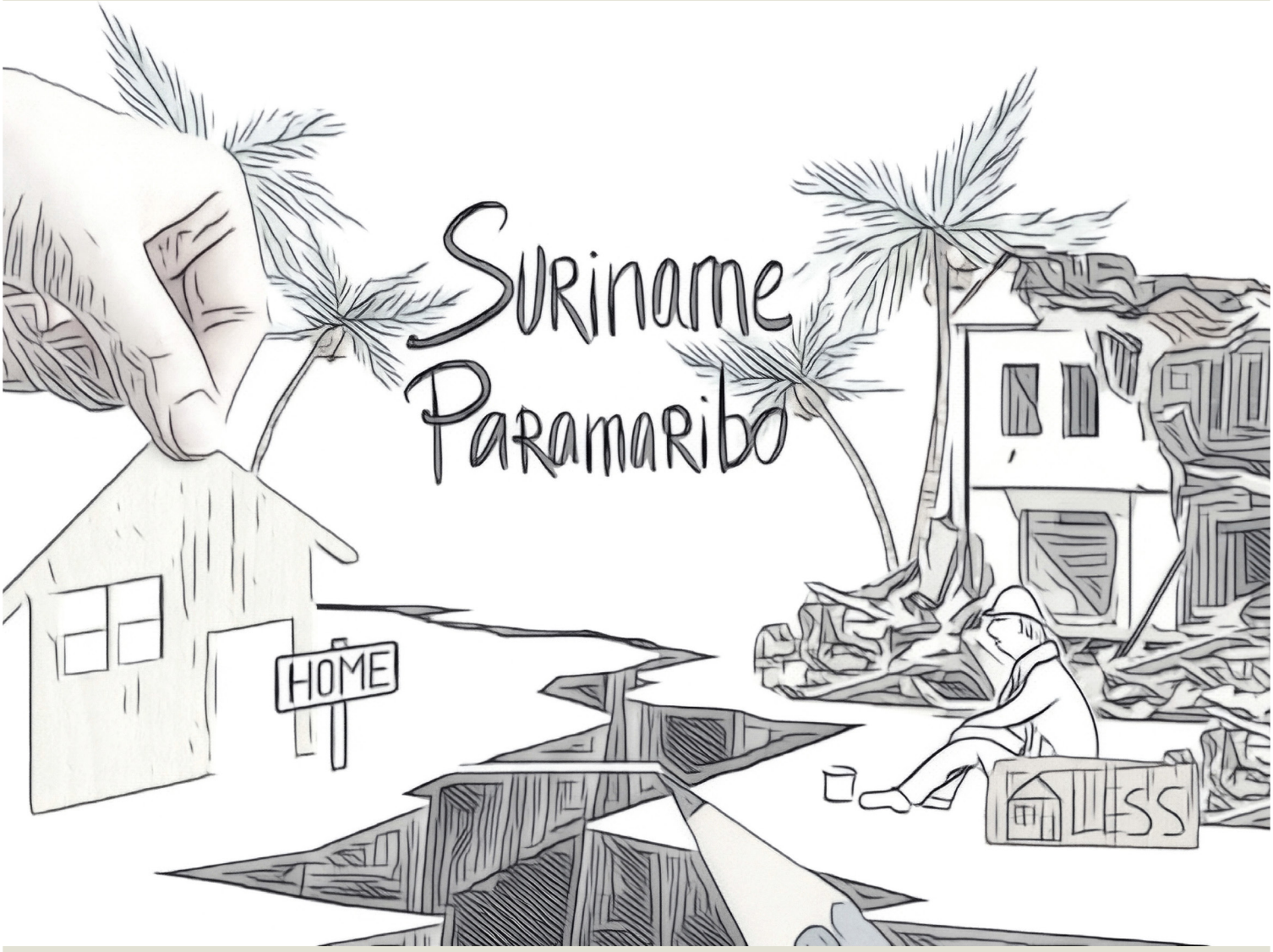
Urban Voids and Human Needs

Bridging Gaps for Paramaribo's Unhoused



(Note. Illustration by Author, 2024)

Graduation Report
MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences

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City of The Future

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GRADUATION REPORT

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I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Madjerin Petrusie, founder of Samaria Tour, whose organization provides vital support to the unhoused community through both essential necessities and guidance for social reintegration. Equal appreciation goes to Mr. Ronald Fernandes, whose personal insights into unhoused experiences were illuminating. His perspectives highlighted the genuine need for assistance among vulnerable communities, becoming a powerful motivator for this research—inspiring me to create, as a designer, opportunities for traditionally marginalized voices to be heard in architectural and urban planning conversations.

To my friends and family, I offer sincere thanks for their unwavering support throughout this endeavour. Their presence helped maintain my perspective and reminded me of life's broader context beyond academic pursuits.

This work is dedicated to my parents, who cultivated my appreciation for education from my earliest years and stood by me at every stage. Their enduring confidence in my capabilities has consistently inspired me to pursue ambitious goals with determination and diligence.

I hope you find this report both informative and engaging.

Sincerely, Shanice Nur Hajati Soeroredjo

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Community, Government, Housing, Paramaribo, Property, Revitalization, Social capital, Suriname, Unhoused community, Urban decline, Urban voids, Vacant/Abandoned properties

This research examines the relationship between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community in Paramaribo, Suriname, exploring how architectural design interventions can transform these urban challenges into opportunities for community integration and social capital development. The study addresses: "How are vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community connected in Paramaribo's neighbourhoods, and how can this connection build social capital?"

The research foundation draws on literature analysis, specifically three theoretical frameworks—Urban Decline Theory, Broken Windows Theory, and Social Capital Theory—supported by personal communications with a social organization and spatial documentation of Paramaribo's urban context.

Findings reveal Suriname's economic instability has created severe poverty conditions particularly affecting low and middle socioeconomic groups, especially the unhoused community struggling with housing instability and social disconnection. Paramaribo simultaneously faces increasing urban voids that accelerate neighbourhood deterioration according to the Broken Windows Theory. These abandoned spaces are frequently used by the unhoused for shelter, resulting in both physical and social problems that create a self-reinforcing cycle of urban decline.

To break this cycle, the research proposes an integrated approach addressing both physical and social dimensions. The physical approach employs spatial analysis to halt neighbourhood decline and provide housing solutions, while the social approach draws on Social Capital Theory to develop interventions for the unhoused community.

The research identifies a vacant site in Centrum, located at the intersection of Verlengde Gemenelandsweg and Johan Adolf Pengelstraat, as optimal for transformation, proposing three key architectural interventions in relation to three key dimensions of integration: social housing with gallery-style access, community gardens, and a community center. These interventions were selected based on both feasibility for the specific location and their potential to create a connected community and social resilient environment where residents can develop routines, engage in meaningful activities, and gradually rebuild their social networks.

By addressing both physical and social dimensions of the problem, these interventions create environments that nurture existing connections while facilitating new ones with the broader community, ultimately breaking the cycle of urban decline while building social capital for Paramaribo's most vulnerable residents.

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RESEARCH

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

	Definition
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBvS	Centrale Bank van Suriname (Central Bank of Suriname)
EFF	Extended Fund Facility
E.G.	Example
GOV/GOV.SR	Government of Suriname (website)
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LVV	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries
MSc	Master of Science
OGA	Directoraat Openbaar Groen en Afvalbeheer
OW	Ministry of Public Works
RGD	Regional Health Service (Municipal Public Health Service)
SPS	Planning Office Suriname
SRD	Surinamese Dollar
SSLC	Suriname Survey of Living Conditions
TU Delft	Delft University of Technology
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Figure 1: Political map of Suriname (1991), produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, illustrating the nations that share borders with Suriname.
Note. Source: From *Suriname Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection* - UT Library Online (z.d.)

01. INTRODUCTION

Fascination

Suriname, my birthplace, is a South American nation characterized by remarkable natural beauty and cultural diversity, evoking in me a profound sense of homecoming. Despite being the smallest sovereign state in South America with an area of 163,820 square kilometres (BBC News, 2023), it supports a vibrant population of approximately 623,236 inhabitants as of 2023 (AlleCijfers.nl, n.d.). Its capital, Paramaribo, serves as a cultural hub where diverse ethnicities coexist harmoniously (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). The country shares borders with French Guiana to the east, Guyana to the west, and Brazil to the south (Fig.1).

During my early childhood, I experienced downtown Paramaribo as a vibrant social center, filled with attractions like Palmentuin, Waterfront, Independence Square, and Fort Zeelandia. However, recent observations in local news media as Dagblad Suriname (2022, 2024c, and 2024e) reveal a concerning urban phenomenon: the increasing presence of the unhoused community alongside vacant/abandoned properties throughout the urban landscape. The sight of members of the unhoused community seeking unauthorized shelters in public spaces, and empty and deteriorating buildings that were once vibrant gathering points has become increasingly common. Witnessing these urban challenges in my birthplace deeply saddens me, particularly as this situation stands in marked contrast to the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (1987).

The Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (1987) outlines fundamental rights: it mandates “a secured means of livelihood for the entire population” (Article 4b), guarantees “everyone has a right to physical, mental and moral integrity” (Article 9[1]), ensures “all who are within the territory of Suriname shall have an equal claim to protection of person and property” (Article 8[1]), and requires the State to create conditions for “optimal satisfaction of basic needs for work, food, health care, education, energy, clothing and communication” (Article 24). Despite these constitutional guarantees, the government’s actions appear minimal in addressing these challenges as highlighted in local news media as Dagblad Suriname (2022, 2024c, 2024e). The concerning urban phenomenon is still visible in today’s society, raising questions about the connection between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties.

Relevance

As a native of Suriname, I am personally invested in understanding Paramaribo’s urban context. My interest lies in examining the connection between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties in Paramaribo’s neighbourhoods, a topic that holds significant relevance for urban planning, architecture, and urban development management. This research examines how these urban challenges are interconnected and explores potential solutions to bridge these challenges.

My ambition for this graduation topic is to bridge gaps for the unhoused community in Paramaribo through the transformation of vacant/abandoned properties. The goal is to create social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces for the unhoused community with essential services they need to rebuild their lives long-term and prevent returning to street life. A crucial aspect is building social capital for the unhoused community through the utilization of vacant/abandoned properties.

The research is structured in three integrated parts that combine theoretical frameworks with practical analysis and design. The Theory section establishes the foundation through Urban Decline Theory, examining economic context and influences. The Theory & Research section applies Broken Windows Theory to analyse the spatial situation in Paramaribo neighbourhoods, focusing on vacant/abandoned properties. The Theory, Research & Design section utilizes Social Capital Theory to develop concrete solutions for the unhoused community, emphasizing social development through architectural interventions.

While focused on Paramaribo, this research offers insights potentially applicable to other urban centers facing similar challenges. In an era of global urbanization, understanding the connection between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties is crucial for developing sustainable cities. This study bridges research and design, contributing to a more holistic approach to architecture in urban development that could influence policy and practice beyond Paramaribo.

02. BACKGROUND

Information

Understanding the Terminology of 'Unhoused'

The term 'unhoused' refers to people without fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence — a situation exacerbated by economic downturns (Henry et al., 2016). Slayton (2021) notes this term has emerged as a preferred alternative to 'homeless,' reflecting efforts to reduce stigmatization. The article highlights that 'homeless' can become intertwined with toxic narratives that blame and demonize people experiencing housing instability and end up living on the streets. The term is often used in a way that implies someone dangerous or devious.

'Unhoused,' as a less charged and formality term, respects the diversity of experiences and circumstances of the unhoused community. As Ronald Fernandes, spokesperson for the unhoused community in Suriname, emphasizes in an interview on SU-PARRIS TV (2022), **"People shouldn't assume everyone living on the street is addicted to drugs or alcohol. Many end up here due to economic circumstances or disabilities."** Housing status varies significantly: sheltered populations may access homeless shelters or transitional housing, while unsheltered populations live in locations not designed for habitation, such as streets, vehicles, or parks (Henry et al., 2016; Slayton, 2021).

In Suriname, socioeconomically vulnerable populations are increasingly becoming unhoused through multiple pathways. The Homeless Initiative (2023) identifies causes including house fires, unaffordable rents, domestic violence, job loss, medical incidents, and unexpected major expenses. Multiple reports in Dagblad Suriname (2024b, 2024d, 2024e) document how individuals and families lose their homes due to fires and financial hardships, forcing them into street living. Research by Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023) reveals how Suriname's economic decline directly affects people's ability to secure and maintain housing, with business closures and rising unemployment leading to increased material deprivation.

Urgent Call for Housing and Support

Slayton (2021) emphasizes that the primary driver behind being unhoused is the lack of affordable housing, compounded by limited access to essential services such as mental health care, medical care, and social work support. The article highlights that effective interventions must integrate both housing solutions and comprehensive support services for the unhoused community.

This situation is particularly evident in Paramaribo, where the housing challenges for the unhoused show significant impact. Madjerin Petrusie, a psychosocial worker/founder Samaria Tour and with over 15 years of experience working with the unhoused community, emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive assistance and housing opportunities. She observes that the situation is **"terrible on the streets, and they pose a real danger to society,"** affecting both the unhoused community and the broader population (Dagblad Suriname, 2024c). Petrusie advocates for an integrated approach combining housing solutions with professional guidance, noting the unhoused community's desperate desire for homes to improve their lives.

However, the housing challenges in Suriname have worsened since 2021, with a sharp decline in housing construction activities resulting in a severe shortage, according to Dagblad Suriname (2021a). This stems from governmental failure to implement effective housing plans and equitable land distribution (2024d). These challenges are further exacerbated by substantial increases in land prices, construction costs, and rents, coupled with declining real incomes. These circumstances not only affect the unhoused community directly but also impact the broader population, potentially deepening social divisions within the city, raising the critical question of where members of the unhoused community can find safe shelter when no alternatives are provided.

"Not everyone on the street is an addict – Many of us are victims of economic hardship or disabilities. We need houses to leave the streets and rebuild our lives."

Mr. Ronald Fernandes
Unhoused individual/ Spokesperson for the unhoused community in Suriname

"It's terrible on the streets, and they pose a real danger to society. People desperately want homes to improve their lives – we need both housing solutions and professional guidance."

"Where can members of the unhoused community find safe shelter when no alternatives are provided?"

Mrs. Madjerin Petrusie
Psychosocial worker/ Founder Samaria Tour

Figure 2: Statements of Mr. Ronald Fernandes and Mrs. Madjerin Petrusie, depicting the urgent call for housing and support.
Note. Source: From Dagblad Suriname (2024c) and Suriname Today (2023).

The Rise of Urban Voids in Suriname

Beyond the housing challenges faced by the unhoused community, Suriname is experiencing a significant increase in vacant and abandoned properties throughout its urban landscape, creating what are known as 'urban voids'—unused, underused, abandoned, or misused urban spaces (Hwang and Lee, 2019). Alexander and Powell (2011) differentiate between these conditions: vacancy denotes unoccupied property, often maintained as a long-term investment, while abandonment indicates owners have ceased investing resources in the property, forgoing routine maintenance and financial obligations. This growth of urban voids is exacerbated by estate issues, where properties become entangled in legal disputes or remain unclaimed after the owner's death, and by property tax defaults, often signalling the owner's intention to abandon the property (Dagblad Suriname, 2024a). Han (2013) notes that property vacancy or abandonment initiates a pattern of deterioration that extends beyond individual properties, affecting neighbourhood conditions such as property values and physical conditions of surrounding buildings.

The Interconnectedness between the Unhoused Community and Vacant/Abandoned Properties

The interconnectedness between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties in Paramaribo manifests in freely accessible spaces. As reported in Dagblad Suriname articles (2024b, 2024e), people experiencing being unhoused (Social fabric) concentrate in areas with public spaces and vacant/abandoned properties (Physical fabric), leading to unauthorized occupancy. Doucette-Préville (2015) explains that public spaces, as state property, are frequently the only places alongside vacant/abandoned properties where the unhoused community can stay without being at the mercy of private property owners as they offer potential free housing options.

As shown in Figure 3, this interconnectedness can be understood through two key dimensions: the social fabric and physical fabric. The social fabric represents the human aspects, where the unhoused community seeks unauthorized shelter in vacant/abandoned properties, leading to social impacts such as social isolation and difficulties within community relationships (Plett et al., 2024). The physical fabric comprises the built environment, where vacant and abandoned properties create tangible urban voids, generating physical impacts such as environmental risks (environmental degradation, potential fire hazards, and sites for criminality) and declining surrounding property values and conditions. The connection between these two fabrics leads to physical and social impacts creating a combined effect on the urban environment, ultimately affecting neighbourhood stability (Alexander and Powell, 2011; Wilkinson, 2011).

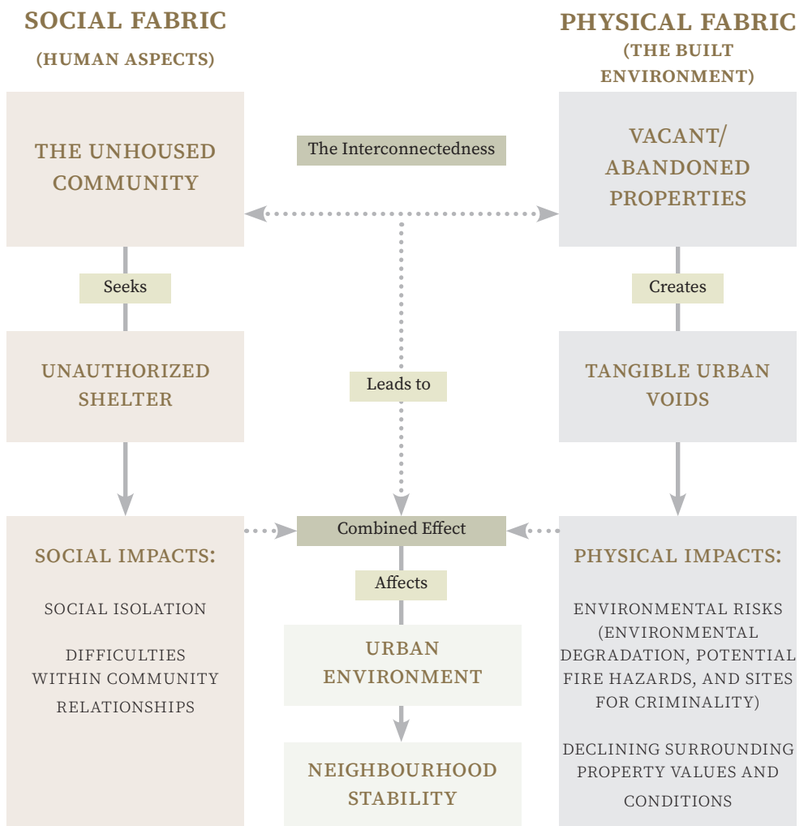


Figure 3: Diagram illustrating the interconnectedness, depicting the connection between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties in Paramaribo.
Note. Source: Illustration by author

Potential for Urban Revitalization

While these interconnected challenges persist, vacant and abandoned properties present potential solutions for addressing the needs of the unhoused community in Paramaribo. Schilling (2002) argues that revitalizing vacant/abandoned properties offers ideal opportunities for community and regional growth management. Cities should focus on urban neighbourhoods and inner ring suburbs as logical places for new development, as many neighbourhoods with deteriorated properties already have necessary infrastructure and municipal services. By adopting holistic strategies that integrate the rehabilitation of vacant/abandoned properties with affordable housing policies and infill development, cities can address housing needs while revitalizing urban areas.

The existing inventory of vacant or abandoned properties within communities represents an untapped resource for addressing housing needs (Wilkinson, 2011). When strategically managed at the municipal level, the redevelopment of these properties can strengthen neighbourhoods' stability and build social capital within communities, potentially reversing the cycle of social isolation experienced by the unhoused community (Plett et al., 2024).

Ministry of Public Works: *"During inspection work by OGA, along with complaints from the community, a very unhygienic situation was found on the abandoned site."*
- Ministry of Public Works (2023a)

Figure 4: Vacant/abandoned property on the LVV grounds at Kankantriestraat, photographed by the Ministry of Public Works, showcasing an empty and deteriorating building.
Note. Source: From *Abandoned LVV site and buildings on Kankantriestraat cleaned up by OGA.*
- Ministry of Public Works (2023a)

Figure 5: The inside of the empty building on the LVV grounds at Kankantriestraat, photographed by the Ministry of Public Works, shows a space filled with garbage.
Note. Source: From *Abandoned LVV site and buildings on Kankantriestraat cleaned up by OGA.* - Ministry of Public Works (2023a)

Figure 6: A collage of Surinamese people working on the removal of vacant/abandoned stalls.
Note. Source: From *OW verwijdert verlaten kraampjes langs Martin Luther Kingweg.* Dagblad Suriname – Dagblad Suriname (2023a)

03. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The primary challenge facing the unhoused community is the lack of affordable housing, compounded by limited access to essential services such as mental health care, medical care, and social work support (Slayton, 2021). In Suriname, this situation has worsened since 2021 due to a sharp decline in housing construction activities, substantial increases in land prices, construction costs, and rents, coupled with declining real incomes (Dagblad Suriname, 2021a; Dagblad Suriname, 2024d). With no alternatives provided, the unhoused community faces severe housing challenges, further complicated by their lack of social capital. Limited or uninfluential social networks, combined with gaps in skills or education, make it challenging for them to build the capital needed to improve their situation (Plett et al., 2024).

Consequently, members of the unhoused community often seek unauthorized shelter in vacant/abandoned properties. However, as reported by Dagblad Suriname (2021b), when these properties become informal shelters, they create a cycle of decline: properties deteriorate physically while social tensions rise between occupants and surrounding community members. This situation reflects broader systemic issues in housing policies and property management, where both physical and social fabric deterioration affects the urban environment and neighbourhood stability. Figure 7 illustrates this complex cycle of challenges facing the unhoused community.

This concerning urban phenomenon of increasing presence of the unhoused community alongside vacant/abandoned properties throughout Suriname's urban landscape requires academic research and understanding. While basic observations are documented in local news media like Dagblad Suriname (2021b, 2024e), there is limited academic research examining the connection between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community, and how these challenges might be bridged while building social capital. As Plett et al. (2024) explains, social capital encompasses the relationships and networks a person has, the benefits of those relationships, and the ability to mobilize these connections to achieve goals. When people build capital by expanding their social networks, they gain better access to essential services they need.

The knowledge gap is particularly evident in two key aspects:

The connection between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community.
Building social capital for the unhoused community through design transformation of vacant/abandoned properties.

This research aims to fill this knowledge gap by examining how the connection between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community can build social capital in Paramaribo's neighbourhoods.

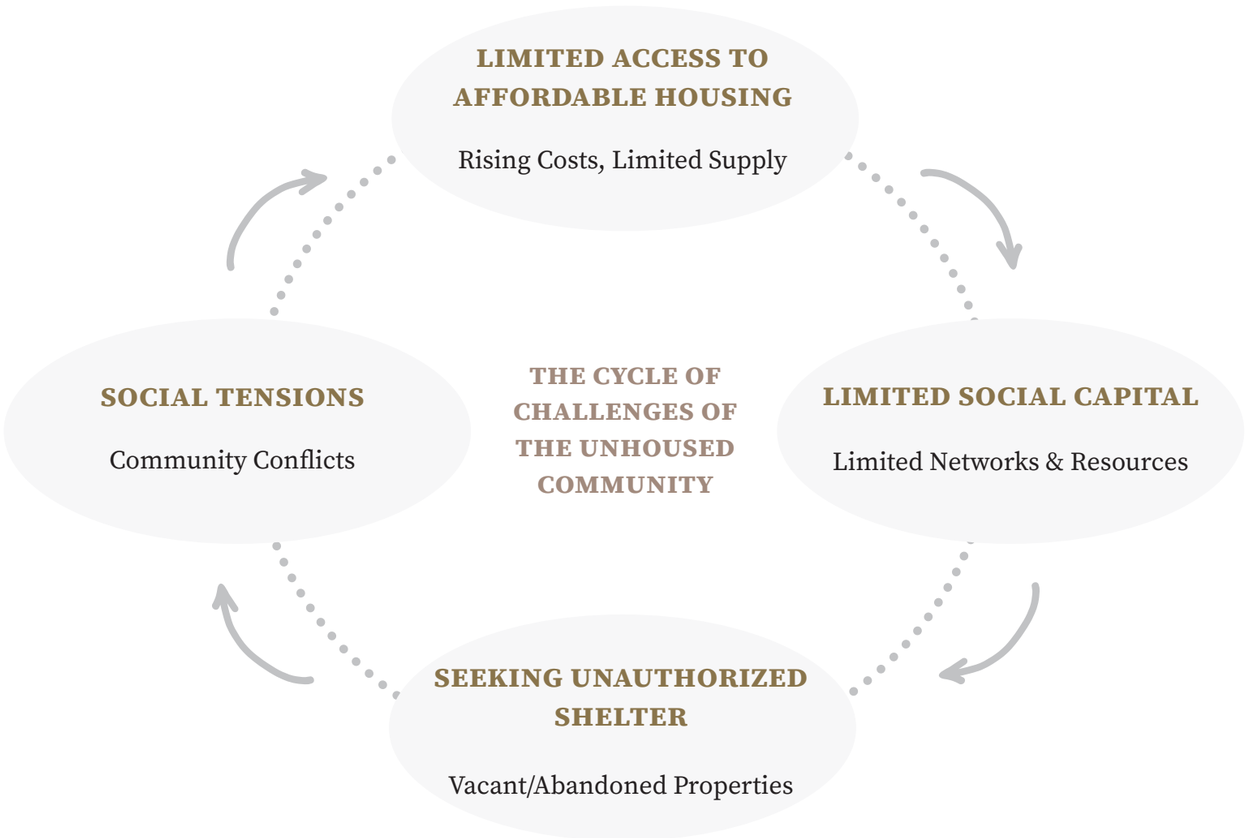


Figure 7: The complex cycle of challenges facing the unhoused community, depicting the complexity of problems for the Unhoused.
Note. Source: Illustration by author

04. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

MAIN QUESTION:

How are vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community connected in Paramaribo's neighbourhoods, and how can this connection build social capital?

Following from the problem statement, the main research question examines the relationship between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community, and how this connection can contribute to building social capital. As noted in the relevance section, the research is structured in three integrated parts that combine theoretical frameworks with practical analysis and design, with sub-questions structured along economic, spatial, and social lines.

CHAPTER THEORY:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

Establishes the foundation through Urban Decline Theory
Examines economic context and influences

Sub Question 1:

How has Suriname's economic journey (1975-2024) shaped its current economic and poverty conditions?

Sub Question 2:

How do Suriname's economic and poverty conditions influence the relationship between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties?

CHAPTER THEORY & RESEARCH:

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

Applies Broken Windows Theory
Analyses the spatial situation in Paramaribo neighbourhoods
Focuses on vacant/abandoned properties

Sub Question 3:

How has Paramaribo's urban development influenced the current patterns of neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment?

Sub Question 4:

Which vacant/abandoned property in the study area shows potential for transformative solutions that support the unhoused community?

CHAPTER THEORY, RESEARCH & DESIGN:

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

Utilizes Social Capital Theory
Develops concrete solutions for the unhoused community
Emphasizes social development through architectural intervention

Sub Question 5:

How can architectural interventions transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community?

05. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the connection between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community, and its relation within Paramaribo's urban context, this research draws upon three key theories: Urban Decline Theory, Broken Windows Theory, and Social Capital Theory.

Urban Decline Theory

Friedrichs (1993) explains how economic decline connects urban challenges. When cities lose economic position, business closures lead to unemployment, poverty, and increased need for assistance. This affects city revenues and investment capacity, potentially pushing low socio-economic populations into housing instability. In Paramaribo's context, this theory helps analyse how economic hardship creates connections between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community, as economic decline and poverty contribute to property vacancy/abandonment and housing challenges for the unhoused.

The theoretical foundation of Urban Decline Theory contributes to formulating two sub-questions:

1. How has Suriname's economic journey (1975-2024) shaped its current economic and poverty conditions?

- This analyses Suriname's economic development since independence and its impact on current economic and poverty conditions

2. How do Suriname's economic and poverty conditions influence the relationship between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties?

- This examines how economic, and poverty conditions influence the connection between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties.

This theoretical lens guides economic questions about economic factors, economic and poverty conditions, and property vacancy/abandonment, essential for understanding the economic drivers behind urban decline and how this connects vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community.

Broken Windows Theory

Wilson and Kelling (1989) explain how physical and social urban problems become connected. Their theory demonstrates how unrepaired damage (like broken windows) signals a lack of care, inviting further deterioration and criminal activity (Fig.8). This cycle shows how physical deterioration leads to reduced safety and security in neighbourhoods, as visible neglect encourages more serious criminal behaviour. When residents perceive their neighbourhood as unsafe, it affects their daily activities and community interactions.

The theoretical foundation of Broken Windows Theory contributes to formulating two sub-questions:

3. How has Paramaribo's urban development influenced the current patterns of neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment?

- This analyses how urban development has led to current patterns of neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment.

4. Which vacant/abandoned property in the study area shows potential for transformative solutions that support the unhoused community?

- This identifies a specific location with potential for transformation to benefit the unhoused community.

This theoretical lens guides spatial analysis of neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment, essential for understanding how physical deterioration connects to social challenges and identifying potential transformation opportunities that could benefit the unhoused community.

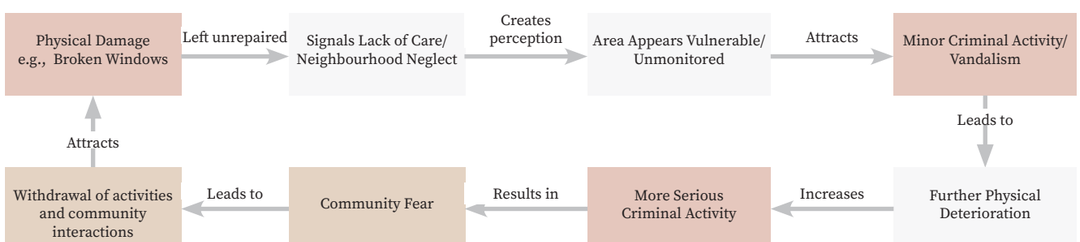


Figure 8: Explanation of 'The Broken Windows' Theory by Wilson and Kelling (1989), highlighting the problem of safety in communities. Note. Source: Illustration by author

Social Capital Theory

Plett et al. (2024) explain how Pierre Bourdieu's social capital theory emphasizes how social relationships shape community dynamics. Social capital includes the relationships people have, the benefits of those relationships, and the ability to mobilize connections to reach goals. This theory focuses specifically on how relationships between residents develop, maintain, or deteriorate within neighbourhoods.

The theoretical foundation of Social Capital Theory contributes to formulating one design-focused sub-question:

5. How can architectural interventions transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community?

- This question explores how architectural interventions can transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that help the unhoused build social connections while integrating them into the broader community.

The unhoused community often faces challenges in building social capital due to limited networks and resources, making it difficult to access essential services and improve their situation. This theoretical lens guides the transition from theory to research and ultimately design, examining how architectural design interventions through the transformation of vacant/abandoned properties can strengthen connections between the unhoused and broader community.

Conclusion

These three theoretical frameworks illuminate how economic decline, physical deterioration, and social networks shape the connection between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community in Paramaribo. Understanding these interconnected aspects guides potential solutions that combine physical transformation with social capital building for urban revitalization.

06. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Methodology, Positioning and Methods

Following the Naturalistic research paradigm (Groat and Wang, 2013), this study acknowledges that knowledge and reality are socially constructed through different perspectives. This approach aligns with examining the connection between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community in Paramaribo's neighbourhoods, as it requires understanding economic, spatial, and social dimensions.

The research addresses the main question: "How are vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community connected in Paramaribo's neighbourhoods, and how can this connection build social capital?" Using mixed methods with an emphasis on qualitative analysis supported by quantitative data, the study explores this connection through three theoretical lenses:

Economic Development (Theory)

- Urban Decline Theory examines how economic factors influence urban decline.
- Analyses Suriname's economic journey (1975-2024) and its impact on current economic and poverty conditions, and its influences on the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties.

Spatial Development (Theory & Research)

- Broken Windows Theory explores how physical deterioration affects neighbourhood dynamics.
- Combines theoretical analysis with spatial documentation and mapping of Paramaribo's neighbourhoods with focus on vacant/abandoned properties.

Social Development (Theory, Research & Design)

- Social Capital Theory investigates community relationships and network building.
- Incorporates insights from local social organizations working with the unhoused community.

Research methods include:

- Comprehensive literature analysis
- Personal communication with representatives from social organizations
- Spatial documentation and mapping
- Design exploration for transformation opportunities

This integrated approach examines how the connection between vacant/ abandoned properties and the unhoused community affects both social and physical aspects of neighbourhoods, ultimately influencing neighbourhood conditions and social capital development.

SCHEMATIC RESEARCH DIAGRAM

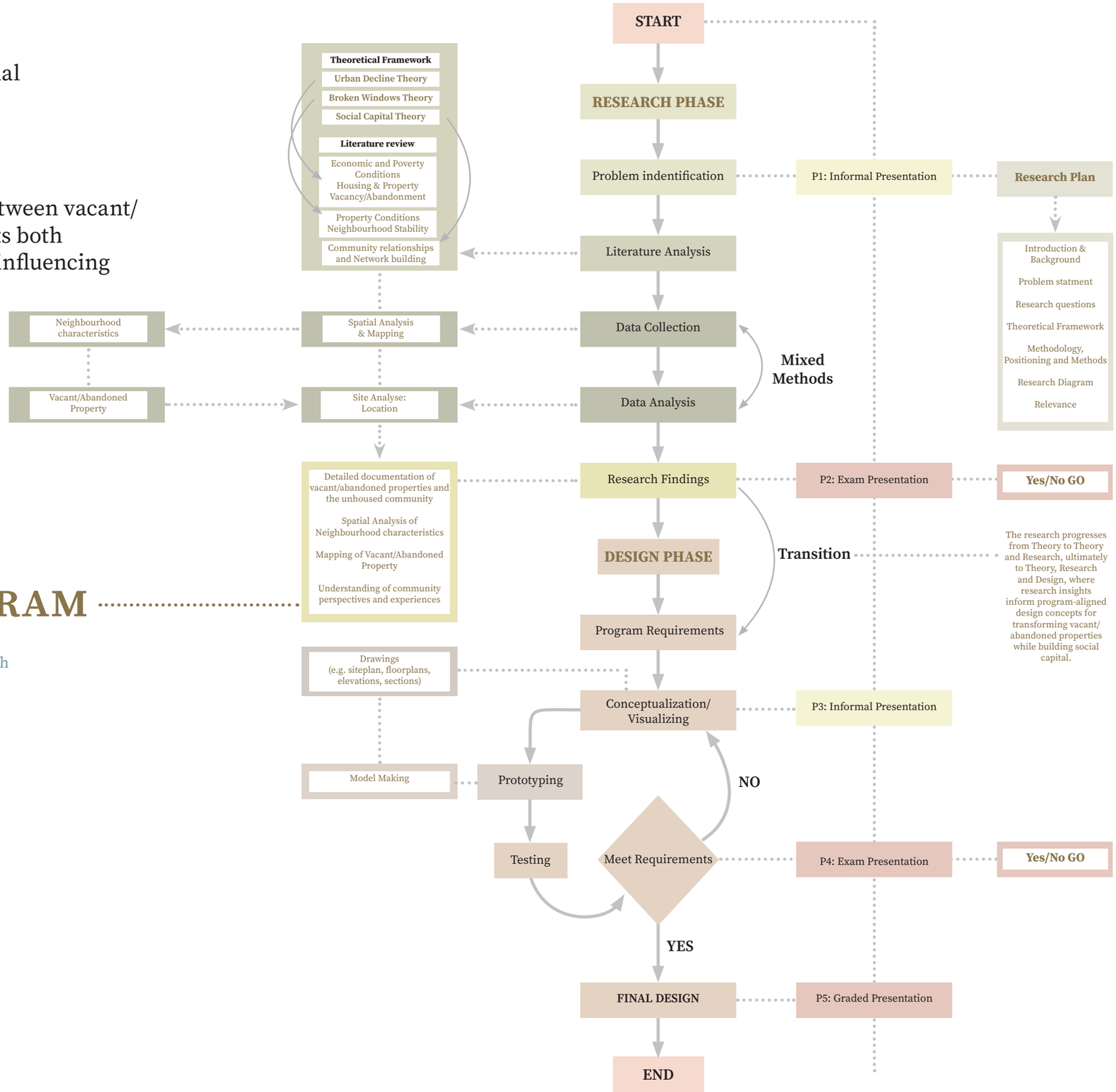


Figure 9: Schematic Research Diagram visualizing the process, showing the research phase & design phase.
Note. Source: Illustration by author

07.

CHAPTER THEORY:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

7.1. URBAN DECLINE THEORY

Introduction

Introduction to Urban Decline Theory

According to Friedrichs (1993), urban decline begins with business closures and job losses. His research examines the consequent urban deterioration process and its city-wide implications.

When cities lose economic strength, business closures lead to rising unemployment, creating a downward spiral: as unemployment rises, tax revenue decreases while public assistance costs increase. Diminished tax income compromises the city's ability to maintain essential infrastructure - schools, libraries, roads, and parks - and attract new businesses. Moreover, reduced consumer spending leads to lower revenues for local businesses and services, further diminishing the city's tax base and deepening its financial struggles (Friedrichs, 1993).

Beyond economic impacts, Friedrichs (1993) identifies significant demographic changes. Younger, educated residents often move away from declining cities, while older residents (especially those over 45) and those with less education remain. This selective migration leads to more poverty in the city center and increased crime rates. With educated workers departing, cities struggle to attract new businesses and improve their situation. This perpetuates the cycle: falling employment reduces tax revenue, forcing cuts to public services. Poor services and maintenance make the area less attractive, driving more residents away and intensifying the city's economic and social challenges (Friedrichs, 1993).

This process of urban decline affects all urban aspects, from educational quality to public safety and neighbourhood conditions. Through this theoretical lens, this chapter examines how Suriname's economic journey since Independence (1975 – 2024) has influenced its current economic and poverty conditions, and how these conditions shape the relationship between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties.

Figure 10: A crowd gathered at the Waterfront in Paramaribo (1895-1898).
Note. Source: From *De Waterkant, Paramaribo (vermoedelijk op Koninginnedag, 31 Augustus).* Rijksmuseum – Van Lelyveld, T. (2009a)

SUB QUESTION 1:

How has Suriname's economic journey (1975-2024) shaped its current economic and poverty conditions?

Figure 11: The sugar factory of the Dutch Trading Company in Mariënburg: Warehouses, railway tracks, and smoking chimneys (1895-1898).
Note. Source: From *Op "Mariënburg" / Suikerfabriek der Ned. Handel Maatschappij 1895 - 1898.* Rijksmuseum – Van Lelyveld, T. (2009b)

7.2. SURINAME'S ECONOMIC JOURNEY: DEVELOPMENT, CRISIS, AND RECOVERY (1975 - 2024)

As documented by Ooft (2016), Suriname has built its economy on the strength of its natural resources. The country's economic performance has largely depended on mining - especially bauxite, crude oil, and gold. Since becoming independent in 1975, Suriname experienced yearly inflation averaging 37.3% while economically growing at a modest 2.3% annually (Fig.12).

Looking at Suriname's economic journey, we can break it down into four distinct periods (Ooft, 2016).

1. Post-Independence Economic Development (1975 - 2000)

Right after independence (1975-1980), Suriname enjoyed stable economic conditions with low inflation and healthy growth, thanks largely to its thriving bauxite industry. However, the following years (1980-1994) brought significant challenges when global bauxite prices fell, and political unrest created instability. Making matters worse, the government's lack of experience, poor economic policies, and the loss of Dutch aid from 1982 to 1987 pushed the economy into decline (Ooft, 2016).

From 1995 to 2000, the country attempted major economic reforms to get back on track. While these changes worked initially (1995-1997), bringing more stable prices and renewed growth, the government's decision to expand public sector jobs and increase spending soon led to budget problems and rising inflation (Ooft, 2016).

2. Period of Economic Stability (2001 - 2014)

From 2001, Suriname pursued sustainable economic growth through strategic investments in construction, mining, and infrastructure development. Price stability was achieved through monetary policies by the Central Bank of Suriname. In 2003, measures were implemented to increase government revenues, including higher income and sales taxes. The economy thrived from 2003 due to high prices for its main exports: gold and crude oil. In addition, The Central Bank's vigilant monetary policies and the 2004 introduction of the Surinamese Dollar (SRD) reinforced economic stability. However, after 2013, the economy showed fluctuations as global prices for Suriname's key exports - gold and crude oil - started falling. From 2001-2014, Suriname's Central Bank kept inflation modest at 9.3% average, while the economy sustained 4.5% average growth (Ooft, 2016).

3. Period of Economic Instability (2015 - 2021)

Following the relatively stable period of 2001-2014, Suriname encountered serious economic difficulties. While fluctuations began appearing in 2013-2014, the major shift into instability occurred in 2015. Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023) describe how multiple factors sparked a financial crisis in 2015-2016: plummeting global prices for gold and crude oil, shutdown of the vital aluminium industry, and unsustainable government borrowing-based spending. This combination triggered a cascade of problems – mounting national debt, dwindling state revenues, currency devaluation, and surging inflation.

Although the economy showed signs of recovery during 2017-2018, this improvement proved short-lived. By 2020, the country faced renewed challenges: import costs soared, foreign debt remained high, and exchange rates became increasingly variable. These issues further weakened the Surinamese dollar and eroded consumer purchasing power, ultimately leading to a negative GDP growth of -2.7% in 2021 (Sobhie and Kisoensingh, 2023).

Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19

When COVID-19 arrived in 2020-2021, it dealt another blow to Suriname's struggling economy. According to Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023), the crisis reached its peak in 2021, with far-reaching effects. The damage spread throughout society – from shops and businesses shutting their doors, to workers losing jobs or income, to families facing growing financial hardship across the nation.

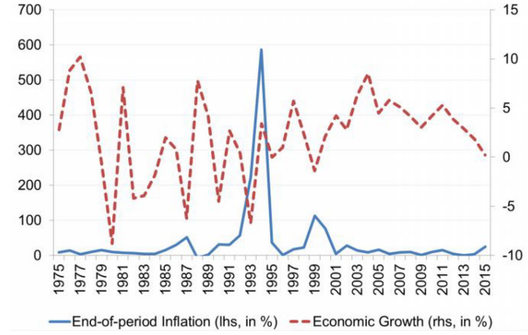


Figure 12: Diagram of Inflation and Economic Growth in Suriname, Central Bank of Suriname.

Note. Source: From *Inflation and Economic Activity in Suriname* – Ooft (2016)

According to Arteaga et al. (2021), the 2020 IDB Telephone Survey highlighted widespread economic hardship during the pandemic. Many Surinamese households experienced a decline in income, with some earning less than half the minimum wage due to job losses, business closures, and reduced remittances.

The employment impact was particularly severe for certain groups. Domestic workers were hit hardest, with 37% losing their jobs (Fig.13). Low and middle-income families suffered more severely than high-income households. Job searching became increasingly difficult, with 31% of low-income households unable to find new employment (Fig.14) (Arteaga et al., 2021).

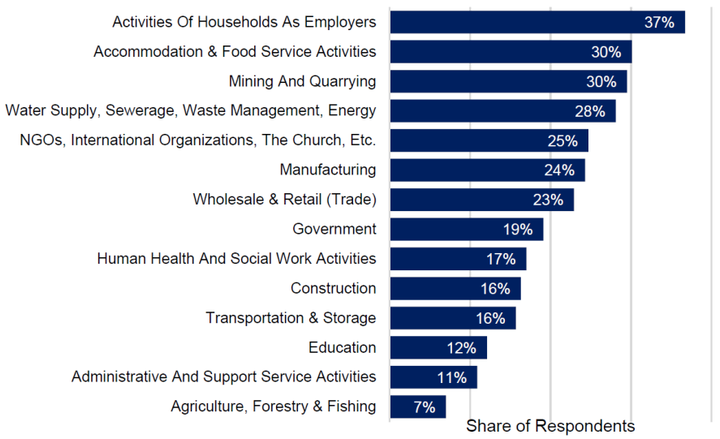


Figure 13: Diagram share of population with employment loss by employment sector, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)

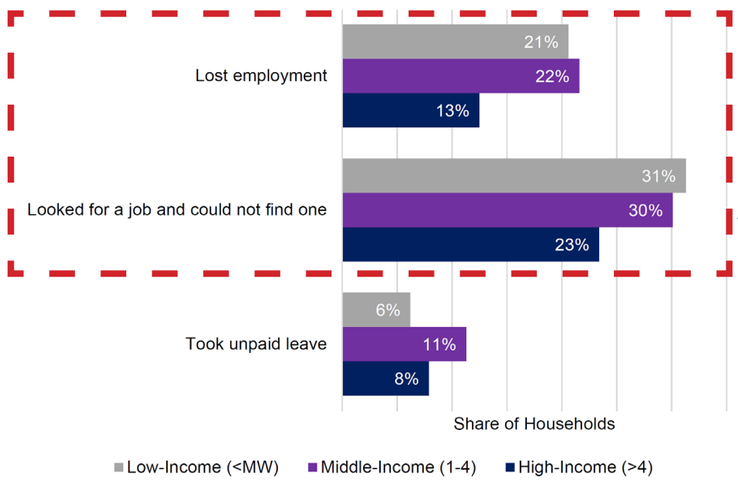


Figure 14: Diagram share of the households by income level and job status, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)

According to Arteaga et al. (2021), based on the vulnerability category in the 2016/17 SSLC, poor and extremely poor households faced greater challenges across multiple areas. They experienced higher rates of job loss and more difficulty accessing medical care. Finding new employment proved especially challenging for this group. Those already struggling financially before the pandemic were hit particularly hard by the economic downturn (Fig.15) (Arteaga et al., 2021).

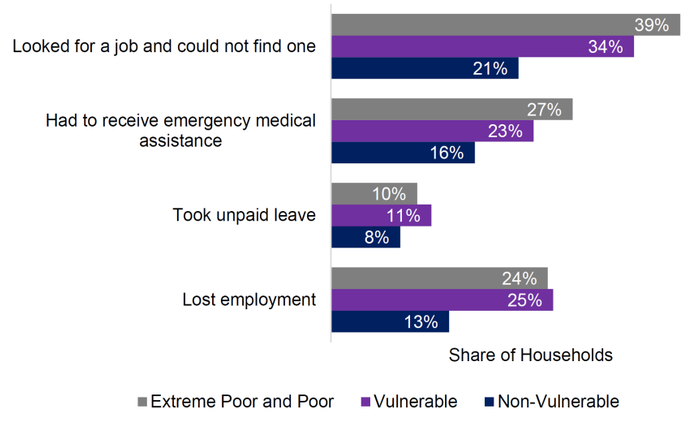


Figure 15: Diagram employment impact by 2016/17 Vulnerability, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)

The impact varied across employment sectors and gender lines. Men typically dominated sectors such as water supply, waste management, mining, and transportation, while women were more prevalent in accommodation, healthcare, education, and public administration (Fig.16).

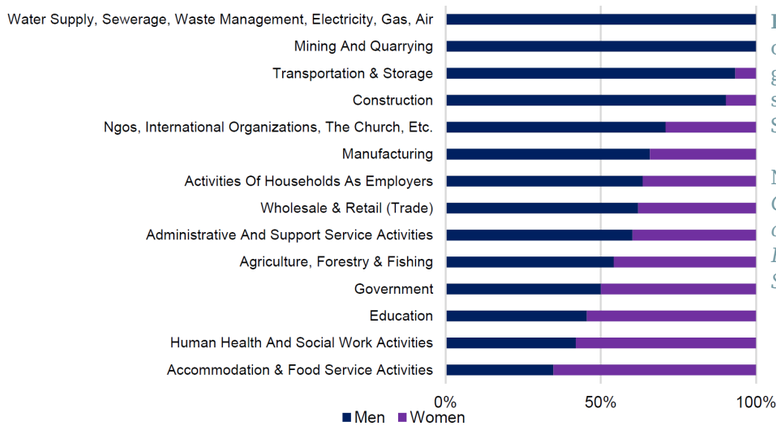


Figure 16: Diagram share of employed population by gender and employment sector, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)

Notably, men in low-income households faced the highest job loss rate at 36%, suggesting certain male-dominated sectors were particularly affected by the pandemic (Fig.19) (Arteaga et al., 2021).

Movement restrictions emerged as the primary reason people stopped working, though the impact varied by income level (Fig.20). Low-income households were the most affected. In addition to movement restrictions, temporary business closures and health and safety concerns were also significant factors contributing to work stoppages (Arteaga et al., 2021).

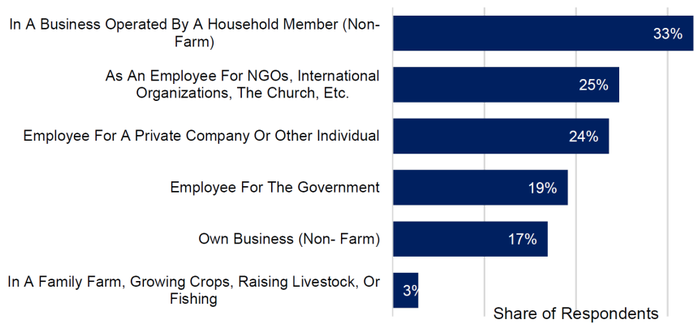
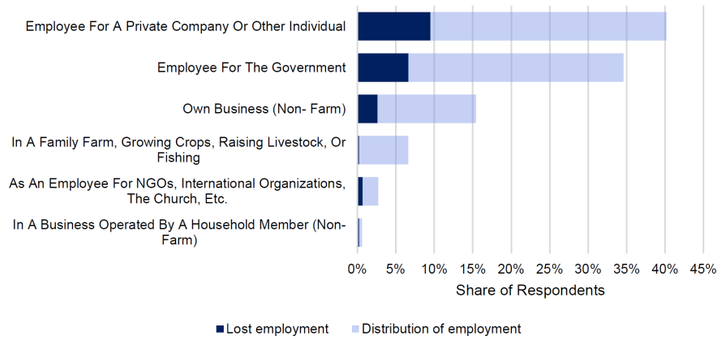


Figure 17: Diagram share of population that lost their employment by employment type, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)

Figure 18: Diagram distribution of employed population by employment type and share of population with employment loss, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)



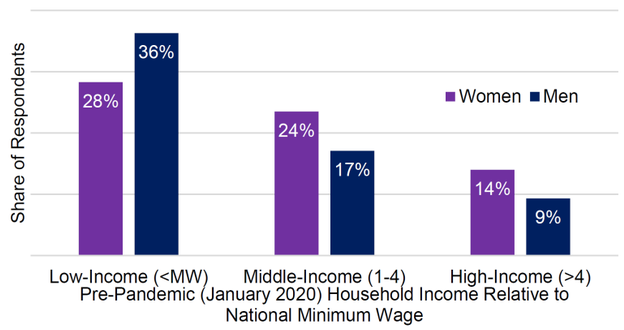


Figure 19: Diagram employment loss by gender and income level, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)

Reasons for stop working	Share of households
Not Able to Work due to Movement Restrictions	30%
Business / Office Temporary Closed	19%
Health and Safety	18%
Ill / Quarantined	10%
Vacation	8%
Laid Off While Business Continues	6%
Seasonal Worker	5%
Retired	2%
Unpaid Leave	2%
Business / Office Permanently Closed	1%

Figure 20: Table share of households by reasons for stop working, 2020 IDB Telephone Survey.

Note. Source: From *The Consequences of COVID-19 on Livelihoods in Suriname: Evidence from a Telephone Survey.* – Arteaga et al. (2021)

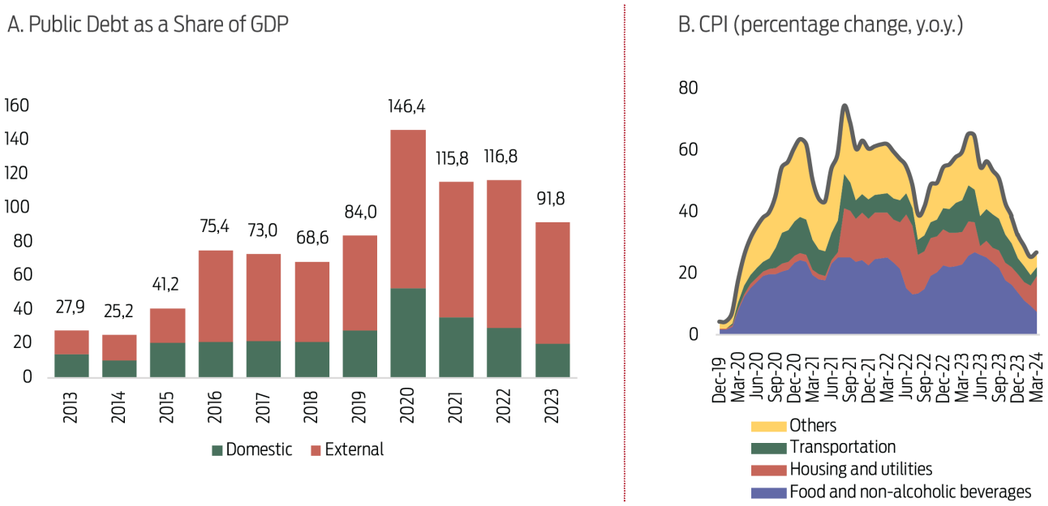
4. Economic Recovery Programs (2020 - 2024)

Following the severe economic downturn, Suriname's government took decisive action to rebuild its economy. As reported by Beuermann et al. (2024), the administration launched an economic recovery program in 2020 after the elections. The new government's first step was implementing a nine-month crisis program focused on several key areas: managing debt, improving monetary and exchange rate policies, stabilizing the financial sector, and strengthening economic governance to help cushion the impact of COVID-19.

The recovery strategy included restructuring both official and external debt, supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement. The efforts began showing positive results: public debt, which had reached an alarming peak of nearly 150% of GDP in 2020 due to falling GDP and currency devaluation, decreased significantly to 92% of GDP by 2023 (Fig.21) (Beuermann et al., 2024).

Another sign of improvement came through inflation rates. The country had been struggling with inflation hovering around 50% year-over-year, but by January 2024, this had dropped to 27% - the lowest level since the economic crisis began in early 2020 (Fig.21) (Beuermann et al., 2024).

Figure 21: Diagram Suriname's Economy is showing signs of Recovery (%)
Note. Source: From *Suriname Poverty and Equity Assessment* – Beuermann et al. (2024)



Sources: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook (October 2023); and Suriname General Bureau of Statistics (February 2024).

7.3. ECONOMIC AND POVERTY CONDITIONS IN SURINAME

According to Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023), economic conditions serve as the fundamental driver of societal wellbeing. The relationship is clear: economic growth helps reduce poverty, while economic decline deepens it. This pattern becomes particularly visible in urban areas, where Friedrichs (1993) identifies a domino effect - economic distress leads to business failures, triggering job losses, which in turn reduces tax revenue while increasing demand for social services. The impact reaches into every corner of urban life, from education quality to neighbourhood conditions.

For a small emerging economy like Suriname, these effects are intensified, as both global market fluctuations and local economic challenges create significant ripples throughout society (Sobhie and Kisoensingh, 2023).

Understanding Poverty

Poverty can be viewed through multiple lenses. While some approaches focus on a single dimension, others consider multiple factors. The basic concept often centers on material living standards – what people need to survive. However, there's general agreement that poverty encompasses more than just material lack; it includes limitations in food access, social participation, power, and healthcare access (Sobhie and Kisoensingh, 2023).

According to Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023), the United Nations' Copenhagen Declaration (1995) defines poverty as:

> *"Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion" (as cited in Sobhie and Kisoensingh, 2023).*

Poverty in Suriname

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022), poverty in Suriname affects multiple dimensions of people's lives. In 2018, approximately 3% of Suriname's population (around 16,000 people) were classified as multidimensionally poor, experiencing deprivation not only in income but also in essential areas such as education, healthcare, and living conditions. Additionally, about 4% of the population (approximately 23,000 people) are considered vulnerable to multidimensional poverty, meaning they could fall into poverty if their circumstances deteriorate. The Planning Bureau's findings are even more concerning, reporting that 20% of Suriname's population are living in extreme poverty (ILO, 2022).

By 2022, according to Beuermann et al. (2024), the poor were significantly less likely to participate in the labour market, with only 52.2% labour force participation and 15.6% unemployment rates (Fig.22). The economic situation has particularly impacted those who were already financially vulnerable before the pandemic, making them even poorer.

Government Response

In response to these challenges, the government implemented the Crisis and Recovery Plan 2020-2022, making poverty reduction a top social priority. According to Sobhie and Kisoensingh (2023), this plan takes a comprehensive approach through collaboration across multiple ministries. The Ministry of Labor, Employment and Youth Affairs leads the initiative, focusing particularly on labour-related issues such as unemployment, low wages, and worker protection.

Figure 22: Suriname: The poor have less access to assets (%)
Note. Source: From *Suriname Poverty and Equity Assessment* – Beuermann et al. (2024)

	Poor (<US$6.85)	Vulnerable (US$6.85-US$14)	Middle Class and up (>US$14)	Total Population
Dwelling				
Not owned by household	42.1	38.2	31.9	35.3
Low-quality material	5.5	4.5	3.9	4.3
No access to electricity	1.1	0.1	0.2	0.3
Physical assets				
Cellphone	96.7	96.3	97.2	96.9
TV	69.9	80.6	86.6	82.6
Cable TV	0.2	2.7	9.8	6.2
Car	35.0	59.5	72.1	63.3
Owns less than half of list of appliances	49.9	25.9	16.5	23.8
Adult labor market outcomes				
Labor force participation	52.2	65.1	70.4	65.5
Unemployed	15.6	9.3	4.1	7.5
Sector (Employed)				
Agriculture	10.1	6.7	5.2	6.3
Mining	1.7	5.0	3.2	3.7
Manufacturing	8.5	7.7	6.2	7.0
Construction	14.1	9.8	5.7	8.1
Retail	4.0	6.7	6.1	6.1
Hospitality	7.0	4.6	5.6	5.4
Public administration	2.6	5.6	7.4	6.2
Education and health	9.3	15.0	18.3	16.1
Households as employer	4.3	2.5	2.7	2.8
Administrative services	9.2	12.5	17.4	14.7
Transportation	4.3	5.8	7.7	6.6
Utilities	1.9	4.3	2.4	3.0
Other	23.0	13.9	12.3	14.0
Access to markets				
Bank account	53.1	70.3	80.9	73.9
Phone	96.8	97.0	98.2	97.6
Internet	57.8	69.3	79.5	73.4

Source: Poverty assessment team based on the 2022 Suriname Survey of Living Conditions (IDB 2022).

SUB QUESTION 2:

How do Suriname's economic and poverty conditions influence the relationship between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties?

7.4. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BARRIERS FOR SURINAME'S UNHOUSED COMMUNITY

Economic Barriers and Resource Access

Despite entering a recovery period, many Surinamese still struggle with rising living costs and basic necessities. While inflation remains extremely high, average incomes have not kept pace. Van Den Heuvel (2023) notes that living costs rose significantly in 2022, widening the gap between rich and poor. The country has faced multiple economic shocks, and low average salaries make it difficult for people to afford basic needs. For instance, while a loaf of bread costs around €1.50, people in poorer neighbourhoods earn only €75 to €100 per month, highlighting the severity of economic disparity.

Beuermann et al. (2024) emphasizes this substantial gap between poor and wealthy households in terms of both tangible and intangible assets. Poor households have limited purchasing power, reducing their ability to own homes or vehicles, which are often crucial for economic stability. Additionally, limited access to financial services (bank accounts) and digital services (internet) further compounds economic difficulties and limits participation in today's digital economy.

> *Despite entering a recovery period, many Surinamese still struggle with rising living costs and basic necessities. While inflation remains extremely high, average incomes have not kept pace.* - **Van Den Heuvel (2023)**

Housing Shortage

According to Slayton (2021), the primary driver behind being unhoused is the lack of affordable housing, compounded by limited access to essential services such as mental health care, medical care, and social work support. With one-fifth of the population living in extreme poverty (ILO, 2022; Beuermann et al., 2024), the economic situation has particularly

impacted those who were already financially vulnerable before the pandemic. This phenomenon is increasingly visible in Paramaribo's urban context, where Dagblad Suriname (2024e) reports growing numbers of unhoused people in central areas, notably near abandoned buildings, historical monuments, and at traffic lights.

The housing crisis has deepened since 2021, with a sharp decline in housing construction activities resulting in severe shortages (Dagblad Suriname, 2021a). Between 2020-2022, the Suriname Housing Foundation registered 5,372 home seekers (Dagblad Suriname, 2024d). This situation stems from a 40-year history of governmental failure to implement effective housing plans and equitable land distribution.

The crisis particularly affects low- and mid-low socioeconomic groups. Rental costs have become prohibitive, with monthly rents around 350 euros (12,000 SRD), forcing families to work multiple jobs or have multiple family members working just to afford housing. This leaves little income for other life necessities (Dagblad Suriname, 2024d). Even thirty-year-olds struggle to live independently, leading to overcrowded living conditions as families combine households to manage costs (Dagblad Suriname, 2023b). For the unhoused community, the situation is even more challenging, as current economic conditions hinder new housing construction, further reducing their ability to generate income and participate productively in society (Slayton, 2021).

Social Isolation and Community Integration

People become unhoused through various pathways: losing homes to fires, family conflicts, mental and physical health issues, or substance addiction. Additionally, gambling has emerged as a significant factor, where people lose their homes and possessions until they end up on the streets (Dagblad Suriname, 2024e). As Madjerin Petrusie notes, the situation is terrible on the streets, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive assistance and housing opportunities for the unhoused community (Dagblad Suriname, 2024c).

Plett et al. (2024) note that formerly unhoused individuals often face social isolation and struggle to develop community connections. Without meaningful engagement, they frequently experience boredom, depression, and declining physical health. The challenges intensify for those with substance disorders, mental health conditions, or physical disabilities. People with mental illness often find reconnecting with family and friends difficult, while those in substance recovery must rebuild social ties while avoiding potential relapse triggers. Individuals with physical health limitations typically encounter mobility barriers in community settings or experience rapid fatigue (Plett et al., 2024).

Neighbourhoods with easy access to public transit and communal spaces foster natural social interactions. Community engagement flourishes through gardening initiatives and diverse cultural, recreational, and athletic programs. Plett et al. (2024) highlight community gardens as particularly effective, providing nutritious food while cultivating social connections and strengthening place attachment.

For individuals managing mental health conditions, physical limitations, gambling issues, or substance disorders, accessible health and social services are crucial. Service providers can promote inclusion through no-cost, community-based programs including counseling, peer support, group therapy, and wellness activities like yoga and art classes. According to Plett et al. (2024), Community events can further support the sense of belonging for those transitioning from unhoused to housed (Plett et al., 2024).

> *Neighbourhoods with easy access to public transit and communal spaces foster natural social interactions.*
> **- Plett et al. (2024)**

Dus dat geld is zo op.

Het is nu erger geworden.

Ik kan nu maar één keer per dag eten.

Alles is duur in de winkel.

Ik heb geen elektriciteit,
ik heb geen water.

Wij hebben gedwaald, met als gevolg het
inkrimpen van onze economie.

Figure 23: An assemblage of people in poverty.
Note. Source: From *Allerarmsten Suriname zwaar getroffen door crisis*. NOS – Tebbens en Tebbens (2016)

7.5. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF PROPERTY VACANCY/ABANDONMENT

Understanding Suriname's Property Abandonment Crisis

While Suriname faces a housing shortage, it simultaneously experiences a significant increase in vacant/abandoned properties throughout its urban landscape. Dagblad Suriname (2024a) notes that properties often become entangled in legal disputes, remain unclaimed after owners' deaths, or face tax defaults, signalling abandonment.

This paradox is evident through observations in Dagblad Suriname (2021b). Magna, a mother seeking housing, describes numerous empty houses standing deteriorating - some overtaken by weeds and garbage, others requiring only minor repairs - yet remain unavailable for sale or rent. Another resident, Jurgen, points out how even well-maintained properties sit empty due to unrealistically high asking prices.

Friedrichs' (1993) framework helps explain this situation: as inflation rises and economic instability grows, consumer spending falls and tax revenues decline, creating deeper financial problems for urban areas. Property owners, facing these pressures, often leave the country, abandoning their properties. Accordino (2000) outlines the typical progression of property vacancy/abandonment: first, owners stop maintaining their properties, then default on mortgages, and finally cease paying property taxes.

The impact of this cycle extends beyond individual properties. As Burchell and Listokin (1981, cited in Accordino, 2000) observe, property vacancy/abandonment acts as both a symptom and a disease - it reflects existing poverty and economic decline while simultaneously accelerating urban deterioration. Ironically, these vacant/abandoned properties often become the only housing option for unhoused individuals who have no other alternatives.

Impact on Property Values and Neighbourhood Stability

According to New Western (2023), property value represents real estate's estimated worth, determined by factors including physical characteristics (location, condition, size), economic trends, market demand, local amenities, and comparable sales. The relationship between vacant/abandoned properties and property values depends primarily on duration and proximity. Han (2013) notes that the longer a property remains vacant/abandoned and unmaintained, the greater its negative effect on nearby property values, with impact strongest on closest properties.

Accordino (2000) emphasizes that vacant/abandoned properties impose significant costs on neighbouring property owners by:

- Diminishing property owners' equity and overall wealth
- Making property resale increasingly difficult
- Reducing the property tax base for the city

As assessed values decrease, cities must either raise property tax rates or accept lower tax revenues, limiting their ability to maintain essential services and invest in public improvements.

Understanding the Deterioration Process

Han (2013) identifies three key patterns of property vacancy/abandonment:

1. Functional abandonment: Properties become uninhabitable due to structural issues
2. Financial abandonment: Owners cease meeting financial obligations
3. Physical abandonment: Lack of maintenance renders the property unfit for occupation

The deterioration process follows a predictable pattern: reduced investment leads to building deterioration, making properties less desirable and reducing their value. This leads to reduced occupancy and further decay. Once properties become vacant/abandoned, both property values and neighbourhood satisfaction decrease, often prompting other residents to relocate, further destabilizing the community. Han (2013) notes this creates a self-reinforcing cycle between property vacancy/abandonment and neighbourhood decline, making it difficult to identify the initial cause.

> *Once properties become vacant/abandoned, both property values and neighbourhood satisfaction decrease, often prompting other residents to relocate, which further destabilizes the community.*
> *- Han (2013)*

Figure 24: Dilapidated building in downtown Paramaribo.
Note. Source: From *Dc Bhola erkent probleem bouwvallige gebouwen in binnenstad Paramaribo.* – Dagblad Suriname (2022)

7.6. CONCLUSION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

Sub Question 1: How has Suriname's economic journey (1975-2024) shaped its current economic and poverty conditions?

Suriname's economic journey since independence has created cycles of stability and crisis that directly influence current poverty conditions. Following post-independence growth (1975-1980), the country experienced significant economic inconsistency due to fluctuations in its resource-dependent economy. While 2001-2014 brought stability with 4.5% average growth and managed inflation, the 2015-2016 commodity price collapse triggered severe economic distress, further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021).

These economic challenges have generated widespread poverty, with 20% of Surinamese living in extreme poverty and 3% facing multidimensional deprivation across essential services (ILO, 2022). Low and middle-income groups bear the heaviest burden, evidenced by poor households' limited labor participation (52.2%) and high unemployment (15.6%) (Beuermann et al., 2024). This population struggles to access both physical assets and essential services, creating persistent instability.

The economic downturn has particularly worsened conditions for the already vulnerable, as rising costs outpace stagnant incomes. Despite IMF-supported recovery initiatives, economic instability continues to entrench poverty nationwide, with especially severe consequences for the unhoused community.

Sub Question 2: How do Suriname's economic and poverty conditions influence the relationship between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties?

Suriname's economic and poverty conditions create a paradoxical housing situation that directly influences the relationship between the unhoused community and vacant/abandoned properties. While the country faces a severe housing shortage with over 5,000 registered home seekers (Dagblad Suriname, 2024d), it simultaneously experiences a significant increase in vacant/abandoned properties throughout its urban landscape.

This paradox follows Friedrichs' (1993) framework of urban decline: economic instability causes property owners to abandon their properties while prohibitive rental costs force low-income groups into unstable housing situations. As Burchell and Listokin (1981, cited in Accordino, 2000) note, property vacancy/abandonment both reflects existing poverty and accelerates urban deterioration.

Beyond housing concerns, Plett et al. (2024) note that the unhoused commonly face social isolation and community disconnection. Without meaningful engagement, they experience depression and deteriorating health, with additional barriers for those managing health conditions or addiction recovery. These combined economic and social challenges create a self-reinforcing cycle where vacant properties become the default option for individuals lacking both housing stability and social support networks.

To Summarize

Suriname's economic journey reveals the relationship between economic conditions, poverty, and housing challenges. The nation has weathered cycles of stability and crisis, with the 2015-2016 economic collapse and COVID-19 pandemic generating severe poverty affecting one-fifth of the population and creating substantial barriers for lower socioeconomic groups.

This economic instability has produced a paradoxical situation where housing shortages exist alongside increasing vacant/abandoned properties. Following Friedrichs' urban decline framework, economic pressures force property abandonment while making housing unaffordable. Beyond housing concerns, the unhoused face social isolation, creating a cycle where vacant properties become the only option for those lacking housing and social support systems.

Breaking this cycle requires addressing both housing needs and the underlying social isolation problems. This context leads directly to our central design question: How can architectural interventions transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community? Through inclusive architectural interventions, vacant lands can potentially be transformed into spaces that not only provide housing but also foster the social connections and community integration essential for sustainable solutions to Suriname's housing challenges.

08.
CHAPTER THEORY & RESEARCH:
SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

8.1. BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY
Introduction

Introduction to Broken Windows Theory

Vacant/abandoned properties pose significant challenges to urban communities. According to experts (Alexander & Powell, 2011; Goldstein et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 2011; Schilling, 2002), these properties are defined as residential, commercial, or industrial buildings or lots that attract debris, threaten public safety, and become venues for criminal activity. They particularly impact old city areas with run-down business districts and industrial zones, creating environmental hazards and straining public services. These properties often contain hazards like illegal dumping, leaking sewage, and fire risks, while attracting criminal activities.

Wilson and Kelling's (1989) Broken Windows theory connects these challenges to neighbourhood decline. When vacant/abandoned properties show visible neglect, like broken windows, they signal a lack of care that invites further deterioration and criminal activity. This deterioration affects residents' perception of safety, impacting their daily activities and community interactions. As Schilling (2002) notes, a few neglected properties can trigger widespread neighbourhood decline, while local governments often lack resources for proper maintenance. Those living near vacant/abandoned properties experience decreased property values, diminished quality of life, and weakened sense of community. Local governments must allocate significant taxpayer funds to maintain these properties, creating an additional burden on city resources. According to Wilkinson (2011), this maintenance burden becomes particularly challenging when cities face economic decline.

This connects with Friedrichs' (1993) Urban Decline theory, where economic challenges limit cities' ability to maintain properties. Alexander & Powell (2011) highlight how economic decline, unemployment, and population loss contribute to increasing property vacancy/abandonment. The interaction between these theories creates a self-reinforcing cycle: economic decline leads to property abandonment, triggering neighbourhood deterioration and further economic and social challenges. This chapter examines how Paramaribo's urban development has shaped current neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment patterns, leading to specific site analysis for potential transformation.

SUB QUESTION 3:

How has Paramaribo's urban development influenced the current patterns of neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment?

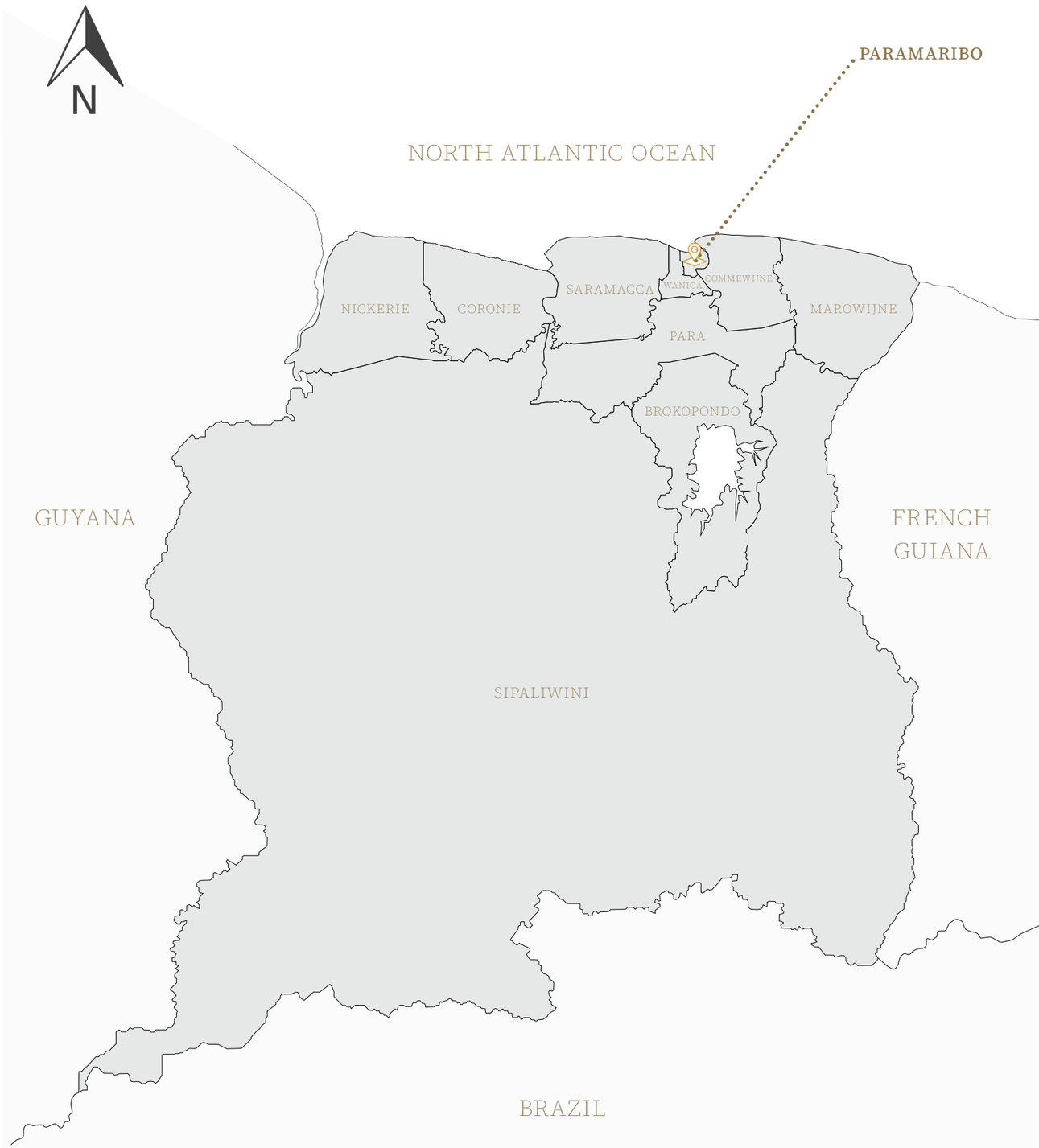
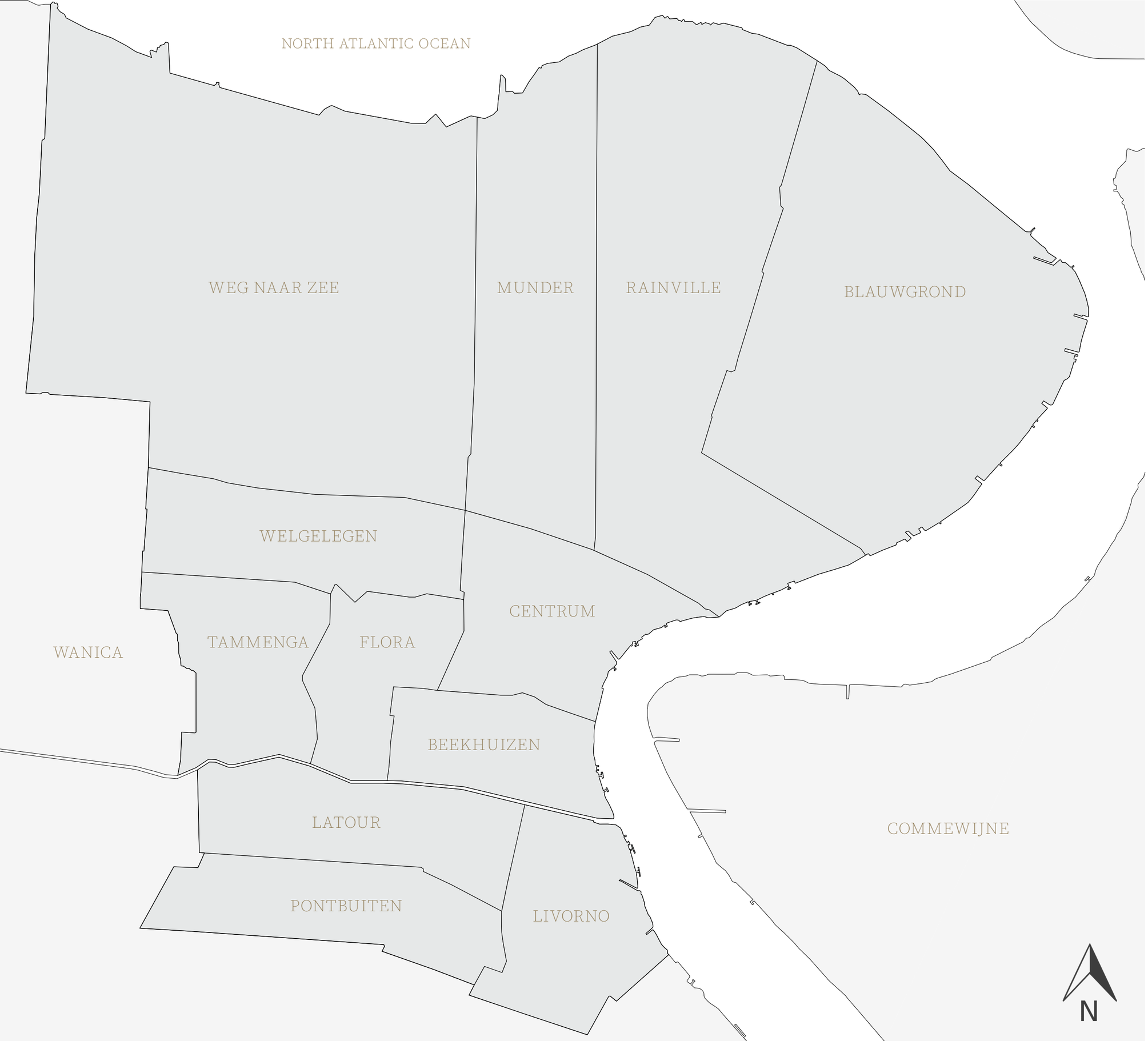


Figure 25: The figure on the right shows a map of Suriname with Paramaribo highlighted.
Note. Source: Illustration by author.



PARAMARIBO:

Paramaribo, the capital and primary port of Suriname, is located along the Suriname River, 15 kilometres inland from the Atlantic Ocean (SHATA, n.d.). As the smallest district yet most densely populated, it comprises 12 resorts (sub-districts) and houses 237,923 residents within 183 square kilometres, representing half of Suriname's total population (World Population Review, 2024).

The city center is distinguished by its Dutch colonial wooden architecture, which earned UNESCO World Heritage recognition in 2002 (SHATA, n.d.). Paramaribo's character reflects its colonial and immigration history, with a rich cultural mosaic of Indigenous peoples, Maroons, Creoles, Hindustani, Javanese, and Chinese communities (Sapa Pana Travel, n.d.)

Figure 26: The figure on the left shows Paramaribo with its 12 resorts (sub-districts). Note. Source: Illustration by author.

8.2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN PARAMARIBO

Paramaribo's history begins with European colonizers building upon an indigenous settlement between 1650 and 1800. The location was strategically chosen for its fertile clay layers ideal for plantation agriculture and natural shell ridges that rose above the surrounding swampland. Together with Fort Zeelandia, these features protected against river currents and created a perfect harbour for ocean-going vessels (Fatah-Black, 2013).

These natural shell ridges influenced Paramaribo's distinctive grid-like street pattern that persists today (Fig.29). From its humble beginnings as a fort with scattered dwellings, the city transformed into a vibrant urban center with a bustling waterfront (Waterkant), markets, theatres, and cultural institutions. During the late 18th century, the city expanded beyond its original core, developing new neighbourhoods along wide, sandy streets and evolving into a hub of social, economic, and governmental activities (Fatah-Black, 2013).

The 1950s marked a significant transition as plantation decline and interior conflicts triggered rural-urban migration. Between the 1950s and 1960s, the city nearly doubled in size (Fig.27). Pre-independence developments (before 1975) were characterized by well-structured, properly equipped infrastructure that supported continuous urban growth. However, post-independence expansion became more unstructured, creating a discontinuous urban landscape with poorer infrastructure (Heirman & Coppens, 2013).

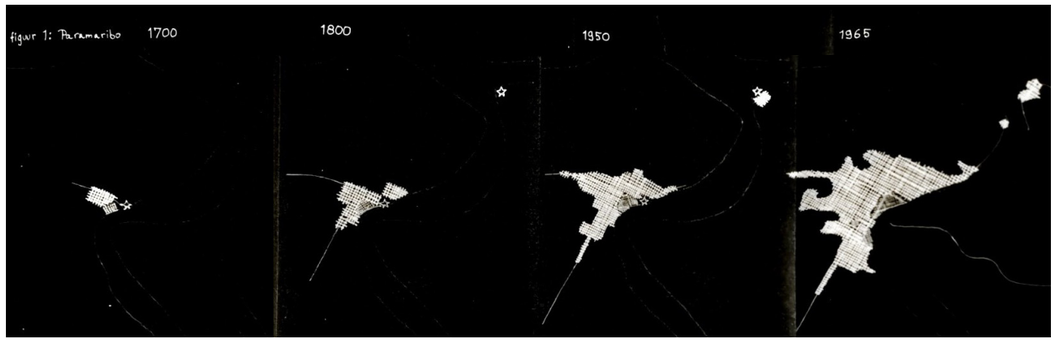
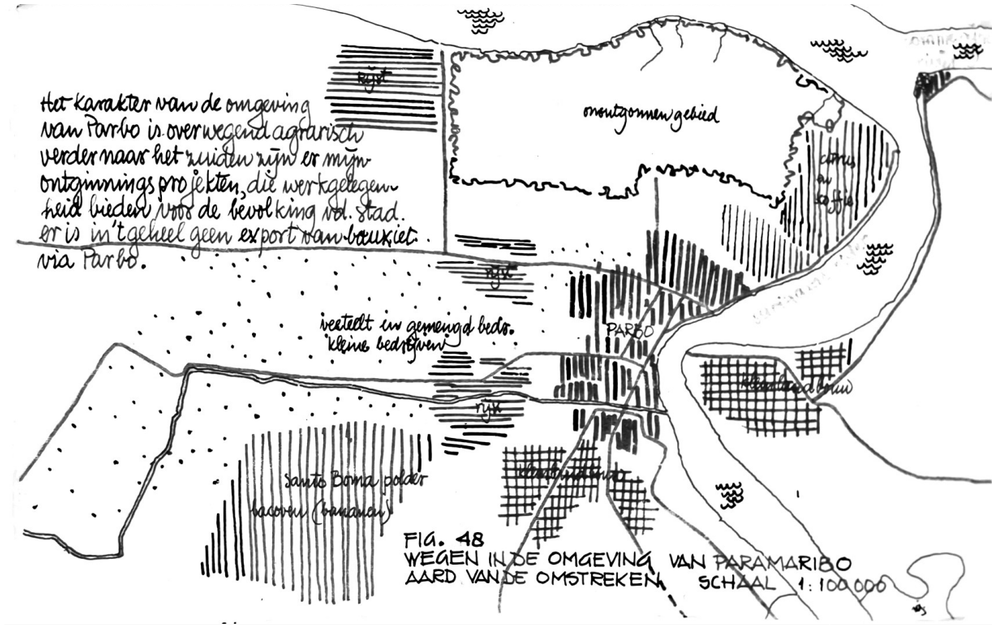


Figure 27: Urban Growth of Paramaribo between 1700 and 1965
Note. Source: From *Stedebouwkundig onderzoek van Paramaribo: Figuren.* – TH Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde (1969)

Figure 28: Characteristics of the Surrounding Area, Scale 1:100.000
Note. Source: From *Stedebouwkundig onderzoek van Paramaribo: Figuren.* – TH Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde (1969)



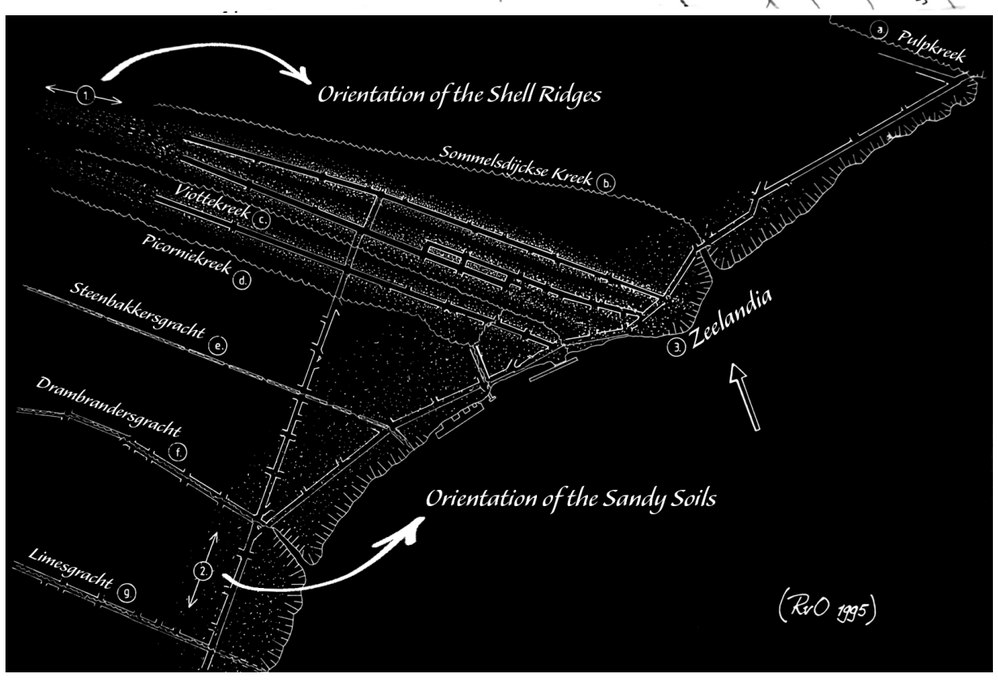


Figure 29: The Various Elements of Paramaribo's First City Expansion.
Note. Source: From *Restauratie historische binnenstad Paramaribo* – Oers, et al. (1996)

Urban Growth Patterns and Development

According to Heirman & Coppens (2013), urban growth manifests in three distinct patterns: infill development within existing urban fabric, continuous expansion along city borders, and outlying growth disconnected from the urban core. This growth typically responds to demographic changes and increased consumption and production needs.

Urban growth occurs when people relocate due to unfavourable conditions in their place of origin (such as unemployment or poor public services) to areas offering better opportunities. Inner cities often lack sufficient living space, while higher central city costs - including land prices, property taxes, and general living expenses - can force residents to seek affordable housing in surrounding areas.

Paramaribo exemplifies these growth patterns. The city's expansion from 1700 to 1964 demonstrates significant urban development, growing from 25 hectares to 2,800 hectares - a 112-fold increase (Fig. 30). This growth reflects both population increase and the search for affordable housing options beyond the city center. As central areas became more expensive and crowded, development naturally expanded outward, following patterns of both continuous expansion and outlying growth.

Figure 30: The growth of the urbanized area up to 1964.
Note. Source: From *Stedebouwkundig onderzoek van Paramaribo: Figuren.* – TH Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde (1969)

Paramaribo features a large suburban belt surrounded by transitioning rural areas. The city is predominantly characterized by detached, low-rise buildings. While the historical center and northern urban core have closely placed buildings of varying sizes, the suburban areas typically feature detached houses with gardens. The city's fringes contain rural reserves with small suburban allotments, while special districts housing institutions, industrial zones, and tourist facilities are primarily located along the river and canal, with some dispersed throughout the city (Fig.31) (Heirman & Coppens, 2013).

THE URBAN TRANSECT LEGEND:

- Urban Center
- General Urban
- Suburban
- Special District
- Rural Reserve

Figure 31: Paramaribo Urban District Boundary 1965.
Note. Source: From *Stedebouwkundig onderzoek van Paramaribo: Figuren.* – TH Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde (1969)

Urban Migration and Growth Patterns (1900-1980)

Large-scale urban migration occurred in Paramaribo during the first half of the 20th century, driven by two main pull factors: educational opportunities and employment prospects. This migration intensified in the second half of the century due to plantation deterioration and the Interior civil war, which forced many people to seek refuge in the city (Heirman & Coppens, 2013).

The resulting population growth was significant: Paramaribo's population grew from approximately 32,000 residents at the start of the 20th century to 74,000 by mid-century. Between 1950 and 1980, the population further increased to 170,000 (Heirman & Coppens, 2013). Figure 32 illustrates the city's land utilization in 1965, revealing distinct zones: the urban center dominated by commerce, industrial zones along the coastline, and suburban areas characterized by residential development and open spaces to accommodate the growing migrant population (Heirman & Coppens, 2013).

Figure 32: Generalized Land Utilization 1965.
Note. Source: From *Stedebouwkundig onderzoek van Paramaribo: Figuren.* – TH Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde (1969)

The historical map (Fig.32) from 1965 directly illustrates how Paramaribo adapted to accommodate its significant population growth. In figure 33, the map shows the future development of zoning areas, specifically work areas and residential areas. The zoning pattern illustrates how Paramaribo's planners attempted to organize the rapid urban growth resulting from the mid-century migration wave, creating designated areas for both economic activity and residential development.

Figure 33: Future development or zoning plans.
Note. Source: From *Stedebouwkundig onderzoek van Paramaribo: Figuren.* – TH Delft, Afdeling der Bouwkunde (1969)

8.3. PARAMARIBO'S NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

Urban Development and Land Use

Paramaribo district serves as Suriname's primary administrative and economic hub, housing governmental institutions and concentrated commercial facilities. Since 1965, the city has maintained four distinct land-use sectors: industrial zones, trading districts, public spaces, and residential areas (Fig.34) (Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014). As population grew, the city expanded through planned development, with government and real estate developers creating new allotments on former plantations in the northeast and larger private projects in the north, while less structured and poorly equipped developments emerged in the east, west, and south (Heirman & Coppens, 2013).

Development patterns vary significantly across the city. The southern region features ribbon development along major transportation routes. West Paramaribo shows a more disorganized landscape with unclear plot divisions, poor drainage leading to wet season flooding, and irregular road networks. In contrast, North Paramaribo exemplifies efficient urban planning with spacious plots, systematic drainage connected to the Suriname River, and an orthogonal road network (Heirman & Coppens, 2013).

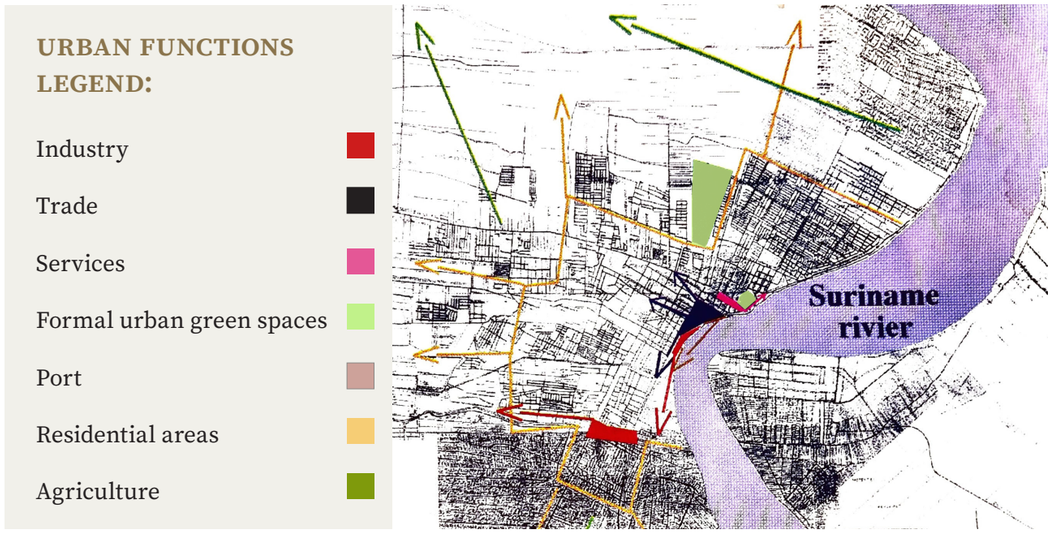


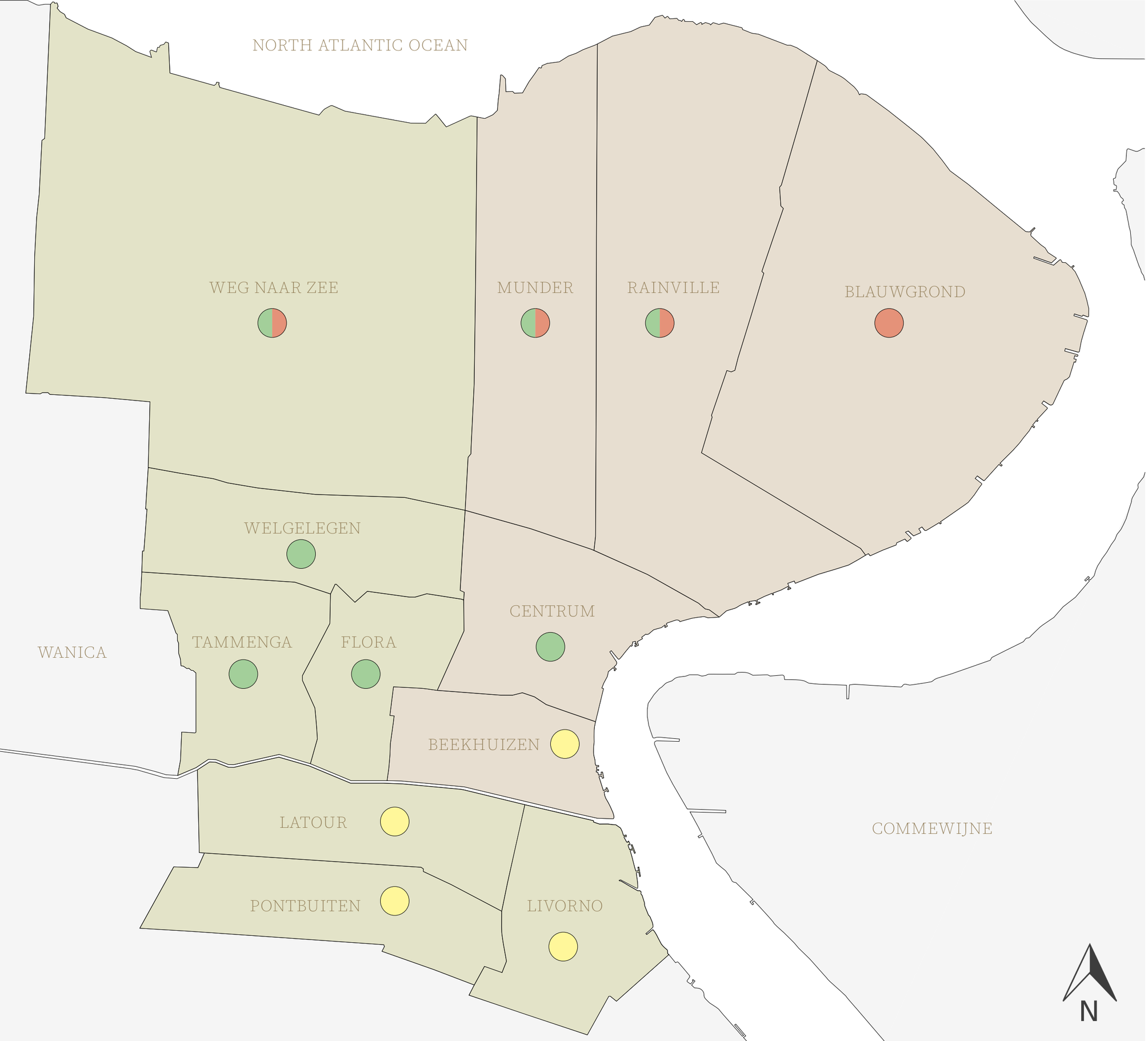
Figure 34: Shifting urban functions in the Paramaribo district over time.
Note. Source: From *Structuurschets voor Paramaribo : stedelijke problematiek in samenhang met de regionale problematiek (2e dr).* – Oers, R. v. (1994).

Socioeconomic Distribution and Housing Patterns

The city's twelve administrative resorts (sub-districts) reveal distinct socioeconomic patterns (Fig.35). According to Verrest (2009), upper-middle-class and elite neighbourhoods dominate the north, while working-class and middle-class areas concentrate in the west and south. Oers (1994) illustrates this through plot sizes: upper-middle-class housing plots range from 400-600m^2, while elite residences occupy 800-1,500m^2. These northern properties are typically standalone stone structures under private ownership.

Fung-Loy et al. (2019) define socioeconomic segregation as the concentration of similar socio-economic groups in specific areas. This creates visible urban patterns: wealthy residents typically occupy expensive real estate, while urban poor populations concentrate in less desirable areas. While Paramaribo's center remains the hub for major economic activities, residential patterns have shifted significantly, with wealthy residents relocating to northern and western suburbs, leaving working-class populations in central areas (Fung-Loy & Van Rompaey, 2021).

The government historically addressed housing needs through rental and purchase programs in social housing projects, focusing on southern areas like Zorg and Hoop and Flora (Verrest, 2009). Low-income groups tend to cluster in areas with similar social and cultural backgrounds, fostering community familiarity. These patterns have created a clear north-south socioeconomic division (Fung-Loy et al., 2019). Specific resorts show distinct characteristics: Pontbuiten, Latour, Beekhuizen, and Livorno are known as low-cost neighbourhoods with above-average unemployment rates, while Blauwgrond has developed as an elite neighbourhood. Areas like Tammenga and Flora reflect average city-level socioeconomic conditions.



The district of Paramaribo contains two administrative jurisdictions:

LEGEND:

Northeast Paramaribo

Southwest Paramaribo

Higher Socio-Economic Neighbourhood

Average Socio-Economic Neighbourhood

Lower Socio-Economic Neighbourhood

Figure 35: Socioeconomic Division Between North and South Paramaribo. Note. Source: Illustration by author.

WEG NAAR ZEE

Figure 36

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 41,1 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Southwest Region

Weg naar Zee is located in the extreme northwest of Paramaribo, bordering the Atlantic coast. This sub-district is characterized by its mangroves, with a large portion consisting of agricultural land. As of 2013, the area had a population of 13,832 residents. It's between an average and higher socio-economic neighbourhood with spacious plots, typically featuring standalone structures under private ownership. The area contains only five schools, all providing basic education (primary and junior secondary levels) (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

MUNDER

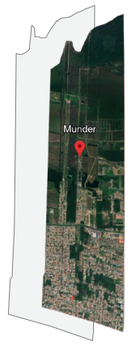


Figure 37

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 13,7 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Northeast Region

Munder is located in the northern part of Paramaribo, adjacent to Weg naar Zee and bordered by the Atlantic coast. The sub-district is characterized by agricultural land to the north. As of 2013, the area had a population of 16,197 residents. It's between an average and higher socio-economic neighbourhood with spacious plots, typically featuring standalone structures under private ownership. The area contains 15 schools, all providing basic education (kindergarten and primary levels) (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

RAINVILLE

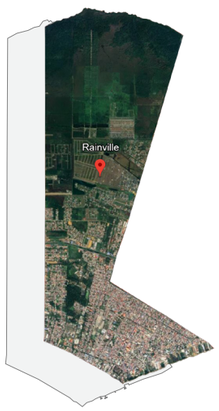
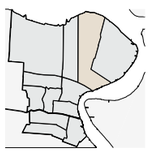


Figure 38



DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 30,7 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Northeast Region

Rainville is located in northern Paramaribo, adjacent to Munder and bordered by the Atlantic coast. The sub-district is characterized by agricultural land to the north. As of 2013, the area had a population of 22,345 residents, exceeding both Weg naar Zee and Munder. It's between an average and higher socio-economic neighbourhood with spacious plots, typically featuring standalone structures under private ownership. Rainville has one of the highest density of schools with 25 institutions ranging from kindergarten to Senior Secondary Education (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 42,5 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Northeast Region

BLAUWGROND

Blauwgrond is located in the northeastern part of Paramaribo, adjacent to Rainville and bordered by the Atlantic Coast. The sub-district is characterized by extensive residential zones and serves as a culinary hub with numerous food revenues. As of 2013, the area had a population of 26,260 residents, making it, alongside Latour, one of the most populated districts. Blauwgrond can be seen as an elite neighbourhood with standalone structures under private ownership. The area contains 22 schools ranging from kindergarten to Senior Secondary Education (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

Figure 39

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 6,9 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Southwest Region

WELGELEGEN

Welgelegen is located in the western part of Paramaribo, below Weg naar Zee. The sub-district features high-density extensive residential zones with clear ribbon development patterns. It is an average socio-economic neighbourhood with standalone structures under private ownership, varying from residential houses to accommodations. As of 2013, it had a population of 17,706 residents and 7 schools ranging from kindergarten to Senior Secondary Education (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014)

Figure 40

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 9,5 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Northeast Region

CENTRUM

Centrum is located in the southeastern part of Paramaribo, bordered by Munder, Rainville, Welgelegen, Flora, Beekhuizen, and the Suriname River. Its center remains the hub for major economic activities, whereas the historic inner city consists of most tourist attractions and serves as the primary employment zone. It's considered an average socio-economic neighbourhood with mostly working-class groups. As of 2013, it had a population of 24,837 residents, with also the highest number of schools (67) ranging from kindergarten to Senior Secondary Education (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

Figure 41

TAMMENGA

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 6,0 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Southwest Region

Tammenga is located in the western part of Paramaribo, adjacent to Welgelegen, Flora, and the Wanica district. Its landscape consists of irregular road networks with features both residential zones and areas with businesses and institutions. It's considered an average socio-economic neighbourhood with working-class and middle-class groups. As of 2013, it had a population of 13,676 residents and 13 schools ranging from kindergarten to university level (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

Figure 42

FLORA

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 4,2 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Southwest Region

Flora is located in the southwestern part of Paramaribo, bordered by Welgelegen, Tammenga, Centrum, and Beekhuizen. Its landscape consists of irregular road networks and is characterized by residential zones including social housing developments. It's considered an average socio-economic neighbourhood with working-class and middle-class groups. As of 2013, it had a population of 17,294 residents and 11 schools providing basic education (primary and junior secondary levels) (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

Figure 43

BEEKHUIZEN

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 6,3 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Northeast Region

Beekhuizen is located in southern Paramaribo, bordered by Centrum, Flora, and the Suriname River. Its landscape consists of irregular road networks with unclear plot divisions. Originally a sugar cane plantation, the sub-district now features a mix of residential areas and industrial zones with shops and businesses. It's considered a lower socio-economic neighbourhood with above-average unemployment rates. As of 2013, the area had 17,060 residents and 21 schools offering primary to Senior Secondary Education (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014; BookingSU, n.d.).

Figure 44

LATOUR

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 6,9 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Southwest Region

Latour is located in southwestern Paramaribo, bordered by Tammenga, Flora, Beekhuizen, Livorno, Pontbuiten, and the Wanica district. Its landscape consists of irregular road networks with ribbon development patterns and agricultural land. Latour is a low socio-economic neighbourhood featuring residential areas. As of 2013, it was the most densely populated sub-district in Paramaribo with 30,476 residents and 31 schools offering kindergarten to junior secondary education (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

Figure 45

PONTBUITEN

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 6,5 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Southwest Region

Pontbuiten is located in southern Paramaribo, bordered by Latour, Livorno, and the Wanica district. Its landscape consists of irregular road networks with ribbon development patterns and agricultural land. It's a low socio-economic neighbourhood with residential areas housing low- and low-middle-class groups. As of 2013, the area had 21,693 residents and 14 schools providing basic education (kindergarten and primary levels) (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

Figure 46

LIVORNO

DISTRICT: Paramaribo
TOTAL AREA: 8,7 km²
ADMINISTRATIVE REGION: Southwest Region

Livorno is located in southeastern Paramaribo, bordered by Latour, Pontbuiten, the Suriname River, and Wanica district. Like Latour and Pontbuiten, it's a low socio-economic neighbourhood with irregular road networks. Originally a plantation area like Beekhuizen, it now features residential areas, small farming enterprises, and commercial businesses. As of 2013, the area had 7,151 residents and 15 schools providing education from kindergarten to Senior Secondary level (Oers, 1994; Planning Office Suriname – SPS, 2014).

Figure 47

8.4. PROPERTY VACANCY AND ABANDONMENT PATTERNS

Suburban Development and Urban Decline

Property vacancy/abandonment is closely linked to suburban sprawl. When development focuses on undeveloped suburban or rural areas instead of existing urban sites, it draws economic activity away from the city center, leaving existing infrastructure underutilized (Goldstein et al., 2001). In Paramaribo, this pattern emerged as population growth led to new developments in the northeastern part of the city on former plantations. While the north saw well-planned private allotments, the east, west, and south received less structured and poorly equipped developments (Heirman & Coppens, 2013). This expansion sacrificed valuable wetlands in the north and fertile agricultural land in other areas.

Cycle of Vacancy/Abandonment

The migration of wealthy residents from the city center to northern and western suburbs left working-class populations behind (Fung-Loy & Van Rompaey, 2021). This shift reduced tax revenue for maintaining central properties, following Goldstein et al.'s (2001) observation that "jobs follow people and people follow jobs."

Property abandonment typically stems from industrial decline, job losses, and property owners' inability to maintain their properties. The most affected areas are often old cities with run-down industrial and dock areas, or economies unable to adapt to new uses. Goldstein et al. (2001) describes this as a cyclical process where business decline leads to job losses, which reduces income for property maintenance. As properties deteriorate, neighbourhoods decline, and populations drop as employed residents leave. This makes the area less attractive for business investment, leading to more closures. Properties become abandoned, creating 'urban voids,' and remaining properties become difficult to sell. Owners then face the choice of abandoning their properties or struggling with mounting tax burdens while property values continue to fall. This self-perpetuating cycle of decline continues as each abandoned property further diminishes the area's appeal for new investment and development.

Property Vacancy/Abandonment in Paramaribo

Many plots of land in Suriname, both with and without buildings, have fallen into neglect and deterioration, causing disturbance to neighbouring properties and often becoming sites for criminal activity and illegal waste dumping (Ministry of Public Works, 2023). This situation creates significant concerns for nearby residents. As District Commissioner of Northeast Paramaribo Ricardo Bhola emphasizes in Dagblad Suriname (2022), living next to a dilapidated building with unknown ownership creates fear among residents, particularly regarding fire risks that could affect surrounding properties. The Commissioner identifies deteriorating buildings in the city center as a structural problem requiring either renovation or removal. Figure 51 demonstrates these challenges through three examples of deteriorating and abandoned government buildings located in Centrum and Beekhuizen, which have become targets for vandalism and illegal dumping.

Revitalization of 'Urban Voids'

Economic forces primarily drive vacant/abandoned property growth, with weak markets and high unemployment significantly impacting vacancy/abandonment rates (Wilkinson, 2011). As these properties increase, cities need funding to stabilize declining neighbourhoods. However, urban voids also present opportunities for revitalization and community development.

Goldstein et al. (2001) suggests redirecting resources from outward expansion to inward development, utilizing existing infrastructure to revitalize deteriorated areas and enhance urban environments. Schilling (2002) reinforces this approach, advocating for focusing development on urban neighbourhoods where existing infrastructure can support renewal. These vacant/abandoned properties represent an untapped resource for addressing housing and commercial needs. As Wilkinson (2011) notes, the inventory of vacant buildings or lands can meet housing demands while contributing to urban revitalization, offering a dual solution to housing challenges and neighbourhood renewal.

NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

WEG NAAR ZEE

MUNDER

RAINVILLE

BLAUWGROND

WELGELEGEN

WANICA

TAMMENGA

FLORA

CENTRUM

BEEKHUIZEN

LATOUR

PONTBUITEN

LIVORNO

COMMEWIJNE

N

Fig. 48: Ston Oso (Monumental building)

Fig.49: Unfinished headquarters of the police

Fig.50: LVV grounds at Kankantriestraat

Figure 51 : Examples of property vacancy/ abandonment issues in Paramaribo, illustrated through three various deteriorating and abandoned government buildings. Note. Source: Illustration by author.

8.5. PARAMARIBO'S NEIGHBOURHOOD TRANSFORMATION

Neighbourhood Transformation Principles

Each neighbourhood possesses distinctive characteristics with its own unique composition of stakeholders and inhabitants. According to André Ouwehand in Gruis et al. (2006), neighbourhood transformation often evokes images of vandalized houses, rundown buildings being demolished by cranes, and construction of new housing with redesigned public spaces. Yet neighbourhood transformation inherently encompasses both socioeconomic motivations and outcomes.

Social factors play a crucial role in the image and problems of deprived neighbourhoods, emerging as central considerations in urban renewal initiatives and sustainability efforts. Sustainable urban renewal involves intervening in neighbourhoods to solve problems while ensuring housing gains built-in value that can adapt to future changes without requiring massive investments later. This process requires resident cooperation and consideration of population dynamics (Gruis et al., 2006).

Ouwehand emphasizes that neighbourhood transformation cannot be reduced to merely building new homes and expecting everything to improve. The process transcends physical interventions—demolishing old buildings and constructing new ones that meet current demand does not address all neighbourhood problems. Social factors strongly influence a neighbourhood's position in the housing market. A more mixed population might improve a neighbourhood's reputation and create better integration and participation opportunities for residents living in poor conditions who need good educational facilities and job opportunities. Sustainable neighbourhood transformation necessitates an integrated approach combining physical redevelopment with social revitalization strategies (Gruis et al., 2006).

Robin Houterman and Edward Hulsbergen (Gruis et al., 2006) further contend that urban environments should support multifaceted social, economic, and ecological functions across various spatial dimensions. Equitable neighbourhood transformation must incorporate all community members, particularly prioritizing vulnerable and deprived residents—adhering to the principle that ***"the worst off should be as well off as possible."***

Investing in upgrading the existing environment and eventually in new buildings are important tools to improve living conditions, potentially catalysing community engagement. These interventions can simultaneously attract economic investment, enhancing neighbourhood viability and counteracting urban decline (Gruis et al., 2006).

Paramaribo's Context and Requirements

The economic situation in Suriname has particularly impacted financially low-socioeconomic groups but also vulnerable populations such as the unhoused community, limiting their access to both tangible assets (homes, vehicles) and intangible assets (financial and digital services). The current economic conditions of Suriname hinder new housing construction, further reducing the unhoused community's ability to generate income and participate in society (ILO, 2022; Beuermann et al., 2024; Slayton, 2021).

In Paramaribo's context, the principles of neighbourhood transformation align with the city's current challenges of high poverty rates, housing shortages, and property vacancy/abandonment. The paradoxical situation where vacant/abandoned buildings exist alongside housing shortages creates an opportunity for integrated physical redevelopment with social revitalization strategies.

As Schilling (2002) and Wilkinson (2011) note that cities can no longer expand outward due to environmental impacts, economic costs, and land availability. Instead, cities must look inward to urban neighbourhoods and inner-ring suburbs for development. Areas with vacant/abandoned properties already possess necessary infrastructure and municipal services, offering potential resources for the unhoused community through revitalization.

> *"—demolishing old buildings and constructing new ones that meet current demand does not address all neighbourhood problems.* - **Gruis et al. (2006)**

SUB QUESTION 4:

Which vacant/abandoned property in the study area shows potential for transformative solutions that support the unhoused community?

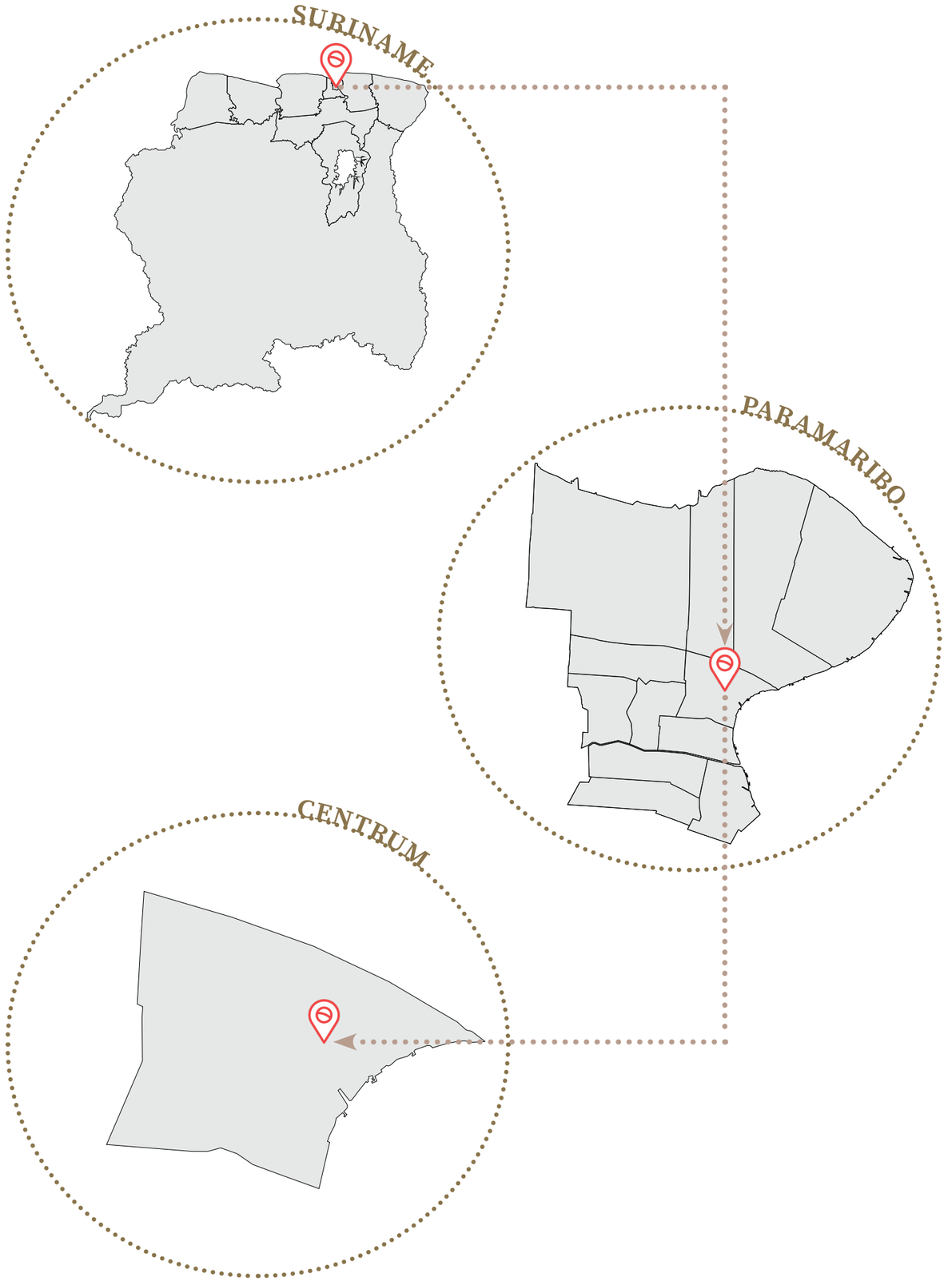


Figure 52: Illustration of the Site Selection Process, Zooming in on the Chosen Location. Note. Source: Illustration by author.

8.6. POTENTIAL SITE SELECTION IN PARAMARIBO

Location Considerations

The unhoused community in Paramaribo primarily concentrates in the Centrum resort (Dagblad Suriname, 2024e). According to Planning Office Suriname – SPS (2014), this central area serves as the city's primary administrative and economic hub, surrounded by mixed-use zones. All economic activities, both national and regional, are coordinated from this capital district, with significant employment concentrations in and around the city center.

Through **Personal Communication**, Mrs. Madjerin Petrusie (Psychosocial worker/Founder Samaria Tour) explains that the unhoused community prefers central areas over purely residential zones due to better access to support systems. The central location offers proximity to social organizations, foundations providing food and drink assistance, and essential services. This strategic location, combined with nearby employment opportunities and community support networks, plays a crucial role in facilitating societal reintegration for the unhoused community.

Site Selection Criteria

The transformation of a vacant/abandoned property into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces requires careful evaluation of several key aspects.

The primary consideration focuses on location and accessibility: any selected site must be centrally located with good public transportation links, easily accessible essential services, and strong connections to existing urban infrastructure.

Economic integration forms another crucial element in site selection. The chosen location should offer proximity to employment opportunities and commercial areas, while ensuring easy access to social organizations, support services, and educational facilities. These factors are essential for supporting the unhoused community's reintegration into society.

The physical characteristics of the property itself play a vital role in selection. The structure or land plot must offer sufficient space for residential development, show clear potential transformation solutions, and harmonize with its surrounding urban context.

Ownership structure and administrative considerations also significantly influence site selection. According to Goldstein et al. (2001), private owners may be reluctant to sell a property that will represent a financial loss or that could possibly increase in value in the future. In this case, government-owned properties with no monumental status are preferred due to their clear legal status, streamlined administrative processes, and potential for immediate intervention, avoiding the complications often associated with private ownership and monumental conditions.

Chosen Site

Following these criteria, I have chosen the unfinished police headquarters from the examples in paragraph 8.4. The site is situated in the sub-district Centrum, presenting itself as the optimal choice as it offers essential urban amenities nearby. It's located at the intersection of two main roads: Verlengde Gemenelandsweg and Johan Adolf Pengelstraat (J.A. Pengelstraat). The area's plot scale (Fig. 54) provides significant potential for development into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces, serving both the unhoused community and contributing to broader neighbourhood transformation.

However, in 2023, the government decided to demolish the building and initiate construction for a new police headquarters, with work scheduled to begin in 2024. While the Ministry of Public Works prioritizes the site for police facilities, the location shows greater potential for addressing the needs of the unhoused community. In this case, the vacant/abandoned property will be treated as vacant land for redevelopment with recycling the debris of the demolished building for construction such as ground floor.

Figure 53: Status of the Unfinished Main Police Headquarters prior to Demolition.
Note. Source: From *Realisatie nieuw hoofdbureau van politie heeft prioriteit.* – Dagblad de West (2023)

Figure 54: Current situation of the Plot Area.
Note. Source: Illustration by author.

VERLENGDE GEMENELANDSWEG

PLOT AREA 9.710 M²

JOHAN ADOLF PENGELSTRAAT

GEMENELANDSWEG

LOCATION
SCALE 1:500

N

8.7. LOCATION SITE OVERVIEW

Background information

At the intersection of Verlengde Gemenelandsweg and Johan Adolf Pengelstraat (J.A. Pengelstraat) stands the unfinished police headquarters (Fig. 54), a project marked by irregularities since its start fourteen years ago. Despite construction beginning in December 2009, the project lacked proper oversight from the Ministry of Public Works or expert supervision. Although supervision was later implemented, it failed to ensure the project's completion, and construction was halted in 2013, leaving the structure abandoned and neglected (De Ware Tijd Online, 2022).

After a decade of vacancy, President Santokhi initiated demolition plans. According to Dagblad de West (2023), extensive investigation and expert reports led the government to decide on demolishing the structure and replacing it with a modern police headquarters. Minister of Public Works Riad Nurmohamed highlighted in De Ware Tijd Online (2023) significant construction deficiencies: substandard columns, inadequate foundation depth, and questionable structural integrity.

Technical reports concluded that new construction would be the safest option, as no architect would accept the existing structure's risks. The demolition plan includes salvaging usable materials for the Ministry of Public Works. Multiple engineering firms supported this decision, citing safety and sustainability concerns - echoing a similar demolition proposal from 2014 during the Bouterse/Ameerali administration.

The government has allocated five to seven million US dollars from the state budget for the new construction, including consultancy, demolition, construction, and complete furnishing (De Ware Tijd Online, 2023). However, while Minister Nurmohamed emphasized the priority of housing the police, Dagblad de West (2023) references a 2014 media report questioning the site's suitability for a main police headquarters, noting that J.A. Pengelstraat's one-way traffic system would prevent police vehicles from heading south.

Figure 55: An assemblage of the unfinished Main Police Headquarters. Note. Source: From *Start sloopwerkzaamheden onafgebouwd hoofdbureau van politie in Suriname. Waterkant.* - Waterkant (2023)

Figure 56: Timeline of the Unfinished Main Police Headquarters resulting in demolition and vacant land. Note. Source: *Satellite Images* - Google Earth (2025)

Figure 57: The building is in a deteriorating state. Note. Source: *Bekendmaking- Het slopen van het onafgemaakte gebouw Hoofdbureau van de politie* - Government of Suriname (2023, August).

FUTURE VISION FOR AREA DEVELOPMENT

The location demonstrates exceptional potential for addressing the needs of the unhoused community. Situated in a mixed-use zone at the intersection of commercial and residential areas (Fig.58), the site offers unique opportunities for developing social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces where unhoused individuals can access essential services to rebuild their lives long-term and avoid returning to street life.

The surrounding area features diverse facilities including a gas station, restaurants (including take-away options), offices, and educational and religious institutions (Fig.59 & 60). The site's strategic location near the city center ensures excellent accessibility to road networks and public transportation such as bus services (Fig.62), while the nearby port area, commercial-, and retail districts could provide future employment opportunities. This combination makes the location an ideal setting for developing supportive housing. Additionally, nearby healthcare services such as RGD headquarters (Municipal Public Health Service) and their pharmacy can contribute as social support for the unhoused.

Despite these existing resources, critical questions remain: What architectural interventions are needed not only to transform this vacant land into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces, but also to build social capital for unhoused individuals who typically have limited networks and resources?

In the next chapter, we delve deeper into the Social Development Findings which includes the development of the central design question: How can architectural interventions transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community?

LOCATION

SCALE 1:5000

COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

RESIDENTIAL AREA

MIXED-USE ZONING

CITY CENTER

PORT AREA

RESIDENTIAL AREA

RESIDENTIAL AREA

VERLENGDE GEMENELANDSWEG

GEMENELANDSWEG

JOHAN ADOLF PENGELSTRAAT

N

Figure 58: Climate data and surrounding areas with distinct zones. Note. Source: Illustration by author.

LOCATION

SCALE 1:2000

VERLENGDE GEMENELANDSWEG

JOHAN ADOLF PENGELSTRAAT

JOHAN ADOLF PENGELSTRAAT

GEMENELANDSWEG

LEGEND:

- Educational institutions
- Religion institutions
- Commercial district
- Offices
- Housing and accommodation
- Public safety and order
- Retail services
- Healthcare services
- Social Services
- Other services

N

Figure 59: Land use analysis, including zoning and typologies. Note. Source: Illustration by author.

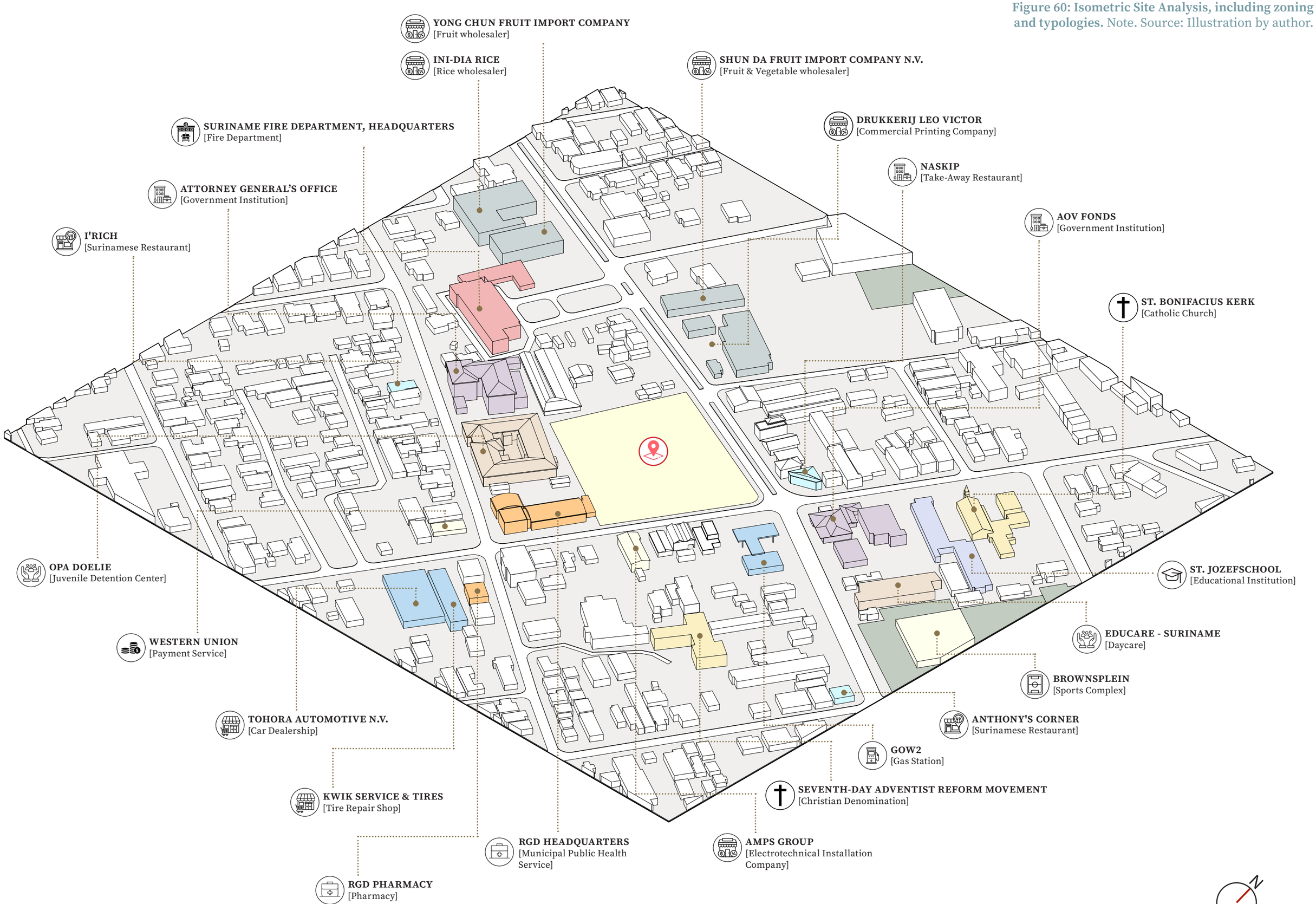
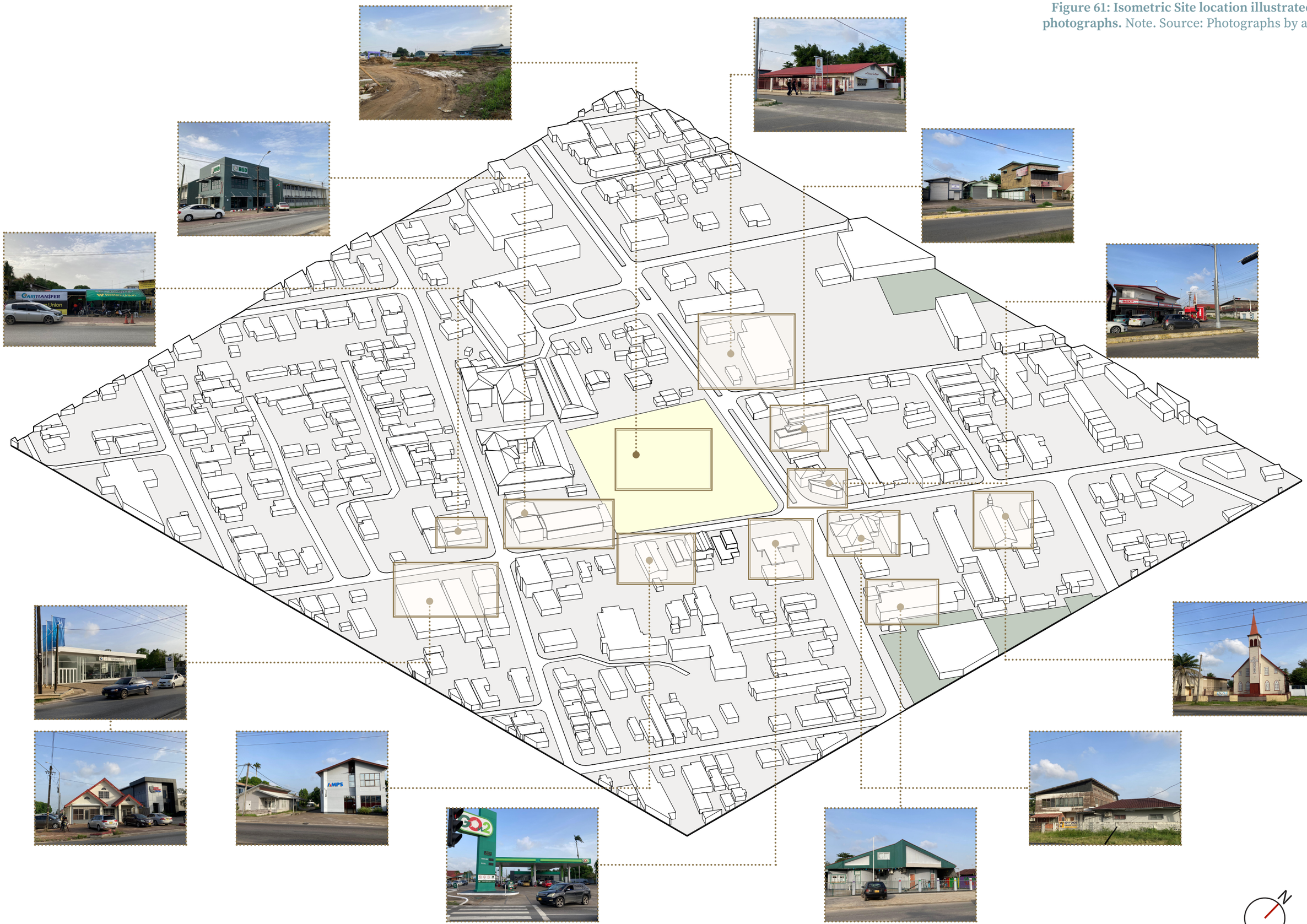


Figure 60: Isometric Site Analysis, including zoning and typologies. Note. Source: Illustration by author.

Figure 61: Isometric Site location illustrated with photographs. Note. Source: Photographs by author.



LOCATION

SCALE 1:5000

Figure 62: Accessibility via public transport and road networks. Note. Source: Illustration by author.

PK

VERLENGDE GEMENELANDSWEG

JOHAN ADOLF PENGELSTRAAT

GEMENELANDSWEG

JOHAN ADOLF PENGELSTRAAT

ZWARTENHOVENBRUG STRAAT

L9/ PSB

L8

L2/L7/PL/PLH/
PNA/POB/POZ/
PRVZ/PBO

N

LEGEND:

BUS ROUTES

PSB - (Paramaribo - Santo Boma)

PRVZ - (Paramaribo - Republiek - Vierkinderen - Zanderij)

POZ- (Paramaribo - Onverwacht - Zanderij)

POB- (Paramaribo - Onverwacht - Biliton)

PNA- (Paramaribo - Nieuw-Amsterdam)

PLH- (Paramaribo - Luchthaven)

PL- (Paramaribo - Lelydorp)

PK- (Paramaribo - Kwatta)

PBO- (Paramaribo - Biliton - Onverwacht)

L9- (CHM - Mattonshooplaan)
L8- (CHM - Adek University)

L7- (CHM - Latourweg)
L2- (Parking Place - Hernhutterstr)

8.8. CONCLUSION

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

Sub Question 3: How has Paramaribo's urban development influenced the current patterns of neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment?

Paramaribo's urban development has significantly shaped its current neighbourhood conditions and property vacancy/abandonment patterns. The city's growth reveals a clear north-south socioeconomic divide. Higher socioeconomic classes occupy northern areas with larger allotments and well-planned infrastructure, while middle and lower socioeconomic classes concentrate in southern regions with social housing developments.

Pre-independence infrastructure was well-structured, while post-independence expansion created a discontinuous urban landscape. This pattern, combined with wealthy residents' migration to northern suburbs, has reduced tax revenue for maintaining central properties, leaving central and southern areas vulnerable to property vacancy/abandonment. This reflects the "broken windows theory," where visible signs of abandonment accelerate neighbourhood deterioration, leading to increased social disorder and further abandonment.

Addressing these deprived neighbourhoods requires applying neighbourhood transformation principles that extend beyond physical interventions. As Gruis et al. (2006) emphasize, sustainable revitalization must combine physical redevelopment with social strategies that prioritize vulnerable residents. Rather than simply demolishing abandoned structures, transformation should create mixed communities that improve neighbourhood reputation while providing educational and employment opportunities for residents in poor conditions, ultimately enhancing community integration and stability.

Sub Question 4: Which vacant/abandoned property in the study area shows potential for transformative solutions that support the unhoused community?

The vacant land of the unfinished police headquarters in Centrum emerges as the optimal site for transformation. Standing vacant for a decade since 2013, this government-owned property offers significant potential for redevelopment. Its strategic location at the intersection of Verlengde Gemenelandsweg and Johan Adolf Pengelstraat provides several key advantages:

- Central location with access to essential services and public transportation
- Proximity to employment opportunities and support services
- Sufficient plot size (9.710 m^2) for residential development
- Government ownership facilitating transformation
- Location within a mixed-use zone supporting community integration

The site's current demolition plans, combined with questions about its suitability for police facilities due to traffic limitations, create an opportunity to reconsider its potential as a community-focused development with affordable and supportive housing. Through **personal communication**, Mrs. Madjerin Petrusie confirms that the unhoused community prefers central locations like this for better access to support systems, making this site particularly valuable for transformation that addresses both housing needs and social integration.

To Summarize

The spatial development findings reveal how Paramaribo's historical growth patterns have created both challenges and opportunities. The city's north-south socioeconomic divide, post-independence unstructured expansion, and migration of wealthy residents to suburbs have contributed to central area decline and property vacancy/abandonment. This pattern reflects the "broken windows theory," where visible signs of abandonment accelerate neighbourhood deterioration and social disorder, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of decline.

The identified site in Centrum presents a prime opportunity to transform vacant land with existing resources into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community. This aligns with our central design question: "How can architectural interventions transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community?"

This transformation approach offers a pathway to address both spatial and social challenges by providing supportive affordable housing that contributes to neighbourhood revitalization while fostering integration for the unhoused community that thrives in central, service-rich environments.

09.

CHAPTER THEORY, RESEARCH & DESIGN: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

9.1. SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

Introduction

Introduction to Social Capital Theory

The integration of individuals or groups into communities, particularly those transitioning from being unhoused, represents a complex social challenge requiring a deep understanding of social networks and community integration. This chapter explores these relationships through the lens of Social Capital Theory, examining how architectural design can strengthen connections between the unhoused and broader community.

Social Capital Theory, developed through the work of prominent sociologists Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), provides a framework for understanding how social networks shape community resources. While Bourdieu emphasizes how group membership provides access to collective resources and opportunities, Coleman focuses on how these resources exist within relationships themselves. Building on these foundations, Plett et al. (2024) highlight social capital's crucial role in community belonging and power dynamics. The theory considers collective capital (social, cultural, economic, and symbolic) as currency - the more capital someone possesses, the greater their potential for developing connections and accessing opportunities. As Bourdieu (1986) notes, social connections can enhance both economic and cultural advantages through network dynamics.

Understanding community integration requires examining multiple dimensions. Plett et al. (2024) adopt Wong and Solomon's framework, identifying three key aspects: physical integration (time spent in community), social integration (network development), and psychological integration (sense of belonging). Individuals transitioning from unhoused to housed often face significant barriers in these areas, including limited income, transportation challenges, and social isolation, particularly affecting those with additional challenges such as mental illness or physical disabilities.

In this chapter we will be examining several aspects of social capital and community integration, in how these relationships develop, maintain, or deteriorate within Paramaribo's urban context, so that we have a better understanding in which architectural interventions might foster stronger community connections.

9.2. THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social capital has multiple definitions depending on the context but fundamentally relates to how an individual's integration within social networks influences their life outcomes (Lancee, 2012). These networks serve as valuable social resources with the potential to enhance living conditions, facilitate goal achievement, and promote collective action (Lancee, 2012; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Nyamari, 2024). According to Lancee's (2012) definition, social capital suggests that individuals or groups who have access to dependable social resources—including both their immediate connections and the extended resources available through these networks—gain significant advantages in pursuing and attaining their objectives.

Key Components and Forms of Social Capital

Woolcock & Narayan (2000) emphasize that eight underlying factors constitute an individual's social capital: participation in the local community, pro-action in a social context, feelings of trust and safety, neighbourhood connections, connections with family and friends, tolerance of diversity, value of life, and work connections.

Nyamari (2024) summarizes social capital as a concept encompassing networks, relationships, norms, and trust that exist within a community or society. It can take various forms, including bonding social capital (connections within homogeneous groups) and bridging social capital (connections across diverse social networks).

Lancee (2012) distinguishes between two key components of social capital: structural and cognitive. The structural element represents the "wires" in the network—the types and institutional embeddedness of ties. The cognitive element refers to the "nodes"—attitudes and values such as perceptions of support, reciprocity, and trust that facilitate resource exchange.

Trust, a frequently used indicator of cognitive social capital, involves confidence in the reliability of people, systems, or principles and plays a crucial role in fostering neighbourhood cohesion. Importantly, social capital encompasses not only resources used but also those potentially available through one's network (Lancee, 2012).

Benefits at Individual and Community Levels

At an individual level, social capital enables better access to information, opportunities, and resources that might otherwise be unavailable. Strong networks can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and pathways to advancement that significantly improve quality of life and resilience during challenges (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

At the collective level, social capital includes networks with total closure where all individuals connect with each other. Belonging to multiple groups expands the network, potentially increasing available resources—the larger the network, the higher the social capital. This collective nature means individuals without direct ties can still benefit from group-level social capital, such as neighbourhoods with high trust levels and well-organized committees (Lancee, 2012).

Social capital serves as a fundamental building block for community development, as Nyamari (2024) explains, by facilitating cooperation, fostering collaboration, and mobilizing resources to address local needs and promote positive social change. When neighbours interact regularly, Woolcock & Narayan (2000) note that social capital accumulates, satisfying social needs and substantially improving living conditions throughout the community. They emphasize that social connections create essential pathways for accessing growth-promoting resources. Importantly, they point out that social capital doesn't exist in isolation but operates within broader political frameworks. The dynamic relationship between community networks and institutional structures plays a decisive role in how development unfolds within society.

Notably, Lancee (2012) observes that people typically have stronger ties and greater trust with those sharing the same background origin, contributing to collective social capital within cultural groups. However, a bond can be broken when opportunities are available outside the community, where one is less dependent on community resources; the mechanism that maintains bounded solidarity and enforceable trust within the group will grow weaker. This highlights the dynamic nature of social capital, which requires continuous investment and nurturing to maintain its positive effects on both individuals and communities.

9.3. BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH SOCIAL CAPITAL

Strengthening neighbourhoods to become sustainable and self-governing requires fostering social cohesion, building social capital, and increasing resident participation and responsibility (Kleinhans, 2006). Social capital forms the foundation upon which social stability and a community's self-help capacity are built—serving as a key factor in reversing neighbourhood decline (p.67).

Nyamari (2024) observes that social capital enables collective information sharing, activity coordination, and resource pooling toward common goals. Through collaboration, community empowerment, and leveraging local knowledge, social capital drives positive change, innovation, and resilience-building. Networks of trust and cooperation also enhance economic opportunities by improving access to resources, markets, and employment, ultimately strengthening economic resilience. By fostering a sense of belonging and social connectedness, social capital promotes positive health-being, reduces health disparities, and enhances overall community well-being (Nyamari, 2024).

In neighbourhood contexts, social capital encompasses benefits from casual interactions, shared norms, trust, and collective action (Kleinhans, 2006). Kleinhans (2006) states, social quality proves essential for neighbourhood sustainability, with expected length of residence playing a crucial role—residents who anticipate staying long-term typically invest more in building social capital. High social capital neighbourhoods tend to become desirable places that positively influence their urban surroundings. This presents opportunities to transform deteriorating areas, as neighbourhood improvements can enhance trust and support the development of social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces. However, social capital theory suggests that effective norm enforcement requires closed social structures where residents are interconnected and know each other (pp.68-73).

> *Social capital forms the foundation upon which social stability and a community's self-help capacity are built—serving as a key factor in reversing neighbourhood decline -* **(Kleinhans, 2006, p. 70)**

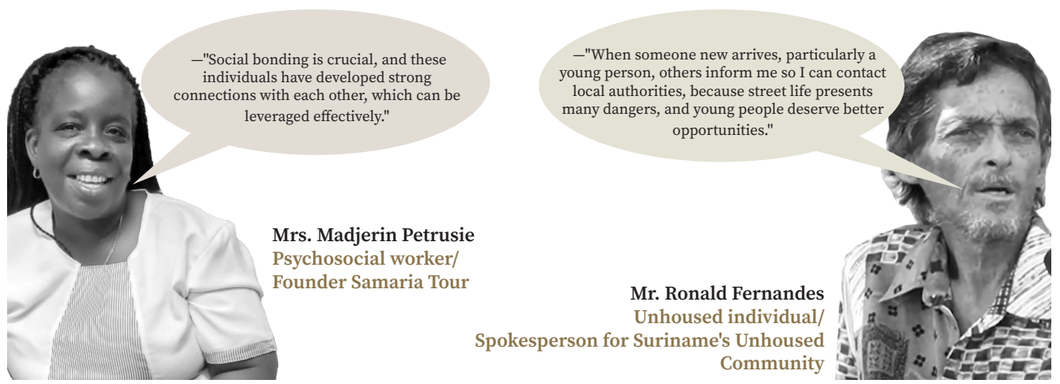
Personal Communication Insights

Through personal communication with Mrs. Madjerin Petrusie (Psychosocial worker/Founder Samaria Tour) and Mr. Ronald Fernandes (spokesperson for Suriname's unhoused community), valuable insights emerged about social connections among individuals lacking stable housing. Both emphasized the strong bonds that develop among the unhoused, primarily through shared circumstances and challenges.

With over 15 years of experience working with unhoused individuals, Mrs. Petrusie notes: *"There is an urgent need for comprehensive assistance, as more people find themselves without housing. Social bonding is crucial, and these individuals have developed strong connections with each other, which can be leveraged effectively."*

Mr. Fernandes highlights his community awareness: *"I know everyone living on the streets because we maintain close contact. When someone new arrives, particularly a young person, others inform me so I can contact local authorities, because street life presents many dangers, and young people deserve better opportunities."*

He further emphasizes that everyone deserves safe housing: *"People may have faced challenges that resulted in losing their housing, but after time on the streets, the yearning for a stable home grows stronger each day. While we receive support from organizations like Samaria Tour Foundation, which provides necessities and social engagement, what we truly need is secure housing and social support to successfully reintegrate into society."*



SUB QUESTION 5:

How can architectural interventions transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community?

9.4. ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Architectural interventions have evolved into multifaceted strategies that can catalyse social transformation through dynamic, experimental actions designed to explore new possibilities within existing environments. As Ciesla et al. (2024) explain, viewing architecture as intervention creates opportunities for transformative change across urban environments, spatial structures, and social situations, ultimately generating viable visions for how we build and inhabit our spaces.

This approach is particularly relevant when addressing the needs of unhoused populations. Plett et al. (2024) observe that individuals experiencing housing instability frequently encounter social isolation and struggle with community belonging, lacking the social power necessary to develop a sense of place and connection. These challenges highlight the importance of comprehensive architectural design interventions that make the transition from unhoused to housed not only physically accessible but socially integrated.

The sense of belonging represents a critical outcome for individuals transitioning to housing. Beyond providing shelter, architectural interventions must facilitate access to necessary resources that support stable long-term housing while reducing the risk of returning to housing instability. Building social capital becomes essential in this process, increasing possibilities for accessing further opportunities and creating pathways to community integration (Plett et al., 2024).

Shared spaces where social interactions naturally occur play a crucial role in shaping collective identity within neighbourhood contexts (Ciesla et al., 2024). Hou (2024) highlights that social movements function as essential catalysts for developing reliable social networks, while sustainable initiatives such as community gardens and social housing not only enhance quality of life but also strengthen social resilience.

He notes that elevated levels of social capital can positively impact residents' mental and physical wellbeing by providing essential emotional support, information access, and social resources that encourage healthier lifestyle choices. For instance, strong social capital promotes engagement in physical activities and sports. Communities equipped

with quality facilities—including sports fields, accessible parks, and recreational areas—offer enhanced opportunities for health promotion, motivating outdoor participation and contributing to overall improved community health outcomes (Hou, 2024).

Research by Plett et al. (2024) reveals that engaging in conversations and activities with others who have experienced similar situations fosters belonging. Community-integrated activities—establishing supports, engaging in hobbies, sharing meals, and participating in community organization programs—effectively build this sense of connection. Importantly, many formerly unhoused individuals express desire to give back to their communities, taking on meaningful roles that further strengthen social bonds. Establishing routines that connect people while providing opportunities to engage with nature and outdoor spaces proves essential for rejuvenating mental well-being.

For the chosen site location—vacant land containing debris from an unfinished police headquarters—transformation into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces requires architectural interventions addressing both housing and social support needs. Strategic design elements should facilitate various indoor and outdoor activities such as gardening and workshops provided by social organizations.

Nyamari (2024) notes that community organizations, non-profit agencies, and local governments can leverage existing social networks and community resources to facilitate collaboration and collective action among residents. Initiatives like community gardens, neighbourhood watch programs, and youth mentorship programs strengthen social ties, foster trust, and empower residents to work collectively. By investing in initiatives that bond social capital, practitioners contribute to developing social resilient and inclusive communities (Nyamari, 2024).

Effective architectural interventions thus go beyond providing physical shelter—they create environments that nurture social connections, facilitate community integration, and build resilience through shared experiences and mutual support.

Architectural Interventions

Figure 63: Conceptual sketch of residential building with communal areas. Note. Source: *James Holyoak* - Pinterest (2025)

Social Housing

For the unhoused community, lack of housing creates a significant barrier to stability. Building safe, affordable housing provides not only shelter but a crucial sense of belonging (Plett et al., 2024). Designing apartment blocks with integrated community spaces offers both private living areas and access to essential services. Gallery-style access promotes natural neighbour interactions, fostering the development of social connections through everyday encounters.

Figure 64: Visualization of community garden featuring planting beds. Note. Source: *Henning Larsen* - Pinterest (2025)

Community Gardens & Outdoor Spaces

Community gardens and outdoor spaces (e.g. sports fields, accessible parks and recreational areas) serve multiple needs for individuals transitioning from being unhoused. These green spaces provide access to affordable, nutritious food while supporting community health. Gardens create natural opportunities for building connections, developing a sense of community, and establishing ownership over shared space (Plett et al., 2024). The process of nurturing plants parallels the growth of social bonds.

Figure 65: Perspective drawing of community center showing social gathering spaces. Note. Source: *Palast-Architectes* - Pinterest (2025)

Community Center

Capacity-building strengthens individuals' and communities' ability to cultivate and mobilize social capital effectively (Nyamari, 2024). This includes training programs, workshops, and networking events that equip residents with skills and resources to sustain community development. Health and social providers should implement accessible programming—neighbour support groups, therapy sessions, and activity-based groups like yoga, art, or communal cooking classes—that facilitate belonging and community integration through meaningful engagement.

9.5. CONCLUSION

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

How can architectural design interventions transform vacant/abandoned properties into social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces that build social capital for the unhoused community?

The examination of social capital theory and its application to Paramaribo's context provides valuable insights into how architectural interventions can transform vacant/abandoned properties into spaces that support both housing needs and social integration for the unhoused community.

Social capital—the networks, relationships, and trust within communities—proves essential for individuals transitioning from being unhoused to housed, particularly in developing the three key dimensions of integration: physical presence in community, social network development, and psychological sense of belonging. As evident from personal communications with Mrs. Petrusie and Mr. Fernandes, the unhoused community in Paramaribo already demonstrates strong internal bonds formed through shared experiences, which can serve as a foundation for broader community integration.

Effective architectural interventions must therefore go beyond providing mere shelter to create environments that nurture these existing connections while facilitating new ones with the broader community. The proposed transformation of the vacant land site in Centrum offers an ideal opportunity to implement this approach through three key design interventions in relation to three key dimensions of integration:

1. Social housing with gallery-style access promotes everyday neighbour interactions while providing stable, affordable homes that create a crucial sense of belonging.

2. Community gardens and outdoor spaces serve dual purposes—providing affordable nutrition while creating natural settings for social connection and community ownership that build bridging capital across different groups.

3. A community center facilitates capacity-building programs that equip residents with skills to maintain relationships and access opportunities, while hosting activities that strengthen community bonds.

These interventions collectively address the primary barriers to community integration identified by Plett et al. (2024)—limited income, transportation challenges, and social isolation—by creating a self-contained but connected community environment where residents can develop routines, engage in meaningful activities, and gradually rebuild their social networks.

As Kleinhans (2006) notes, social capital forms the foundation upon which neighbourhood stability is built. By transforming vacant/abandoned properties into spaces that intentionally foster both bonding capital (within the unhoused community) and bridging capital (with the broader neighbourhood), these architectural interventions can contribute not only to addressing immediate housing needs but also to reversing neighbourhood decline and creating sustainable, integrated communities where all residents can thrive.

10. FINAL CONCLUSION

Transforming Urban Voids into Social Capital for Suriname's Unhoused

This research has examined the complex relationship between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community in Paramaribo, Suriname, exploring how architectural interventions can transform these urban challenges into opportunities for community integration and social capital development.

The findings reveal a multifaceted picture of Suriname's urban context. The country's economic journey since independence has created cycles of stability and crisis, with the 2015-2016 economic collapse and COVID-19 pandemic creating severe poverty conditions where one in five residents live in extreme poverty. This economic instability has produced a paradoxical situation where severe housing shortages exist alongside increasing vacant/abandoned properties throughout the urban landscape.

Paramaribo's urban development has significantly shaped this relationship, creating a north-south socioeconomic divide with higher socioeconomic classes in well-planned northern areas and lower socioeconomic groups concentrated in less structured southern regions. Following Friedrichs' urban decline framework, economic pressures force property abandonment while making housing unaffordable for those most in need, creating a self-reinforcing cycle where visible signs of abandonment accelerate neighbourhood deterioration and social disorder.

To break this cycle, the research proposes an integrated approach addressing both physical and social dimensions. Our spatial analysis identified the vacant land of the former unfinished police headquarters in Centrum as an optimal site for transformation, offering strategic advantages including central location, access to essential services, proximity to employment opportunities, and sufficient size for development within a mixed-use zone. This site represents a prime opportunity to address both housing needs and the social isolation challenges faced by the unhoused community.

Social capital theory provides the framework for understanding how architectural interventions can transform this vacant property into spaces that support both housing needs and community integration. As evident from personal communications with Mrs. Petrusie and Mr. Fernandes, the unhoused community in Paramaribo already demonstrates strong internal bonds formed through shared experiences, which can serve as a foundation for broader community integration.

The proposed architectural interventions in relation to three key dimensions of integration—social housing with gallery-style access, community gardens and outdoor spaces, and a community center—collectively address the primary barriers to community integration identified by Plett et al. (2024). By creating a self-contained but connected community environment, these interventions can help residents develop routines, engage in meaningful activities, and gradually rebuild their social networks.

As Kleinhans (2006) notes, social capital forms the foundation upon which neighbourhood stability is built. By transforming vacant/abandoned properties into spaces that intentionally foster both bonding capital (within the unhoused community) and bridging capital (with the broader neighbourhood), these architectural interventions contribute not only to addressing immediate housing needs but also to reversing neighbourhood decline and creating sustainable, integrated communities.

This research demonstrates that addressing Paramaribo's housing challenges requires more than physical solutions—it demands an integrated approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of economic conditions, spatial development, and social integration. Through thoughtful architectural design that prioritizes community building alongside housing provision, vacant urban voids can become vibrant spaces of opportunity and connection, breaking the cycle of urban decline, social isolation and creating pathways to stability for Suriname's most vulnerable residents. However, there remains room for further research to implement these solutions at different scales.

REFLECTION REPORT

Introduction

As part of the graduation report, I will reflect on the following aspects that influenced my research and design during the graduation phase. This reflection addresses the relationship between my project and academic program, the integration of research and design processes, my methodological approach, the project's impact and ethical dimensions, the transferability of results, professional development journey and future work development.

Academic Focus and Positioning

(What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?)

My graduation project addresses the challenges faced by Paramaribo's unhoused community through the transformation of vacant and abandoned properties. I aim to create social resilient, community-integrated residential spaces providing both housing and essential services for long-term rehabilitation and prevention of returning to street life. Building social capital within the unhoused community forms a central pillar of this approach.

As a Surinamese native, I contribute contextual understanding to this research, examining how architectural interventions can bridge the gap between the unhoused population and underutilized urban properties. The City of the Future Studio's focus on global urbanization challenges creates an ideal framework for developing architectural solutions for marginalized communities.

Within the Architecture Track, I can craft innovative design strategies transforming neglected properties into dignified living environments that foster community integration and personal development. This aligns with the MSc Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences program's core mission of addressing complex urban challenges through architectural innovation. Despite Paramaribo's unique economic challenges, my research demonstrates architecture's capacity to create meaningful social impact in developing urban contexts.

Research-Design Integration

(How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?)

My research follows a structured approach with three integrated sections combining theoretical frameworks with analysis and design interventions. The first section uses Urban Decline Theory to examine Paramaribo's economic context and challenges facing the unhoused community.

The second section applies Broken Windows Theory to analyze spatial conditions in Paramaribo's neighborhoods, focusing on vacant properties. This analysis directly informs my site selection process, identifying locations with transformation potential.

The final section integrates theory, research, and design to address my central question about transforming vacant properties into community-integrated spaces that build social capital. Using Social Capital Theory, I develop innovative housing solutions prioritizing social development through architectural interventions.

I structured my research to align with design, ensuring consistency throughout the process. This integration creates a cohesive approach where theory informs practice. As my understanding of social capital deepened, I refined design criteria to better address community building, incorporating emerging insights iteratively.

Methodological Reflection

(How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?)

I employ a structured methodology, using my research plan as foundation and guide. My approach aligns research with design, allowing consistent reference to core objectives throughout the process, providing clearer understanding of motivations and opportunities for continuous improvement.

My research addresses how vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused community connect in Paramaribo and how this builds

social capital. I used mixed methods (e.g. literature analysis, personal communication, spatial documentation and mapping) emphasizing qualitative analysis with quantitative support, exploring connections through three theoretical lenses: Economic Development, Spatial Development, and Social Development. These frameworks illuminate how economic decline, physical deterioration, and social networks shape relationships between vacant properties and the unhoused.

This methodological approach offers contextual and holistic perspective. By combining economic, spatial, and social lenses, I addressed urban challenges more comprehensively than a single-discipline approach. This proved valuable in a context with limited formal data, enabling triangulation across different sources when information on property vacancy and unhoused populations was scarce.

Critical reflection reveals both strengths and limitations. While the multi-theoretical approach provided comprehensive understanding, synthesizing findings across domains required significant integration work. Additionally, time constraints limited community engagement depth; a more participatory approach with extended stakeholder involvement would have further enriched the design outcomes.

Project Impact and Ethical Dimensions

(How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?)

My graduation project contributes across multiple dimensions: addressing urgent housing needs while building community resilience through social capital development, while offering a transferable framework for understanding housing instability and property vacancy relationships. This knowledge benefits professionals facing similar challenges globally, particularly where limited research exists.

The academic value lies in integrating Urban Decline Theory, Broken Windows Theory, and Social Capital Theory to address complex urban challenges. This multidisciplinary approach fills knowledge gaps regarding vacant properties and unhoused populations in developing contexts like Paramaribo, where such information is scarce.

From a societal perspective, this project addresses an urgent humanitarian need while offering a sustainable intervention model. Suriname's economic crisis disproportionately affects marginalized communities, particularly the unhoused who lack advocacy in policy discussions. My project creates environments enabling social capital development beyond physical housing.

The ethical dimensions are central to my design approach. I recognize that interventions for vulnerable populations must address community integration beyond shelter. By building social capital alongside physical infrastructure, the project views the unhoused as active participants rather than charity recipients.

As a designer, I provide a platform for unheard voices in architectural and urban development discussions. Architecture becomes advocacy, creating spaces where marginalized individuals rebuild with dignity and security, establishing a precedent for inclusive urban development regardless of economic circumstances.

Project Extension Possibilities

(How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?)

The transferability of this project extends beyond Paramaribo, offering value through its methodological approach and design solutions. By addressing connections between vacant/abandoned properties and the unhoused through integrated frameworks, I've developed strategies adaptable to similar urban contexts globally, particularly in developing regions.

My methodological framework—combining economic, spatial, and social perspectives—provides a template for contexts with limited data. Techniques for assessing property vacancy and mapping unhoused populations in data-scarce environments could benefit other developing cities. This approach offers a model that researchers can adapt while adjusting specific methods to local conditions.

The design solutions emphasize building social capital alongside physical infrastructure, creating a holistic intervention model. This integration has high transferability potential, with principles adaptable to diverse

contexts while maintaining focus on dignity, community integration, and personal development.

Documentation of successes and challenges provides valuable knowledge for future interventions. As a designer addressing challenges in my home country, this project demonstrates the value of contextual understanding while leveraging local knowledge in developing universally applicable solutions.

Professional Development Journey

(How has this graduation project transformed your professional identity and prepared you for future challenges in your field?)

This graduation project has fundamentally transformed my professional identity, evolving me from a student of architecture to an architect who understands the profound social responsibility embedded in design practice. By addressing the complex challenge of housing for Paramaribo's unhoused population, I've developed a multidisciplinary perspective that will shape my future professional approach.

The multifaceted nature of this project—integrating research, building technology, and architectural design—has equipped me with valuable skills for navigating complex challenges. Working simultaneously across these domains taught me how to maintain a holistic view while managing multiple considerations. There were moments when I struggled to balance these elements, occasionally losing sight of my core design objectives. However, these challenges proved invaluable, as they forced me to continuously return to fundamental questions: "Who am I designing for?" and "What impact do I aim to achieve?"

Critical feedback from mentors regarding how to create truly social resilient, community-integrated spaces pushed me to think more deeply about design implementation. Questions about site selection, transformation strategies, and community integration kept my thinking process dynamic and increasingly nuanced. This iterative feedback process has prepared me for professional contexts where I will need to defend and refine design decisions while maintaining focus on core objectives.

Perhaps most significantly, this project has solidified my professional identity as an architect who values social impact and contextual understanding. Working on housing solutions for vulnerable populations in my home country has deepened my commitment to addressing real-world challenges through thoughtful design. I now see architecture not merely as creating physical structures but as crafting environments that can transform lives and build community resilience.

For future challenges in my field, I've learned the importance of establishing a clear, structured approach from the outset while remaining adaptable to new insights. The ability to toggle between theoretical frameworks and practical design considerations—a skill honed throughout this project—will be invaluable in my professional practice. This graduation project has ultimately prepared me to address complex social and urban challenges with both technical competence and ethical awareness, transforming me into a more thoughtful, capable, and socially conscious design professional.

Future Work Development

(What were the most innovative aspects of your project, and what limitations or constraints did you encounter that could inform future related work?)

One of the most innovative aspects of my project lies in the introduction of a building block typology in a context where it doesn't traditionally exist. While my graduation project focuses on Suriname, I needed to navigate significant differences in building regulations, construction techniques, cultural expectations, climate considerations, and sustainability approaches. This required me to shift my thinking to address various contexts while adjusting specific methods to local conditions.

In Suriname, typical urban blocks with continuous perimeter buildings don't exist, as construction typically occurs on individual plots featuring standalone structures under private ownership. Therefore, designing a comprehensive building block with integrated community spaces represents a significant innovation in the project, potentially creating the first such development with dedicated community facilities in this context.

The introduction of this typology, combined with its specific focus on building social capital for the unhoused community, creates an innovative approach to housing solutions in Paramaribo. By designing spaces that facilitate both physical housing and social interaction, the project offers a new paradigm for addressing housing instability in a context where such integrated approaches are uncommon.

Key limitations encountered include the challenge of applying design principles from a European educational context to Suriname's unique urban fabric and cultural setting. The significant economic constraints faced by Suriname also imposed limitations on the feasibility of certain design approaches, requiring creative solutions that balance aspirational design with practical implementation possibilities. Additionally, limited access to comprehensive data about vacancy/abandonment patterns and unhoused populations created methodological challenges that required adaptive research approaches.

These limitations inform several directions for future work. First, developing more context-specific building typologies that respond to local cultural practices while addressing contemporary social needs represents a promising area for exploration. Second, creating more robust methodologies for assessing housing needs and property vacancy in data-scarce environments could benefit similar projects in developing contexts. Finally, further research on financing models for social housing interventions in economically challenged environments could enhance the feasibility of similar projects.

The tension between introducing innovative housing typologies while ensuring cultural resonance with the target population remains a crucial consideration for future work in this field. As I noted, because every country has its own rules and differences, a key challenge for future development will be how to adjust designs to resonate with the specific communities for whom we design, balancing innovation with contextual appropriateness.

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