

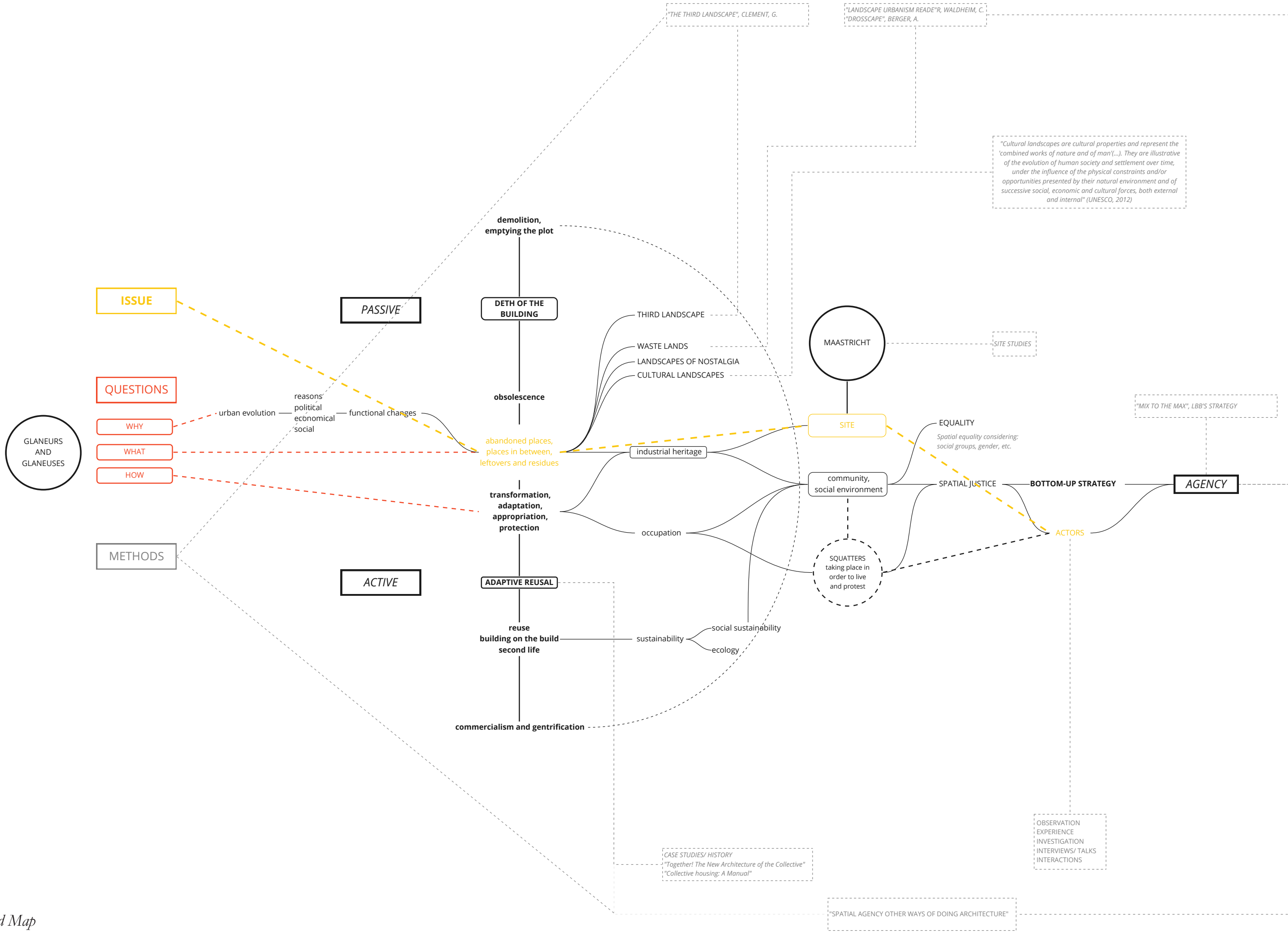
Glaneurs, Glaneuses

- Social Sustainability of Spaces

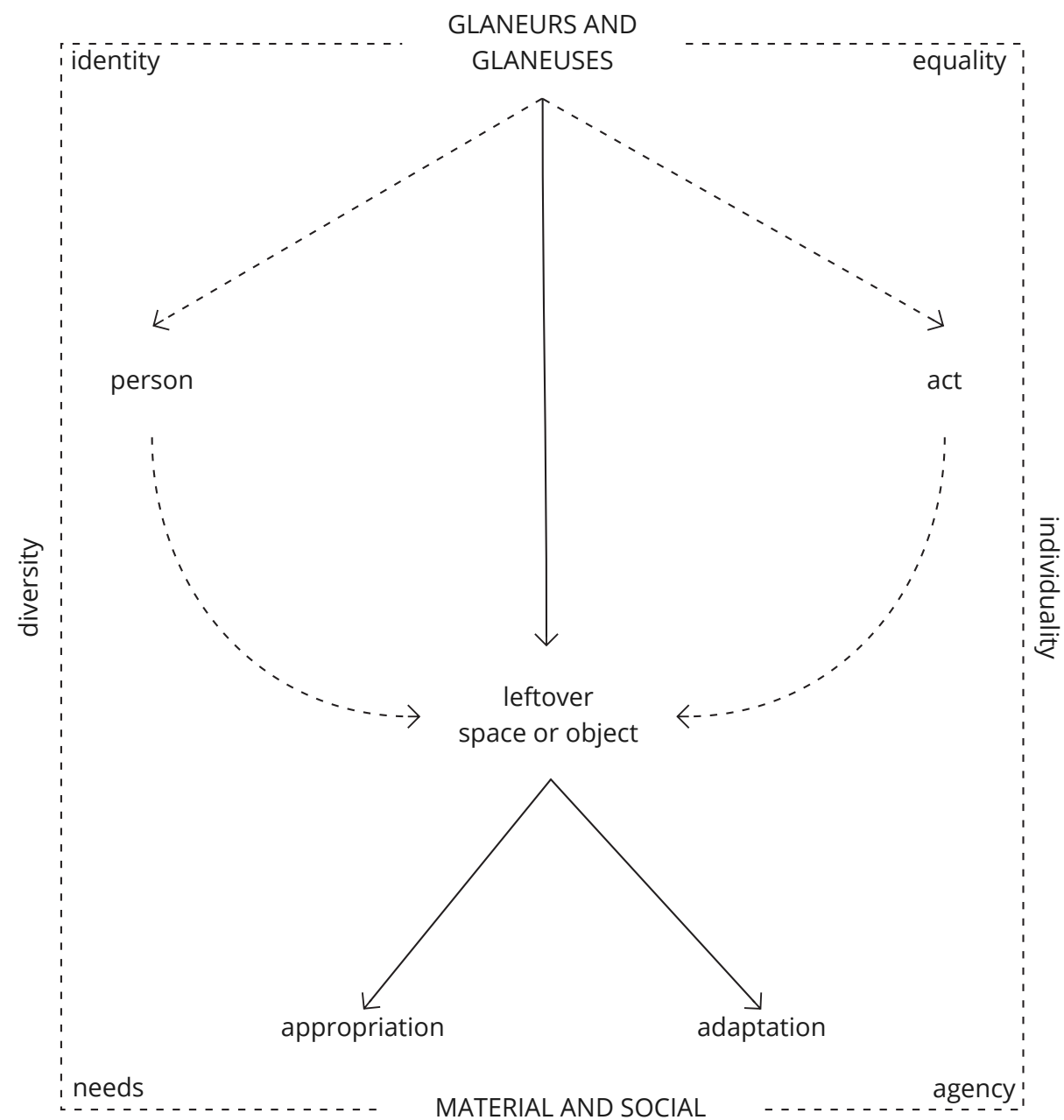
Research Plan

Urban Architecture Graduation Studio

Nina Kempa



Mind Map



Research Plan

Introduction

Interpretation of the theme

'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger...'

King James Bible, Old Testament, Leviticus 19:9-10.

The studio's theme - Glaneurs, Glaneuses and gleaning means reusing and giving a new life to what was left behind. In the past, it was a natural act of compensation and an opportunity for the less privileged. The landholders did not become less wealthy by leaving some of the harvests on the fields and the poor could benefit from a gratuitous feed. Nowadays, this is no longer a tradition, in many places, the law and the private owners prohibit it. In many situations, the crops stay on the fields and get wasted by letting them rotten or burning them or destroying them in any other way. This procedure is a capitalistic turn relying on increasing the value and controlling the product focusing on the economic aspect, neglecting the social impact.

The act of gleaning related to architecture links with the accessibility of spaces, distribution of resources and social rights. Those echos are strongly visible in the urban context as growing issues of inequalities. In the built environment, using the leftovers is associated with the redevelopment of spaces and giving them a new life and purpose. Those remains are visible as the abandoned buildings and spaces, as the residues (third landscapes). The act of gleaning could be an organised shift as adaptive reuse or an almost spontaneous procedure of appropriation and occupation as an act of different purposes: political, economic or social. It can be seen as a sustainable approach and a response to the throwaway culture of the Anthropocene - the easier thing is to start from the carte blanche than deal with the complex dependencies and achieve the compromise. The topic is adequate to what is currently taking place at the Boschstraatkwartier in Maastricht, which is our studio location.

Problem

Site

The site, like the whole city of Maastricht, has a dynamic past. Rich in heritage and spatially pleasant surroundings, it builds the identity of the place. Located in the very south of the Netherlands, between Belgium and Germany, this thriving city has, for many years, been the face of the cultural center of the diverse society open for expats, tourists and students. Therefore, for good reasons, it was the European Capital of Cultural in 2018. However, this is only one layer of the city’s landscape. An accurate illustration of this complexity is the chosen site. The atmosphere of the Sphinxkwartier is changing as the industry moves further from the Center. The still operating factory, the redeveloped space of the Bassin and a squat - Landbouwbelang (LBB), together create a compound and layered cultural landscape.

For twenty years, the LBB building and its community have been a significant point on the cultural, artistic, and social scene. However, because of the initiated Belvédère project, the city council wants to continue the district metamorphosis and redevelop the squat and its surrounding area into a living and cultural quarter. This creates a threat to the loss of value and further gentrification. As an answer to this plan, LBB proposes their vision of developing this place - the Mix to the Max strategy (Culturele Vrijplaats Landbouwbelang, 2019), which is to keep the building and continue their activity.

Currently, the community and the state are in the conflict, in my opinion, without solving the situation in a compromising way, the district’s future would be less successful. On the one hand, without officialising the LBB, they are losing many opportunities for growth and development. Also, they are in constant threat because of the technical state of the building. Secondly, the city would be deprived of significant cultural and social venue and some elements that create the interesting image of the town disappear.

Research Questions

The squatting movement aims to demonstrate how architectural projects could mediate between vacancy, ownership, and the right to housing (Boer, Otero Verzier, and Truijen, 2016). Also, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stands:

‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.’

But this is often only a statement, especially in cities like Maastricht that are struggling with the housing crisis and are not able to provide enough places for living. This formulates the question: how architecture could provide the environment of spatial justice? Besides, I am looking for how we, as the architects, could design with historical continuity to keep the existing communities as part of the city fabric? How to give them agency and let them enrich the surroundings to create a socially sustainable environment?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How architecture could provide the environment of spatial justice?

How we, as the architects, could design with historical continuity to keep these communities as part of the city fabric?

How to give the agency to the users and let them enrich the surroundings to create a socially sustainable environment?

Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Research Framework

My research plan aims to find solutions for the current situation at the site in Maastricht. The strategy seeks the remedies for the problematic and entangled situation to make the future of Sphinxkwartier flourishing for the whole society of Maastricht, including the conflicting interest of LBB and municipality. To gain a richer insight into this compound issue, I will implement a series of methods to find answers to the research questions and strategies for the socially sustainable development of the Sphinxkwartier.

Observation, interviews

A starting point of the research was a field study of the site. The experience of the place, observation and interviews revealed the actors of the area, their agenda and the characters. I plan to continue my initial studies to illustrate the complete picture of the site and its ‘actors’. The investigation seeks to find who they are, their background, how their relationship with the site and city looks like and how an architectural intervention could improve their daily life or the future.

Mapping

Continuing the ethnographic studies, I plan to investigate the actors - build the profiles of people connected with the site and the neighbourhood’s demography. Combining this information with the current offer of ‘social spaces’ of Maastricht will create a net of links between people and spaces. By mapping, I can analyse if and how those spaces work and use the conclusions for the future strategy.

Historical research

On the contrary to the current state, in the next step, historiography will be used as a base for site studies in the urban context. To show a long history of transformations, composing together this urban collage, relations with the city and references to other communities (monasteries) and their dependencies. I plan to create collage drawing(s) of those layers tracing how spaces functioned in the past to look for the strategy for the new development.

Case studies

The stem of my research is analysing the processes and means of appropriation (Awan, Schneider, and Till, 2011) and urban methods for redeveloping the wastelands (Waldheim, 2006). In the case studies, I am looking for architecture that facilitates the practices of everyday life and reclamation of public spaces back to the community. To facilitate appropriation, accessibility and social mixing, I plan to look through the previous attempts to study successful solutions.

I intend to research Superstudio’s manifestos and designs to analyse their solutions and ideas for the social change that can be achieved by architecture. They created an ‘anti-design’ culture as a means to critic the politics and built environment infected by capitalism:

“If design is merely an inducement to consume, then we must reject design...if architecture and town planning is merely the formalization of present unjust social divisions, then we must reject town planning and its

cities until all design activities are aimed towards meeting primary needs. Until then, design must disappear. We can live without architecture.”

Adolfo Natalini, Co-Founder of the Superstudio, 1971

This statement is a very radical view, however it points the problem of commercialisation of public spaces and injustice that results from it, which was an issue in the 1960s when the studio emerged and also currently.

Also, analysing the means of appropriation, I tend to investigate the self-building systems and philosophies. The one that caught my attention is Walter’s Segal self-build method. His idea is based on the traditional timber frame construction that achieves lightweight structures that can be built with minimal experience and efficiently considering using of resources (Grahame and McKean, 2021). This is a direct link to what I could experience at LBB. Thanks to one member - Reinder, we could try to work with a self-building system of his invention - using bamboo sticks and wires.

The third case study is Drop City. It was an anti-establishment living community formed in southern Colorado, the USA, in 1965 (Matthews, 2010). It was created by a group of art students as an underground place to stay and work. The project was inspired by the Buckminster Fuller domes structures, however the whole place was self-built, reusing materials like metal panels from cars and other inexpensive materials.

Finally, I intend to explore existing models of buildings and spaces to live for the dispossessed communities. I plan to analyse more profound the example of Les Frigo that I had the opportunity to visit during our studio trip to Paris. This place is a previous squat that is now turned into a legal place to live and work for many creative people. I have personal contact with one person - Jean-Paul, an artist but also a ‘head’ of the community of Les Frigos. I would like to look through how the metamorphosis of the place happened and trace all of the results. Besides, I expect to analyse more socially sustainable examples to enrich my research and find valid conclusions.

Literature

I chose literary sources to position myself better in the context of the research. The selected books and articles are among others: Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed by James C. Scott, Architecture of Appropriation: On Squatting as Spatial Practice by Rene Boer, Marina Otero Verzier and Katjia Truijen, and Spatial Agency, Other Ways of Doing Architecture by Nishat Awan, Tatiana Schneider and Jeremy Till will help to provide answers for my research questions. The data on the current situation of Maastricht and the problems of the city - housing crisis, migrants, refugees, homelessness, will allow me to analyse the site’s actual condition and find conclusions for the design proposal.

Design agenda

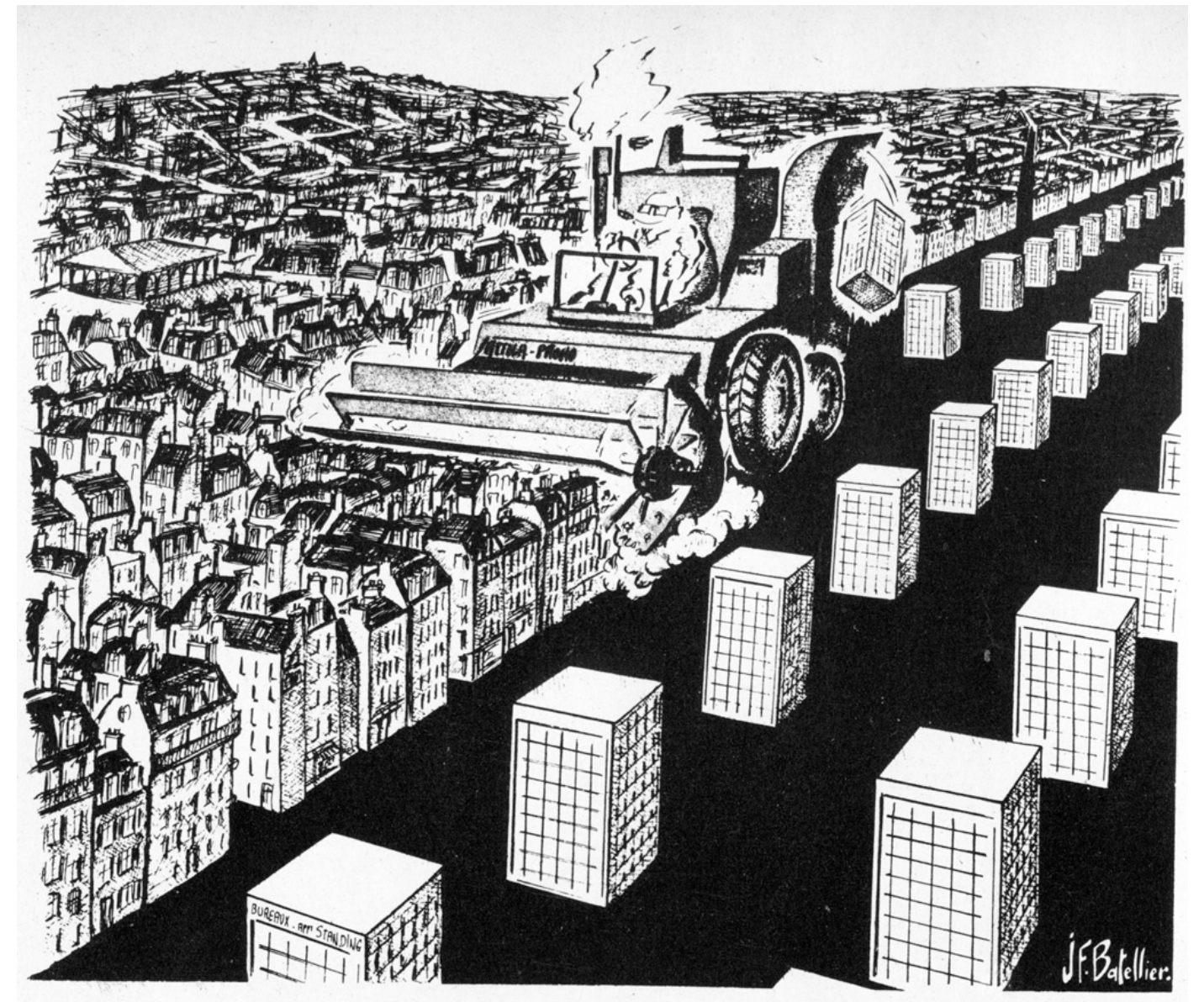
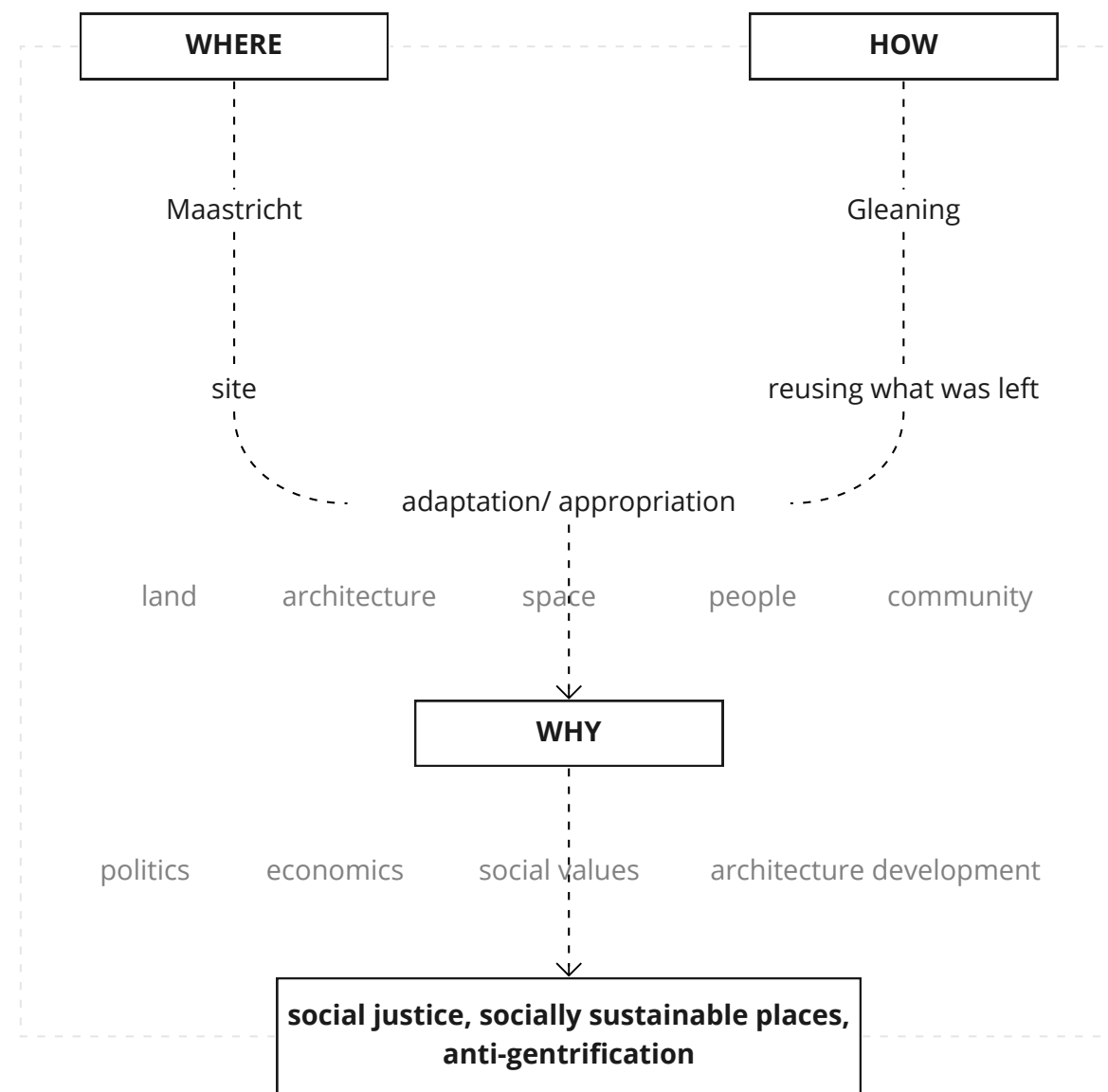
The intended product of this thesis aims to create an architectural proposal, the strategy that answers the research questions regarding the issues of spatial equity, privatization and commercialisation of public spaces. The problem of the spatial inequalities, accessibility of spaces and gentrification of the cities is growing, therefore finding the possible solutions is the key for fruitful development for not only privileged areas and people. Considering the other social groups and acknowledging them, in my opinion, it would bring benefits for the whole urban fabric and its users.

Keywords:

appropriation
gentrification
gleaning
spatial agency
spatial justice
social sustainability

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