Temporary Use through Sense of Place: Insights from South La and Osu

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Joint Degree of the Technische Universiteit Delft & Wageningen University and Research

Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Metropolitan Solutions (AMS)

Amsterdam, 19 January 2026

TUDelft

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UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

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ADVANCED METROPOLITAN SOLUTIONS

ABSTRACT

In South La and Osu (Accra), residents often adapt vacant urban areas to meet everyday needs. This qualitative study uses a sense-of-place lens to understand these practices and their implications for the temporary use of vacant urban areas. By researching residents' sense of place and attitudes towards vacant urban areas, the contexts and conditions for temporary use were explored. The data revealed that the contexts and activities that take place in both areas were influenced by their respective attitudes and sense of place. The sense of place also gave insights into potential future temporary uses. However, the data was inadequate to provide an assessment of the overall potential, lacking data on the actors and their influence. Future research on these actors and their power relations is suggested. Research into resolving the mismatch between customary practices and state laws is also suggested, as this mismatch facilitates the occurrence of vacant urban areas.

Cover: An unfinished structure in South La, Accra (Photograph by author)

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PREFACE

Throughout the MADE program, we had focused on urban challenges facing cities today and in the future. Most of these challenges were set in Amsterdam or other cities in the Global North. Within our program, we rarely discussed the future urban centers of the world, namely cities in Sub-Saharan Africa. With my thesis, I aimed to experience these cities by focusing on Accra.

However, the excitement slowly turned into a nuisance. As the collaboration with Limbo Accra was based on false promises, and personal circumstances had brought me back to the Netherlands. After a 3-month break, I reengaged with my research, only to struggle with the relevance of my thesis. It took the convincing of the people around me to go through with it, to deliver this work in front of you today. And those people I would like to thank.

Thank you to Maryam and Karin for being understanding and thorough supervisors. Your sharp feedback and flexibility regarding my personal circumstances helped me until the end.

Thank you to Olav Wissink for guiding me when I had to pause my thesis process. Your advice helped me decide to continue with my research.

And thank you to all the family members and friends who supported me during this whole process. You know who you are.

This will be my academic career, for the time being. But I won't completely shut the door behind me, who knows what the future holds?

Glenn Bommelé

Amsterdam, January 2026

INTRODUCTION

Cities in the Global South are among the fastest-growing in the world, especially in West Africa (Korah & Wimberly, 2024). The growth of these urban areas raises challenges for residents and local governments. One such challenge is the rise of unfinished buildings (Xu & Wang, 2020), prompting some organizations to find solutions to mitigate this. I collaborated with one such organization, Limbo Accra. Limbo Accra is "a spatial design & research-based practice dedicated to unlocking the potential of unfinished buildings across West Africa and beyond" (Limbo Accra, n.d.). According to Wallpaper*, "**by repairing and reimagining unfinished spaces**, the studio creates dynamic platforms for dialogue, creativity, and community, resulting in a **new legacy for overlooked structures**" (Adams, 2025). The perception that these structures are "overlooked" and in need of "reimagining" is in line with ideas of vacancy in the Global North, while alternative uses for vacant buildings in the context of cities in the Global South remain largely understudied (Agheyisi, 2025). The idea of "**bringing new life to abandoned buildings**" (Adams, 2025) was also pitched to kickstart this research; however, during the data collection, it became clear that "abandoned" was not how respondents saw these structures, as one respondent put it:

*"Because do you **go back to abandoned things**? I do not know. Maybe I do not understand the word. Like you abandoned something. I mean, if you abandoned something, you just left it, right? There is **no interest in going back to it**." (R13)*

There seemed to be a discrepancy between the term vacancy as perceived by Limbo Accra and me, and the respondents in this research. According to Respondent 13, the structures discussed will be returned to. Abandoned to him means that there is no interest in the building; he indicates that the owners are still interested in it. It shows that the term vacancy is not as universal as one might think, as these "overlooked" and "abandoned" structures did not seem so vacant after all. I realized it was nonsensical to bring new life to something that was never abandoned to begin with. This disagreement on the definition of vacancy is brought up because it is a recurring theme in this thesis: vacancy in the Global North versus the Global South. When is something viewed as vacant? How do cities in the Global North treat vacancy, as opposed to those in the Global South: what are the differences and similarities? Is there a problem with vacancy in the Global South? And how can this thesis explore potential ways forward?

In this introductory chapter, vacancy as viewed in cities of the Global North and South will be discussed. Followed by the academic problem setting of vacancy in a major city in the Global South: Accra, Ghana. Finally, the case study of this thesis and the research questions are presented.

Figure 1: An unfinished structure in Accra. Structures like these arise due to the unplanned urban sprawl of the city. (Photograph by author)

Vacancy in the Global North and the Global South

Cities are constantly reshaped through cycles of construction, abandonment, and demolition. Due to these dynamic characteristics of cities, leftovers and vacant spaces emerge. According to Trancik (1986), these spaces can be seen as "lost spaces" within (landscape) architecture and the urban field. Describing them as "the undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign — anti-spaces, making no positive contribution to the surroundings or users. They are ill-defined, without measurable boundaries, and fail to connect elements in a coherent way" (Trancik, 1986, p. 3-4). From an urban planner's perspective, Michael Davidson and Fay Dolnick described these spaces as "lands or buildings that are not actively used for any purpose" and "a lot or parcel of land with no constructed improvements" (2004, p. 244). According to O'Callaghan et al. (2021), there is no international consensus on the definition of vacant land, and they are therefore highly context-specific. However, the idea of emptiness, uselessness, and negative input remains dominant, regardless of the observer's perspective (Mseddi, 2020). Newman et al. (2018) name these areas vacant urban areas (VUAs). VUAs include both empty plots of land and unfinished structures (Newman et al., 2018).

A systematic literature analysis conducted by Naghibi et al. (2020) shows that most research on VUAs has been conducted in cities in the U.S. and in other cities in the Global North. Urban shrinkage caused by deindustrialization in the Global North has been the main focus for research on VUAs and their usage (Du et al., 2020; Andres & Zhang, 2020). In this context, VUAs can attract urban explorers, vandalizers, and squatters (Macdonald et al., 2022). In the Global South, VUAs primarily occur due to rapid urban sprawl (Newman et al., 2016), which is triggered by inadequate provision, land speculation, and high development costs (Gebru et al., 2026). This encourages informal self-construction, where vacancy can emerge as a result of less land provision (O'Callaghan, 2023). For example, due to incremental building and high building costs, projects could be left vacant, giving the impression of being abandoned (Ameyaw et al., 2025). These VUAs offer an opportunity for informal workers, such as street vendors, to use them to accommodate and support themselves (Lindell, 2019).

In the Global North, VUAs indicate a lack of productive use and the potential for redevelopment, whereas in the Global South, they typically indicate issues related to land management, speculation, and informal settlements (Gebru et al., 2026). In the Global North, vacancy is thus mostly seen as negative, being unproductive, and a wasted potential for redevelopment. To combat the negative effects of the presence of VUAs, VUAs have been redeveloped, adding new economic, ecological, and social value to the areas in which they reside (Kim et al., 2018). For example, the adaptive re-use of vacant shipyards across Northwest Europe (Hettema & Egberts, 2020) and the repurposing of abandoned buildings in Rome (Galdini, 2020). Cities in the Global South have also adopted these practices. Through projects such as the redevelopment of a vacant highway into green space in Kuala Lumpur City (Anuar & Abdullah, 2020) and the transformation of former brownfields into parks in Cairo (Elrahman, 2016). Next to the redevelopment of VUAs, VUAs also have the potential for temporary use of their space, also referred to as temporary urbanism (O'Callaghan, 2023; Mseddi, 2020).

Figure 2: NDSM shipyard in Amsterdam, before and after redevelopment. This shipyard is an example of the way VUAs in the Global North are treated, as areas with potential. Left: by Marion Golsteijn (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Smederij_NDSM.JPG), „Smederij NDSM", https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/nl/deed.en. Right: by Matthias Süßen creator QS:P170,Q59087075 (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Straat_Museum_at_NDSM_(Amsterdam)-msu-9505-.jpg), https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode

The different contexts in the Global North and South result in different temporary uses of VUAs. Research on temporary urbanism in the Global North typically regards temporary urbanism as a means for economic regeneration (Németh & Langhorst, 2014) and as a tool for urban image-making (Andres & Kraftl, 2021). This is called top-down temporary urbanism, "planned and constructed by those who hold the power in decision-making (i.e., landowners, developers, local authorities)" (Andres & Zhang, 2020; p. 3). Bottom-up temporary urbanism, which is "outside any formal planning frameworks ... [and] led by individuals or collectives" (Andres & Zhang, 2020; p. 3), also takes place, although there has been a trend towards top-down temporary urbanism for the last two decades (Andres & Kraftl, 2021).

In the Global South, however, bottom-up temporary use has always been a feature that accompanies the growth of cities, and entails every aspect of life and livelihood (i.e., settlement, social and health services, socio-political organizations, etc.), especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Agheyisi, 2025; Bakare et al., 2020). Bottom-up temporary urbanism provides economic flexibility in terms of direct bargaining power, less vulnerability, and a better return on investment, and is usually viewed as a small-scale and survivalist strategy undertaken by socio-spatially marginalized people (Richmond et al., 2018).

The key differences between appropriating vacancy in the Global North and South are between formalized and informalized planning. In the Global South, this sometimes results in conflict between various actors. This problem will be elaborated upon in the following section, introducing Accra, a major city in the Global South, as the case study for this thesis. It will present the academic problem statement on the potential for temporary use of VUAs.

Problem Setting

A study on the urban sprawl of Accra has shown that non-built-up land has largely been converted to urban built-up areas in the last few decades (Akubia & Bruns, 2019). This urban growth is caused by decades of rural-urban migration, making Accra home to a large group of people from lower socio-economic status (Doe et al., 2022). Due to inappropriate planning regulations and a lack of coordination between municipalities, planning institutions, and the customary land sector, development has outpaced planning in Accra (Gillespie, 2016).

Accra also experiences plural governance, as state legislation and customary practices do not always align (Akuoko et al., 2025). In addition, the marketization of the housing sector has created a situation in which private developers build housing for the few, while the masses rely on poor-quality informal housing (Gillespie, 2016; Issahaku Korah, 2019). This unplanned urban sprawl manifests in two contrasting forms: a market-driven, middle-class building boom, illustrated by the rise of gated communities in Accra (Atanga et al., 2024), and the proliferation of informal settlements such as Old Fadama, which houses migrants from Northern Ghana and neighboring countries (Agyabeng et al., 2022).

However, projects caused by this sprawl are abandoned easily due to capital lock-up, loss of interest, inability to pay workers, or loss of revenue (Addy et al., 2023), resulting in VUAs. These VUAs can cause declining property values, aesthetic problems at the community level, improper use of resources, increased poverty levels, and unemployment (Amoa-Abban, 2017). Some initial research into the effects of VUAs in Accra has been conducted. In the Accra neighborhood of East Legon, research shows that, in addition to the negative effects listed previously, VUAs can also foster social cohesion and alleviate rising rents for landowners. These results cannot be applied uniformly, as perceptions on VUAs are influenced by customary practices, which vary across communities (Nkrumah et al., 2021). This stresses the importance of considering local perceptions and customary practices of VUAs for temporary users.

In the Global South, temporary uses are mainly carried out by informal workers (Richmond et al., 2018). Employment in Ghana is for 85 percent carried out in the informal sector, with Accra accounting for over a third of the urban informal sector in Ghana (Anyidoho et al., 2025). As informal users are in need of spaces to operate from, VUAs can be a valuable resource for them (Agheyisi, 2025). In Accra, this is illustrated by temporary shops alongside the roads at Awoshie Junction (Dawson, 2021) and in the Abuja neighborhood, where caretakers safeguard the property of their relatives (Amankwaa & Gough, 2022). Sometimes these bottom-up temporary uses are condoned by the communities, like the self-constructed drainage system in a neighborhood in northern Accra (Foli & Uitermark, 2024). In some cases, conflicts arise due to informal construction (Asafo, 2024) or eviction by local authorities, as they "consider the regulation of street vendors one of the most pressing challenges" (Spire & Choplin, 2018, p. 2).

Figure 3: Street vendors operating next to a VUA in Accra. These vendors are an example of informal temporary users. (Photograph by author)

for the actors involved in temporary uses of VUAs. Similar to Andres et al. (2021), research in Benin City, Nigeria, advocates for the inclusion of temporary uses in the informal sector into formal state planning (Agheyisi, 2025). The research also stresses the importance of understanding the socio-spatial dimensions of cities in the Global South.

Informal and temporary uses face opposition in Accra today (Okwei et al., 2025), which forces temporary users to adapt (Akuoko et al., 2025). Understanding the places in which these temporary users operate would give insight into the potential for and provide a more durable temporary use of VUAs. One way to understand places is to know the opinions of residents on temporary use practices and how they see their place. In this thesis, this is explored by researching the sense of place (SoP) of residents in areas containing VUAs. SoP describes people-place relationships based on the place meanings and attachment a person has for a particular setting (Khatibi et al., 2025).

Meetiyagoda et al.'s (2024b) systematic literature review revealed that SoP has been primarily researched in the Global North and used to assess the commitment during urban planning processes or improve collaboration among other actors. Research in the Global North has looked into the effect temporary uses have on SoP, showcasing the link between the two (Finsterwalder et al., 2024). However, utilizing SoP to explore the potential for temporary use is largely missing from the literature. SoP has the potential to explore the ability and capacity to organize, develop, and create services to address everyday needs. SoP could also explore current practices and help inform the actors involved in them. Realizing the call to include informal temporary users in urban planning in the Global South, SoP could play a role in including their planning in the Global South, SoP could play a role in including their

Given these conflicts, Andres et al. (2021) advocate for incorporating informal and temporary dynamics into urban planning in the Global South. Conventional urban planning in Accra has historically been fragmented and lags behind urban growth, excluding informal users (Croese et al., 2023). Combating this exclusion, informal users have turned to mutual agreement among each other, shaping temporary uses (Akuoko et al., 2025). Andres et al. (2021) stress the importance for cities in the Global South to adapt to the ability and capacity of individuals to organize, develop, and create services to address everyday needs.

In this thesis, these everyday needs and existing resident-led practices in VUAs have been researched. Doing so helped give insights into their ability to shape temporary use in the area. creating recommendations

practices and informing other actors to explore the potential for the temporary use of VUAs.

In this thesis, Yu's (2024) operationalization of SoP is used, consisting of the emotional attachment (EA) and functional dependence (FD) of residents. EA is about the feelings people have toward a place's cultural meanings, values, narratives, and history. FD refers to the perception of a place as a source for mainly supporting individuals' needs and goals. Together, these components help to understand people-place relationships and the place itself.

Agheyisi (2025) identifies contextual characteristics that give insight into temporary urbanism in Benin City, Nigeria, developing an analytical framework. This analytical framework has been applied to assess the potential for temporary use of VUAs in Accra. This potential helps understand which temporary uses of VUAs are socially acceptable and feasible, given the context of the research areas.

Case Study

In this thesis, the definition of vacant spaces as described by Newman et al. (2018) will be used, naming them vacant urban areas (VUAs). VUAs include both empty plots of land and unfinished structures (Newman et al., 2018). I adopt this definition, but treat vacancy as potentially inactive or stalled, in accordance with the views on vacancy from respondents. This definition was chosen as it stresses the inactivity of the areas, not the abandonment.

A comparison of two areas in Accra was conducted. This comparative study aimed to better understand the relationship between SoP and VUAs, and to explore the temporary use of VUAs. The two adjacent areas of South La and Osu were compared, as they differ in size and characteristics. South La is a small, primarily residential estate with recent investment interests, and Osu is a residential area with commercial spots, experiencing decade-long redevelopment.

These differences result in different types of VUAs present in the areas. Osu, experiencing long investment interest, has been largely built up, resulting in stalled projects being the most common type of VUA, i.e., stalled constructions and apartment buildings. In addition, being a former colonial city, Osu has numerous deteriorated colonial houses. The commercial character of Osu also results in more temporary uses of VUAs than in South La. Examples include a billboard and squatters operating informal businesses.

The recent development interest of South La resulted in some stalled projects, but mostly deteriorated houses and empty plots of land, as development has yet to be started. Uses of these spaces are not as prevalent as in Osu, which is partly due to the familiarity of the residents with the owners and the adversity residents have towards squatters.

The full description of both areas will follow in the Methodology and Results section of this thesis.

Analytically, the two areas represent two different stages of development. As VUAs in the Global South are caused by rapid urbanization, the urban development rate of an area would influence the occurrence of VUAs. The different development rates of South La and Osu have led to different occurrences of VUAs and attitudes towards VUAs. Seeing as the areas are situated next to each other, this comparison study stresses the importance of place when considering the potential for temporary use of VUAs. This thesis aims to explore the potential for the temporary use of VUAs in both areas. It also explores what role actors could play in this potential. The main and sub-research questions are as follows:

How can insights into residents' SoP and attitudes towards VUAs be used in designing strategies for the temporary use of VUAs in South La and Osu, Accra?

And the sub-research questions:

1) *What is residents' SoP in South La and Osu, consisting of their EA and FD?*

2) *What are residents' attitudes towards VUAs?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Existing literature on the temporary use of VUAs focuses on cities in the context of the Global North. By applying SoP, VUAs, and their temporary use could be explored in the context of the Global South. This chapter will introduce the SoP as conceptualized by Yu (2024), with EA and FD as its components. To assess the potential for temporary use of VUAs in South La and Osu, the analytical framework by Agheyisi (2025) and Martin et al. (2020) will be discussed. Examining both the SoP of two areas and applying an analytical framework for temporary use in the Global South, this conceptual framework has provided a good assessment of the potential for the temporary use of VUAs in Accra.

Sense of Place (SoP)

Understanding SoP requires clarifying what is meant by "place". A place is a concept that combines physical form, activities, and meaning (Montgomery, 1998). Or, as Agnew (1987) formulates it, the geographical location, locale, and SoP. SoP is understood as the connection between people and places (Meetiyagoda et al., 2024a). According to Frantzeskaki et al. (2018, p. 1047), SoP is a "collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values and feelings that individuals and groups associate with a particular locality". Shamai and Ilatov (2005) define SoP as knowledge, belonging, attachment, and commitment to a place. SoP thus refers to the more subjective experiences of a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes (Cresswell, 2009). Generally, SoP is divided into three dimensions: place attachment, place dependence, and place identity.

- **Place Attachment** refers to the affective bonds people hold towards places (Low & Altman, 1992).
- **Place Dependence** is defined by the importance of a place in providing features and conditions that support specific goals or desired activities (Erfani, 2022).
- **Place Identity** refers to the symbolic relationships in a place that give meaning and purpose to life, reflect a sense of belonging, and are important to a person's well-being (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). It contributes to individual, group, and cultural self-definition and integrity (Low & Altman, 1992).

Due to the various definitions and applications of SoP, there is a lack of clear theorizing and consensus on SoP (Banks & Bowman, 2024). SoP is often operationalized in one or both of the following ways: as evaluative statements about the intensity of people-place relations, and as descriptive statements about place (Raymond et al., 2023). Yu (2024) applied to operationalizations by using the components of emotional attachment (EA) (i.e., place attachment and identity) and functional dependence (FD) (i.e., place dependence).

- **Emotional Attachment (EA)** illustrates what feelings people have toward a place's cultural meanings, values, narratives, and history.
- **Functional Dependence (FD)** refers to the perception that a place mainly serves as a source for material and non-material resources that support individuals' needs and goals (Yu, 2024)

Yu stresses the importance of considering the two subdimensions together. When EA and FD are viewed separately, they can potentially compete. Considering EA alone, referring to the historical continuity of a place, could lead to romanticizing the past and traditions (Dacin et al., 2019). Seeing a place through FD alone could provide insufficient insight into the place. It could also reduce the place into an undifferentiated space according to Relph's (1973) theory of

placelessness (Seamon and Sowers, 2008). Relph explained that 'placelessness' refers to places that have no distinctive personality (Najafi & Shariff, 2011). According to Yu (2024), EA can lead to an increased commitment from people to develop strategies attempting to maintain the cultural and historical continuity of the place as much as possible. FD can, likewise, lead to an increased commitment from people to develop strategies that would help improve the local economy. In the context of this thesis, the EA was used to understand the identity of the research areas. And FD was used to identify community needs, exploring potential temporary uses for VUAs to fulfill these needs. Exploring both these components helped contextualize the areas in which temporary use of VUAs could exist. Potentially, embodying both components can enable EA and FD to transform a place while maintaining its essential function, structure, and identity (Yu, 2024). This thesis aimed to explore potential temporary uses that adhere to both components of SoP. Figure 4 illustrates this aim, providing a possible base for future research on temporary practices of VUAs.

Figure 4: SoP and temporary urbanism practices, based on Yu (2024). The model shows how understanding the subdimensions of SoP could potentially influence the future temporary urbanism practices of an area. FD and EA disembodied could lead to either the development of the place or merely maintaining place identity. Adhering to both

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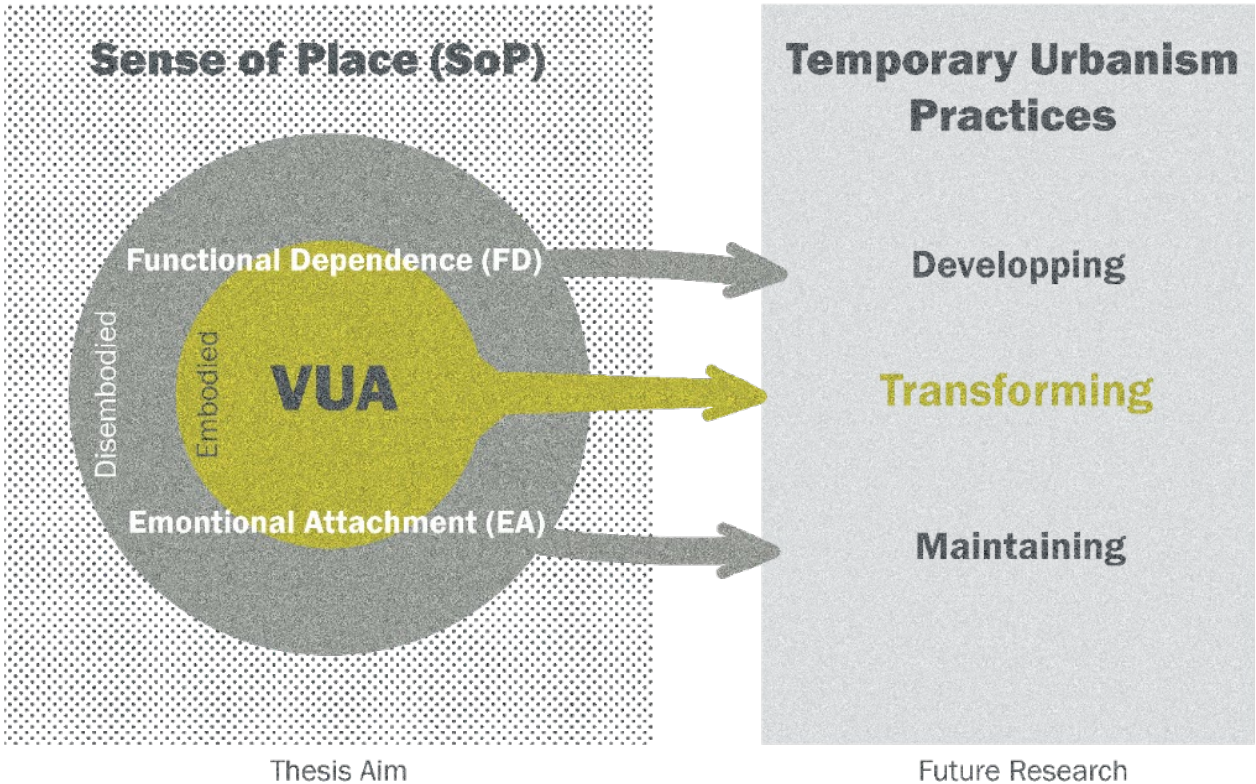
Temporary Use

Temporary Urbanism has been a feature that accompanies cities worldwide. It encompasses "processes, practices, and policies of, and for spatial adaptability" (Andres & Zhang, 2020, p. 1), transforming space and impacting the surrounding socio-economic environment. Within temporary urbanism, temporary use takes a prominent role. Temporary uses can be viewed as an instrumental tool of urban development and management or as an intrinsically valuable process, which often has political and/or emancipatory connotations, depending on the perspective of the actor (Turku et al., 2023). In some cases, both viewpoints are at play.

In the context of cities in the Global North, the temporary uses of VUAs became common in the 1970s as a by-product of deindustrialization, and urban and socioeconomic transformations (Andres, 2013). These uses can be defined as a set of short-term practices developed in a context of economic, urban, or political disorder in an often emergent and adaptive manner (ibid.). According to Lehtovuori & Ruoppila (2017), two actors are involved in temporary urbanism: the planner/developer and the activist/user. Oswalt et el. (2013) argue that owners of VUAs and policy-makers are also actors within temporary urbanism.

In the Global North, temporary urbanism undermines the power and connections of the existing city, challenging the notion of the city being permanent (Andres & Zhang, 2020). Madanipour (2017) suggests that within this undermining, actors could define time as kairos, experienced and managed as moments of opportunity, or as chronos, time seen as constant. This binary splits the literature into two kinds of temporary uses: interim uses, which occupy a space until another higher use emerges, and "tactical" urbanism, which aims to bring about long-term change in urban development (Stevens, 2020). Oswalt et al.

(2013) offer a more nuanced typology framework on the durations of temporary uses. These will be elaborated on below and are visualized in Figure 5:

1) **Stand-in**: the temporary use has no lasting effect on the space and fills in the gap between the last and next use.
2) **Free Flow**: the temporary use moves to new locations as the opportunity arises. It combines stand-in use with long-term development, as the change of location updates the temporary usage.
3) **Impulse**: the temporary use establishes a new activity profile that is carried out in the space and its surroundings even after the temporary use ends.
4) **Consolidation**: the former temporary use becomes established and turns into long-term use. Informal arrangements are formalized through long-term leases and regular permits.
5) **Co-existence**: the temporary use continues to exist on a smaller scale. Prevalent when the usage is niche.
6) **Parasite**: the temporary use exploits the potential of an existing long-term use by operating next to it.
7) **Pioneer**: the temporary use appropriates unused territory. After the success of its usage, the activities continue indefinitely, taking on permanent, formalized forms.
8) **Subversion**: the temporary use is strategically selected to disturb and transform a long-term use. While short-lived, they affect the institutions targeted.
9) **Displacement**: permanent uses are temporarily displaced and continue elsewhere while waiting for their return to their original location.
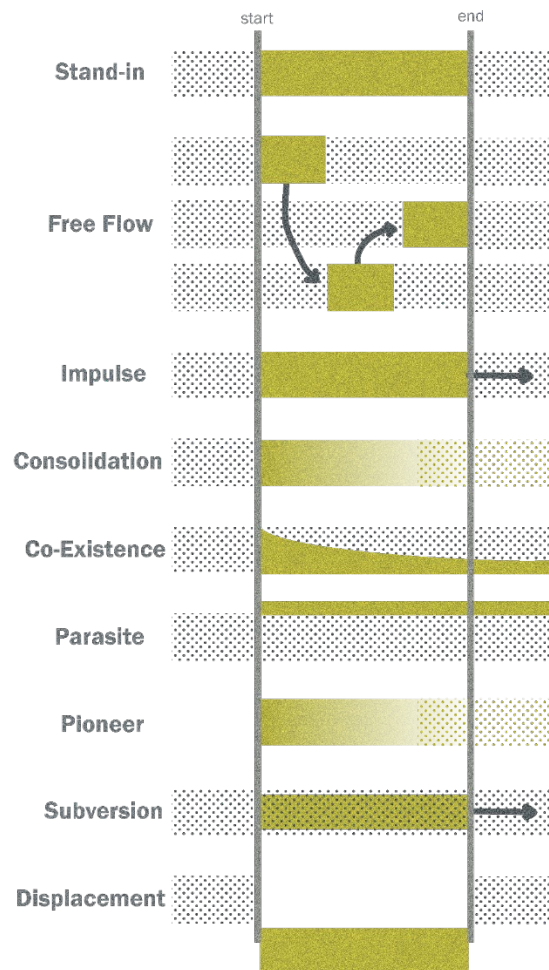
Figure 5: The typologies of temporary urbanism as described by Oswalt et al. (2013). It illustrates the relationship between permanent uses (dotted rectangles) and temporary uses (solid yellow rectangles). The start and end lines demarcate the temporary period. (Illustration by author)

These typologies provide a framework through which the durations of temporary uses of VUAs in Accra could be assessed. However, these frameworks were developed based on temporary urbanism as it occurs in the Global North. For this thesis, an additional analytical framework for the temporary use of VUAs in the context of the Global South is needed.

The literature often portrays temporary use in the Global South as a form of resistance by citizens and other marginalized social groups (Hou, 2020), and as spaces for economic activities, particularly street trading (Huang et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2022). These activities are carried out in the informal sector, which is a common feature in rapidly urbanizing cities in the Global South (Lara-Hernandez et al., 2020). These activities shape the character of cities in the Global South and provide vitality, i.e., income and flexibility, to informal users (Agheyisi, 2025). These uses sometimes have negative effects for users, as insecurity is created by a lack of employment rights and social protection (i.e., sick leave, paid time, and health insurance) (Rogan et al., 2017).

Moreover, temporary uses could have broader societal and political implications due to informal users experiencing a disconnection from representative and other social institutions (Duman, 2025). As a result, governments often regulate temporary informal uses, which temporary users resist (Agheyisi, 2025; Bakare et al., 2020; Andres et al., 2019). Examples include formerly evicted street vendors in Lagos attempting to reclaim and maintain their vending space (Omoegun et al., 2019) and vendors in Kampala refusing their eviction, sometimes resulting in altercations with law enforcement (Lindell et al., 2019).

Realizing these conflicts, Agheyisi (2025) argues for a more systematic inclusion of temporary use into existing urban plans and treats VUAs as

a potential resource. Where cities in the Global North mainly experience temporary use of VUAs through top-down formalized channels to promote urban regeneration, cities in the Global South experience this use bottom-up (Andres et al., 2019). Since local authorities are declaring the temporary use of VUAs unlawful, Certomà et al. (2020) introduce the concept of "informal planning", defined as an organized form of collective planning that builds upon grassroots initiatives, but also entails collaboration and dialogue with official planners. Similarly, Andres et al. (2021) call for a combination of formal planning and alternative-substitute place-making, which relates to everyday, adaptable, temporary dynamics linked to survival. This potential of incorporating temporary uses into urban planning will be explored in the context of Accra.

Agheyisi (2025) developed an analytical framework based on temporary urbanism as it occurred in Benin City, Nigeria. Derived from Martin et al.'s (2020) Characteristics of Temporary Use, these characteristics were expanded upon to include government regulation. This made it possible to show the relevance of regulations for the temporary use of VUAs. Together with the typologies on the durations for temporary use, this framework provides an adequate assessment of the potential temporary use of VUAs in Accra. Using Martin et al. (2020) and Agheyisi (2025), the characteristics are defined as follows:

1) **Activity**: As a result of a lack of comprehension and accommodation of temporary activities in formal planning regulations, temporary users look for VUAs to operate from. In the Global South, these activities are often conducted in the informal sector and regarded as dominant features of urban economies. Analyzing the current activities occurring in VUAs helped understand the types of temporary uses that are possible in both areas. The attitudes respondents have towards these activities provided insight into their desirability and potential future use. It indicates which uses are socially accepted in South La and Osu.

2) **Context**: The sporadic growth of cities in the Global South has made temporary uses a permanent feature. The growth is accompanied by incremental construction, land speculation, and weak land provision, which could encourage temporary uses. Understanding the growth and development in South La and Osu has given insights into the conditions that make temporary use possible. These socio-economic environments could enable and facilitate temporary uses.

3) **Space**: Temporary development is often presented as a solution for underutilized spaces, providing opportunities for temporary users and property owners. This sheds light on the problem of land speculation. Also, weak urban planning could be addressed by encouraging temporary uses of otherwise unused spaces. To address these problems in both areas, the types of spaces available for temporary use have been analyzed.

4) **Actors**: Analyzing the potential for temporary use also involves analyzing its users. Research has focused more on the VUAs themselves than on the actors and processes involved in the temporary use of these VUAs. Exploring how temporary users are seen and treated by respondents provided insight into the way these users shape their respective areas. This analysis has also provided insights into other influential actors within the temporary use of VUAs. These insights provided an overview of the actors involved, their power relations, and their influence on the potential of temporary uses.

5)   **Duration**: The duration of temporary uses usually spans the time between the exit of one user of a VUA and the arrival of another. How these temporary uses develop over time reveals aspects of their intended use and effect on the surroundings and/or actors, as the durations are dependent on the power relations among actors. Using the 9 typologies of Oswalt et al. (2013) has gained insights into the potential typologies in South La and Osu.

6)   **Regulation**: Temporary uses of VUAs appear in the context of weak planning, shaped by regulation in the form of restrictions and incentives. Restrictions involve constraints issued by authorities, while incentives subsidize temporary uses by means such as cheaper rents and flexible space acquisition. Government regulations determine the extent to which these uses are tolerated. The enforcement of these regulations affects the temporary users and thus the potential for temporary use. Exploring existing legislation on these regulations has helped explore the possible conflicts with authorities that could arise in South La and Osu.

This analytical framework provides a good assessment of the current temporary uses of VUAs in South La and Osu. Doing so has also indicated what potential temporary uses could occur in the future, designing strategies for the appropriate actors.

Conceptual Framework

This thesis aims to explore the potential for the temporary use of VUAs in the context of Accra. The SoP has been explored to give insight into this potential. Figure 6 visualizes the conceptual framework, which is in line with this thesis's aim and draws from the theories mentioned previously.

The potential for temporary use has been explored by researching residents' SoP. Researching the SoP, divided into EA and FD (Yu, 2024), gave insights into the current identity, community needs, and community development of the research areas. Residents were also asked about their attitudes towards VUAs, as this gave insight into the current perceptions and temporary uses of VUAs. Together, these provided an exploration of the contexts in which current temporary uses of VUAs take place.

To gain insights into the dynamics of current and potential temporary uses of VUAs, the six characteristics are examined in relation to EA, FD, and attitudes towards VUA, exploring 'Activity', 'Context', 'Space', 'Actors', 'Duration', and 'Regulation'. Additional data on the regulations from formal institutions was also applied to assess the 'Regulation'.
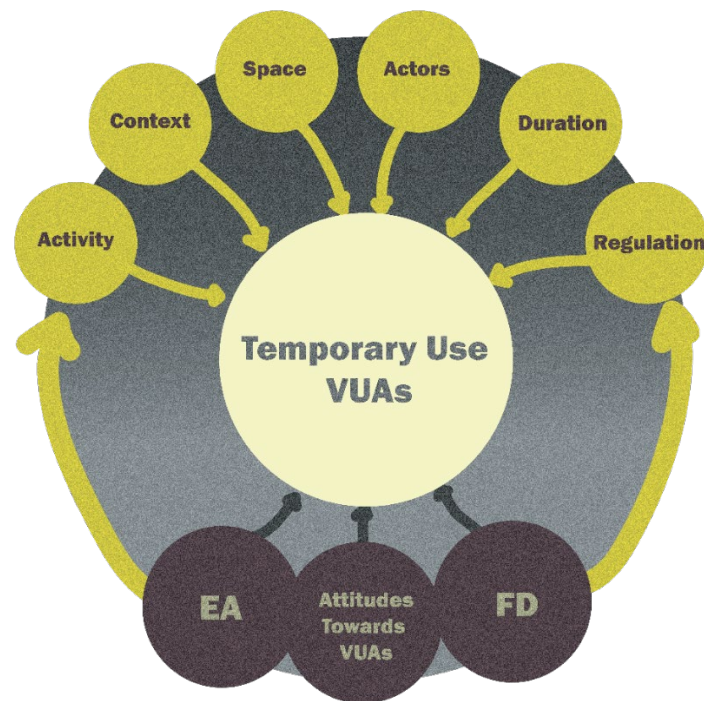

Figure 6: The Conceptual Framework of this thesis. The black arrows indicate that EA, FD, and attitudes provided indirect insight into temporary uses of VUAs. The yellow arrows indicate how this data provided insights into the potential for temporary use of VUAs, using the 6 characteristics from the analytical framework. Each characteristic contributes to the assessment of the potential for temporary use of VUAs in South La and Osu. (Illustration by author)

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods of research used to answer this thesis's research question. Qualitative research has been conducted using a case study comparing two distinct areas in Accra: South La and Osu. A case study enables the in-depth examination of a complex urban issue, VUAs, within its real-life social, spatial, and institutional context, making it suitable for exploring residents' sense of place and attitudes across bounded areas (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This comparative case study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases being studied. The cases studied are South La and Osu, and the in-depth descriptions were provided through the SoP, attitudes towards VUAs, and the potential strategies for temporary use of VUAs in both areas. The case study will help answer the following main and sub-research questions:

How can insights into residents' SoP and attitudes towards VUAs be used in designing strategies for the temporary use of VUAs in South La and Osu, Accra?

1) *What are residents' SoP in South La and Osu, derived from their EA and FD?*
2) *What are residents' attitudes towards VUAs?*

To gain a deeper understanding of the SoP and attitudes towards VUAs, interviews were selected as the data collection method. Interviews allow for the gathering of data that reflects the subjective experience of participants (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). In the case of this thesis, semi-structured interviews have been used, as they enable deep exploration (Megaldi & Berler, 2020), accompanied by follow-up questions to clarify or gain a deeper understanding of participants' responses (Ruslin et al., 2022). To gain insight into residents' SoPs, the questions of Yu's original questionnaire (2024) were used. Additional questions about the general opinions of, wishes for, and alternative uses of VUAs helped to gain insight into residents' attitudes towards VUAs. See Appendix A for the interview questionnaire used for this research.

In the rest of this chapter, the research areas and data collection will be discussed. Followed by an explanation of the reflexive thematic analysis applied to explore the SoP and attitudes. Concluding with a discussion on cultural sensitivity and reflexivity of the author of this thesis.

Research Areas

Using a comparative case study, residents' SoP and attitudes toward VUAs were examined in two Accra neighborhoods: South La and Osu. Neighborhoods were selected instead of a single VUA because the aim is to explore the conditions in which temporary use of VUAs could be socially acceptable and feasible. Cases were purposively chosen for *(1)* contrasting demographics and urban form, *(2)* residential character, and *(3)* documented presence/proximity of VUAs.

Firstly, as differences in place would most likely result in differences in SoP and attitudes towards VUAs, both areas have different demographic characteristics, density, urban layout, and connectivity to the rest of the city. Statistics on the neighborhood-level were not available, so their respective districts were used: La Dade-Kotopon Municipal Assembly (LaDMA) for South La, and Korle-Klottey Municipal Assembly (KoKMA) for Osu. The Greater Accra Region (GAR) was used as a reference column. See Table 1 for a comparison of the districts.

Table 1: Statistical comparison between GAR, LaDMA (South La), and KoKMA (Osu). Data is received from the Ghana Statistical Service (2021a) & (2021b). *VUAs were calculated from the "Level of Completion of Structures by District, Region, and Type of Locality and region" Table (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021a).

District		GAR	LaDMA (South La)	KoKMA (Osu)
Population (amount)		5.455.692	140.264	68.633
Density (people/km^2)		1.681	3.888	5.770
Ethnic Groups (%)	Akan	41,1	31,4	30,8
	Ga	24,6	43,8	41,5
	Ewe	20,2	13,9	12,3
	Mole-Dagbon	5,7	5,8	7,7
	Others	8,4	5,1	7,7
Non-Ghanaians (%)		1,7	1,9	4,6
Religion (%)	Christianity	84,4	90	81,8
	Islam	11,6	5	10,6
	No Religion	2,8	3,2	3,8
	Other	1,2	1,8	3,8
Employment Sector (%)	Private Formal	24,4	24,9	25,4
	Private Informal	65,6	49,7	62,2
	Public	8,8	24,2	10,7
	Other	1,2	1,2	1,7
VUAs (%)*		18,8	7,4	3,4
Tenure Arrangement (%)	Owner-occupied	36,4	31,7	29,8
	Renting	47,6	42,6	41,7
	Rent-free	12,6	23	26,2
	Perching	0,5	0,4	0,8
	Squatting	0,5	0,4	0,4
	Caretaker	2,4	1,9	1,1

According to the Composite Budget Plan for LaDMA, LaDMA's roads are 36% unpaved, and one of its major roads that carries rush-hour traffic, La Road, passes by South La. South La's streetscape runs parallel to this road (LaDMA, 2024). As opposed to KoKMA, where 6% of the roads are unpaved, and three major roads circumvent Osu (KoKMA, 2024). Osu's streetscape appears not to be predesigned and is therefore more sporadic than South La's (KoKMA, 2023).

The boundaries for the areas were taken from official documents from both districts. For South La, the official area takes up the New Kaajaanor electoral map (LaDMA, 2015). As the west side of this area is more residential, only this part was considered South La for this thesis. For Osu, the drainage network map was used to define its boundaries (KoKMA, 2023). As the map does not specify the boundaries of Osu, respondents' descriptions of Osu were also used to set the boundaries. For this thesis, the area east of Oxford Street had been considered Osu. See Figures 7 and 8 for the official maps.

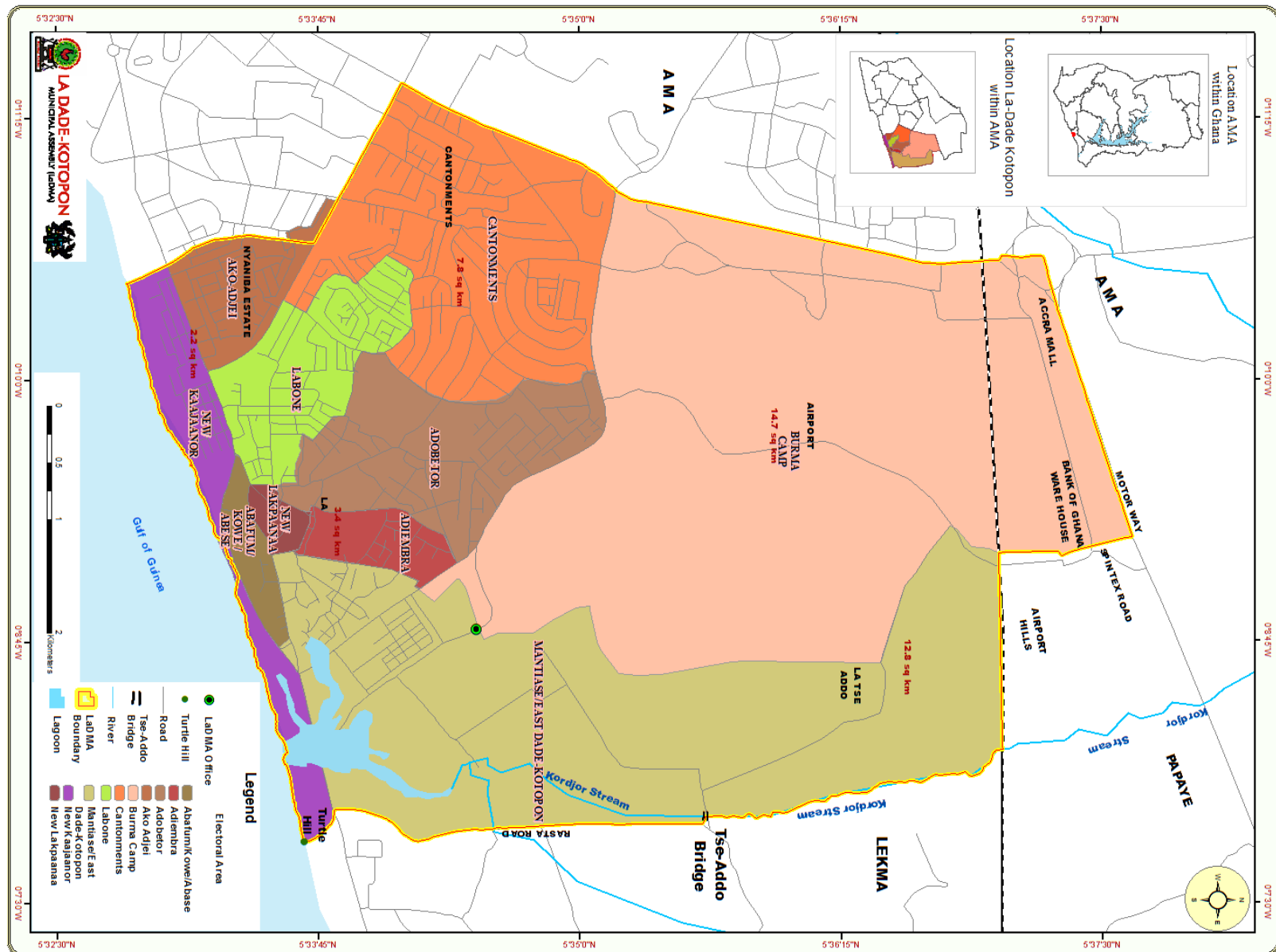Figure 7: The electoral map of LaDMA indicating South La (New Kaajaanor electoral area) in purple (LaDMA, 2015). For this thesis, only the purple area directly under Labone (green) was researched.
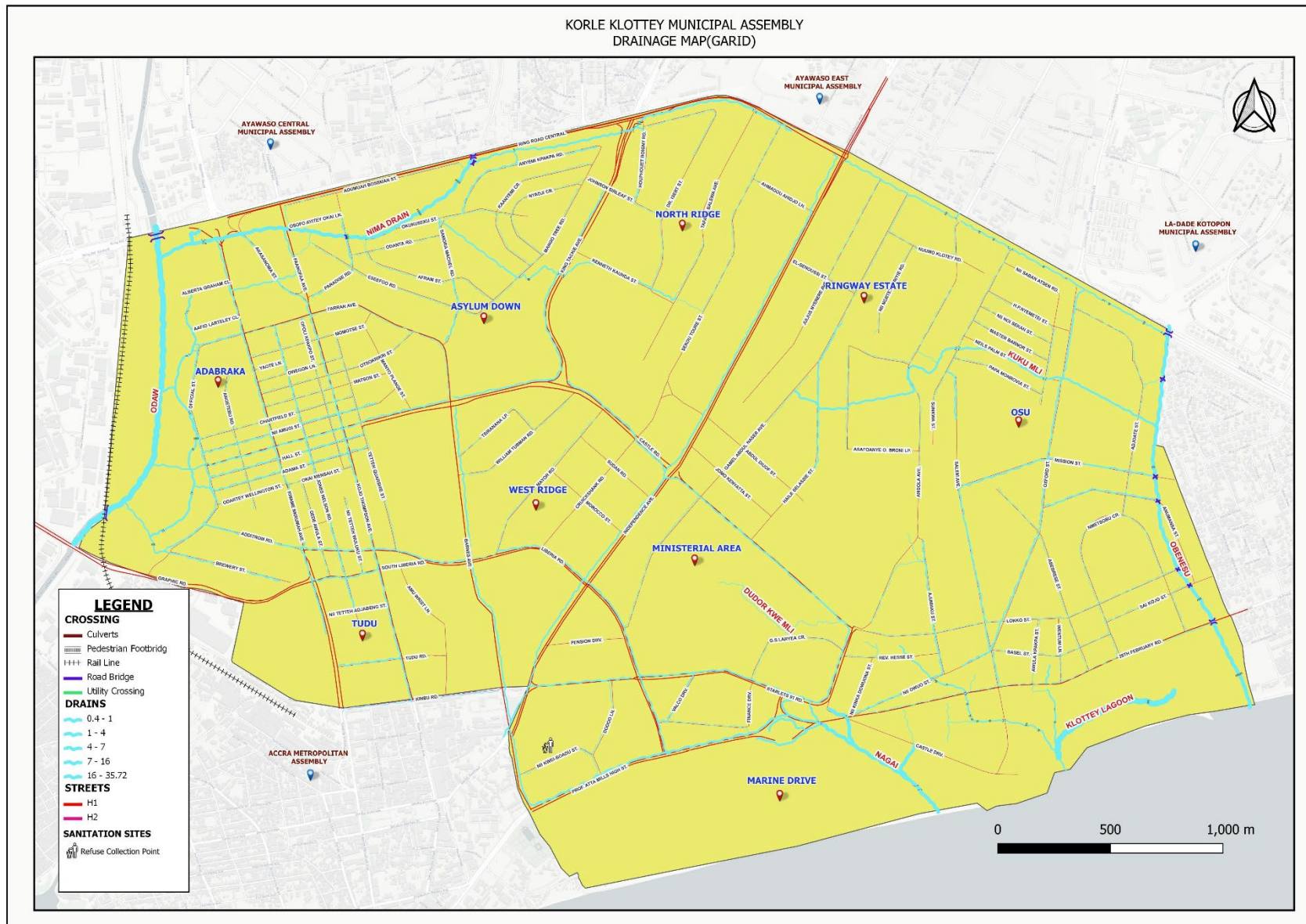
Figure 8: The drainage network map of KoKMA indicating Osu (right) (KoKMA, 2023). For this thesis, the area right of Oxford Street (red line running through KoKMA from the top right to the bottom left) was researched.

For Osu, the drainage map did show Osu, although respondents incorporated different areas as being part of Osu. This could potentially influence the SoP and attitudes developed. For example, some respondents explicitly called the area of Ako Adjei part of Osu:

*"In fact, the estates' people called Osu '**Ako Adjei**'. That is how people would call it." (R15)*

*"... every year there is a party around my area, which is **Ako Adjei**, ..." (R19)*

This area is, however, officially its own neighborhood, part of LaDMA, not KoKMA. Including their views as part of Osu could have resulted in a misrepresentation of the SoP and attitudes identified. The contradictions in the areas considered Osu are visualized in Figure 9.
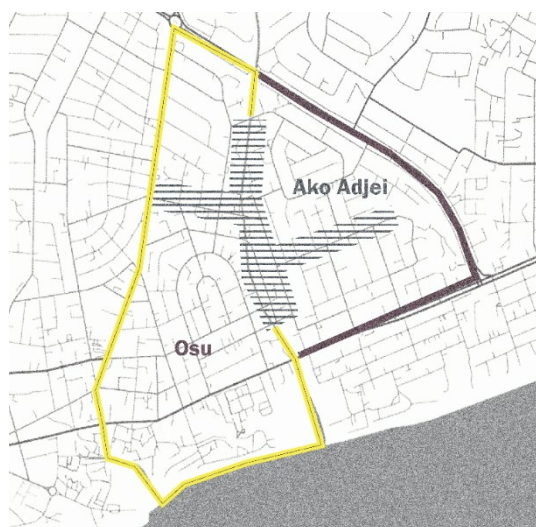

Figure 9: The inconsistencies in the boundaries of Osu. The yellow area is derived from the drainage network map (official demarcation missing). The stripped areas are the streets used for in-person interviews. And black is the area of Ako Adjei, which some respondents also see as Osu. (Illustration by author)

Secondly, as residents are the target group of this thesis, both areas were selected because they were residential. As residents were more likely to have a stronger SoP than visitors to the areas. Children and adolescents were excluded from the research sample as they require stricter guidelines when interviewed. And lastly, both areas should be familiar with the phenomenon of VUAs, either currently containing them, having contained them in the past, or having VUAs in surrounding areas. Familiarity with VUAs is crucial in developing attitudes towards VUAs.

Scouting for suitable areas was done via a preliminary investigation of literature online and satellite imagery (see previous section). Only after site visits by the author of this thesis, determining the occurrence of VUAs and differences in the areas' size, layout, and connectivity to the rest of the city, were the two research areas, South La and Osu, selected. Note that this was the first time the author visited Accra and Ghana in general. The scouting conducted by the author aligns more with a Eurocentric understanding of urban areas. More on the descriptions of the areas in the Results section of this thesis.

Data Collection

A total of 21 interviews were conducted with residents of South La and Osu, respectively, 11 and 10 interviews for each area. The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes on average, ranging from 10 to 50 minutes. The interviews were conducted in two phases: in-person for South La and partly for Osu; online for the rest of the Osu sample. Differences in these phases will be presented below.
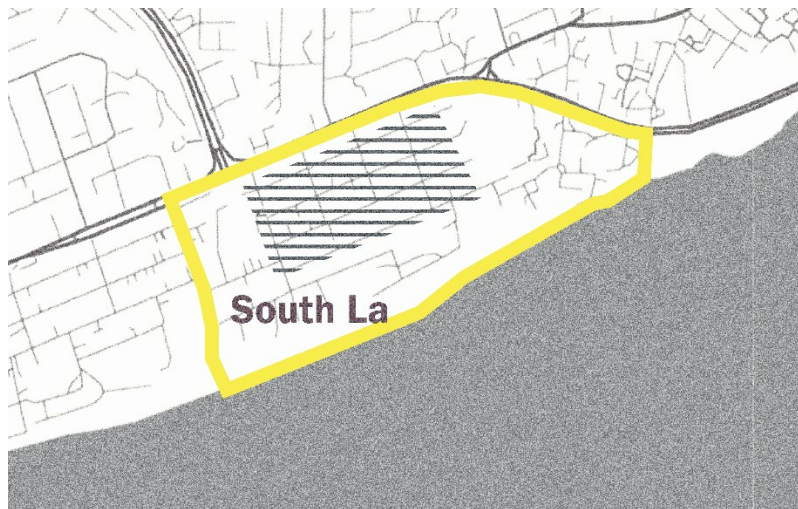

Figure 10: The research area of South La in this thesis (in yellow). The striped area indicates the streets where the interviews were conducted. (Illustration by author)

For South La, the in-person interviews took place in May 2025, where the research sample was created at random by approaching residents on the street. The locations selected were First to Fourth Otswe Street, as these were mostly residential and lively. Random sampling was selected to create an equal distribution of respondents' age and gender. Interviews were held from late morning to early afternoon, from Monday to Saturday. Sundays were avoided as most residents of South La would

be attending church. Doing random sampling at this time frame resulted in interviews with residents who were not at work during the day or who took a break from their work.
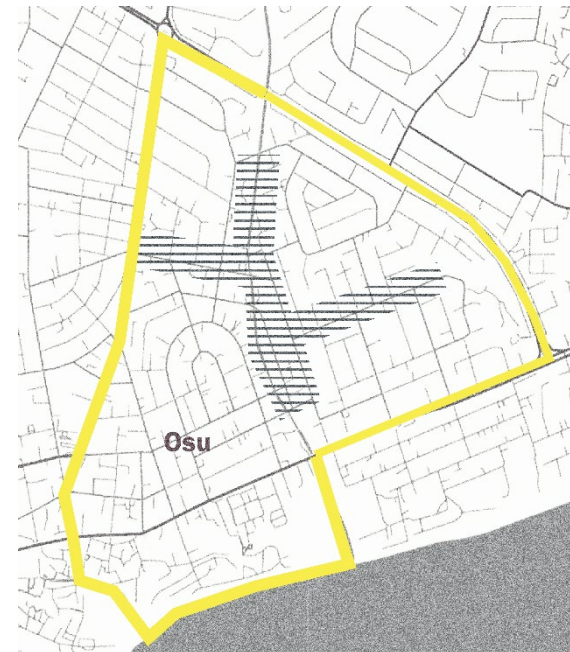
Figure 11: The research area of Osu in this thesis (in yellow). The striped area indicates the streets where the in-person interviews were conducted. (Illustration by author)

For Osu, the first 4 interviews were conducted the same way as in South La, with the goal of an equal distribution of respondents' age and sex. The locations selected were around Mission Street, Okodan Road, and Klanaa Street, as these were active areas. Due to time constraints, the interviews for Osu had to be halted and were resumed in September 2025. I did not have the means to return to Ghana; thus, these interviews were conducted online. Snowball sampling was used to

gather a sufficient number of respondents for the Osu sample on time. However, sampling this way resulted in an unequal distribution of respondents' age and sex. Also, respondents with similar architectural backgrounds were interviewed, as the first online respondent was an architect by trade. Due to Osu's popularity among non-Ghanaians, 2 out of 10 interviews were with non-Ghanaians. This distribution may also be a misrepresentation of the actual number of non-Ghanaians in Osu.

Data was collected using a recording device. In some cases, respondents did not give permission to be recorded, and notes were taken instead. Transcribing the interviews was conducted using Microsoft Word's built-in Transcription tool, in accordance with the MSc Thesis Course Guidelines (WUR, 2026). For both areas, neither many of the respondents nor I had English as our native language. Accounting for implications in the interpretation of the data, the text was transcribed as true to the source as possible. See Table 2 for the complete list of respondents.

Table 2: The list of respondents for this thesis. Respondents 12 and 19 were non-Ghanaians from the Global North, while Respondents 16, 17, and 18 had an architectural background.

No.	Location	Gender	Age	Long-term/new resident	Datatype	Length
1	South La	M	20-30	Long-term	Notes	-
2	South La	M	30-40	Long-term	Transcript	00:15:41
3	South La	M	50-60	Long-term	Notes	-
4	South La	M	30-40	Long-term	Transcript	00:25:02
5	South La	M	20-30	New	Transcript	00:16:15
6	South La	F	40-50	Long-term	Transcript	00:10:38
7	South La	F	40-50	Long-term	Transcript	00:12:57
8	South La	M	70-80	Long-term	Transcript	00:22:48
9	South La	F	30-40	New	Notes	-
10	South La	M	60-70	Long-term	Notes	-
11	South La	F	30-40	New	Transcript	00:11:21
12	Osu	M	70-80	New	Transcript	00:52:30
13	Osu	M	20-30	New	Transcript	00:29:05
14	Osu	M	30-40	Long-term	Transcript	00:35:18
15	Osu	M	60-70	Long-term	Transcript	00:32:55
16	Osu	M	30-40	New	Transcript	00:42:04
17	Osu	M	20-30	Long-term	Transcript	00:29:30
18	Osu	M	30-40	Long-term	Transcript	00:19:41
19	Osu	F	30-40	New	Transcript	00:15:15
20	Osu	M	30-40	Long-term	Transcript	00:18:20
21	Osu	F	30-40	Long-term	Transcript	00:13:27

As Table 2 shows, the majority of respondents were men, meaning a woman's perspective was inadequately represented in the SoP and attitudes towards VUAs. During the first phase, many women who were approached for an interview declined. Some indicated they were busy working, as the interviews were conducted during the day. My positionality could also influence the women's decision to decline an interview with a man. The time of day could have also resulted in a misrepresentation of the data relating to financial restraints, as the respondents interviewed were not at work during working days. There was a significant focus on economic issues with the South La sample, which could be characteristic of South La. Another possible

explanation is the inflation rate at the time. Ghana's inflation rate for May 2025 was 18,4%, compared to 9,4% in September 2025 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2025). This significantly lower rate could have influenced the different views on the economy for both samples.

Data Analysis

The data was coded and analyzed using the Atlas.ti software. To explore the SoP and attitudes towards VUAs in South La and Osu, the data were analyzed via reflexive thematic analysis (TA). TA is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In reflexive TA, themes do not emerge; rather, they provide a coherent interpretation of the data, grounded in data (Braun et al., 2019). The researcher is seen as a storyteller, actively engaged in interpreting the data through the lens of their own beliefs and positionality. To provide transparency in this thesis, the author's positionality and possible implications will be presented at the end of this chapter.

Thematic analysis was useful to explore patterns within the data that helped answer RQ1 and RQ2. To determine what EA and FD were, their definitions according to Yu (2024) have been taken and coded accordingly, meaning:

- **EA** illustrates residents' feelings toward a place's <u>cultural meanings, values, narratives, and history</u> (Yu, 2024, p. 398).
    - o *EA*, according to Yu (2024, p. 388), implicitly expresses the maintenance of place, i.e., "providing a historical continuity of the place as much as possible", meaning to preserve the local identity. In this thesis, this was operationalized by examining <u>all personal statements that reflected attachment to the place</u>. These

statements could also imply detachment from the place.
    - o *Cultural meanings, values, narratives, and history* encompass <u>mostly non-physical attributes that helped define the area</u> to which respondents refer in their statements. Examples include traditions, identities, and histories, and also some physical attributes, as they are aligned with the history of the areas. Examples include traditional architecture and the names of streets.
- **FD** refers to the perception that their place serves as a source for (non-)material resources that support individuals' <u>needs and goals</u> (Yu, 2024, p. 399).
    - o *FD,* according to Yu (2024, p. 392), "[embraces] the pragmatic functionality of place. ... [it develops] place, meaning to amass material wealth in the place". In this thesis, this was operationalized as <u>all assets that could be used by the respondents when needed</u>. Examples include income, food, housing, jobs, spaces to congregate, etc. Some (non-)material examples include trust, cooperation, and skills (Yu, 2024, p. 391).
    - o *Needs and goals* were operationalized as all respondents' statements that <u>reflect their ability to achieve something</u>. This could be both positive and negative, or a wish for the future. Also, statements that reflect contentment with the current situation were coded as FD.

For the attitudes towards VUAs, all statements regarding VUAs were coded. The coding was done semantically, capturing explicit meaning and staying close to the respondents' language (Braun et al., 2019). All three categories were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis Phases (2006).

Table 3: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. This is the validation process of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Ahmed et al. (2025) created a checklist to accompany Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, serving as a practical tool. Doing so verified the adherence to all essential phases of thematic analysis, ensuring a comprehensive and rigorous approach. This, together with Table 3, has been consulted throughout the thesis. For an overview, see Appendix B. The abovementioned steps have helped answer RQ1: *What are residents' SoP in South La and Osu, consisting of their EA and FD?* The same was done to explore residents' attitudes towards VUAs, helping to answer RQ2.

The gathered results were applied to the analytical framework of temporary use of VUAs, exploring which strategies for temporary use could be applied in South La and Osu. Statements made by the respondents corresponding with one or more of the 6 characteristics were coded accordingly. Themes were made for these codes to analyze what defines each characteristic in both Osu and South La. For the 'Regulation' characteristic, literature on existing legislation concerning temporary use and VUAs was reviewed. The Land Use and Spatial Planning Regulations (Boateng, 2019) and the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) Plan 40 have been consulted (LUSPA, n.d.). Together, these gave a brief overview of the governmental regulations that could influence the potential for temporary use of VUAs. During the discussion, these findings were juxtaposed with the literature.

Cultural Sensitivity, Reflexivity, and Positionality

The research took place in areas of Accra, Ghana. The author was new to the country and is therefore of the opinion that cultural sensitivity and his prejudices had to be addressed throughout the research. Some of the applied methodological principles already complement this sensitivity. However, to ensure even more sensitivity during the process of researching, the cultural sensitivity guidelines as presented by Lie-A-Ling et al. (2023) were implemented. This involved an iterative process. The guidelines can be found in Appendix C. For the writing of this thesis, Olmos Vega's (2022) practical guide to reflexivity was incorporated. Each chapter includes extra mentions of the author's own reflexivity and offers a more transparent view of how the data was collected and presented. The author of this thesis is a young Dutchman, part of the African Diaspora. Considering this positionality, the data collected could be influenced by differences in age, sex, and ethnicity between the author and the respondents. A Eurocentric view on urban areas could also influence the interviews conducted, the data analyzed, and the findings presented. The discussion chapter will present possible implications due to the author's positionality regarding the validity of this thesis.

RESULTS

The results are divided into three sections, following the order of the research questions (RQ) of this thesis. First, both research areas will be presented, followed by the findings of both their SoP, answering RQ1. Second, both areas' attitudes towards VUAs are presented, corresponding with RQ2. Finally, the findings for the potential for the temporary use of VUAs in both areas are presented, for the main RQ. Quotes from interview participants will be shown with the abbreviated *"R[number]"*, i.e., *"R1"* for Respondent 1, etc.

South La

South La, South Labadi, or the South La Estates is a neighborhood in the south of Accra, part of the La Dade-Kotopon Municipal Assembly (LaDMA) district (LaDMA, n.d.). Its borders are La Road in the North that runs towards the East, separating South La from La (Labadi), where it got part of its name from. On the south side, it borders the Gulf of Guinea, where its border runs West until La Road turns into 28th February Road, and Osu begins. The neighborhood was partially built by Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah, to house the victims of an earthquake that occurred in neighboring La *(R8)*.

The area is mainly home to families, with people belonging to different tribes, like Ga, Ewe's, and Ashanti *(R1)*. There are also some people from other African countries, like Nigeria *(R5)*. The layout of this area is characterized by streets that run parallel to La Road in the north, named First, Second, Third, and Fourth Street *(R1)*. Originally home to single-family houses only, in recent years, more high-rise buildings have been built *(R1)*. The area is home to a hospital, which is being rebuilt. Next to some amenities like small shops and bars, the area is mostly known for its beach clubs along the shore.

Osu

Osu is a commercial and residential neighborhood in central Accra, part of the Korle-Klottey Municipal District (KoKMA, n.d.). The border is defined by main roads separating Osu from neighboring Cantoments, by Ring Road East, and North Ridge, by Oxford Street. Osu also borders South La and the Gulf of Guinea in the South, where Osu Castle is situated *(R15)*. A former colonial city, the area is still home to many older colonial houses. Due to this colonial character, the streetscape is not a perfect grid like South La, but more sporadic *(R17)*. Osu has always been the main commercial hub of Ghana, with a lot of enterprises setting up shops on Oxford Street. This reputation has resulted in a mix of Ghanaians and foreigners settling in Osu. Next to a commercial hub, Osu is also known for its nightlife.

Sense of Place (SoP)

Following Yu's model for SoP (2024), SoP has two components: EA and FD. The findings of both the EA and FD will be presented. This will be done side-by-side, giving an adequate comparison of the SoP in South La and Osu. This section will conclude with a summary of these findings, linking back to RQ1: *What is residents' SoP in South La and Osu, consisting of their EA and FD?*

Emotional Attachment (EA) South La

For the research area of South La, three EA themes were identified. Firstly, respondents expressed a sense of **Pride** of living in this area. As South La is at the coast, its proximity to the beach is a source of pride for respondents, as one said: *"We are proud of that, because [we] are near the sea. ... A lot of people love to be [here], because of the sea"* *(R8)*. Many respondents experienced living in South La as unique, stating that: *"I do not like any neighborhood apart from South La, I prefer*

this place" (R6). This sense of pride illustrates a positive emotional attachment respondents have with living in South La.

The second theme developed was **Tight-Knit**. Tight-knit in the sense that the respondents, whose families settled in South La decades ago, value their friendship amongst each other. According to one respondent, they *"care for each other, we are like a family. When [something] happens to you, it happens to me. ... We are bonded together" (R8)*. This togetherness is reflected in the way respondents gather for social events. Like for Homowo, a Ga Festival where *"a lot of people go to La, the other side of the road, ... That is what we do as a community" (R1)*. Street parties are organized frequently, as one respondent said that *"one week ago we did [one] because we are like family" (R2)*. However, because of this bond, long-term residents tend to be less familiar with newer residents moving in. As Respondent 10 expressed that *"back in the day, everyone was friendly; now there are people who are not from here"*, indicating that, nowadays, new residents made the place less friendly. Although some respondents greeted newer residents to *"get familiar with each other, [because they] are a member of the area" (R4)*, others were nostalgic about the past as *"it was nice because everybody knew everybody [in] those days"(R2)*. Some newer residents had a hard time adjusting to life in South La:

R5: "The beginning was not easy, it was very tough for me. But [as] time goes on, you get used to the system over here. Now I have picked it up, …"

Interviewer: "Why was it hard in the beginning?"

R5: When I was new here. I did not grow up here, I grew up in Labone, officially.

Respondent 5 expressed a hard time adjusting to South La because he was new. Long-term residents tend to socialize with other long-term residents, creating boundaries for new residents.

Lastly, South La is described as a **Calm** place. Respondents describe South La as peaceful, as *"there are no burglars here and no fighting; it is not a ghetto" (R10)*. Many long-term residents express that the area has become calmer than during their childhoods due to global changes, because *"now everybody is on their phones in their rooms. So social gathering here is a bit on the low" (R4)*. But also due to more local changes, like the rebuilding of the General Hospital, which started in 2020. According to one respondent, *"you do not see people like before. Before, the hospital was active, and [a] whole lot of people [visited]" (R11)*. The Calm theme reflects both a positive attachment, as respondents experience South La as a peaceful area to live in, and a negative attachment, as the area has become quiet.

Emotional Attachment (EA) Osu

For the research area of Osu, three EA themes were identified, the first being the **Ga Community.** Osu is traditionally a Ga community, and the identity of this tribe is noticeable in the descriptions respondents gave of Osu. The most significant reference was to the Homowo celebrations, as *"that is our festival. ... So that is one unique thing that happens in Osu that unites all of us" (R20)*. The Ga identity is also clear in that newer (non-Ga) residents make extra efforts to stay in touch with "the locals": *"I think there is still a sense of appreciation for like the community and what it is. A lot of the friends that I know that live here, they still buy from the local markets" (R13)*. Newer residents sometimes overlook the Ga chieftaincy. Some Ga respondents *"feel like the foreigners should start seeing the traditional leaders. If they have any advanced ideas to make that traditional communication and*

togetherness become a very big whole thing, that will be so beautiful" *(R14)*. The Ga Community is therefore seen as an essential part of what Osu is, in its celebrations, residents, and the importance of the traditional leadership.

The second EA theme is **Vibrant Mix**. Vibrant in the sense that Osu has built a reputation as the place to be over the years, because *"mention Osu, somebody in Tamale, Bolgatanga, whatever, knows Osu" (R15)*. This reputation has made Osu popular, encouraging many to move there. According to Respondent 20: *"Everybody [is] trying to catch a piece of the energy or vibe in Osu"*. This resulted in Osu becoming an area with people from various tribes and of different nationalities. Some respondents say this mix goes well because *"people [in Osu] love foreigners. … We want to welcome them in our community" (R14)*. This mix is also represented in the vibrancy of Osu, as *"there are places that are very quiet and places that are also, like, noisy" (R21)*. The vibrant mix resembles the diverse group of people who have been drawn to settling in Osu. People were drawn to the vibrancy of the area, but the area is also a mix due to its quieter parts.

The third EA theme is **Comfortable Home**, as both long-term and newer residents feel at home in Osu. According to Respondent 15, *"Osu has given me life … it has made me who I am."* Also, respondents originally not from Osu would call it their home. They expressed it as their favorite place to be, and fell in love with the place after first experiencing it:

"Osu is home. I am not from Accra, though, but Osu has always been home for me. I will call Osu home." (R18)

The mix present in Osu makes "[*it*] *not like super upscale, that is out of touch. And it is not super local, that it is difficult to settle for a foreigner, if you get what I mean?" (R13)*. Respondents experience an overall comfort with living in Osu, resulting in the feeling of being at home for both long-term and newer residents.

For South La's EA, respondents expressed a sense of pride for the area, mostly due to its proximity to the beach. It is a calm area where long-term residents feel like family. However, this tight-knit character also forms a boundary for newer residents, as some respondents experienced difficulty settling in. The calmness of the area is also viewed negatively, as there are fewer people than in the past. Juxtaposed to Osu's EA, Osu's identity is partially formed by the Ga community. Next to Ga's, there is a mix of people from various tribes and nationalities. In this vibrancy, Osu is busy, although calmer parts, like in South La, are present in Osu. Where some newer residents might have a hard time adjusting in South La, in Osu, both long-term and new residents feel at home.

Functional Dependence (FD) South La

For South La's FD, three themes were developed. To start, respondents expressed that South La is in the process of **Redevelopment.** Because of its location, South La is referred to by some as *"the center. … This is the middle of everywhere you wanna go [to], it is easy to move" (R2)*. The accessibility and proximity to the beach have made South La a prime area to invest in, and thus, *"a lot of development is taking place, massive buildings are being built" (R3)*. Respondents inherited their family houses and participated in the development process, like Respondent 8: "*Like my house, because I have a lot of land in the front and back, I developed it into a guesthouse. … I rent it out. Some will stay for a week, a month, even for a year"*. This generates income for them, resulting in some *"people moving into new houses outside of this neighborhood" (R3)*. Respondent 10 noticed that "*the kids do not want to live here anymore, so they sell it. Most of the kids live in the US or in*

Europe". This means that people could benefit from the redevelopment interest in South La.

Lack of Public Services is another theme that was developed, and entails services that should benefit the entire community. Some respondents wished *"the government will bring some trucks that [would] pick up those [bins] or put them at vantage points" (R6)*, while others wished there would be more *"light on the street, ..., the street will be more beautiful in the night" (R7)*. The number of facilities for people to gather is limited, as redevelopment has removed some of these facilities. According to Respondent 3: *"There was a soccer pitch on this street, but now they have built a family house here"*. As a result, people sometimes gather on the streets for events and parties. Some respondents want *"people to stop having programs on the streets, [because] for those [events], they block the street"(R4)*. Additionally, there is no *"organization or group where we can collectively come [and] think about the future of this place" (R8)*. There used to be such an organization, but *"when the people from the organization got the money to do things, they spent it on other things. There was a lack of responsibility" (R10)*. Some respondents are therefore skeptical about the government providing them with adequate services and facilities, as could be illustrated from the rebuilding of the General Hospital:

R11: "The [redevelopment] is very huge for these few people. [The government] should bring in more people. Not a few people like this."

Interviewer: "Did [the government] promise that they should be finished before a certain date?

R11: They even promised us to finish it in two years, and two years have passed and come. So right now we do not even know when they are going to finish, we heard that there is no money to finish it here."

This illustrates the lack of trust residents have in good public services for South La. This lack of trust is related to previous mismanagement and current insufficient services. This is reflected in the lack of public services, as described in this theme.

Lastly, the theme of **Economic Downturn** was developed as *"things were fine and [now] the global economy has changed, things are a little bit difficult" (R8)*. These global changes have resulted in local changes for the respondents of South La, where some had to adapt to generate enough income. As Respondent 6 puts it: "*I have to do other things, because I was not only selling [this]. At first, I was selling one [thing]. ... But now, because things have changed, I have to add other things so that the profits will be more*". The proximity to the beach and the investment interest have made it *"expensive to maintain houses around here, because of the beach" (R4)*. The area has become quieter after the General Hospital closed down, resulting in some respondents losing their clients:

"Nowadays, it is not easy for a businessperson like me. ... Because people used to come here, we had a whole lot of [medical] treatment that [happened] here. So people come from far places, and then we get business to do with them; some buy, some do their hair." (R11)

The changing global economy and recent redevelopment projects have changed the ease with which some people can support themselves financially. Maintaining houses and generating income is more difficult.

Functional Dependence (FD) Osu

Three themes were developed for the FD of Osu. The first being **Hotspot**, also reflected in the Vibrant Mix mentioned in EA. Osu is the commercial hub of Accra, with Oxford Street being its main artery, which *"is busy and always [active] late at night. Oxford Street never sleeps" (R17)*. There are numerous restaurants, pubs, nightclubs, and shops where people from all over Accra come to Osu. As respondent 18 illustrates: *"You could live in Osu all your life without having to go anywhere. So Osu is the center of everything"*. Osu is unique in that it is known as one of the few areas where *"you would find at night, sex workers on the street" (R17)*. Another uniqueness to Osu is that *"a lot of queer-friendly events happen here, and I believe it only happens in Osu" (R13)*. This uniqueness also adds to Osu being a hotspot, attracting people from all walks of life. Crime is regarded as very low in Osu, as *"a foreigner can walk as late as 1 am, 2 am, [with] no issue" (R14)*. Respondent 19 states that *"I feel never unsafe being here, even as a woman. There is a lot of like, great social control around the place where I live"*. Due to this and its proximity to other commercial districts and the beach, redevelopment has resulted in *"new buildings and businesses springing up here" (R20)*. Similar to South La, some long-term residents in Osu have *"repurposed their homes to be able to make more money from renting out their structures to visitors" (R18)*.

The second theme is **Competition**, as the popularity of Osu has resulted in respondents experiencing competition with others, internally and externally. Long-term residents wish that new businesses would *"help the community here in Osu" (R14)*. Employment by these new companies is not always given to long-term residents:

R20: "Corporate social responsibility is not a responsibility here. The companies do not give back."

Interviewer: "So if there is a business in Osu, they should give back to the community?"

R20: "Yes, but they do not."

Interviewer: "So that is something that you also hope companies will do."

R20: Yeah, exactly. Give back to the community and give priority employment to indigenous that are qualified for the job."

This competition is also reflected in the purchasing power of newer residents, as they *"would not buy from the local markets in Osu, they would buy from ShopRite [supermarket chain] and then eat in the expensive restaurants" (R13)*. Some newer residents are aware of this competition as they are *"employing locals here, and there is a mutual benefit" (R12),* or see that "*there is a lot of houses being charged in dollars, which is massively problematic"* (R19). The competition is also a result of *"a general redistribution of interest. ... As to where people believe the market is going to grow" (R16)*. Osu is not unique anymore, as "*now there are so many spots in Accra" (R17)*. Those up-and-coming spots are attracting investments away from Osu. Because of this, some respondents express the feeling that *"everything is just stagnant" (R14)*. Due to development interests, long-term residents feel competition in

employment and rising prices. Competition is also occurring in that the investment interest is shifting to other areas in Accra.

Figure 13: An apartment for sale in Osu. (Photograph by author)

The last theme developed was **Improper Planning**, as due to inadequate urban planning, expressed by respondents, problems have been occurring in Osu. The traffic congestion is a problem as some say *"it is clear there is no plan to tackle [the] traffic situation" (R18)*; the open drainage is poorly designed, as people could be "*falling into a ditch. ... and also [the drainages] get clogged" (R12)*, and walkability in the area is *"very close and tight, but it is also because things have been building up over the years" (R19)*. Some respondents are vocal about the lack of proper government, saying the *"oversight is very poor, the government is not doing enough at all. That is how it has always been, sadly" (R18)*. While others see that the private development in Osu has caused some of these planning problems: *"There is a lot of private ownership. And then there is no accountability if you do not do what you are supposed*

to do. Everything is just sporadic" (R17). The general tendency of the respondents is that planning is left for the municipality to fix, as *"you hardly have locals influencing much" (R18)*. Some newer residents have started to try to fix problems by themselves, although they say this is not always appreciated by the municipality:

"You do not want to get involved in municipal jobs that the government should be doing, because they do not thank you. There will be jealousies, and they want to blame you then for the mess that they have not cleaned up." (R12)

The quote illustrates that some respondents view that the improper urban planning in Osu is caused by the government providing inadequate services. Improper planning also reflects how sporadic private development has resulted in planning issues for Osu. However, one could argue that viewing these services as inadequate comes from a Eurocentric view on urban life, as Respondent 12 continues:

"There are these open gutters. ... So I put these boards down, and then I got the idea of putting pot plants. So I made lots of pot plants here. ... Then the city came to me, and they said: 'You cannot do this. What are you doing? You are beautifying *this. You are making it your area now. It is not your area!" (R12)*

This quote illustrates a conflict between the respondent and the municipality. The respondent believed he was improving the area (i.e., beautifying) by taking action that was illegitimate in the eyes of the municipality. It was examples like these, corresponding with dissatisfaction with the municipality, that led to the development of the Improper Planning theme.

For South La's FD, respondents are experiencing recent redevelopment interest in their area, with some benefiting from this. For other respondents, it is harder to get by financially due to changes on global and local levels. Some adjusted their work to generate more income. Public services were not perceived as adequately provided, leaving some respondents skeptical. Compared to South La's FD, Osu is seen as a hotspot for people, attracting redevelopment for years. However, due to rising prices and shifting investment interests, competition has been experienced by some respondents. Residents in Osu, like in South La, also experienced improper planning, but respondents were more vocal about blaming the government. However, some also acknowledged that private development caused some of the planning issues.

Attitudes towards VUAs

The themes identified for the attitudes towards VUAs will be presented below. First, the findings for South La will be given, followed by Osu. This section will conclude with a summary of these findings, comparing the attitudes, linking back to RQ2: *What are residents' attitudes towards VUAs?*

South La

The VUAs identified in South La fell into the following categories: deteriorated houses, empty land plots, and unfinished structures. The deteriorated houses and empty land plots are a result of the inheritance of the property. South La was built as a family estate, filled with wooden structures (R1). These wooden structures started deteriorating over time if the family members stopped maintaining the houses. Some inherited the houses, and are in legal battle about ownership or proposals for the property. The same goes for the empty plots of land. The unfinished structures are a result of stalled development, either

due to litigation or financial issues. These structures are either former family houses that started renovation or entirely new projects near the coast, like the stalled construction of a beach club. See Figure 14 for the identified VUAs in South La.
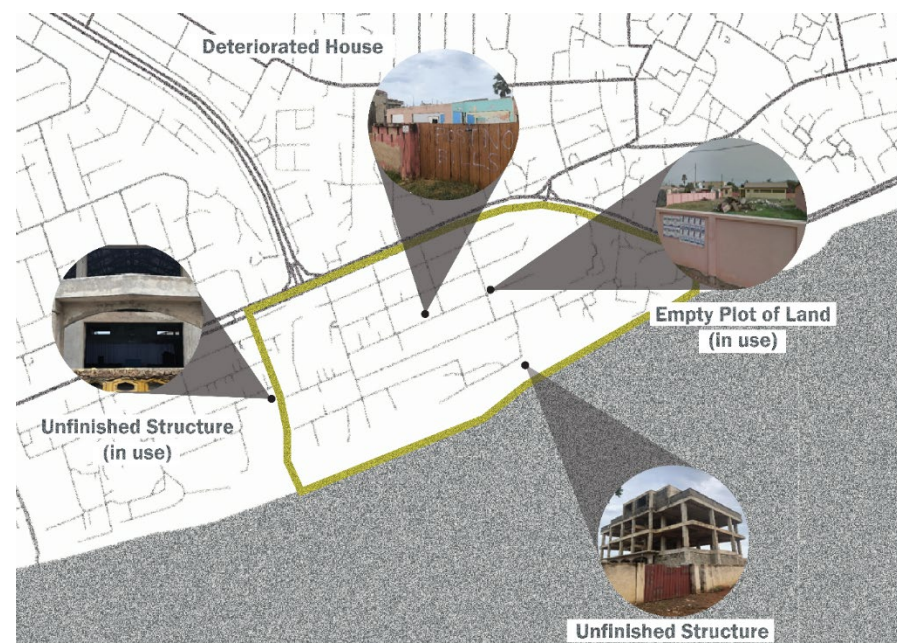
Figure 14: The types of VUAs in South La identified during this thesis: Unfinished Structures, In-use empty plots of land, Deteriorated houses, and In-use Unfinished Structures. (Illustration by author)

Two themes for attitudes towards VUAs were identified. The first being **Private Issue**, as respondents felt they had no say in the occurrence of VUAs. Seeing as *"everything here is owned by someone" (R3)*, in their eyes, *"you do not have any control over it, it is a private issue of the owner" (R10)*. Most respondents desired the VUAs to be completed as

intended and were indifferent to their occurrence. According to Respondent 2, the owners *"are building it, they will finish it. It does not bother us"*. Others state that they are not the owner, so it is not up to them to decide:

Interviewer: "Have you seen people reuse [VUAs] like that?"

R7: "No. If something does not belong to you, you do not have any authority to start doing anything on it. ... We go to the right channel, before the person can even go ahead."

The quote illustrates the private ownership of VUAs in South La. This ownership is a result of the inheritance of long-term residents. Seeing the tight-knit theme of South La, long-term residents protect each other's property, which is also the case for VUAs:

"If someone sees you at a [VUA], because we know each other around, we know their owners, somehow we will call the owner and tell them straight away: 'I have seen someone in your building, there is no reason for him to be there. Let's find a way of getting him out." (R4)

The private ownership of the VUAs is thus safeguarded by other residents, because of the strong community in South La. Overall, respondents see VUAs as something private.

The second theme is **Constraints**, as constraints to complete the VUAs have caused negative externalities for the surroundings. Respondents argue that VUAs attract wildlife and squatters, making *"the building not look very attractive" (R5)*. Sometimes waste is being dumped at VUAs. According to Respondent 6: *"If somebody has some stones that she does not want, because this place is empty, they just dump them there"*. The presence of VUAs is also a reminder of the housing shortage for some:

" So I feel so bad seeing [VUAs] like that. ... At least I have somewhere, where I put my head at night. But some people are out there. They have no rest, [they] sleep along the road." (R11)

VUAs are also seen as a wasted potential for some, making them *"wish it belonged to me so that I can do something on it and make money out of it" (R7)*. Some respondents see VUAs as a waste of money, as a completed project would generate income. 7 out of 11 respondents see a lack of funding as the cause for VUAs. Another 6 out of 11 Respondents suggest that owners should sell their property, and some suggest to *"look for a partnership if they do not have the finances" (R5)*. The financial struggles are also illustrated by the following:

R2: "Then they will sell [the VUA]. ... For the unfinished buildings, it is hard, you need money."

Interviewer: "Yeah, that is true. They are just waiting for money there, aren't they?"

R2: "Do you not have clients?"

Interviewer: "Clients?"

R2: "I need someone who wants to complete my building for me. Maybe you have some clients, agents who [are] interested in investing."

The excerpt above showcases that the financial constraints experienced by R2 prompt him to seek investors for his property.

Osu

Osu follows a similar VUAs categorization as South La: deteriorated houses, empty plots of land, and unfinished structures. The main difference is that the deteriorated houses are colonial, some over 100 years old, meaning the area has been populated for longer than South La *(R17)*. Because the area has been built up for longer, colonial houses are more prevalent than unfinished structures. Both VUAs are caused by litigation issues or a lack of funding. See Figure 15 for the identified VUAs in Osu.
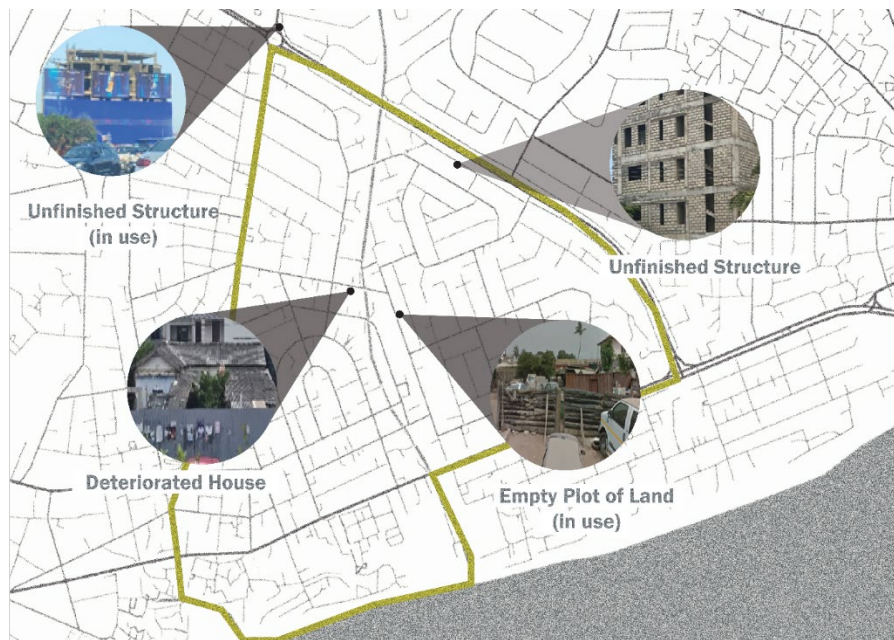

Figure 15: The types of VUAs in Osu identified during this thesis: Unfinished Structures, In-use empty plots of land, Deteriorated houses, and In-use Unfinished Structures. (Illustration by author)

Three themes were developed for the attitudes towards VUAs among respondents from Osu. The first is similar to South La, as respondents see VUAs as a **Private Issue**. These privately owned properties get stalled *"because you have feuds between siblings and family members" (R15)*. Respondents expressed that they hardly think of VUAs, because that is *"the way cities exist here, they are just constantly in the process of developing" (R12)*. It is seen as private property, where the owner decides what to do with it. According to Respondent 13: *"I never think of what could be done with VUAs, because it is someone's property. I never consume it as public property."*

Another theme that was developed was the attitude to see VUAs as an **Untapped Potential**. Some respondents wonder if the projects are going to be completed. Completing it has the potential to generate extra income for the community. Leaving them in the current state makes *"you wonder what they could be used for. It does not make the city, like the whole skyline, look attractive" (R17)*. Some respondents even came up with possible uses for the VUAs. Such as for spaces to congregate or art exhibitions, *"just more investment in that instead of taking [VUAs] down and just building something ugly new" (R19)*. Respondents would like to see VUAs either completed as intended or used creatively, but they also realize that *"they do not have the funds to complete it, because certain things in Osu are very expensive" (R18)*. Untapped Potential means that the benefits for the owner and the community at large are unused, due to the inability to complete or repurpose.

As for the last theme that was developed, respondents stated that there are Safety Issues when it comes to VUAs. Not only because of the construction of the structure itself, as "you probably see weak-looking

scaffolding, and probably exposed iron rods" (R18). Also, the presence of squatters, which was viewed negatively by some respondents:

"And it was just full of stuff, and it was actually really disgusting because [the squatters] were using [the VUA] as a toilet, and you could smell it from our place. So, I kept asking them not to do that." (R12)

Because of these concerns, some state that the plans for VUAs are *"non-negotiable: demolition" (R18)*, while others think the government should assess the situation and make a decision on what to do with the structure, to *"rebuild it and maybe give it out for people to rent or for lease" (R21)*. Some expressed that construction in Osu, and Ghana in general, is not done properly, which might result in VUAs being unsuitable for any usage or completion:

"Unfinished buildings come out when people do not plan, and most of the time, people hardly do that from this side of the world." (R17)

If planning were done properly, VUAs would be structurally sound to complete or repurpose temporarily. Resulting in fewer safety issues for the structure, and to the community to an extent.

Comparing South La and Osu

The attitudes towards VUAs of both areas are similar in some ways. This is clear from the Private Issue theme, present in both areas. VUAs are the result of privately owned projects that are stalled (for financial or legal reasons). It leaves respondents indifferent to their occurrence; they have no say in the matter. Because of the close bonds between residents in South La, respondents mentioned that private property is actively protected by residents there.

Similarly, the constraint theme and untapped potential theme also resemble each other. In South La, VUAs are seen as constraining the owner, especially considering the funds VUAs could generate. In Osu, VUAs are seen more as untapped potential, not only financially but also in terms of benefits for the community.

Additionally, respondents in Osu were concerned about the safety issues that could arise from repurposing or completing VUAs. These concerns were based on their view that, generally, proper planning and safety are not a top priority for many Ghanaians. Due to this experience, they were not optimistic about the ability to reuse VUAs.

Potential for temporary use of VUAs

The potential for temporary urbanism will be presented using this thesis's conceptual framework. The SoP and attitudes towards VUAs have provided insight into the 6 characteristics of this framework. First, the analysis of South La will be given, followed by Osu. Each section starts with a visual that summarizes the potential temporary urbanism of each area. See Figure 16 for South La below.
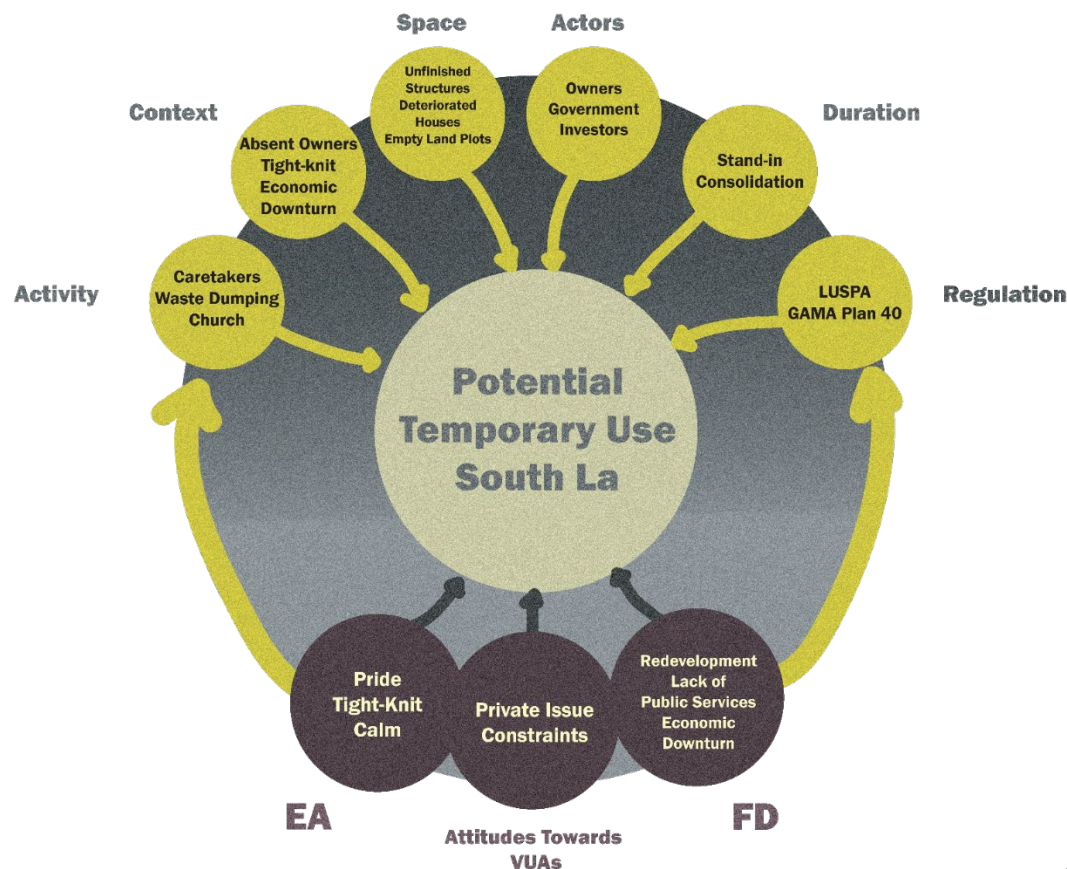
South La

Activity

The respondents were not as familiar with temporary uses of VUAs in South La as the following excerpt illustrates:

Interviewer: "If the owner does not do anything, have you seen people use [VUAs]?"

R10: "No, it just stays like that."

However, some respondents did notice some temporary uses of VUAs. When a project gets stalled, a caretaker is hired, *"who is there to watch over the house for you" (R4)*. Sometimes the temporary use is used to complete the project, like for a church in the area:

"Churches, they take long [time] to build, they have to take offerings, after offerings. So the offerings are what they used to build the church. This one, I am sure, by the next 10 years they will be finished." (R2)

Already using the structure of the building as a church is generating income to complete the project. A final temporary use is an empty plot of land that/s being used as a dumping ground for waste, as proper waste disposal in the area is missing:

"At first, there were some containers around, you can see a bin, or you can put something [in it]. ... But now it is no more. Everybody has it inside. So when the person is passing, and then he has something and just throws it on the floor." (R6)

Figure 16 (Left): The analysis for the potential for temporary urbanism in South La. The black arrows indicate the indirect connection between SoP and this potential, while the yellow arrows indicate direct connections between SoP and the potential for temporary use of VUAs. (Illustration by author)

The lack of garbage bins in the area has made the VUA an alternative space to dump waste. The interviews gave insights into community needs for South La that can be translated into potential future use of VUAs. These needs are depicted in Table 4, accompanied by literature on potential uses.

Table 4: South La's community needs translated into potential temporary uses.

Community Need	Excerpt	Potential temporary use
Trash accumulation in the area	*"Pure water [bottles], rubbish everywhere. But at first it was not so. So that is what I want to change" (R6).*	Recycling cooperatives (Putra & Tewdwr-Jones, 2026); Community composting (Baldauf et al., 2025)
Improved street lighting	*"The street lights keep going on and off in the night" (R7).*	Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (De Biasi, 2017); Temporary lighting (Rossi et al., 2015).
No spaces to congregate for (young) people	*"So I think we need recreational centers where the kids will come and play" (R4).*	Adaptive reuse for social spaces (Stanganelli et al., 2023)
Need for housing	*"The houses that there are no people in it, I wish I could have a place like it" (R11).*	Adaptive reuse for housing (Madeddu & Clifford, 2023)

Context

As South La's SoP indicated previously, recent redevelopment interest has prompted many property owners to construct apartments on their properties. Due to the financial or legal constraints experienced by some owners, VUAs could occur. For some respondents, these VUAs give the impression that they are abandoned as *"you do not see the owner, but there are owners for it" (R11)*. This impression of abandonment is the result of some owners having moved abroad:

"The owner of this one, the parents are gone. The son is living in America or Britain. And he just built [a new apartment]. When you see things like that, all the children or grandchildren are living abroad." (R8)

The perceived abandonment of VUAs could signal to temporary users that there are spaces available for temporary usage. However, in part due to the tight-knit character of South La, respondents tend to protect private properties. Some respondents state that temporary users, whom they refer to as squatters, are not welcome in South La:

Interviewer: "Have you seen people using [VUAs] or reusing them for something else? When it is not being redeveloped?"

R4: "Oh no."

Interviewer: "They just stay empty?"

R4: Yeah, it is not like you see, like squatters. Because of the neighborhood, we do not accept people like that. ... Probably, they might be thieves, people with other ulterior motives. So, for our own security, we do not entertain squatters around."

The continuing economic downturn in the area could, however, potentially encourage temporary uses of VUAs. From the Economic Downturn theme, some respondents have stated the necessity to adapt their work to generate more income. Other respondents expressed their desire to own VUAs and make better use of them, as that would also generate more income for them. It showcases the current economic environment of respondents in South La, which could potentially enable some to turn to the informal sector, which is often carried out in VUAs.

Space

The VUAs that are being temporarily used include empty plots of land (as a dumping ground), and unfinished projects (church and caretakers). More spaces are available as *"we have an abandoned land at the end of this particular [street]. And then another one too is there" (R7)*. The deteriorated houses listed at the beginning of this chapter could potentially also be temporarily used.

Actors

The owners are key to temporary urbanism in two ways. For one, VUAs occur because of financial constraints of the owners or because of litigation. Second, because of the private ownership of VUAs, the owners decide what kind of temporary use would be allowed on the property, as *"if [VUAs] do not belong to you, you cannot just go there" (R7)*. The government is also an influential actor, as *"there are things that you want to do, but you need the assembly to be a part [of it]. Then you need a permit" (R4)*. If a permit is not issued, the government could halt construction, as illustrated by the graffiti on Figure 17.

Figure 17: Graffiti on the wall in South La reading: "Stop work & produce permit by LaDMA 15-6-" (Author, 2025). Regulations regarding construction issued by LaDMA were presented in this manner. (Photograph by author)

The halting of construction can give rise to VUAs. Another actor mentioned is investors, *"because of the lack of money, [the owners] have to look for financing or an investor. Someone who comes to invest in a building and finishes the building for you" (R5)*. This illustrates the role investors play in the completion of VUAs and thus the occurrence of VUAs.

Duration

The current temporary uses are most likely Stand-In and Consolidation. With Stand-In, the temporary use has no lasting effect on the space and fills in the gap between the last and next use. This is the case with the caretakers, who guard the property until the project is completed. And with the waste dumping, it is highly unlikely that the owners would allow their property to stay a dumping ground. The church is an example of Consolidation, where the former temporary use becomes established and turns into long-term use. The church is already temporarily in-use, while the structure is being completed.

Regulation

The government, one of the actors in South La, has regulations in place to restrict or incentivize VUAs and their usage, as showcased by Figure 17. Table 5 showcases the regulations in place for South La.

Regulation	Restriction or Incentive	Details	Source
Abatement of blight	Restriction	35. (1) District Assemblies may acquire, hold, clear, repair, manage or dispose of any blighted property. ...	(Boateng, 2019)
Planning Permit	Restriction	44. (1) Physical developments that require a planning permit include the following: (a) temporary structure; (b) temporary activities that require the use of public space; ... (d) change of use; ...	(Boateng, 2019)
Development Permit	Restriction	45. (1) A physical development that requires a development permit Includes: ... (b) the making of a structural alteration or transformation, or a renovation to a building; ... (f) regularization of existing structures; and (g) redevelopment.	(Boateng, 2019)

Regulation	Restriction or Incentive	Details	Source
Promote infill or productive use of vacant and underused plots and reduce blight and stagnation	Incentive	... 1.4b Encourage short-, medium-, and long-term uses for vacant plots. ... 1.4d Focus vacant/underused plot redevelopment within centers, and outside centers, consider temporary or transitional land uses for vacant plots	(LUSPA, n.d.)
Support economic competitiveness by improving quality of life in neighborhoods	Incentive	... 7.4j Promote the use of vacant land for urban agriculture, tree farming, habitat restoration, or other uses that would create jobs, improve neighborhood quality-of-life, and become 'greener'. ...	(LUSPA, n.d.)
Maximize local job creation and household earnings through job retention, business attraction and business expansion	Incentive	... 7.6i Emphasize the reuse of vacant and blighted buildings for business investment	(LUSPA, n.d.)

The data is received from the Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority (Boateng, 2019) & (LUSPA, n.d.). Only regulations tackling VUAs and the temporary use of VUAs are presented. Note that this overview is incomplete and serves merely as a depiction of possible implications or subsidies for the potential of temporary urbanism. The incentives could potentially encourage temporary use of VUAs in the future, as it is part of the 2040 vision for Ghana, while 7.4j and 7.6i encourage the permanent reuse of VUAs. Additionally, the Planning Permit could be a potential barrier for temporary uses. The Abatement of Blight is a restriction in place that could limit the number of VUAs available for temporary use. The Development Permit is a restriction that could increase the number of VUAs, as the projects could be halted by this restriction. These regulations are the same in Osu.

Osu

Activity

Respondents in Osu were familiar with temporary uses in their area. Most of these uses were carried out by informal users, seen by some respondents as squatters: *"if you leave your building unattended, you will get a lot of squatters" (R18)*. One of the empty plots of land is used as a car shop:

"Our neighbors were basically and are still squatters. This is an empty lot. This is what happens when families fight, and they cannot decide on what to do with the property ... . And one of [the squatters] there is a car mechanic." (R12).

Next to these informal uses, temporary uses in Osu are also present in the form of advertisements. An unfinished structure near Oxford Street is used as a billboard, because *"it is a very good spot for something like that" (R17)*. Similar to South La, *"when the project stops or stalls, then the owner might allow a caretaker to stay on the property" (R16)*.

Insight into Osu's needs formed the base for potential future use of VUAs. These needs are depicted in Table 6, accompanied by literature on potential uses.
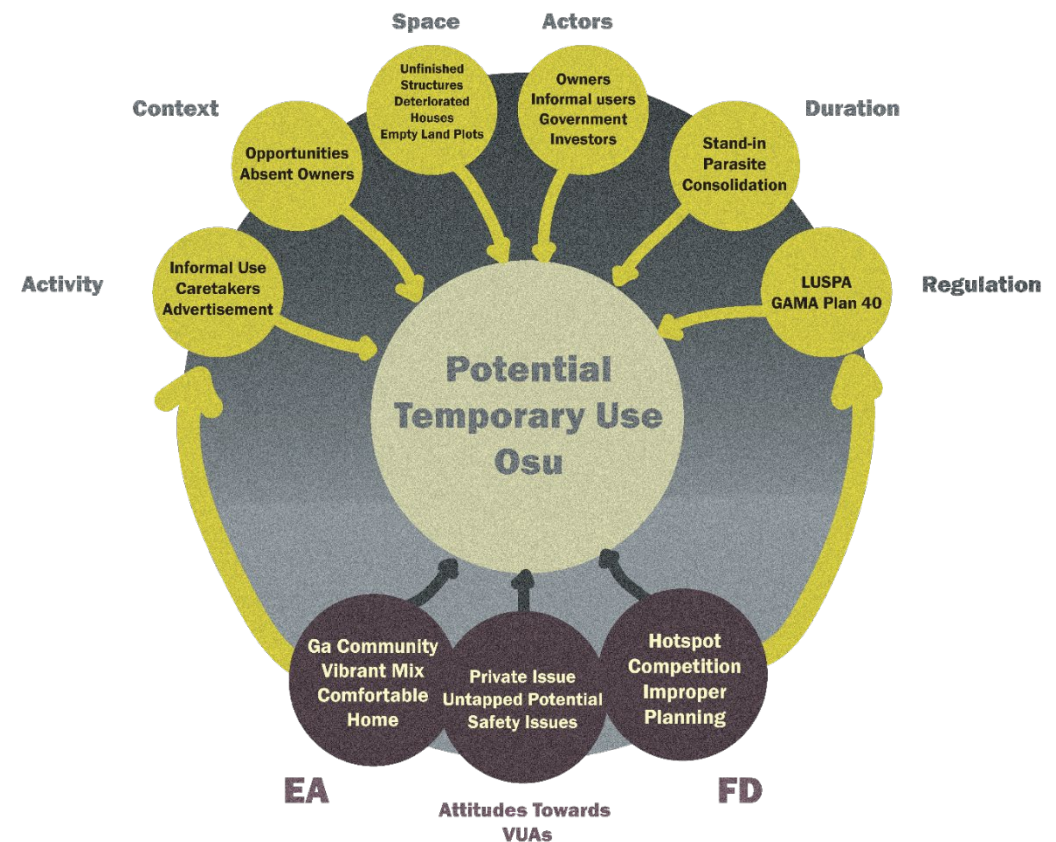

Figure 18: The analysis for the potential for temporary urbanism in Osu. The black arrows indicate the indirect connection between SoP and this potential, while the yellow arrows indicate direct connections between SoP and the potential for temporary use of VUAs. (Illustration by author)

Table 6: Osu's community needs translated into potential temporary uses.

Community Need	Excerpt	Potential temporary use
Traffic congestion	*"Traffic congestion on Oxford Street. It can get very tiring and hectic at some point" (R18).*	Transformation of spaces for future mobility (Park et al., 2023)
Trash accumulation in the drainage network	*"And they are all blocked up and people just throw their rubbish around the way" (R12).*	Recycling cooperatives (Putra & Tewdwr-Jones, 2026); Community composting (Baldauf et al., 2025)
Flooding	*"Areas flood, we had [a flood] in Circle [Oxford St. Roundabout] a few years ago" (R12).*	Urban green (Al-Betawi, 2024); Rainwater harvesting (Elder & Gerlak, 2019)
Improved walkability	*"And you could encourage more walking if you had parks to walk on by the street and things like this" (R17).*	Improved street usage (Salama et al., 2024); Pedestrianization (Yassin, 2019)
Rising rents	*"And also, the rent is rising at a very fast pace, driven by the demand"(R13)*	Adaptive reuse for housing (Madeddu & Clifford, 2023); Caretakers (Wagner & Ronden, 2026).

Context

The informal sector in Osu makes up a larger portion of the total local economy than in South La (see Table 1; Methodology). Osu's SoP indicated that the economic opportunities in the area draw people from the entire country to Osu. As Respondent 13 puts it:

"I was very conscious about the opportunity, how I could leverage where I was living to get specific clients that I was looking for. Even before moving to Osu, I would always come to Osu."

The opportunities in Osu have not only attracted some of the respondents to Osu, but also others *"trying to find a better life in Accra,*

and they might come, and there is nowhere to go. So these unfinished buildings become like a house for [them]" (R17). VUAs act as a shelter for those looking for opportunities in Osu, or they act as a workplace, as is the case for the car shop. Both uses indicate informal uses, encouraging temporary uses of VUAs.

Similar to South La, the VUAs occur as a result of redevelopment interest in Osu. The owners are not always present, as *"the owner has a place to stay, they are not frantically looking for a place to be" (R13).* Respondent 20 states that litigation could result in VUAs:

R20: "You end up going to court. Up and down, up and down. A lot of frustration. So then some [owners] give up."

Interviewer: "Some give up and then the [VUA] stays there, right?"

R20: "It stays there yeah."

This perceived abandonment has signaled to some temporary users that the VUAs could be occupied:

"At our area, you can see some guys who come and just stay in. They do not know the owner of the house because nobody stays there." (R21)

The combination of opportunities in Osu and the absence of the owners of VUAs has encouraged temporary uses of VUAs. One temporary use conducted by the owner himself is the advertisement on a VUA:

"[The owner] figures out, oh, well, I can put a big LCD screen on here. And now he is making more money off advertising on that screen than he is off renting the building." (R16)

The billboard was meant to be temporary, but now it has become the main use. The location of the structure made this use as resourceful as

it turned out to be, exemplifying the opportunities available in Osu, prompting the temporary use of VUAs.

Space

The VUAs that are being temporarily used include empty plots of land (as a car shop), and unfinished projects (billboard and caretakers). The number of unfinished structures in Osu is limited compared to other parts of Accra, because Osu was a colonial city, and *"colonial cities have a lot of old buildings ... [Osu] has always been filled" (R17)*. These colonial houses deteriorate over time, because *"they are just not being repaired or being taken care of" (R19)*. These deteriorated houses could potentially also be used for temporary use.

Actors

Again, the owners influence the occurrence of VUAs because of their inability to complete the project, and they ultimately decide what kind of temporary use would be allowed on the property. This is illustrated by Respondent 12:

"And then just suddenly, one day after the next, the owners just got the police and got [the squatters] all out, put them on the street here…. And then they said, Okay, you have got to take your cars away, and they put the date on, which was sometime in 2024, at the beginning" (R12).

The signing of the date is a reference to the government issuing a halt to the temporary use, similar to the graffiti in South La (see Figure 17). Next to halting construction, they could also halt temporary uses of VUAs. In Osu, squatting of VUAs is carried out by informal users, making them actors as well, as illustrated by the activities described earlier. Investors to kickstart halted projects are also present in Osu, with Respondent 16 being one of them:

"We struck an agreement with them in which we invest what needs to be invested in order to finish the property. And then what we do is we manage the property. We rent the property out on an 80/20 split with the owner of the property until we make our investment back." (R16)

This illustrates the role investors play in the completion of VUAs, influencing the potential for temporary urbanism in Osu.

Duration

The current temporary uses are most likely Stand-In, Parasite, and Consolidation. The caretakers, who guard the property until the project is completed, are an example of Stand-In. Similarly, the car shop occupied the empty plot of land until it was evicted. Following the eviction, the car shop acted as a Parasite, meaning the temporary use exploited the potential of the empty plot of land by operating next to it, as *"now the mechanics are working on cars outside" (R12)*. The billboard is an example of Consolidation, where the former temporary use becomes established and turns into long-term use. The billboard was meant as a boost for the original project, but it has become the main function as *"it has always been like that, that building has been uncompleted since I was a kid" (R17)*.

Regulation

The same regulation presented in Table 6 also applies to Osu, as there was no difference in regulation between the two respective municipalities of South La and Osu. However, the effectiveness of these regulations could be questioned, as is the case with the eviction of the car shop, as *"there are still people here, and it is slowly coming back again." (R12)*. This could indicate that temporary uses in Osu could prevail, despite the regulations in place.

DISCUSSION

This thesis aims to explore the conditions under which the temporary use of VUAs in South La and Osu is possible, i.e., under which such uses are socially acceptable and feasible. The results indicate that temporary uses of VUAs are highly context-dependent. South La's lack of informal uses of VUAs could partly be explained by residents' attitudes towards squatting. In contrast, the prevalence and persistence of informal uses in Osu, despite evictions, could partly be explained by the economic opportunities in Osu. Ultimately, owners have the final say in the temporary use of their properties.

However, this decision is often constrained by financial or legal considerations. These results are discussed in relation to existing literature. In addition, recommendations for future research aiding strategies on temporary use will be presented. First, an evaluation of the SoP as conducted in this thesis will be assessed, answering the sub-research questions. Both the discussions on SoP and attitudes towards VUAs will be conducted in the context of cities in the Global South.

Sense of Place

Several themes were developed in this thesis, one being the lack of public services. Research into the satisfaction with neighborhood facilities also shows a general dissatisfaction with public services as found in South La. The research was conducted in unplanned neighborhoods in Ibadjan Nigeria, while South La is a planned neighborhood (Adewale et al., 2020). Despite this difference in urban form, the overlap in dissatisfaction suggests that perceived service gaps may cut across planning status.

Research into the place attachment of residents in a historical neighborhood in Sanandaj City, Iran, shows similar dissatisfaction with public amenities, including a lack of street lighting, which was also reported in South La. In addition, residents with financial means migrated out of the neighborhood because of dilapidated buildings. A similar migration of inheritors of VUAs could also be witnessed in South La, with these former residents now residing abroad (Maghsoodi Tilaki & Farhad, 2024). This suggests that disinvestment and perceived decline may shape SoP not only through everyday experience, but also through decisions to exit.

Osu is a historic neighborhood, where the Ga identity is prominent, while the historical architecture is not referred to as significant. This is in contrast with the Aghazaman neighborhood, where the architectural significance of the historic city is emphasized in playing a key role in residents' SoP (Maghsoodi Tilaki & Farhad, 2024).

Also, the seemingly opposed Osu themes of Ga Community and Vibrant Mix were developed. On the one hand, Osu is typically Ga; on the other hand, it is a mix of all sorts of people. Two things could be true at the same time, as areas around the world with a distinct ethnic identity could change demographically and still adhere to their original identity, for example, in Harlem, New York (Rennert et al., 2025). This supports interpreting Osu's SoP as layered, simultaneously rooted in Ga identity and shaped by ongoing socio-demographic change.

Regarding the improper planning theme, such inadequate planning also occurs in other parts of Accra. According to Asafo (2024), housing designs could be compromised when there is conflict about land ownership in rapidly developing areas of Accra. At a state level, planning efforts in Accra have historically been fragmented and lagged behind the rapid urban growth (Croese et al., 2023). Another study in an informal settlement in Accra has shown that improvements to the area have failed due to insufficient funding and inadequate maintenance

(Ziorklui et al., 2024). This highlights the prevalence of a lack in urban planning found in Accra.

Osu is experiencing competition due to rising prices and shifting redevelopment. According to Gillespie (2020), Accra's inner city has not undergone urban regeneration and gentrification, as is also the case in the Global North. However, inequalities are growing due to land privatization and government opposition to the informal sector. Similar opposition occurs in Osu, with the eviction of informal users, showcasing an aspect of the present inequalities, which contributes to the 'Competition' theme.

Attitudes towards VUAs

Both South La and Osu have the Private Issue theme, meaning that the VUAs are owned by families in their area. This is in accordance with a study by Korah et al. (2020), which states that over 80% of the land in Ghana is owned by chiefs, families, and individuals. The consultation and engagement of the chiefs, families, and individuals are needed to go about land acquisition. However, Twumasi et al. (2025) describe a more complex system where there is a lack of coordination between traditional rulers and the governmental agencies, leading to conflicts and improper administration.

This process can greatly delay any construction development and thus cause VUAs. It seems that VUAs are less a private issue and more the result of complex land tenure. Asafo (2024) states that temporary structures are rapidly built to secure land tenure, resulting in many uncompleted structures. In addition, the customary land tenure promotes informal land sales, which sometimes result in land alienation and halt effective land administration, resulting in litigation with state authorities (Ayambire et al., 2019). In both South La and Osu, litigation was mentioned as one of the constraints causing VUAs.

Another constraint was the lack of financial means, especially experienced in South La. According to one study in Accra, a combination of rising land values, high construction costs, and unavailable financial tools has excluded low-income households from the private real estate market (Gaisie et al., 2019). These factors could have also influenced the ability of property owners to complete their projects, illustrated in the Constraints theme. Kumar (2025) underscores this by stating that the availability of housing financing is extremely limited in Ghana. Acquiring housing requires a 50% down payment, meaning that only high-income households can finance home ownership.

The view of seeing VUAs as Untapped Potential is not isolated in Ghana. The Agbogbloshie scrapyard in Accra has been viewed as a blighted area by governmental agencies, considering redevelopment plans for the area. This view of this scrapyard is in line with the Untapped Potential theme, looking for alternative uses for the area (Sarpong et al., 2025). Additionally, research into the urban development of the Ejisu Municipality of Ghana concluded with a call to optimize unoccupied or underutilized land, seeing them as a potential to revitalize neighborhoods (Asibey et al., 2024).

Respondents in Osu were concerned about the safety of the VUAs, saying that they were probably not constructed properly. Similarly, a study into affordable housing in Nigerian informal settlements found that due to financial constraints in completing or acquiring housing, residents resort to incremental and/or make-shift housing instead. This improvised housing is characterized by the alternative use of materials, questioning the structural integrity of the buildings (Akinwande & Hui, 2024). Another study found that low-quality concrete represents a significant problem in building construction in Ghana and could therefore contribute to the common phenomenon of building collapses

(Tutu et al., 2022), attributing to the concerns for safety. Asafo (2024) states that most self-built houses are built below accepted standards due to hiring local artisans rather than experts, such as professional contractors. The studies mentioned illustrate numerous problems within the Ghanaian construction industry, validating the concerns for the safety of VUAs made by respondents.

Potential for Temporary Use

This thesis aimed to indicate the potential for temporary use of VUAs by exploring the SoP and attitudes towards VUAs. To assess this ability, the 6 characteristics for the potential for temporary use of VUAs will be discussed separately, and possible implications will be presented.

Activity

The respondents of both areas did not mention many temporary uses for VUAs. The activities mentioned in the results chapter were described by a few accounts, and some were described generally and hypothetically, like the possibility of owners employing caretakers for their buildings. This might be caused by the fact that the respondents do not really take notice of temporary uses of VUAs or VUAs in general. The phenomenon of VUAs could be seen as ordinary and does not draw much attention from respondents when describing their place or attitudes towards VUAs. The activities presented in this research could therefore be fewer than the actual kinds of activities possible.

For the uses that were mentioned, the lack of informal use in South La stands out. This could be partially explained by South La's 'Tight-knit' theme. Another explanation is the significantly smaller size of the informal sector (49,7%) in LaDMA, which could be even lower in South La, given that this statistic is an average of several neighborhoods (See Table 1, Methodology). Compare this to KoKMA, which has a

percentage of 62,2% and where respondents had noticed squatting and informal uses of VUAs in their area. A study in the temporary use of VUAs in Benin City also saw that temporary use is predominantly carried out in the informal sector (Agheyisi, 2025).

The literature often refers to these informal users as street vendors operating next to strategic spots (Dawson, 2021; Akuoko et al., 2025). However, the street vendors mentioned do not operate from VUAs as described in this thesis, but along roadsides. Caretakers are employed to safeguard residential property, and they are a common sight in areas experiencing fast development. A study in Kumasi shows that caretakers contribute to neighborhood safety and improve the aesthetics of unfinished buildings (Adu-Gyamfi, 2021).

These caretakers were employed to oversee and safeguard buildings primarily during periods of stalled construction. My findings indicate that caretakers' presence was closely tied to interruptions in the construction process rather than continuous oversight throughout development. Private residential development is occurring in both Osu and South La, which explains the occurrence of caretakers in both areas. However, their role becomes particularly noticeable during construction delays, when buildings are left unfinished.

Ameyaw et al. (2025) confirm that (financial) constraints of housebuilders in Ghana are the predominant reason for incremental housing. This incremental approach to housing often leads to stalled construction, producing vacant and unfinished areas (VUAs). Thus, the presence of caretakers can be understood as a response to the vulnerabilities created by incremental building practices.

As for the informal use of VUAs, this was primarily associated with squatting activities. Squatters operate from a need for survival, influenced by several factors such as high cost of rent, unemployment,

and poverty (Mensah et al., 2021). The opportunities present in Osu, including both available space and economic potential, may therefore have attracted informal uses of VUAs. This is reflected in the 'Competition' theme, referencing the economic hardship experienced by some in the area. Agheyisi (2025) emphasizes that economic downturn can encourage informal activities in VUAs. Given Osu's reputation as a commercial hub, such conditions likely incentivized informal economic activities, helping to explain the stronger presence of economically motivated informal uses observed there.

Context

In the previous section, it already became clear that temporary uses of VUAs in the Global South are predominantly carried out in the informal sector. In Osu, which functions as a commercial hotspot, some of these informal uses were present. One study attributes the rural-urban migration in Ghana to better chances of employment and living conditions (Ayambire et al., 2019). The economic opportunities experienced in Osu reflect these dynamics. A study into informal settlements in Accra also highlights the opportunities migrants seek in the city. According to Armah et al. (2025), 86% of the West-African migrant respondents in Accra cited that their migration was primarily work-related, with an additional 35% of the respondents hoping to experience better life conditions. Both underscore the opportunities people seek in Accra, with Osu exemplifying opportunity in this thesis.

In both areas, the VUAs appeared abandoned, as the owners were not present. In South La, it was stated that some of these owners were living abroad. According to Osman et al. (2022), Ghanaian migrants contribute to the economic livelihood of households by increasing the income of recipient family members. Their remittances help secure houses constructed incrementally over a long period of time. These constructions could give the appearance of being abandoned, as is the case in Osu and South La, thereby increasing the likelihood of occupation by temporary users. According to Wagner & Ronden (2026), remittance houses occur in all communities and countries in the Global South, but especially where there has been a significant out-migration trend for labor, and family and other social networks remain in place. These migrations are comparable to those observed in South La. The construction may be occupied by family members or caretakers, or sometimes left purposefully vacant (Wagner & Ronden, 2026). This directly links the occurrences of VUAs to the outward migration of residents, something also cited by respondents in South La.

South La also has the 'Tight-knit' theme, influencing the temporary use of VUAs. A similar tight-knit characteristic could be found in the Abese Quarter in Accra. This research indicates that communities with a sense of cohesion and cultural attachment contribute to residents' enthusiasm and support for infrastructure provision and management (Ziorklui et al., 2024). In South La, this sense of cohesion is expressed by protecting neighbors' property.

South La expressed a strong stance against squatting. The effects of residential approval on squatting in Ghana have not been explicitly researched yet. However, squatters have faced heavy opposition from the state (Gillespie, 2017). Agheyisi (2025) states that if temporary users become a neighborhood asset, it will become harder to evict them, which could be the case with the car shop in Osu. However, if the temporary use is noxious in nature, local residents could also fight back (Agheyisi, 2025). This could explain the stance of residents in South La, who, generally speaking, view squatters negatively. Another study in Accra confirms this stance, where tenants who pay rent to the landlord are still referred to as squatters by other residents and associated with precarity and illegality (Foli & Uitermark, 2024).

Space

This thesis has overlooked some common spaces for temporary use. The spaces where (informal) temporary uses are mainly carried out in Accra are along the roadside in containers, kiosks, or shacks (Dawson, 2021). These users are street vendors who often occupy strategic spots for their enterprise, like close to markets or hotels (Spire & Choplin, 2018). This is opposed to the VUAs described in this research, which consist of unfinished structures, deteriorated houses, and empty plots of land. According to Azunre et al. (2022), informal temporary uses operate predominantly from informal settlements. Both these spaces, as potential spaces, were not considered in this thesis. The main reason is that these spaces do not adhere to the definition of VUAs, as the roads and informal settlements are not considered to be vacant, as described in this thesis.

Actors

The actors in both areas were largely the same, except for the informal users in Osu. Since informal use of VUAs was present in that area, this is to be expected. Respondents in both areas identified the owners as the most important actor, relating to the 'Private Issue' theme. The owner decides whether to allow temporary use, resume construction, or evict users. According to the respondents, the government and investors are also actors, but mostly in roles that support owners, helping to complete their project or to evict squatters.

A main actor missing from these accounts is the customary landholders present in Ghanaian cities (Cobbinah et al., 2020). According to Cobbinah et al. (2020), conflicts between customary land ownership and administration can result in indeterminate boundaries, long processes of land acquisition, and weak consultation with landowners. In other words, this could result in litigation, as mentioned

by respondents. This study did not explicitly account for customary landholders as actors, despite their role in allocating land rights and legitimizing ownership. Moreover, Asafo (2024) states that most housebuilders in peri-urban Accra interact with several factors such as land sellers, municipal authorities, police, courts, and landguards, revealing a far more complex network of actors. These interactions constitute not only complex social relations but also a financial burden that limits housebuilders in completing their houses, resulting in VUAs (Asafo, 2024).

Figure 19: Property in Labone. On the right, written on the wall, it says: "KEEP OFF LA STOOL LANDS". The La stool is the customary landholder of LaDMA. (Photograph by author)

In addition, the differences between customary laws and state laws sometimes lead to ineffective evictions of informal users, as was the case for scrapworkers in Accra (Akuoko et al., 2025). Together, these findings highlight the complexity of the actors and their power, which is lacking from the data as presented in the results. The data in this thesis did not include an adequate or systematic overview of the actors involved in temporary urbanism.

Duration

The durations of temporary use as described by Oswalt et al. (2013) were used to assess the duration of the current temporary uses of VUAs. The Stand-In typology was most frequently identified, as it is generally assumed by respondents that the owners would like to complete their project at some point in the future. Similarly, the church, which was an example of a Consolidation typology, is expected to be completed as originally intended.

By contrast, the billboard in Osu was an example of a use that was meant to be temporary but became permanent. The reasons for these temporary uses were primarily to safeguard the property or to generate more income for the owner. Agheyisi (2025) also states that owners intend to use their property permanently. The available resources and the relationship between the users and the owners appear to shape the duration of the temporary use. Lindell (2019) confirms this by stating that temporary uses, especially for street vendors, are socially determined. Even when evicted from certain spaces, informal users persist due to their social network (Akuoko et al., 2025), exemplified by the car shop in Osu.

Regulation

The results highlighted several restrictions and incentives ordered by Ghana's Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority (LUSPA). The complexity surrounding land ownership raises the question of the effectiveness of these regulations. This is due to the traditional authorities' influence over land, causing, for instance, a mismatch between the formal plan and actual land uses (Ayambire et al., 2019). Nyarko et al. (2025) also found key issues with land use planning, including ineffective planning for climate change at subdistrict levels, contradictions between planning practices and legislation, and a lack of engagement by local citizens in the planning process. The latter was also found in this thesis, as respondents noticed planning was left for the government to deal with. A study of the Ho municipality in Ghana found that non-compliance with land regulation could be a result of logistical and financial constraints, lack of political will, or inadequate human resources (Asamoah et al., 2025). Kombonaah (2025) states that in response to these shortcomings, informal self-organization intends to resolve planning issues. An example of this in the thesis was voiced by Respondent 12, who attempted to cover open gutters in his area. Thus, on paper, the regulation seems restrictive towards the occurrence of VUAs and the temporary use of them, but in reality, these policies could be ineffective.

Limitations

Most respondents were men, meaning a woman's perspective was inadequately represented in the SoP and attitudes towards VUAs. During the first phase of data gathering, many women who were approached for an interview declined. This is a result of the timing of the interviews, which were held during the day, and most women on the streets said they were working and thus too preoccupied to be interviewed. The author's positionality could also influence the women's decision to decline an interview with a man.

The second phase was conducted online, through snowball sampling. The first respondent was a man. For the data collection, this resulted in 9 out of 11 respondents being men. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to correct this imbalance in the number of women respondents. Time constraints also limited the number of interviews that could be conducted.

For both research areas, there were some respondents with a slight language barrier. This may have influenced how they interpreted questions, how they answered, and how the author conducted the interviews. The data could have also been misinterpreted by the author due to differences in vocabulary, sayings, and grammar. Finally, all age groups were represented except for children and teens. This age group was excluded due to the ethical implications of interviewing minors. For future research, their perspective could also be explored.

One of the research area selection criteria was that both areas would be predominantly residential. Osu is, however, a mixed-use neighborhood with commercial pockets. This choice was made due to time constraints. Initially, the high-income neighborhood of Labone was selected, as juxtaposed to South La, these places could result in distinctive SoPs. Unfortunately, residents in Labone were harder to approach for street interviews. At a later point, Osu was selected to substitute for Labone. Only after the analysis of the interviews did it become clear that Osu was not as residential as it first appeared to be.

The initial goal of this thesis was more in line with the aim of Limbo Accra: "bringing new life to abandoned buildings", as was presented in the Introduction. During the process of this thesis, I became aware that these VUAs were not abandoned, but appeared to be. This shifted the aim away from revitalization, towards temporary usage of VUAs. In retrospect, additional interviews with other actors would have gained more insights into the potential of temporary use. However, due to time and financial constraints, I was not able to conduct extra interviews, including different actors in my research sample. This has resulted in some limitations, which will be discussed below.

Talking directly to temporary users would explore more about the conditions necessary for temporary use, as was conducted in the research by Agheyisi (2025). In addition, systematic observations of actual temporary uses of VUAs could have provided a more encompassing overview of the potential for temporary use. The focus would have been less on the residents and potential uses, and more on the current real-life examples. This would have resulted in a better assessment of the current "Activities", "Context", "Durations", and "Spaces" for temporary use.

The study mainly reflects residents' perspectives; key actors (e.g., property owners, caretakers, informal users, municipal officials, and customary land authorities) were not interviewed. This limits insight into the negotiation and decision-making processes shaping VUA use. Additionally, other actors could have emerged from talking to these actors, as the customary land authorities did not emerge from the data. Although conflicts (evictions, ownership disputes, municipal

enforcement) emerged in the data, they were not systematically analyzed through a political or governance lens. This could have improved the findings on the "Regulation" characteristic.

While the thesis discusses potential strategies for temporary use, these remain conceptual and inferential. No design experiments, pilot interventions, or co-creation workshops were conducted to test feasibility. Future research could build upon this research and aid the development of strategies for temporary use. Currently, the recommendations given in this thesis will not be in the form of concrete strategies, but rather research to further develop these strategies.

Recommendations

In this thesis, key stakeholders were not interviewed, and their potential role in temporary urbanism remains unclear. For future research, it is therefore recommended to consider the wishes, abilities, and willingness of owners in applying temporary use on their property. This thesis revealed that they are the ultimate deciders when it comes to the temporary use of VUAs. However, they are often constrained, thus their ability and willingness to apply such use remains uncertain.

A comprehensive network of all the actors involved in temporary urbanism is missing from the data. Respondents consider owners the key actors for the temporary use of VUAs, but the owners' actions are clearly influenced by other actors who were not mentioned in the results. For future research, the roles of land sellers, municipal authorities, police, courts, and customary landholders should also be considered. This includes other actors that might have been overlooked in this thesis. Also, the power of temporary users in Accra should be researched, as the literature and results revealed that temporary users often work around evictions and prevail.

The discussion highlighted that the mismatch between customary law and state law could result in VUAs. In order to aid urban development and limit the occurrence of VUAs, policymakers should look into resolving discrepancies between these two bodies of law. As the customary laws are complex and vary per region, additional research on how to resolve this problem should be conducted and explored in a case study.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the SoP and attitudes towards VUAs in two distinct neighborhoods in Accra, this thesis provides insight into some aspects of the potential for temporary use of VUAs. SoP was selected as a way to understand the conditions for the temporary use of VUAs in each neighborhood, but it failed to shine light on crucial aspects due to SoP's limitation in exploring the actors involved. Nevertheless, SoP and attitudes towards VUA clearly illustrate the contexts in which they can operate. For example, in South La, the lack of informal uses could be influenced by the 'Tight-knit' theme of its SoP. The SoP was also able to identify community needs, which could form the base for potential temporary uses of VUAs in the future.

Although temporary uses were explored using SoP, they were mentioned by a few accounts. These uses could have gone unnoticed by respondents, revealing the limitation of using SoP to gain insights into temporary activities. The contexts in which the temporary uses in both areas could occur were influenced by themes developed in their respective SoP. Showcasing the ability to assess the socio-economic conditions needed for the temporary use of VUAs, using the SoP.

SoP also highlighted that the duration of the temporary use depends on the relationship users have with the owners. However, the persistence of temporary use, even after eviction, could not be explained through SoP. This persistence also illustrates the ineffectiveness of policies in place, which SoP has helped gain insight into.

Due to these crucial limitations, applying SoP, concrete strategies for the temporary could not be developed. To aid this development, future studies could address the actors involved in the temporary use of VUAs. The discussion revealed the influence these additional actors could have on the temporary use of VUAs. It is also highly recommended that the mismatch between customary practices and state law is resolved, as they influence the occurrence of VUAs. Although strategies were not developed, foundational work has been conducted to unlock the potential for temporary use of VUAs in South La and Osu.

FUNDING

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

The interview questions for this thesis were based on the interview questions produced by Yu (2024) for his model. The interview has additional questions concerning VUAs in the area.

Community description

1. Why did you come to this neighborhood? What does a normal day look like for you?
2. How would you describe the community to someone new?

Community changes

3. How was the community 5/10 years ago? What has changed?
4. Have these changes been good to someone? (Benefitted someone)
5. Have these changes changed life for you or your family? How?

Community values

6. What does the community mean to you? Please explain.
7. Are there any traditions or events that you do with your community?

Community needs

8. What do you hope will change in the next 10 years? What do you hope will stay the same?
9. Are there people who do good things for the community? Please explain.

VUAs

10. Have you seen these [show pictures of VUAs in the area]? What do you think of them?
11. Do you think something should be done to these buildings? Why? And what?
12. Have you seen people using these buildings? In what way?

Appendix B: Phases and criteria thematic analysis

Tables 3 and 8 were consulted throughout the analysis of the data regarding the attitudes towards VUAs. The tables were sourced from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Ahmed et al. (2025).

Table 3: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 8: 16-item checklist for ensuring complete thematic analysis in qualitative research (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Process	No.	Criteria
Familiarization with the data	1	Have you thoroughly read and re-read the data to immerse yourself in it?
	2	Have you noted initial ideas and potential patterns during the reading process?
Generating initial codes	3	Have you systematically coded meaningful features in the data?
	4	Have you ensured that all relevant data items are coded comprehensively?
	5	Have you used software or manual methods to organize the codes effectively?
Searching for themes	6	Have you reviewed the codes to identify broader themes?
	7	Have you grouped related codes into potential themes?
Reviewing themes	8	Have you refined and adjusted themes to ensure coherence and relevance?
	9	Have you verified that themes are supported by multiple data excerpts?
	10	Have you ensured that no key aspects of the data were overlooked?
Defining and naming themes	11	Have you clearly defined each theme and its scope?
	12	Have you named the themes in a way that captures their essence?
	13	Have you ensured that themes provide meaningful insight into the research question?
Writing the report	14	Have you provided clear explanations of each theme?
	15	Have you supported themes with direct quotes from the data?
	16	Have you ensured that your analysis provides depth and insight rather than just describing the data?

Appendix C: Cultural sensitivity guidelines

Cultural differences between residents and the author may have led to biases that reduce the reliability and validity of the research. Accounting for the cultural sensitivity involved in this research, reference has been made back to Lie-A-Ling et al. (2023) guidelines for qualitative research. The 12 guidelines are divided into 4 sections and entail the following:

Design

1. The chosen paradigm gives room to engage multiple cultural perspectives and interprets phenomena within context;
2. Reflexivity (i.e., own prejudice) is started early and integrated in all phases of research, with specific goals related to cultural sensitivity;
3. Through reflexivity and encounters with the target community, cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and skills (among else, understanding, consideration, respect, and tailoring) are prompted;
4. Research teams are preferably multicultural in composition;

Data-collection

5. The data-collection process is tailored to meet the collaboration between researcher gatekeepers and informants;
6. Interviewer characteristics are weighed in terms of cultural differences and similarities with potential participants;
7. In case interpreters are utilized, their role and position in terms of reliability and professionalism are discussed with members of the community;
8. Culturally sensitive knowledge and skills are applied iteratively in all stages of research to bridge the cultural distance, including in the fields of language, religion, and cultural etiquette;

Analysis

9. Forms of triangulation incorporate the involvement of members of the target community or symbolic representations, for example, literature or cultural organizations;
10. Reflexive iteration is related to cultural sensitivity with consequences for time investment and effort;

Report

11. A written account is given of choices made regarding cultural sensitivity, including the process of reflexivity and translation;
12. Written reports are checked for overly negative accounts of the target community that can lead to racism or stigmatization.

Appendix D: Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In this thesis, AI was applied in accordance with the Guidelines for MSc Theses from WUR (WUR, 2026). The interviews were transcribed using the AI transcription tool built into Microsoft Word. The data was uploaded to Microsoft using the WUR's student portal, ensuring the data was stored in accordance with the university's privacy protocol. AI was also used as a feedback tool for textual improvement during the writing phase of this thesis, i.e., spelling and grammar check. This was done using Grammarly, a software approved by WUR.

Endpaper: An unfinished structure on the coast in Accra (Photograph by author)