



Architecture and Spatial Justice in Our Cities:
A Study of Teddy Cruz's "Living Rooms at the Border"
By Felicity Cain

Byera Hadley
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Journal Series
2015



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He was dedicated to architectural education, both as a part-time teacher in architectural drawing at the Sydney Technical College, and culminating in his appointment in 1914 as Lecturer-in-Charge at the College's Department of Architecture. Under his guidance, the College became acknowledged as one of the finest schools of architecture in the British Empire.

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Truong Le was awarded
the Byera Hadley Travelling
Scholarship in 2015
Cover image: San Diego-Tijuana
Border Fence & 'Living Rooms at the
Border' Model by eStudio C

The aim was to attend the Urban Affairs Association conference in San Diego and dive deep into Teddy Cruz's "Living Rooms at the Border" project to gather perspectives relevant to Sydney's urban planning and architectural practices.

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Introduction

I was fortunate to be awarded a Student-category Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship (BHTS) in 2016, which allowed me to travel to San Diego, California, from 8 to 29 March 2016 to participate in the 46th Annual Urban Affairs Association (UAA) Conference. There, I presented my paper "Informal Settlements in the Contested City: A Case Study of Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War." The scholarship also enabled me to visit the San Diego-Tijuana border region and dive deep into Teddy Cruz's project conducted with Casa Familiar, "Living Rooms at the Border." The aim was to examine this architectural intervention and the insights from the conference to gather perspectives relevant to Sydney's urban planning and architectural practices. This report summarises the lessons learned from this study trip. I am grateful to the NSW Architects Registration Board for this opportunity.

Context and Relevance

I have been keenly interested in Teddy Cruz's work given it aims to overcome social and spatial injustice challenges - matters dear to my heart. Therefore, as part of my BHTS I chose to study one of his key projects in the San Diego-Tijuana Border region to extract lessons learned that may be relevant to the Sydney context. In addition, I was select to attend the 2016 UAA Conference's theme, "Social Justice in the Global City: Contested Views on Social Control, Borders, and Equity" to present my thesis and which was a relevant chance to help further my understanding of the challenges of spatial justice in urban contexts how architecture and urban planning may overcome (or worse, entrench) these issues.

Attending the UAA Conference, where I presented a poster on the challenges of informal settlements in Aleppo and other Syria cities during the war, and then studied the work of Teddy Cruz in the world's largest cross-border metropolis of San Diego-Tijuana may seem contexts very different than

the Sydney context, a coastal city in Australia doesn't experience conflict or informal urban settlement growth. However, there are many parallels between urban challenges and best practice responses that can be distilled. In particular, many relevant lessons learned can be drawn out by viewing these challenges through a spatial justice lens.

Rapid urbanisation continues globally, from San Diego to Sydney and Syria alike. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) notes that 54% of the world's population resides in urban areas. Still, by 2050, 70% of the world's population is expected to live in urban centres¹. Cities are now leading economic growth globally, and urbanisation will continue to be the key driver of international and national economic development. Increasing urbanisation will bring many benefits and present numerous challenges as cities worldwide grapple with persistent and emerging challenges such as inequality, housing affordability, and environmental sustainability, compounded by worsening challenges due to climate change.

The principle of spatial justice is a key mechanism for responding to these challenges. Spatial justice ensures fair and equitable access to space and resources within urban environments. It emphasises the distribution of public services, amenities, and opportunities in a manner that rectifies historical and systemic inequalities. Spatial justice seeks to address urban segregation, environmental inequity, and social exclusion issues by promoting inclusive, sustainable, and participatory urban planning and design. Many of the practitioners at UAA and architects, such as Teddy Cruz, advocate for architecture as a tool for spatial justice — an ideology that I am eager to integrate into my architectural and urban design philosophy and practice.

¹ <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210582810/read>

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Reflections on the Urban Affairs Association Conference

I was proud to be selected to present a poster summarising my master's thesis at the 46th Annual Urban Affairs Association Conference under the theme, "Social Justice in the Global City: Contested Views on Social Control, Borders, and Equity," which also allowed me to attend various side events and academic presentations that broadened my understanding of social justice in urban contexts.

I presented my master's thesis, "Informal Settlements in the Contested City: A Case Study of Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War", in a poster speaking slot on Friday, 18 March (see following page). The thesis analysed spatial injustice in the Syrian city of Aleppo leading up to the war, with significant divisions in land tenure and access to urban services between east and west Aleppo. The predominately Sunni eastern half of Aleppo was characterised by largely informal settlements and poor urban services, with rapidly rising urbanisation in the lead-up to the war adding to the pressures. Since the war, as my research maps by overlaying maps of informality and the maps of urban destruction, western Aleppo has been drastically impacted. The paper points to the role contributing to the urban inequality underlying the conflict and notes the importance of equal reconstruction support. I was delighted to present the poster and have many accomplished academics and practitioners engage with my research.

The conference theme, "Social Justice in the Global City: Contested Views on Social Control, Borders, and Equity," was also well aligned with my BHTS interest and exploration of Teddy Cruz's work, given his application of theories of spatial justice. Throughout the various conference events, discussions on social control, borders, and equity underscored the importance of social and spatial justice, including the significance of inclusive urban planning and architecture

in fostering equitable environments. Keynote speeches and panels delved into innovative urbanism approaches, stressing the necessity of community engagement, social responsibility, and sustainability in urban development.

Engaging with urban scholars, researchers, and professionals worldwide provided exciting perspectives and strategies for tackling urban challenges in Sydney and beyond. Although Teddy Cruz could not attend UAA, as was previously expected, I connected with other leading border area researchers and practitioners who helped me gain insights on the Living Rooms at the Border and helped inform this report.

A key highlight was the panel on "Urban Planning Across the Border in a Global Age: Projects and Debates", chaired by Lawrence Herzog – a leading researcher on cross-border dynamics – with interesting presentations by Rene Peralta and Christophe Sohn. It was a pleasure to meet Lawrence Herzog, a San Diego State University professor and a leading expert on the urban geography of the U.S.-Mexico border. Lawrence Herzog has extensively researched urban planning, architecture, and cross-border collaboration. He has published numerous leading books and articles on the urban challenges and opportunities in the San Diego-Tijuana region.

Together with Christophe Sohn, he presented a research paper on "The Cross-Border Metropolis Caught Between Debordering and Rebordering: A Plea for a Reflexive Urbanism", making the case for the need for urban planning of border areas that consider beyond national boundaries but instead consider the broader urban and ecology through a 'debordering process'. Rene Peralta from Woodbury University Placemaking presented "New Debordering and the Resurgence of Tijuana, Mexico", offering perspectives on the urban growth patterns alongside the other side of the Border.

Below: presenting my "Informal Settlements in the Contested City: A Case Study of Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War", in a poster speaking slot at the UAA and attending Urban Planning Across the Border in a Global Age: Projects and Debates"



Below my "Informal Settlements in the Contested City: A Case Study of Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War" poster presentation for the UAA 2016

Informal Settlements in the Contested City: A Case Study of Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of an increasingly urban, highly fluid civil war, the Syrian city of Aleppo stands as a highly contested space. Reflecting nation-wide trends in urbanisation, Aleppo experienced rapid rates of rural-urban migration in the 10 years preceding the current conflict. Many new migrants found themselves located in informal settlements, where the urban poor bear the brunt of over-stretched infrastructure. While literature has argued that informal settlements provide a breeding ground for conflict, little analysis has been produced that examines the role of Aleppo's informal settlements in the current conflict. This paper seeks to fill the existing gap in knowledge through an analysis of the informal settlements of Aleppo in the context of the Syrian Civil War, ultimately highlighting the interwoven relationship between the nature of the 'informal' and 'formal'.

Key to the analysis presented here is open-source data on the damage that has occurred in Aleppo, which has been distilled and mapped against the existing land use types of Aleppo. The maps produced highlight the disproportionate damage that has occurred in the city's informal settlements and point to an indelible need for a more nuanced understanding of these urban areas. Furthermore, this paper argues against dichotomised stigmatisations of informal settlements as 'feral cities' that are 'void of any social structures' (Norton, 2003 p. 98), instead positing that current understandings should be extended to capture the immense heterogeneity and strengths present in these urban areas. Finally, it is argued that embedded in the folds of formality and informality are multifarious civil society networks that should be supported by the international community.

Research Questions

Stage 1:
- Which informal settlements of Aleppo have experienced the greatest physical destruction;

- What do the worlds of informality and contestation, when placed in conjunction, contribute to informal settlements in the contested city of Aleppo?

Stage 2:
- Are civil society networks strengthened due to the blend of 'informal' and 'formal' processes involved in acquiring housing in Aleppo;

- How can urban policy support the underlying social and civil structures in Aleppo's informal settlements while ensuring minority groups are not excluded.

Informal Settlement Typologies

Informal settlement formation processes are complex and varied but usually fall under three main categories:

1. Land grabbing or squatting on undeveloped land

Land grabbing or squatting was prevalent in the 1970s and '80s and is said to have died down in recent decades. Nonetheless, land grabbing is reportedly increasing again because the Civil War has resulted in decreased availability of safe housings and land, which has also led to a rent increase of up to 5 times the pre-war prices.

2. The purchase of subdivided peri-urban (agricultural) lots

The subdivision of low-cost unproductive or agricultural land on the urban fringes accounts for the majority of informal settlements in Aleppo. This process has generally been undertaken by informal land agents who subdivide the land into small plots and then sell them to prospective householders. This process of land subdivision has generally ensured regular grid layouts, whereby resident groups subsequently work together to have infrastructure and services, such as water and sewage, extended to their lots

3. Densification through the addition of extra stories

Usually, this form of informality involves the addition of third, fourth and fifth stories on buildings that were initially intended to have no more than two stories. While vertical expansion is most common, it has also led to the 'horizontal' division of already small plots in order to build another dwelling. These additions usually occur with the intent to provide accommodation for rent or to sell to supplement income. Prior to the conflict, it was reported that 40-50% of households in some informal settlements were rent-paying tenants (Clerc, 2014, p.78).

Informal Settlement Typologies

Physical characteristics of informal settlements fall under three broad categories:

- High-rise (5-7 stories), high density, usually deemed unsafe as additional stories have been added incrementally without correct permits or safe construction methods;



Figure 3. Astaafilia, Aleppo. Credit: Hassan el-Sadi

- Medium-low density (1-3 story) settlements that, though structurally safe, are often under-serviced;

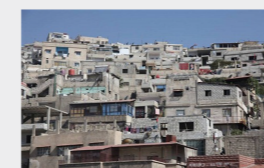
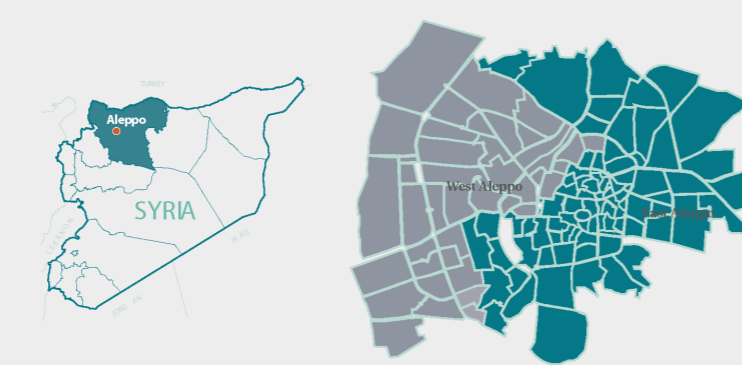


Figure 4. al-Qun, Aleppo. Credit: Hassan el-Sadi

- Settlements that are structurally and environmentally safe but are in contravention of development control legislation.



Above, left - Right: Figure 4. Aleppo, Syria; Figure 5. East - West Aleppo. Created using UN-Habitat (2014) base maps.

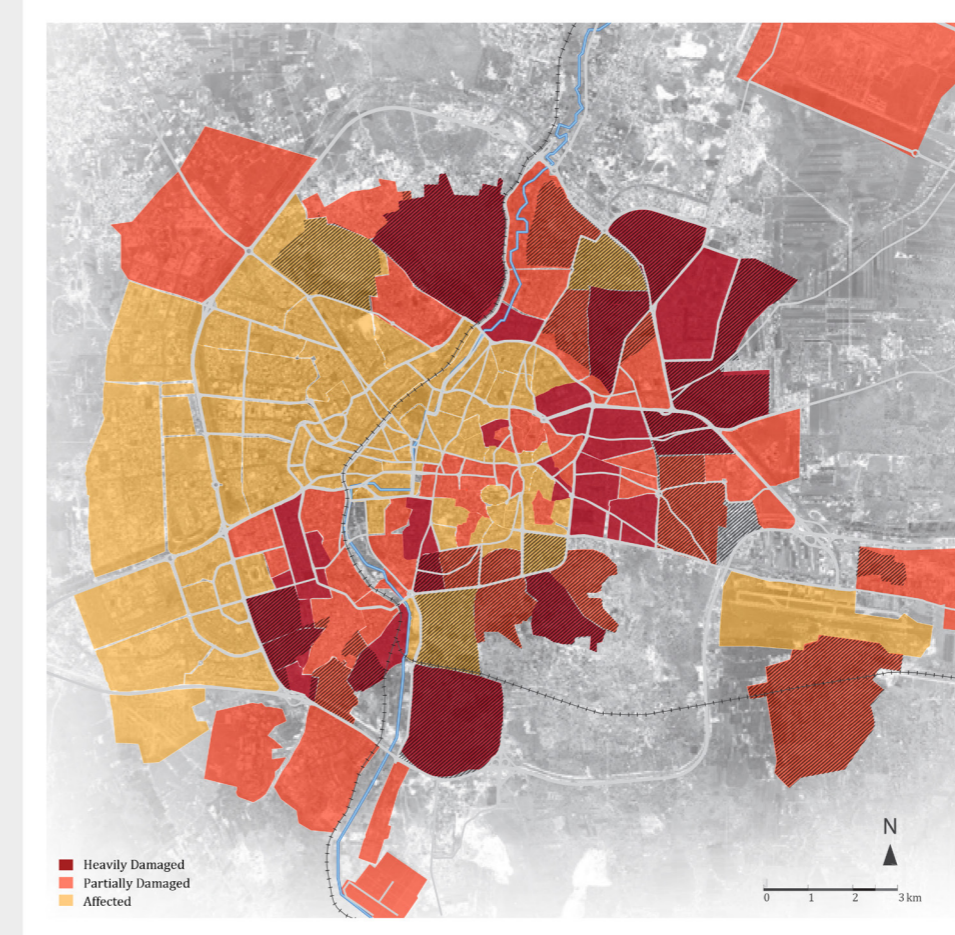
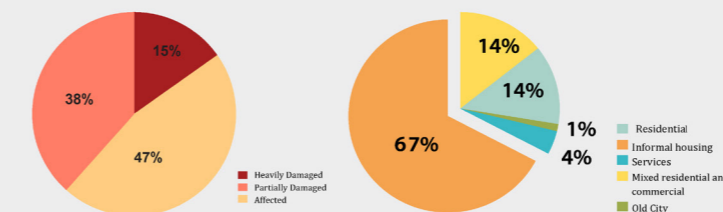


Figure 5. Damage Assessment of Aleppo City, July 2015. Note: Informal areas shown hatched.



Above, left - right: Figure 6. Affected Areas; Figure 7. Affected Land-use; Figure 8. Location of Aleppo's Informal Settlements



Figure 9. Land-Use of Aleppo. Information sourced from Aleppo City Masterplan 2010

Methodology - Maps

This map illustrates the percentages of buildings damaged in the city of Aleppo, Syrian Arab Republic, as determined by satellite imagery analysis and existing open-source damage assessments. Using satellite imagery acquired 01 May 2015, 26 April 2015, 23 May 2014, 23 September 2013, and 21 November 2010 - refer to below sources - and information from UNITAR - UNOSAT (2014) and UN-Habitat (2015) a total of 13,000 damaged structures within the extent of this map identified. These damaged structures are compared with total numbers of buildings found in a pre-conflict satellite image collected in 2009 to determine the percentage of damaged buildings across the city. Based on this analysis, in 20 neighborhoods the number of damaged buildings is more than 30%, and the neighborhood with the most damage is the informal neighbourhood of al Aqabeh, with over 60% of all buildings damaged. This is a preliminary analysis and has not yet been validated in the field.

Map Data Sources

Satellite Data (1): Pleiades
Imagery Dates: 01 May 2015 & 26 April 2015
Copyright: © CNES (2015), Distribution AIR-BUS DS
Source: UNSG; OSM; Caerius 2015
Satellite Data (2): WorldView-2
Imagery Date: 23 May 2014, 23 September 2013 & 21 November 2010
Resolution: 50 cm
Imagery Accessed from/Copyright: Digital-Globe
Source: European Space Imaging
Road Data: Google Map Maker / OSM / ESRI
Other Data: USGS, UNCS, NASA, NGA



45% OF ALEPPO'S RESIDENTS LIVED IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS PRIOR TO THE UPRISINGS
56% OF CITY AREA WHERE INFORMAL CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS & COUNCILS PROVIDE MAJORITY OF URBAN SERVICES

Key References of Literature Review

Please refer to full reference list & bibliography for complete list of sources.

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The Border as a Site of Innovation

Understanding Border Dynamics

San Diego and Tijuana are divided by a stark, harsh border wall at the U.S.-Mexico border, a dense area between San Diego, with a population of 3.3 million, and Tijuana, with a population of 1.5 million. The San Diego-Tijuana area has grown from a loosely connected pair of border towns into a tightly intertwined cross-border metropolis characterised by deep economic, social, and cultural ties. Despite the harsh dividing border wall, an average of 40 million people continue to cross the Border yearly. In many ways, this border region exemplifies the challenges of urbanisation in this globalised yet highly unequal era – a complex urban milieu with severe socio-economic divisions. San Diego's well-planned affluence starkly contrasts Tijuana's informal settlements and vibrant, self-organised communities.

As Lawrence Herzog explains in his "The Co-mingling of Bordering Dynamics in the San Diego-Tijuana Cross-Border Metropolis," The historical evolution and cooperative urban planning efforts have shaped this unique bi-national region. Historically, urban planning efforts in the area have faced challenges due to differing regulatory frameworks, economic disparities, and political contexts. However, since the 1970s, a significant push has been to foster bi-national cooperation. Key initiatives include creating cross-border transportation systems, joint environmental conservation projects like the Tijuana River Estuary restoration, and economic partnerships that leverage the maquiladora industry's potential. However, after 11 September, the border controls became much tighter, and efforts have declined.

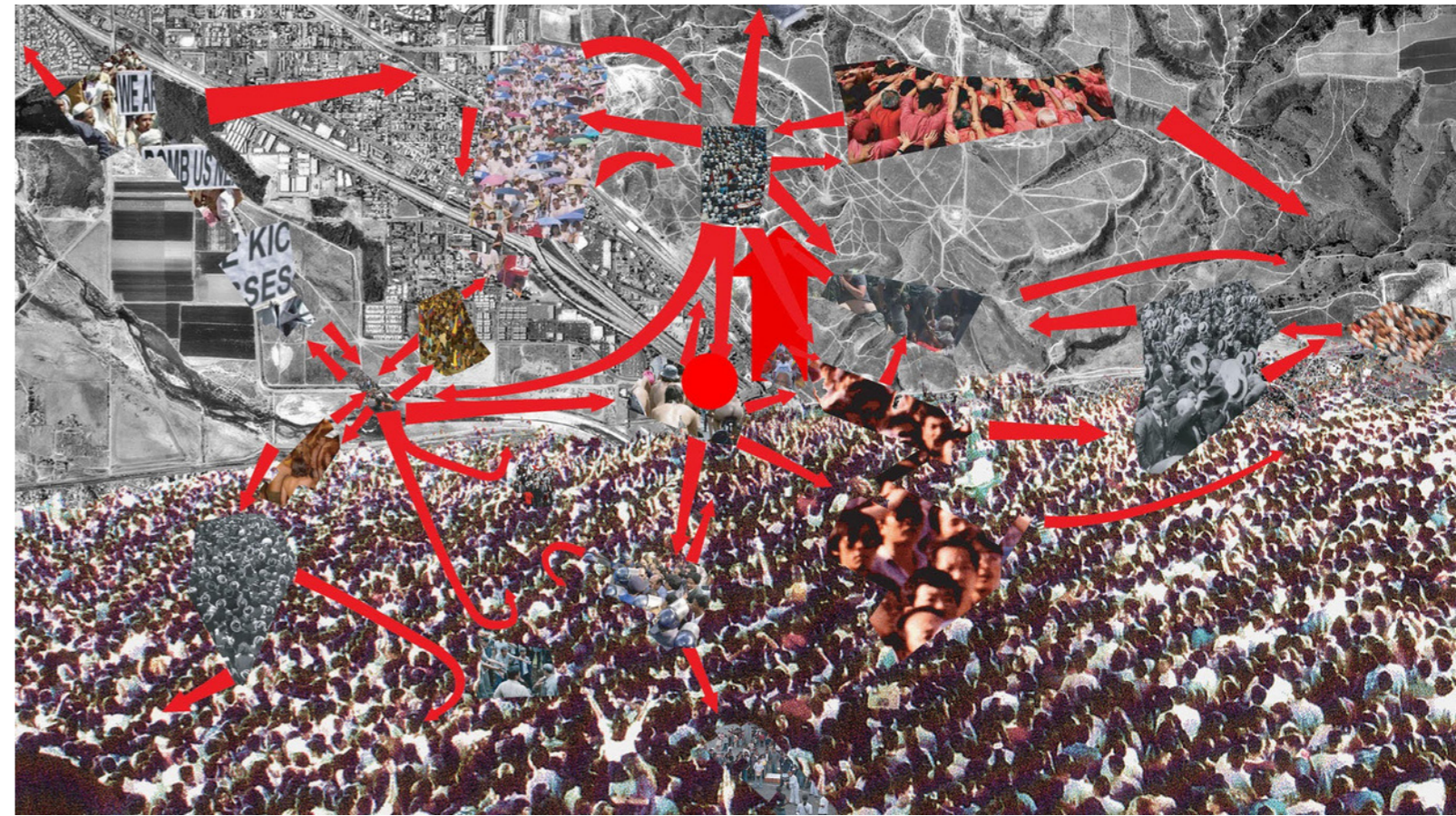
Herzog also introduced other institutions, such as the Smart Border Coalition and the Civic Innovation Lab at the University of San Diego (UCSD), that enable collaborative planning and dialogue between the two cities. These efforts address shared

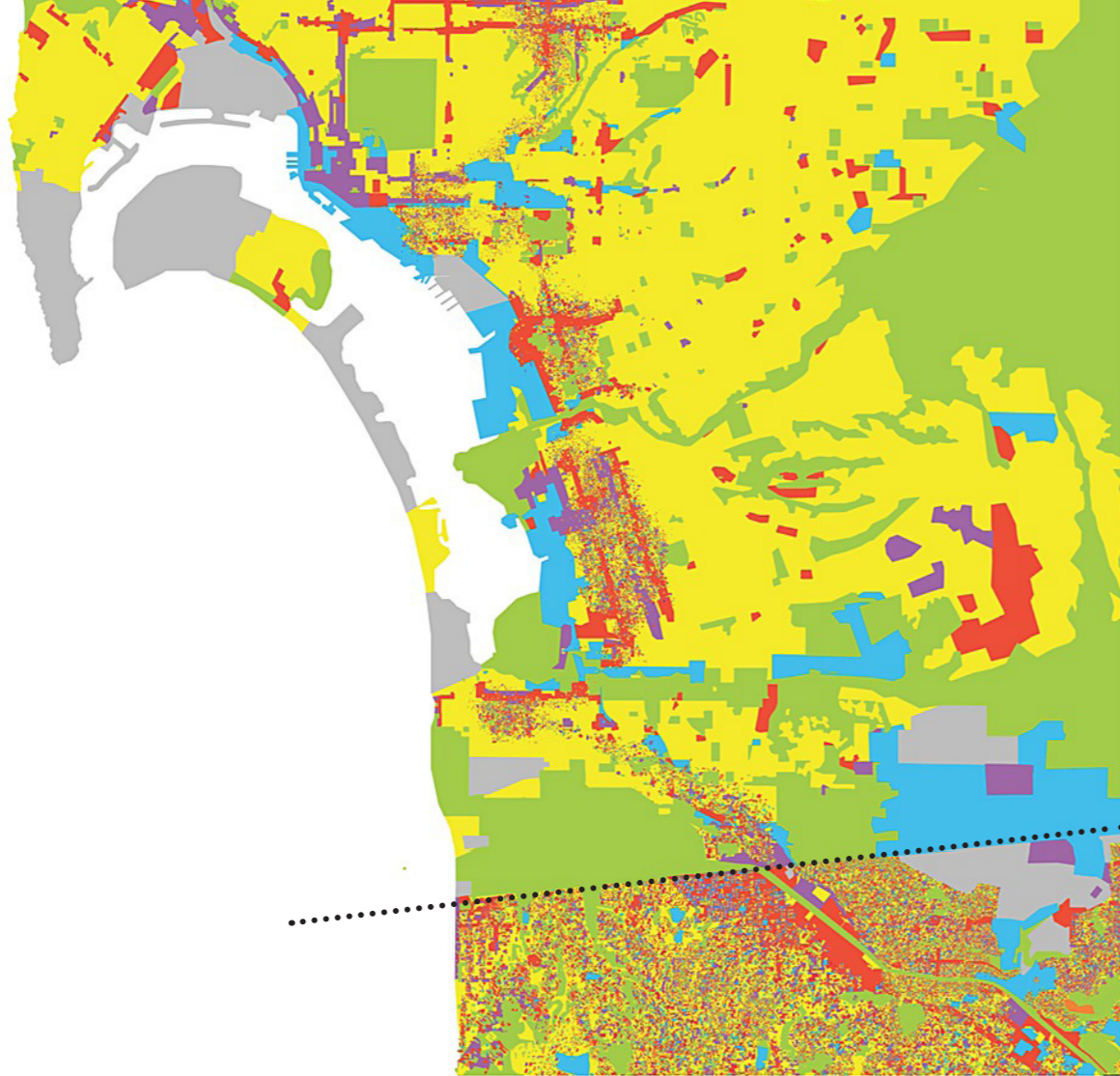
challenges, including infrastructure development, public health, and sustainable growth, by fostering cross-border synergies and integrated urban planning. Similarly, architects like Teddy Cruz perceive this Border as a demarcation and a crucible for urban innovation and social interaction. They use small-scale architecture and community programming as exemplary tools to respond to broader urban challenges.

Estudio Teddy Cruz

Teddy Cruz, now together with Fonna Forman, runs Estudio Teddy Cruz, which aims for a transformative approach to architecture and urbanism that brings together community, architecture and urban planning to overcome socio-economic challenges and unequal urbanisation. Working at the border site is uniquely well-suited in this regard as it is deeply entrenched in the socio-political and economic fabric of the border region, underscoring the necessity for hybrid, adaptive solutions that cultivate community empowerment and financial resilience. The work includes various projects in the San Diego region that take inspiration from informality and the mixed-use nature of development on the Tijuana side of the Border. But at the core, the projects all use architecture for community engagement and overcoming divisions. Cruz states that reimagining border spaces as sites of potential rather than barriers is the key to radically redefining urban development. The "Living Rooms at the Border" project is an example of the project concept of his vision.

Below base: view of the divergent land use and urban forms from the San Diego (left) and Tijuana (right) border. Below top: diagram by Teddy Cruz conceptualising of improved the cross border flows and diversified land uses.





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“Living Rooms at the Border”

“Living Rooms at the Border” is a visionary project concept by architect Teddy Cruz. It is a fascinating study of architecture as a tool to address social and urban complexities along the San Diego-Tijuana border. The project also presents a vision that seeks to challenge and innovate typical urban planning methodologies but, instead, is informed by the fluid adaptability and resilience of informal settlement practices, which are prevalent in many Latin American communities but less so in rigidly planned American suburbs.

Diego’s Centre on Global Justice. The lab, directed by Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, focuses on developing innovative solutions to the bi-national region’s pressing social and urban problems. It combines research, policy-making, and practical interventions to foster integrated development across the border.

Architectural/Urban Design and Attributes

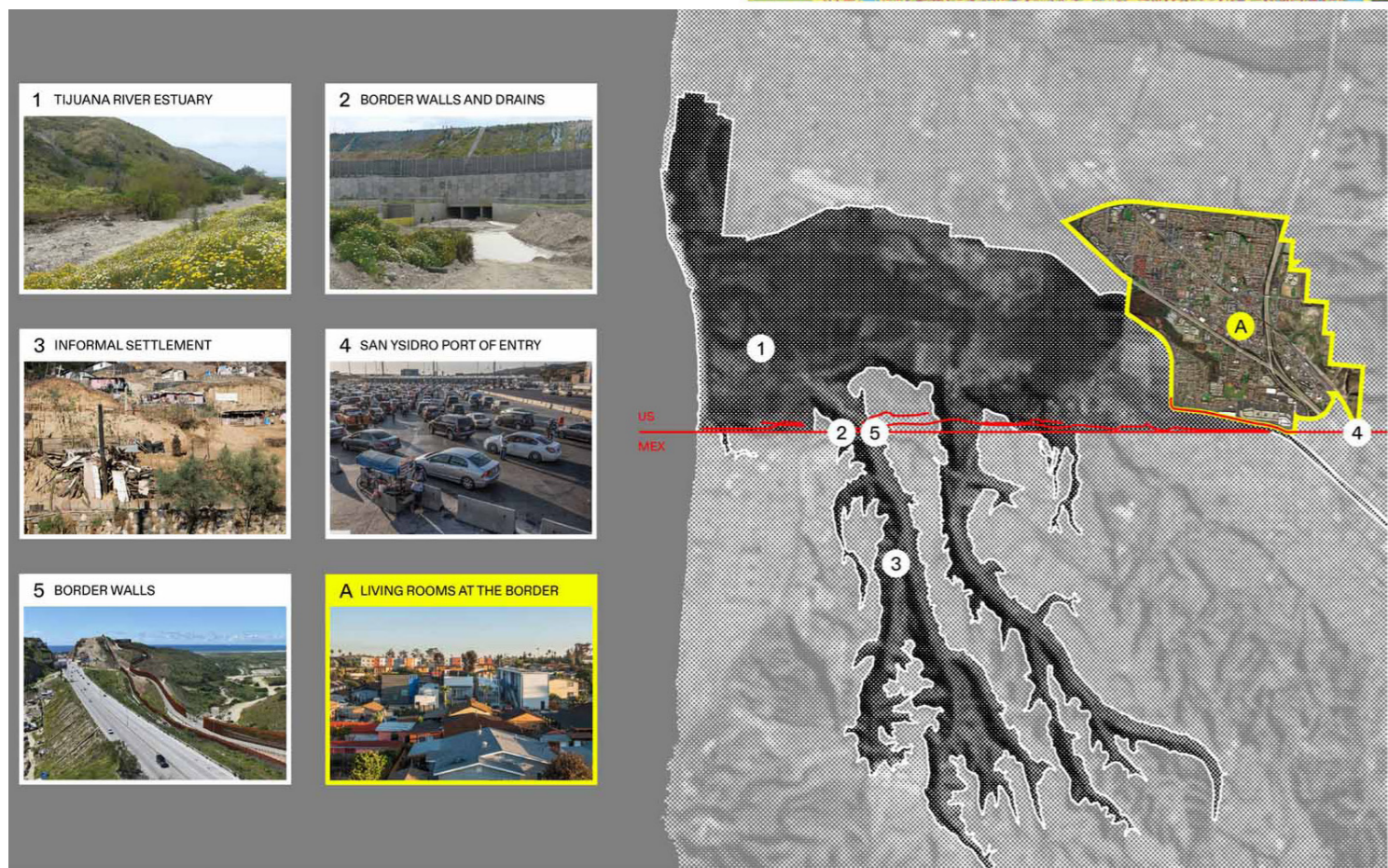
The mixed-use project site is located at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in the historic heart of San Ysidro, a predominantly Latino community in the City of San Diego, a border community less than a mile from the US-Mexico border with a rich history of cultural exchange and socio-economic challenges. The designs were developed over the last five years to be implemented at a vacant plot adjacent to the San Ysidro Church. Interestingly, despite great praise and promotion of the project, the project on-site works had still yet to commence built works, largely due to challenges in urban planning approvals and funding constraints.

The “Living Rooms at the Border” project aims to unite affordable housing with public spaces as communal living rooms designed to bridge socio-economic chasms and facilitate cultural exchange. These spaces are conceived to be inclusive, participatory, and adaptive, mirroring the dynamic nature of the Border. Cruz’s methodology incorporates micro-urbanism and participatory design principles, aiming for significant communal impact through small-scale, potent interventions.

Notably, the key driver behind this project is the community organisation Casa Familiar, which plays a key role in bringing this project to life, with Cruz’s architecture complementing their work. Founded in 1973, Casa Familiar is a community-based organisation in San Ysidro. The organisation provides social services, civic engagement, and community development to the San Ysidro community, and it has been working with Cruz and his partner, Fonna Forman, for many years.

Thus far, the project has been designed to contain ten units of affordable housing and community programming, such as youth clubs, activity hubs, public gardens and cooking spaces, and immigration hubs. Key attributes include flexible usage, local material integration, and a sense of communal belonging. As with many other Teddy Cruz projects, there is an emphasis on recycling materials from both sides of the Border to help symbolise unity and enhance environmental sustainability. The public spaces of the ‘living rooms’ will perform multiple functions, ranging from marketplaces to community venues, flexibly adapting to meet evolving community needs.

In addition, the project is also being coordinated with the Civic Innovation Lab at the University of California San



Above top : Land use diagram by Cruz contrasting the varied land use density of San-Diego Tijuana; Above bottom: Diagram of E Studio Teddy Cruz’ areas of interest/intervention, with the case study location of San Ysidro suburb and church highlighted yellow



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Key architectural/urban hybrid elements include:

1. Affordable & Mixed-Use Housing includes ten affordable residential units and ground-floor commercial and communal space options. This creates opportunities for residents to establish small businesses and social enterprises within residential zones, enhancing economic vitality and community engagement.

2. Flexible Designs: Cruz designs adaptable architectural frameworks that residents can incrementally expand and modify according to their needs and resources. This flexibility mirrors the organic growth seen in informal settlements over the Border. It empowers residents to actively shape their environment so that future residents can adapt the housing units and public spaces to suit their needs.

3. Varied plot uses: Although located on one plot, Cruz proposed vertical expansion with multiple uses on the one plot, where various functions are layered within the same footprint. This not only optimises the use of limited space but also strengthens community bonds by bringing diverse activities closer together.

1. Community Engagement: Facilitates dialogues between residents, architects, and policymakers to ensure that the designs meet the community’s real needs and aspirations. This participatory approach is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability, building on their decades of experience working with the community.

2. Resource Mobilisation: Helps secure funding and resources necessary for constructing and maintaining the complex. By leveraging its extensive network of donors, volunteers, and governmental partnerships, Casa Familiar ensures that the projects are financially viable and supported by a broad coalition. Casa Familiar also reported that fundraising from government grants has been vital in enabling the commencement of this project.

3. Program Implementation: Organises educational programs, cultural activities, and social enterprises within the new communal spaces, activating them as hubs of community life. The vision is to have youth clubs, immigration services, and other community programmes alongside the important community anchor of the San Ysidro church. The vision is that these programs will not only enhance the utility of the spaces but also enrich the cultural and social fabric of the community. This will include a UCSD hub, immigration series, youth club

Casa Familiar

Although construction of the project had yet to commence at the time of the visit, Casa Familiar’s community hub nearby remains active and runs a variety of similar programmes. They are the driving force of the project, with their stated role:

Right from top to bottom: Teddy Cruz’s Living Rooms at the border project diagrams (e-Studio Teddy Cruz) illustrating the mixed used and varied typologies, as informed by the housing from across the border in Tijuana. Second from top shows the San Ysidro Church where the project is to be built around. Images at base show a view of the a US-style mansion on the San Diego border in San Ysidro, as compared to the Tijuana informal settlements just across the border.

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Success of the Project

"Living Rooms at the Border" is, in many ways, an exploration of how architecture can respond to help improve social and spatial justice in urban areas. It explores how border communities can be designed to foster social innovation and economic self-sufficiency. One of the critical architectural interventions involves redefining public and private spaces to serve community needs. Cruz also proposes a more inclusive approach by reimagining suburban lots, often prioritising individual privacy over communal living. In these designs, underutilised spaces are transformed into vibrant communal "living rooms," and the lines between public and private are intentionally blurred to encourage social interaction and collective use.

With the vital support of Casa Familiar and the community engagement and programming to be installed, the project demonstrates how architecture can catalyse social change. This reimagines border communities not as zones of division but as vibrant, interconnected ecosystems where space, culture, and economy coalesce to improve the quality of life for all residents, contributing to a more social and spatially just urban future.

Community Empowerment

A notable triumph of the Living Rooms at the Border project is its substantial focus and potential impact on community empowerment. By engaging residents in the design and implementation phases, the project has instilled a robust sense of ownership and agency among community members. This participatory approach ensures that the spaces are functional and resonate deeply with the community's cultural and social fabric.

Hybrid Economies

Cruz's project melds informal and formal economies effectively, creating robust opportunities for local artisans and entrepreneurs. The project bridges disparate economic modalities by providing spaces conducive to financial activities, fostering economic sustainability and fortifying community cohesion.

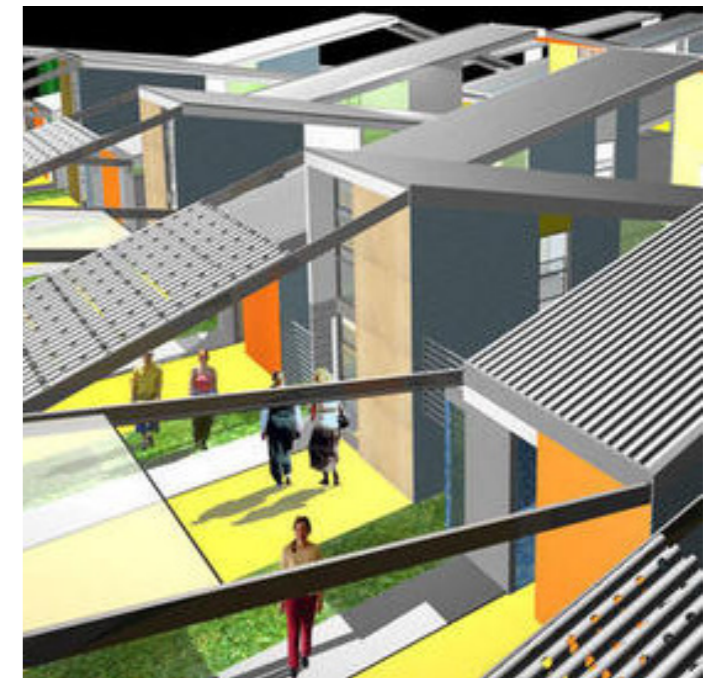
Cultural Exchange

The communal living rooms aim to serve as vibrant hubs for cultural exchange, fostering interactions between diverse groups. Such interactions facilitate mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation—essential in border regions fraught with socio-political tension. The project's potential to nurture cultural dialogue stands as a significant success. The project also aims to forge a counter-narrative to the border fence and the anti-immigrant policies and divisions.

Sustainability & Urban Resilience

The project also aims to contribute to urban resilience through innovative use of recycled materials and adaptive design strategies. Reusing materials sourced from both sides of the Border reduces environmental impact and symbolises the interconnectedness of the two cities. Flexible designs ensure that spaces evolve in response to shifting community needs, promoting long-term sustainability.

Below clockwise from top left diagrams and renders by e-Studio Cruz: community consultation and adaptive use, varied linear/vertical typologies/density, overall rednder of the 10 affordable housing units and other mixed uses assembled around the San Ysidro Church at centre.





Project model: © Studio Cruz

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Challenges of the Project

Socio-Economic and Political Challenges

The San Deigo-Tijuana border region is characterised by lower socio-economic conditions and lower political representation, which can undermine the efficacy of integrative projects especially as government actors may change. Variations in cross-border relations or political climates can also adversely affect intervention success. For example, the project had the backing of Bob Filner who was sworn in as San Diego's mayor in December 2012. He had a strong appreciation for the Latino community of the area and respected Cruz's work; at their advice, he set up an incubator for Civic Imagination for the city council to help roll out this and other projects. However, in 2014, the mayor was ousted and political will and funding waned. The project team had to, therefore, recommence lobbying with the new mayor to readjust expected timelines and seek additional funding.

Policy and Regulatory Constraints

The project's delays in commencement due to the need to adjust local planning controls to enable mixed-use development highlight the challenges in navigating the intricacies of the regulatory and policy framework. Regulatory barriers can stifle innovative solutions, impeding the progress of projects like "Living Rooms at the Border," which requires significant advocacy and lobbying. Balancing regulatory compliance with the need for inventive urban solutions requires careful negotiation and should be considered from the outset.

Scalability

While impactful on a small scale, scaling these interventions to address broader urban challenges poses a notable difficulty. Success in localised contexts doesn't readily translate to city-wide or regional solutions, highlighting scalability questions. Cruz has overcome this by promoting the project and his working modality widely, which can help encourage other architects and planners to consider scaling similar projects.

Meaningful Long-Term Local Engagement

The project's success and implementation will depend on sustained community engagement. Significant, meaningful, and long-term engagement has been a key component of this project, thanks to Casa Familiar and its decades of solid experience working with the community, building trust, and leveraging these strong connections with architects. When community participation wanes or needs to be adequately supported by key organisations like Casa Familiar, the efficacy and longevity of architecture interventions alone may be reduced. Sustaining community involvement for a project of this nature also requires continued and ongoing community leadership and resources.

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Lessons for the Sydney Context

Sydney can derive valuable lessons from Teddy Cruz's project to enhance its urban planning strategies and undertake similar small-scale initiatives. Like San Diego, Sydney faces challenges related to spatial inequity, though not 'across' a border; instead, there is a more substantial east-east socio-economic level disparity. Undertaking projects such as Living Rooms at the Border and overall principles of spatial justice can help address these issues and improve all residents' overall quality of life. In particular, these projects could help improve the delivery of affordable housing in the more affluent Eastern suburbs and/or develop better-designed affordable housing for diverse immigrant groups across Sydney.

Community-led Organisations

A paramount lesson from the project is the critical importance of community participation and partnering with strong, locally embedded community organisations. Engaging local communities in the urban planning process ensures that interventions are tailored to their specific needs and aspirations. Sydney's architects and planners could work more closely and adopt participatory approaches to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility in built projects, especially affordable housing.

Foster Hybrid Economies

Cruz's emphasis on mixed-use hybrid economies can inspire Sydney to explore integrating informal economic activities with formal systems. Sydney's economic opportunities are concentrated in specific city areas, leading to employment disparities and economic segregation. Supporting local artisans, entrepreneurs, and small businesses through initiatives like pop-up markets, community workshops, and co-working spaces can cultivate vibrant, resilient economies reflective of the city's diverse cultural heritage. Projects that combine mixed-use in more dense sites, even if at a small scale and with more even distribution across the city, could help in this way.

Design for Cultural Exchange

Sydney's multicultural essence provides a unique opportunity to design spaces encouraging cultural exchange and dialogue. Across Sydney, uneven distribution of educational and cultural facilities creates disparities in access to quality education and cultural enrichment, particularly comparing Sydney's eastern and western suburbs. Drawing inspiration from Cruz's living rooms concept, planners can create communal spaces where people from different backgrounds can interact and share experiences. Public parks, community centres, and cultural hubs can serve as living rooms celebrating Sydney's diversity.

Adaptive Reuse and Sustainability

The adaptive reuse of materials and spaces is integral to the project and Cruz's broader work. By repurposing existing structures and using recycled materials, Sydney can reduce its environmental footprint while promoting sustainability. Initiatives that better enable recycling construction waste to be made accessible to other building projects rather than going to landfills are urgently needed in Sydney. As far as I could research, few of these initiatives exist in Australia. If local planning policies could better allow flexible and adaptive design strategies on single plots, this could help ensure that residential and urban spaces can evolve in response to changing community needs.

Addressing Policy and Regulatory Barriers

Cruz's experience navigating policy and regulatory constraints highlights the necessity for supportive regulatory frameworks. Key to his practice as an architect has been engaging with urban planners and politicians. By working more closely with state and council planners, architects could lobby for creating policies that facilitate innovative design

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Future Directions

Applying Principles in Urban Projects

Building on the insights from this research, I hope to continue seeking projects centred on applying participatory urbanism and hybrid economy principles to projects in Sydney. I have also observed the importance of policies that support innovative design solutions and foster inclusive urban environments, which would be especially relevant in the increasingly unequal Sydney urban context, especially between the eastern suburbs and western Sydney, as well as at the intra-council level. I hope that as a graduate architect, I can work towards initiating small-scale projects like this with community organisations.

Collaboration and Implementation

I have also observed the importance of close collaboration with NGOs and community organisations to drive the success of architecture projects. Teddy Cruz's work was only achieved through close collaboration with Casa Familiar. This research, therefore, highlights the importance of long-term partnerships with local communities, NGOs, and government agencies to implement small-scale interventions that address specific urban challenges. Starting small and building relationships over time seems critical while engaging closely with researchers, community organisations and policymakers.

solutions while removing barriers to implementation. Collaborative approaches involving policymakers, designers, and community members can yield more effective and inclusive urban planning – even if these begin as small-scale exemplar projects, such as Living Rooms at the Borders, these projects can help spur policy changes to enable future exemplar projects.

Building Urban Resilience

Although the project is only on a small scale, it considers and responds to broader environmental and socio-economic challenges similar to those in Sydney, such as environmental degradation, climate risk, and patterns of inequity. However, addressing the multifaceted sides of urban resilience is pivotal in addressing ecological challenges and socio-economic uncertainties. Architects and planners in Sydney can draw from Cruz's strategies to amplify resilience through flexible design and community empowerment. Initiatives such as community gardens, green infrastructure, and community climate risk/response plans can strengthen Sydney's urban spaces, making them more resilient and adaptive.

ions regarding scalability, community engagement, regula-

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Conculsion and Acknowledgements

Below: e-Studio Cruz Diagram of the Projects 'way of working' of bringing together different densities, scales and uses -- key lessons for the Sydney context.



My participation in the UAA Conference and research on Teddy Cruz's "Living Rooms at the Border" project in the San Diego border region has unlocked valuable learning on the intersections of architecture, urbanism, and social and spatial justice. Studying the San Diego-Tijuana border region and Cruz's work has shown the potential of how innovative design can transform border regions and other strained urban areas into vibrant spaces of opportunity, addressing urban challenges through community empowerment, hybrid economies, cultural exchange, and urban resilience.

While the project has excellent potential successes, it has yet to commence construction, so the crux of its success will entirely depend on its final implementation. The project has had to contend with limitations regarding scalability, community engagement, regulatory constraints, and socio-political tensions. Nonetheless, Cruz's approach offers valuable lessons applicable to other urban contexts, including Sydney.

By embracing principles of participatory urbanism, fostering hybrid economies, designing for cultural exchange, promoting adaptive reuse, addressing policy barriers, and building urban resilience, Sydney can rejuvenate its built environment with more social and spatial just spaces. The lessons learned from the UAA conference and Living Rooms at the Border can help inform my architectural practice to support Sydney in creating inclusive, sustainable, and dynamic urban spaces of socially and spatially just cities.

Thank You

I sincerely thank the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship for enabling this transformative research experience. Participating in the UAA Conference has helped deepen my understanding of architecture and spatial justice and the potential of projects such as Living Rooms at the Border. I am also grateful to the Urban Affairs Association for organising a thought-provoking conference that provided a rich platform for intellectual exchange and practical urban issues discourse. The insights gained will continue to inspire my journey toward contributing to a more just and equitable urban world.



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