WHERE
WHY
WHAT
WHO

political equator los angeles

HELMLE FELLOWSHIP WORKSHOP 2025
CAL POLY POMONA ARCHITECTURE

WHEN
HOW

political equator los angeles

HELMLE FELLOWSHIP WORKSHOP 2025
WITH TEDDY CRUZ AND FONNA FORMAN

CAL POLY POMONA ARCHITECTURE

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
College of Environmental Design
Department of Architecture

Spring 2025

Contents

Introduction to the Helmle Fellowship Workshop 2025

The Helmle Fellowship is awarded annually to professionals for outstanding accomplishments in their engagement with contemporary design issues. The Fellowship was created in 2018 to annually invite a distinguished practicing architect or academic to conduct a workshop at Cal Poly Pomona's Department of Architecture. This fellowship is possible through a generous donation by alumna Juliana Terian (CPPARC 1980).

The Fellowship consists of a public lecture to all students at the University followed by an intensive workshop with selected students. The appointed Helmle Fellows identify a subject area or design approach and collaborates with students to closely examine the design issue. This year, the workshop involved an interdisciplinary group of 25 students from Architecture, Visual Communication Design, Landscape Architecture, and Regenerative Studies.

The Helmle Fellowship Workshop is named in honor of Professor Emeritus Paul Helmle, a beloved and unforgettable presence in the Cal Poly Pomona architecture community. Paul Helmle taught at Cal Poly Pomona for nearly three decades until his retirement in 2001. He left a lasting impression, not only for his brilliance as a designer and critic, but also for his larger-than-life presence. Helmle Fellows emulate the qualities of Paul Helmle and are selected based on their accomplishments at both the professional and academic level, as well as their demonstrated success with design students.

Over the years, we've had the privilege of welcoming a lineup of remarkable Helmle Fellows, including Margaret Kerrison (2023), an experiential storytelling leader for

Fig. 1. Public lecture held in architecture atrium. Photo by Tom Zasadzinksi.

major projects at Disney and beyond; Lawrence Scarpa, FAIA (2020), principal of Brooks + Scarpa; and Nader Tehrani (2019), principal of NADAAA and professor and former dean of the Cooper Union School of Architecture. Each recipient of the award brought a different voice and vision to the conversation.

This year, Cal Poly Pomona was honored to have a pair of Fellows, Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman from Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman.

Fonna Forman and Teddy Cruz are internationally renowned and respected researchers in their separate fields of expertise, Political Science and Architecture, respectively. Fonna Forman is a professor of Political Science and the Founding Director of the Center on Global Justice at the University of California, San Diego. Teddy Cruz is a professor of Public Culture and Spatial Practice in the Department of Visual Arts, also at University of California, San Diego (UCSD).

In their collaboration together, under the Center on Global Justice at UCSD, the two bring a multivalent criticality to the issues they explore within the modern urban fabric that touches on immigration and refugee communities, the right to social belonging, and an awareness of ecological responsibility.

By pairing local community needs on both sides of the political equator, San Diego and Tijuana, with student involvement, Fonna and Teddy have developed and enacted innumerable projects that catalyze change in those communities. Their publications, *Spatializing Justice; Building Blocks*[1] and *Socializing Architecture; Top-Down Bottom-Up*,[2] provide a comprehensive overview of their work, showcasing their unique practice of weaving together architecture, art, public culture, and political theory.

The Helmle Fellowship Workshop 2025, kicked off with a public lecture that introduced key concepts which Teddy and Fonna have distilled from their practice. Following the lecture, the three-day intensive workshop began with a conversation between the Fellows and a group of interdisciplinary students from diverse areas of expertise within the College of Environmental Design. The projects collected here contain the seeds for future inquiry.

Lyannie Tran and Juintow Lin

Department of Architecture: Chair's Foreword

In 2024, after an extensive search process and discussion by the architecture faculty, we decided to award the Helmle Fellowship 2025 to Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman.

For the Department, this was extraordinarily fortuitous as their visit coincided with several major events that marked the beginning of the year and that we could not have foreseen when we held our initial conversations.

In January 2025, the region saw two catastrophic wildfires that destroyed large sections of the Pacific Palisades and Altadena, and within weeks, the country witnessed the return of the Trump administration to office, who backed up his campaign rhetoric by targeting many of the immigrant and marginalized communities that our school seeks to educate and protect. In the Spring when the workshop took place, the effects of these events were becoming visible on our campus and preoccupied many of our faculty and students' lives.

Our choice of recipients was the right choice at just the right time. Teddy and Fonna led a lively and spirited sessions with students, culminating in clear and incisive thinking. They helped to ground conversations around important local and global topics with research and thorough intellectual rigor without resorting to the emotional impact of narrative or biography to convey students' thoughts and feelings.

The projects presented in this book, although brief, are clear and articulate proposals that tackle a broad set of complicated areas.

Much of the research and the discussions that followed were on subjects close to the students' own experiences: the unhoused, the climate crisis, anxiety surrounding the upcoming Olympics, and the utility and hidden malevolence of common building typologies and urban planning.

I am extremely proud of our students' commitment to this workshop and the exercises that surrounded it, and I want to thank Teddy and Fonna on behalf of the Department for being so open to sharing their processes and working methods with our faculty and students.

I believe the workshop and this publication will act as a unique artifact of what proved to be a turbulent year and will serve as an excellent model for what our expectations should be in the future for the Helmle Fellowship. It will no doubt inspire both the students who took part and future students who will see the work preserved here.

Robert Alexander
Professor, Chair, Department of Architecture

Fig. 1. Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman presenting. Photo by Tom Zasadzinksi.

The Political Equator:
Los Angeles Workshop

The Political Equator Workshops have taken us to diverse cities, including Barcelona, Kiev, Auckland, Rome, Miami, Baton Rouge, and now, through the Helmle Fellowship, to Los Angeles, hosted by Cal Poly Pomona. Across these journeys, we have encountered many students of art, architecture, and urbanism, who are eager to ask critical questions about their own creative practices and methods to tackle urban conflict and inequality.

The workshops' methodology emerges from our own research-based practice, embedded in the San Diego-Tijuana border, a microcosm of all the injustices and indignities suffered by many peoples across the world. It is a geography of conflict that has been ground zero for us to explore new socio-spatial strategies of inter-dependence, from which to confront the major challenges of urbanization today: deepening socio-economic inequality, the dramatic migration of peoples across the hemispheres, compounded by the impacts of climate disruption on cities and biodiversity, border building everywhere and the current destruction of a public imagination.

For us, conflict is a generative tool. We believe that critical intervention into the urban field requires first recognizing the contested spatial and institutional power dynamics that drive today's urban crises. Exposing this often-missing information enables us to piece together a more accurate, anticipatory urban research and design intervention. We launched the Political Equator Workshop in Los Angeles with this provocation: the conditions themselves, the institutional mechanisms that produced many crises in this city, are our materials for design; making urban conflict an essential creative tool to reimagine Los

Angeles today. The complexity of these many power relations and their spatialization in this metropolis should solicit new scripts to imagine more experimental architectures committed to exposing, visualizing, and engaging urban conflict as the radical context from which to problematize the relationship between the social, the political, and the aesthetic.

The Los Angeles workshop at Cal Poly Pomona was organized as an intensive three-day dialogical exercise, where students worked in groups to debate and exchange critical reflections of their own city. Each group took as a point of departure a particular condition of conflict and retroactively revealed the conditions that produced it, across a complex set of socio-spatial, institutional, and temporal registers. This initial dialectical set of revelations is the engine for speculative strategies, the designing of procedures to tackle a particular crisis. As we have done across the arc of our engagement with students and community groups, the main pedagogical tool for the Political Equator Workshop is what we call the conflict diagram.

The Conflict Diagram: Los Angeles
Conflict diagrams are visual narratives, composed of text, images, and graphic elements that enable the designer to construct a process map, a relational cartography of the multiple conditions that constitute a particular urban conflict. Conflict diagrams visualize the social, political and environmental impacts produced by these conditions, as well as provocations, conceptual tools and strategies that illuminate potential zones of urban, architectural, artistic, and scholarly intervention. Pedagogically speaking, the development of a conflict diagram invites the participants not only to recognize local conflicts as the foundation for architectural, urban or artistic intervention, but also to expand the field of design beyond buildings, into the construction of the political itself. This involves designing civic process as the fertile ground for new critical spatial practices.

The students focused on Los Angeles, with its zones of mega-wealth and rings of marginalization, and the urban

borders emerging from the collision between top-down forces of urbanization and bottom-up social and ecological systems. These borders are the physical manifestation of contested power relations that are visibly and invisibly embedded in the territory, often deeply at odds with one another. From the specificity of these local zones of conflict, a set of conversations opened up through which students developed brief investigations of spatial, normative, and institutional conditions, and the required political stance and value system to tackle them.

Method: The 5Ws Table and the HOW
In anticipation of the workshop, each group was asked to select one particular spatial condition as a point of departure. This condition needed to manifest at either a local, metropolitan, or bioregional scale, recognizing that the mini-research process will nevertheless involve zooming in and out simultaneously.

The Helmle Workshop began by asking participants to recognize particular urban-regional borders across the City of Los Angeles and its bioregion across many scales. Examples included: 1. local zones of conflict at the scale of a neighborhood -- the way freeway, utility, or gray infrastructure collides with the texture of everyday life of a neighborhood, the collision of physical and natural systems producing small-scale urban borders that divide communities, or the politics and economics of gentrification and displacement; 2. the large-scale urban borders that fragment the socio-spatial texture of the city at large -- like the channelization of the LA River, or building/zoning practices that make Los Angeles uniquely susceptible to urban wildfire; and 3. bioregional zones that amplify a particular urban conflict between the metropolitan, the new exurbs and the rural, the water challenges that link Los Angeles to regional watersheds, etc.

The workshop was organized around two main stages of operation:
1. The 5Ws Table: A Critical Investigation of Conflict
2. The HOW: A Visual Script for Intervention

STAGE 1
THE 5Ws TABLE:
A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF CONFLICT

Developing a conflict diagram begins with asking the
"5Ws" about a contested site. Participants develop a
table of critical provocations that illuminate the distance
between conflicts and opportunities. Groups debate
priorities and fill the table with fragments of information,
strategically composed, using text, diagrams, data, and
visual evidence.

WHERE	WHY	WHAT	WHO	WHEN

WHERE is the space, site, zone, geography of investiga-
tion and potential intervention. The WHERE narrativizes
the conditions that shape the contested context. As much
as this has to do with physical place, it also has to do with
non-place. WHERE must engage the geography itself,
but also, more critically, the power dynamics inscribed in
that geography: the allegorical and metaphorical mean-
ings (and for whom), the institutional entanglements, the
regulatory frameworks, the jurisdictional designations, the
economic interests, the cultural meanings, and networks
of control. What are the visible and invisible conditions
that constitute the location -- conceptual, material, infra-
structural, environmental, institutional, political, jurisdic-
tional, regulatory, economic, historical, cultural, and social
forces that define the territory and the objects it contains?

WHY pertains to the critical issues, questions, challeng-
es, conflicts, controversies, provocations, violations,
injustices, and indignities that arise in your case study,
sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly. WHY motivates
your urban/architectural proposition? WHY do you care?
WHY should others care? WHY will you propose what you
propose? And WHY should others support it? WHY refers
to the issues of concern -- political, ethical, social, cultur-
al, economic, environmental -- embedded in your case,
the fire behind your investigation, and urban/architectural
proposition. WHAT refers to the impacts of the WHY, on
real people, on communities, on the environment, and

on the public. If the WHY is racial injustice, for example, the WHAT refers to the impacts of this: perhaps higher rates of disease and mortality, poorly funded schools, neighborhood divestment, decay, abandoned buildings, homelessness, gentrification, perhaps despair and loss of hope. The WHAT is your evidence of the WHY. The WHAT is the causal output or detritus of the WHY that animates your interest in the case study, and the possible urban/architectural interventions you will propose. The WHAT can be about visible material things, objects, but also about invisible ephemeral, emotional, or aspirational things.

WHO pertains to the people and groups invested in the site, who are impacted by its evolution over time, who have capacities to alter the conditions, and who are the potential audiences of your proposal. WHO is harmed and WHO benefits from the status quo, and from a change in the status quo? WHO must be negotiated with, exchanged with, persuaded, infiltrated? WHO are the institutions you must 'deal' with, learn from, utilize, disrupt, encroach into? WHO must be engaged in any potential proposition? There may be people / institutions / stakeholders that do not yet exist. Sometimes WHO needs to be imagined, narrativized, designed, created, incubated, choreographed, manipulated. Remember too that we as architects and urbanists are part of the WHO: How can we identify, understand, translate, communicate, narrativize, visualize, represent the impacts, if we are newcomers to the contested site? WHO is best situated to represent the WHAT? WHO narrates the city?

WHEN pertains to the temporal dimensions of the condition -- the histories, sequences, durations, rhythms, processes, that constitute the condition and must drive any potential urban/architectural proposition. Characteristics such as slow, "laggy," early, late, rapid, urgent, regressive, progressive, incremental, and gradual, anticipatory, innovative, reactionary, revolutionary are all examples of temporal descriptors. The temporalization of space is necessary to understand the WHY and ultimately to manifest your vision.

STAGE 2
THE HOW:
DESIGNING A VISUAL SCRIPT FOR INTERVENTION

What emerges from the 5Ws table is a narrative that exposes the vectors and forces that are at play in the contested site and also the speculative opportunities to tackle them. They become the building blocks, the materials for the second stage of designing the conflict diagram: elaborating on the opportunities and creative possibilities for intervention, across normative, institutional, and spatial registers. HOW is the process of advancing that proposition. HOW is the activity of mobilizing the materials of the 5Ws -- the varied and intersecting conditions -- into a process map, a visual script for designing the conditions for things to happen. HOW do we move from what is to what might be? HOW do we choreograph time and things to perform a desired effect? HOW is visualized in the conflict diagram as a machine of concepts, animated by a graphic system. The conflict diagram is ultimately a discursive tool that enables participants to take a political position, prioritizing the issues of concern to collectively shape a set of public demands. A final statement containing a range of social commitments is read aloud by all groups; a call for action in their own fields.

At Cal Poly Pomona, we had the privilege of working with two dozen students, representing undergraduate and graduate studies, in the fields of Architecture, Visual Communication Design, Landscape Architecture, and Regenerative Studies. For us, working with this group of students was very special because they intimately recognized the challenges of their own city. Many of them grew up in and around Los Angeles, across inner-city neighborhoods and the suburbs that make this one of the most interesting cities in the world; caught between the politics of sprawl and density, at an important juncture in its history where diverse constituencies are questioning the politics and economics that have endorsed an irresponsible, oil-hungry, and selfish growth, a topic that was shared by many workshop participants.

The compelling topics that were covered by student groups included: the conflicts embedded in a "flammable urbanization," a meditation on the LA fires, the collisions between natural and administrative boundaries, ecological memory and institutional myopia; the politics of gentrification in Boyle Heights and the rethinking of community-owned urban development and local modes of productivity; the vicious institutional cycles that perpetuate homelessness, and the urgent democratization of spatial safety nets/social infrastructures organized around job generation and capacitation; the forensics of vacant space and the reclamation of urban ruins through social contingency and coalitions of care; the reductive meanings of "green space" and the requisites for a new urban-ecological imagination as an armature for rethinking growth in Los Angeles; the conflicts between the urban, the peri-urban and the rural, and the transformation of the "big box" paradigm in the Inland Empire; and a critical reading of the upcoming Olympic Games in Los Angeles, mobilizing it as a tool for democratizing urban infrastructure, and rethinking the city from its own periphery.

We would like to thank our wonderful hosts, including all participating students, who generously shared the experience of this process with us, who were filled with infectious enthusiasm, curiosity, and commitment. Professors Juintow Lin and Lyannie Tran accompanied us on this journey with kindness, patience, and efficiency, and made us feel completely at home at Cal Poly Pomona. Our great thanks to them, to the faculty, and to Robert Alexander, Chair of the Architecture Department, who generously shared insights along the way. Noam Saragosti made our stay at the Neutra VDL House a sublime experience that we will never forget. We also thank the school's administrative and maintenance staff, who supported our process and accommodated our wishes at every turn.

Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman

FLAMMABLE URBANISM

JOELLE SAROUFIM, ALEX DORANTES-SANCHEZ, ALEX BRITO

WHO INSURES EQUITY?

COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS
TENANT PROTECTION
RECOVERY FUNDS
TRANSPARENCY

INVESTORS & DEVELOPERS
TAKING ADVANTAGE OF
VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

AMERICAN DREAM
CONSUMERISM, CONVENIENCE, UNSUSTAINABLE LIVING

CAPITALISM & EXPLOITATION

FALSE SENSE OF
PERMANENCE

MASS
PRODUCTION

TOP DOWN FAILURES
"THIS WAS NOT INEVITABLE"

FRAGMENTATION

GROUPING

CHEAP FLAMMABLE
MATERIALS

SPRAWL INTO
FIRE ZONES

ADAPTIVE LOW
RISK MATERIALS

LOSS OF VERNACULAR
KNOWLEDGE

CONSCIOUS PLANNING

EATON FIRE
ECOLOGICAL
MEMORY

FIRE KNOWLEDGE IGNORED
CULTURAL BURNING CRIMINALIZED
COLONIZATION
"FIRE ISN'T THE CRISIS, IT'S THE SYMPTOM"
CLIMATE CHANGE
RECORD BREAKING EVENTS
INTRODUCTION OF INVASIVE SPECIES
FIRE RISK IN NON–FIRE SEASONS

COMMUNITY BETRAYAL
"WE WERE NEVER PART OF THE PLAN"

DESTRUCTION

LOSS

HEALTH
RISKS

SHARED PUBLIC SPACES
GRIEF, REMEMBRANCE, RECONNECTION

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
"CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE"

TRAUMA

INSTABILITY

FEAR

WHO IS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

IGNORANT ZONING

ECOLOGICAL BUFFER

Sier

01   Joelle Saroufim, Alex Brito, Alex Dorantes-Sanchez

Flammable Urbanism

In January 2025, over the course of three weeks, ten wildfires swept through Los Angeles County,[1] each one leaving behind catastrophic destruction and scorched landscapes.

The Eaton Fire ignited on January 7th was not fully contained until January 30th. This 14,000-acre wildfire reportedly destroyed over 9,000 structures in the surrounding communities of the Eaton Canyon, a region identified as a designated fire corridor. Our analysis through the conflict diagram examines the battleground between ecological memory and top-down failures, as well as their long-term implications.

At one time, fire renewed the land. Later it was feared, suppressed, and then exiled -- until it returned, bigger and uninvited.

It is important to recall that wildfires have occurred naturally in the California landscape long before modern development. The first known caretakers of these lands, the Tongva people, knew this, and so they tended the land through cultural and controlled burns alongside a range of other practices.[2]

Colonization, urbanism, and anti-indigenous policies have historically suppressed prescribed fires along the California landscape, gradually turning our native plant communities flammable, damaging our soil, and depleting native seed banks.[3] This has opened a path for invasive plant species to take over our foothills and beyond.

The National Forest Service began performing prescribed burns along patches of the San Gabriel Mountains in 2021. Meanwhile, natural

Fig. 1. Eaton Fire Initial Attack. Photo from commons.wikimedia.org.

disasters have become more intense than ever.[4] Gradual human-made processes, such as climate change and expansion, have led to exponential climate events and disasters.

We are now experiencing the warmest years on record, driest year starts, record-breaking droughts, hurricane-force Santa Ana wind speeds, and a magnified growth of flammable and invasive plant species across our landscapes.[5] We created these conditions and proceeded to inhabit places further into fire-prone land.

The Wildland-Urban Interface along Eaton Canyon became the battleground where homes stood exposed, doomed by flammable,

mass-produced materials, assembled without fire-conscious design, and surrounded by Eurocentric ornamental landscaping.[6] But behind all the smoke and ash lies the truth: we have historically built cities not for resilience or survival, but simply to consume. We can no longer sustain such mindless logic of profit over life.

The community needs an immediate response. Who is responsible for protecting us, supporting us, and ensuring equity in recovery?

Who will step up to establish community land trusts to prevent displacement, to enforce tenant protections, to release recovery funds, and to demand transparency from aid agencies and insurers?

To rebuild is not enough. Real change begins with identifying the source, and it starts by calling out the true arsonists.

They are not just the sparks or the matches. They are the ones who denied climate policy, who demonized Indigenous knowledge and practices,[7] who cut funding for ecological management,[8] who poured endless resources into surveillance and policing while defunding disaster response agencies, who replaced breathing forests with concrete slabs and called it "growth," who criminalized cultural burns while licensing logging companies to exploit and strip the land bare,[9] and who taught us that development requires domination.

The Eaton Fire was the climax of centuries of ignorant decisions rooted in profit, erasure, and neglect.[10]

This zone isn't just a battleground, but an exposed bigoted system, a lie unveiled. The flames showed us that nature is not limited to where we draw the line, and that wildfires are not natural disasters but collisions between top-down urbanization and the natural environment.

Let's not only reimagine greener urbanism, but also acknowledge that everything is nature, and we are part of it. Rather than distancing ourselves from it, we must act, think, and design in ways that mimic natural systems.[11]

We have to think beyond the idea of fire-resistant structures and fire-retardant chemicals. Before rebuilding mightier neighborhoods, let us start from scratch and redraw zoning lines that reflect ecological truths. Zoning overlays must include ecological risk assessments that define no-build zones and wildland buffers. These overlays must be co-designed by ecologists, local tribes and residents who know the rhythms of the land, not by developers or lobbyists.

Historical burn cycles along with climate models, topography and species distribution maps should inform what should be built and where. New developments should require native, vegetative firebreaks. We should reduce our invasive, concrete footprint with density and prioritize walkable eco-communities with green corridors that reconnect disrupted habitats.[12] We should reallocate budgets to climate adaptation departments instead of post-disaster cleanup and train planners in bioregional design.

Let us rethink transportation! Let us rethink our water management! Let us rethink city governance! Let us rethink fire education!

Let us rethink how we think, and root our new systems in resident, federal, tribal, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Fig. 2. Brainstorming ideas. Photo by Alex Brito.

None of this is theory. Bottom-up transformations have been successful in making an impact. We can do it in our communities if we choose collective well-being over profit.

We have witnessed the power of collective support, including the overwhelming number of volunteers and outpouring of aid during the fires.[13] Now it's all hands on deck, and millions of eyes are watching.

We can do this.The Eaton Fire was not inevitable, one could even say that it burned by design. That means its repetition is a choice. If we do not implement real change now, the flames will return crueler, faster, and louder. But if we turn to ecological memory, community, collaboration and reimagining, we can restore a future for all, where fire no longer devours our cities, but renews and heals, just as it once did.

Let the fire that consumed our communities be the fire that sparked real change.

Not one more town. Not one more life.

And not one more lesson learned too late.

Fig. 3. Reviewing the conflict diagram together. Photo by Joelle Saroufim.

Fig. 4. Team photo. Photo by Juintow Lin.

Fig. 5. Initial Process Draft. Photo by Alex Brito.

who insures Equity?

Investors / Developers taking advantage of vulnerable communities

Cultural Burning Criminalized / Exploitation
Fire knowledge was ignored
Capitalism and Exploitation
Colonization
Introduction of Invasive species

Ecological Memory
Climate Change
Fire Risk during non-fire
Record-Breaking
Fire isn't the crisis it

AMERICAN DREAM consumerism, convenience, unsustainable living

False sense of Permenance

Destruction

CAPITALISM and EXPLOITATION

LOSS

HEALTH RISKS

Mass Production

COMMUNITY BETRAYAL = we were never part of the plan
TRAUMA

Thoughtful Planning or Conscious

Insensitive one-size-fits-all Zoning
Ignorant

Instability, uncertainty, fear

Grouping

held accountable?

Fragmentation

who is

Adaptive low risk materials

cheap Flammable Materials

...awl into ...e zones

"this was not inevitable"

Trauma-informed design in housing / community planning
Shared public spaces (grief, remembrance, reconnect)

Mental Health support
Responsi...

...f Down
...ilures

Loss of Vernacular Knowledge

Fig. 6. Final Sketch. Photo by Alex Dorantes-Sanchez.

DISPLACEMENT BY DESIGN

BOYLE HEIGHTS
LOS ANGELES, CA

Angel Castañon - Benjamin Kittaka - Lorenzo Madayag

0.5 MILE RADIUS

- RESIDENTIAL
- COMMERCIAL
- OTHER

HIGHWAYS
LA TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE SHAPED BY BOYLE HEIGHTS NOT VICE VERSA

→ ENRICHING AND PROTECTING THE INFORMAL SYSTEMS THAT DEFINE AND RUN BOYLE HEIGHTS

→ PULL FROM THE HISTORIC MOBILIZATION OF ACTIVISM

→ THE CONTINUOUS CYCLE OF DISPLACEMENT IN BOYLE HEIGHTS MUST BE BROKEN

GENTRIFICATION
CAN UPWARD ECONOMIC MOBILITY BE JUMPSTARTED FROM WITHIN?

→ HOW CAN THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF BOYLE HEIGHTS SHAPE NEW BUSINESSES?

→ INTERVENE IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES' INTERPRETATION OF "IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS"

→ INCREASING HOME RETENTION THROUGH EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC TRANSITION, LEADING TO OWNERSHIP

POLLUTION
EXTENSIVE POLLUTION RESULTING FROM MASS CAR TRANSIT IS NOT CONDUCIVE TO LIFE

HIGHWAYS
Continual development of car-centric infrastructure through disadvantaged communities, consequently leading to forced relocation, the fragmenting of neighborhoods, and deepening social and economic inequalities.

GENTRIFICATION
Wealthier and often whiter individuals move into the historically marginalized Boyle Heights, causing the displacement of long-time residents due to a rise in the cost of living, resulting in the erasure of established culture and successful societal systems.

POLLUTION
Automobile traffic throughout the I-5, I-10, 101, and 60 freeways that carve through Boyle Heights results in astronomical amounts of environmental and noise pollution. The areas around the East LA Interchange in Boyle Heights have some of the highest rates of Asthma in LA County.

MARIACHI PLAZA
A significant cultural landmark, it is an important point of contention due to the displacement caused by the construction of a metro stop, a part of LA Metro's E Line Extension. How can Transit-Oriented-Development projects be pushed forward without becoming a vehicle for gentrification?

MULTI GENERATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS
Vital informal systems of community develop through the aggregation of households comprised of a diverse range of ages and experiences, ensuring community resilience and informing local businesses.

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL
An essential cultural artifact due to its participation in the 1968 East LA Walkouts, which protested the inequality faced by "Mexican Schools." Yet today, underserved communities across the country still suffer from underfunded schools: less than half of Boyle Heights residents have a high school diploma.

ARTWASHING
Artspace and new galleries are a medium of gentrification, subverting local cultural institutions through resulting rent increases. A long-time pillar of the community, Self Help Graphics, which was involved in the Chicano Movement since the 1970s, was uprooted from its original location due to rising rent costs.

INDUSTRIAL EDGE DEVELOPMENT
There are ongoing efforts by LA lawmakers to redevelop Boyle Heights' industrial edge into multi-unit residential. But will it be enough to retain those who need it most?

HOME OWNERSHIP
21% home ownership leaves residents defenseless to rent spikes. Boyle Heights must be for and by local community, not profit.

ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE
Historic Gentrification and exploitation ravages Boyle Heights and the potential of its residents.

BUILT INFRASTRUCTURE
Hostile development imposed by lawmakers viewed as necessary improvement for a flourishing neighborhood.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
Presence of the natural system of displacement pushed onto low-income and immigrant neighborhoods by policymakers.

02   Angel Castañon, Benjamin Kittaka, Lorenzo Madayag

Displacement by Design: Boyle Heights

The story of Boyle Heights, like countless others across the United States, has been one of unwavering resistance to economic, built, and social infrastructure imposed against them by authoritarian powers.

The original stewards of the land, the Tongva people, lived in harmony until they were forcefully displaced, converted, or killed because of European colonialism.

Whether being forced in, forced out, or seeking the American Dream, Boyle Heights and its diverse range of communities have continued to forge new paths of settlement.

These include Japanese immigrants pursuing opportunity, Russian Jews escaping persecution, and today, a large Mexican-American and Latino immigrant population.

Yet some things never change; the continuous exploitation, lack of comprehensive outreach, disenfranchisement, and now the encroachment of gentrification forces due to the socio-political processes of a system, all disregard the community's complex social and economic fabric.

The conflict diagram is an aid to visualize and analyze the resulting Boyle Heights condition. Through this spatial exercise, the sources of economic, built, and social pressures can all be pinpointed to key places and events that each correspond to hopeful outcomes and opportunities.

Today, Boyle Heights is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Los Angeles, this not by accident, but by design.[1]

Fig. 1. Review with Fonna Forman and Teddy Cruz. Photo by Juintow Lin.
Fig. 2. (Right) Categorizing the ideas. Photo by Benjamin Kittaka.

However, Boyle Heights is not without a voice. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s helped stoke the flames of revolution: the neighborhood became the epicenter of the Chicano Movement and the East LA Walkouts. Over 10,000 students from five East LA high schools walked out of their classrooms to protest segregation, classroom overcrowding, and corporal punishment for speaking Spanish. They demanded increased college opportunities, equitable community access to decision-making, and the hiring of more Mexican-American teachers and administrators.[2]

Boyle Heights has fought back and continues to do so, because the drive for justice lives on. Local activist groups like Defend Boyle Heights[3] are on the frontlines of the anti-gentrification fight in Los Angeles. These groups -- essential in combating cultural colonization and erasure -- protest the presence of new developments, real estate policies, displacement, and art washing tactics, which serve as vehicles of gentrification. These resident-led actions link this current activism to past struggles and conflicts over space, race, and development in the neighborhood.[4]

The use of built infrastructure as a means of displacement and segregation has left physical scars still visible today, yet this has had continuing social and economic consequences. Four freeways, the I-5, I-10, SR-60, and US-101, carve through the community, effectively displacing over 15,000 residents.[5 6 7] The collection of freeways, at points

DISPLACEMENT BY DESIGN
Boyle Heights, Los Angeles

WHERE

A place of marginalization exploitation & resilience
1.

What carry-over exists today from BH's past diverse minority population?
2.

Result of gentrification & exploitation
3.

Single-use zoning is not conducive to a complete and interwoven social fabric
4.

Presence of progressive, local politicians rooted in the minority experience
5.

Tools for Displacement
6.

Not Comp...

Not ...6.

Historical Disenfranchise...

WHY

Enriching the informal systems that define & run Boyle Heights
1.

Ending the HISTORIC trend of Displacement
2.

How to dismantle the effect... ... ... ownership

Preserving the so... fabri...
Preserving Comm...
4.

Providing infor... suppor... econom... ...of th...

A...

WHAT

Extensive pollution resulting from mass car transit is NOT conducive to LIFE
1.

Close proximity to healthcare, essential stores, and promotion of physical health

Building solid and safe bicycle network to create mobility ... essential needs ...it
2.

belonging
2.
3.

Prevention of TOD as a vehicle of gentrification: How to develop without displacement?
3.

Irony of an absence of transportation and purchase commercial Lack of transportation investment for community
4.

WHO

Changing 1
Metros Interpretation of Improvement Projects

Preserving the lifestyle and habits cultivated by mom and pop shops
2.

Part of the social & economic fabric
Pillars of stability
Change 3.

Providing pathways towards home ownership - credit, loans, grants, housing trusts
4.

Amplifying 5
community voices through placing value and acknowledge...

Multi-gen 6
households desire continuity to operate in community-oriented routines

WHEN

upward
Can economic mobility be jumpstarted from within?
1.

- Historical Disenfranchise-ment
- Lack of Outreach
Comprehensive & Continual Community Outreach
2.

People being forced in & being forced out
3.

Resistance to Exploitation from exterior Forces
4.

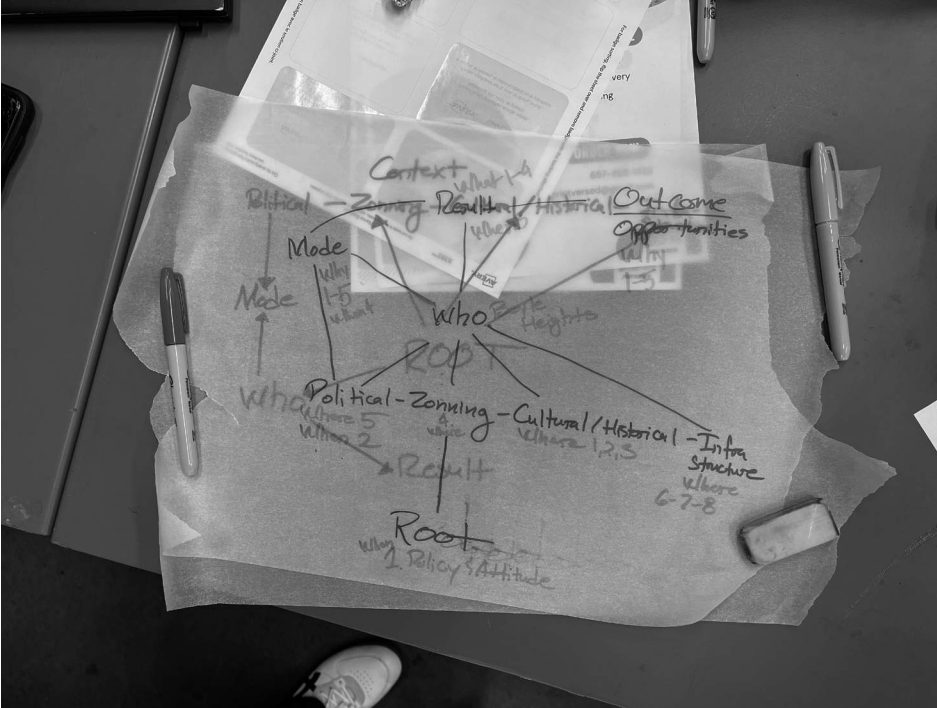Fig. 3. Angel Castañon and Lorenzo Madayag. Photo by Benjamin Kittaka.

Fig.4. Early draft of a conflict diagram. Photo by Benjamin Kittaka.

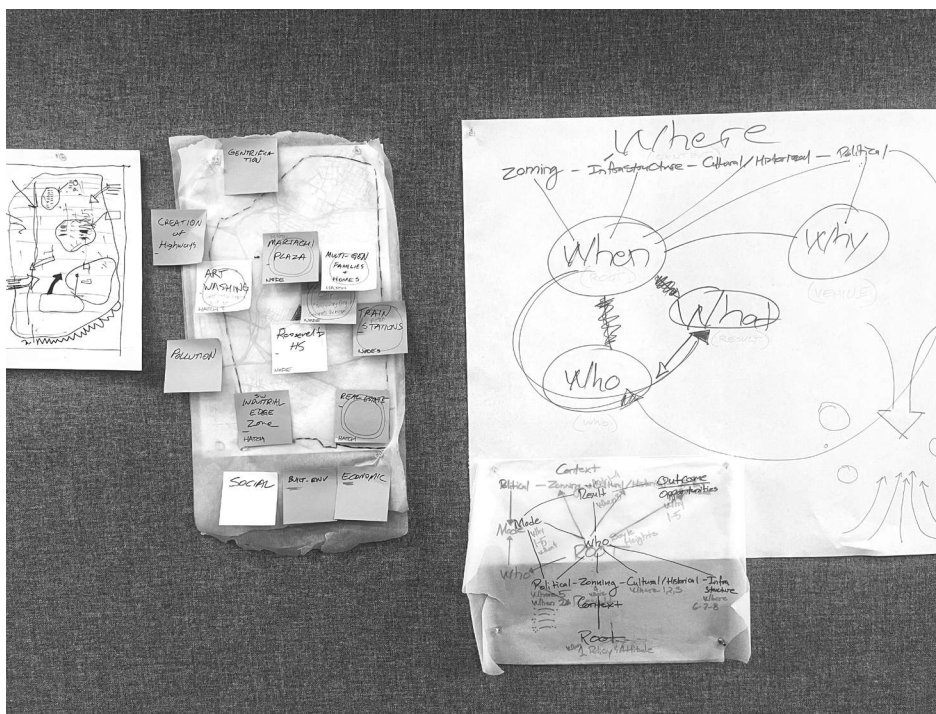Fig. 5. 5Ws charts. Photo by Benjamin Kittaka.

Fig. 6. Different iterations of a conflict diagram. Photo by Benjamin Kittaka.

stretching up to 20 lanes, and the overwhelming quantity of automobile traffic have poisoned the air around Boyle Heights.[8] Smog, noise, pollution, and congestion are harmful to all. Boyle Heights has one of the highest rates of asthma in Los Angeles County.[9] The neighborhood's life expectancy is four years lower than the citywide average. Climate change will only exacerbate this.

Repeated shortcomings in efforts to invest in the community through public transportation initiatives have left the residents skeptical. The Mariachi Plaza Station, one of four metro stations in the neighborhood, was built without regard for the residents that it would displace through construction impacts and rent increases.[10 11] Proper investment in transit infrastructure is essential in freeing us from this car-dependency and adherence to a low-density model of development, but its construction cannot be yet another medium of gentrification and displacement.

Boyle Heights was subject to intense redlining, a discriminatory practice that has long prevented communities of color from advancing economically with equitable opportunity. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation and its parent agency, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, were two agencies established through New Deal-Era policies. These agencies relied on local real estate agents and lenders to determine investment risks in various cities. Banks then used this information to determine where to issue loans. Real estate practices were far from fair, judging neighborhoods based on socioeconomic makeup and racial biases. Consequently, many families of color were effectively forced to rent from exploitative price-gouging landlords. Today, the neighborhood features one to two-story bungalows, duplexes, and quadplexes, and this low density housing stock cannot meaningfully address the housing crisis.[12 13]

Multigenerational households are at risk, disrupting the social fabric, the rich web of informal systems that drive the community. We must ask: how do we support a working-class renting household in which parents and children have equitable access to education, or at the very least, a well-designed economic safety net? Small business owners like the tía selling tamales and champurrado to support her family, or the family-owned panadería, all are essential cultural landmarks and are vital to the social fabric of the community. These businesses have historically been at the mercy of large corporations.

Boyle Heights does not need to be saved. What it does need is access to the necessary tools, economic, built, and social infrastructure, to dismantle the historical disenfranchisement caused by outside policies. It needs to resist exploita-
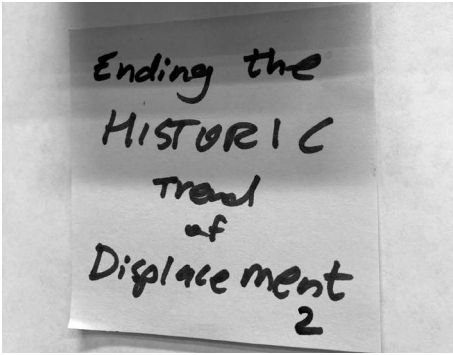
Fig. 7. Sticky note from a 5Ws chart.
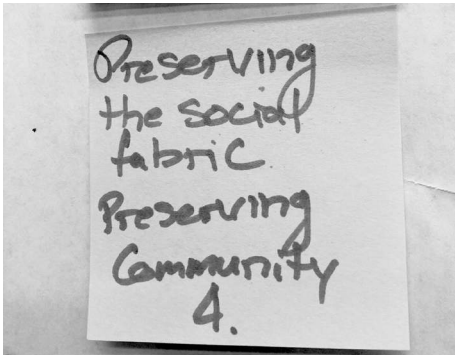Photo by Lyannie Tran.

Fig. 8. Sticky note from a 5Ws chart.
Photo by Lyannie Tran.

tion and amplify community voices to forge its future. Local energy and knowledge must work in tandem with the top-down resources of civic institutions. The city has attempted to involve the community over the years in efforts such as the Boyle Heights Community Plan, most recently updated in March of 2023.[14] [15]

But is this enough to preserve the community and social fabric? What decisions need to be made, and just as importantly by whom? The outdated model of civic policy and engagement, where only those contained in the bureaucracy can make decisions, needs to end. Is it unreasonable to suggest that individuals should have some influence on the future of their neighborhood?

Stakeholders and local leaders of the community need to be involved, not just through outreach, but through equal and active participation as coauthors.

People, not profit, must be the guiding principle. Through the framework of a deliberate, inclusive system of social, economic, and physical infrastructure, and a comprehensive system of engagement, the planning of the future of Boyle Heights will not be one of chance, but rather the product of impactful design.

RETHINKING ZONING THROUGH URBAN ECOLOGY

ITS GEOGRAPHY ISN'T NATURAL, IT HAS BEEN DELIBERATELY SHAPED BY ZONING, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND SPECULATIVE INTEREST

POLICY IN LOS ANGELES OFTEN ARRIVES AFTER THE DAMAGE IS DONE.

X= INDUSTRIAL
+=COMMERCIAL
=GREEN

ZONING IN BOYLE HEIGHTS HAS NOT PROTECTED THE COMMUNITY, IT HAS FRAGMENTED IT.

Break up rigid land divisions. Let zoning support shared use—stack things like tree canopy, shade, and water movement onto city blocks so they serve more needs at once.

Use temporary zoning to activate empty lots. Make space for gardens, cooling stations, or neighborhood events. Support local care with tools, microgrants, and flexible boundaries.

Use alleys, rail lines, or old infrastructure as walkable, shaded paths where people, water, and pollinators can move through the city together.

Follow how water flows and where green life thrives. Use vacant land to build shared ecological infrastructure that helps both people and the environment.

ADVOCATES

LOW INCOME

BUSINESS

RESIDENTS

CITY AGENCY

FAMILY

WEALTHY

LOS ANGELES

HARD BOUNDARIES ENCLOSE BOYLE HEIGHTS: INDUSTRIAL AREAS, RAILROAD TRACKS, FREEWAYS, AND THE LA RIVER, WHICH HAS BECOME A CONCRETE SCAR

IF WE ARE TO BUILD LIVING SYSTEMS, WE MUST REZONE NOT FOR SEPARATION, BUT FOR REPAIR: ALLOWING WATER, TREES, GATHERING, AND CARE TO CROSS LINES THAT WERE MEANT TO DIVIDE.

THE SAME COMMUNITIES THAT ARE DENIED ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE, HOUSING, AND TRANSPORTATION ARE ALSO SHUT OUT OF THE NATURAL SYSTEMS THAT COULD SUPPORT THEM

BOYLE HEIGHTS

TREE PLANTING AND SHADE DISTRIBUTION ARE UNEVEN, OFTEN REFLECTING BROADER INEQUALITIES

CREATE LIVING SYSTEMS OUT OF VACANT SPACES BY REIMAGINING, CHANGING ZONING

GREEN SPACE URBAN ECOLOGY NEEDS TO EVOLVE INTO A LIVING SYSTEM RATHER THAN A FINISHED PRODUCT

REDONDO JUNCTION ROUND HOUSE

OPEN SPACE
MULTI FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
COMMERCIAL
INDUSTRIAL
GREEN SPACE
PUBLIC FACILITIES
PARKING
LOS ANGELES RIVER
HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
HIGHWAY ORIENTED COMMERCIAL

| 03 | Ian Perez, Keana Angelique B. Mallari, Sandy Cruz Falcon, Yining Li |

Rethinking Zoning Through Urban Ecology

A city is never apolitical. To believe otherwise is to ignore how racism, exclusion, and control have always shaped space.

Boyle Heights is more than just a community; it is a battleground where residents fight an upstream battle against systems designed to displace them. Its geography isn't natural; it has been deliberately shaped by zoning, infrastructure, and speculative interests that prioritize profit over people.

Our initial topic examined "green spaces" in Los Angeles. We thought green spaces like were innocuous, similar to parks, trees, shade, and clean air or aesthetics. We soon discovered, however, that this definition is not only naive, but is a topic that can be used as a weapon.

Green space is all too frequently a broken promise in Los Angeles. They are spaces that are superficially made beautiful for the next stage of urban development. It encourages privatization and policing.[1] In practice, something that seems "green" on paper might be grey. It is a space that does not meet general expectations of an open space that welcomes the public. For many communities, particularly Boyle Heights, this type of green is a warning sign of gentrification, surveillance, and eventual displacement.

It is time to rethink this term now as an urban ecology and not just blindly increase the amount of green spaces. Urban ecology needs to evolve into a living system rather than a finished product. It must benefit the collective, the land, the body, and the culture.

Development should begin from the bottom up, guided by those historically excluded.

Hard boundaries enclose Boyle Heights: industrial areas, railroad tracks, freeways, and the Los Angeles River.[2] The LA River, once a thriving body, now exists as a concrete scar, outlining edges of cities rather than connecting communities. But it holds the potential to become a spine of urban repair, where ecology, culture, and access are braided into a shared civic platform.[3] These edges that define the community are based on what is built up in the economy rather than who resides there. Zoning in Boyle Heights has not protected the community; it has fragmented it.[4] For example, industrial zoning next to homes has exposed families to pollution and truck traffic, while limiting space for community-focused development. These land-use choices have disrupted neighborhood cohesion and raised health concerns.

If we are to build living systems, we must rezone not for separation, but for repair, allowing water, trees, gathering, and care to cross lines that were meant to divide. The neighborhood has become a checkerboard of boundaries, dividing people from land, schools from shade, and housing from habitation.

Our conflict diagram brings these issues to light. There are opportunities within these vacant spaces for innovation, and our group advocates for a bottom-up approach driven by community participation and input. Leftover alleys, fenced edges, and vacant lots are not truly empty; they are constrained by policy, ownership issues, or long-standing neglect.

Mapping the invisible is the first step. This includes the water under the pavement, the social ties across fences, and the cultural practices that persist and fight the upstream battle. Institutional power and emerging community power must be mapped, not only where it is but also where it might reappear.

In Los Angeles, urban ecology is frequently discussed as a public good; but for whom? The same communities that are denied access to healthcare, housing, and transportation are also shut out of the natural systems that could support them.[5] Tree planting and shade distribution are uneven, often reflecting broader inequities in urban design. Parks tend to appear only after displacement has already started. These green spaces become desirable amenities that drive up property values and living costs, ultimately pricing out long-time, lower-income residents.

What is being cultivated when we talk about urban ecology? Repair is the first step toward true urban ecology.
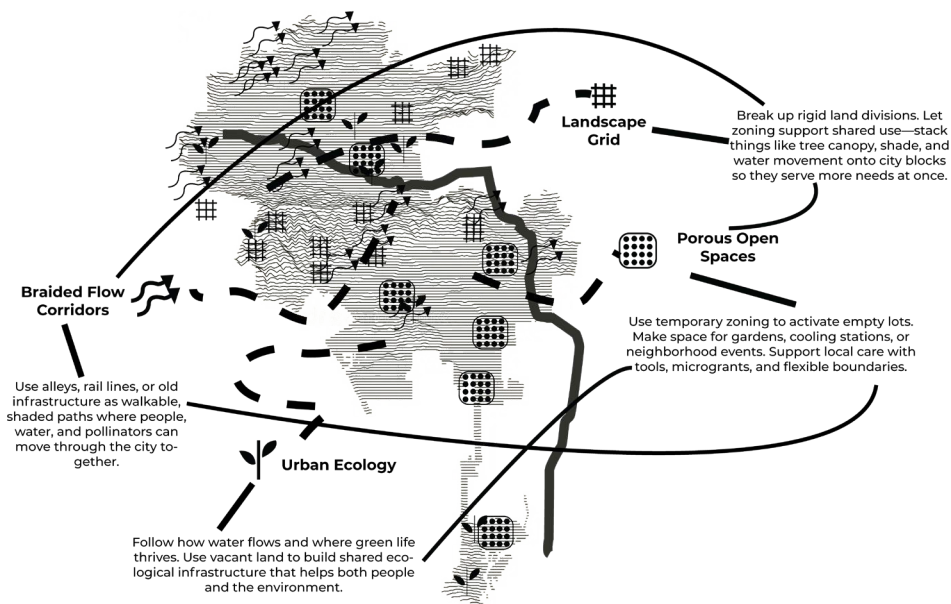
We must build a stronger founda-

Fig. 1. Diagram of river systems linking with city ecology. Photo by Ian Perez.

tion from the bottom that recognizes what has been displaced, rather than planting trees for the sake of metrics. Urban ecology should emerge organically, not be forced. This entails addressing the people who have been overlooked, the water that has been diverted, and the soil that has been buried in Boyle Heights. The temptation to beautify without belonging must be resisted. Land must be viewed not only as property, but as potential; instead, it is fenced, locked, and controlled.

We all need for food, shade, access, and community gathering. Ownership ought to change from speculation to care. Boyle Heights' future should be shaped by its residents, not absent landlords. In our vision, zoning is reprogrammed by ecological collectives, neighborhood ownership, and a broader push for urban ecology. We present new vocabulary: interconnection, landscape grids, urban ecology, porous open spaces, and braided flow corridors. These strategies transform vacant lots into living systems by replacing strict separation with relational repair. Our zoning diagram reveals how zoning keeps land use static; ignoring how communities live. We aim to create possibilities for the care, culture, and climate that zoning had wiped out. Communities can implement block-by-block transformation in Boyle Heights.[6]

The climate, culture, and care that is destroyed by zoning can also be restorative. It is possible for neighborhoods like Boyle Heights to adopt block-by-block transformation prototypes. But timing is everything. If we wait for the city to catch up, it will be too late.

Fig. 2. Progress on the 5Ws table. Photo by Lyannie Tran.
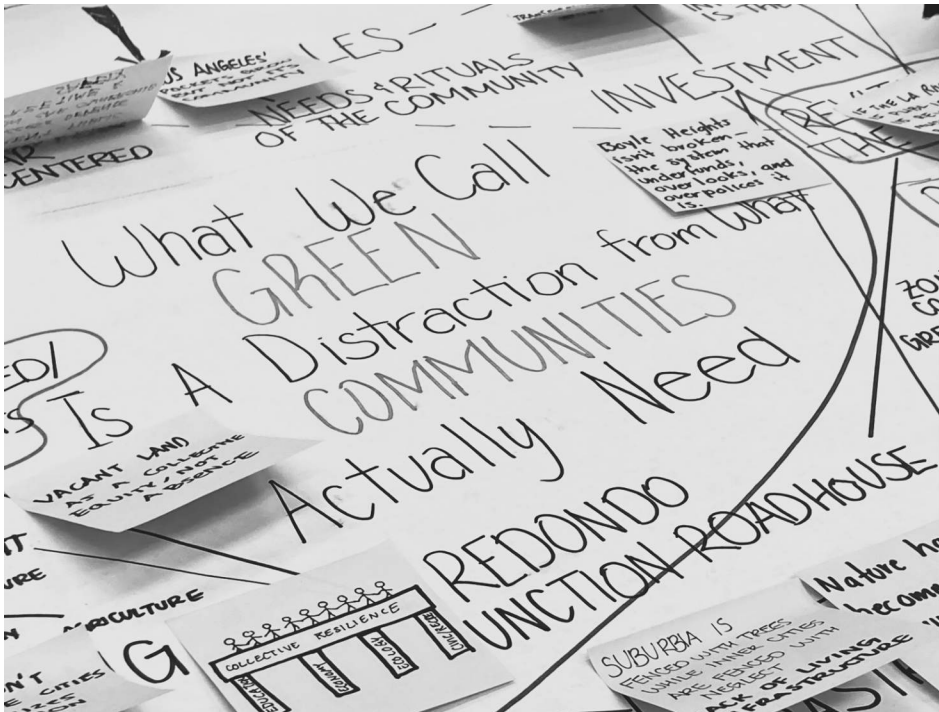
Fig. 3. Developing ideas for the conflict diagram. Photo by Lyannie Tran.

Fig. 4. Students presenting their diagrams to Teddy and Fonna. Photo by Juintow Lin.

Policy in Los Angeles often arrives after the damage is done, offering structure only once the land has already been reshaped by speculation.[7] Our conflict diagram exposes the lag between community need and institutional response, where paper protections rarely match lived reality. But hidden within city frameworks are tools waiting to be activated: ecological overlays, interim use permits, and land trusts that, if demanded, could unlock space for collective use. Instead of big budgets and hollow promises, we need small, coordinated interventions: planting where it is practical, sharing where it is necessary, and reclaiming where it is allowed.

This is not a project for the future; rather, it is a protest of the status quo.

From Boyle Heights, we can build a model on one that is scaled not by size, but by spirit. It is a city not designed from above but cultivated from below where the margins do not disappear, they organize.

If Boyle Heights can reclaim its river, reprogram its zoning, and re-connect its people to the land, then any city can. It starts here, in Boyle Heights.

THE MANIFESTATION OF A BROKEN SYSTEM, RECLAIMING URBAN RUINS

FATIMA JEFFREY | JOSH SHIROISHI | KEVIN JUAREZ-MARTINEZ

SOCIAL HUBS TO CULTIVATE THIRD SPACES

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING TO FURTHER DISPLACED INDIVIDUALS

RESTORING AN ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH BIOPHILIC ZONES

REGENERATIVE URBANISM TO ACTIVATE VACANT SPACE

RESOURCES CAPITAL KNOWLEDGE LABOR TIME

TO PROVIDE: EDUCATION SHELTER FOOD RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

CITY GOVERNMENT
DISTRICT OFFICIALS
HOMELESS
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
PRIVATE COMPANIES
NON PROFITS
LOCAL RESIDENTS
UNHOUSED
ACTIVISTS

CALL FOR CULTURAL REVITALIZATION THROUGH COALITION

VISUAL ARTS SCULPTURE THEATERS

ESTABLISH AN ARTIST SANCTUARY

RENT SHARING TACKLES HIGH EXPENSES OF LIVING

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURES FOR COMMUNITY LED MICRO ECONOMY

TRANSFORMING OCEANWIDE PLAZA TO INCUBATE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OF LOS ANGELES

LOS ANGELES'S SYSTEMATIC DYSFUNCTION DEVASTATES THE COMMUNITY

NEGLECTION OF PEOPLE'S VOICES AND HOPES

PUBLIC SENTIMENT IS HOPELESS IN A MONUMENTAL CHALLENGE

SAFETY HAZARDS OF A PROJECT CAN LEAD TO HEALTH DETERIORATION

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF DETRIMENTAL GENTRIFICATION

THE PARADOX / IRONY OF LUXURY LIVING IN A HOUSING CRISIS

ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION CAUSED BY URBAN DECAY

HOUSING COSTS = LUXURY LIVING WHY!

ECONOMIC BURDEN TO THE CITY

UNNECESSARY WASTE OF TAX DOLLARS USED TO ENSURE SAFETY

SECURITY / LAW ENFORCEMENT BEING DEPLOYED

04   Fatima Jeffrey, Joshua Shiroishi, Kevin Juarez-Martinez

The Manifestation of a Broken System, Reclaiming Urban Ruins

In recent times, the number of abandoned buildings throughout Los Angeles County has increased for many internal and external reasons, which include economic, health, and technological elements. This contributes to the ongoing struggle with urban decay and has undermined the city's ability to provide for its people. Los Angeles, like many other cities across the country, has abandoned buildings that have become a burden to their beloved neighborhoods.

Oceanwide Plaza is one of these abandoned building sites. Development of this project began in 2006, when a New York real estate firm purchased the 4.6-acre parking lot and proposed two 677 ft residential towers along with commercial spaces on the lower floors of the project. When the project reached the Great 2008 Recession, construction had not begun, and the project was later sold to overseas developer, China Oceanwide. Construction then resumed in 2015, but in 2018, the company faced financial hardships, and the building, then only partially completed, was again listed for sale. As of April 2025, the property has not been re-sold, and the building, in its unfinished state, remains abandoned. In its current state, it has been vandalized. In response, the City of Los Angeles has attempted to protect the building from future vandalism and trespassing through policing actions.[1]

Oceanwide Plaza is the embodiment of urban decay, a glaring issue that affects the people of Los Angeles. It is a strong example of a broken system, where the construction of luxury apartments is prioritized over the development of community needs. This is a call

Fig. 1. Students talking to Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman. Photo by Juintow Lin.

for action to reclaim urban ruins by creating spaces within abandoned buildings that can be redirected back to the community. A conflict diagram was developed to demonstrate the cause and effect of this situation. Our diagram represents a building built on a fractured foundation due to the abandoned ruins caused by a broken system. However, within this abandoned building, there is hope, an opportunity to reinvent these spaces and to give back to the community.

Looking into the history of Oceanwide Plaza, we uncovered three main reasons why Los Angeles' systemic dysfunction devastates the local community: 1) the hypocrisy of luxury living, 2) the economic burden, and 3) the lack of response to the community's call for change.[2] The abandoned towers stand as a contradiction to the original purpose of their creation, luxury homes in the heart of Los Angeles. These abandoned towers stand empty while the unhoused fill the streets; while families who have lost their homes in the wildfires seek safe refuge; and while many residents are being evicted due to increasing rental rates. Oceanwide Plaza sits unoccupied, while Los Angeles faces a desperate need for more living spaces. With time, the neglect of this space will lead to environmental destruction and urban decay, as seen elsewhere in Los Angeles. These towers are an economic burden to the city of Los Angeles. Many identify them as an eyesore that can lead to a decline in property values for the local businesses and homeowners in this area. This, in turn, can attract illicit activity and decrease safety in the surrounding area. Meanwhile, the city is wasting resources and tax money on security and maintenance of the building.[3] Overall, this building exacerbates economic instability.

Neglecting the voices of Los Angeles residents has buried the

hope for potential change. Such a monumental challenge leaves residents feeling hopeless and powerless because they are faced with safety hazards that increase and contribute to public health deterioration. The social impact of detrimental gentrification, which displaces the very residents that shape the community's identity, ultimately destroys the fabric of what makes a community unique.

Within these conflicts, we explored opportunities to resolve such issues. We propose to transform this abandoned structure to incubate a restoration process for the community through cultural revitalization, regenerative urbanism, and building a micro economy.

One approach is to foster cultural revitalization through coalitions. City officials, educational institutions, private companies, non-profits, activists, workers, students, and the unhoused can share valuable resources. When coalitions between entities are formed, knowledge is shared, and resources are distributed. Basic needs such as shelters can be met.

Building infrastructure for community-led microeconomics is key for restoration. One goal is to establish a small business marketplace/incubator where local businesses are supported and in turn can help commercialize a district. Families could collaborate together and become investors and rent shared

spaces to tackle high expenses. Lastly, street artists could reclaim this space to create an artist sanctuary, with different programs of theaters, art studios, and exhibits which bring in tourism and generate revenue.

Regenerative urbanism is the goal to revitalize the urban environment through enhancing current infrastructure to create resilient communities.[4] This can serve as a tool to activate vacant spaces in Oceanwide Plaza. Transitional housing can be implemented to host unhoused individuals and wildfire survivors. Abandoned spaces can be reclaimed to nurture third spaces where people can interact and form new social destinations.[5]

This is an opportunity to reclaim urban ruins and rebuild the future of abandoned spaces for those who need them the most. By transforming Oceanwide Plaza from a failed development to a resource, we begin to rewrite the future of our city. This could be an adaptive reuse project, similar to many East Coast transformative abandoned skyscraper projects, such as the rehabilitation of the Flatiron building into multi-family housing. In this instance, affordable housing brought the upper floors to life through inhabitation.[6]

Los Angeles needs a place that serves and empowers all its residents, starting with the most vulnerable.

Fig. 2. 5Ws analysis. Photo by Kevin Juarez-Martinez.

Fig. 3. "How" analysis. Photo by Fatima Jeffrey.

Fig. 4. Bubble diagram. Photo by Fatima Jeffrey.

Fig. 5. Preliminary diagram. Photo by Kevin Juarez-Martinez.

CONFRONTING DISPARITY AND NEGLECT: HOW LOS ANGELES FAILS THE UNHOUSED

Democratizing support systems for the homeless through Civic Participation (Community)

*SUBSTANCE ABUSE — *TRAUMA

*STEREOTYPES DIFFERENT CLASSES AND THEIR PREJUDICE OF DANGER ASSOCIATED BY UNHOUSED

REDLINING BETWEEN THE WEALTHY AND THE POOR — OVER CONCENTRATED AREAS

{UNHOUSED}

{veterans} {incarcerated} {unprivileged}

*POLICIES LIMITING ACCESS TO INSURANCE AND RESOURCES

Establish a Legal Right to Housing (Policy)

areas of encampment

*INCENTIVES TO DRIVE THE UNHOUSED OUT — *GENTRIFICATION

*POLITICAL RESISTANCE

-PUBLIC OPINION -ECONOMIC WEALTH -STREET CLEANING

{political officals} {government} {developers}

-JULY 2024 NEWSOM EXECUTIVE ORDER THAT ALLOWS CITIES TO ENFORCE BAN ON SLEEPING ON THE STREETS

Reclaiming Infrastructure for the Homeless (Infrastructure)

abandoned buildings that were/are privately developed

*GENTRIFICATION

*MARGINALIZATION

-STREET CLEANINGS

-DISPLACEMENT OF THE UNHOUSED

-PRIORITIZE SURVIVAL OVER GROWTH

{undocumented} {unhoused individuals}

{discrimination} {cities desire for beautification}

*EX: 2028 OLYMPICS *2021 ECHO PARK ENCAMPMENT CLEARANCE FOR RENOVATIONS

Incentivizing Landowners for Social Impact (Economy)

wealthy area vs historical low income area

*MISALLOCATION OF MONEY *GENTRIFICATION

-WANT TO BOOST ECONOMY SHORT-TERM SOLUTION -PRIORITIZING PROFIT OVER EQUALITY -POLITICAL RESISTANCE FROM WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD

{landlords} {business} {real estate}

*INCENTIVES TO DRIVE HOMELESS OUT *LA BECOMES MORE DENSE WANTING TO EXPAND EX.SKID ROW

DEMAND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

community / higher education

shared pedagogy

DO NOT JUST REBUILD, PROTECT OUR PEOPLE!

activating housing

DON'T SEGREGATE, INVEST IN COMMUNITY

HIGHER EDUCATION

SKID ROW

RESIDENTIAL

POLITICAL EQUATOR

05

Ana Sofia Botero Cely, Nicholas Do,
Erika Estrella and Leslie Gutierrez

Confronting Disparity and Neglect: How Los Angeles Fails the Unhoused

Homelessness within Los Angeles, particularly in Skid Row, is one example of the broader mental health crisis facing unhoused people.

One of the biggest challenges with homelessness is the self-perpetuating cycle caused by unstable housing and lack of self-growth opportunities. This is further exacerbated by stigmatization and discrimination from the housed.

When looking at a multilevel approach of local, metropolitan, and bioregional issues, we identified key issues through the use of the 5Ws.

This tool, developed during the Political Equator Workshop, encourages us to ask: Where, Why, What, Who, and When in order to understand a conflict or topic. Through this analysis, we identified not only zones of vulnerability, but also opportunities. Each line on the map is not just a connection, it represents the tensions between systems and people. Homelessness is not linear. It is a complex web of intersecting forces that are difficult to escape.

Our conflict diagram is a reflection of loss, fear, neglect, and anger. It maps out the interconnected elements that lead to systemic failure. It focuses on the mental health impacts of the unhoused in the city of Los Angeles, more specifically Skid Row.

In our analysis, four key actions are investigated: (1) democratize homelessness through civic participation and community involvement, (2) incentivize landowners to generate economic social impact, (3) spatial justice through infrastructure reclamation, and (4) establish a legal right to housing.
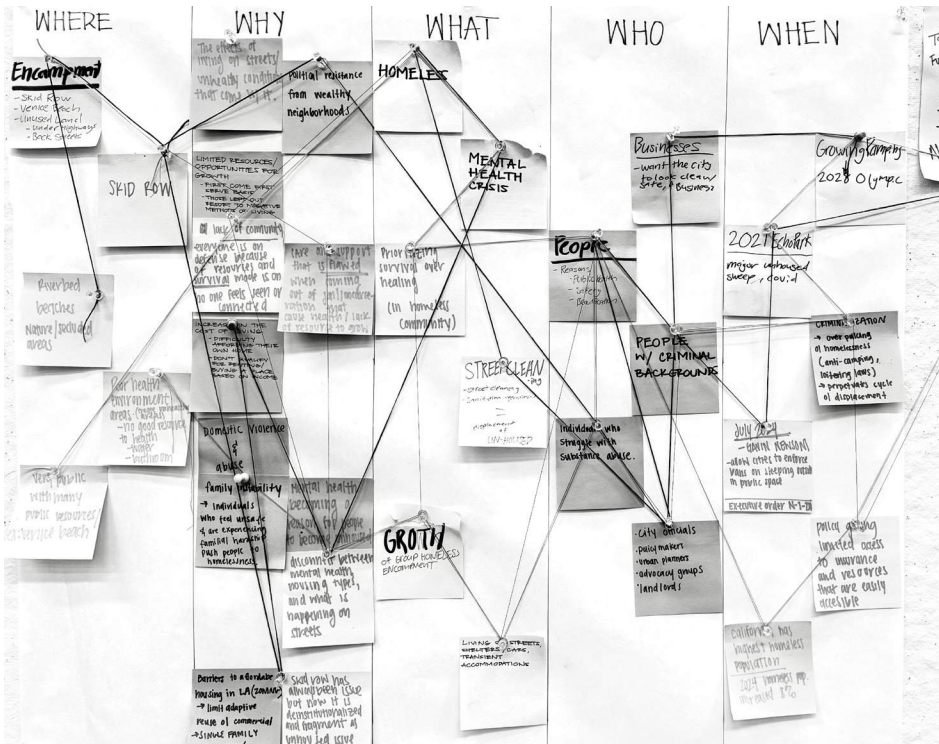
Fig. 1. Group's 5Ws mapped with string to show connections. Photo by Nicholas Do.

Don't Segregate, Invest in Community!
Democratizing homelessness through civic participation acknowledges that the city often stigmatizes the unhoused for their encampments and misinterprets their personal histories of trauma or substance abuse. This often leads to overconcentrated areas and redlining between the wealthy and the poor. These divisions also occur between city officials or landlords and the unhoused or under-privileged. Many of those affected have experienced policies that restrict access to essential resources.[1] For example, in July 2024, Newsom issued an executive order that allowed cities to enforce bans on sleeping on the streets.[2]

Rather than designing standardized micro-units for shelter, such as in Star Apartments by Michael Maltzan,[3] what if we prioritized the existing skills and knowledge of the unhoused, enabling them to support one another and participate in the design process? Imagine micro-communities where unhoused individuals and students work together through shared pedagogy, learning trades, building projects, and gaining educational experience through collaborative practice. In South Los Angeles, there are many areas with underutilized civic cultural centers that could host creative and collaborative workshops. High schools and community colleges can establish civic mentorship

programs; by pairing students with the unhoused to develop and cultivate entrepreneurial skills. In dense and populated areas such as Echo Park, Koreatown, and downtown Los Angeles, which have suffered in recent years after COVID-19,[4] this would create opportunities to restore civic participation for both the unhoused and local community residents.[5] Overall, these can become micro-places of opportunity, community, and synergy, breaking down NIMBY behaviors, and creating long-term infrastructure for inclusion.

Demand Housing Affordability!
Incentivizing landowners to create social impact should target both affluent and historically low-income areas. In affluent communities, public funds should be used to incentivize community collaboration or investment. In low-income areas, prioritizing economic results needs to also address affordability of the living conditions. The misallocation of funds towards addressing the unhoused showcases the prioritization of profit over equality and the desire to boost the economy through short-term solutions. One example is the removal of the unhoused from the streets under the guise of street cleaning. This is a cosmetic solution that moves the unhoused population around the city, but does not attempt to address the cause of the situation.

We identify the base factors contributing to this issue are corporate businesses and the government. These entities are driven by the desire to expand and densify the city of Los Angeles, especially in preparation for the 2028 Olympics in pursuit of a cleaner image for tourists.[6][7]

What would happen if we incentivized the community with tax reductions, volunteer credits, or school grants to build Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)? In this way, more housing could be built in the areas where housing is needed, and professional design and collaboration can come from students and the local construction community. These micro-communities would be a starting point for reintegrating unhoused individuals back into society.

ADUs are a great solution. They can encourage housing based on shared hobbies and interests. Grouping unhoused individuals with similar skills and interests with one another allows for creative growth and helps facilitate active means of improving mental health. This creates micro-economies for collaboration, and it could be self-sustaining.

Programs could also be established with higher education institutions to design co-living units and give tax breaks to homeowners who lease for transitional housing. Taking a step further, city-owned parcels of land could also be allocated to housing co-ops that match skills

with productive uses such as urban farming or fabrication labs.

Rebuild and Protect our People!
Infrastructure reclamation recognizes that abandoned developments offer no real solutions, only opportunities for further gentrification and marginalization within communities.

Those primarily affected by it are unhoused individuals. The city's desire for superficial beautification has been further exacerbated by initiatives such as street cleaning noted above, to prepare for the upcoming Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.[8]Reclaiming infrastructure for the unhoused means using skills to activate interstitial unused areas in Los Angeles. This includes unused warehouses, and properties that can provide opportunities for long-term ecosystems where unhoused individuals can live, build, and create communities of care.

Reclaiming infrastructure can be initiated and funded by schools, more specifically young aspiring students of business, architecture, and related fields. For example, underutilized warehouses in the arts district, could be reclaimed through student projects to create live/work small business areas with modular housing and community fabrication spaces.

Invest in Repairing and Restructure Policies!
Establishing a legal right to housing is how we can create lasting permanence. Recalling Pruitt-Igoe, public housing was a "solution" at that time and demonstrates how past policies prioritized necessity over care. This lack of intentionality within government policy reflects why their actions have historically failed to address the homelessness crisis through long-term solutions. For example, in Skid Row, homelessness has persisted for decades with no clear resolution or evolution; affluent neighborhoods create political resistance, inevitably creating encampments in areas that lack many resources.

Who is responsible for us? When housing becomes a privilege rather than a right, we must ask not only whom it has failed but who benefits from that failure. We need to establish housing as a legal and moral obligation, not a privilege.

What would downtown Los Angeles look like if every district required supportive housing and services? Every neighborhood, even the wealthiest, should be zoned with affordable housing minimums. We must organize public funds towards long-term reintegration rather than short-term solutions. A statewide legal right to housing must be established, ensuring that no person is left without shelter and support. When policy decentralizes power, it creates opportunities for anyone to take action. When housing is a right, solidarity replaces survival.

Fig. 2. First presentations to Teddy and Fonna. Photo by Nicholas Do.

Final Thoughts: Recognizing Opportunity and Permanence

Homelessness on Skid Row is a very complex and urgent issue.[9] It is a layered crisis that stems from ongoing systemic failure that needs to be addressed. However, we have learned that there are clear opportunities to help the unhoused as seen in examples such as creating micro-communities, creating long-term spaces that create positive change not just for the unhoused but for many communities in Los Angeles. Through democratizing architecture, incentivizing community action, reclaiming infrastructure, and policy change, we recognize that permanence becomes possible when designing with people, not just for them.

From Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman's bottom-up/top-down approach, we are able to seek solutions derived from both directions. This includes understanding that the provision of resources to support unhoused individuals is vital to restoring active participation in communities and holding those in higher power accountable.

Fig. 3. Version 1 of Group's Diagram. Photo by Lyannie Tran.

Fig. 4. Group discussing over 5Ws and drafts. Photo by Lyannie Tran.

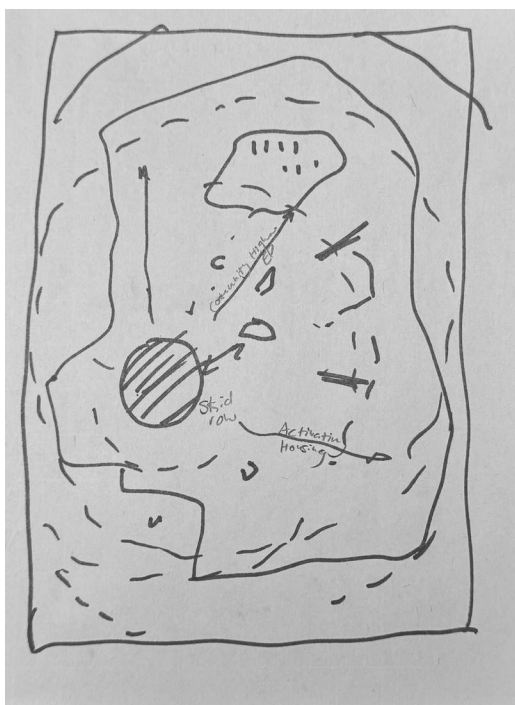Fig. 5. Group photo with final conflict diagram. Photo by Leslie Gutierrez.

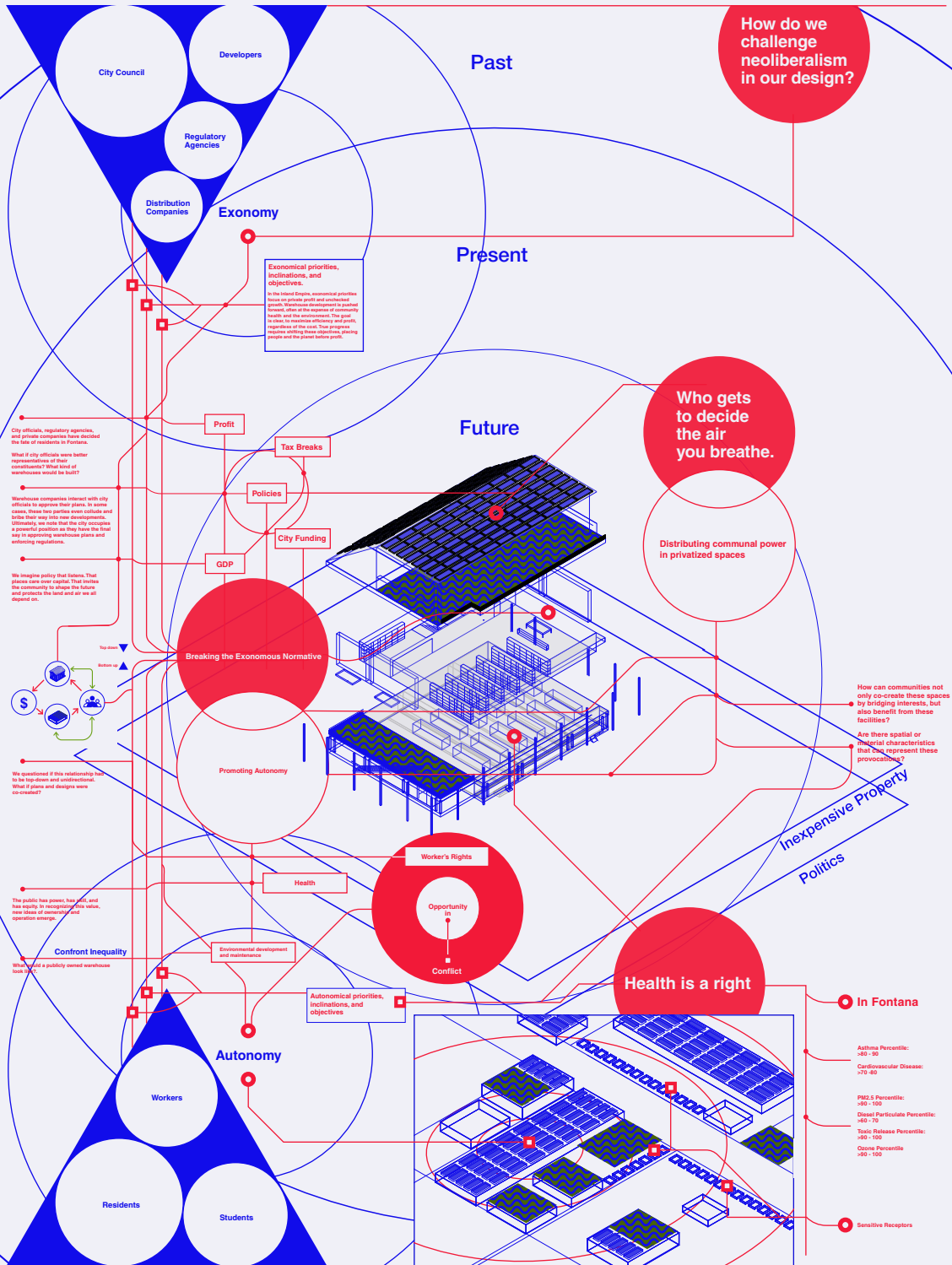Fig. 6. Sketch of conflict diagram from Teddy. Photo By Nicholas Do.

Unboxing Neoliberalism and Exonomy in the Warehouse

Top Down

City Council

Developers

Regulatory Agencies

Distribution Companies

Past

Present

Exonomy

How do we challenge neoliberalism in our design?

Exonomical priorities, inclinations, and objectives.

In the Inland Empire, exonomical priorities focus on private profit and unchecked growth. Warehouse development is pushed forward, often at the expense of community health and the environment. The goal is clear, to maximize efficiency and profit, regardless of the cost. True progress requires shifting these objectives, placing people and the planet before profit.

Future

City officials, regulatory agencies, and private companies have decided the fate of residents in Fontana.

What if city officials were better representatives of their constituents? What kind of warehouses would be built?

Warehouse companies interact with city officials to approve their plans. In some cases, these two parties even collude and bribe their way into new developments. Ultimately, we note that the city occupies a powerful position as they have the final say in approving warehouse plans and enforcing regulations.

We imagine policy that listens. That places care over capital. That invites the community to shape the future and protects the land and air we all depend on.

Who gets to decide the air you breathe.

Distributing communal power in privatized spaces

Profit

Tax Breaks

Policies

City Funding

GDP

How can communities not only co-create these spaces by bridging interests, but also benefit from these facilities?

Are there spatial or material characteristics that can represent these provocations?

Breaking the Exonomous Normative

Top down ▼
Bottom up ▲

$

We questioned if this relationship had to be top-down and unidirectional. What if plans and designs were co-created?

Promoting Autonomy

The public has power, has skill, and has equity. In recognizing this value, new ideas of ownership and operation emerge.

Confront Inequality

What would a publicly owned warehouse look like?

Worker's Rights

Health

Opportunity in

Conflict

Environmental development and maintenance

Autonomical priorities, inclinations, and objectives

Health is a right

In Fontana

Asthma Percentile: >80 - 90

Cardiovascular Disease: >70 -80

PM2.5 Percentile: >90 - 100

Diesel Particulate Percentile: >60 - 70

Toxic Release Percentile: >90 - 100

Ozone Percentile >90 - 100

Sensitive Receptors

Autonomy

Workers

Residents

Students

Bottom Up

Inexpensive Property

Politics

Warehouses are a part of the ecology in this region. Transforming individual sites with our design proposals enriches the entire community and can protect their health.

06

Danilo Nesmiyan, Giovanna Bowen,
John Silvestre, Kaelah Wilson

Unboxing Neoliberalism and Exonomy in the Warehouse

Our vision for the future of warehouse design in the Inland Empire is a response to legacies of injustice. This proposal seeks to reclaim autonomy for residents and workers and emphasizes values that exist outside of neoliberal perspectives. Our proposed design includes changes at spatial and material levels, as well as at institutional and social levels.

Neoliberal practices in the United States were popularized in the 1980s and have remained influential ever since.[1] These are practices that favor private enterprise and the free market, often at the expense of public interest. Some scholars have even pointed to this practice as one that exacerbated the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic due to weakened social protections, like healthcare and workers' rights.[2] Prioritizing private profit over people has

resulted in excessive warehouse development in the Inland Empire, which intensifies social and environmental crises.

The Inland Empire has the worst air quality in the country, specifically in the cities of Ontario, San Bernardino, Bloomington, and Fontana.[3][4] Warehouses, constituting over a billion square feet, are serviced by over a million diesel trucks per day. These large engines emit pollutants like NOx and PM 2.5 into the air.[5] Studies by the EPA have proven that these air pollutants contribute to increased risks of asthma and cardiovascular disease.[6][7]

Access to good health is a natural right, yet the residents and natural environment of this region bear the consequences of polluted air, an unintended side effect due to modern efficiencies in global trade, such

as overnight package delivery. Warehouses are concentrated in the Inland Empire due to affordable land, available workforce, and favorable political conditions. Companies like Amazon hit record profits while warehouse workers are consistently paid below a living wage.[8] Other warehouses are built right next to sensitive receptors including homes and even schools. Disregard for the health of nearby residents is exemplified by recent warehouse developments in the city of Fontana.

Fontana's high school has over fifteen warehouses within a one-mile radius, including one approved recently by the city in 2021, which is sited on the same block as the school. Outcry from residents was not enough to challenge the forces of neoliberalism these facilities embody.

In recognizing the conflicts around warehousing in the Inland Empire, this illuminated ways that development could be improved. Incorporating technologies like photovoltaics for building operation and electric vehicles, increasing the number of positions that pay a living wage, designing green spaces on site for workers and the public, and designating spatial and temporal truck routes away from sensitive receptors are some ideas that challenge the neoliberal value system and promote public health. These changes may carry a monetary cost, but we believe these ideas can begin to subvert the idea of

profit over people and mark a shift towards a new value system. As we propose solutions and improvements to warehouse design, we must consider who can implement these changes. Who decides the air you breathe or the landscape you live in? These questions led us to explore the exonomous norm. We define the term "exonomy" to represent a lack of autonomy. Exonomy refers to a governance imposed by external forces. It is the norm for this region and characterizes the current process of warehouse development.

City officials, regulatory agencies, and private companies have decided the fate of residents in Fontana. Citizens do not decide how warehouses are designed nor where they are built. They are shut out of decisions that affect their health, the types of available jobs, and their agency over land that is sacrificed for warehouses rather than reserved for housing or agriculture.

This is nothing new.

The Inland Empire was built by stripping residents of their autonomy. This began with Spanish colonizers, who displaced and captured the indigenous Serrano, turning them into a labor force for the Spanish Missions.[9] This labor pool expanded during an agricultural "citrus boom" to include new immigrants such as the Chinese, then Japanese, and later Mexican migrants.[10] Private interests deter-

mined the lives of these workers, seducing them with promises of jobs and the pursuit of happiness, only to later instill laws such as the Chinese Exclusionary Act (1882), Japanese internment (1942-1946), and ongoing anti-immigration policies.

The future of the region does not lie within this exonomous domination. Where are the opportunities for regaining autonomy and creating positive change?

By illuminating the past and present power conflicts in the region, we uncover numerous opportunities for improvement. Presently, warehouse companies interact with the city government to approve their plans. In some cases, these two parties have been suspected of colluding with each other.[11] Ultimately, the city occupies a powerful position, as it has the final say in approving warehouse plans and enforcing regulations.

How would the approval process look if city officials truly represented their constituents? What kind of warehouses would be built? The conflict diagram presented here promotes the power of the populace. Although the democratic process is by no means perfect, we believe that public investment in interest groups and a culture of civic engagement is critical. Some cities have succeeded in regulating truck routes and even placing moratoriums on development.

Re-establishing the representative relationship between the residents and city government has the potential to impact warehouse development. We also recognize that residents can play a stronger role if they form a direct relationship with warehouse developers.

We questioned whether this relationship had to be top-down and unidirectional. What if plans and designs were co-created?

The current relationship between the public and private industry is reactionary and siloed. Private entities typically interact with the public through lawsuits and exposés, a costly and time-consuming process for both parties. Instead of working together, these groups are positioned as if their interests are mutually exclusive.

Yet, we recognize that warehouses exist as a link to the global distribution of goods. They provide thousands of jobs both within their walls and beyond. They make it possible for small businesses to reach customers around the globe, and they bring investments into local economies. There is a potential to align these benefits with residents' concerns about their own health and job security.

How can local interests in Fontana be bridged with private, institutional, and global interests?

Fig. 1. Students discussing the project and gathering information. Photo by Juintow Lin.

Fig. 2. Group collaborating to create a chart for the 5Ws. Photo by Danilo Nesmiyan.

The local community, when collected together, has the power, skill, and equity in addressing these issues. In recognizing this value, new ideas of ownership and operation can emerge. How can communities not only co-create these spaces by bridging interests, but also benefit from these facilities? What would a publicly owned warehouse look like?

The warehouse design presented here was influenced by all of these provocations and questions. On a material level, the design includes increased public green space, photovoltaics, electric freight and in-dustrial vehicles, EV charging, modular interiors that can extend the building's future programming use, and break rooms which promote well-being and autonomy for workers. More importantly, however, the design proposes institutional shifts. Warehouses should be designed collaboratively with the community and could even be developed by the community through new forms of ownership.

The warehousing crisis represents legacies of neoliberalism and exonomy in the region, but it also invites innovation for a mutually beneficial future.

Fig. 3. Completed 5Ws chart. Photo by Danilo Nesmiyan.

THE OLYMPICS IS A TOOL.

Presented by Marvin Alexander, Ethan Francisco, Do Kyung Lee, and Lauren Wong. April 2025.

LA28 is ripe with potential to improve the urban landscape of Los Angeles.

By reimagining sustainable investment, can the Olympics be a tool to build a resilient social infrastructure for our city's future?

"¿Qué le gustaría ver mejorado en su comunidad?"

What do you wish to see improved in your neighborhood?

COMMUNITY INTELLIGENCE ADVOCACY

"你認為你家附近有哪些空間很重要,需要被保存下來的呢?"

Which site in your neighborhood do you think is important to preserve?

SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENT = LONGTERM SOCIAL BENEFITS

SCALABLE SOLUTION

RELATIONAL RESILIENCE

BUILD EQUITY & ACCESS WITH CONNECTIVITY

Những vấn đề nào quang trong nhất mà bạn muốn các nhà lãnh đạo cộng đồng của mình cần quan tâm?
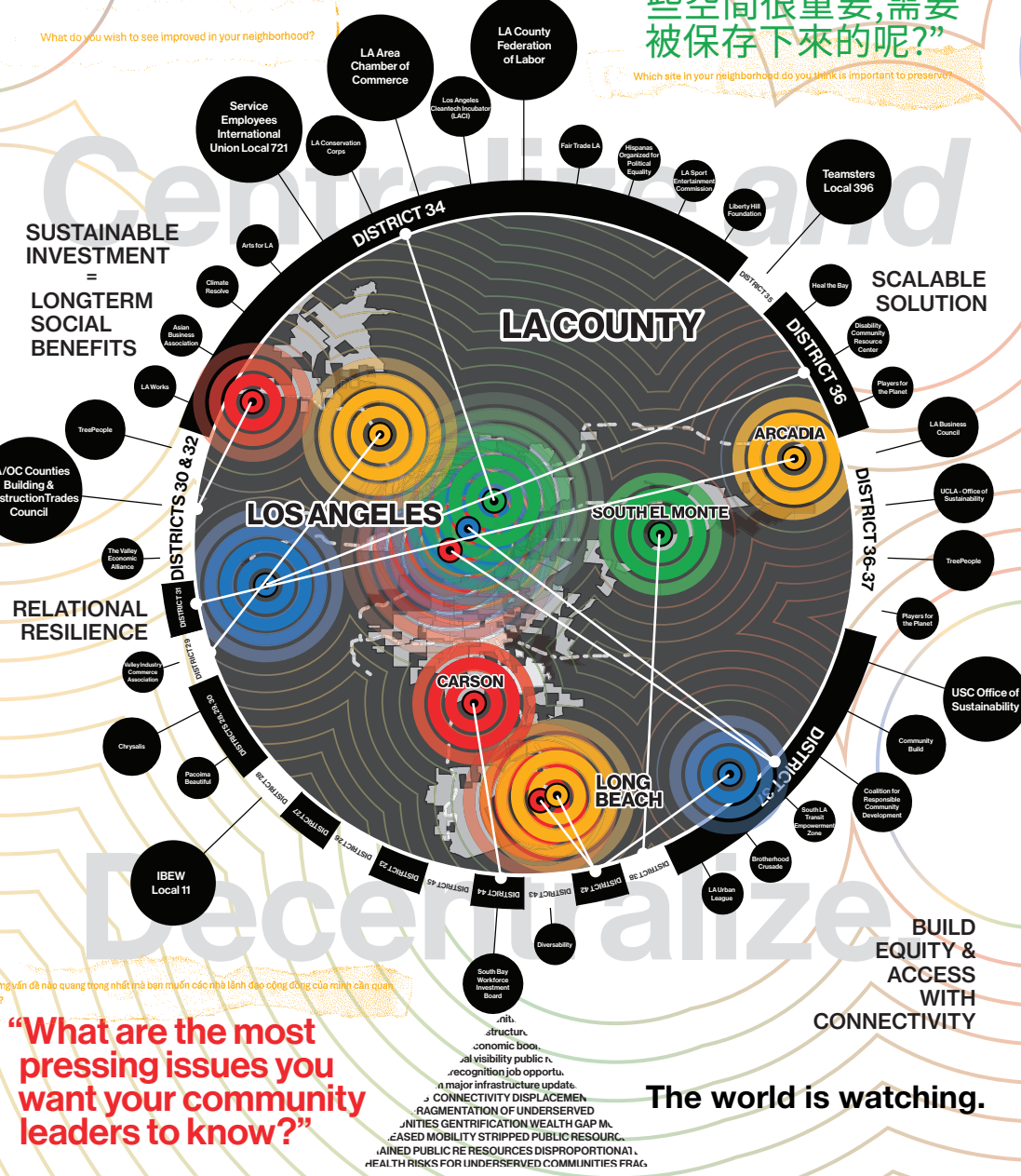
"What are the most pressing issues you want your community leaders to know?"

The world is watching.

07   Marvin Alexander, Ethan Francisco, Do Kyung Lee, and Lauren Wong

The Olympics Is a Tool

The Olympics is not just a sporting event. It is one of the largest global spectacles that arrives with billions in capital,[1] heightened media attention, and political urgency. With Los Angeles hosting the 2028 Olympics (LA28), the city of Los Angeles stands at a precipice. How will this city respond to a once-in-a-generation opportunity?

We assert: the Olympics is a tool -- and like any tool, it can be used to build, or it can be used to destroy.

A History of Transformation
Historically, the Olympics has transformed its host cities, for example Barcelona's beaches, London's transit systems, and Beijing's skyline. But too often, the promise of prosperity has come at a cost: entire communities have been displaced, neighborhoods gentrified, ecologies degraded, and public resources

drained. These are not unintended consequences. They are reflections of top-down planning that prioritize spectacle over people.

But LA28 is meant to be different. It's pitched as a "no-build" Olympics,[2] one that doesn't require massive new stadiums or infra- structure. Instead, the plan is to retrofit and revitalize what already exists. This opens the door to key questions: what if the Olympics didn't just avoid harm -- but actively sought to heal it? What if the presence of this global sports competition highlighted the city's specific urban conflicts, thereby pressuring response?

The Circle of Affluence
At the heart of our vision lies the "circle of affluence." Olympic venues, mapped across LA County, act as epicenters of economic energy. Capital flows in via tourists, corporations,

Fig. 1. Teddy & Fonna trace over conflict diagram. Photo by Juintow Lin.
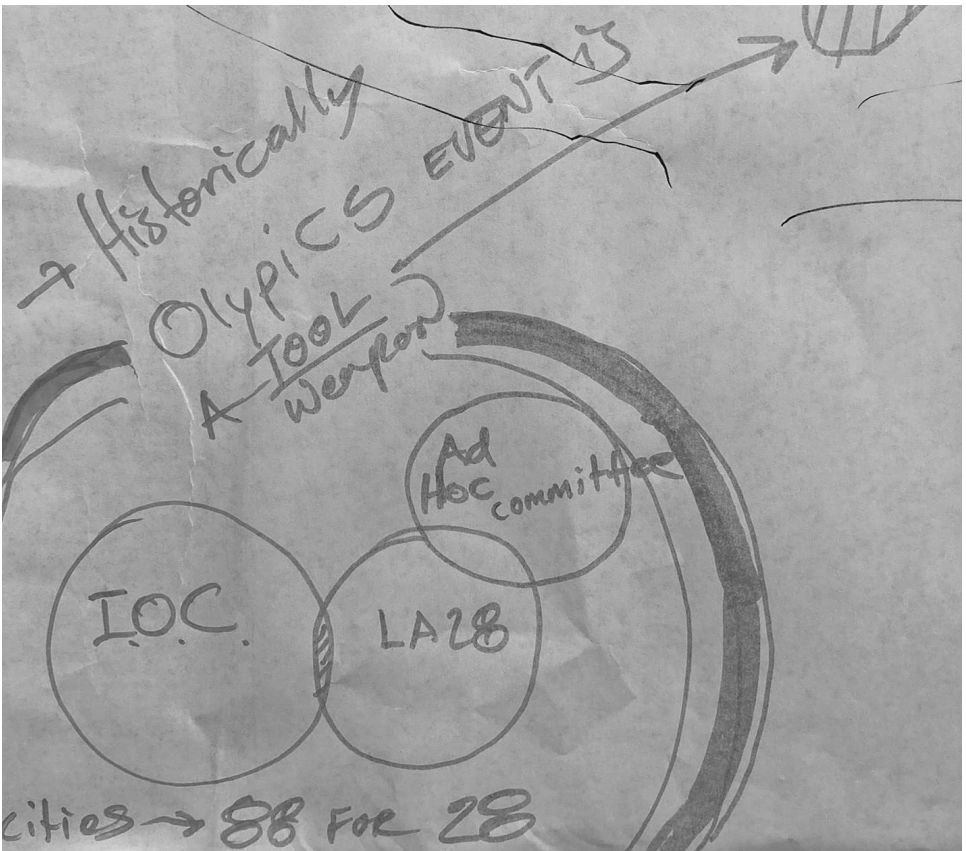
Fig. 2. Mapping out the connections. Photo by Lyannie Tran.

and private investment. Traditionally, this energy has been contained, siloed, and absorbed by the affluent.[3] With LA28, however, there is potential to radiate that energy outward as venues are spread throughout counties surrounding Los Angeles.

The conflict lies here: Will this circle of affluence spill out and embrace the traditionally underserved communities in its path? Or will it wash over them, indifferent and extractive?

From Top-Down to Bottom-Up
The Olympics must not be a monologue from the powerful. It must be a dialogue with the people.

Through 88for28, the countywide coalition of representatives from 88 cities and 140 unincorporated communities, and through dozens of working groups across congressional districts,[4] LA28 has a chance to rewrite the power dynamic.

The top-down approach is clear; mega-corporations and sponsors like Nike, Visa, and Samsung inject capital.[5] LA28 and the 88for28 councils centralize these resources as they plan, prioritize, and distribute the funds.[6] However, without accountability, this process risks serving the interests of the few. That's where the bottom-up approach comes in.

In dialogue with the community, we ask:

What do you wish to see improved in your neighborhood?

What spaces should be preserved?

What issues do you want your leaders to understand?

By starting with questions, we invite communities to participate not just as spectators, but as co-authors of

What are the most pressing issues you want your community leaders to k

¿Qué le gustaría ver mejorado en su comunidad?

Những vấn đề nào quang trọng nhất mà bạn muốn các nhà lãnh đạo cộng đồng của tâm?

¿Cuáles son los problemas más urgentes que desea que sus representantes comunitarios conozcan?

What do you wish to see improved in your neighborh

Which site in your neighborhood do you think is important to pres

Fig. 3. Proposed survey questions translated into various languages by Do Kyung Lee

their future. Empowered individuals influence working groups, that elect mindful officials, and shape how resources are distributed. This feedback loop between top and bottom, between capital and community, must be protected and prioritized.

Working Groups: The Heart of Distribution

The inner rings of our conflict diagram show the vital role of grassroots organizations and NGOs in working groups.[7] These are not abstract entities. They are integrated into neighborhoods. They know the streets, the schools, and the air their communities inhabit. They hold the knowledge needed to deploy Olympic resources where they are most needed.

These groups must not be token partners. They must be central actors in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Their connection to congressional districts ensures that local knowledge can shape regional outcomes. This is how equity is built, not with broad strokes, but through surgical, informed, and compassionate decisions.

Decentralization as Justice

Los Angeles is famously decentralized, a patchwork of districts with unique needs. This mosaic often leads to uneven representation and services. But with LA28, decentralization is both our approach and framework: it becomes our strength. Multiple venues spread throughout the Los Angeles region can create multiple points and paths of impact. This dispersion, if applied even more widely to reach its peripheries, can decentralize and redistribute wealth, investment, and opportunity.

Improved metro systems and highways can reconnect communities long cut off from the city's core.[8] Influx of tourism around suburban venues can uplift local businesses and generate jobs.

The goal is not just to host a successful Olympics; it is to leave behind a more connected, resilient, and equitable Los Angeles.

A Double-Edged Sword

We are not blind to the risks. The very forces that bring development can also bring destruction.[9] Gentrification, displacement, environmental strain, and drained public resources loom over every major event. The Olympics can widen wealth gaps as easily as it can close them.

Tools don't choose how they're used, people do.

We call for a vigilant, transparent system that constantly holds itself accountable: equity audits, community consultations, legal safeguards against displacement, affordable housing guarantees, and environmental protections.

A city that builds with its people, not over them.[10]

Fig. 4. The team poses with their printed poster. Photo by Juintow Lin.

A Lasting Legacy

We do not measure success by the number of medals won. We measure it by whether the child in Pacoima can ride a clean, fast train to a good school; whether the family in South Los Angeles can remain in their apartment without fear of eviction; whether the air is clean and whether the streets are safer to walk.

The Olympics is a temporary event, but its effects are not.

Our children will grow up in the shadow -- or the light -- of what we choose to do now.
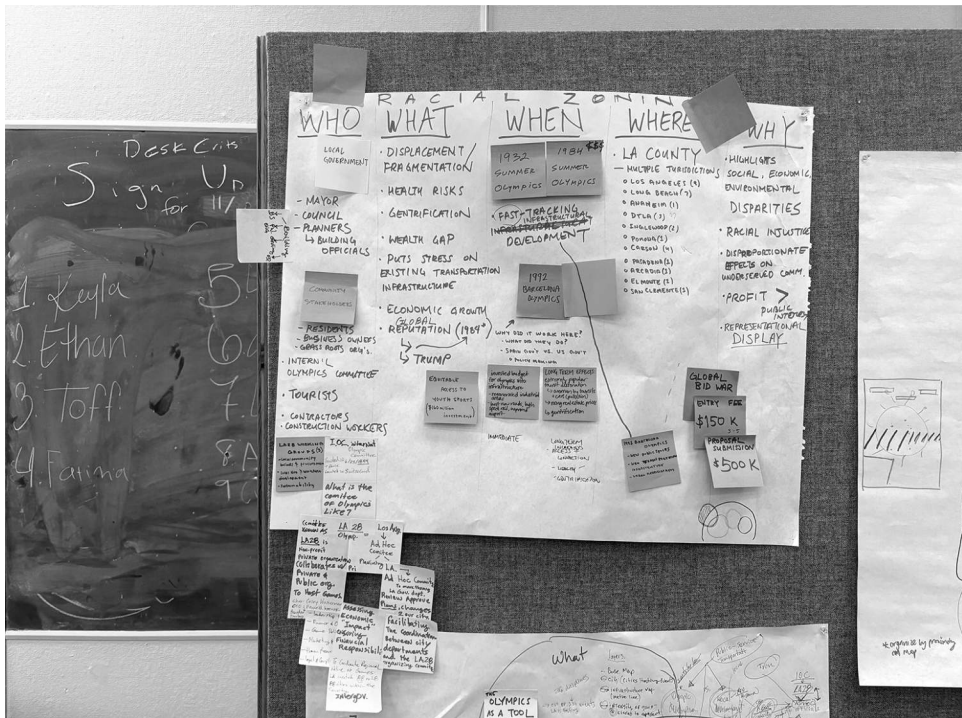
Fig. 5. 5Ws brainstorming. Photo by Ethan Francisco.
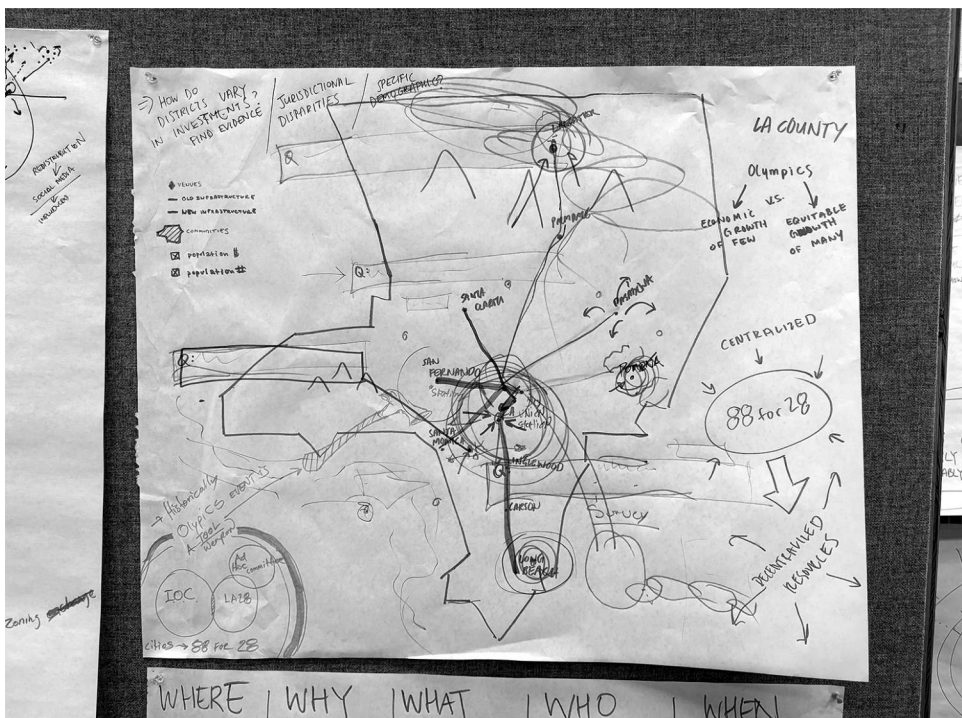
Fig. 6. Mapped venues over LA County map diagram. Photo by Ethan Francisco.
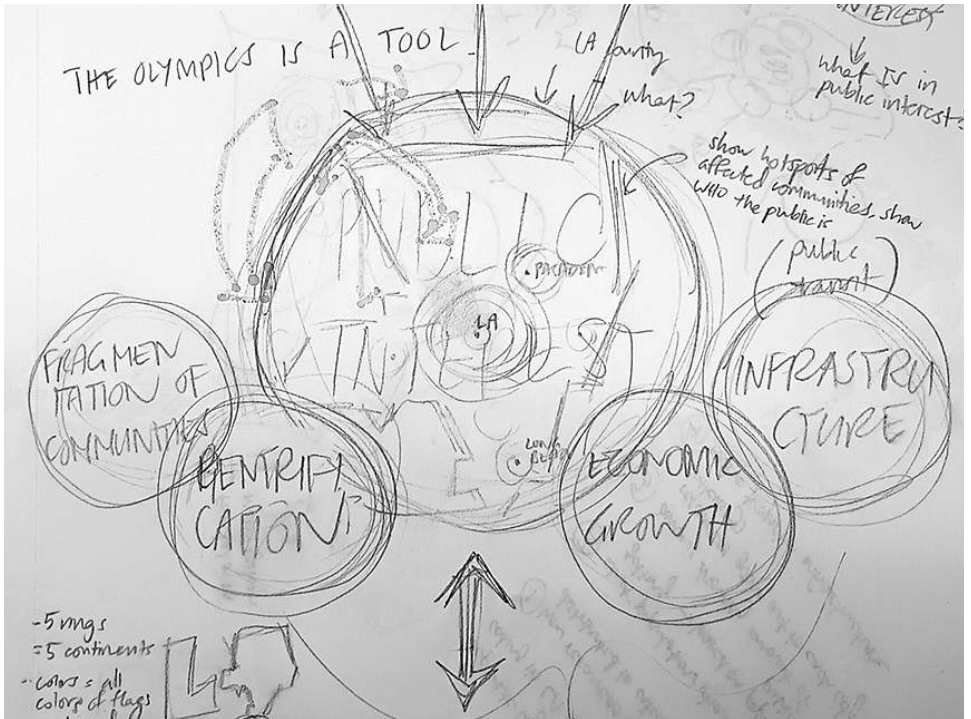
Fig. 7. Olympics conflict diagram. Photo by Lauren Wong.
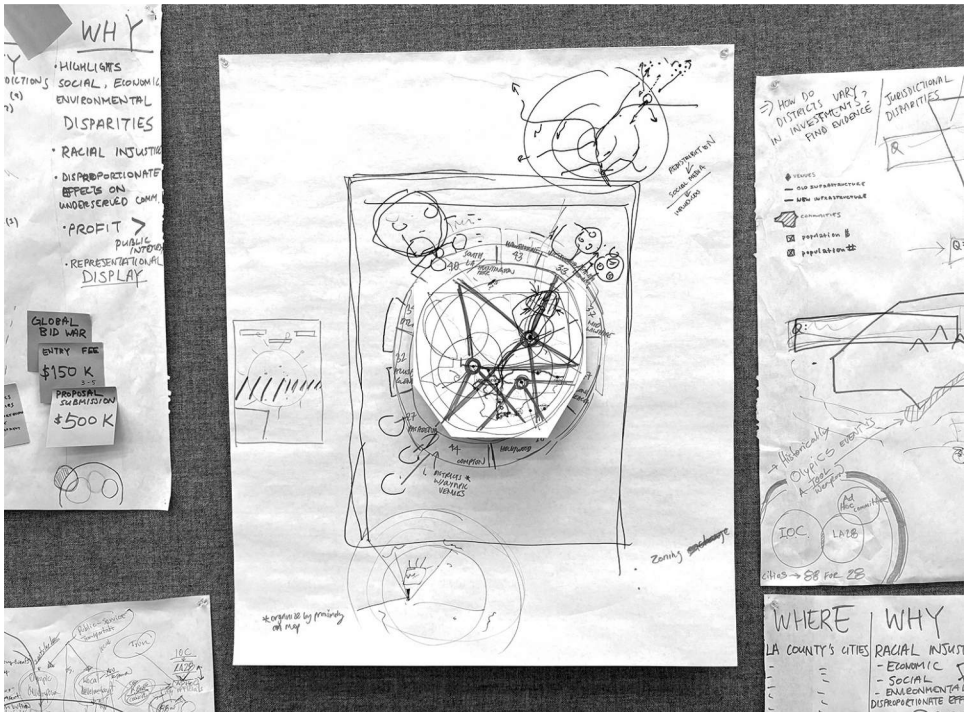
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Workshop Participants

Marvin Alexander
Master of Architecture, Second year
Marvin is embarking on a transformative journey in architecture. He embraces every exciting moment and formidable challenge as an opportunity for growth. He has discovered that true success is not built on strength and courage alone, but on the ability to adapt, to bend with the winds of change, and to rise stronger with every turn of the journey. His path is one of hope and resilience.

Ana Sofia Botero Cely
Bachelor of Architecture, Third year, minor in Regenerative Studies
Ana Sofia is on a journey to transform lives and truly change the way buildings are experienced. She aspires to apply sustainable and regenerative systems to allow humans to learn, create communities, and help transform the future of the built environment. In her free time, she loves to learn, make jewelry, and spend time with family and friends.

Giovanna Bowen
Master of Architecture, Second year
Giovanna holds a Bachelor of Interior Design and a minor in Finance from California State University, Long Beach. She is eager to design sustainable and impactful spaces. Outside of design, she enjoys spending time with family and traveling.

Alex Brito
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design, Third year
Alex aims to reshape the way the world approaches organizing visual information. This degree is just the beginning for him, as he embraces new challenges with open arms, a pencil, and a sketchbook in hand.

Angel Castañon
Bachelor of Architecture, Fourth year
Angel has experience volunteering in his community from food distribution to collaborating with a variety of nonprofits. What initially turned into a personal interest in design turned into an ambition to see how the built environment can help uplift personal and communal experiences through design.

Sandy Cruz Falcon
Bachelor of Architecture, Third year, minor in Regenerative Studies
Sandy is passionate about sustainable design and aims to integrate architectural innovation with regenerative principles to create environmentally responsible projects. Outside of academics, Sandy enjoys watercolor painting, a hobby that allows her to explore color, form, and natural inspiration.

Nicholas Do
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design, Fourth year
Nicholas is passionate about creating thoughtful, impactful designs across branding, print, and digital media. With a love for creative problem-solving, he aims to design experiences that connect people and inspire positive change. In his free time, he enjoys playing pickleball and cooking new dishes.

Alex Dorantes-Sanchez
Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture, Third year, minor in Horticulture
Alex is devoted to improving the quality of life for all beings, today and for future generations, through innovative, regenerative, and holistic environmental design. Alex is a first-generation student raised in Puebla, Mexico, where she uncovered her fondness for the natural environment through the sacred practices and teachings of the women in her life.

Erika Estrella
Bachelor of Architecture, Fourth year
Erika is interested in exploring multifamily housing in her future career. Beyond architecture, she expresses her passion for design through sewing and fashion, more specifically sourcing vintage items and clothing. She is heavily inspired by historic architecture, vintage furniture, and fashion.

Ethan Francisco
Bachelor of Architecture, Fourth year
Ethan's deep curiosity fuels a love for cooking, the performing and visual arts, and exploring diverse cultures and histories. Passionate about all fields of design, he hopes to learn from each and expand his creative perspective.

Leslie Gutierrez
Master of Architecture, Second year
Leslie holds a bachelor's degree in interior design and a minor in Spanish from California State University, Long Beach. She is a first-generation student who aspires to gain experience in multiple design areas and to design for a better future in sustainability.

Fatima Jeffrey
Master of Architecture, Second year
Fatima is the current president of the Graduate Student Association (GSA). She holds a bachelor's degree in construction management from Bringham Young University. Fatima is passionate about architecture and adaptive reuse design. She enjoys learning, photography, and sketching.

Kevin Juarez-Martinez
Bachelor of Architecture, Fourth year
Kevin serves as Student Ambassador for AIA Pasadena & Foothill, actively supporting emerging architects and fostering student engagement through workshops and networking events. In his free time, he enjoys participating in local running events and exploring hiking trails.
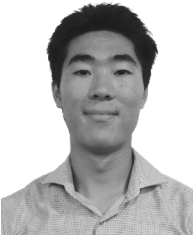
Benjamin Kittaka
Bachelor of Architecture, Fourth year
Benjamin is passionate about creating connection through design and has been involved in such work through both architecture and graphic design. As a designer, Benjamin enjoys problem-solving from all angles to find the most fitting solution. In addition to design, Benjamin tries to spend time away from his computer appreciating nature or playing sports.

Do Kyung Lee
Master of Landscape Architecture, First year
Do Kyung is interested in how landscape architecture can be used as a tool to create an expansive culture of belonging. She is interested in participatory design and the intersection of art, ecology and community resilience. She holds a Bachelors of Fine Arts from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Yining Li
Bachelor of Architecture, Third year

Yining is passionate about sustainable design and exploring how architecture can positively impact both communities and the environment. Outside of her studies, she enjoys traveling the world to experience diverse architectural styles and cultures, drawing inspiration from the diversity of built environments she encounters.

Juintow Lin
Professor of Architecture

Juintow teaches courses on sustainability, design, construction, and technology. She is also a registered architect and founder/principal of the FoxLin Architects. Prior to this, she worked for Foster and Partners, Pei Cobb Freed and Partners, and Marmol Radziner. Lin received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from MIT, where she researched Sustainable Urban Housing in China and co-edited and co-authored a book of the same title.

Lorenzo Madayag
Bachelor of Architecture, Fourth year

Lorenzo is driven by a commitment towards using design as a medium of positive change for all people. A perfectionist, Lorenzo appreciates exploring design through the notion that creative solutions are the best. Besides his dedication to academics, Lorenzo loves fashion, has a passion for automobiles, and enjoys culinary pursuits.

Keana Angelique Mallari
Bachelor of Architecture, Third year, minor in Regenerative Studies

Keana is passionate about architecture and helping others. She is actively involved in AIAS, NOMAS, TSD, and ENV Council. She strives to create inclusive, forward-thinking spaces that prioritize environmental stewardship and community impact through innovative and regenerative architectural solutions.

Danilo Nesmiyan
Bachelor of Architecture, Third year
Danilo is an aspiring architectural designer with a strong passion for innovative design and addressing environmental challenges. His leadership on campus includes involvement with the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) and his upcoming role as President of the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS). Beyond architecture, Danilo enjoys learning new languages, traveling, engaging in outdoor activities, and spending quality time with family and friends.

Ian Perez
Bachelor of Landscape Architecture, Third year
Ian is passionate about sustainability, design, and advocacy in his field. A San Diego resident, he finds inspiration in the city's landscape and the diverse culture around it. After earning his Bachelor's degree, he plans to pursue a Master's in Architecture.

Joelle Saroufim
Master of Architecture, Third year
Scouting and community work instilled in Joelle a strong interest in understanding people and nature. With two architecture degrees earned across different parts of the world, her approach is shaped by a belief in considering the human; their differences, needs, and simple joys of living behind every detail.

Joshua Shiroishi
Bachelor of Architecture, Fourth year
Joshua hopes to create a positive impact on communities and people by developing a fuller understanding of architecture from a professional perspective. Outside of architecture, Joshua appreciates other forms of design through film, video games, drawing, and writing.

John Daniel Silvestre

Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design, Third year

John is driven by the belief that great design elevates the world. He works to imbue and inspire visual interest in the lives of others, making the world a little more beautiful, one step at a time.

Lyannie Q. Tran

Assistant Professor of Architecture

Communities have power and can provide valuable insights into their own built environment. Lyannie is a strong proponent in harnessing the power of communities for spatial justice. With this in mind, she advocates for students to engage critically in uncovering the impacts of design in everyday life and to reformulate thinking that will give agency to the local community.

Kaelah Wilson

Master of Science, Regenerative Studies

Kaelah is inspired by nature and by designers who dare to envision a better world. Her current studies in regeneration and her background in ecology create a unique perspective that she looks forward to sharing with industry leaders who are building sustainable cities and communities.

Lauren Wong

Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design, Fourth year

Lauren is a graphic designer and illustrator. She is passionate about helping important stories be told through the engaging power of visuals and is constantly curious about learning more about the world around her.

On next page: Group photo of Helmle Fellowship Workshop 2025 participants with Fonna Forman and Teddy Cruz (center). Photo by Lyannie Tran.

Acknowledgments

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