, selected as an extreme example of the revitalization of one specific piece of infrastructure, the former freight-rail track running through Manhattan’s now redeveloped and gentrified West Side including Chelsea and the Meatpacking District. While Manhattan is no longer considered by any measure as a declining city area, it once was in the latter half of the twentieth century while experiencing population decline and a municipal economic crisis that nearly led to bankruptcy. For a full description of The High Line, see pages 354-55 in the article.

Landscape Urbanist approaches to urban regeneration and revitalization differ greatly from those of New Urbanism by focusing on ecology and landscape to create true public spaces. The popularity and impact of The High Line in New York mirrors the complex reality of contemporary provision of public space. The conversion of this remnant piece of infrastructure into a trendsetting public park serves in this thesis as an example of Re-Urbanism branded as Landscape Urbanism.

Explorative and observational urbanism methods were used. Archival research and document analysis including blogs, reviews, and published journal articles, was used in identifying the debate surrounding the project’s development. Direct observations were carried out between 2012 and 2014 by the authors and focused on the following main topics: connections; accessibility; and rules and restrictions, or place management, as well as an inventory of services and functions. These observations included experiential impressions by the authors with extensive photography of the features of the project and systematic note taking. The “Methods” section of the article fully explains the methods used (p.354 in the article) and the “Observations” section describes how we conducted our fieldwork (pp.357-58 in the article).

The High Line shows the way to a new role for urban green space by utilizing abandoned infrastructure. In analyzing the narrative of The High Line, this article stressed the importance of understanding localities and connectivity. The article concluded that great landscaping does not create great places without careful consideration of the surrounding community and residents. Key themes in this article include: elevated parks, Landscape Urbanism, urban regeneration, environmental gentrification and urban public places.
5.4 Article IV


**Article IV** focused on the geography and landscape of central Detroit, Michigan, USA, as an emblematic example of urban decline that has resulted in extreme structural changes to the urban fabric, this is further described in pages 5-9 in the article. In such an environment, what are the advantages and constraints for creating a vibrant public realm? How can heritage contribute in a declining city that has little or no extant public realm left? Do urban planning and design models based upon local heritage patterns offer still-valid, effective measures for the reinvention of cities and towns that experience structural change?

In this article I looked for commonalities, and a way forward from among a range of competing urban design models. I considered seven contemporary urban planning and design ideals that dominate the contemporary planning and design discourse, and their different views of the past and urban heritage in relation to the approaches in Detroit. From these, a synthesis approach was drawn, making several recommendations and observations, and with a focus on the capacities of so-called “placemaking” approaches.

The explorative research used a combined strategy including elements of the case study method and mixed methods approach. Data collection was done through the analysis of primary documents from city and state official reports, as well as developer publications and releases, and secondary sources such as newspaper and magazine articles and relevant websites. Site visits, direct observation, visual mapping analysis, recorded observation and memos, photography.

This article examined the option of using urban planning and design based upon local urban heritage as a means to revive these post-industrial cities, towns and neighborhoods. In the article, urban heritage is understood and examined as contributing a pattern of infrastructure that provides a helpful supportive framework, and (importantly) a set of structural limitations (e.g. historic plot boundaries), that can serve as a generative resource for new urban planning and design. I concluded that the necessary framework for democratic participation and opportunity within urban space can be provided most directly by leveraging the assets of urban heritage. Overall, the key themes explored through Article IV were: urban heritage, urban design, urban decline, placemaking, and the context of Detroit.
5.5 Article V


*Article V* focused on the same geography and landscape as Article IV, and more specifically on an ongoing large scale development project in the central core of Detroit, popularly known as “The District Detroit”, see pages 13-15 in the article for a full description of the case.

Within the realm of contemporary urban design theory and practice, a number of authors have conceptualized the trends and processes of city development and planning into a series of urbanisms. This conceptual discussion essay examined the overall tenants of the ‘Re-Urbanism paradigm’, a paradigm that has long been present in city planning and development but has received limited analysis and criticism and has not gained a more integrated position within the professional and academic worlds.

This article continued a paradigm development outline, leaning on the characteristics of other urbanisms in order to develop and provide a frame of reference and to contribute to the ongoing build-up of taxonomies about the trajectory of contemporary urban design thought. Focusing on the American representative case of Detroit, I argued for a better understanding of this urban regeneration paradigm, which is characterized as a rational urban planning & design approach in the contemporary age of inner-city revitalization. Key themes included: urbanism, urban design, urban paradigms, urban decline, and urban revitalization.
6. Results and Conclusions: Main Findings and Future Directions

This concluding chapter discusses the findings in relation to the overall project aim and the individual research questions of each article. Starting from the research problem presented in this thesis, that urban decline and its consequences have led to a condition of ‘placelessness’ resulting from deterioration of the physical urban form and loss of community and social life therein; this thesis presents re-urbanization as one of the greatest opportunities and challenges for Detroit and other declining cities. The aim of this research project has been to inform better understandings of urban revitalization in the context of urban decline, and to contribute to discussions on how to rebuild declining cities with integrated urbanism paradigms and approaches. The research study has identified several leading and key contemporary urbanism paradigms and investigated their responses to urban decline, and their approaches to urban revitalization, focusing on the use of place-led (placemaking) approaches to recreate place in a post-­decline context. The following section presents the main contribution of each research article that corresponds to each research question.

6.1 Results and Contributions of Research Articles

Article I investigated claims by proponents of Landscape Urbanism that promote the paradigm as best suited to address the urban form and structuring of cities as well as issues of social equity and ecological restoration, especially in the context of declining cities (Waldheim, 2016). The claims evaluated were specifically in relation to viewing Lafayette Park in Detroit as a precedent model for Landscape Urbanism. I made three main conclusions from this article. The first was a rejection of the claim that Lafayette Park serves as a model of socially-just and progressive urbanism. The second was a rejection of the claim that the spatial configuration of Lafayette Park contributes to socio-economic success, I found rather that the modest economic success of the project is directly related to the benefit of proximity to the center of the city. The third conclusion was a rejection of the claim by Waldheim that there was an “explicit environmentalist position” at Lafayette Park; on the contrary I noted that the project entailed an amount of greenery typical of suburban projects, including energy intensive high maintenance requirements. The main contribution of this article was drawing out fundamental lessons of urban form and structural re-connection in opposition to the type of Re-Urbanism found at Lafayette Park which constitutes a modern suburban pattern that contributes to decentralization and a dependency on the use of private automobiles.
Article II evaluated New Urbanist approaches employed in the HOPE VI program as another form of Re-Urbanism in the modern era of inner-city urban renewal, and investigates whether or not this model offers alternatives to modernist housing areas by providing place-led, structural solutions for declining neighborhoods in the U.S. The findings presented negative and positive aspects of the HOPE VI program. I found that the three cases investigated followed well known criticisms of HOPE VI, such as increased displacement, social exclusion, and increased gentrification. At the same time, I found that the HOPE VI program succeeded in reconnecting with the urban fabric and improving human-scale public space values, as well as improving transportation links and site security. This article contributes to an improved understanding of the role and relevance of New Urbanist formulated strategies at reversing the decline of disconnected, former Modernist planned public housing projects, and recommends cross-disciplinary, collaborative and integrated approaches to rebuilding distressed urban neighborhoods both in the U.S. and in Europe.

Article III focused on the Landscape Urbanist project and case of The High Line in New York City as a catalyst for urban revitalization and investigated whether or not these types of interventions create truly public places or offer solutions for the structural re-connection of the urban fabric. I found that Landscape Urbanism had achieved a high degree of success in focusing on the reuse of abandoned infrastructure, which I find is a revitalized piece of urban heritage that aims to connect and transform a district which was previously considered ‘underdeveloped’. The High Line has acted as a driver in revitalizing the surrounding Hudson Yards district and has impacted surrounding real estate values, further increasing gentrification in this section of Manhattan, and I concluded that high-design landscaping cannot create a true public place without a sensitive approach towards the neighborhood. The main contribution of this article is the presentation of a paradigmatic case that shows tension between urban revitalization and gentrification, raises issues of typology and replicability, and serves as another example of Re-Urbanism by reconnecting the urban fabric.

Article IV examined how urban heritage can be understood not as the focus on individual monuments or buildings, but as an infrastructure to act as a supportive framework for urban planning and design, specifically in the case of urban decline. I found that decades of Modernist urban renewal and suburban sprawl in declining cities such as Detroit contributed to a loss in both the diversity of urban form and economic diversity which further contributed to urban decay, this pointed to the important role of connectivity of urban form in the social and economic health of a city. The main contribution of this article to the thesis is the presentation of a model termed ‘Heritage Urbanism’ which posits that heritage, when viewed as a generative resource could perform a key role in the re-weaving of urban fabrics fragmented by improving connectivity and would contribute to supporting an argument for
“growing a finer grain city economy” (Jacobs, 1969), this provides lessons for future Re-Urbanism efforts and processes in cities.

Article V continued in the line of exploring key paradigms in contemporary urbanism and questioned how these different approaches could be synthesized to improve urban revitalization processes. Similar to Article IV, I focused on Detroit as a city in transition and in the process of re-making by presenting a case of urban redevelopment in the city center, known as the “District Detroit”. Although ambitious in the projects aims and promises, the project further fragmented the urban fabric while demolishing historic buildings and important pieces of the street network. The suggestion in this article is that by avoiding past mistakes, and synthesizing the best ideas of urbanism paradigms, including increased involvement between institutional collaborations, a “Re-Urbanism” approach could be improved upon from where it stands today. The main contribution of this article was a finding that Re-Urbanism holds promise as a more concrete model of placemaking, which relies on the re-weaving of the disrupted urban fabric; this means a stronger emphasis on re-connecting the urban fabric in future urban developments by connecting streets and constructing supportive buildings around the traditional street and public spaces – both the sidewalk and public places such as plazas and squares.

6.2 Discussion

“In the future, the quest for sustainable place-making may transcend all (new, green, post, everyday, etc.) urbanisms. The aim should be to engage with ideas while avoiding being distracted by ideology and ideologues. Rather than high art, the ‘design’ in urban design is best understood as a problem-solving process.”

-Matthew Carmona, 2010

Article I, the case of Lafayette Park in Detroit was used to highlight that while indeed there is much to admire about Lafayette Park, including the aesthetics of the architecture and landscape, the paper demonstrated as it pertains to Landscape Urbanists claims, that it should not be a model to recover for future use in urban development. This is due to the way that the basic structure and urban form prohibits walkability, economic vitality, and many other well documented aspects. One of the key strengths of Lafayette Park is the project’s close proximity to the central business district of Detroit; this alone implies that the project could not have been done successfully in any context, for example at the edge of the city or in suburban areas, but that the vitality of the city center was an important and inseparable element of Lafayette park’s perceived successes. This shows a major issue in the replicability of these projects which ignores the fact that one reason these
examples as well as it does, is the proximity to Downtown. This is much like the way that the famed High Line project in Article III is so successful because of its position within the density of the Manhattan street grid and speaks to the *irreplicable* nature of both The High Line and Lafayette Park, one a built project by Landscape Urbanists, and the latter a model held up by Landscape Urbanists.

In contrast to New Urbanism, as explored in Article II, Landscape Urbanism does not provide codes or typologies that can be used in a variety of contexts, but rather highlights context specific projects. Landscape Urbanist professionals and academics have offered a completely different solution to the declining city than those who see streets, important historic buildings and public places, and arguably the social infrastructure behind all this, as important ingredients in revitalization. Instead, they explicitly turn their back on the concept of the street and the plaza as generators of economic and social activity, and promote continued decentralization. This represents the competing solutions for remaking the declining city where there is a conflict between place-based strategies and the proposals of Landscape Urbanism and ‘starchitecture’. Article I does not conclude that Landscape Architecture has nothing to offer the city, but does contest the idea that landscape architects should be the dominant urbanist of our age (Waldheim, 2016, p.4). Article I addressed calls by prominent Landscape Urbanists to reassess failed models of urban renewal, and possibly even implement them again, this is discussed as an idea that is going against the current trends of ongoing revitalization efforts in the case the declining city of Detroit where many place-based initiatives and efforts are leading the revitalization at the core. However, there are also many examples of successful landscape approaches, especially in the context of vacant and underutilized land as described in Chapter Three.

Bettencourt (2013) conceptualizes cities as natural systems comprised of large social networks, and suggests that former industrial cities now in decline, such as Detroit, could increase social connectivity, or “heal their social fabrics” by reducing the “spatial extent of the city”. Bettencourt’s suggestion for planning is to enable conditions that help to “create the city from the general to the particular, through designs that are generative of the whole but not prescriptive of the smaller parts”. This reflects much of what I suggest in Article IV which observes and highlights the historical dimensions of the urban fabric as a generator for future physical landscapes and city-making and *re-making*. In a systems approach, inspiration is taken from the historical urban fabric in structuring and rebuilding cities, particularly in the urban decline context where there is often little to nothing remaining of the previous built city aside from the “bones” of the city, that is considered as the street network and plot system.

In contemporary urbanism practices, often overlooked are the morphological characteristics of a city which are the most enduring – streets and property divisions,
which could be utilized as a restarting point for rebuilding declining cities. This approach does not seek to recreate the past or to deal with typical heritage issues such as preservation and authenticity or originality even, except where the “bones” of the city are concerned. One way that this could work in practice is by urban planning policies that embrace the notion of “fabric repair” in key areas. This would require a deeper understanding of the built environment and the conditions which created it. There is a similar suggestion in discussions surrounding suburban “sprawl repair” (Tachieva, 2010; Talen, 2011).

The urban structure or fabric of a city determines the potentials and possibilities for the public realm (Lynch, 1960; Relph, 1976). The demolitions of the urban structure and fabric of Detroit, and of the communities, in the 1950s irrevocably changed the city in ways that articles I, II, IV, and V have all investigated, showing that these changes in the morphological structure negatively affected the city over time in conjunction with other factors discussed in Chapters Two and Three. These articles have described what lessons can be learned for future urban planning, both in the reweaving of the urban fabric, and also what can be learned to influence future decisions so as avoid repeating these mistakes.

6.3 Contribution of the Study

Through illustrating various ways that place-based and heritage-led urbanism have been applied in re-making declining cities, the results from this thesis are an in-depth analysis of the policy and planning mechanisms that were employed in the ongoing revitalization of Detroit, revealing a new model involving the combination of leadership from local government entities, private business leaders, private charitable foundations and small scale grass roots activism, and local entrepreneurship, which have all come together to re-make the city, differing from previous models and top-down approaches.

After an exploration of key urbanism paradigms from different cases, the main argument in this thesis is that the combination of place-led and heritage-led strategies offers cities the best chance to integrate revitalization efforts through institutional and strategic partnerships, and that taken together these can be viewed as “re-weaving” actions, aimed at rehabilitating the urban structure to increase urban qualities such as walkability, public transit opportunities, housing, and commercial activities. This is discussed under the new proposal of “Re-Urbanism”.

This dissertation is not promoting Re-Urbanism as the model witnessed in the case of Article V, but has described it as an observed urban phenomenon, one that is far from perfect, and rather flawed, but representative of the development models in the western context under current financing schemes for producing cities. In surveying
key paradigms, and searching for the best aspects and adapting it to the local context, improving on the Re-Urbanism model could be done by adding the missing components of heritage and place. Often over-looked, or not given enough attention, urban heritage and place-led urban development ideas have a role to play in contemporary urban design, and especially in “Re-Urbanism” projects or developments. A systems-approach to city-making offers an integrated approach between urban paradigms where by harnessing the best aspects of paradigms, an improved model of “Re-Urbanism” could become an essential part of making places in the contemporary city. In a similar suggestion of declining cities changing the approach to urban development and management, Hollander et al. (2009) discuss how shrinking cities may be “moving from one kind of urbanism to another” (2009, p. 232) and the need for shifting away from previous growth paradigms to place-based approaches.

The suggestion is that generic principles of “good” urbanism and placemaking should be implemented according to the realities of the local situation in cities facing urban decline, and not hampered by dogmatic planning and design approaches. In this sense, a reconstituted version of Re-Urbanism transcends individual paradigms and breaks down the silos of professional practices associated with disciplines of urban planning and problem solving processes. Integration of urban planning and design paradigms has implications for the practice of urban design and urban development, it is recommended in this thesis that both embrace the science of urban morphology as related to “Heritage Urbanism” presented in Article IV, which could improve the way we understand urbanism and connections of individual projects to the larger urban structure as discussed in Article V. This study also contributes to scholarly literature on paradigms in urban theory and practice including New Urbanism, Landscape Urbanism, and revitalization strategies for declining cities.

6.4 Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations resulting from this research correspond to the findings and conclusions of each of the five research articles.

Article I suggests that government planning bodies should not over rely on the suggestions of Landscape Urbanism for urban structure policy, which are seen in this work as a repetition of the failed Modernist urban renewal plans, which at best provided great architecture and landscaping, and at worst diminished social values, local economy, walkability values, and were completely reliant on automobiles in opposition to addressing the current climate crisis. This recommendation does not discount the contributions that landscape architecture can make to the city making process, both historically and in contemporary times. This is a suggestion that planners should focus more on the ‘life between buildings’ (Gehl, 2010, p. 25) where
there is also attention paid towards the smaller infrastructure which influence much of our everyday behavior.

Article II established that reducing crime is one of the first steps in revitalizing a neighborhood, and for creating a good environment for living. Declining cities such as Detroit need to have a human scale message and requirement in each new project, and city government should be more directive in the typologies of new buildings to avoid suburban style development in the urban core. The recommendations from this article also reaffirming efforts towards building more inclusive communities and remaining vigilant about the impacts that new developments have on increasing displacement of long-term residents through associated gentrification.

The results of Article III recommend careful consideration in attempting to replicate the success of The High Line which is shown to not be a truly open public space, cities must think more contextually. Article III also recommends avoiding the resulting extreme increases in real estate values that have expedited the gentrification process. Another recommendation resulting from Article III is not replacing traditional public spaces and places with semi-public or semi-private landscape interventions such as The High Line without at least offsetting this by continuing to plan for truly open and democratic parks and green public spaces. An example of the differentiation is recognized through comparisons and contrasts of functions, uses, and accessibility between New York’s Central Park and The High Line.

The results presented in Article IV, recommend for policy and planning bodies to embrace the idea that there is something generative in the fabric which should be preserved and grown on, rather than being further disrupted as we witnessed in the case of the District Detroit development in Article V. Article IV suggests that cities need a type of heritage management that will deal in a more pro-dynamic way, where regenerating the urban fabric as a generator for city development comes into focus, this calls for a rehabilitation of the morphological structure of the city, making reconnections where possible, and not leaving out the element of culture-heritage-place memory. This approach is not one which treats historical buildings and cityscapes as frozen in time, or looking to the past, but instead builds upon the heritage of the urban fabric for future city making. The recommendation from this article also highlights the role that increased awareness and attention on the part of urban planning actors to urban morphology in the development and making, or re-making of cities could play in future urban planning and design.

While Re-Urbanism is a form of market-based urbanism, the market is dominated by very wealthy individuals who gain too much ‘say’ for how the city will be developed. With too little public oversight, as in the case of the District Detroit in Article V, a new incentive for infill development that fits into an overall area plan is needed. Article V recommends that cities explore new models for furthering alliances
between different actors involved in the redevelopment process, through different financing and planning schemes, opening the option of investing in, and the building of, urban architecture and urbanism to more stakeholders and entrepreneurs.

These main recommendations have to work in unison and in combination with borrowing the best ideas, and leaving the weaker ideas behind of different key paradigms in urban planning and design theory and practice. The research presented in this study comes down to the idea of rebuilding the city through improved approaches to urbanism and through borrowing the most successful ideas from key paradigms. The benefits of the city such as the main street is in the American DNA, and no shopping mall or amorphous green space will replace the social vitality, the benefit of face to face contact, or the benefits of walkability to health and climate. This is the habitat humans instinctively created over millennia, no amount of technicians’ expertise can engineer a better example, one only needs to look to the projects of 1950s urban renewal in Detroit, where construction of housing and freeways destroyed these qualities all over the city for an example of the effect that one paradigm can have on a city over time.

### 6.5 Future Directions and Coda

This dissertation has looked into the role of place-based and heritage-led strategies in the regeneration of declining cities. Possible future directions that can be taken in research could explore how ‘urban form regeneration’ can positively impact cities from the perspectives and return seeing the ground, or base physical layer as a generator for healthy, vital, enduring cities. I find that there is a spatial morphology that tends to cradle the first ‘locations of revitalization’ and in future research I would like to investigate what physical characteristics of certain districts and their street networks and spatial patterns seem to attract more entrepreneurial activities as an indicator of early revitalization and gentrification. Of particular interest is the role of urban morphological change over time and the consequences and potentials for urban planning and design in developing a more thorough understanding of this.

For example, Ryan’s (2008) study of Detroit shows a dramatic shift from a fine-grained city to a coarse grain urban fabric and questions how planners failed to understand that the “older fabric may have possessed more economic vitality and potential”. In future research, one could investigate this relationship that different urban fabrics have to economic vitality, and overall urban resilience in the face of change, that is to say, ‘adaptability’ of a city according to different types of urban form. A possible research question in such a research constellation then is: What are the geographical locations and spatial characteristics of the “revitalization catalysts/activities” and is there a logic to location? What is the role of morphology in creating places with vibrant public realms? Could these “archipelagos of
revitalization” be tested using spatial analysis tools like space syntax, accompanied with direct observations, and by interviewing users? How could the scale of local network connectivity related to the activity of new business location, entrepreneurial activities, and ‘revitalization focused efforts’ be examined in order to draw out lessons for future urban planning, design and development?

In Introspection, and with a dose of self-criticism, this study could have taken the main road of spatial analysis and data research where the focus could have been predominantly on a thorough investigation of the spatial qualities of neighborhoods in Detroit. In connection to that a deeper study on the housing stock and its relation to the streets and public places would be beneficial. The study could be performed in a visual ethnography way and/or combined with an advanced space syntax study.

As an urbanist, both a contemporary one with one foot in designing the past and one in remaking the present, I saw the complexities of the micro, meso and macro situations on the ground in Detroit and similar places going through major structural changes and inner transformations as result of forces from outside and within. A deeper understanding of urbanism is particularly important in the ongoing discussions about carbon solutions in that urbanism also addresses the social, economic and environmental challenges of low-income populations and urban economies. Through this research study and as an urbanist I have had the task, and opportunity to analyze, address and suggest ways to shape the field of urbanism, urban economic development and city re-building by offering insights on how to build greater creative and more inclusive communities, neighborhoods and places.

In studying Detroit and other similar places going through major transformations, and of course revisiting the literature in the field, one can see that cities have always had sharp contrasts of poverty and wealth. But cities still attract those on the margins of society for economic opportunities and a better life, while the affluent do it for business and for pleasure. Cities offer an abundance of both. Urban inequality and the current urban crisis is something we should worry and do research about, but also keep in very clear and stable perspective. Despite all of their complex problems, U.S. cities are positioned far better than they were two or three decades ago.

In urban planning and design today, there is a need to understand how to better integrate different paradigms, approaches, practices and how to harness the generative possibilities of the urban fabric as an asset for future urban development. Finally, a combination of different key ideas from the competing urban design paradigms that can give us explanations and answers as well as solutions for public realms, coupled with explorations in key elements of different urbanisms where a nuanced understanding of public space is brought in, may be an approach that many of our cities are missing at this moment in time.
7. References


8. Five Articles

Comments on Co-authored Articles: Author Contributions and Presentations


Previous Presentations: This article was presented as a draft in November, 2016, at the Division of Urban and Regional Studies at KTH as part of the mid-seminar requirement.


- This article is presented in two formats, both a reader friendly version, and the original version that appeared in print and translated.

Contributions: Conceptualization, R.L., T.H.; Methodology, R.L., T.H.; Formal Analysis, R.L; Investigation, R.L.; Writing-Original Draft Preparation, R.L.; Writing-Review & Editing, R.L, T.H.; Visualization, R.L.; Supervision, T.H.; Funding Acquisition, T.H.

Previous Presentations: A previous version of this article was presented at the European Network for Housing Research: Local Welfare and Local Markets in a Globalised World, June 25-27, 2012, Lillehammer, Norway.


Previous Presentations: A previous version of this article was presented by Helene Littke at the Fabos Conference on Landscape and Greenway Planning, Pathways to Sustainability, April 2013, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA.


Previous Presentations: A previous version of this article was presented at the Nordic Association of Architectural Research Symposium: Reflecting Histories and Directing Futures, June 15-16, 2017, at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway.


Previous Presentations: A previous version of this article was presented at the Association of European Schools of Planning Annual Congress: Making Spaces for Hope, July 10-14, 2018 at Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden.