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Reconceptualizing spatial capital to unlock spatial justice: the A.U.R.A. framework

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ABSTRACT

A fundamental challenge in urban scholarship is bridging theories of spatial justice with material reality. This paper critiques static concepts of 'spatial capital' for obscuring the dynamic social production of spatial advantage. We reconceptualize spatial capital as a dynamic capacity and introduce the A.U.R.A. framework – a heuristic enacted through the practices of Access, Utilise, Resist, and Adapt. Synthesizing insights from Bourdieu, Lefebvre, and intersectionality, A.U.R.A. offers a rigorous methodology for diagnosing injustice and a foundation for transforming the conditions that reproduce spatial inequality in cities.

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Contours of a critical spatial inquiry

Contemporary urban research increasingly acknowledges that space operates not merely as a backdrop but plays an active role in structuring social and economic inequality. Yet, much of this recognition remains partial, often limited to descriptive accounts of spatial distribution or access. What tends to remain unexamined is the way space itself is deeply implicated in the reproduction of social hierarchies – functioning not only as a material substrate but as a dynamic field of power, practice, and struggle (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Soja, 2010).

Urban space is never neutral territory. It is actively shaped by histories of extraction, regulation, and displacement that render certain lives visible, connected, and legitimate, while peripheralising or entrenching others. Spatial arrangements thus function not merely as outcomes of inequality but as durable infrastructures that actively reproduce it (Harvey, 2012; Caldeira, 2017; Ghertner, 2015). These structures are often embedded within planning logics, housing policies, and investment practices that prioritize some populations while marginalising or even erasing others (Roy, 2005; Newton, 2009). These spatial injustices – often rooted in colonial histories of segregation and postcolonial patterns of development – persist and deepen through their intersectional nature. Factors such as class, race, caste, gender, citizenship, and migratory status converge in specific

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places, shaping individuals' encounters with the city's material and symbolic geographies (Crenshaw, 1989; Peake, 2009).

This convergence is not merely an accumulation of social disadvantages; it is the production of negative spatial capital. For instance, for women in informal settlements, inadequate housing is not just a lack of shelter but a material constraint on economic agency. Gendered surveillance and poor lighting are not just safety issues; they are spatial mechanisms that shrink women's legitimate domain of action, effectively taxing their mobility (Lemanski, 2011; Chant, 2013). These intersecting disadvantages become spatially encoded – in fragile tenure, in the very layout of pathways – transforming the built environment into an infrastructure of constraint that actively limits the possibilities of life, labour, and leisure.

Amidst pervasive constraint, urban space remains a site of practice, negotiation, and claim-making. Marginalised communities deploy tactical adaptations, collective appropriations, and forms of spatial resistance that complicate linear narratives of vulnerability (Holston, 2008; Bayat, 2013). These actions reveal deep spatial knowledge while asserting alternative urban imaginaries, showing how residents actively shape the city's fabric, albeit under profoundly unequal terms (Appadurai, 2001; Simone, 2010). Recognizing these dynamics demands a conceptual approach attuned to the interplay of structure and agency. It requires tools capable of tracing not just inequality's map, but the practices through which people inhabit, contest, and transform space. This necessitates rethinking spatial advantage – not as a static asset, but as a relationally produced, unequally distributed capacity.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to distinguish two terms that are used throughout this paper. Spatial inequality refers to the uneven distribution of material, infrastructural, or symbolic resources across urban space. Spatial injustice, by contrast, refers to the processes through which such inequalities are produced, legitimised, normalised, or contested. While inequality describes patterned outcomes, injustice directs attention to the structural and political relations that generate and sustain those outcomes. This distinction, following Soja (2010), Fainstein (2010), and Fraser (2000), underpins the argument that follows and clarifies why A.U.R.A. is concerned not only with the mapping of unequal conditions, but with the practices through which those conditions are reproduced or resisted.

It is here that the concept of 'spatial capital' falters under scrutiny. Though gaining traction since its introduction (Lévy, 1994; 2003), it is frequently reduced to a static measure of locational advantage or infrastructural proximity (Marcus, 2007; Rérat & Lees, 2011). This instrumental framing evacuates power and social struggle, critically overlooking how physical closeness can belie deep social and symbolic distance – powerfully illustrated by Wacquant's (2008) analysis of the ghetto – or how identical locations yield radically different outcomes mediated by institutional positioning (Roy, 2009; Yiftachel, 2009; Soja, 2010). These limitations are most acute in contexts of informality and displacement, where spatial advantage is not inherited but actively struggled for. Consequently, this narrow view misses the very ingenuity and resistance through which communities navigate exclusion by producing spatial value from below (Simone, 2010; McFarlane, 2011; Bayat, 2013).

This paper confronts this deficit directly. We offer a reconceptualisation of spatial capital as a situated and dynamic capacity, forged through the interrelated practices of

accessing, utilising, resisting, and adapting space. While other relational theories of space provide a critical lens, they often lack an operational tool for empirical analysis. To bridge this gap, we synthesize Bourdieu's theory of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), Lefebvre's theory of the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991), and intersectionality analytics (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015) to propose the A.U.R.A. framework (Access, Utilize, Resist, Adapt). This framework serves as both a critical lens and an operational heuristic for understanding spatial (in)justice. Forsaking the fixation on static location, A.U.R.A. dissects how spatial capital is produced and mobilized through the everyday practices of individuals and groups as they interact with and contest a given space. This approach opens generative space for understanding – and ultimately transforming – the lived conditions where spatial justice is denied or realized.

The argument unfolds as follows. Section 2 deploys intersectionality to analyze how spatial recognition is produced. Section 3 revisits spatial capital as a contested capacity, moving beyond location to a relational understanding. Section 4 provides theoretical clarification, arguing for its status as a distinct form of capital. Finally, Section 5 introduces and operationalizes the A.U.R.A. framework, demonstrating its utility through a pilot application before we conclude by outlining pathways toward spatial justice futures.

In proposing this framework, we seek to build upon, but offer a distinct contribution to, foundational theories of spatial justice. Where Edward Soja's work provides a powerful geographic imagination for what spatial justice is and why it is a critical urban struggle, and Susan Fainstein's 'Just City' offers robust normative principles for evaluating the justice of urban outcomes (e.g. equity, democracy, diversity), the A.U.R.A. framework provides a different kind of tool: a micro-political, practice-oriented heuristic. Its primary aim is to operationalize the analysis of how spatial (in)justice is produced, negotiated, and contested at the scale of everyday life, offering a complementary lens to these essential normative frameworks.

Intersectionality and the spatial production of inequality

Rethinking spatial capital as a relational capacity necessitates interrogating how spatial relations are structured by regimes of recognisability and legitimacy. Not all claims achieve equal legibility; not all bodies encounter space equitably. The capacity to access, inhabit, and transform urban environments is profoundly shaped by how difference is read, regulated, and encoded in spatial practices and institutions (Butler, 1993; McKittrick, 2006; Peake, 2009). This section deploys intersectionality not simply as a descriptor of overlapping social positions, but as an analytic of *spatial intelligibility*—concerned with how intersecting structures of power confer or withhold recognition within specific spatial arrangements (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015; Hancock, 2016). This allows us to foreground a different dimension of spatial capital: one conditioned not by physical access alone, but by the politics of visibility and legitimacy.

From social categories to spatial arrangements

The spatial field is more than a terrain for resource distribution; it is a domain that produces legitimacy, adjudicates claims, and enforces normative belonging (Amin, 2013;

Haritaworn, 2015). Spatial arrangements encode assumptions about who cities are for and which presences are legitimate or suspect. These assumptions are shaped not just by planning decisions, but by deeper socio-cultural matrices that associate particular bodies, behaviours, and aesthetics with order, risk, or disruption (Pulido, 2000; Gilmore, 2007).

Intersectionality, mobilized as a spatial analytic, reveals that these processes of coding are neither neutral nor uniform. Bodies marked by racialisation, gender nonconformity, caste location, or disability are not only differently positioned within urban hierarchies; they are subject to differentiated forms of legibility – being hyper-visible and over-regulated in one context, while invisible and overlooked in another (Valentine, 2007; Puar, 2007; Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018). Spatial recognition thus emerges as power: the power to determine whose needs are anticipated, whose practices are normalised, and whose expressions are dismissed.

These processes transcend formal planning, enacted through diffuse norms in signage, surveillance, and design semiotics (Mitchell, 2003; Ahmed, 2006). The placement of benches to discourage rest, the absence of neighbourhood lighting, or the redrawing of public-private boundaries all produce differential recognisability, reproducing societal judgments about which lives are valued. In such contexts, spatial capital cannot equate to infrastructural access alone. It must encompass access to recognisable spatial belonging – the capacity to occupy space without friction, misreading, or hyper-surveillance. This concerns not just inclusion, but its terms, and the affective and material costs for different subjects (Fraser, 2000; Berlant, 2011).

Situated power and the politics of recognition

This politics of recognition is also institutional. Terms denoting legitimate or illegible space are encoded in regulations and legal designations that grant value to some forms while erasing or stigmatising others (Holston, 2008; Miraftab, 2009). Informal settlements, often framed as illegal or transient irrespective of their durability (Roy, 2005; Ghertner, 2015), exemplify this non-neutral classification, which in turn shapes interventions, sanctions improvements, and determines entitlements.

Such regulatory framings operate via differentiation, as not all populations are recognized as full urban subjects. Those lacking tenure or with irregular status are often excluded from entitlements, recognized instead through registers of risk, disorder, or illegitimacy (Yiftachel, 2009). These differentiated recognition regimes, shaped by evolving priorities and discretion, consistently filter access to resources, protections, and representational legitimacy. This filtering extends even to ostensibly inclusive planning processes. Formal mechanisms may invite marginalized groups on pre-scripted terms that demand institutionally-aligned legibility (Sandercock, 1998; Purcell, 2009), leaving vernacular strategies and informal negotiations unrecognized despite their critical survival function. This constitutes a structured misrecognition. At stake is how space becomes governable, as what counts as a problem, a community, or an improvement is mediated by normative regimes of visibility (Scott, 1998; Ranganathan & Bratman, 2021). Here, spatial capital transcends physical access to become the capacity for recognition as a legitimate spatial actor with claims, desires, and rights.

Therefore, any reconceptualisation of spatial capital must account for these material and relational dynamics alongside the layered structures of recognition. A narrow focus on infrastructure cannot register the dispossession, negotiation, and situated agency shaping urban life. What is required is a fundamental rethinking that moves beyond static metrics to engage the spatial practices, constraints, and resistances through which capital is actively produced – a task grounded in a relational and intersectional understanding.

Spatial capital revisited: from inherited value to contested capacity

Building upon the critique of static, location-centric framings – which overlook how spatial advantage is contested and produced through intersecting hierarchies (Roy, 2005; Miraftab, 2009; Yiftachel, 2009; Soja, 2010) – this section advances a different ontology. We propose understanding spatial capital not as a fixed property, but as a contested capacity that is dynamically produced via social relations, institutional filters, and historical geographies of inequality (Bourdieu, 1986; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). This reimagining, by explicitly centering relationality, intersectionality, and spatial struggle, serves as the conceptual bedrock for the A.U.R. A. framework.

Beyond location: diagnosing the conceptual trap

Despite its popularity, the concept of spatial capital often avoids sustained theoretical interrogation. As noted, its widespread usage frequently reduces it to locational advantage measured by proximity to infrastructure or services (Dijst *et al.*, 2002; Marcus, 2007; Rérat & Lees, 2011). This perspective treats spatial capital as an externally measurable good tied to a place's physical properties, assuming that proximity itself constitutes opportunity while flattening the layered ways people relate to, claim, or are excluded from space. This conceptual narrowing reveals an ontological commitment to fixed space and uniformly capable urban subjects, obscuring the social relations, legal classifications, and affective geographies that structure the differential ability to translate location into actualised advantage (Roy, 2005; Soja, 2010). This ontological commitment means two individuals equally close to amenities may encounter vastly different frictions based on citizenship, stigma, gendered mobility constraints, or surveillance regimes (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Peake, 2009).

Furthermore, this model conflates access with inclusion, ignoring how formal infrastructural presence can coincide with social, political, or symbolic disconnection. Informal settlements near elite neighbourhoods often remain excluded from services, legal recognition, or political representation (Yiftachel, 2009; Ghertner, 2015) – exclusions constitutive of how spatial advantage is structured, yet poorly grasped by dominant formulations that overlook disadvantage actively produced through regulatory, aesthetic, and ideological mechanisms (Roy, 2009; Caldeira, 2017).

Finally, decoupling spatial capital from lived practice prevents grasping the inventive generation of capacity under constraint. Tactical urbanism, informal infrastructure-building, or spatial refusal constitute significant means of surviving

and reconfiguring urban marginality, yet remain illegible within dominant capital models (Simone, 2010; McFarlane, 2011; Bayat, 2013). Understanding spatial capital solely through proximity or legality misses the terrain of everyday improvisation and endurance that shapes urban space. This necessitates a fundamental conceptual rethinking grounded in a relational, contested theory of space.

Grounding spatial capital in relational urban theory

To move beyond static, metricised understandings requires rethinking the ontology of space itself. Against the notion of space as an inert container, relational urban theory asserts that space is continuously produced, differentiated, and made meaningful through practice, power, and positionality (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). In this view, space is not merely the context of social life but a constitutive dimension of it, shaped by historical processes and institutional logics that give form to both advantage and exclusion (Soja, 2010; Dovey, 2010).

This shift from absolute to relational space holds profound implications. It dislodges the presumption that value is intrinsic to location and instead foregrounds the situated, contingent, and power-laden processes through which spatial value is produced. Proximity, after all, is not experienced equally; the same physical distance to a resource is rendered meaningful or meaningless depending on one's position within intersecting fields of recognition, legality, and social capital (Roy, 2005; Peake, 2009). This insight, drawing from Lefebvre's (1991) triadic production of space and feminist and decolonial urban theories (McKittrick, 2006; Valentine, 2007), makes visible how spatial value emerges not just from material configurations, but from the recognition (or misrecognition) of those who inhabit and activate space.

To frame spatial capital within this ontological terrain is to understand it not as a thing, but as a dynamic capacity embedded within urban space itself. This capacity – to generate advantage or disadvantage – is inscribed in a space's material configurations and symbolic meanings, and is mobilized only when individuals and communities engage in the situated practices of accessing, utilising, resisting, or adapting it. This capacity derives not from location alone, but from one's positioning within broader socio-spatial regimes. Moreover, relational urban theory reveals that these regimes are not merely imposed from above but are negotiated from below. Residents in informal settlements, for instance, do not passively occupy marginal spaces; they actively produce spatial value through collective organisation and infrastructural improvisation (Simone, 2010; McFarlane, 2011). While generative, these practices remain largely illegible within prevailing models of spatial capital, which fail to register the lived, contested ways capital is spatially enacted.

Importantly, these dynamics are not uniform across contexts. In many postcolonial and Southern urban settings, uneven state presence, informality, and the afterlives of racialised and caste-based ordering fundamentally shape how spatial advantage is produced, recognised, and denied (Roy, 2005; Caldeira, 2017). Spatial capital in these settings cannot be treated as a neutral, transferable property of 'good location'; it is continuously negotiated within historically situated regimes of legitimacy, entitlement, and vulnerability. Thus emerges the need for a concept of spatial capital attuned to this relational production. This demands a closer examination of the conditions under which

space functions as capital by assessing its distinct material, symbolic, and institutional properties as a resource within urban power structures (cf. Wacquant, 2008).

Is spatial capital a capital? Theoretical clarifications and extensions

While the previous section repositioned spatial capital as a dynamic, relational capacity, it left open a foundational question: Does ‘spatial capital’ merit recognition as a distinct form of capital, or is it a derivative manifestation of other capitals – economic, social, or cultural? Resolving this question, which navigates complex debates about the concept’s validity (cf. Ripoll, 2019; Stock & Lucas, 2022), bears directly on its conceptual rigour and its potential to illuminate how spatial arrangements confer advantage and reproduce inequality.

To address this lacuna, this section turns to the conceptual architecture of capital theory. We situate spatial capital within and against Bourdieu’s (1986) typology, engaging debates on whether space is a mere medium (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) or exerts autonomous structuring effects warranting treatment as capital proper (Marcus, 2007; Lévy & Lussault, 2013; Rerat, 2018). The discussion unfolds twofold: first, by critically examining spatial capital against Bourdieu’s criteria (scarcity, convertibility, efficacy), and second, by arguing for its relative autonomy. This lays the theoretical foundation for our reconceptualisation, grounded in critical social theory.

Spatial capital in the field of capitals: a Bourdieusian reading

Bourdieu’s (1986) theorisation of capital as accumulated labour yielding strategic advantage remains foundational. His tripartite schema (economic, cultural, social) revealed how inequality is reproduced beyond market logic. To establish spatial capital as a distinct form, however, we must address a core ambiguity inherited from Bourdieu’s foundational work: is space merely a passive field where other capitals are expressed, or is it an active structuring force? A minimalist reading, viewing space as a simple terrain for inscribing social distances (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), would reduce elite clustering to a mere reflection of economic and cultural capital (Savage *et al.*, 2004). Our framework builds on a stronger reading that aligns with Lefebvre’s (1991) theory of spatial production.

We argue that spatial capital emerges when space itself is strategically produced and deployed – through zoning, infrastructural investment, or place-branding – to create durable and convertible advantages. It is this synthesis of Bourdieu’s concept of ‘accumulated labour’ with Lefebvre’s insistence on space as actively ‘produced’ that allows us to see spatial capital as a distinct, relational form that can generate irreducible effects. This debate resonates in urban studies, where scholars show capitals being both deployed *in* space and co-constituted *through* spatial logics like segregation (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Roy, 2009; Mace, 2017). The central question remains whether spatial configurations themselves generate irreducible advantage.

Space as capital: durability, legibility, convertibility, and contestation

To treat spatial capital as a distinct form requires engaging Bourdieu's (1986) logic: a resource qualifies as capital if it (1) embodies accumulated labour, (2) is convertible into other capital forms, and (3) functions efficaciously within a social field. Can spatial configurations meet this threshold?

We argue affirmatively. First, space embodies accumulated labour; the built environment materialises successive rounds of investment, regulation, and design, reflecting socio-historical priorities. As Bourdieu (1998) observed, spatial arrangements are 'objectified history,' sedimenting the past into durable forms that structure possibility.

Second, spatial capital is convertible. Strategic location can mobilize economic returns (rent gaps), cultural capital (symbolic proximity), or social capital (network access). Conversely, spatial dislocation or stigmatization inhibits conversion. Wacquant's (2008) work on territorial stigma, for example, demonstrates how a disadvantaged location impedes employment and trust, regardless of individual attributes, functioning as a form of negative symbolic capital that is irreducibly spatial.

Third, spatial capital operates efficaciously within structured fields of power. Its value, never absolute, is relationally determined within the urban field via planning regimes, market logics, legal recognition, and aesthetic discourses (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Zoning, connectivity, or symbolic status dictates land value; prime versus marginal space is produced and reproduced through dynamic interactions between capital holders, state institutions, and development imaginaries, implicating spatial capital in Bourdieu's 'struggles over legitimate accumulation' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241), fought on and through space itself.

This efficacy is reinforced by spatial arrangements' durability and inertia. Unlike mobile capitals, spatial capital is 'sticky,' fixing advantage and disadvantage into urban morphology. Well-connected areas attract investment while neglected zones face cumulative disinvestment – a spatial Matthew effect amplifying inequality (Harvey, 2002; Massey, 2005; Merton, 1968). Established configurations resist change, their temporal stickiness lending distinct power: inscribing differential access and mobility into the urban fabric beyond individual actors or cycles.

Equally vital is space's symbolic legibility. Certain forms (iconic architecture, historic districts) garner prestige and investment via imbued meanings (value, legitimacy, modernity) (Zukin, 1995; Vale, 2014), while others (informal settlements, peripheral estates), though proximate, remain symbolically disqualified (seen as unplanned, chaotic, or illegal). This symbolic charge shapes governance, finance, and inhabitation, influencing who constitutes a legitimate urban subject whose claims are recognized or denied. Spatial capital thus operates not just materially but as a socially coded visibility field intersecting with class, race, caste, and status to structure spatial citizenship (Holston, 2008; Yiftachel, 2009).

Finally, spatial capital is defined by contestation. Following Bourdieu, a resource's status as capital is confirmed when it becomes the subject of struggle within a social field. Urban space is precisely such a field. Practices like tactical urbanism and land regularisation are not merely 'projects'; they are counter-

hegemonic claims on the legitimate use and value of space (Miraftab, 2009; Kern, 2020). The very fact that marginalized groups mobilize to appropriate, resist, and reconfigure spatial arrangements proves that spatial advantage is a scarce, valuable, and convertible resource. This constant struggle over its distribution and meaning is the ultimate confirmation of its power as a distinct form of capital.

(Re)defining spatial capital: embedded capacity, situated activation, and contested urban power

Having established spatial capital as a distinct capital form satisfying Bourdieusian criteria, we can now synthesize the preceding analysis into a rigorous definition:

Spatial capital constitutes the latent capacity embedded within urban space—inscribed in its material configurations, symbolic meanings, and institutional frameworks—to engender differentiated forms of advantage or disadvantage (economic, social, cultural, or symbolic) that is realized when mobilized through situated individual and collective practices.

This definition offers key analytical advantages. Firstly, defining spatial capital as a latent capacity that is realized through mobilization avoids the theoretical pitfalls of treating space as either a fixed property or a wholly derivative backdrop (Marcus, 2007; Lévy & Lussault, 2013). This formulation strategically separates the *potential* embedded within a space from the *actuality* of capital, which is only produced relationally. Secondly, explicitly encompassing multiple advantage and disadvantage dimensions (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) expands analysis beyond narrow economism (Zukin, 1995; Wacquant, 2008). Thirdly, by demanding that capacity is ‘realized when mobilized,’ the definition centers the situated practices – use, resistance, improvisation – that constitute its actualisation, thereby foregrounding agency amidst structural constraints (Holston, 2008; Simone, 2010; Bayat, 2013). Finally, framing spatial capital as both resource and constraint addresses the fundamental tension of space: that it simultaneously enables and restricts (Ghertner, 2015; Caldeira, 2017). In this formulation, spatial capital becomes an active, consequential dimension of urban power.

This definition hinges on a key distinction between latent potential and realized activation, a concept central to Bourdieusian logic. Economic capital, for instance, sits ‘latent’ as a value in a bank account but only functions as capital when mobilized through investment or exchange. Similarly, spatial capital is the *potential* embedded in spatial arrangements, a potential that is only realized – and thus becomes analytically visible – through the social practices that A.U.R.A. documents. Furthermore, this emphasis on practice does not imply unbounded agency. The capacity to ‘Utilize,’ ‘Resist,’ or ‘Adapt’ is profoundly shaped by structural conditions of tenure, legal status, and social position. A. U.R.A.’s purpose is therefore to make visible the *terrain of struggle* itself, illuminating both the ingenuity of inhabitants and the formidable structural barriers that contain and condition their actions.

Unpacking spatial capital: dimensions, forms, and processes of accumulation

To operationalize this definition, we must unpack its concrete components. Building on the preceding theoretical discussion, we can map spatial capital as a multidimensional

construct arising from the interplay of Lefebvrian spatial production and Bourdieusian capital logic. This construct comprises four interlinked Dimensions, manifests in two primary Forms, and is generated through four iterative Processes.

The Dimensions of spatial capital are:

- Physical: Material and infrastructural qualities (buildings, networks, land).
- Economic: Land values, market dynamics, and investment costs.
- Social: Networks, solidarity, and trust that mediate access.
- Cultural: Place-based identity, symbolic meanings, memory, and aesthetics.

These dimensions are mutually constitutive and manifest through two interconnected Forms:

- Formal vs. Informal: Codified arrangements (e.g. zoning) versus grassroots practices.
- Individual vs. Collective: Personal attributes versus communal practices and group mobilization.

These are produced through four key Processes of Accumulation:

- (1) Identifying: Recognizing spatial resources and their potential benefits.
- (2) Accessing: Navigating structural barriers to entry, use, or entitlement.
- (3) Adapting: Engaging in spatial negotiation and modification to leverage environments.
- (4) Networking: Stabilising accumulated capital via supportive relationships and alliances.

These processes are not linear but iterative and relational, mediated by power and agency. The centrality of this contestation – a struggle akin to the Right to the City – necessitates a framework designed specifically to analyze these practices. These interlinked dimensions, forms, and processes of accumulation are synthesised in [Figure 1](#).

While the preceding discussion maps the theoretical anatomy of spatial capital – its Dimensions, Forms, and general Processes of Accumulation – a separate tool is required to diagnose how this capital is operationalized and contested in the lived reality of urban space. The four processes of accumulation describe how spatial capital is broadly formed and stabilized. However, to analyze the micro-political practices of *spatial justice*, we must focus on the specific ways inhabitants gain entry, use, challenge, and transform their environments. Therefore, building from this theoretical foundation, we developed the A.U.R.A. framework as a specific heuristic lens to analyze these situated practices.

The A.U.R.A. framework: access, utilize, resist, adapt

Having established spatial capital as a dynamic capacity shaped by power, identity, and context – not static location – this section introduces the A.U.R.A. framework (Access, Utilize, Resist, Adapt). While theoretical work establishes spatial capital's legitimacy (e.g.

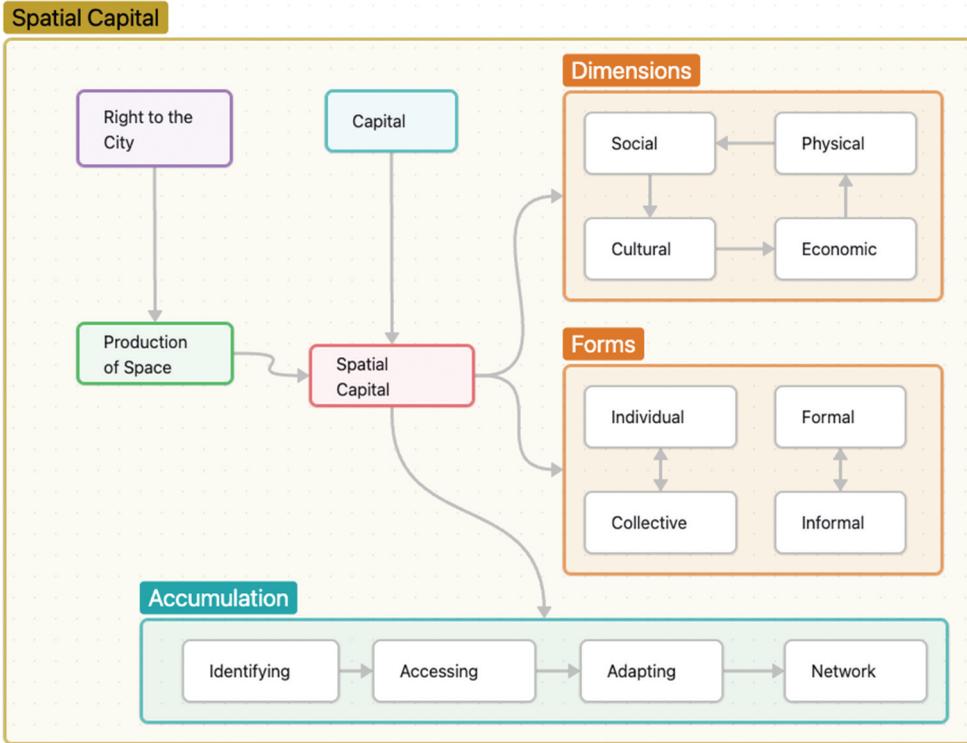


Figure 1. Spatial capital – dimensions, forms and process of accumulation. *Source:* Authors’ own diagram.

Stock & Lucas, 2022), operational frameworks translating this into analysis of lived spatial struggles and pathways toward justice remain underdeveloped, limiting effective engagement with spatial inequalities (cf. Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2010; Mace, 2017).

A.U.R.A. offers a process-oriented perspective, positioning the built environment as an active site of contestation, negotiation, and agency. It foregrounds how diverse actors – residents, organisations, planners – gain entry (Access), harness spaces (Utilize), challenge exclusions (Resist), and reconfigure environments (Adapt). By operationalizing prior socio-spatial insights, A.U.R.A. highlights inequality’s roots in complex power interplays (related to class, gender, race, or institutions) (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015), revealing inhabitants navigating overlapping barriers via multifaceted spatial strategies (Miraftab, 2009; Bayat, 2013). Central to A.U.R.A. is its design to capture spatial capital’s unfolding contestation, offering a necessary conceptual bridge between critical spatial analysis and transformative spatial praxis.

Intersectionality underpins the entire A.U.R.A. framework. Each modality – Access, Utilise, Resist, and Adapt – operates through differentiated social positions that shape how spatial capacities are exercised, denied, or transformed. Gender, caste, race, class, age, and ability all inflect what is possible within a given spatial condition, determining not only who enters but who can use, contest, or modify it. Intersectionality therefore functions here not as an external lens, but as a constitutive dynamic internal to every modality of A.U.R.A.

The components of A.U.R.A.: unpacking spatial agency

Access: negotiating spatial legibility, symbolic exclusion, and uneven entry

Within A.U.R.A., Access moves beyond mere physical entry to denote the genuine capacity to meaningfully enter, occupy, and claim urban space. This approach, anchored in Sen's (1999) capabilities framework and enriched by feminist and postcolonial critiques (Roy, 2005; Peake, 2009), understands access as a material, social, and symbolic achievement. Spaces, non-neutral territories, possess embedded spatial capital selectively facilitating or restricting entry via intertwined infrastructure, legal norms, symbolic legitimacy, and social identity mechanisms (Miraftab, 2009; Soja, 2010). Authentic access emerges relationally, dependent on spatial capital's structuring and perception by different actors (McKittrick, 2006).

Significantly, formal openness alone rarely guarantees equitable entry; spaces inherently communicate symbolic inclusion or exclusion messages. Public parks lacking accessible infrastructure implicitly reinforce ableist norms, undermining access despite formal availability. Patriarchal urban streets lacking lighting or visibility symbolically encode risk and marginalisation for women, transforming accessible spaces into sites of exclusion and fear (Phadke *et al.*, 2011). Spatial capital's symbolic dimension materially conditions safe, meaningful access.

Conversely, enabling spatial capital is actively produced via deliberate design or collective agency. Informal settlements deploying collective interventions (community lighting, surveillance, negotiated pathways) recast marginal spaces into genuinely accessible environments (Simone, 2004; Holston, 2008), enhancing spatial capital through collective practices challenging exclusionary norms, affirming rights to meaningful presence. Genuine access emerges not passively, but via active spatial infrastructure and symbolic code reconfigurations. The meaning of access is therefore contingent upon positionality. The same threshold, pathway, or regulatory code is lived differently by women, migrants, or disabled residents, each navigating distinct combinations of visibility, risk, and recognition. Access, in this sense, is always conditional and mediated by intersecting relations of power. However, meaningful access, while foundational, remains insufficient. The capacity for active engagement – captured via Utilise – is equally critical for spatial justice.

Utilize: activating and appropriating urban spaces within existing structures

If Access marks entry, Utilize represents spatial capital's realization through meaningful, flexible engagement *within existing spatial structures*. Grounded in Lefebvre's (1991) social production of space, utilisation transcends passive occupancy, emphasizing diverse actors' agency employing spaces responsive to specific social, economic, or cultural aspirations, often without major structural alteration (Simone, 2010; McFarlane, 2011). Within A.U.R.A., utilisation signifies space's capacity supporting varied, sometimes unintended, usage patterns.

Critically, utilisation underscores spaces' non-prescriptive nature. Spaces possess varying spatial capital degrees based on adaptability to diverse, often unforeseen, appropriations (Marcus, 2007; Bayat, 2013). Parks designed for children may function simultaneously as migrant community social hubs, their embedded capital reflected in capacity hosting multiple uses without conflict, reinforcing spatial and social resilience.

Similarly, constrained urban streets exemplify beneficial spatial capital via informal appropriation: lower-income neighbourhood streets serving mobility alongside community gatherings, festivities, and economic activities demonstrate latent capital through multifunctionality and social responsiveness (Holston, 2008; Watson, 2009). Conversely, rigid regulatory environments (such as gated complexes or high-rise resettlement) exhibit negative spatial outcomes, severely limiting creative and meaningful appropriation via stringent design and institutional constraints. Utilisation thus offers a crucial evaluative lens: inherent adaptability shapes lived realities. Spaces imbued with enabling spatial capital accommodate diverse practices, fostering resilience and empowerment. Conversely, spaces burdened by constraining spatial features – those that are rigid, exclusionary, or excessively formal – restrict appropriation, reproducing marginalisation. These dynamics, too, are intersectionally patterned. The ability to use space freely or inventively often hinges on social visibility, safety, and legitimacy – conditions unevenly distributed across identity and status. Intersectional hierarchies thus translate directly into the rhythms and boundaries of everyday use. Yet, even active utilisation capacity doesn't inherently shield inhabitants from structural vulnerabilities. Critically interrogating these requires addressing Resist.

Resist: contesting, negotiating, and rejecting spatial constraints

While Utilise highlights accommodating diverse needs, Resist foregrounds agency contesting, negotiating, or rejecting oppressive spatial conditions. Rooted theoretically in insurgent urbanism (Miraftab, 2009), the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2012), and feminist or postcolonial spatial injustice critiques (Roy, 2005; McKittrick, 2006), resistance within A.U.R.A. encapsulates defensive reactions and proactive spatial claims. It encompasses overt protest alongside the fundamental, often overlooked, right to refuse or reject harmful, exclusionary environments (Holston, 2008; Anguelovski *et al.*, 2020).

This framing positions resistance integrally within spatial capital, extending beyond advantage notions to reveal conditions where space constrains or endangers residents (Yiftachel, 2009; Ghertner, 2015). Resettlement near hazards exemplifies this, limiting capacity to contest or refuse harm, highlighting how structural inequalities (related to socio-economic status, institutional marginalisation, or limited political agency) undermine resistance, entrenching disadvantage (Roy, 2009; Doshi, 2013).

Importantly, resistance within A.U.R.A. recognises a spectrum: from visible mobilisation to subtle, everyday negotiation and refusal. Explicit resistance (protests, petitions) confronts structural barriers, yet remains significant, illuminating inequalities and articulating collective claims. Equally vital are nuanced daily resistances: informal practices, spatial non-compliance, or tactical subversions asserting dignity and agency under severe constraint (Scott, 1998; Simone, 2010; Bayat, 2013). Such practices reveal alternative agency and resistance's intersectional realities shaped by identity (race, gender, class, caste, status), mediating whose contestations gain recognition and whose remain suppressed (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015).

This multifaceted resistance understanding enriches A.U.R.A., illuminating spatial capital's active negotiation, reinforcement, and destabilisation through continuous struggle. Addressing structurally constrained resistance reveals deep-seated injustices.

Resistance becomes central to comprehending urban resilience, dignity, and empowerment, especially where explicit refusals face institutional curtailment. Yet this capacity to resist is profoundly shaped by intersectional positionality. The repertoire of resistance available to a tenured male homeowner – overt political protest, legal challenges – is fundamentally different from that available to an undocumented migrant woman, for whom resistance might be limited to the covert, everyday acts of non-compliance that fly below the state’s radar. The calculus of risk is different; the stakes are different. Resistance is therefore not a universal act of will but a situated practice negotiated at the sharp edge of intersecting vulnerabilities. A.U.R.A.’s analytical power lies in making these varied, often invisible, forms of resistance legible as potent political acts. Yet, challenging immediate exclusions often proves insufficient without deeper structural interventions durably reshaping space. This leads organically to Adapt.

Adapt: structurally transforming urban space and spatial capacities

While Resist underscores contesting oppression, Adapt embodies community ability to structurally modify or transform spaces into lasting configurations aligned with evolving collective aspirations. Rooted in incremental urbanism, resilience, and socio-spatial agency theories (Simone, 2004; Holston, 2008; McFarlane, 2011), adaptation represents durable physical, social, or institutional transformations embedding new functionalities or meanings. Unlike temporary utilisation, adaptation implies sustained *structural interventions* enhancing or anchoring spatial capital.

This dimension advances spatial capital understanding by highlighting communities actively reshaping spaces, extending structural capacities amidst constraints. Incremental housing modifications in Global South sites-and-services schemes (adding rooms, workshops, sanitation) exemplify structural adaptations materially embedding resilience, autonomy, and economic agency (Turner, 1976; Benjamin, 2008). Conversely, rigid large-scale resettlement projects severely restrict adaptive capacities, hindering socio-economic mobility and exacerbating precarity (Doshi, 2013).

Global North adaptation unfolds differently yet remains critical. Community-led redevelopment (abandoned properties into co-ops, industrial site reuse) exemplifies spatial transformations negotiated within formal frameworks, embodying collective sustainability, affordability, or cohesion aspirations (Lang & Novy, 2014; Czischke & Huisman, 2018). Yet access remains uneven; wealthier or influential groups often better positioned to institutionalise transformations, highlighting persistent inequalities (Marcuse, 2010; Anguelovski *et al.*, 2020).

Adaptation also manifests via collective infrastructural interventions reconfiguring neighbourhood capacities. Community-managed sanitation or neighbourhood-led energy and agriculture initiatives illustrate durable adaptations strengthening spatial capital via enhanced resilience and socio-political autonomy (Watson, 2009; McFarlane, 2011; Schlosberg & Coles, 2016). Intersectional constraints persist: marginalised communities face institutional barriers, insecure tenure, and resource limitations curtailing structural transformation capacity (Roy, 2005; Yiftachel, 2009).

Ultimately, Adapt underscores spatial capital’s structural securing through sustained socio-spatial modifications embedding resilience, autonomy, and collective aspirations. Highlighting uneven possibilities illuminates pathways towards genuine spatial justice, bridging immediate contestations with transformative, long-term outcomes. It completes

A.U.R.A., clarifying how spatial capital – via access, utilisation, resistance, and adaptation – critically informs inclusive, just urban futures. Even adaptation – the most materially visible expression of agency – is shaped by intersectional position. The capacity to alter dwellings, extend livelihoods, or reorganise collective space presupposes access to resources, tenure security, and social legitimacy that are themselves unevenly distributed. The endurance of adaptation thus reveals, as much as it repairs, entrenched inequities within spatial capital.

To demonstrate how these components function in concert before their formal operationalization, consider the A.U.R.A. framework in analyzing a common urban scenario: an established informal settlement targeted for a large-scale infrastructure project. A traditional analysis might focus only on the settlement's lack of formal tenure.

The A.U.R.A. framework, demands a more nuanced inquiry that moves sequentially through the layers of spatial practice. It would begin with Access, questioning not just physical entry but legal recognition, before mapping how residents Utilise the space to create value through enterprises and social gatherings. From there, the analysis would document acts of Resist – from overt organizing to everyday non-compliance – and finally identify forms of Adapt, such as the incremental upgrading of homes, that reveal a capacity for structural transformation often ignored by formal planning. By tracing these interconnected practices, the researcher can construct a far richer diagnosis of spatial injustice—one that identifies not just deficits, but also the existing capacities and struggles of the community.

From concept to inquiry: operationalising A.U.R.A. for situated urban research

Operationalizing A.U.R.A. requires contextual activation, not rigid standardization. It serves as a critical-analytical lens for tracing the differential practices of Access, Utilisation, Resistance, and Adaptation. This demands a reflexive methodology that combines empirical attentiveness with an intersectional and structural critique. [Table 1](#) synthesises this potential practice, serving not as a prescriptive checklist, but as a heuristic scaffold for research. Comparison across cases does not rely on numeric scoring. Instead, interpretation proceeds by examining the balance among the four modalities – where they reinforce one another, where they are blocked, and where compensations emerge. This approach preserves contextual nuance while allowing systematic cross-case comparison. These steps provide methodological transparency and allow the framework's replication in comparable research and teaching contexts. The framework's added value lies not in inventing new methods, but in providing a critical lens that directs these established ethnographic and qualitative approaches toward the specific, often-overlooked practices through which spatial capital is produced and contested.

The fourth column of the table, 'Illustrative Conditions,' offers interpretive cues – grounded, observable traces signalling spatial capital or its absence. Access manifests not just physically but via experiences of safety; resistance might materialize through silence or informal refusal. These cues aid concrete analysis attuned to local specificity.

Employing this heuristic effectively demands certain methodological commitments. Research must be spatially attuned, treating space not as a neutral container but as an active medium of power and struggle (Lefebvre, 1991; Harley, 1989). It requires intersectionality in design and analysis, deploying methods like oral histories or participatory

Table 1. Operationalizing the A.U.R.A. Framework for situated urban Research.

Component	Analytical Focus	Indicative Methods	Critical Research Questions	Illustrative Conditions to Observe
Access	Examine how spatial capital enables or restricts meaningful entry into spaces—legally, physically, symbolically. Focus on intersectional exclusions and spatial legibility.	Spatial ethnography, accessibility audits, participatory mapping, legal/policy review	How do spatial configurations enable or constrain access differently across social groups? How is access legitimised or denied?	Legally accessible spaces with socially exclusionary atmospheres; infrastructural absence (e.g. ramps, lighting) limiting functional access; ambiguous tenure or zoning status reducing secure use; fear-driven avoidance tied to gendered or racialised perceptions of safety.
Utilize	Assess the extent to which space accommodates diverse needs within existing structures without requiring formal transformation. Highlight everyday spatial agency and negotiated use.	Time-use diaries, observational walkthroughs, participatory design exercises, behaviour mapping	Who is able to use the space, and how? What kinds of uses are legitimised, tolerated, or suppressed?	Informal repurposing of formal infrastructure (e.g. using stairwells for socialising or vending); simultaneous but unequal uses of shared space (e.g. women using parks only at set times); socio-cultural mismatch between intended and actual use; time-based exclusions (e.g. curfews).
Resist	Explore spatial contestation in both overt and subtle forms. Focus on how individuals and collectives challenge, endure, or subvert exclusionary spatial logics.	Oral histories, counter-mapping, protest media analysis, embedded fieldwork	How do actors resist spatial injustice when formal avenues are closed? What forms does resistance take under constraint?	Structurally constrained refusal (e.g. inability to reject relocation); compelled endurance of unsafe environments; subtle spatial dissent (e.g. reclaiming space via practice, renaming); erasure from formal participatory processes as denied voice.
Adapt	Investigate the capacity for durable structural spatial transformation. Emphasise how users reshape spaces structurally over time to assert autonomy and resilience.	Longitudinal studies, design ethnography, community workshops, archival spatial analysis	What enables spatial adaptation over time? Who can adapt space, and who is structurally prevented?	Incremental modifications for livelihood (e.g. rental units, storefronts); community-driven infrastructure upgrades; spatial rigidity in formal housing impeding change; evidence of layered, intergenerational adaptation in flexible settlements.

Source: Authors' own conceptualisation.

mapping to center subaltern spatial knowledge (Peake & Rieker, 2013; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). Given that spatial transformation is a process, it demands temporal and processual sensitivity, favoring longitudinal and ethnographic approaches where feasible (Simone, 2004; McFarlane, 2011). Finally, it calls for epistemic justice and ethical engagement, moving beyond extractive research to co-produce knowledge with communities, recognizing their situated expertise and ensuring accountability (Kindon *et al.*, 2007; Tronto, 2013). Centring lived practices in this way equips scholars and practitioners to trace not just where inequalities manifest, but *how* they are inhabited, contested, and reconfigured – making A.U.R.A. a diagnostic tool for imagining and enabling just spatial futures.

From theory to practice: a pilot application of the framework

To evaluate its practical applicability and to test its translation from theory to situated analysis, the A.U.R.A. framework was piloted through a two-hour workshop involving ninety-two participants from diverse backgrounds – including students, academics, researchers, and practitioners – organised into 20 interdisciplinary groups. The session opened with a concise introduction to the reconceptualised theory of spatial capital and the four modalities of A.U.R.A. Each group then used the digital A.U.R.A. tool to collaboratively analyse pre-selected urban situations, documenting their observations for Access, Utilise, Resist, and Adapt. The exercise generated a comparative set of qualitative outputs that were subsequently reviewed and cross-checked by the facilitation team to ensure interpretive consistency. A full technical account of the digital tool, its interface, and the extended multi-site workshops is being prepared separately, and therefore lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The results confirmed the framework's analytical and pedagogical potential. It guided participants to move fluidly between micro-level spatial analysis and relational interpretation, enabling them to articulate spatial (in)justice through situated practices rather than abstract categories. [Figures 2–4](#) illustrate this process: [Figure 2](#) provides contextual information for a selected spatial condition, [Figure 3](#) presents one group's analysis as an A.U.R.A. profile, visualising the relative intensity of each modality, while [Figure 4](#) offers a Pattern Ecology situating multiple profiles within a comparative analytical field, exposing clusters and gaps across cases.

This pilot application demonstrates that the A.U.R.A. framework is not merely a conceptual model but a functional heuristic. It provides a structured method that enables both rigorous case-by-case diagnosis and high-level comparative analysis of spatial inequality.

Conclusion: a framework for activating spatial justice

This paper has reconceptualized spatial capital not as a static attribute of location, but as a dynamic capacity produced through the everyday practices of Access, Utilisation, Resistance, and Adaptation; the A.U.R.A. framework provides a heuristic tool to illuminate these micro-political processes where spatial justice is ultimately won or lost. This concluding section reflects on the theoretical and political implications of this

AURA > Pattern Gallery > Community space

← **Community space**
Typology: Shared Courtyard/Alley

1. Context 2. Narratives 3. A.U.R.A. Analysis 4. Justice & Role 5. Situational Dynamics

1. Context

Pattern Name
Community space

Pattern Typology
A short, descriptive category for the pattern.
Shared Courtyard/Alley

One-Sentence Summary
A dense, shared space serving as essential access, circulation, and a m...

Key Users
The primary users or inhabitants of this space.
Residents of adjacent buildings, visitors, delivery personnel, children

Tags
Keywords categorizing this pattern.
shared-space residential dense-urban social-space circulation
Add tags and press Enter

Location
Country is required for map plotting. Coordinates are optional.
Latitude Longitude
India

Context Images
General images that show the overall spatial condition.



Description
A rich description of the spatial pattern and its context.

This spatial pattern describes a shared area situated between multiple residential structures in a high-density urban environment. It functions as the primary means of access and circulation for the inhabitants of the surrounding buildings. Beyond mere passage, the space is intensively utilised for a variety of daily activities, including parking of personal vehicles, social gathering, temporary storage, and extending domestic life outdoors. Its configuration is shaped by the proximity of structures and the collective needs of the residents, evolving organically to accommodate multiple, sometimes competing, uses within a limited footprint.

Figure 2. Contextual information of a spatial condition analysed. *Source:* Screenshot from the A.U.R.A. web application developed by the authors; anonymised outputs from the pilot workshop.

reorientation, arguing that it provides a necessary grammar for engaging with the central urban struggles of our time.

The framework's primary contribution is that it fundamentally redefines what spatial capital is and provides a clear method for its diagnosis. Its four modalities are not a linear sequence but a recursive interplay. The power of the framework lies in reading these modalities together to diagnose a space's unique spatial capital. The resulting 'A.U.R.A. Profile' – the specific signature of a place – reveals its underlying condition, shifting the understanding of spatial capital from a single metric to a multi-dimensional capacity. A space characterized by high Utilisation and Adaptation despite low formal Access, for instance, reveals a resilient, user-generated form of spatial capital built on agency and insurgent placemaking. Conversely, a space with high formal Access but limited possibilities for Resistance or Adaptation points to a brittle form of institutional spatial capital reliant on control.

This cyclical process of generating and contesting these forms of capital, echoing McFarlane's (2011) concept of 'learning the city,' is profoundly shaped by one's position



Figure 3. The A.U.R.A. analysis and resulting radar profile for a single ‘community space’ pattern. *Source:* Screenshot from the A.U.R.A. web application developed by the authors; anonymised outputs from the pilot workshop.

within intersectional regimes of recognition (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015). A.U.R.A. thus provides a language to trace not just *that* spatial outcomes are unequal, but *how* the very nature of a place’s spatial capital is actively navigated, reproduced, or subverted through the everyday labours of urban inhabitants.

By grounding analysis in these practices, our framework offers a crucial bridge to the foundational concerns of critical urban theory. Whereas Soja’s *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Soja, 2010) and Fainstein’s *Just City* (Fainstein, 2010) articulate justice primarily in normative and distributive terms, A.U.R.A. advances a diagnostic approach. It treats justice as an everyday spatial capacity, traced through the material enactments of recognition, agency, resistance, and adaptation within lived urban situations. It aligns

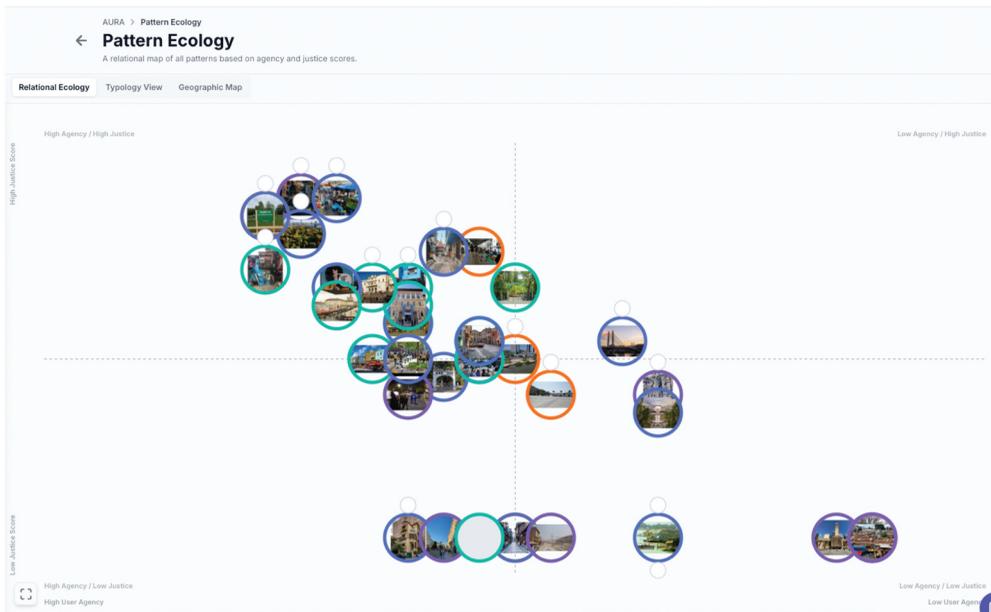


Figure 4. The relational ‘pattern Ecology’ view, which situates multiple patterns in a comparative analytical space. *Source:* Screenshot from the A.U.R.A. web application developed by the authors; anonymised outputs from the pilot workshop.

directly with Lefebvre’s (1996, 1991) insistence on *l’espace vécu* (lived space) as the terrain where the conceived space of planners and the perceived space of daily routines are challenged and reworked. Through the lens of A.U.R.A., the informal economies, tactical appropriations, and insurgent planning practices documented by scholars like Bayat (2013), Simone (2010), and Miraftab (2009) are not positioned as residual or peripheral. Instead, they are centered as core sites where distinct forms of spatial capital – and therefore distinct conditions of justice – are produced. This perspective reframes these actions not as mere coping mechanisms, but as a form of political work that actively constitutes the city.

The implications of this extend into the political and ethical domain, particularly in an era of escalating crises. When climate change, pandemics, or economic shocks manifest, spatial injustice becomes the primary mechanism through which vulnerability is distributed. The capacity to withstand, respond, and recover is profoundly spatial. It depends on secure access to shelter, the ability to utilize neighborhood resources, the power to resist displacement, and the agency to adapt one’s environment. The A.U.R.A. framework provides the analytical tools to understand how limitations in these capacities translate into what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) terms ‘organized abandonment.’ Simultaneously, it illuminates the often-invisible practices through which marginalized communities build collective resilience against such threats.

Recognizing these practices, however, is only the first step. The political task is their active cultivation. This requires more than simply redistributing resources; it demands a fundamental shift in epistemic authority – a change in whose knowledge counts (Sandercock, 2003; Fainstein, 2010). In practice, this means

privileging the lived expertise of residents in zoning hearings over abstract traffic models. It means treating the informal adaptations of street vendors not as problems to be erased, but as data on how public space can better serve diverse needs. The A.U.R.A. framework facilitates this by providing a grammar to translate these lived spatial practices into legible evidence for more just planning. It means valuing the spatial knowledge produced by those navigating everyday survival and embedding that knowledge within formal decision-making processes. It requires a shift from policies that seek to discipline or erase informality to those that enable the agentic capacities already at work on the margins.

The framework thus opens immediate pathways for research and praxis. First, its diagnostic structure can be embedded in participatory planning and design processes to identify where spatial capacities are being curtailed and how they might be restored. Second, comparative studies across neighbourhoods and cities can build a repository of recurring A.U.R.A. profiles linking spatial form to justice outcomes. Third, incorporating the framework into planning and architecture education can cultivate reflexivity toward spatial agency and constraint among future practitioners. Through such applications, A.U.R.A. transforms from an analytical device into a grounded methodology for enacting spatial justice.

In this light, spatial justice emerges not as a static ideal to be achieved, but as a continuous and demanding praxis. The A.U.R.A. framework is ultimately a provocation: to reimagine spatial capital not as a finite asset to be measured, but as a set of relational capacities to be fought for and cultivated. It insists that because the city is actively produced, its injustices are not immutable. They are contested, reworked, and can be undone through the very practices this framework helps us to see and value. The challenge now, for scholars and practitioners alike, is to remain committed to the deeper question at stake: not just how space is lived, but how it might be remade – more justly, more collectively, and more urgently.

The path forward requires deploying and testing this framework across diverse geopolitical contexts. A critical next step is comparative research that examines how the dynamics of spatial capital are shaped by the legacies of colonialism and the logics of urban informality, particularly within cities of the Global South. Such work would not only enrich the framework but also challenge the universality of urban theories developed in the North. For practitioners, the challenge lies in adapting A.U.R.A. as a participatory tool-one that enables communities to codify their own spatial knowledge and assert their claims within formal planning processes. By linking critical theory to a grounded heuristic, the ultimate ambition is to provide a more robust grammar for both understanding and transforming the central urban struggles of our time.

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