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Bridging Matera's Fragmented Identity: Unifying Disconnected Urban Spaces

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Abstract: The city, like a piece of architecture, is a structure in space, but one of gigantic scale, something perceived only over a long period. A space is termed a place when it acquires an identity. The entirety of urban personality, urban communication, urban conduct, and urban design constitute the urban identity. This research delves into divided urban identities and examines how urban and architectural design influence the fragmentation of the cityscape. It explores the connection between urban environments' physical attributes and the divide of social, cultural, and political identities within cities. This study uses a multidisciplinary method to acquire thorough knowledge by combining architectural studies, urban planning theories, and social-cultural perspectives. The case study of reference is the city of Matera, in southern Italy, which has a unique history of a slow shaping of its urban and productive landscape throughout centuries due to heavy environmental constraints and resource availability and which has suffered forced evacuation and major discontinuities in the past century. Here, the opposing traits of the historical Sassi district and the new town are examined, focusing on their resulting separated urban identities. The study also looks at how divided cities may be reconciled and integrated, emphasizing the relevance of a holistic urban approach for the framing of complex issues. The research proposes methods and best practices for developing inclusive urban settings that promote cohesion and shared identities through the analysis of successful cases of urban regeneration, adaptive reuse of spaces, and participatory design processes. The findings of this research contribute to both academic and practical knowledge by deepening the understanding of the relationship between urban design, architecture, and divided urban identities. It emphasizes the value of comprehensive approaches to urban planning that take into account the social, cultural, and historical settings of cities to foster inclusivity, rapprochement, and the development of common urban identities.

Keywords: fragmented cities; social cohesion; divided urban identities; perceived landscape

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of civilization, humans have continuously sought to identify with and shape their environments, evolving alongside them. As a result, cultures have emerged, societies have formed, places have been created, and these environments have acquired distinct characteristics [1].

The visible physical structures of a city serve as a symbolic representation of the society that resides within it. Likewise, society focuses on engaging in urban practices, recognizing their potential as influential agents of change and transformation. From a sociological perspective, a city is a cultural object because it uses its physical form to create certain collective meanings. Public space is where social life manifests its communal values; it is not a physical thing or merely an open area [2]. Several elements shape the identity of cities, districts, and neighborhoods. Among these elements are the urban form, streets, and various public spaces, all of which significantly define a place's character [3].

Lynch describes identity as the degree to which a person can recognize or remember a place as distinct from others, attributing the concept of identity to "individuality or oneness" [4]. Every place possesses both an identity and an image, but they are distinct concepts. While identity refers to the objective characteristics of a place (what it is inherently like), image combines this identity with how the place is perceived. For individuals, the image of a place reflects their personal feelings and impressions about it [5]. Focusing on the physical environment, Lynch explores the concept of "imageability", which refers to the capacity of a city's physical features to create a vivid image in the mind of an observer. A city with high imageability is described as well-structured, distinctive, memorable, and understandable over time [4]. City identity is often perceived at the broader urban scale, aligning with an individual's connection to their city or nation, and encompasses pro-environmental factors that influence attitudes and behaviors in daily life [6].

Urban character is linked to the socio-spatial intensity of urban appearance at medium and small scales, shaped by material and formal elements such as building types, vegetation, and the evolving social structure of everyday life [6]. According to Lynch, the urban landscape is organized through five key elements: paths (e.g., streets, walkways, transit routes, canals, and railroads), edges (e.g., shorelines, railway cuts, boundaries of development, and walls), districts (medium-to-large areas within the city characterized by shared, identifiable qualities), nodes (key points such as junctions, breaks in transportation, convergence of pathways, and public spaces like street corners or enclosed squares), and landmarks (distinct physical objects such as buildings, signs, or natural features). These elements collectively form the framework through which a city's identity and image are perceived [4]. The urban identity dimension is shaped by a collective process of interpretation and narrative, rather than solely by design features, playing a crucial role in city development policies and local integration. This dimension is also tied to the urban form, including city streets, the built environment, overall architecture, and the events of daily life [6].

The significance and value of a setting for individuals or groups are shaped by their personal and collective experiences with that environment [7,8]. In some cases, these place meanings develop into strong emotional connections, influencing attitudes and behaviors. Such meaning and attachment contribute to the imageability of a place, which is influenced by culture and experience [9], and are key in shaping the social and cultural values of a location, particularly for its residents [10]. From the perspective of public identity, Jane Jacobs (1961) emphasizes that trust within urban spaces is formed through casual, everyday interactions—greetings, nods, and brief exchanges—that build a shared public identity. These informal encounters during daily life on the streets foster a sense of belonging and familiarity, contributing to a cohesive public persona for the neighborhood. This trust, rooted in mutual recognition and respect, becomes a crucial resource for both individual and community resilience in times of need. Without these ongoing interactions, a neighborhood's trust and, consequently, its public identity begins to weaken, highlighting the importance of these daily social rituals in sustaining the social fabric of urban life [11].

Heritage plays a pivotal role in shaping and reinforcing collective identities. However, individual encounters at heritage sites reveal a more intricate dynamic, where widely recognized narratives may be not only reiterated but also reinterpreted and reshaped on a personal level, leading to the formation of new identity narratives [12]. The unique characteristic of emerging visual identity forms, especially within cultural heritage sites and assets, lies in their approach to interpreting values and content in a versatile, dynamic, and multifaceted way. These identities are shaped by how well they represent something within its specific context, its inherent and recognized value, and the value attributed to it [13].

Built heritage forms a significant aspect of the cultural heritage in urban environments. Entire districts or towns can be recognized as cultural heritage sites, but there are also areas within cities that, while not officially designated as heritage sites, play a crucial role in defining the urban character. These "urban fragments" often embody unique elements

such as population density, historical significance, street layout, or distinct cultural or morphological traits. They serve as the backdrop for more prominent heritage sites, yet they should not be dismissed as mere context. Often, the collective value arises from the interaction between these fragments and the recognized heritage assets, highlighting the importance of the entire ensemble [14].

Fragmented urban identity is a phenomenon observed in many cities worldwide, where social, historical, and spatial discontinuities disrupt a cohesive sense of place and identity. In Lviv, Ukraine, this fragmentation stems from Lviv's multicultural past, where diverse ethnic communities coexisted but were subjected to geopolitical shifts, particularly under Soviet policies, emphasizing historical, social, and political influences that disrupted its cohesive cultural landscape. The socialist period imposed ideological homogeneity on Lviv, erasing distinct cultural elements and enforcing uniformity. Post-World War II urban reorganization and the decline of ethnic communities, especially Jewish and Polish groups, further contributed to urban discontinuity, removing important social ties and physical structures that once connected the urban fabric [15]. In Hergla, Tunisia, segmentation originates from several interlinked factors. Rapid, unregulated urban expansion has transformed agricultural and natural lands, especially near tourist and coastal zones, disrupting Hergla's traditional landscape identity. Economic liberalization policies prioritizing tourism and foreign investments have led to uniform developments that erode the city's historical and cultural character [16].

Accelerated economic development, population growth, and globalization pressures on cities in the Gulf region have led to widespread architectural homogeneity. Historic districts in Doha, like Msheireb, suffered from modernization-focused demolitions, leading to the displacement of communities and the loss of traditional neighborhoods. Consequently, Doha's unique urban identity eroded as historic structures were replaced by high-rise, globally styled buildings with little regard for local context, disconnecting the physical environment from the city's cultural heritage [17,18]. Furthermore, the lack of adequate urban planning and regulation has exacerbated fragmentation. Weak enforcement of land-use policies allowed unchecked construction practices that neglected Hergla's and Doha's indigenous architectural styles, leading to a disjointed urban landscape [16,18].

Another case is the urban landscape of Medellin, where prolonged social conflict and rapid, unregulated reconstruction efforts after the civil war have led to significant fragmentation in its urban identity [19]. Colombia's shift to free-market policies in the early 1990s dismantled local industry protections, leading to Medellin's severe economic decline. Intensifying social conflicts, with guerrilla and paramilitary forces controlling vast areas, drove rural refugees into Medellin's urban peripheries, exacerbating unemployment and instability. This migration, combined with abandoned industrial sites, reshaped the city's landscape, creating voids in inner-city areas and expanding informal settlements in high-risk zones. Consequently, Medellin's urban identity became increasingly fragmented, marked by economic and spatial isolation, social divides, and stark contrasts between developed and neglected areas [19,20].

This paper delves into the intricate duality of Matera's urban fabric (Figure 1), where the modern new town and ancient Sassi district embody contrasting yet interconnected identities. Through the lens of tactical urbanism and Lynch's principles, the study explores Matera's fragmented identity across historical, cultural, and social dimensions. By proposing innovative placemaking strategies, it seeks to integrate these distinct elements into a unified, diverse, and lively urban environment.

Matera, located in southern Italy and designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site [21], offers a compelling case study for the investigation of fragmented urban identities. Its distinctive juxtaposition of ancient Sassi cave dwellings and modern urban developments creates a landscape where cultural heritage intersects with contemporary challenges. This research uses Matera to explore how urban planning and architectural interventions can reconcile these divisions and foster a more unified and integrated urban identity.

(**a**)   (**b**)

Figure 1. (**a**) The rock-cut architecture of Sassi. (**b**) The modern architecture of the new town. Source: authors, 2023.

Matera is a medium-sized city with a population of 60,000, situated in Basilicata, Italy. It ranks as the third oldest continuously inhabited settlement globally, with origins tracing back to the Paleolithic era. Known as the City of the Sassi, Matera is famous for its ancient neighborhoods which consist of caves carved into the rocky ravine on which the city is constructed [22]. Matera stands as a testament to a city shaped by intersecting narratives: the burgeoning new town intertwines with the ancient Sassi district, crafting a unique urban identity [23].

Aims and Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the challenges associated with divided urban identities, focusing on Matera. The study aims to reconcile fragmented landscapes and promote interconnected urban environments by employing integrated urban planning and architectural strategies. Specifically, it seeks to examine how urban design can influence the fragmentation of identities and either contribute to or mitigate divisions within the urban fabric.

Key research goals include evaluating the role of urban design in shaping fragmented identities, analyzing how the physical environment reflects and reinforces social and cultural divides, and exploring the historical evolution of distinct urban areas in Matera, such as the Sassi district and the new town. Furthermore, the study aims to propose strategies that integrate architectural and urban planning practices to enhance unity and inclusivity. It advocates for planning frameworks that foster cohesive and shared urban identities.

Ultimately, the research will provide insights into how cities facing similar challenges of urban fragmentation can benefit from comprehensive planning strategies and offer practical solutions for fostering integrated urban communities.

2. Methodology

Figure 2 illustrates the research process focused on urban identity and the role of urban planning in addressing fragmented landscapes, using Matera, Italy, as a case study. The flowchart outlines the sequential stages of the research, aiming to develop inclusive urban planning approaches that address divided urban environments.

The research begins with theory formulation, examining factors that shape a city's identity, particularly Matera's distinct duality between the historic Sassi district and newer urban developments. This stage informs the research questions: how do urban design and historical evolution influence fragmented urban identities, and how can comprehensive urban planning foster integration and inclusivity?
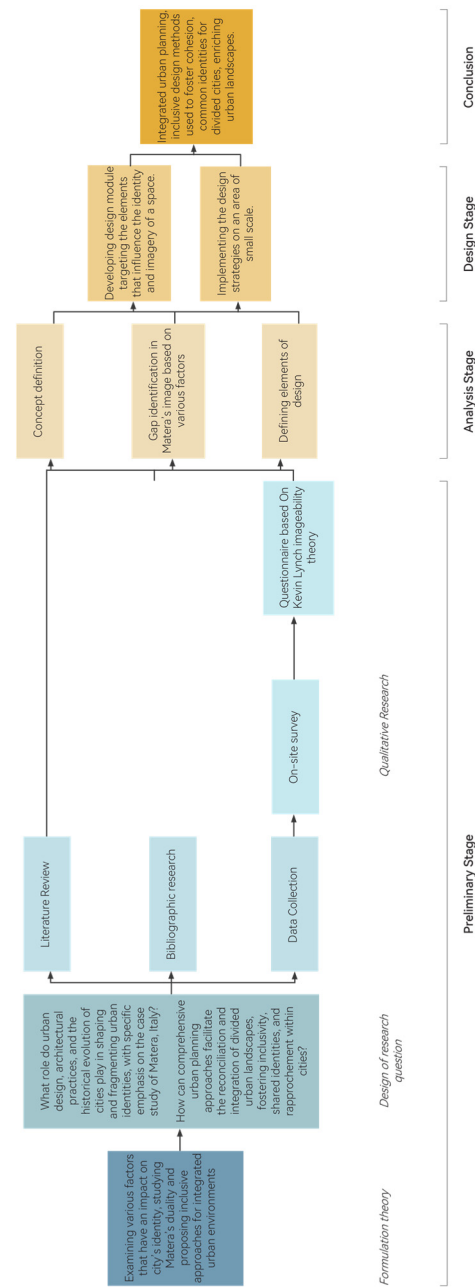
Figure 2. Flowchart describing the methodology.

The preliminary phase involves a literature review and bibliographic research to establish a theoretical foundation. Data collection follows, utilizing on-site surveys in Matera and a questionnaire grounded in Kevin Lynch's imageability theory. This approach captures residents' perceptions, revealing insights into Matera's fragmented urban identities.

In the analysis stage, core concepts like urban identity, fragmentation, and inclusivity are defined. Identifying gaps in Matera's urban image allows the study to pinpoint key design elements that affect space identity. These findings guide the development of urban planning strategies aimed at unifying the city's divided landscape.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Identity

A person's identity comprises various aspects and patterns that shape their world. Human identity greatly relies on places and objects. Therefore, it is crucial not only to have an environment that aids orientation but also to include specific elements for identification.

Human identity relies on the identity of the place itself [24]. The identity of a place reflects a balance between its unique elements, people, and urban activities, which are inherently linked by a reciprocal relationship that distinguishes and unites a particular location [4].

A definition is provided by Relph, who distinguishes between 'identity' and 'identity with'. He states the following:

> "*The identity of something refers to a persistent sameness and unity which allows that thing to be differentiated from other things. The term 'identity' connoted both a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others. Thus, identity is founded both in the person or object and in the culture to which they belong. It is not static and unchangeable but varies as circumstances and attitudes change, and it is not uniform and undifferentiated, but has several components and forms*" [25].

According to Harold M. Proshansky,

> "*Those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment*" [26].

Whether considered from a linguistic standpoint or through a modern philosophical lens, the fundamental meaning of "identity" remains consistent—it refers to the distinctiveness of the self and the unique qualities, traits, values, and elements that distinguish an individual or a society [27].

Sociologist Melinda Milligan explains "locational socialization" as a process by which one's active connection with a place produces shared meanings while researching the impact of displacement and estrangement from familiar locations on identity. These meanings are built onto a location, and it is via this process that place identification and attachment are shared with others [28]. The term "place identity" is generally understood as the recognition of a location's physical characteristics, both natural and built, as well as its social attributes, including events, celebrations, and festivals (Figure 3). The characteristics include its urban configuration, road networks, and shared public spaces [29]. It is the collection of meanings connected to a certain cultural landscape that any individual or group of individuals uses to create their own unique personal or social identities [24]. As a result, a place's identity encompasses more than its outward appearance and has "meaning" for both the individual and the community [30].
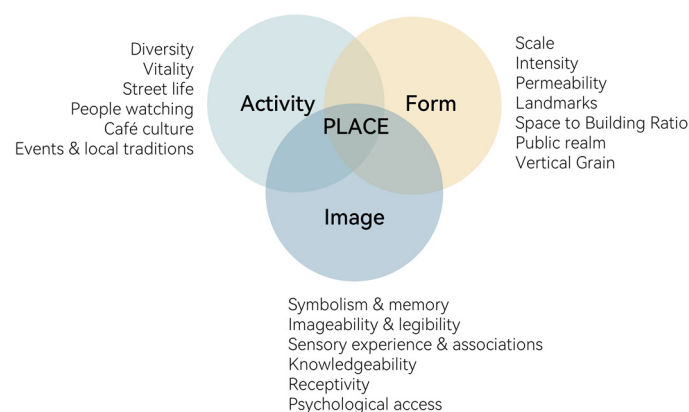

Figure 3. Three essential elements of identity of place. Adapted after Canter, 1977 [31].

The place is shaped by its meanings [25], combining physical, socio-cultural, and psychological elements. In regeneration, the key principles are as follows: (a) place experience is both physical and psychological; (b) user perceptions help define place attachment and character; and (c) place attachment fosters identity, well-being, and happiness for urban dwellers [32].

Place identity is tied to shared human characteristics that shape identity, including ideas, beliefs, preferences, values, and goals. At the smallest urban scale, it is associated with topographical and subjective place experiences, such as memories, activities, emotions, meanings, and lived experiences. This dimension is also connected to personal and social identity, reflecting authenticity, uniqueness, and local distinctiveness, which foster a sense of belonging [6]. The concept of "Sense of Place" (Figure 4) includes the many complicated ways in which people connect with a place: anthropologically (through symbolic attachments), ecologically (via sensations), geographically (via esthetics), historically (via habits), and sociologically (by community attachment) [33].
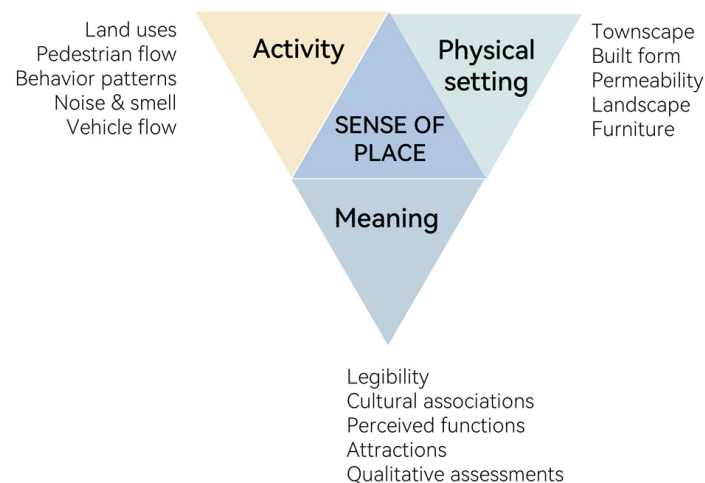
Figure 4. The components of sense of place. Adapted after Canter, 1977 [31].

"Sense of place, place attachment, and rootedness each describe different strengths of relationships that people have with places. Furthermore, space and place are not objective phenomena, but are experienced differently by individuals for whom place holds unique meanings" [34].

Place attachment and a sense of belonging are essential for establishing an emotional and cognitive relationship with a space, which leads to a feeling of security and connection with the community. Two of the three factors that prompt a community to create a neighborhood plan are to preserve the community's culture and identity and to safeguard its distinguishing features. Communities' identities are shaped through their interactions with the areas of their home territory to which they are bound by shared experiences, memories, emotions, preferences, and values. Signs and symbols that represent a "poetic way of dwelling in the world" reflect all of this [35].

Individual and community concepts of place identity coexist in an increasingly complicated society. These kinds of social identification reveal themselves as 'mind maps,' in which physical space is mentally registered. Thus, when asked to characterize the region where they live, individuals of the same household will define it differently based on their perceptions and activities. This is illustrated by place experience taking on rational implications rather than being purely subjective. This indicates that an individual's ability to recognize a location as a place is affected by what others tell them about the area, and is filtered by their socialization, which is shaped by class, gender, age, professional education, ethnicity, nationality, and so on [36]. Neighborhood character is a complex mechanism resisting change in urban form and daily lifestyles, encompassing physical attributes and a sense of place and community. This dimension closely relates to physical characteristics such as scale, form, architectural style, essence, and the historical image of cities or places [6]. Kevin Lynch notes that creating a functional mental image involves a series of essential steps. Initially, it requires the identification of an object, which implies setting it apart from other entities and recognizing its individuality. This concept of "identity" should refer to uniqueness rather than mere equality with other objects. Secondly, the

mental image must encompass the spatial or pattern relations between the object, the observer, and other elements. Finally, the object within the image must carry significance for the observer, whether practical or emotional. This notion of "meaning" also represents a relationship, albeit distinct from spatial or pattern relations [4].

It is conceivable that a place can have as many identities as there are actors involved. The content of these identities is not fixed or predetermined; it is subject to change over time and can even vary concurrently, depending on the groups and individuals interacting with the space. Even when a group shares a collective perception of a place, there is often some level of discrepancy between individuals, particularly when comparing individual perspectives to the group's perspective [37].

There is a close relationship between a place's identity and its history. As a result, urban identity is linked to the physical characteristics of the city, making urban identity correspond with a historical identity that is developed through ongoing stratifications [24]. As Reinhard Friedmann states, "The urban identity is the sum of urban personality, urban conduct, urban design and urban communication" [38]. It is not a static representation of its current state, but rather the product of concrete progress over time. This is because identity is the result of the relationships that people form with their surroundings. They have made each regional context unique and different by leaving their mark on a region's cultural heritage. The distinctiveness of locales, area identity, and historical stratifications cannot be conveyed without risking the abstraction and crystallization of the product, and it becomes extraneous to the space-time environment. Area identity can only be demonstrated and articulated through the past that has shaped it, necessitating ongoing interpretative mediation [39].

Cities have recently undergone fast urbanization due to the global economy's rapid growth, which has caused built-up urban areas to be structurally reorganized and marginal new urban regions to be established. Additionally, this results in several issues with urban development, including resource depletion, ecological degradation, the segregation of work and home, misalignment of functions, and the fragmentation of urban areas [40]. Fragmentation is frequently defined as a tool of spatial and social exclusion, related to homogenization, disintegration, and segregation processes [41].

According to Yue, Zhao, Xu, Gu, and Jia, "*Urban space fragmentation refers to a non-integrated state of urban space. It is a kind of "fragmented" state and formation process, which is characterized by the separation of space, function, and society*" [40]. The contemporary fragmented city is observed as "a produced object", which Rem Koolhaas defines as The Generic City—a world of loneliness, individuality, ephemerality, and transiency that rejects the significance of genius loci, causing identity disappearance and the production of non-places, resulting in the degradation of public space [41].

3.2. Factors Contributing to the Fragmentation of Urban Identity

3.2.1. Historical Reasons

History can be considered the second variable that introduces unpredictability. It encompasses all that has evolved in the past, making it a significant influencer of physical structure, spatial arrangement, and urban growth in general. Urban geographers recognize how political, social, economic, and ideological developments are deeply connected to their historical evolution and interdependence, often following established paths of development [42]. Historical identity is deeply rooted in a city's monuments, architectural styles, and traditional urban forms, and plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural and social cohesion of communities. Historical events profoundly impact urban identity fragmentation as they shape collective memory and narratives. Traumatic events deepen divisions and perpetuate historical grievances, while efforts in heritage preservation and cultural revitalization foster a sense of identity and belonging. When urban development projects disregard these historical elements, they risk disrupting the cultural continuity that connects current populations with their urban heritage. This neglect can result in the

alienation of communities, leading to a fragmented city identity as modern developments fail to resonate with the shared history and memory that once unified the space [43].

3.2.2. Geographical Reasons

Cities shaped by natural geographical features such as rivers, mountains, or coastlines often experience spatial fragmentation, where these natural barriers divide communities physically, limiting movement and social interaction between them. This division fosters the development of isolated urban identities in different parts of the city, as geographical separation results in distinct cultural, social, and economic characteristics emerging on either side of these barriers [44]. For instance, in cities where a river divides neighborhoods, the communities on either side may evolve separately, reinforcing urban identity fragmentation due to the lack of shared interactions [45]. Rivers divide neighborhoods and influence architectural styles by acting as physical boundaries. The topography of mountainous terrain creates separate neighborhoods. Coastal communities have distinct urban identities affected by maritime activities and trade. Highways have the potential to divide communities and disrupt social connections [46].

3.2.3. Social and Economic Disparities

The formation and growth of urban space fragmentation can be facilitated by the expanding wealth disparity among urban dwellers brought on by economic development and social structure changes [40]. Income disparity and unequal access to resources can cause splits within cities. Marginalized neighborhoods may have limited possibilities, exclusion, and social isolation, resulting in fractured urban identities and perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities [47].

Economic development initiatives can lead to gentrification, a process where rising property values and investment result in the displacement of long-standing communities. This shift often replaces local cultural identities with corporate or upscale influences, adversely affecting the social fabric of neighborhoods. Research indicates that gentrification tends to alienate original residents, disrupting established social networks and exacerbating inequalities within urban environments [48,49].

3.2.4. Urban Planning Decisions

Public spaces in cities are examined as one of the places where the contradictions and conflicts that characterize the current phase are on display. These contradictions can be found on a macro-social level, such as between major urban center renewal projects and the needs of populations that are facing eviction, as well as on a micro level, such as between practices of particular groups and social actors in everyday life frameworks [43]. In some cities, policies aimed at integrating marginalized groups can paradoxically increase fragmentation by fostering separate identities based on neighborhood-specific participation and governance models [50]. Urban policies like zoning regulations and public housing strategies can divide cities by creating distinct areas for different socio-economic classes, which reinforces segregation and identity fragmentation [43].

3.2.5. Political Ideologies

City division can occur through physical and mental barriers, with physical divisions involving visible structures like walls, fences, concrete blocks, or natural geographical features. However, mental divisions often exist in cities without such tangible boundaries, shaped by historical events or identity-related factors. These mental borders can arise around symbolic locations, such as streets that were once front lines in wars, neighborhoods, building complexes, or bridges, which come to represent divisions in residents' minds. These boundaries may be straight or curved, clearly defined or more abstract, and they can shift dynamically depending on the significance of the spaces to different groups. Additionally, power dynamics within cities play a crucial role in creating divisions. Often linked to a critical historical juncture, power struggles between factions within micro-

geopolitical communities lead to internal conflicts, disputes, or violence. These struggles shape relationships within the city, driving both social and physical separations. As a result, urban divisions emerge from a complex interplay of historical events, power dynamics, and both physical and mental barriers [51].

3.3. Intervention Strategy

Designing a "sense of place" or creating an integral part of a city is a complex and nuanced task, far surpassing the challenges of suburban housing or new town planning. It requires not only favorable conditions but also a deep understanding of what makes urban spaces successful, and the skills to design for urban vitality. Additionally, it necessitates sound judgment in knowing when to actively design and when to allow for organic development. The goal is to balance planning with spaces for natural growth, keeping in mind the desired type of place and the best strategies to achieve it [52].

In his work on urban success indicators, Barry Sherman [53] identified key characteristics that define successful urban environments. These indicators emphasize a balance between functionality, esthetic appeal, and social engagement. The following are the main criteria:

Invisible planning: effective urban design feels organic and unforced, with planning efforts integrated so seamlessly that the environment appears to have evolved naturally.

Dynamic visual forms: a successful city should feature stimulating, esthetically pleasing shapes and structures that captivate attention.

Vibrant street life: streets should encourage social activity and interaction, fostering a sense of familiarity and comfort among residents and visitors.

Hidden spaces for exploration: successful urban spaces contain secret or less visible areas that invite exploration and deeper engagement with the environment.

Surprises: urban spaces should include elements of surprise or novelty to maintain interest and stimulate conversation among the population.

Encouragement of innovation: the city should promote experimentation and creative activities, allowing room for innovation and adaptation.

Casual meeting opportunities: public spaces should offer environments conducive to informal gatherings, enhancing community interaction.

Diverse food and leisure experiences: there should be accessible venues offering a variety of food and drink options, catering to different preferences and promoting leisure at varying levels of formality.

Comfortable seating: cities must provide comfortable and inviting places for people to sit and enjoy the urban environment.

Balancing social and private spaces: there needs to be a balance between areas for social engagement and spaces that allow for privacy and reflection.

Seasonal integration: seasonal changes should be an intrinsic and celebrated part of the urban experience, blending seamlessly into the daily life of the city.

Sensory engagement: a successful urban environment enhances the senses, providing stimuli that foster community, esthetic pleasure, and a strong sense of belonging.

A study by Salama and Wiedmann [17] on urban fragmentation in Doha, Qatar, outlines the effects of rapid development and decentralization driven by large-scale investments in megaprojects and a deregulated market environment. Their research highlights how fragmented governance structures and a focus on isolated megaprojects led to a "patchwork" urban landscape, lacking continuity and integration across different urban areas. Strategies suggested include a coordinated governance approach, strengthened regulations, and creating sub-centers to balance centralized growth with peripheral developments. Salama and Wiedmann emphasize the need for cohesive urban governance to address disjointed development and to create a balanced urban structure that supports diverse urban identities [17]. In the Msheireb project in Doha, Qatar, urban regeneration was deployed to revitalize historic districts and restore a sense of local identity. This project emphasized continuity with the past by integrating traditional Qatari architectural elements

in new developments, aiming to merge the historic and contemporary in a harmonious manner [18].

In the case of Medellin, a multi-faceted strategy known as the "Medellin Model" was implemented, combining infrastructure, social integration, and community-focused development. Key to this transformation was the creation of the MetroCable system, a cable car network that physically and symbolically connected isolated neighborhoods in the hilly peripheries to the city center [54]. Community-led programs, particularly hip hop and graffiti art, empowered local youth to reclaim public spaces, reshape the neighborhood's image, and foster a sense of collective pride. Strategic public spaces like "Casa Kolacho" became cultural hubs, attracting tourism and economic activity while offering residents a safe space for artistic expression [55].

Chizzonetti and Batkova [15] discuss the role of architectural design in preserving and enhancing urban identity within Lviv's fragmented cityscape. It emphasizes that, to accurately represent the city's cultural identity, design must meet minimum contextual quality criteria, considering both authenticity and symbolic values. Architectural projects should not only reference historical forms but also evoke intangible cultural elements to make absent heritage perceptible, addressing Lviv's limited physical historical remnants. Furthermore, the study discusses the delicate balance between reinforcing cultural diversity and promoting unity, warning against extremes—either isolating cultural differences or forcing homogeneity, both of which could dilute Lviv's unique identity [15].

3.3.1. Tactical Urbanism

The tagline of tactical urbanism is "short-term action for long-term change", indicating that the ultimate goal of their transitory actions is to test the efficacy of an idea before committing to its full adoption [35].

It can be defined as follows:

> "*A city and/or citizen-led approach to neighborhood building using short-term, low-cost and scalable interventions, intended to catalyze long-term change*".

Improving the livability of the towns and communities is frequently initiated at the street, block, or building levels. While bigger-scale efforts are important, incremental, small-scale gains are increasingly considered as a method to stage larger investments [56]. Urban planning might go even further, defining "zones of tolerance" where official and informal or spontaneous activity can coexist. This would support urban intensification, which may supplement its designated uses with others that are consistent with it. Such a method was investigated in everyday urbanism: sidewalks used as extensions of enterprises, sports fields converted into leisure activity venues, parking lots converted into street markets, and so on [35].

Many cities worldwide are being referred to as "Creative Cities" as a result of the current interest of municipal government in creative philosophies. Tactical urbanism derives from such action and has thus become a popular movement for individuals who want to transform and rearrange their city without state participation. Urban governments utilize the phrase "tactical urbanism" to continue neoliberal strategies of urban development in the post-recessionary age, which has turned the movement into a brand unto itself. The creative concept, which is now at the heart of mobile urban policy, has come under fire for being hollow and serving as nothing more than a defense of the public–private urban reconstruction techniques that are already in use. It has been argued that the Creative City paradigm, along with the prevailing ideas of the "creative class" and the "creative economy", represents the most recent interpretation of neoliberal urban growth and the social, cultural, and economic disparities it causes [57].

3.3.2. Placemaking

People are motivated by placemaking to collectively envision and reinvent public places as the pulse of every neighborhood. Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which the public realm can be designed to maximize the shared value, strengthening

the bond between people and the places they share. Placemaking encourages innovative patterns of use, focusing particularly on the physical, cultural, and social identities that characterize urbanism, becoming tactical when it can function through "a healthy balance of planning and doing", as Mike Lydon describes it. By micro-transforming, co-managing, and caring for spaces and services in their neighborhoods, residents can "(re)make" the city and contribute to the creation of shared urban development scenarios. This is in addition to "planning" through large-scale and long-term policies, plans, and projects [58].

Placemaking goes beyond improving urban design by fostering creative uses of spaces while emphasizing the physical, cultural, and social identities that shape a place and drive its continuous development [59].

> "*There is a distinction between a search for ways to improve the lives of citizens and the search for ways that enable citizens to live the life that they value and that removes the obstructions that look down on and coerce people to live a life that others value*", writes Jane Samuels in her 2005 book "Citizen as Agent of Change in Urban Development".

> Melissa Mean and Charlie Tims remarked that "*Parks, streets, and other public spaces provide the necessary bandwidth for the flow of information between people; they are where we learn who we live with, what they look like and what they do*" [60].

4. Study Area: Matera

4.1. Background

Matera, located in Italy's Basilicata region (Figure 5), is one of the country's oldest settlements, famous for its "Sassi"—prehistoric cave dwellings carved into rock. The Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera feature a complex of homes, churches, and monasteries integrated into the natural caves of the Murgia. This 1016-acre site includes ancient cave habitats in the Sasso Caveoso and Sasso Barisano districts, showcasing continuous human occupation from the Paleolithic era [61].

Italy   Basilicata   Matera
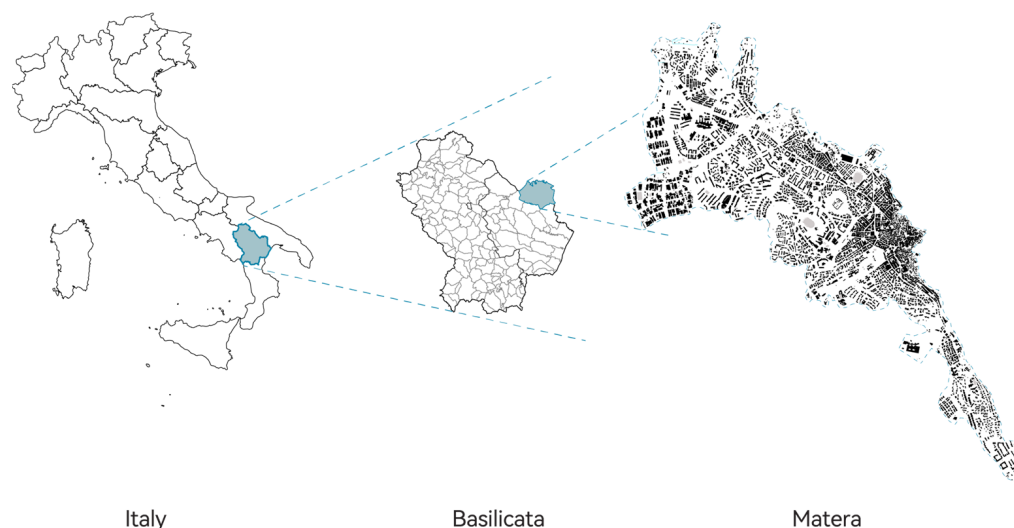
Figure 5. The study area Matera is located in the south-western part of Italy in the Basilicata region.

Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993, the Sassi represents a rock-cut settlement (Figure 6a,b) harmoniously integrated into its natural landscape, reflecting significant stages of human history [21]. Traditionally reliant on agriculture, Matera's economy has shifted in recent decades towards tourism, crafts, and research, reshaping the city's economic and cultural fabric [23].

(**a**)

(**b**)

Figure 6. (**a**) View of Sassi from Apulian Murgia caves. Source: Ellen Hurst, 2023. (**b**) View of cathedral from Piazza Vittorio Veneto. Source: Sara El Aawar, 2023.

It is situated close to the port city of Bari (Figure 7) on a huge limestone cliff that extends out into the Apulian Murgia (high plains). It occurs at the boundary between the calcareous Apulian plains and the clay Lucanian hills, and in between the walls of the Gravina di Matera, a deep canyon that emphasizes geological change (Figure 8). The ancient cave city of Matera, which is partially underground and carved into a cliff below the modern city, is hidden from view from above, which served as an early cave settlers' defensive tactic throughout the region and contributed to the city's survival [61].
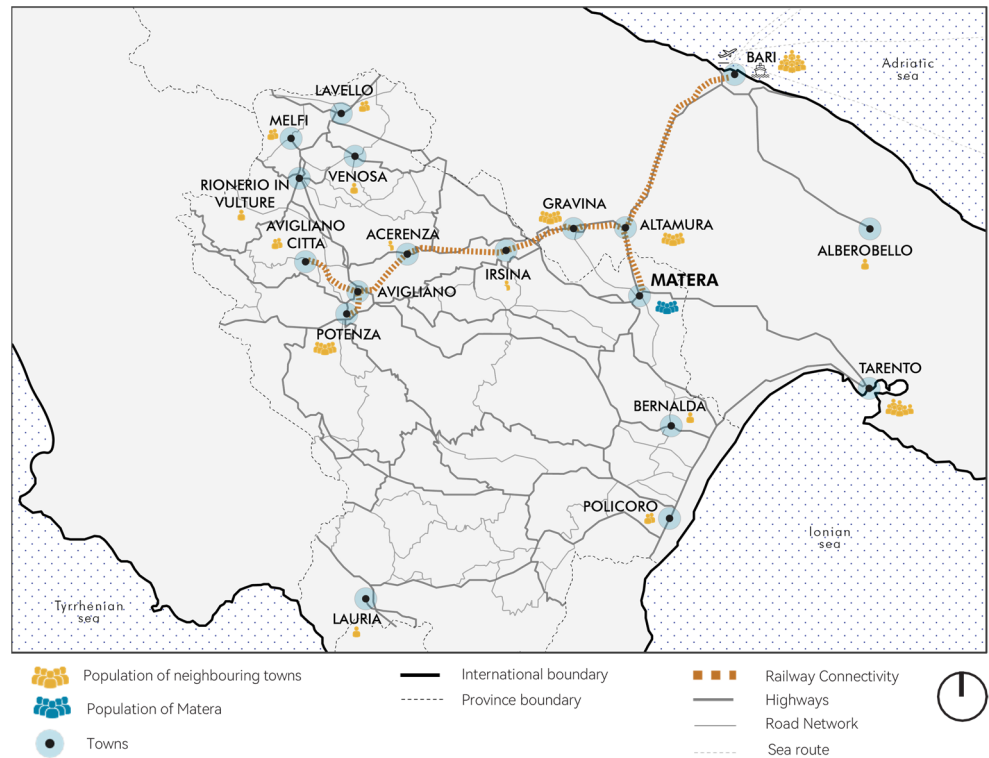
Figure 7. Neighborly relations. Source: Google Earth, changed by authors.
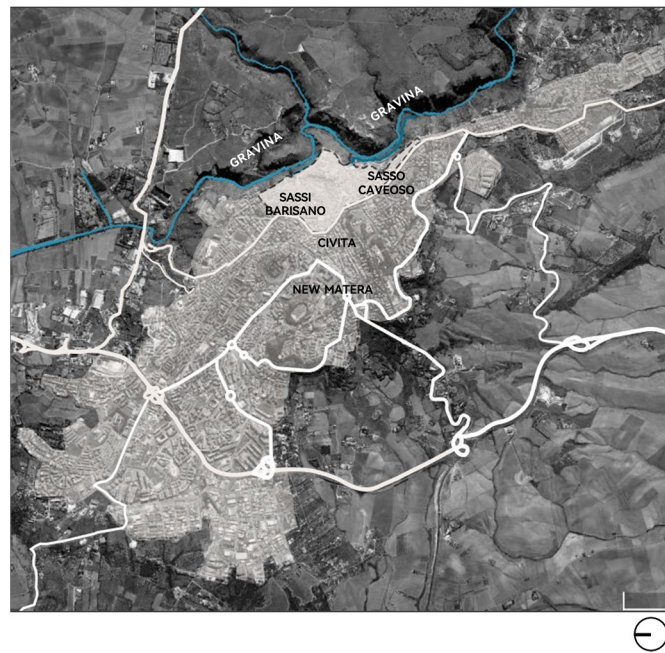
Figure 8. Satellite imagery highlights geographical features. Source: Google Earth, changed by authors.

4.2. Social Fabric

The history of Matera illustrates (Figure 9) a long evolution from a settlement with continuous or intermittent habitation spanning 100,000 to 700,000 years, encompassing various cultures from the Paleolithic to the Iron Age. Over millennia, Matera's urban fabric was shaped by numerous conquerors and divergent groups, influencing its cultural, genetic, and social landscape, including its names, music, religion, and cuisine [61]. From its founding around 900 AD until the mid-20th century, Matera's population comprised peasants, aristocrats (both religious and secular), and merchants, who lived in the Sassi or

on the Civita—a land division housing the church, castle, and elite residences. The Sassi included both opulent palazzi and modest cave dwellings. By the 17th century, wealthier inhabitants began moving to a flat plain above the ravine, leading to a spatial and social separation between the Sassi and the piano [62].
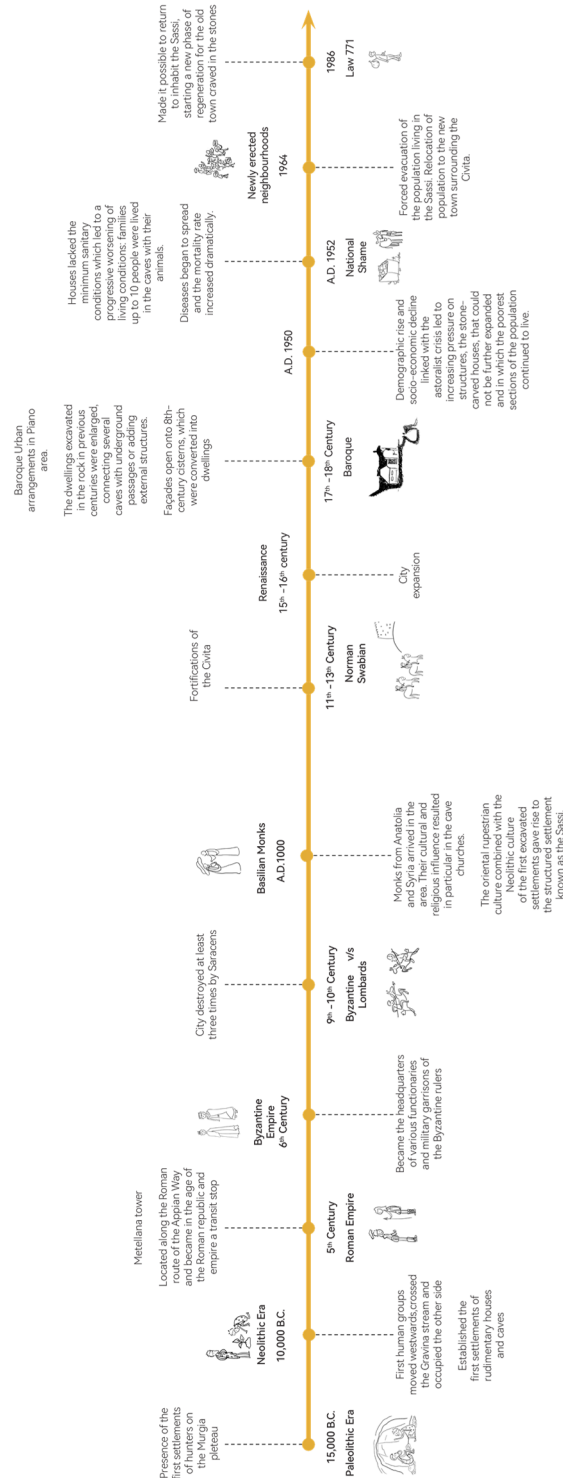
Figure 9. Timeline.

In the 1950s to 1970s, the Italian government relocated Sassi inhabitants to improve living conditions, responding to domestic and international criticism. Although the intention was to replace historic homes with modern housing, much of the traditional lifestyle

was lost. The 1952 legislation allocated funds for Sassi's refurbishment, yet only a third of the Sassi were deemed uninhabitable. Despite the Materan aristocracy's support for rehabilitating the habitable Sassi, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi linked the initiative to the Marshall Plan and pursued a policy of relocating residents to new, government-subsidized housing. Architects developed modernist rural villages and new cities for the displaced population, aiming to reduce travel time to farms and provide better living conditions. However, the rural projects largely failed, and many Materans struggled with the transition to urban living, losing their traditional lifestyle and self-sufficiency. The construction projects exacerbated economic and social challenges, leaving many reliant on government support [62]. By the early 1970s, local intellectuals advocated for the preservation of the Sassi's historical and artistic value. In 1986, Legge 771 provided funding for Sassi's rehabilitation, entrusted its management to Matera for 99 years, and established the Ufficio Sassi for oversight. This legislation marked the Sassi's transition from a marginalized area to a central element of Matera's urban identity [63].

4.3. Fragmentation of Identity

This sketch (Figure 10) presents a contrast between the old and new areas of a town, highlighting several key challenges and spatial dynamics. On one side, it illustrates the "Sassi" and the older settlements, characterized by historic stone structures and monuments that draw tourists. These areas are marked by the challenges of excessive surface heating and a concentration of heritage sites.
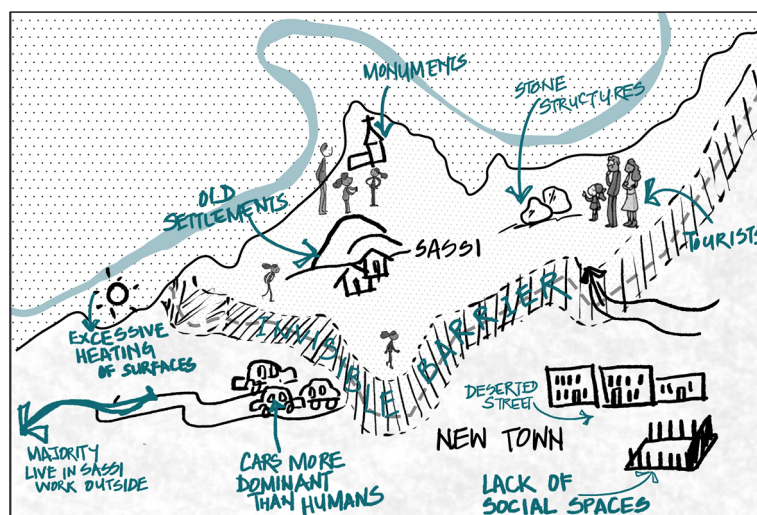
Figure 10. Fragmentation of Matera.

The sketch (Figure 10) also emphasizes a sharp divide or "invisible barrier" between these historic areas and the "new town", which is depicted as lacking vibrant social spaces, resulting in deserted streets and reduced pedestrian activity. In the new town, cars are depicted as dominating the streets, reinforcing a sense of isolation and diminishing human-scale interaction. Overall, the sketch portrays a spatial segregation where cultural and tourist activity is confined to the old town, while the newer areas suffer from underuse and a lack of communal spaces.

The image (Figure 11) provides a dual analysis of the "Sassi" and the "New Town" by distinguishing both tangible and intangible qualities that define each area. For the Sassi, the tangible attributes include an organic layout shaped by the terrain, consisting of intricate networks of staircases, alleys, and interconnected streets. Adaptive reuse is also evident as many cave dwellings have been repurposed into modern facilities, retaining the architectural legacy while accommodating contemporary needs. On the intangible side, Sassi embodies a deep historical connection and cultural identity, preserving the community's traditions, folklore, and unique way of life, which strengthens its authenticity.
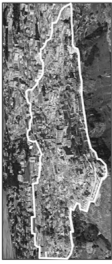
Figure 11. Comparative analysis of elements of identity between Sassi and New Town. Drawn by authors.

In contrast, the New Town is characterized by its tangible elements of broader streets and robust infrastructure, facilitating movement and connectivity. The presence of modern amenities like parks, shopping centers, and institutions reflects a deliberate urban planning approach. Intangibly, the New Town is marked by its embrace of innovation and contemporary lifestyles. It fosters a dynamic environment with new businesses and cultural activities that align with global standards and modern aspirations, promoting growth and community engagement in a more modern context.

The following image (Figure 12) further accentuates these differences, with Sassi depicted as a labyrinth of historic pathways and stone houses, while the New Town is portrayed as an orderly grid of wide boulevards, modern buildings, and structured landscapes.
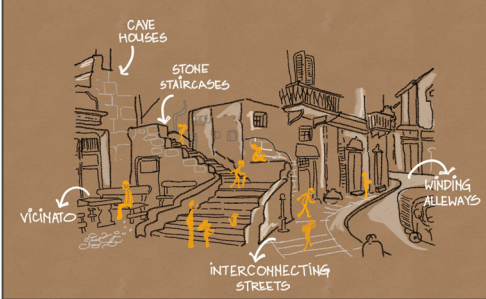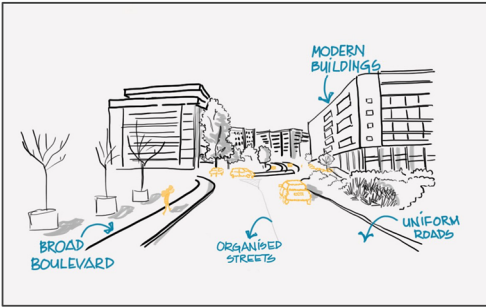
	TANGIBLE	INTANGIBLE	
SASSI	**Organic Layout** The Sassi district's organic layout develops from previous growth patterns and follows the contours of the ground. As a result, there is an intricate web of connected staircases, lanes, and streets that is full of surprises. **Adaptive Reuse** The Sassi's cave homes have been modified for modern living; some have been turned into homes, hotels, restaurants, and shops. These buildings' tangible legacy is preserved through adaptive reuse, and usable spaces for modern demands are created as a result.	**Sense of History and Authenticity** It fosters a link to the city's history and inspires a sense of nostalgia and cultural authenticity by giving a look into the traditional way of life. **Cultural Identity** The intangible characteristics of the Sassi are a reflection of Matera's cultural identity, including its folklore, customs, and sense of community. The Sassi's intangible wealth is a result of the locals' devotion to their culture and preservation efforts.	
NEW TOWN	**Wider roadways** Utility networks and well-organized transport systems are among the modern infrastructure elements of the new town. The new town's physical infrastructure features make it easier to move around, get to amenities, and connect to other areas of the city and beyond. **Urban Amenities** The new community has a number of urban amenities, including parks, shopping malls, schools, and medical centres	**Innovation** The new town is an example of an innovative, dynamic urban environment that welcomes change. The new town's intangible attributes exude a sense of development, and business ownership drawing new enterprises and encouraging an entrepreneurial attitude among the populace. **Contemporary Lifestyle** Modern and international lifestyles are reflected in the intangible features of the new town. Cultural events, art galleries, cafes, and a variety of dining establishments all contribute to the metropolitan ambience that appeals to modern tastes and aspirations.	

Figure 12. Comparative analysis of tangible and intangible heritage between Sassi and New Town. Drawn by authors.

4.4. On-Site Survey

An on-site survey was conducted in Matera on 18 April 2023, titled "Imageability on Matera", based on the foundation of elements of identity by Kevin Lynch. The survey involved 18 participants, including residents, workers, students, and tourists, who responded to a questionnaire administered in person. The aim was to analyze various elements influencing people's perceptions and the mental images they form about Matera.

By utilizing questionnaires (Figure A1 in Appendix A) and interviews, the survey sought to explore elements contributing to the formation of mental images among participants. This analysis aimed to identify crucial factors that shape the legibility, coherence, and overall identity of Matera. The findings (Figure 13) from this research laid the groundwork for determining essential design elements necessary for potential interventions in the city.

The students surveyed belonged to the age group of 11–16 years. They belonged to two groups, one who were the residents and others who came to study at Matera from another city. Their mental image encompassed the flowers, colors, and sculptures. Many described the behavior of the people they came across. The majority associated Matera with the Sassi district consisting of caves and made of stone.

Amongst the residents interviewed, some were working in Matera and few had left the city to pursue higher studies. The ones who are working in Matera have a lot of emotions attached to the place and associate themselves with the Sassi. The students studying in other cities find that the city of Matera does not offer any social activities and that they would rather live in other cities than in Matera.

The tourists that participated in the survey were mostly from different nationalities and came to Matera to explore its unique characteristics of being a cave city. Traveling from Bari to spend a couple of days and head back to other destinations, they associated Matera with how it is branded as the "Cave City". Their usual path circumvented the tourist itinerary set for an exploration of the city.

"Matera is a city of monuments, architecture and a small-big city"

"A tremendous place, full of emotions. Makes me think of 'matter' with stone elements that are omnipresent. A semi concentric circle of modern city that surrounds the Sassi neighbourhood."

"People carved out the stones to make home for themselves"

"When I think of Matera, first thing that comes to my mind is the stone city."

"The town is garnished with perfume which comes from the pane"

"Matera is a city with many stones, old houses and unreal appearance"

"In Matera, I think it's easy to get lost, because of narrow and different types streets"

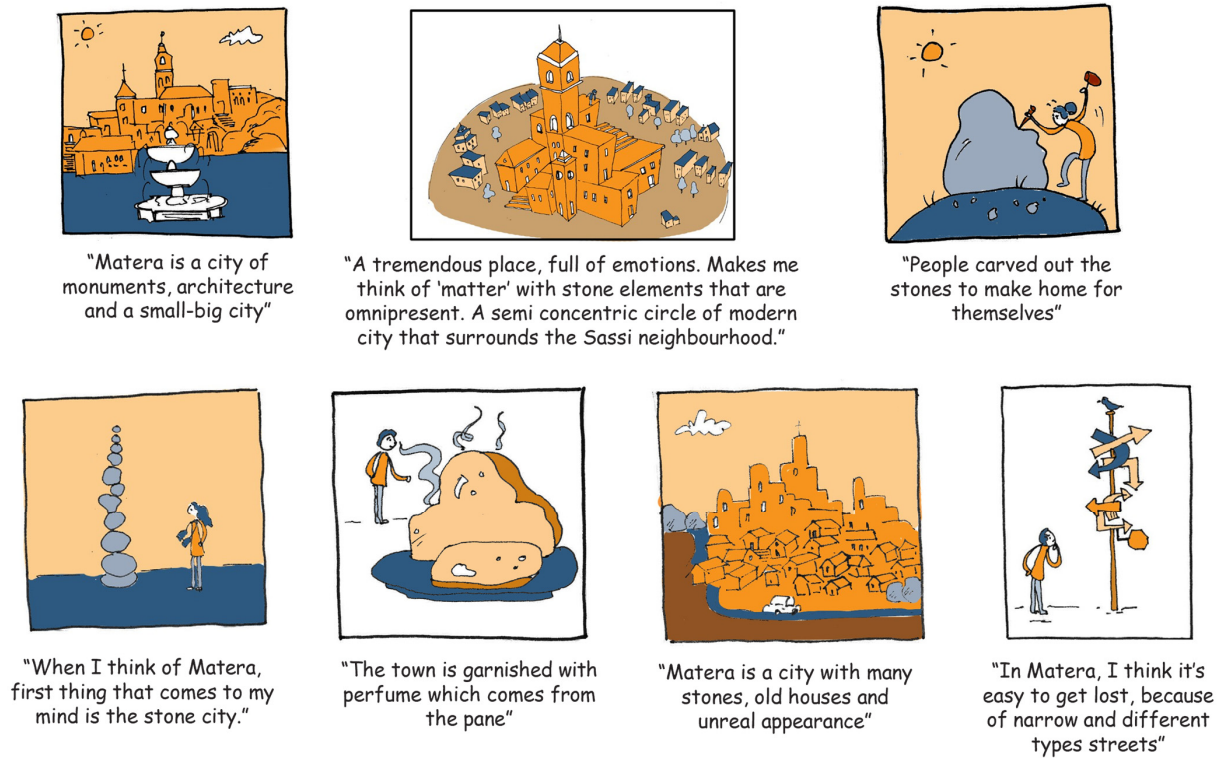**Figure 13.** The responses of the participants during the survey. Drawn by the authors.

5. Results

5.1. Mapping the Imageability Based on the Survey Conducted

The research conducted through the survey led to the mapping of the landmarks, paths, districts, and nodes that the respondents associated with themselves the most (Figure 14).
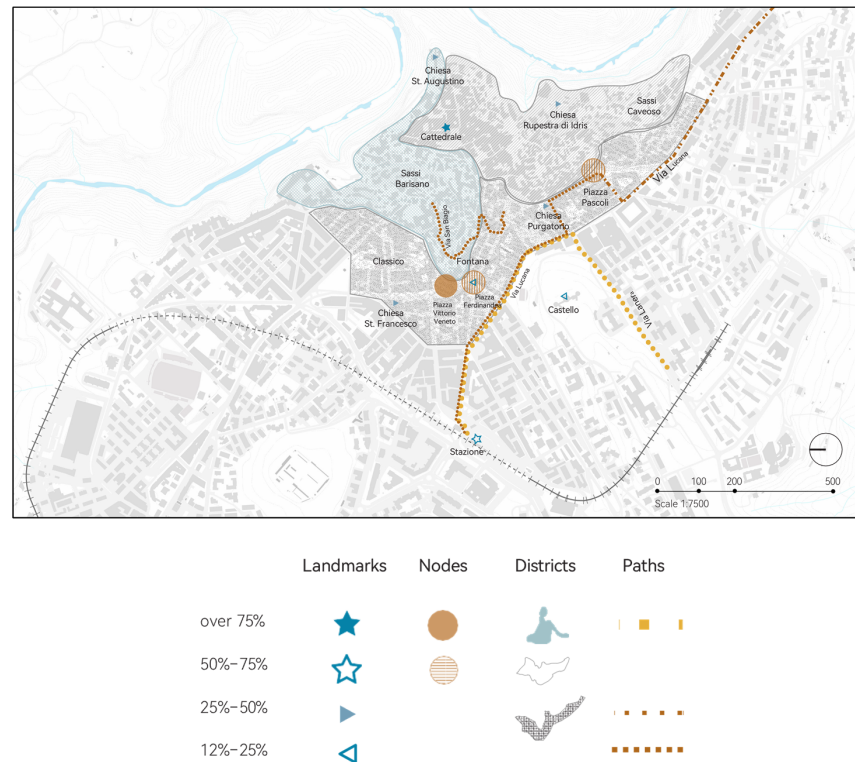

Figure 14. Imageability questionnaire mapping.

This led to the discovery that people strongly identify Matera as Sassi. The elements spread between the Gravina and the railway line. Hence, the piano area between the Sassi and the railway line was considered, which creates the bridge between the old and the new for the design development.

5.2. Context

The image is a detailed map (Figure 15) providing an urban analysis of Matera, Italy, highlighting key features that define the city's layout and cultural landscape. This map gives a comprehensive overview of Matera's urban structure, emphasizing the integration of historical, natural, and modern elements. It reflects the city's dual identity, blending its ancient Sassi district with newer developments while maintaining a strong connection to its cultural and environmental context. The map aids in understanding how Matera's unique landscape has been organized and how different urban elements interact within the city's complex fabric.
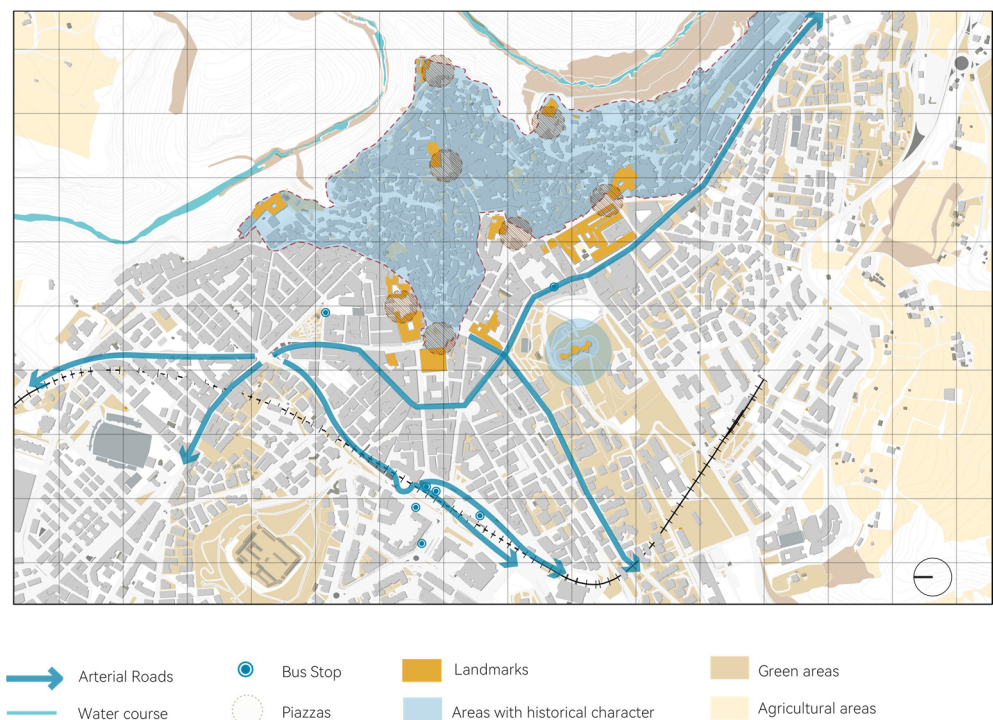

➡ Arterial Roads	◉ Bus Stop	🟧 Landmarks	🟫 Green areas
— Water course	◌ Piazzas	🟦 Areas with historical character	🟨 Agricultural areas

Figure 15. A map highlighting the key features of the town.

5.3. Elements of Identity

The map (Figure 16) illustrates the urban structure and elements of the city's identity using principles from Kevin Lynch's theory of urban design. The map integrates these elements to depict how different areas of Matera contribute to the city's identity. By illustrating the distinctions between modern and vernacular streets, marking important boundaries, and identifying key nodes, the map reveals the layers of historical and contemporary urban development that coexist in Matera. This synthesis of Kevin Lynch's principles with the urban context of Matera allows for an understanding of how the city's identity is perceived and experienced by its inhabitants and visitors.

This map of Matera, informed by Kevin Lynch's theory of urban design, depicts the city's structure and identity by highlighting the interplay between modern and vernacular streets, key boundaries, and significant nodes. Through this integration, the map captures the coexistence of historical and contemporary urban elements, offering insights into how Matera's identity is perceived and experienced by both its residents and visitors. These pave the way for intervention. A model was to be designed that could be replicated in

other parts of the town with similar characteristics. The area chosen to design the prototype consists of modern and vernacular characteristics of streets and Type 1, 2, and 3 nodes.

Figure 16. Elements of identity of Matera.

5.4. Site

The chosen site (Figure 17) in Matera is not only pivotal for connecting the city's historical and modern urban fabrics but also serves as a model for replicating similar design interventions across other parts of the town. Situated at the intersection of the ancient Sassi and the more contemporary urban areas, the site represents a microcosm of Matera's broader identity challenges. Its strategic location allows for the integration of the city's rich historical heritage with modern urban development, providing a blueprint for how other fragmented areas of Matera can be similarly bridged. The site's accessibility and centrality ensure that any successful interventions here can be easily adapted and applied to other key areas within the town, fostering a city-wide sense of cohesion.

Furthermore, by demonstrating how to effectively blend historical and contemporary elements in this prominent site, the design model can be replicated in other neighborhoods with similar dualities. The radial street patterns and the site's role as a hub of urban activity make it an exemplary location for testing and refining design strategies that can be scaled to other parts of Matera. This approach ensures that the interventions are not only site-specific but also adaptable, providing a flexible framework that can address the fragmented identities across different areas of the city. By using this site as a starting point, the design model has the potential to influence urban development throughout Matera, creating a more unified and cohesive urban environment.
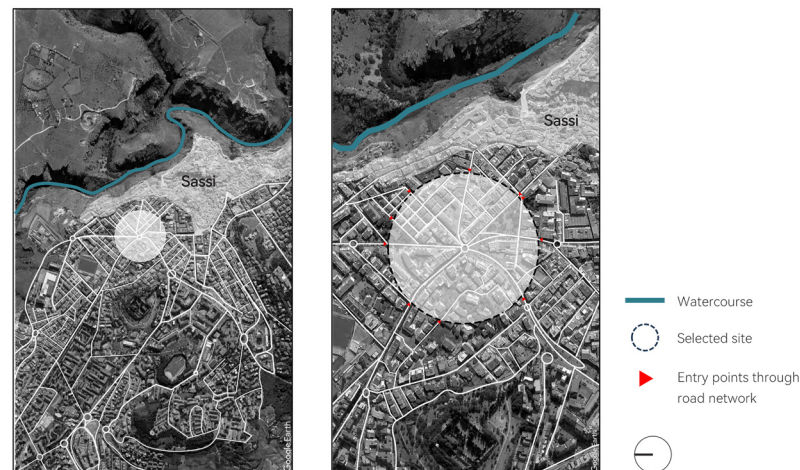
Figure 17. Satellite images of the site, highlighting the road connectivity and proximity to the Sassi area. Drawn on Google Earth by the authors.

6. Overall Strategy

6.1. Concept

The concept (Figure 18) integrates social, cultural, and environmental elements into Matera's urban design, creating a vibrant space that reflects the city's identity and enhances residents' quality of life. It provides a strategic framework to bridge Matera's fragmented identity by merging its historical character with modern urban features. The plan revitalizes key open spaces, weaving them into the city's social and cultural fabric to create continuous threads of identity across different areas. By incorporating nodes such as open-air art museums, social spaces, and street markets, the design fosters community interactions and a shared sense of unity in previously disconnected parts of the city.
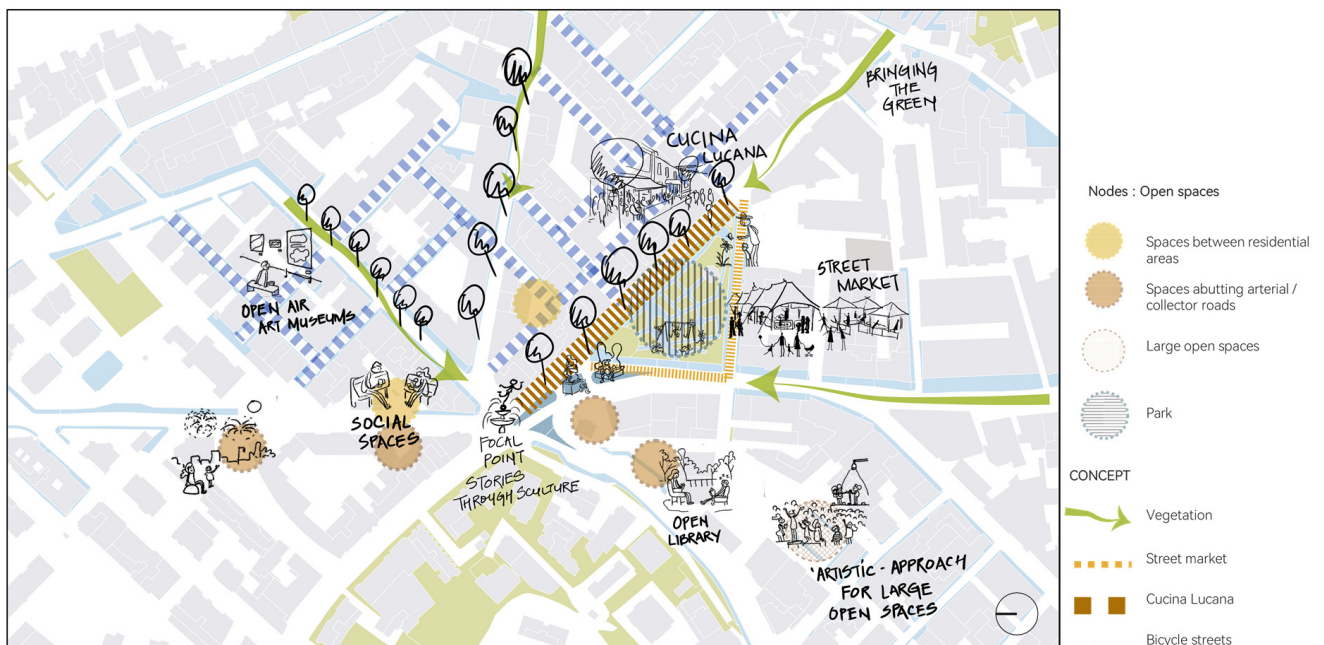

Figure 18. Conceptual diagram.

(i)   Nodes and Open Spaces:

- Spaces between residential areas: these are smaller areas designed for local social interactions.

- Spaces abutting arterial/collector roads: these are larger spaces that likely serve as community gathering points, connected to main traffic routes.
- Large open spaces: these could be major public areas intended for larger gatherings or events, possibly serving as focal points in the urban design.
- Parks: green spaces designed for leisure, relaxation, and contributing to the overall esthetic and environmental quality of the city.

(ii) Conceptual Elements:

- Vegetation: the introduction of greenery into urban spaces, aimed at enhancing the environmental quality and providing a natural element within the city.
- Street market: represents areas designated for market activities, where vendors can sell goods in an open-air environment, encouraging social interaction and economic activity.
- Cucina Lucana: indicates spaces dedicated to local cuisine, perhaps restaurants or food stalls, celebrating Matera's culinary heritage.
- Bicycle streets: paths designated for cyclists, promoting sustainable transportation and connecting various parts of the city.

(iii) Artistic and Open Spaces:

- Open-air art museums: these areas are intended to showcase art in public spaces, allowing residents and visitors to engage with cultural artifacts as part of their daily lives.
- Social spaces: these are areas specifically designed for community interaction, where people can gather, socialize, and engage in activities.
- Focal point stories through sculpture: represents key areas where sculptures or public art tell the story of the city or its people, creating landmarks and enhancing the city's cultural identity.
- Open library: spaces dedicated to open-air reading and learning, fostering education and intellectual engagement in a relaxed, accessible environment.
- Artistic approach for large open spaces: an overarching theme where art is integrated into the design of large open spaces, making these areas not just functional but also esthetically and culturally rich.

The diagram underscores the importance of green corridors, public gathering spaces, and culturally significant features like "Cucina Lucana" as both physical and symbolic links between the city's districts. These interventions break down physical barriers within Matera's urban landscape, drawing diverse groups into shared spaces. By harmonizing historical and contemporary elements through art, greenery, and community-focused amenities, the design intends to mend Matera's fragmented identity, fostering a more coherent and inclusive urban environment.

6.2. Design Matrix

The design matrix (Figure 19) plays a crucial role in bridging the fragmented identity of Matera by addressing the diverse and historically layered urban fabric of the city. Matera's identity is shaped by a complex interplay between its ancient, vernacular spaces and the more modern developments that have occurred over time. The matrix acknowledges this duality by proposing design interventions that are adaptable and culturally appropriate for different types of urban spaces.

By emphasizing flexibility, natural elements, and cultural relevance, the matrix ensures that contemporary interventions respect and complement Matera's historical and cultural context. For instance, in nodes like public squares and parks, the use of local materials and culturally inspired sculptures helps preserve the city's traditional character while also meeting modern needs. Edges and paths are designed to create smooth transitions between different urban forms, connecting older, vernacular streets with newer infrastructure. This approach strengthens the physical links within Matera and brings together its fragmented identity, creating spaces that honor both its rich heritage and its ongoing evolution.

Figure 19. Design matrix.

6.3. Strategy Implementation

An urban design intervention in Matera is shown in depth in the image (Figure 20), which demonstrates how intentional placemaking has turned an underused and fragmented area into a unified, lively location that incorporates a variety of cultural, social, and environmental factors.
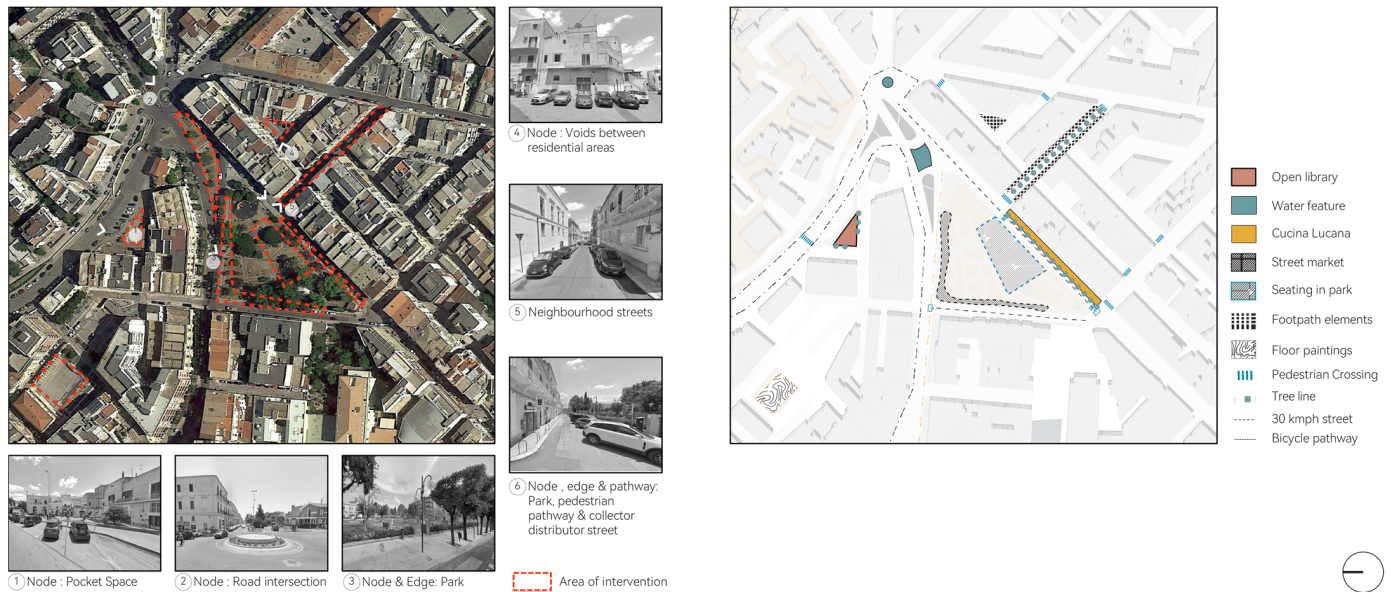

Figure 20. Transformation through strategy.

The "Before" side of the image highlights the area's fragmented nature, characterized by voids between residential buildings, and disconnected nodes such as road intersections, pocket spaces, and underutilized parks. The neighborhood streets are primarily vehicle-oriented, lacking pedestrian-friendly features, which contributes to the area's disjointed identity. The park in the center, surrounded by residential and commercial buildings, appears isolated, with limited connectivity to the surrounding urban fabric, further emphasizing the separation of different urban elements.

The "After" side of the image illustrates the implementation of tactical and urban placemaking strategies designed to bridge these gaps. Key interventions include the creation of an open library, water features, and a revitalized "Cucina Lucana" area, which

serve as cultural and social hubs. The street converted into the Cucina Lucana consists of cafes, pubs, and restaurants, that are already existing. The street has been revitalized to make it inclusive of the cultural aspect of Matera. The introduction of street markets and seating in the park enhances social interaction, while footpath elements and pedestrian crossings improve accessibility and safety. The area between the park and the pedestrian pathway abutting it creates a dynamic space that can accommodate spillover activities.

6.4. Design

6.4.1. Masterplan

The masterplan (Figure 21) for urban design intervention in selected areas incorporates floor art and sculptures created by local artisans, infusing the public realm with cultural depth that honors Matera's historical legacy while shaping a modern urban experience. These artistic elements serve more than just esthetic purposes; they function as symbolic links that visually and emotionally reconnect the city's fragmented districts. Streets are reimagined as green, tree-lined corridors that prioritize pedestrians and cyclists, promoting sustainable mobility and reducing vehicular dominance. Enhanced landscaping, including green spaces both inside and outside, creates shaded areas that foster social interaction, inviting residents and visitors to relax, connect, and actively engage with the urban landscape.

1. Cucina Lucana
2. Street Market
3. Water features
4. Folklore Sculptures
5. Open public library
6. Floor painting in open space converting them to sports area or gathering spaces
7. Bicycle streets
8. Ethnic flora boulevards

0　　25　　50　　　100m

Figure 21. Masterplan.

The axonometric view (Figure 22) of Matera highlights six key design interventions aimed at revitalizing the city's urban landscape. These interventions include the creation of parks, which introduce green spaces within the city. Existing public squares are revitalized to serve as dynamic social spaces that can transform according to the needs of the community. Pocket spaces, which are currently large concrete areas situated between buildings and mostly used as parking lots, are designed as open libraries. Voids, previously neglected gaps between structures, are transformed into areas that reduce vehicle presence

and increase human activity, with added vegetation. Redesigned streets and edges enhance pedestrian movement. Additionally, interventions at road intersections improve traffic flow, pedestrian accessibility, and safety, harmonizing the coexistence of vehicular and foot traffic. The nodes of the road junctions become places for sculptures that highlight the history and story of Matera, crafted by local artisans. Collectively, these interventions reflect a tactical urbanism approach that bridges Matera's rich historical heritage with contemporary urban needs.
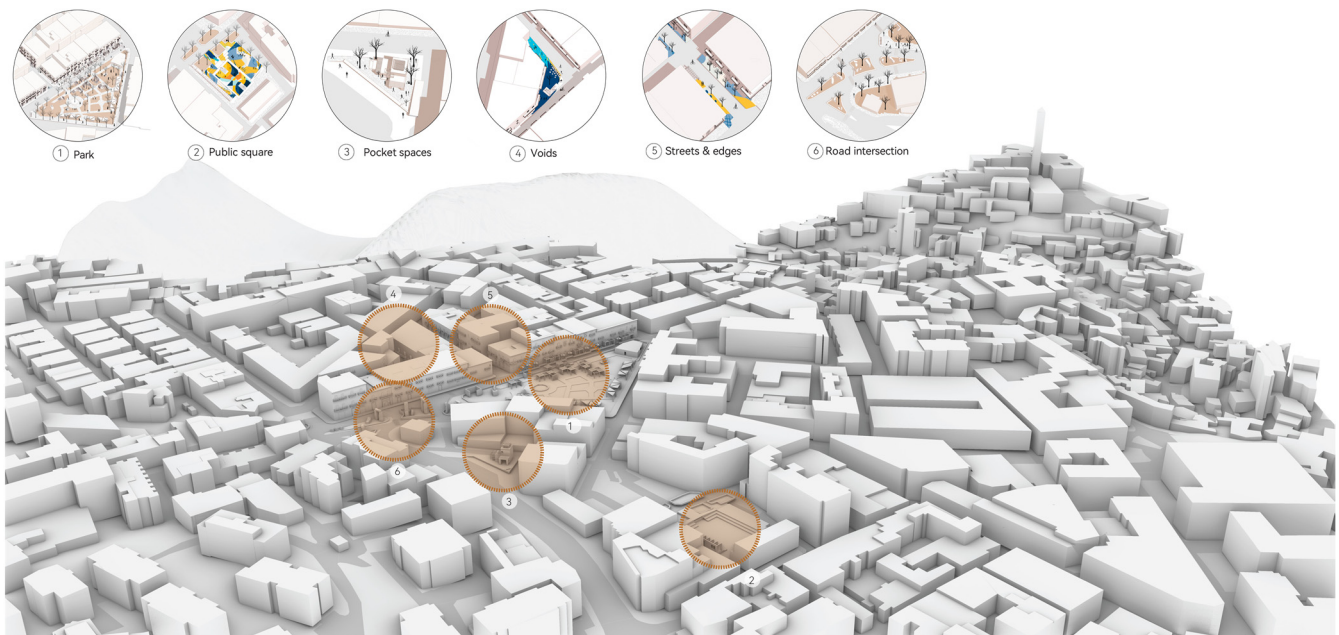

Figure 22. The axonometric view of Matera with interventions in the chosen area.

6.4.2. Nodes, Paths, Edges: Park

The revitalization initiative aims to integrate the commercial vitality of the street with the residential calmness of the upper levels. The transformation into "Cucina Lucana" leverages the region's culinary heritage, establishing the street as a dedicated gastronomic corridor that highlights local cuisine. The design (Figure 23) includes the implementation of temporary shading systems and strategically positioned seating areas that extend into the adjacent park, fostering a seamless and inviting environment for both diners and pedestrians. The previously vehicle-centric street has been restructured into a 30 km/h slow zone, promoting a shared space where automobiles, bicycles, and pedestrians can safely coexist. The introduction of bollards has been strategically employed to regulate vehicular movement, thereby enhancing pedestrian safety and accessibility.

Additionally, two streets bordering the park have been converted into flexible marketplace zones. These areas are engineered to be multifunctional, capable of accommodating small-scale vendors and temporary retail setups, thereby nurturing local entrepreneurial initiatives. The marketplace furniture will be produced by local artisans, effectively revitalizing the traditional "furniture district" and ensuring cultural continuity.

The public park has been reconfigured to create visual and physical connectivity with the surrounding streets, facilitating the seamless flow of activities between the street and park spaces. The restaurant seating areas have been designed as modular cubical units, drawing inspiration from the stone-cut rock architecture characteristic of Matera. This modular approach not only reflects the city's historical context but also offers flexibility, enabling the seating to be re-purposed for various other uses, and supporting a diverse range of activities within the park.
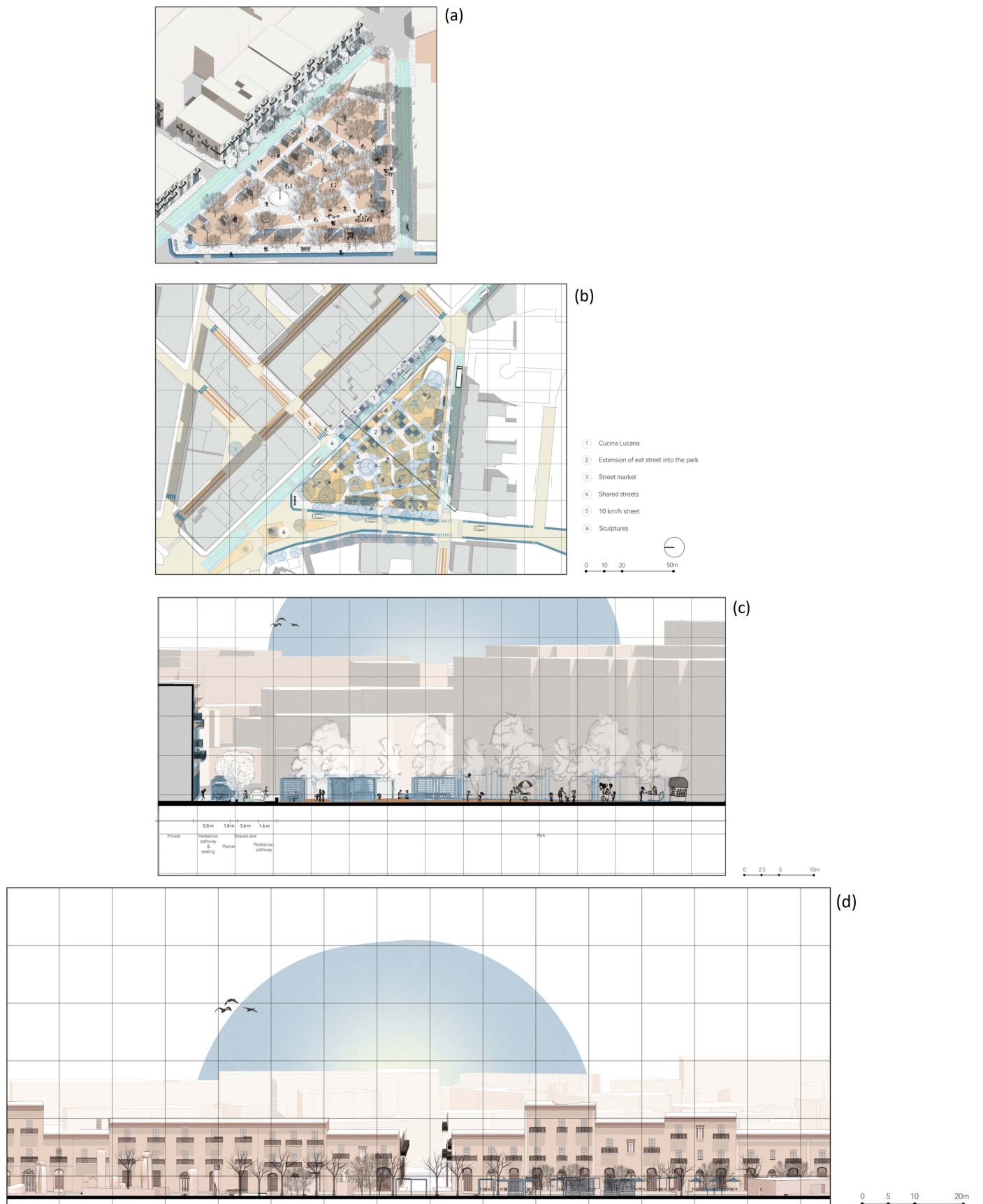
(a)

(b)

1　Cucina Lucana
2　Extension of eat street into the park
3　Street market
4　Shared streets
5　10 km/h street
6　Sculptures

0　10　20　　50m

(c)

| | 5.0 m | 1.0 m | 3.6 m | 1.6 m | | |
| Private | Pedestrian pathway & seating | Planter | Shared lane | Pedestrian pathway | | Park |

0　2.5　5　　10m

(d)

0　5　10　　20m

Figure 23. (**a**) Axonometric view; (**b**) plan; (**c**) section; (**d**) elevation of park and Cucina Lucana street.

6.4.3. Nodes: Pocket Spaces

The intervention introduces a small-scale public structure, an open library, crafted using locally sourced tufo rock, that utilizes Matera's traditional construction techniques and ensures a strong contextual integration with the surrounding urban fabric. The building's design (Figure 24) employs a modular unit system, meticulously scaled to human proportions, which enhances both its accessibility and usability while fostering a sense of intimacy within the public realm.
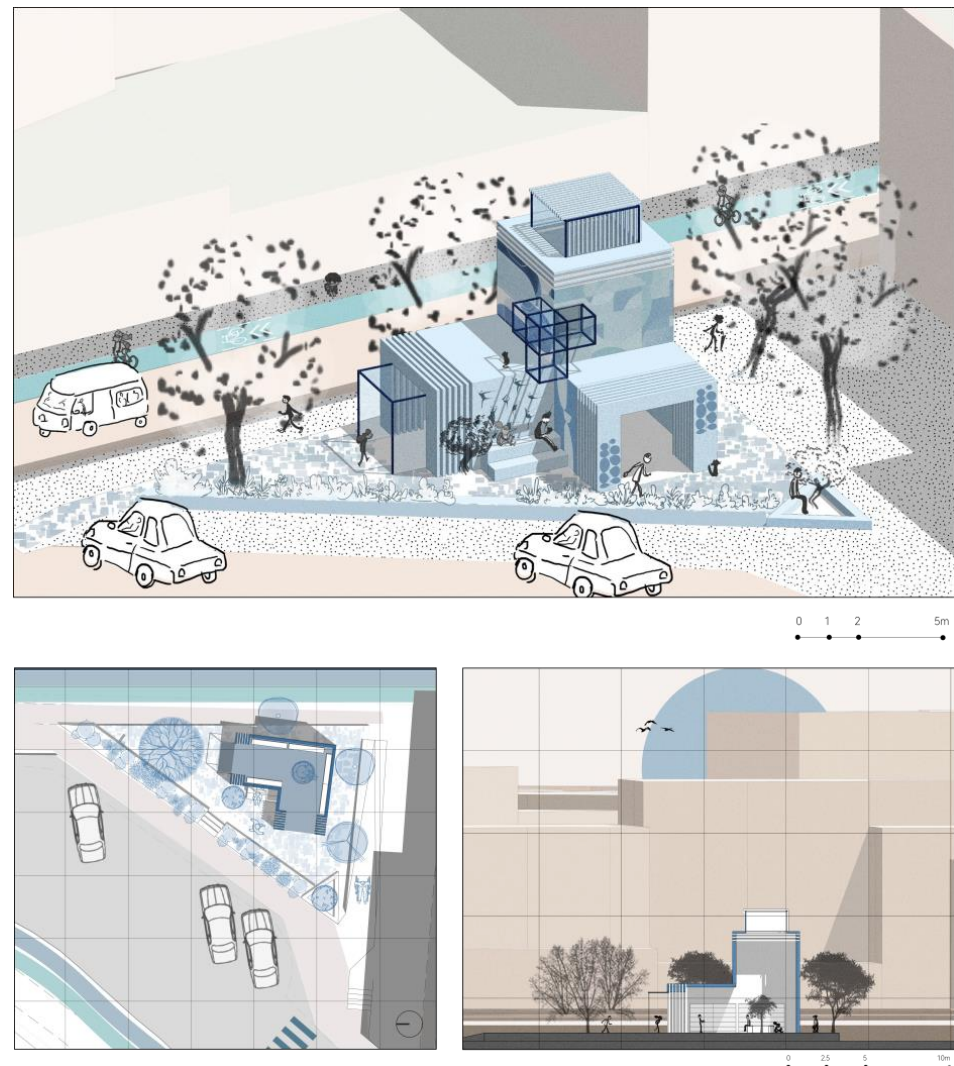

Figure 24. Axonometric view, plan, and section of library design in pocket space.

Furniture pieces are custom-designed by local craftsmen, aiming to revitalize the legacy of Matera's historical "furniture district", thereby integrating traditional craftsmanship into contemporary public architecture. The walls of the library are adorned with murals and artworks by local artists, infusing the space with visual narratives that portray the city's cultural heritage and contribute to the formation of place identity in micro-scale urban settings. Indigenous vegetation is incorporated into the design, with green elements placed both inside the structure and in the adjacent spaces, enhancing the biophilic qualities of the environment, creating shaded areas, and reinforcing a connection between architecture and nature. This approach aims to elevate the architectural character of the library and establish it as a vibrant community node that reflects and amplifies the cultural essence of Matera.

6.4.4. Nodes: Public Squares

The design strategy for the open public squares utilizes art as an activator of urban spaces. In this particular piazza (Figure 25), dynamic ground and wall treatments incorporate vibrant, contextually relevant floor paintings, enhancing the visual appeal and fostering a playful interaction with the environment. The surface is marked with multifunctional graphic patterns, including basketball court lines, which define recreational zones and introduce a sense of movement and engagement. The design emphasizes adaptability, with elements like a mobile basketball hoop that can be repositioned or removed to transform the square for various activities, from sports to public gatherings, markets, or cultural events.

Figure 25. Axonometric view of the transformation of open public ground into basketball court.

This flexible infrastructure maximizes the usability of the space, allowing an easy transition between different functions, thereby maintaining a constant level of activity and vibrancy. The strategic use of color and pattern creates a brighter, more inviting atmosphere, making the piazza a focal point for community interaction and social engagement. The integration of art and modular elements within the architectural landscape enhances the spatial quality and blurs the boundaries between leisure, play, and public utility. The approach aims to revitalize underutilized urban areas and fosters a sense of ownership and identity among residents, as the spaces are tailored to be responsive to the evolving needs of the community.

6.4.5. Nodes: Voids Between Residential Area

The gaps between buildings are redesigned (Figure 26) to be wide enough to allow for pedestrian movement and facilitate natural light penetration. The pavements are painted with textures for aesthetic appeal. These materials are chosen for their durability and aesthetic appeal. Adequate lighting fixtures are placed along the voids to enhance visibility and safety during nighttime. The lighting design includes a combination of overhead lights and ground-level fixtures to ensure even illumination. Planters or green walls are incorporated into the design to introduce vegetation, which helps in cooling the area and improving air quality. The choice of plants is based on their suitability to the local climate and maintenance requirements. Seating areas, such as benches and shaded resting spots, are strategically placed to encourage social interaction and provide comfort to pedestrians.
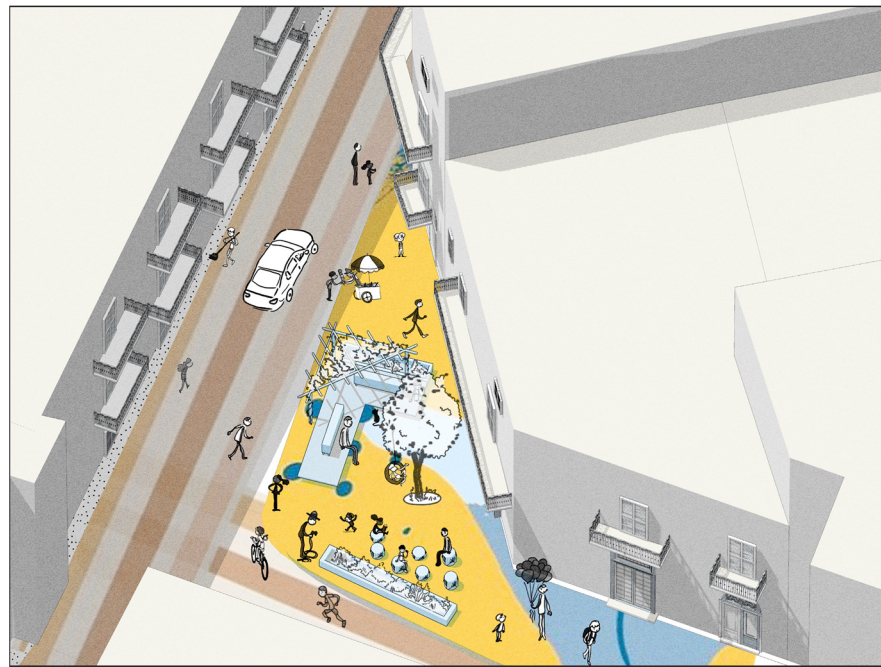
Figure 26. An axonometric view of the design for the voids.

6.4.6. Paths: Neighborhood Streets

The neighborhood streets are currently used for parking or as thoroughfares for vehicles. The area is being redesigned (Figure 27) to shift the focus towards pedestrian priority. The streets will be converted into low-speed zones, and street furniture with shading devices will be added to make the area livelier and more interactive. Lighting will be enhanced along the street to increase brightness and improve security. The design incorporates the concept of having more human activity at the street threshold to create a sense of safety and vibrancy.

Figure 27. The design interventions along the neighborhood streets.

6.4.7. Paths: Slow-Mobility Network

The network (Figure 28) contributes to the revitalization of the chosen area. Improved accessibility would lead to increased foot traffic, potentially boosting local businesses and contributing to the area's economic development.
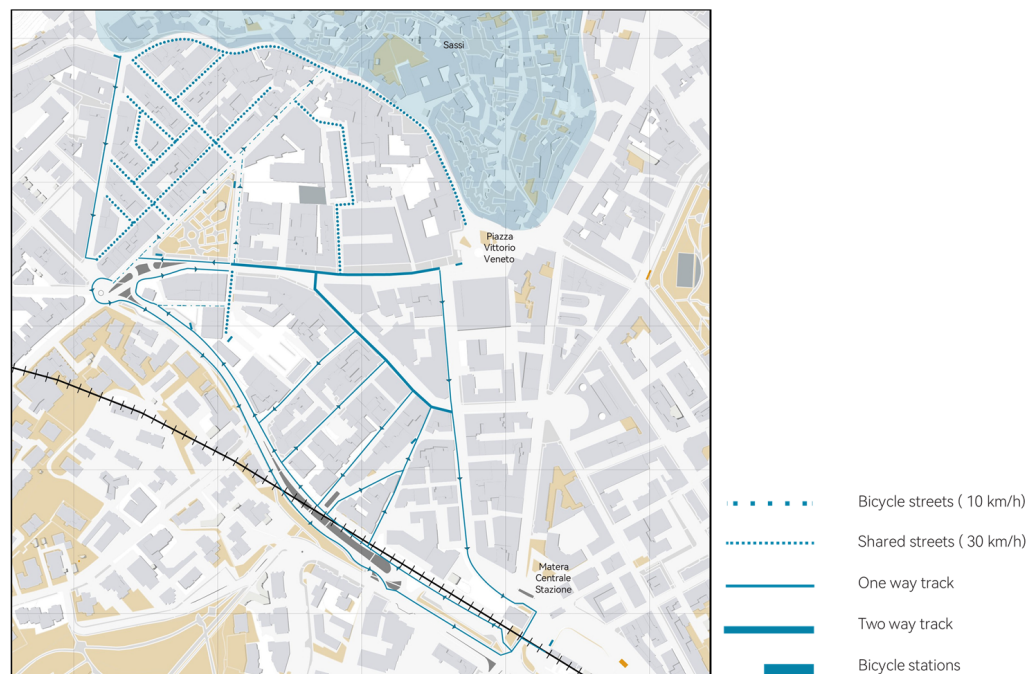

Figure 28. Map of bicycle network.

This initiative ensures that the chosen area becomes easily accessible to key landmarks like the historic Sassi, Piazza Vittorio Veneto (a central square), and Matera Centrale (the central train station). It facilitates smooth movement between these significant areas, promoting a more integrated urban experience. It encourages sustainable modes of transportation, reducing reliance on motor vehicles. By providing an alternative means of travel, it promotes eco-friendly mobility, minimizing carbon emissions, and contributing to a cleaner environment.

7. Analysis

Spatial analysis (Figures 29 and 30) has been carried out following both Lynch's [4] framework, emphasizing form and cognitive legibility (like paths and landmarks), and Canter's model [31], focusing on psychological and behavioral impacts like sensory experience and receptivity. The analysis is conducted to evaluate and visualize the impact of urban design interventions on key elements of Matera's spatial and experiential identity. By comparing conditions before and after the design changes, it helps to measure improvements in factors such as permeability, street life, and legibility. This allows urban planners to assess how effective the redesign has been in enhancing the city's accessibility, cultural identity, and social interaction. The expansion of the blue areas indicates the success of interventions in improving these aspects, providing a clear visual representation of the overall effectiveness of the design in transforming Matera's urban landscape. In essence, this analysis helps demonstrate how urban design interventions have reshaped Matera's urban identity, addressing both the physical structure and the social, cultural, and psychological experience of the space.
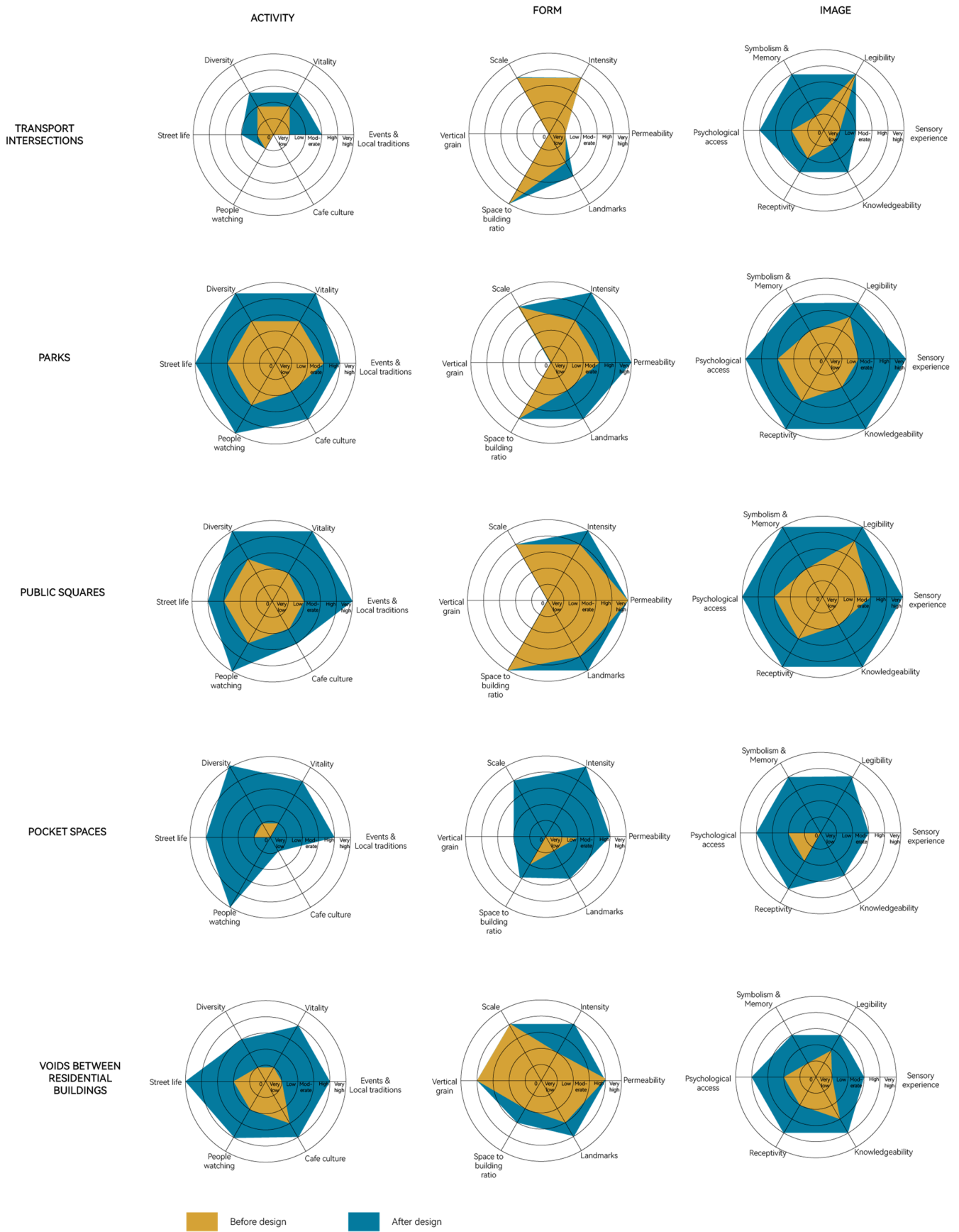
Figure 29. Analysis of nodes by Kevin Lynch [4] performed for elements of identity of place defined by Canter [31]. Carried out by authors.
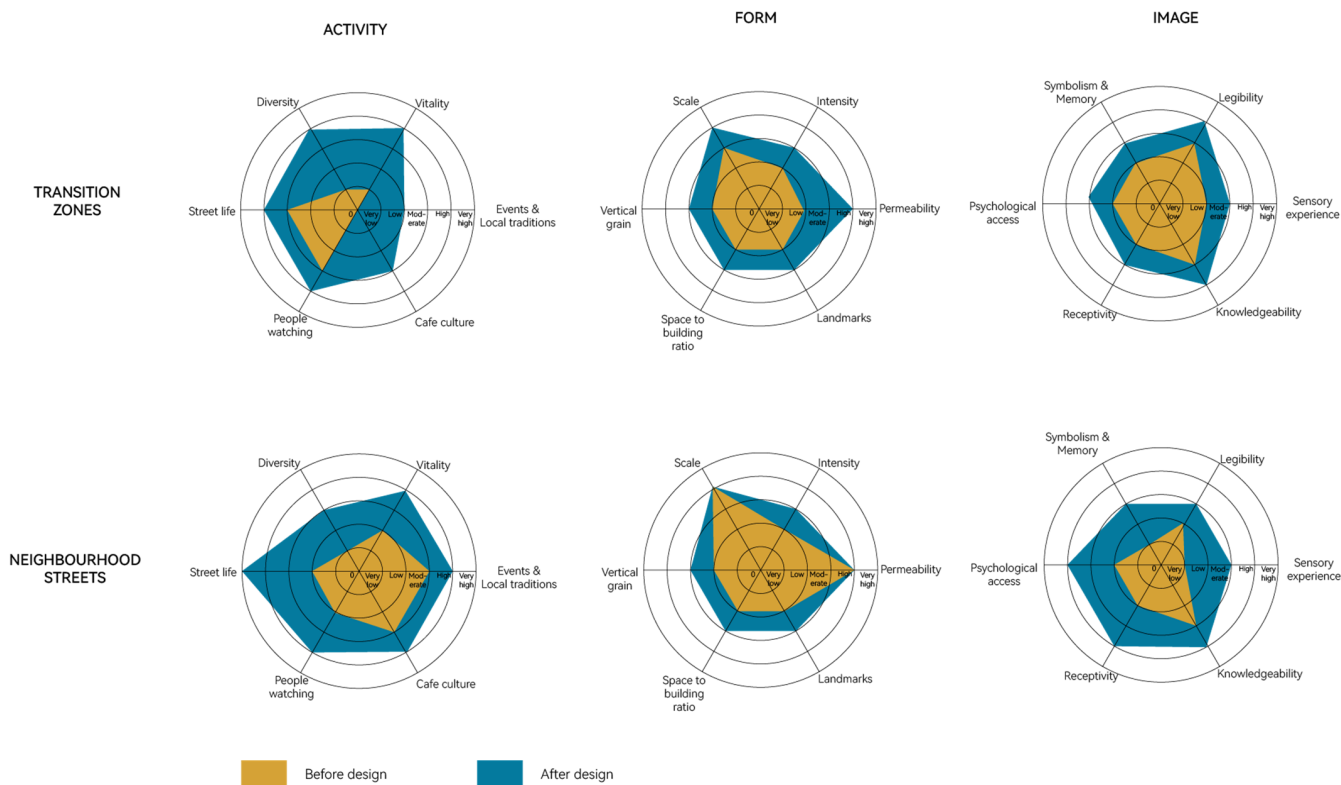
Figure 30. Analysis of edges and paths by Kevin Lynch [4] performed for elements of identity of place defined by Canter [31]. Carried out by authors.

8. Conclusions

This study comprehensively examines Matera's urban identity, revealing its intricate layers through historical richness, modern dynamics, and strategic urban interventions. The research highlights the contrasting yet complementary narratives that shape Matera's unique character by comparing the ancient Sassi district with the new town. The historical center of Matera, with its distinctive geography and a deep-rooted sense of place, attracts both residents and tourists due to its strong identity. In contrast, the new town was developed mainly to solve housing problems, resulting in a lack of distinct identity and limited social interaction spaces. This disparity has created an uneven focus on the historical center at the expense of the new town's development.

The study employs the principles of tactical urbanism—such as those advocated by Lydon and Garcia (2015)—to explore placemaking strategies that aim to revitalize Matera's urban landscape. Following scholars like Kevin Lynch, who emphasized the importance of "imageability" in creating memorable urban environments, this study explored specific nodes, edges, streets, and open areas within Matera's urban fabric to propose interventions that could be replicated elsewhere. By employing tactical urbanism strategies, such as creating street markets, traditional food streets, and pedestrian-friendly zones, the study illustrates how Matera's urban landscape could be reshaped to enhance community engagement and cultural expression. Moreover, the incorporation of open libraries, artistic streetscapes, and revived [27] traditional crafts further strengthen Matera's cultural identity and foster a sense of belonging among its inhabitants.

The approach proposed for Matera presents distinct advantages over strategies observed in Doha [17] and Hergla [16]. Unlike these cases, where large-scale or tourism-focused developments predominate, Matera's model emphasizes smaller-scale, community-oriented interventions embedded within a holistic urban planning framework. Grounded in principles of tactical urbanism, placemaking, and active community involvement, this approach seeks to address urban identity fragmentation through a multi-layered, inclu-

sive strategy that respects and reinforces cultural heritage rather than prioritizing purely economic growth.

Matera and Medellín [55] share significant parallels in their strategies, particularly in revitalizing urban identity by engaging communities and preserving cultural traditions. Both cities use approaches that foster social cohesion and a sense of place, despite operating in vastly different contexts. Similarly, the Msheireb district in Qatar Boussaa adopts a compact, walkable urban model to facilitate social interaction, which aligns with Matera's promotion of slow mobility to enhance local connectivity and accessibility. The design for Matera conceptualizes the themes of memory and identity, as suggested by Chizzonetti and Batkova [15]. This involves utilizing local materials, traditional craftsmanship, and design elements that evoke the rich history of Matera. Furthermore, Lviv's approach to balancing diversity and cohesion served as a valuable lesson for Matera, demonstrating how to foster inclusivity without imposing homogeneity.

Importantly, the study emphasizes the significance of testing these theoretical ideas in the particular case of Matera, ensuring their relevance and adaptability to the local context. Observations from Matera indicate that while the proposed interventions successfully balance heritage preservation with contemporary needs, applying similar strategies in other cities will require modifications. Testing the adaptability of these concepts across different urban settings could be beneficial, allowing for adjustments to reflect each area's unique historical and cultural dynamics.

Reflecting on the meaning of these findings, it becomes evident that Matera's approach to urban design could serve as a model for other cities facing similar challenges. The study's emphasis on combining heritage conservation with contemporary needs aligns with Doreen Massey's hypothesis that modern place identities are shaped by dynamic social interactions at various scales. However, generalizing these findings necessitates methodological changes in urban planning and heritage protection frameworks. This research suggests that existing methodologies must incorporate more flexible, dynamic strategies that accommodate the evolving identities of urban areas. A shift in the organization of urban planning and heritage protection is essential, prioritizing interdisciplinary collaboration to integrate the cultural, social, and historical dimensions of cities. Future research could address this gap by applying similar methodologies in diverse urban settings to test the adaptability of the proposed interventions.

The study also has certain limitations, including its exclusive focus on Matera, which may restrict the broader applicability of its conclusions. Additionally, the research does not delve deeply into the preservation of the Sassi district's structures or the rainwater collection system in the cisterns, which are critical aspects of Matera's urban fabric. Future research could benefit from a more inclusive approach that examines these factors alongside imageability and placemaking strategies.

In terms of architectural, planning, and policy implications, the findings suggest that a more integrated approach is needed—one that balances heritage conservation with innovative urban planning. This research underlines the importance of creating spaces that resonate with both historical significance and contemporary lifestyles, thereby fostering a sustainable urban environment. Moreover, lessons learned from this study highlight the need for urban planners and policymakers to consider the cultural and social dimensions of public spaces as they design interventions aimed at strengthening community bonds.

To summarize, the key takeaway from this study is that Matera's urban identity is not static but continuously evolving through deliberate, thoughtful interventions that honor its historical past while embracing modern needs. By blending the historical and contemporary, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that advocates for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches in urban planning, offering a replicable model for other cities seeking to balance preservation with progress. Testing and refining these approaches in other cities will be critical, ensuring that urban planning and heritage protection frameworks can be adapted to diverse and evolving urban landscapes.

Appendix A

Name:
Date of birth:

MATERA IMAGEABILTY QUESTIONNAIRE

Date (of visiting Matera):

1. What first comes to your mind, what symbolizes the word "Matera" for you? How would you broadly describe Matera in a physical sense?

2. Could you make a quick map of central Matera, inward towards Cathedral or downtown area. Make it just as if you were making a rapid description of the city to a stranger, covering all the main features. The drawing doesn't need to be accurate —just a rough sketch.
[Take notes on the sequence in which the map is drawn.]

***A PATH THAT YOU FREQUENTED THE MOST / USED THE MAXIMUM DURING YOUR VISIT AT MATERA**
3. i) From _____ to _____
   ii) Mode of transportation
        a) Foot   b) Cycle   c) Car   d) Public transport _____

a. Describe complete and explicit directions for the trip that you normally take going from _____ to _____. Picture yourself actually making the trip, and describe the sequence of things you saw, heard, or smelled along the way, including the path markers that became important to you, and the clues that a stranger would need to make the same decisions that you made. Importance to be given to physical pictures of things.
It's not important if you can't remember the names of streets and places.

b. Do you have any particular emotional feelings about various parts of your trip? How long would it take you? Are there parts of the trip where you felt uncertain of your location?

4. List 3 elements of Matera you think are most distinctive. They may be large or small, the ones that for you are the easiest to identify and remember.

For each of the three elements
a. Describe the element? If you were taken there blindfolded; when the blindfold was taken off what clues would you use to positively identify where you were?

b. Are there any particular emotions/feelings that you have with regard to the element?

c. Would you show me on your map where are the boundaries of it?

5. Would you draw the direction of the north on your map?

6. Did you find Matera an easy city to find your way in, or to identify its parts?

7. What cities of your acquaintance have a good orientation? Why?

Figure A1. The questionnaire used for interviewing.

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