

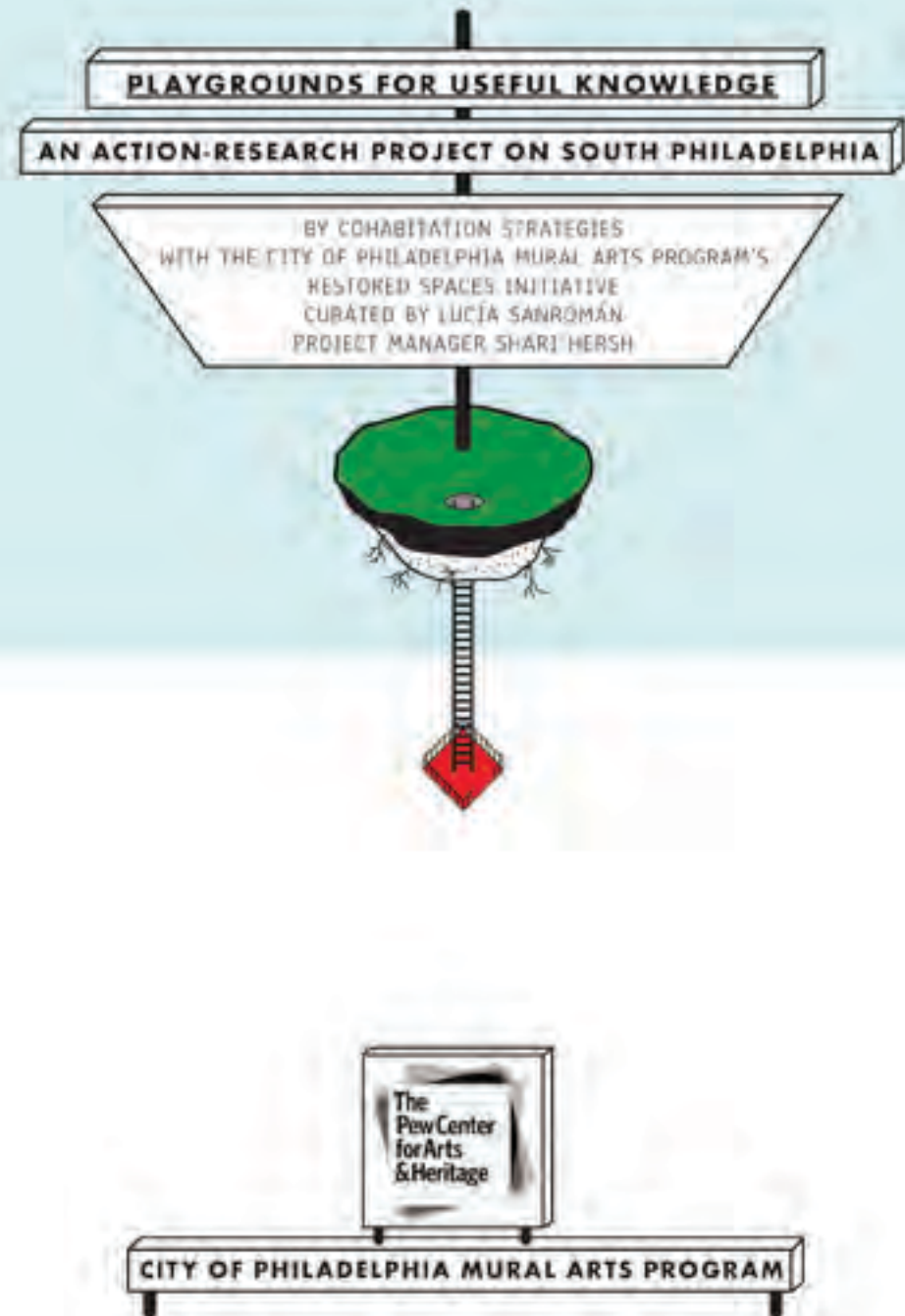
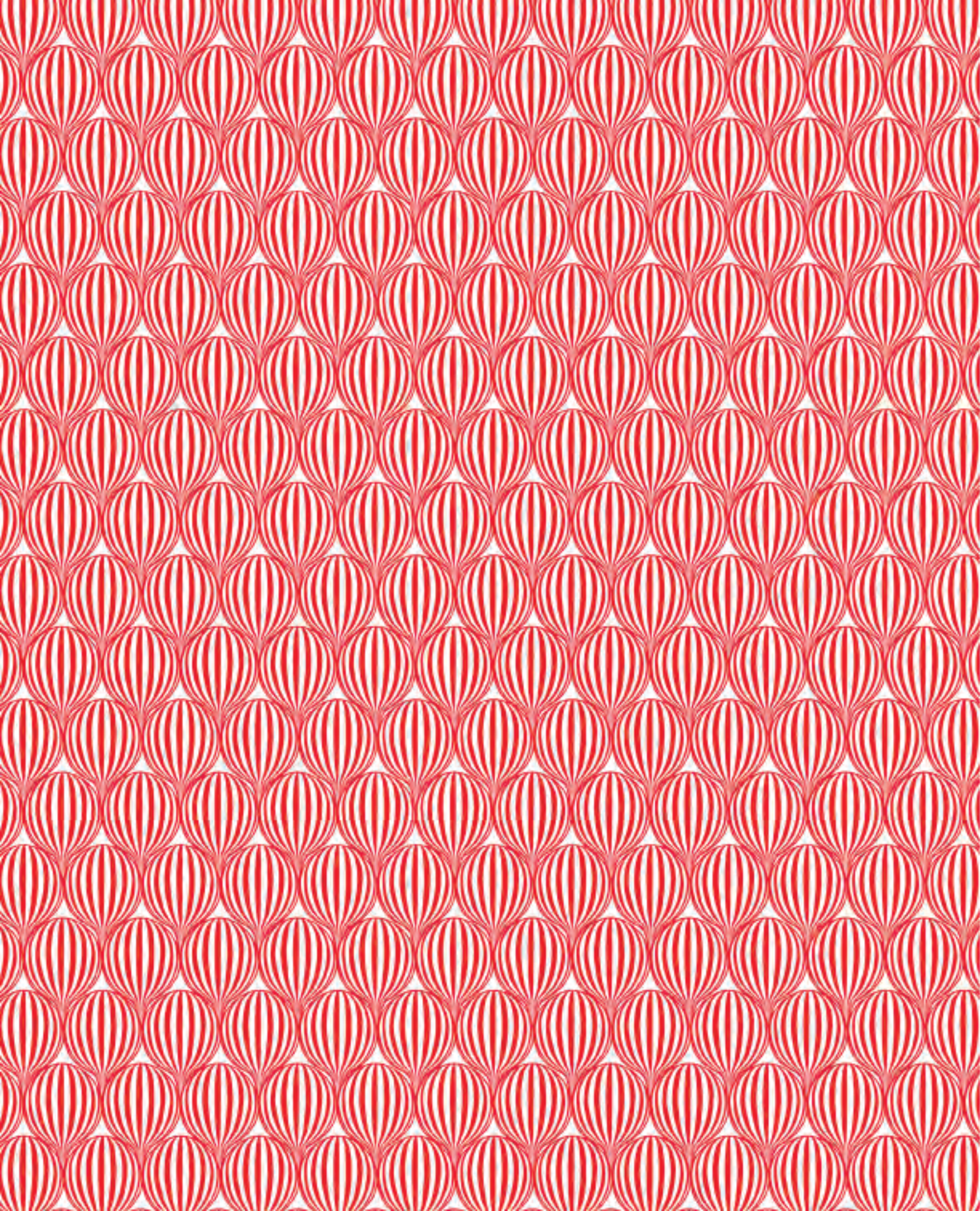


**AN ACTION-RESEARCH PROJECT
ON SOUTH PHILADELPHIA**

COHABITATION STRATEGIES

**THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA MURAL ARTS PROGRAM'S
RESTORED SPACES INITIATIVE**





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the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program's
Restored Spaces Initiative.

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PREFACE

Jane Golden

Over the years, the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program has grown beyond its name. From our roots as the Anti-Graffiti Network and then community mural makers, the scope of our work has expanded enormously. Now, our projects range in size and scale, from the small and intimate to the large and grand—projects that straddle artistic practices from the sculptural to conceptual.

The thread that binds our projects together is our process. Our art-making empowers and engages a broad range of “authors,” including artists, community members, and young people. Broad authorship and a collaborative process that takes multiple perspectives into account are central to the identity of our program and why I feel the work has been so resilient over the past 30 years. We see ourselves in our work, our stories, our histories, our struggles, and our aspirations for change, and in a sense, our work belongs to us all. Our work crosses boundaries, building social capital, creating opportunities for engagement, and breaking down barriers, both evident and intangible, between the public, private, and civic sectors.

Our work is also a complex journey that requires an investment of time that prioritizes people, and we are always striving to improve upon our processes. We were thrilled to receive a grant from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage to work with curator Lucía Sanromán and with Cohabitation Strategies (CohStra), a nonprofit cooperative that engages radical planning processes, prioritizing relationships to activate communities.

It has been a privilege and an extraordinary learning experience. Their work is done with discipline and integrity and helps us to re-think our role in communities and the ways we gather and share knowledge in an area marked by its diversity. CohStra works intensively at methodically building relationships, garnering trust, gaining respect, and generating ideas. They have successfully woven together a large group of partners and collaborators, many of whom have never communicated or worked together, in order to re-imagine collectively the future of their community.

We are so pleased to have been a part of this partnership, and to watch the project transform into something vibrant and unexpected.

NOTES ON CHANGE

Lucía Sanromán

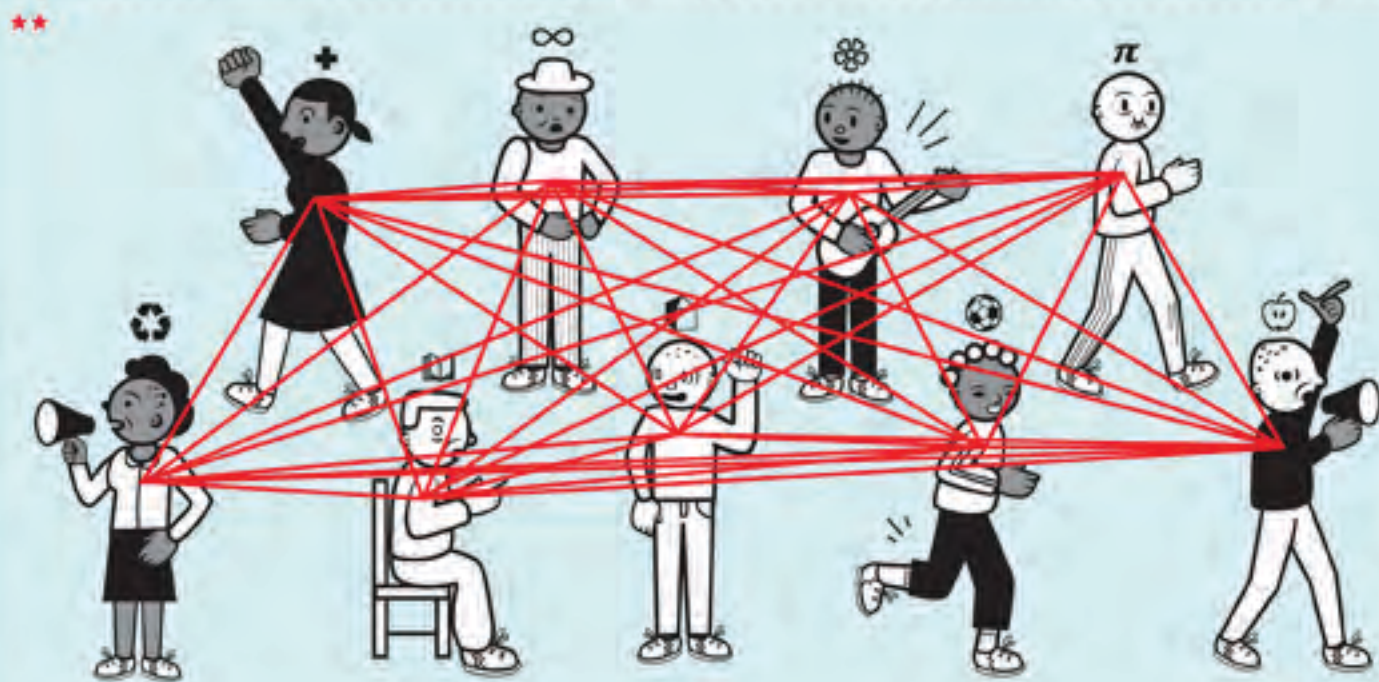
Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge is an homage to South Philadelphia and the diverse communities and individuals that make it unique. Composed of populations that include long-settled African-American and Italian communities as well as more recent East Asian and Latino refugees and undocumented migrants, South Philly is a microcosm of conditions that affect many multicultural communities across the United States, which are characterized by extraordinary cultural richness thriving under persistent cultural divides and prejudices among different cultural groups. Today, when racial tensions are opportunistically exploited to gain political influence in the United States and elsewhere, it is especially important to understand the social composition of such communities and to create holistic urban and artistic projects that address and ease intolerance and discrimination.

It is therefore not surprising that Cohabitation Strategies (CohStra), itself constituted of diverse practitioners, chose to focus their project *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge* in this area. Core members Lucia Babina and Emiliano Gandolfi are Italians living in Spain, while Gabriela Rendón and Miguel Robles-Durán are Mexicans living in Brooklyn, and all are familiar with the process of migration. It seems in hindsight natural that they would feel most comfortable in a neighborhood identified with this phenomenon. Thus, over the course of an intense year of learning and interaction, South Philadelphia has slowly come into focus as the subject of this complex urban action-research project. Framed ambitiously between a work of socially engaged public art and an urban research report, this project is meant to provide new tools for future artistic and environmental projects in the area produced by the Restored Spaces Initiative of the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program.

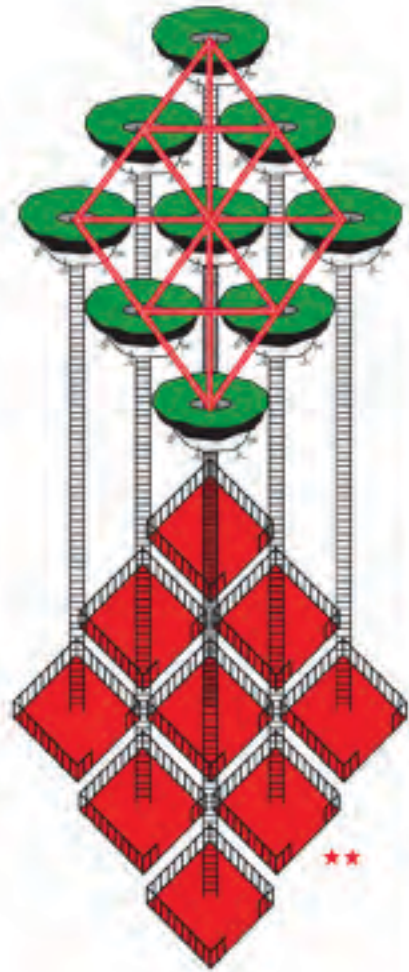
Created and organized in collaboration with Shari Hersh, Restored Spaces' tireless and incisive

director, *Playgrounds* has been demanding, confusing, and frustrating, and also generative, unexpected, and enlightening. As curator for this still ongoing process, the first challenge I have faced is one of representation: What exactly is Cohabitation Strategies? How can this collective help generate new models of inclusion and social participation for Restored Spaces? To answer these questions it is useful to remember CohStra's origins. Founded in 2008 in response to the financial crisis, this cooperative of socio-spatial research—as they describe themselves—works across the disciplines of planning, urban theory, art, and activism and consciously frames its work as a Marxist critique of the pressures and exploitation capitalism places on urban centers. CohStra contends that, rather than addressing the desires and needs of its inhabitants, capital functions to transform cities into commodities for speculation. Their collective's purpose is to investigate and encourage the concept of the “right to the city” as developed by Henry Lefebvre in 1968, and more recently by David Harvey who writes, “the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”¹

In this statement Harvey poetically draws the limits of our freedom in terms of defining the city, and challenges us to reclaim our right to create our environment as we do ourselves. By linking the self with the city, Harvey opens a space for everyone to reinvent what it might be. CohStra's approach takes on this challenge, and its impetus for change, by enmeshing four parallel tactics with unexpected results: First, through artist Lucia Babina's community-based work, they embed themselves in existing social networks to gain trust from individuals and communities and understand the conditions of a place from within. After closely observing Lucia at work for the better part of a year, I believe



¹ David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review* 53, pp. 71–80.



her methodology is only loosely based on a model of community organizing or social work, and actually engages through empathy and connection, identification, intuition, and friendship, rather than by appealing to the promise of “help” too often implicit in the relationship between an external organizer or social worker and an under-represented community. As an Italian invited to work in Philadelphia, Lucia’s idiosyncratic way of weaving fine threads of solidarity has resulted in a firm and hopefully resilient social network that is for her a “relational object” of its own and her artistic form. Working closely with Emiliano Gandolfi and project assistant Beth Uzwiak, Lucia created a comprehensive and imaginative program of public events at the project’s South Philadelphia hub space to synergize the social component of *Playgrounds*.

Second, CohStra’s has consistently positioned its work as a mediator between urban planning theory and practice in the realm of academia and the communities that it purports to address. Two of its members, Gabriela Rendón and Miguel Robles-Durán, are planners, and Gabriela in particular emphasizes quantitative analysis using traditional and non-traditional planning methodologies, and she developed research on ownership to map the invisible but progressive real estate speculation in the area. This is gathered in this report through textual analysis and maps created to give a birds-eye view of South Philadelphia. One of our aims from the inception has been to deliver a document that can give Restored Spaces the information necessary to work long term in an area of the city. This report is that document. Lucia’s on-the-ground social engagement provided the information necessary for CohStra to suggest South Philadelphia, and specifically the seven adjacent neighborhoods that they call the “South Seven,” as the focus for their project and their recommended area for future Restored Spaces engagement. But Gabriela’s exhaustive analysis provides the external and more objective view of the area’s inhabitants and the public policies that impact them.

The third element of CohStra’s work is more speculative and seeks to provide practical solutions to endemic urban problems. In several previous

projects they have proposed new systems to redress unyielding inequities, such as an innovative housing model called the “Hybrid Cooperative Housing Trust” for New York as it undergoes, as they write, “the biggest housing crisis in the modern history of New York City.”² Very early on in this project’s research process, CohStra identified gentrified development in South Philadelphia as a serious threat in a persistently under-funded community. This led them to create a new prototype for the use of interstitial lots by creating a network of linked *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge* where South Philly’s diverse community members and organizations define the content and uses of these spaces, utilizing both the emerging Land Bank and the hundreds of empty lots in the area to provide physical spaces where community voices can dictate land use through community ownership. In this yearlong project’s accelerated timeframe, it has not been possible to fully explore this experimental proposal’s viability with neighborhood participants; however, it is Miguel’s contention that further developing such a groundbreaking system as public artwork can holdy push the boundary of the emerging notion of “useful” art into policy and urban planning.

The fourth element that makes CohStra’s approach unique is perhaps best understood through Emiliano, who provides a conceptual and critical framework for CohStra’s projects, bridging each of the disciplinary areas their work encompasses and establishing a strategic foundation that unites disparate approaches and points of view. In addition, he is often charged with defining the design elements, especially the built components, an aspect of their practice that is carefully composed to symbolize the social issue at the heart of the project and to allude formally to agitprop imagery from the history of leftist and communist aesthetics.

CohStra, like other collectives operating in the field of art, utilizes aesthetics as an alibi to create ambitious, multifaceted, and slippery projects that come in and out of artistic focus. They exercise the autonomy allowed artists while simultaneously articulating other disciplinary approaches to provide

useful solutions grounded on more scientific and objective analysis of urban conditions than those associated with the artist’s subjectivity. Their practice is extra-disciplinary in that it uses the means of the discipline to challenge the institutional siloes within which it functions.³ Thus, while practicing in academia and cultural organizations, CohStra’s work critiques these institutions, crossing through disciplines to reach another space, one firmly grounded on the utopic reimagining of reality that we trust art alone to catalyze. However, if I were to pinpoint where the “art” in this project is, I would say that it lies in the subtle forms of engagement that took place patiently but within a relatively short time when four individuals, foreigners to Philadelphia and to the United States, entered a migrant community with good intentions, doubts, and a great desire to question, together with those whom they encountered, the status quo.

It has become a trope in social practice to say that discourse itself is the medium, just as in murals paint is the medium, and participation and engagement are the means. Yet, in both social practice and mural making, something remains hidden behind the façade of art: the institution that funds and organizes projects, bringing artists and, in the case of Mural Arts, public and private resources to an area through art. Restored Spaces motivated this project when, with support of a Pew Catalyst Grant, I first joined MAP in 2013 as curator-in-residence and was inspired by this program’s dedication to creating infrastructural and environmental design and art projects in schools and community centers. I believe Restored Spaces can and should make more foundational improvements in the urban fabric of the city. Yet, I also found that in order to make more resilient and self-sustaining processes, future Restored Spaces projects need to emerge from the communities themselves, using grassroots research and exploratory cultural experiences to engage the stories, interests, and challenges of people, rather than responding to policy and institutional priorities, while also cultivating the local leadership necessary for significant long-term change.

From its inception, my curatorial proposal was conceived

as a tool for institutional learning and self-reflection—in other words, as a facilitator for change. I believe *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge* has fulfilled that challenge and that the information and social networks created during this process promise to lead to more resilient, self-sustaining, and endogenous ways for the Restored Spaces Initiative to work with, and not only in, South Philadelphia, making more horizontal collaboration with its inhabitants possible while extending the considerable resources and expertise of Mural Arts to that community. Thank you, CohStra, for accepting the invitation to participate in this project, which you have evolved well beyond my original idea, and for having the endurance to work through its trials.

In closing, I should say that none of this would have been possible without the ceaseless, patient, and deep commitment of Shari and her team, Julius Ferraro and Margaret Kearney. Shari generously made available her knowledge of Philadelphia, enabling Lucia to meet her and MAP’s network of collaborators and peers; they organized every aspect of the production of our hub space and accompanying events, aside from managing the behind-the-scenes bureaucracies that are the bane of any artistic project. Together with MAP Director Jane Golden, Shari put her considerable knowledge and cultural and political connections at the service of this project. It has been a privilege to receive their trust. But I am grateful, above all, for their willingness to change.

³ I borrow the term “extra-disciplinary” from Brian Holmes, who deploys it to expand the capacities of artists to enter into other disciplines as a form of new institutional critique. See Brian Holmes, “Extradisciplinary Investigations: Towards a New Critique of Institutions,” <http://www.pep.net/0106/0106/holmes/en>

INTRODUCTION

Cohabitation Strategies

Playgrounds for Useful

Knowledge is an urban research and artistic intervention project in South Philadelphia that evolved from an invitation by curator Lucia Sanromán to collaborate with project manager Shari Hersh and the Restored Spaces Initiative of the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. Cohabitation Strategies (CohStra) was asked to create parameters for future artistic urban and infrastructural interventions by Restored Spaces that can lead to deeper, longer-term investment in the needs and preoccupations of specific communities. This community-led, process-based approach marks an evolution in the forms of participation and co-production historically deployed by Mural Arts that allows for a more sustained and resilient interaction by the Restored Spaces Initiative with a rapidly changing city. Therefore, our main goal has been to create an action platform for strategic socio-spatial interventions at the scale of the neighborhood that aim to reveal, produce, share, and politicize local knowledge in response to the contradictory and unjust realities of contemporary urbanization. *Playgrounds* seeks the medium- and long-term restructuring of physical spaces parallel to the promotion of new cultural, social, and economic dynamics, in order to produce more just and sustainable forms of collective inhabiting.

We have looked at the concept of playgrounds in the historical tradition of ludic imaginaries, drawing on examples such as Charles Fourier's 19th century utopian experiments with playful alternatives to regular work; the Dadaists' incessant desire to undermine the oppressive structures of social order through play; the Situationists' playful protests against modern bureaucracy's alienating forms of urbanization; Constant Nieuwenhuys' anti-capitalist urban visions for the *Homo Ludens*, or man at play; Henri Lefebvre's critique of the persistent production of urban everydayness (boredom) in confrontation with the unfulfilled social promises of more free time, leisure, and play; Aldo van Eyck's vision for giving urban spaces to civic imagination in the more than 700 playgrounds

that he designed; as well eruptions of collective protest and their capacity to interrupt daily life and produce new political subjectivities through playful confrontations in urban spaces.

In line with these imaginaries, we believe that urban play can break the ordinary into moments of shared collectivity, enabling participants to imagine a radically different urban daily life. Urban play is not about "games": repetitive activities where strict rules are set and followed with the end purpose of winning. On the contrary, urban play is a source of original, unrestricted, and dynamic "useful knowledge," where the core reward becomes the evolution of the activity itself, as it begins to alter socio-spatial conditions. As it will be explained in Section 5, Cohabitation Strategies seeks to entice and support neighborhood organizations, community leaders, and inhabitants to become urban players in the production of new neighborhood spaces. Taking this into consideration, one of our proposals is that by taking advantage of the hundreds of vacant lots and underutilized spaces in South Philadelphia and strategically developing them, the project can support collective programs that challenge conflict within the neighborhood while staging productive social confrontation.

The concept of "useful knowledge" has allowed us to gather a catalogue of the diverse skills, experiences, and insights of various civic organizations and citizens involved with the project. We understand "useful knowledge" as forms of understanding, skills, and experience that can be placed at the service of social emancipation, justice, and equality in our daily lives. It is mundane, assumed knowledge, which can be culturally specific but can also be translated across social, economic, and ethnic divides. A central component of our project is a catalogue of "useful knowledge" that has been gathered through collaborative play with neighbors and organizations in workshops, events, artistic performances, and actions.

After months of quantitative and qualitative research on Philadelphia's many neighborhoods, we decided to pilot a project based on qualitative

and action research combined with activities and actions out of a hub space at 632 Jackson Street in Philadelphia that operated from June to November 2015. *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge* focuses on an area of South Philadelphia east of Broad Street, in what we have come to call "the South Seven," which comprises seven interconnected neighborhoods—Passyunk Square, East Passyunk, Dickenson Narrows, Greenwich, Pennsport, Lower Moyamensing, and Whitman.

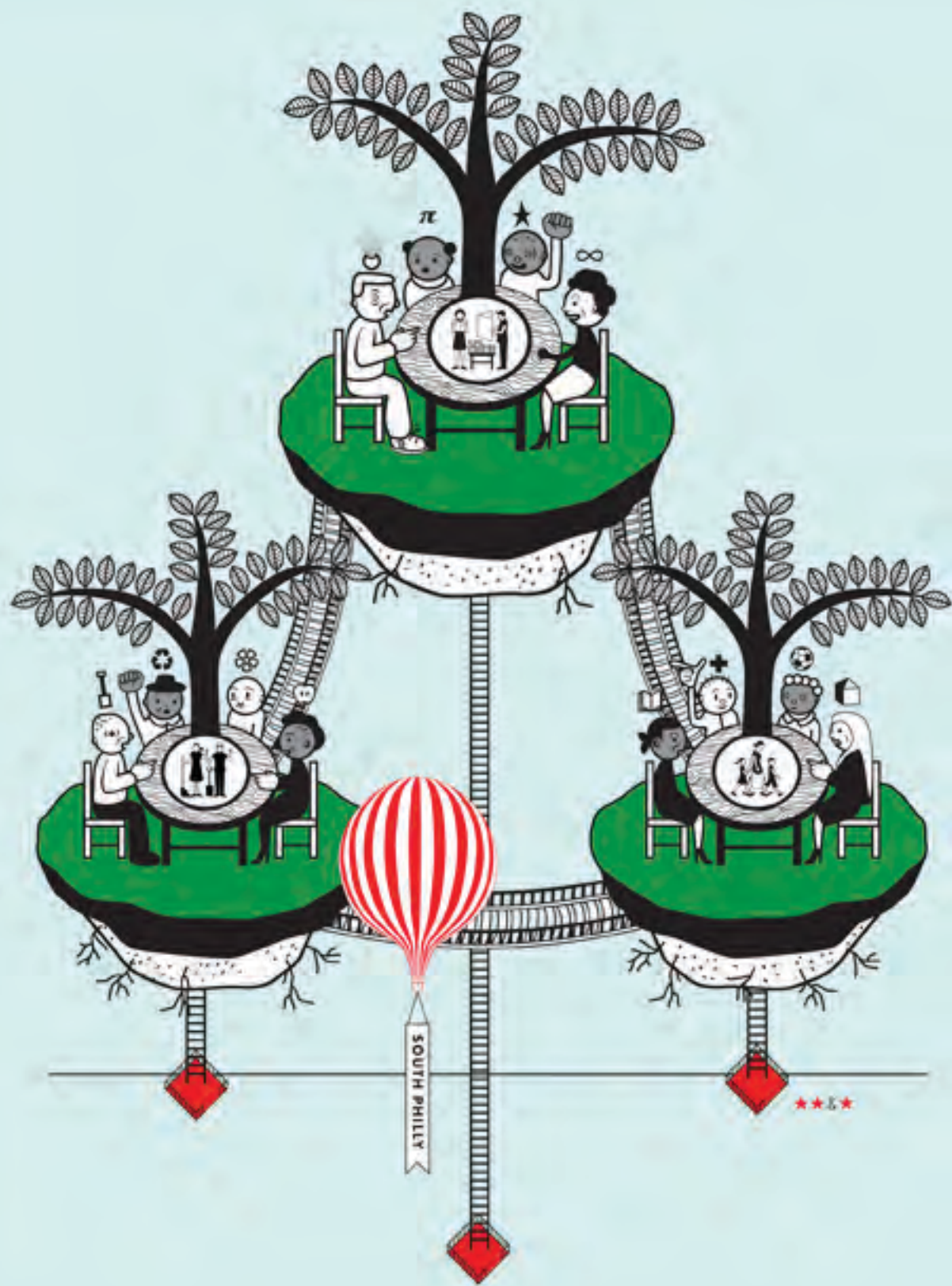
Our investigation has shown that this area possesses many attributes that we believe are important for this project's development, which include: the area's large concentration of vacant land; its medium-term vulnerability towards structured gentrification; the wide ethnic diversity of its inhabitants; and the large number of small civic organizations and economies operating in the area, which are an immense depository of not yet unified useful knowledge. The highly active heterogeneous groups that call South Philadelphia home have become the main co-creators of *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge*. They have worked

with us to generate transformative links within the community by sharing culturally and organizationally specific useful knowledge within a context that encourages urban play and visionary imagination over profit and competition. To this end, *Playgrounds* builds on the following available resources and conditions:

1. The universe of useful knowledge that numerous civic associations, residents, and non-profit entities hold and are ready to share.
2. The political, artistic, and logistical assets and experience that Mural Arts and its Restored Spaces initiative bring as the project's partners and co-organizers.
3. The economic and political support of diverse organizations such as The Pew Charitable Trust, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Water Department, and City Council.
4. The cultural support of diverse local and non-local artists and cultural producers.
5. The accessibility of public land currently under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Philadelphia Land Bank initiative.
6. **The urgent need for urban play!**



BOTTOM RIGHT: Situationist posters produced by the Atelier Populaire, Paris, 1968



COHABITATION STRATEGIES' ACTION-RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Cohabitation Strategies is a cooperative primarily pursuing socio-spatial investigations that lead to transformative projects and actions. The aim of the cooperative is three-fold:

1. Facilitating the production and exchange of scientific and popular knowledge through trans-disciplinary research methods.
2. Understanding and disseminating complex urban processes through collective practices and the development of pedagogical instruments.
3. Responding to the conditions of urban decline, inequality, and segregation via the design of strategic processes and urban interventions.

The cooperative's co-founders, Lucia Babina, Emiliano Gandolfi, Gabriela Rendón, and Miguel Robles-Durán, have expertise in architectural design, urban theory, spatial planning and strategy, curatorial practice, and cultural and art production. This core team expands to include collaborators with knowledge in other fields such as political economy, geography, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, environmental sciences, and other areas when a project demands additional perspectives. Cohabitation Strategies does not have a fixed center of operation because its research and working structures are participatory. A working space is typically established in the investigation area in order to work collaboratively with residents as well as public and private institutions involved in the area's social, economic, and physical development.

Cohabitation Strategies' research framework seeks an urban understanding at both macro and micro scales through strategic and action research. These macro and micro inquiry components are interconnected and feed each other. Our research goal is to generate a thorough diagnosis

of areas by those who live and work there, with the assistance of innovative tools. The macro level of our research is centered on scientific knowledge: academic understanding produced through transdisciplinary and dialectic research studies that use quantitative and qualitative research methods. The micro inquiry component, on the other hand, focuses on popular knowledge and wisdom from the local community, which is mostly revealed through local initiatives and projects using creative participatory research tools and methods. The proposed dialectical research framework is key to combining theoretical and popular knowledge to bridge the divide between conceptual and empirical understandings of urban dynamics in transformative projects that involve the public.

The action-research framework developed for *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge* is introduced first, including its different phases, methods, and participants, to provide an understanding of this twelve-month project. Later, each phase will be described thoroughly, including outcomes. The research process comprises six interrelated research components that do not follow a strict sequence. Due to the complexity of action-research, most of these processes developed in parallel.

1. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH: CITYWIDE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

The first research phase focused on targeted qualitative and quantitative investigations both to construct a preliminary understanding of Philadelphia's socio-spatial dynamics and to select potential localities for intervention by anticipating specific areas' urgencies and needs for transformation.

These two goals were achieved using common quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research was conducted from October to December 2014. Census data and key spatial data sets from public and private libraries



were used to measure and visualize the distribution of specific social, economic, and spatial conditions. We initially looked at the city in terms of districts as defined by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

see section 1.3 An urbanist with specialization in geographic information systems (GIS), Troy Hallisey, joined the team to support the construction of a preliminary understanding of the city by numbers. The citywide visualizations generated during this phase revealed three potential areas of intervention, which were investigated further in fieldwork. These areas included the Lower North, West, and South Districts. Qualitative research was conducted in these three locations during Cohabitation Strategies' first residency, which took place from mid-November to mid-December 2014. During this period, members of CohStra closely investigated these districts through fieldwork, and dozens of open and targeted interviews with residents, community leaders, and local community organization members were conducted along with more thorough spatial analysis of the areas. In-depth conversations with Shari Hersh, senior project manager and founder of the Restored Spaces Initiative, were also fundamental to this portion of the research as they gave a context for the project based on the capacities and areas of growth for this artistic initiative.

Merging the outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative research led to a preliminary understanding of the selected areas of interest and of the city's political, social, economic, spatial, and environmental relations vis-a-vis these specific districts. Additionally, in order to complement the quantitative and qualitative research, we investigated the city's public policy, plans, artistic programs, social initiatives, and tools promoting urban development, and we conducted targeted interviews with city officials. The ultimate outcome of this preliminary research was clear support for the selection of the South District (roughly analogous to South Philadelphia), and more specifically eastern South Philadelphia, or the South Seven as we call it, as our project's main area of focus.

2. INTERVENTION AREA: SITE SELECTION PARAMETERS AND THE SOUTH SEVEN AREA

An area of eastern South Philadelphia that we named the South Seven, due to the fact that it comprises seven neighborhoods, was selected as the focus area for this action-research project. From January to March 2015, we considered fifteen parameters in our site selection, which included vacant lot density, ethnic diversity, localized organizational capacity, neighborhood stability, gentrification, non-profit organizations in the area, and the active involvement of the Mural Arts Program in the area. **see section 2**

3. EXPLORING LOCAL NEEDS, AGENCY, PRACTICES, AND ASSETS IN THE SOUTH SEVEN

A more focused urban investigation began once the area of intervention was strategically selected. A second residency, which took place during the last two weeks of March 2015, marked the onset of this research phase, which lasted until June 2015. During this period, the work focused on building relationships with residents, community members, and local nonprofit organizations, as well as unearthing local narratives to learn about social, economic, environmental, and physical issues, local assets, and latent threats. We had two main tasks: first, understanding local agency, practices, and assets—in other words, local needs and resources to satisfy those needs; second, identifying current issues and latent trends.

These two ambitious lines of research were developed simultaneously using different research methods, including ethnographic techniques with participant observation, key informant interviews, and other forms of fieldwork. Beth Uzwiak, an anthropologist based in South Philadelphia, joined the team during this stage of the project to unearth local narratives. Research included

structured, semi-structured, and informal interviews, as well as informal interactions with community members and leaders. This fieldwork was complemented with secondary source research, spatial analysis, and other urban investigations. Research on real estate trends, ownership changes, local economies, and community gardens was conducted to corroborate and correlate with the testimonies collected from the interviews.

In order to understand community needs, agency, and assets, a number of aspects were investigated: (1) community needs, services and convergences; (2) local practices and cultural values; and (3) territorial assets and potentials. We organized a participatory neighborhood survey to map community gardens and local economies along one of the main corridors. CohStra collaborated with Asian Americans United (AAU) in this participatory mapping, which took place in July 2015, with students from AAU's summer camp who assisted in this endeavor while learning about neighborhood changes and gentrification.

4. AUTO-DIAGNOSIS: CURRENT ISSUES AND LATENT THREATS IN THE SOUTH SEVEN

While building relationships, we had the chance to discover community agencies, local initiatives, and territorial assets. The fieldwork research and our committee meetings at the hub on Jackson Street revealed several local narratives and concerns that were shared with us. The main issues can be summed up in a list of major deficiencies in the South Seven:

1. Lack of opportunities: scarcity of conditions for the emergence of new businesses.
2. Lack of communication among communities: the existence of cultural barriers and need for public space.
3. Lack of sense of ownership: social insecurity and litter in the streets.
4. Lack of resources: disinvestment in facilities and services.
5. Lack of power: voting abstention

and disempowerment related to the neighborhood's future development.

We diagnosed current issues and latent threats in the South Seven through personal accounts collected from March to June 2015 that were corroborated during the following research phase, during which we fostered awareness of the issues to help develop visions to respond to such conditions and risks.

5. PROJECT DEFINITION: PLAYGROUNDS FOR USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

Merging the scientific and popular knowledge produced over the previous research phases enabled us to define the project and design an operative framework for the long-term engagement of the Restored Spaces Initiative in South Philadelphia. The knowledge produced up to this point allowed the following (in no particular order):

1. To identify and define a network of governmental and non-governmental institutions, local associations, grassroots groups, and citizens that can become project partners and build up the ongoing action-research.
2. To define potential spaces to be activated as locations for future Restored Spaces projects, and to share and to collectively define priorities and solutions to generate a sustainable and just neighborhood through the metaphor of sharing useful knowledge. We envisioned a neighborhood hub to create a neutral and safe space where community members could feel free to express themselves despite differences in background, race, and citizenship status.
3. To develop tools and processes created to foster sustainable and equitable participation and to engage community members and leaders in the subsequent project steps. These tools and processes include participatory games, participatory performances, neighborhood committees,



TOP RIGHT:
New development in South Philadelphia





neighborhood assemblies, workshops, and a public festival.

4. To define an overall engagement framework to restore physical, economic, and social aspects, from the grassroots up and from the periphery in. These may include, without being limited to, processes for trans-generational production/exchange of local knowledge; collectivized production of local economic activities; appropriation and management of underutilized public and private spaces; and production of alternative community controlled models of development to provide new recreational, living, working, and/or learning spaces for the community.

6. CREATING AWARENESS AND PRIORITIZING NEEDS: ACTIVATING LAND, ENGAGING CITIZENSHIP, AND MOBILIZING PEOPLE

From May through September 2015, *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge* occupied a vacant lot at 632 Jackson Street, creating a temporary hub space where the demands of daily life were interrupted through play to inspire new spatial imaginaries and political subjectivities. Working in close collaboration with a variety of neighborhood partners, CohStra modeled the creation of a temporary community space as a participatory pilot project that activates playful ways of critically thinking about land occupation, gentrification, environmental restoration, and housing through participatory design, while inspiring cross-cultural communication by generating knowledge exchange through performance and dialogue from a specific site.

CohStra's methodology seeks to show community members the forces that foster segregation and threaten their localities. Subsequently, our work helps community members realize and leverage their own knowledge to make their visions a reality. The last phase of this action-research project aimed to do just that: to create awareness and mobilize community members

and leaders to generate shared visions and collectively strategize potential alternatives for action, building truly transformative urban interventions.

Working out of our hub space on Jackson Street, we pursued this goal through different activities organized around three major community actions and a number of community meetings and informal gatherings. In our experience, public actions—besides being excellent tools to disseminate pressing conditions afflicting local communities—provide opportunities to test the effectiveness of the initial premises and to register feedback. Ultimately, these public actions generate ideal conditions to solidify a local network of citizens, cultural practitioners, community groups, local artists, and social workers already engaged in the neighborhood. Thus, these public actions were organized and envisioned as pilot engagements to test collaboration, understanding, and solidarity among the neighborhood base.

Three actions were planned progressively: *Action 1: Sharing Knowledge* took place on June 28 and gathered together more than a dozen community organizers, representatives of civic organizations, and artists at the hub on Jackson Street. Philadelphia Theatre of the Oppressed opened the event with an interactive theater workshop, performing stories and images drawn from months of community research. Participants were invited to interpret what they saw, opening up conversations about vital neighborhood issues that were then continued in small committees. Although each committee had a different focus—social, spatial, and economic—all of the conversations centered on issues related to safety, gentrification, and neighborhood litter, among other issues.

The useful knowledge disseminated and discussed in Action 1 was transformed into shared visions in *Action 2: A Space for Urban Reappropriation*, which took place on July 18. While committees were convened during the first meeting to address issues related to South Seven's space, economy, and social issues, the committees met during the second meeting to discuss the possibility of

working together towards a single larger event that could bring the various community organizations and disparate cultural groups together in pursuit of a common goal. The use and rehabilitation of Mifflin Square became a focus, and the committees discussed various ways to address persistent neighborhood problems such as litter through the creation of a "Trash Academy." The first idea that emerged from the Urban Reappropriation meeting was to work on a "night market" as an event to catalyze public attention on the area's emergent shadow economies. However, it soon became clear that there was too little time to work on such an ambitious aim, and during the planning process, the night market evolved into a collaborative festival that could lay the foundation for more structured strategies for neighborhood interventions.

This final Action was always intended as the largest in ambition and scope. Yet the strong involvement of community representatives during Action 2 raised the bar to develop a public event in Mifflin Square that included the efforts of an extensive number of civic organizations and individuals. Action 3 turned into the Mifflin Square Alliance Festival, a public event with a focus on cultural exchange, communal activities, and knowledge sharing. The general feeling of the committees' work led to the idea that, in an area where the fragmentation of social texture has always been distinctive to the point of becoming a theater of true racial conflicts, a festival could become the right occasion for working collectively on a common goal, while testing the possibilities of cooperation and building a common vision for the development of the area. The Mifflin Square Alliance Festival was organized in three programs representing some of the most relevant themes that emerged from the committee meetings. The central part of the festival constituted a program called PowerHouse, a stage on which performances, music, dance, acting, and storytelling could represent the area's diversity and become the theater for debates on the neighborhood's development. Another important aspect of the festival became the Useful Knowledge workshop area, where local initiatives could showcase their programs and ideas. The Kids'

Union became the area for youth recreation activities. All these activities came together with a celebration of local foods through the establishment of an extensive picnic area and an art installation that represented the diversity of the neighborhood through a variety of lanterns coming together in a communal circle.

This project has involved work with committees focused on different aspects, social, spatial and economical, that formed at the first session and worked over a period of three months, addressing local needs, priorities, and visions. It is important to mention that the project's activities—actions, community meetings, and informal gatherings—were facilitated by members of Cohabitation Strategies but entirely led by community members and leaders. The neighborhood hub utilized creative tools, communication tools, awareness, and engagement. One main collaborator, Philadelphia Theatre of the Oppressed, gave life to the first Playground of Useful Knowledge. Through forum theatre, participatory performances, community gatherings, interactive games, and other socially engaged artistic activities, community stakeholders enjoyed themselves while learning about important issues facing their community and constructing localized solutions.

This report provides a detailed account of the different research phases, including aims and outcomes. This dossier is meant to be used by the Restored Spaces Initiative and future artistic collaborators, working in South Philadelphia and involved long-term in addressing the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants. Therefore, this report is conceived as a tool for artists, activists, local officials, and community stakeholders involved in the social, economic, and spatial development of the South Seven.



1. CITYWIDE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS



Cohabitation Strategies' initial introduction to the City of Philadelphia was an unusual one: it took place through visualization and analysis of a series of maps we produced in order both to generate a preliminary understanding of the city's social, economic, and urban challenges and to prepare for a productive first residency. This first residency in November 2015 was a challenge, since its ultimate goal was the selection and investigation of a number of potential localities where we could eventually conduct participatory action research, envision a long-term project, and promote a number of community-based interventions for the coming years. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research was key for this endeavor.

This section describes the quantitative and qualitative research and outlines their outcomes. The quantitative research was conducted using census data, geospatial data from different public and private digital libraries, and spatial analysis, while the qualitative research was conducted mainly through interviews, spatial analysis, and participant observation. Additionally, we conducted research through use of secondary source research to learn about current city plans, initiatives, and instruments that the city is promoting for urban and housing development.

To select our area of interest, we used the district lines as defined by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's Philadelphia 2035 Plan, [see section 1.3](#). Our main districts of focus initially were the Lower North District (which includes the Frankford, Northwood, Summerdale, Lawncrest, and Oxford Circle neighborhoods), the West District (which includes the Overbrook, Carroll Park, Haddington, Morris Park, Cobbs Creek, Dunlap, Mill Creek, Belmont, and Mantua

neighborhoods), and the South District (roughly analogous to what is considered South Philadelphia and including neighborhoods such as Grays Ferry, Whitman, East Passyunk, Pennsport, and Point Breeze).

1.1 PHILADELPHIA BY THE NUMBERS

This section is the result of a two-month citywide quantitative investigation. The analysis of targeted census data and its spatial distribution exposes important challenges facing the city and specific districts. Selected key data sets, taken from the Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access as well as other public and private digital libraries, enabled a thorough analysis of factors correlated with Philadelphia's people, economy, and built environment. By crossing a number of data sets, we generated citywide visualizations that revealed three key areas of interest defined during this preliminary work. These areas include the Lower North, West, and South districts ([figure 1.1.1](#)).

PEOPLE

A study of population figures reveals that Philadelphia, unlike most post-industrial American cities, has a growing population, having experienced 2.2% growth from 2010 to 2014. Out of the city's 1,560,269 inhabitants, 22.2% are under 18, and only 12.4% are over 65 years old. Therefore, Philadelphia is a young city that is growing slowly but steadily (US Census Bureau 2015).

Philadelphia contains almost the same percentage of African-American (44.2%) and white inhabitants (45.5%), with the Latino population comprising the third largest demographic (13.3%). The Latino population is rapidly growing, with a 45% increase from 2000 to 2010 (US Census Bureau 2000, 2010). Like most North American cities with diverse populations, Philadelphia is remarkably spatially segregated in terms of race and income level.

By mapping the spatial distribution of race and income, we identified three city areas where spatial segregation is particularly stark. The first such area is the Lower North District, where both African-American and Latino populations are concentrated

CITY DISTRICTS AND DISTRICTS OF INTEREST

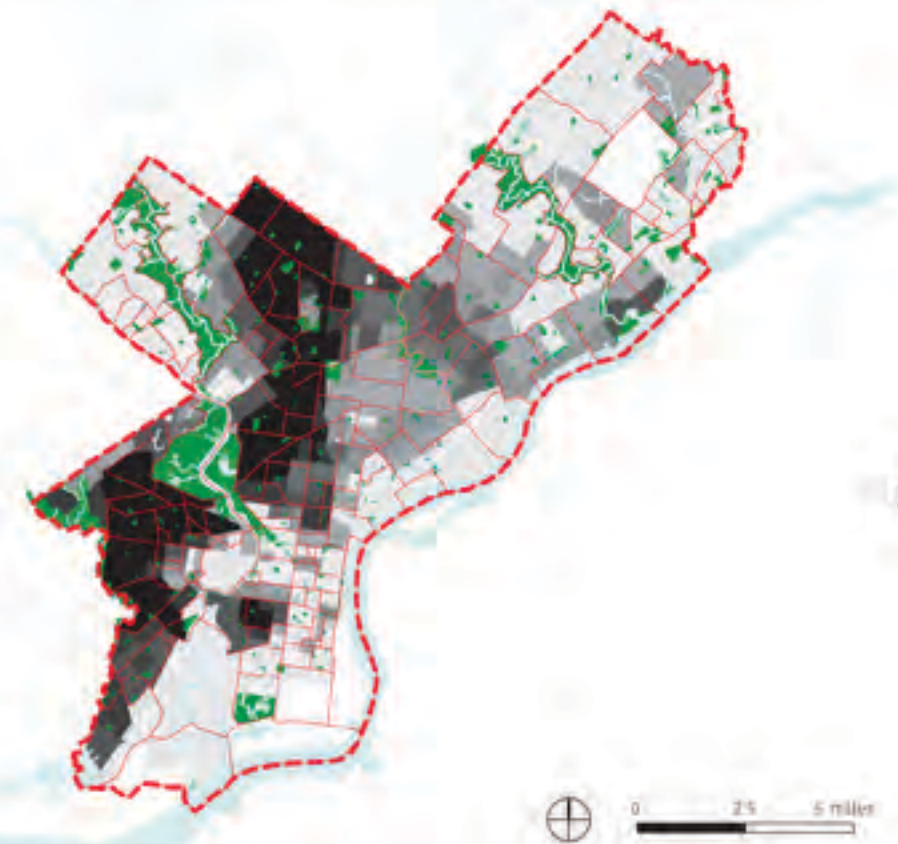
- City Districts
- City of Philadelphia
- Districts of Interest
- Parks
- Rivers



AFRICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION

- Neighborhoods
- City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers

No data
0% - 15%
15% - 30%
30% - 45%
45% - 60%
60% - 75%
75% - 90%
90% - 100%



LATINO POPULATION

— Neighborhoods
 - - - City of Philadelphia
 ■ Parks
 ■ Rivers

No data
 0% - 15%
 15% - 30%
 30% - 45%
 45% - 60%
 60% - 75%
 75% - 90%
 90% - 100%



WHITE POPULATION

— Neighborhoods
 - - - City of Philadelphia
 ■ Parks
 ■ Rivers

No data
 0% - 15%
 15% - 30%
 30% - 45%
 45% - 60%
 60% - 75%
 75% - 90%
 90% - 100%



in a circumscribed locality (see figures 1.1.2 and 1.1.3). Compared with the rest of the city, the Lower North's income level is extremely low (see figure 1.1.7). This area has been home to Latino families since they first settled in the city, and is historically seen as a place of struggle with strong organized efforts aimed at creating a sense of community to help fight against systemic problems.

The second area identified is the West District, where larger concentrations of African Americans were identified. This area seems more segregated in terms of race but less in terms of income level, making it more consolidated and stable (see figures 1.1.2 and 1.1.7).

The third area, the South District, is the most interesting for our purposes, as it is home to a remarkable concentration of immigrants, foreign-born residents, and newcomers from diverse parts of the world (see figure 1.1.6). In this neighborhood, segregation is low in terms of race, since whites, African Americans, Latinos, and an increasing number of Asians live side by side. However, spatial segregation

in terms of income level can be traced in the district's central area (see figure 1.1.7). The South District, originally populated by Irish and Italian families, has changed over the years with an influx of Latino and Asian families as well as other minority groups. Undocumented Mexicans and refugees from South Asia make up two new key ethnic groups (see figures 1.1.3 and 1.1.5). The remainder of the population is composed of African Americans in the district's western area and whites in its northern area near Center City, although this demographic is further spread across the southern neighborhood (see figure 1.1.4).

According to US Census data, 88.7% of Philadelphia's population over 25 years old has a high school degree or higher, and 27.5% has a bachelor's degree or higher. The spatial distribution of people with at least a bachelor's degree reveals a clear correlation between income and education levels in the Lower North, West, and South Districts (see figure 1.1.8).

ASIAN POPULATION

— Neighborhoods
 - - - City of Philadelphia
 ■ Parks
 ■ Rivers

No data
 0% - 15%
 15% - 30%
 30% - 45%
 45% - 60%
 60% - 75%



NON-US CITIZENS POPULATION

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers

- 0% - 2.5%
- 2.5% - 5%
- 5% - 10%
- 10% - 15%
- 15% - 20%
- 20% +



RESIDENTS WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers

- 0% - 15%
- 15% - 30%
- 30% - 45%
- 45% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- 75% - 90%
- 90% - 100%



MEDIAN INCOME

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers

- No data
- \$0 - \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$40,000
- \$40,000 - \$60,000
- \$60,000 - \$80,000
- \$80,000 - \$100,000
- \$100,000 - \$120,000
- \$120,000 - \$140,000
- \$140,000 +



ECONOMY

This section looks at Philadelphia industry and employment data in order to gain an understanding of the local economic realities of the city's inhabitants.

Philadelphians are employed mostly in four main industries: 30.5% work in educational services, and health care and social assistance; 11.4% in professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services; 10.4% in retail trade; and 9.7% in arts, entertainment and recreation. The rest of the employed population works in the other nine industries that are identified in the city, including agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining (0.2%); construction (4.0%); manufacturing (6.9%); wholesale trade (2.1%); transportation and warehousing, and utilities (5.3%); information (2.0%); finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing (6.3%); public administration (6.4%); and other services (4.8%) (US Census 2013).

According to the US Census Bureau (2013), over 35.5% of Philadelphia's population works in management, business, science and arts; 24.5% in sales; 23.4% in service; 10.8% in production, transportation, and material moving; and 5.8% in fields related to natural resources, construction, and maintenance.

Only 3.9% of the city's entire employed population is self-employed. The great majority of workers, 82.3%, are private wage and salary workers, and 13.7% of employed city residents are government workers. This research also reveals that over 15% percent of the labor force is unemployed (see figure 1.1.9) and that the city's median annual income is extremely low (\$37,192) compared to the state (\$52,548) and national (\$53,046) median incomes (see figure 1.1.7). Additionally, from 2009-2013, on average over 26% of all residents lived below the poverty line (US Census 2013) (see figure 1.1.10).

Poverty is not an isolated variable, and an understanding of poverty requires investigation of



TOP LEFT: 1.1.6
Non-US Citizens Population

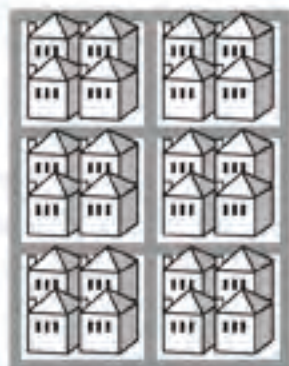
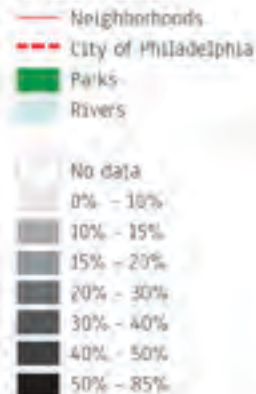
BOTTOM LEFT: 1.1.7
Median Income

TOP RIGHT: 1.1.8
Residents with Bachelor's
Degree or Higher

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



POPULATION BELOW THE POVERTY LINE



★★

related conditions such as crime, unemployment, and other parameters measuring social issues (see figure 1.1.9 and 1.1.11). The North and West Districts are some of Philadelphia's poorest inner city areas with low wages, high unemployment, a lack of economic stability, and a high rate of health and mental health problems. These characteristics are accompanied by high crime rates and drug-related incidents. In the South District, fewer (10-20% of the population) people live under the poverty line than in the North and West Districts (60-90% of the population). However, unemployment is high in the South District, and immigrants, particularly undocumented ones, lack access to welfare. Thus, though unemployment appears to be a structural issue in all three areas, Lower North and West District residents have better public assistance than those in the South District, mainly due to citizenship status.

Looking at the distributions of race, median income, poverty, education, occupation, unemployment, and other key data sets, the South District became an area of particular

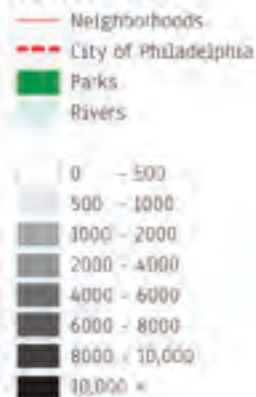
interest for the project. This area, which faces complex and interrelated issues, has been further investigated through interviews.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In Philadelphia, owner-occupied housing makes up 53.3% of all occupied housing units. Owner- and renter-occupied housing are spread evenly across the city (see figures 1.1.12 and 1.1.13). Spatial analysis revealed that owner-occupied housing is common even in districts with a high percentage of poverty.

The median housing value is \$143,000, and the median gross rent is \$893. When analyzing this data against the local median household income (\$37,192/year), the median gross rent, and the monthly owner costs (\$1,249), the city's unaffordability is exposed (US Census Bureau 2013). This conclusion is based on the standard guideline for housing affordability, which requires housing expenditure not to exceed 30% of the household

POLICE INCIDENTS PER CENSUS TRACT



TOP LEFT: 1.1.9
Unemployment Rate

TOP RIGHT: 1.1.10
Population below the Poverty Line

BOTTOM LEFT: 1.1.11
Police Incidents per Census Tract

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers

- 0% - 15%
- 15% - 30%
- 30% - 45%
- 45% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- 75% - 90%
- 90% - 100%



RENTER-OCCUPIED HOUSING

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers

- 0% - 15%
- 15% - 30%
- 30% - 45%
- 45% - 60%
- 60% - 75%
- 75% - 90%
- 90% - 100%



gross income. Statistics demonstrate that 49% of renter households and 31.3% of owner-occupied households in Philadelphia pay more than 35% of their gross income on housing (US Census Bureau 2013). Additionally, households that pay more than 40% on housing are spread evenly throughout the city (see figure 1.1.14).

The Philadelphia Housing Authority is the largest landlord in Pennsylvania. It provides 81,000 people with affordable housing in over 50 developments, mainly located in the city's northern, southern, and western areas.

The housing condition in the South District is in flux, with the most expensive properties in the city located to the area's north and gradually affecting property values farther and farther south within the district. Median home values in and around Center City are over \$550,000, and such costs are spreading to the South District's northern area, which combines renter- and owner-occupied housing (see figure 1.1.15). Understanding the South District's ownership structure is important, as speculation is increasing

in this area, thus affecting low-income renters and long-standing community members who have begun to be pushed out by high prices and buyouts. Through informal encounters with community members we learned that Mexicans and other Hispanic groups have already been displaced farther South.

The large number of vacant lots located in the South District suggests that there is significant opportunity for future development (see figure 1.3.3). There are already a substantial number of new buildings in the district's northern area that are profiting from proximity to Center City and the surrounding thriving neighborhoods. As the district experiences rapid change, attention must be paid to its existing communities.

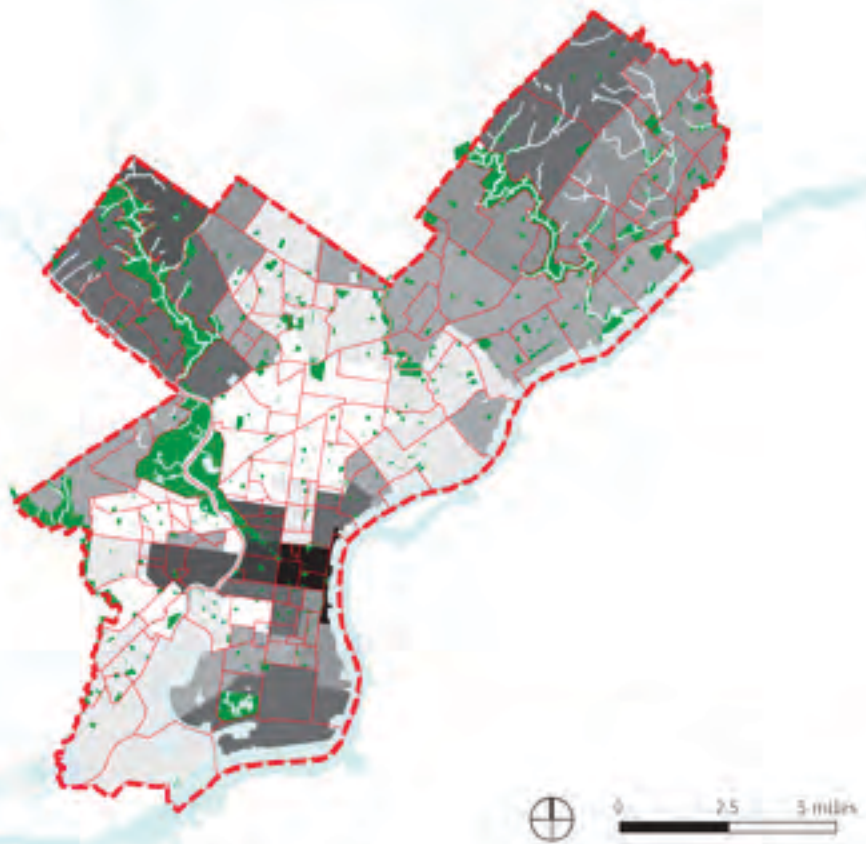
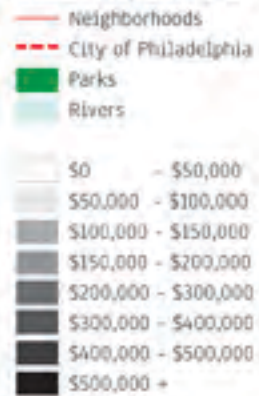
HOUSEHOLDS PAYING 40%+ OF INCOME TO HOUSING

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers

- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- 40% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 70%
- 70% +



MEDIAN HOME PRICE



1.2 AREAS OF INTEREST: WEST, NORTH AND SOUTH PHILADELPHIA

After considering the city's overall socio-spatial structure, we focused on determining which specific areas could be more interesting as an experimental ground for a long-term cultural and research project. We analyzed different areas with a particular focus on districts with inhabitants living partially under the poverty line. After a first analysis, we detected three neighborhood areas that could offer the needed social sustainability for guaranteeing some form of resilience for the project.

The three areas that gained our interest were Norris Square and its surroundings in the Lower North District, the east side of the South District, and a large portion of the West District (see figure 1.2.1, 1.2.2 and 1.2.3). In contrast with the first two areas, it seemed more arduous to define a focal point in the West District.

DEFINITION OF AN AREA

The definition of these three areas led us to conduct a preliminary analysis based on urban characteristics and an ethnographic study on local perceptions. On one side we conducted extensive research on demographic, social, economic, and spatial conditions; on the other we achieved a fuller understanding of city dynamics through interviews with local stakeholders, residents, social workers, and other citizens we define as "local experts": people who have a partial understanding of the forces molding their neighborhood, but who have much better perception, at the street level, of each community and even household's local tensions and sensibilities. The superimposition of these two perspectives provided us with a wider angle of observation, at times highlighting the contradictions between an eminently professional understanding of the city and more subjective perceptions of how things truly work.

TOP LEFT: 1.1.15
Median Home Price

TOP RIGHT: 1.2.1
Housing in Lower North Philadelphia

MIDDLE RIGHT: 1.2.2
Housing in South Philadelphia

BOTTOM RIGHT: 1.2.3
Housing in West Philadelphia



In fact, each of the three defined areas is a good potential site for intervention; however, we attempted to prioritize the work and focus it within an area where we think the conditions exist for a sustainable intervention in the project's limited available timeframe.

What became clear during our conversations to define the area of focus was that each of the three observed areas required a completely different intervention strategy. Our priority was to determine the most urgent topics the project could address and each area's latent potentials. To address the most urgent topics means to understand in which direction each area is heading from a larger urban framework: what are the underlying forces at play and the municipality's plans, and in what directions is real estate market development heading, what are the environmental conditions, and other parameters.

Our approach to determining a neighborhood's "latent potentials" was more subtle but just as important, as it indicates which topics, concerns, and issues can emerge from the communities with whom we will be working. Often, identifying latent potentials is a sensitive topic, as it leads to a more intimate conversation about what unexpressed cultural baggage a community carries, its members' interests and passions, and in the case of immigrants, their background in their native countries, etc.

These qualitative and quantitative forms of urban research led us to determine a specific area of the South District as the project's space of operation. At the moment, the area we selected does not have a specific official denomination, but it is commonly defined as the east side of the South District or the area east of South Broad Street (*see figure 1.2.4*). This part of South Philadelphia is evidently going through transformation, but has not received attention from large developers comparable to that in neighborhoods west of South Broad Street such as Point Breeze.

We believe such conditions allow us to anticipate the risk of eviction that the changing urban dynamics towards gentrification usually lead to. The

project focused on determining different socio-spatial strategies for this area that allow the development of greater social, economic, and environmental justice and sustainability; while doing this, however, we made sure to delineate ways to engage with the neighborhood inhabitants and to determine arrangements towards the prevention of any form of eviction.

During our fieldwork in this specific area of South Philadelphia, we learned of a number of active organizations working mostly with immigrants. What stands out, as we have observed in many other areas where we have operated, is that these organizations hardly communicate with each other. This lack of collaboration is a weakness that represented an interesting challenge to the project, as well as preventing the community from coalescing into a consistent and strong united front to leverage their political clout.

Another important aspect that was addressed over the course of our work is the area's relative shortage of local economies. In terms of local economy, we investigated the informal economies of this area, and what knowledge the local residents possess that could allow the creation of new economic activities and small neighborhood collectives.

As reported earlier, the area lacks quality public spaces that can function as civic gathering places where social differences emerge and create dialogue. We see this scarcity as an important spatial factor that reinforces the strong ethnic segregation characteristic of this area. Without public space, it simply is difficult to encounter, to meet, or even to acknowledge the existence of other groups or people within the neighborhood.





1.3 PUBLIC CITY PLANS, INITIATIVES, AND INSTRUMENTS FOSTERING URBAN RESTRUCTURING

Housing development, urban rehabilitation, and economic and community development have long been coveted in Philadelphia. Since private investment is rare in most cities that have experienced urban decline—whether due to deindustrialization, depopulation, deprivation, disinvestment, or all the above combined—governmental institutions, at different levels, have created and implemented policies, programs, and tools to boost development in accordance with local priorities and needs. As part of this research, we have studied a number of these instruments, especially those directly or indirectly affecting the project’s area of interest: the eastern side of the South District.

We learned that a number of these efforts have focused on economic development and the rehabilitation of vacant and derelict properties in blighted and post-industrial neighborhoods, especially those located in the northern and western parts of the city, as well as along the river (see figure 1.3.1). We investigated some of the area-based initiatives, including the Empowerment Zones, Enterprise Zones, and Redevelopment Certified Zones, and discovered that their outcomes are still uncertain. Long-term transformations in some areas are yet to be seen, even after millions of federal dollars have been poured into some of these areas. We also learned that only one of these area-based initiatives addresses the project’s area of interest in the South District. City plans, district plans, and other targeted initiatives were also examined. Those contributing to development in the project’s area of interest are described below.

PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANS

There are a significant number of plans that the city has formulated and implemented over the years with the assistance of City Council members, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, community development corporations,

community-based organizations, local experts, community stakeholders, and citizens. The following outlines some current key plans:

PHILADELPHIA 2035

This is a two-phase comprehensive plan developed by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC). It is intended as a blueprint for physical development in the city, using a number of public policies and instruments. The plan provides recommendations at both the city and district levels. The first phase is the Citywide Vision, which forecasts an additional 100,000 residents and 40,000 jobs in the city by 2035. The plan has three forward-looking themes: Thrive, Connect, and Renew. Each theme addresses different topics and goals. “Thrive” looks at neighborhoods, economic development, and land management; “Connect” address transportation and utilities; “Renew” focuses on open space, environmental resources, historic preservation, and the public realm.

For more information about the goals, visit <http://phila2035.org>.

According to the PCPC (2011), this plan defines broad, far-reaching goals for the future, building on the city’s strengths as a strong metropolitan center: its diverse neighborhoods and industrial legacy areas ripe for renewal and redevelopment. Implementing the plan’s objectives and strategies will contribute to a stronger economy, a healthier population, and a smaller environmental footprint in the years to come. It is important to mention that this plan builds on the environmental goals set in Greenworks and Philadelphia 2009 (see below Green City Plans). A number of plans have been developed at the district level. In the coming years, the PCPC plans to complete 18 strategic district plans, which will incorporate the city’s new zoning code and assist in zoning map revisions.

DISTRICT PLANS

Philadelphia2035’s district plans aim to provide recommendations on future land use, development opportunities, urban design scenarios, and zoning changes. These plans appear to be developed according to local needs, priorities, and visions.

AREA-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers
- Empowerment Zones
- ▨ Philadelphia Enterprise Zones
- ▨ Redevelopment Certified Areas



following the guidelines of the Citywide Vision. The city has been divided into 18 districts (see figure 1.1.1). The plans developed in the following districts have been approved and adopted: Central, Central Northeast, Lower North, Lower Northeast, Lower Northwest, Lower South, University Southwest, West Park, and South Districts.

Among the three initial areas of interest, only one, the Lower North District, had an approved district plan when we began this investigation. The plan for the West District did not yet have a starting date, and the development of the South District’s plan had just begun.

SOUTH DISTRICT PLAN

This plan officially began in September 2014, one month before we started our investigation. The planning team organized two public meetings where residents were invited to participate and were encouraged to get involved in shaping the district’s development. The plan’s development

process initially seemed like an opportunity for this project, but then we realized that the planning process was quite accelerated. We were present at the two public meetings. Additionally, as we became more and more interested in working in this district, we interviewed Nicole Ozdemir, the South District Planning Team’s project manager. In the preliminary reports of those meetings, the eastern area of the South District was barely addressed. CohStra asked Ozdemir if the area’s minority groups had participated in the public meetings or if they were contacted to have an individual voice in the plan. The project manager informed us that the main local groups were invited but did not attend, and were contacted afterwards but without much result. She acknowledged that it was difficult to get minority groups involved.

The PCPC’s analysis and recommendations were published in April 2015, and soon after, in June 2015, the South District plan was approved. The plan’s focus areas addressed for investment and improvements are along South Broad



Street, Point Breeze Avenue, and the municipal complex located in East Passyunk.

For more information about the District Plan, visit <http://phila2035.org/home-page/district/>.

CohStra studied the plan's analysis and recommendations according to its different themes: Thrive, Connect, and Renew. Each theme addresses a number of aspects. Outlined below are only those that directly relate to this project's aim and the issues and threats identified during the action-research portion of our investigation in eastern South Philadelphia.

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

The plan addresses the 26 commercial corridors and centers located in the South District. It states that public-private cooperation is needed in commercial corridors with high vacancy rates and proposes the organization and creation of business associations and business improvement districts (BID) and designation of corridor managers. The plan recommends commercial zoning to support growth of existing pedestrian corridors in neighborhoods and auto-oriented corridors along the edges of the district. Additionally, the plan proposes corridor management programs and façade and streetscape improvements along pedestrian corridors, including South 7th Street and East Passyunk Avenue, which are identified as some of the area's main business corridors (see figure 4.5.1). The plan describes three financial assistance programs for commercial corridors: the Storefront Improvement Program, InStore, and the Merchant's Fund. [see section 4.5](#)

South 7th Street is an important place for Cambodian immigrants. Business owners and residents have come together around the cause of promoting their food and culture through the creation of an official Cambodia Town. Improving current business and increasing foot traffic could help the community set up a Business Improvement District. However, fieldwork revealed that some frictions are latent between different community groups. [see section 4.5](#)

HOUSING The PCPC's recommendations are to downzone residential blocks where single-family use is dominant to protect against conversion to multi-family units, especially along smaller streets. Increasing the supply of affordable housing by redeveloping obsolete institutional and industrial buildings and using city inventory land is another recommendation. The discounted sale of public land through the Land Bank would be required (see Land Bank on page 34). The final recommendation is the rezoning of the paintbrush factory at South 12th and Jackson Streets from industrial to residential to encourage reuse. The main transit streets and avenues are addressed for rezoning and development of multifamily housing, including Snyder Avenue in eastern South Philadelphia.

Institutional and industrial buildings are being acquired by private entities without any commitment to develop affordable housing. Bok High School, which has been sold for 2 million, is being converted into a "makerspace" targeting creative young people, while the Brush Factory is turned into luxury apartments for households with incomes higher than those of community members. Affordable housing must be developed on city-owned land as well as in the areas proposed for rezoning and densification to promote development without displacement. [see section 4.1](#)

PUBLIC REALM The plan addresses the three main diagonal avenues--Point Breeze, Passyunk, and Moyamensing--, that cut across the rigid grid of the district, creating dynamic spaces and providing room for commercial corridors. The recommendations include the creation and enhancement of pedestrian spaces to support public use and increase pedestrian safety at high-use areas, the creation of gateways to demarcate commercial corridors, and beautification and safety improvements underneath major transportation infrastructure. Specific areas are addressed outside or on the periphery of our project's area of interest, such as Broad Street, Washington Avenue, and Moyamensing

Avenue between Washington Avenue and Greenwich Street.

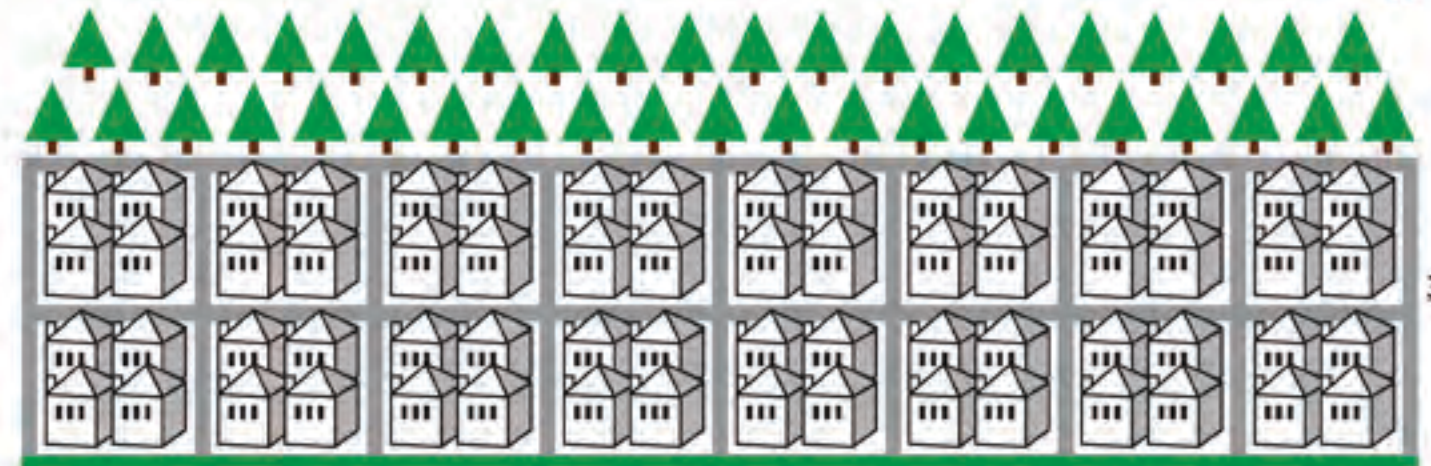
OPEN SPACE The recommendations for recreation centers and parks include improving, greening, and activating spaces currently in need. Within our project's area of interest, Mifflin Square and Weinberg Park have been prioritized for investment. The first has been prioritized because of its need for repair, and the second for greening to fill in service gaps for green space access. Many other parks are addressed on the periphery of the project's area, since they provide a better connection from the district to Center City and to the four miles of waterfront and trails along the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers.

The improvement and greening of Mifflin Square and Weinberg Park are necessary. However, these sites cannot fully satisfy the needs of the different community groups that live around these green spaces. The preservation and creation of community gardens is critical for the community's wellbeing and to promote interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. [see section 4.2](#)

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES The plan confronts the challenges regarding water management due to the district's low sea level elevation, the area's

lack of trees, and preservation of community gardens. According to the plan, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) has been working to mitigate stormwater and flooding issues by the installation of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI). This has been done in partnership with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR), the Philadelphia Streets Department, the School District of Philadelphia, and local interest groups. The plan states that over 40 GSI projects have been implemented in the South District. More information about these projects, and those in the design process, are catalogued on a Green Stormwater Infrastructure Project Map. For more information about the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Project map, visit <http://www.phillywatersheds.org/BigGreenMap>.

The recommendations include the building of green stormwater infrastructure at public facilities, the expansion of stormwater management to reduce runoff and flooding, the establishment of wetland parks, the planting of street trees to increase tree cover and improve air quality, and the preservation of established community gardens on public and privately-owned land through ownership transfer to the city through the Neighborhood Gardens Trust or the Department of Parks and Recreation. The plan builds upon the goals set in the Philadelphia Greenworks and Green Plan, which will be outlined below.



One of Green 2015's primary aims is finding opportunity sites for new city park space in areas where people lack green space within a half-mile of their homes. The area with the highest population density and lowest access to green space is South Philadelphia.



GREEN CITY PLANS

The City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program's Restored Spaces Initiative's mission and work align with the overlapping goals of the City of Philadelphia's greening plans in several ways. The City of Philadelphia has developed a number of plans and policy initiatives to continue developing ways to improve the city. These plans include Greenworks Philadelphia, 2009, Mayor's Office of Sustainability; Green City, Clean Waters, 2009, Philadelphia Water Department; GreenPlan Philadelphia, 2010, Office of the Managing Director; Green 2015, 2010, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation; Philadelphia 2035: A Comprehensive Plan, 2011, City Planning Commission; and Philadelphia Trails Master Plan, 2013, City Planning Commission.

The City of Philadelphia can, and in some cases does, work on building a sustainable urban environment hand-in-hand with the Restored Spaces Initiative. Some goals that can be collectively addressed include building a green stormwater infrastructure system, improving access to green infrastructure and increasing the number of residents within walking distance of public green space, and reducing vacancy through transforming vacant lots into community resources.

The Philadelphia Water Department plans to implement incentives for a green stormwater infrastructure system that would address the overburdened sewer system (Philadelphia Parks and Recreation 2010). As highlighted in the Green 2015 Report (2010), this provides the opportunity to align the Green 2015 goal of equal access to parks with a site's environmental performance when identifying future sites for city park space. Here the urban environment can be improved by connecting park access with stormwater management. Another productive, efficient, and sustainable way complementary goals can be addressed includes identifying existing public resources such as vacated rail corridors, recreation centers, and underused Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR) sites such as underused public land and schoolyards. These sites can be easily transformed into public green spaces useful for communities across Philadelphia, and particularly for those in South

Philadelphia, which has the highest population density and lowest access to green space. As described in the Green 2015 Report, the Department of Public Property has stated that it welcomes serious inquiries from city agencies and members of the public who wish to convert vacant parcels under its jurisdiction into productive uses for the city.

By drawing on these shared goals, Restored Spaces works where there is momentum for varied improvements, including new or underway green stormwater infrastructure, schoolyards, green spaces, and public art. This work serves multiple purposes to address the goals outlined above. First, by creating environmental art, Restored Spaces directly affects the environment. Second, highlighting some of the main issues and targets within Philadelphia's greening plans can generate greater public awareness and engagement around green initiatives. Third, through the use of socially-engaged public art as a platform, Restored Spaces connects to diverse partners to harness the capacity of a broad spectrum of local stakeholders to share the responsibility for driving neighborhood change.

One of Green 2015's primary aims is finding opportunity sites for new city park space in areas where people lack green space within a half-mile of their homes. The area with the highest population density and lowest access to green space is South Philadelphia.

An area of opportunity is working with the Department of Public Health to create new fitness programs and install exercise equipment in recreation centers citywide. This is an initiative already underway with some key sites for implementation in South Philadelphia. Recreation Centers and underused PPR Opportunity Sites include: Tolentine Community Center, 1025 Mifflin Street, 0.72 acre; Burke Playground, South 2nd and Jackson Streets, 1.4 acres; Ford PAL Recreation Center, Mercy Street between South 6th and 7th Streets, 0.6 acre; Rizzo Rink, Front and Washington Streets, 2.3 acres (see figure 1.3.2).

OPPORTUNITY SITES FOR GREEN SPACES

- South Seven
- Parks
- Rivers
- Recreation Centers and underused PPR Opportunity Sites
- Opportunity to green existing underused public land
- Schoolyards

1. Tolentine Community Center
2. Rizzo Rink
3. Ford PAL Recreation Center
4. Burke Playground
5. South Philadelphia High School
6. Southwark School
7. Bok Technical High School
8. Broad Street and Snyder Avenue
9. 3117 South Columbus Boulevard



As mentioned above, the Department of Public Property welcomes serious inquiries from city agencies and members of the public who wish to convert vacant parcels under its jurisdiction into productive uses for the city. Here lies another opportunity area, with the following underused public land with potential to be transformed into green space for the South Philadelphia community: Broad Street and Snyder Avenue; 3117 South Columbus Boulevard, 26.3 acres. Schoolyards include: South Philadelphia High School, Broad Street and Snyder Avenue, 2.5 acres; Southwark School, Ninth Street and Mifflin Street, 1.2 acres; Edward Bok, Ninth and Mifflin Streets, 0.37 acres (see figure 1.3.2).

INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY-BASED PLANS

Independent Community-Based Plans, which are area-based advisory plans with limited power, have been developed in a number of districts. Even though the PCPC is not obligated to support local recommendations, these independent plans have been considered

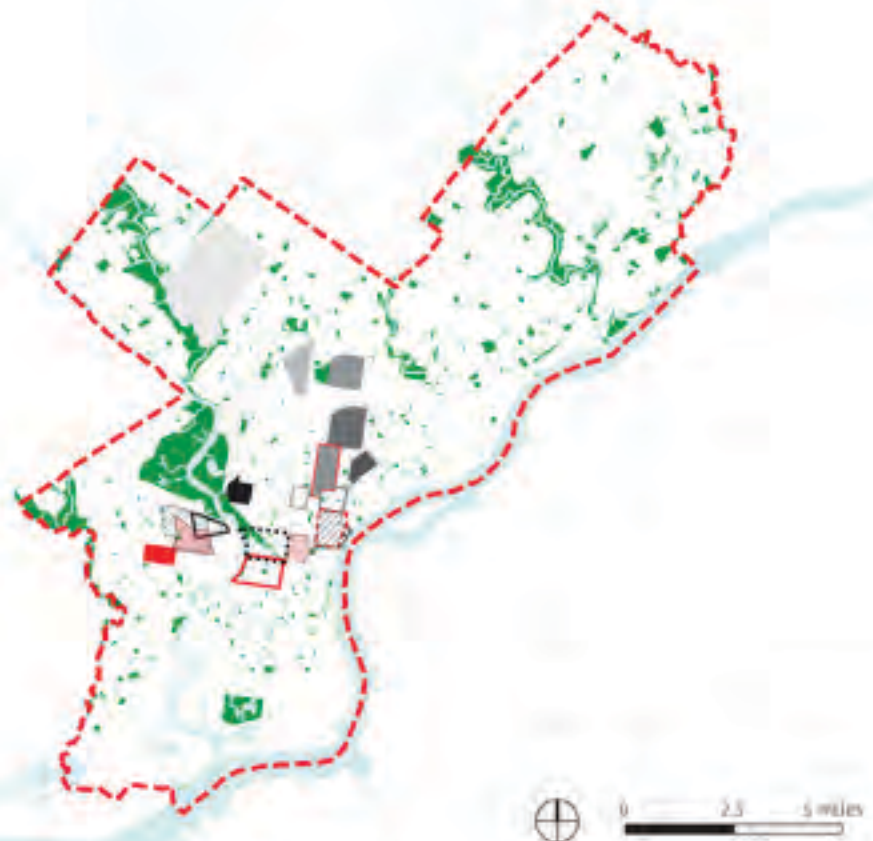
by the PCPC in recent District Plans. These plans have been developed by a cohort of community stakeholders and supported by public funds and even private financial institutions. Further research is required to learn about the planning process, partners, and funding. However, something that caught our attention while looking at the three preliminary areas of interest in this initial investigation is that, unlike the West and Lower North Districts, the South District does not have independent community-based plans (see figure 1.3.2). This fact made the South District even more attractive for this research project.

VACANT PROPERTY STRATEGY AND VACANT LOT PROGRAM

Vacant land and buildings are the product of interconnected agents that have led to urban decline and structural vacancies. Deindustrialization, decline in economic opportunities, middle income flight to suburbs, redlining, disinvestment, and property neglect are just a few of the agents that contributed

**INDEPENDENT
COMMUNITY-BASED PLANS**

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers
- Brewerytown Neighborhood Plan
- Center City Residents' Association Neighborhood Plan
- Chinatown Neighborhood Plan
- East Kensington TCOI Plan
- H.A.C.E. Neighborhood Development Plan
- Hunting Park Neighborhood Strategic Plan 2022
- Logan Square Neighborhood Parkway Plan
- Make Your Mark: Lower Lancaster Revitalization Plan
- Mt. Airy Neighborhood Plan
- Nicetown Economic Development and Housing Strategy
- Northern Liberties Neighborhood Plan
- Northern Liberties Waterfront Plan
- Our Community Our Ideas: Eastern North SCT Quality of Life Plan
- Our Community Plan: A Shared Vision - Eastern North Philadelphia
- The Neighborhood Plan by Walnut Hill
- We Are Mantua: Mantua Transformation Plan
- West Passelton Saunders Park Neighborhood Plan
- Yorktown Master Plan 2015



VACANT LAND

- Neighborhoods
- - - City of Philadelphia
- Parks
- Rivers
- Vacant Land



to the deterioration of structures and the demolition of one- and two-family homes across the city giving way to vacant land.

According to the Vacant Lot Program, there are approximately 40,000 vacant lots in the city, over 74% of which are privately owned (see figure 1.3.4). This initiative, which is part of the Community Life Improvement Program, is in charge of inspecting and maintaining vacant lots. It is the responsibility of the owner to secure and maintain their vacant property. Unfortunately, not all vacant lot owners take care of their property. Property owner neglect, combined with careless tossing of trash and illegal dumping of bulk trash, is common in some areas, including South Philadelphia. Vacant properties in unsanitary condition lower property values and add to the perception of blight in neighborhoods. Thus, when owners improperly maintain lots, the program cleans them and bills all costs to the owner. If the cost is not paid, a lien is placed against the property. According to the program, the Community Life Improvement Programs' crew cleaned 11,700 lots in fiscal year 2013. However, questions about the Vacant Lot Program's effectiveness in South Philadelphia emerged in this preliminary research phase, since litter is clearly a significant health and environmental problem in the area (see figure 1.3.5).

For more information visit: <http://www.phila.gov/qualityoflife/vacantlot-program/Pages/default.aspx>.

According to the Vacant Property Strategy, approximately 25,000 structures are believed to be vacant because the owner either had obtained a vacant property license, or had been cited for violations that are likely indicators of vacancy. The Vacant Property Strategy was initiated by the Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections in the fall of 2011, and is part of a larger program led by the Managing Director's Office and the Finance Director's Office to address the way city-owned and privately-owned property is bought, sold, and maintained. According to the Philadelphia Citizen Planning Institute (2011), one quarter of the city's vacant properties are owned by public agencies. Having identified vacant

properties, this initiative has three main objectives: finding the properties' owners, utilizing new enforcement measures to make the properties safe following the "doors and windows" ordinance, and dictating court time. Out of the 25,000 vacant structures in the program's database, 12,072 have been inspected; of these properties, 43% cited for "doors and windows" are taking action to either register, sell, or rehabilitate the property (Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections 2013). The consolidation of city-owned vacant properties into one agency (the Land Bank, outlined below) and the acquisition of long-term tax delinquent properties by the same agency, which represent half of all vacant properties, are some of this institute's recommendations.

For more information, visit: <http://www.phila.gov/li/aboutus/Pages/VacantPropertyStrategy.aspx>.

LAND BANK

The city has worked hard to keep properties up to code and to make vacant lots and properties safe. However, properties experiencing structural abandonment, code violations, or significant tax arrears have gradually been acquired by different public entities: the city, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, and the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation. In recent decades, city-owned land has often been transferred to responsible landlords, sometimes neighbors, to put such properties in use, but many times this is done without any city vision or community plan.

In order to return vacant and tax-delinquent property to productive use with a defined purpose, the Philadelphia Land Bank has been conceived with the following powers (Philadelphia Land Bank 2014):

- Acquire tax-delinquent properties through tax foreclosure.
- Clear the titles to those properties so that new owners are not burdened by old liens.
- Consolidate properties owned by multiple public agencies into single ownership in order to speed property transfers to new, private owners.
- Assist in the assemblage and disposition of land for community, nonprofit, and for-profit uses.

The Land Bank is committed by law to develop a Strategic Plan that will

Questions about the Vacant Lot Program's effectiveness in South Philadelphia emerged in this preliminary research phase, since litter is clearly a significant health and environmental problem in the area.

According to the Philadelphia Citizen Planning Institute (2011), one quarter of the city's vacant properties are owned by public agencies.



guide the acquisition, maintenance, and disposition of property. The recently published 2015 Strategic Plan sets up the ground rules of the Land Bank by following these initiatives (Philadelphia Land Bank 2014):

- Identifying market conditions across the city.
- Providing an inventory of vacant land and tax-delinquent properties that the Land Bank could take.
- Establishing goals to guide Land Bank activity.
- Identifying priority acquisition areas.
- Defining annual targets against which to measure progress.

According to the Land Bank (2015), there are roughly 8,000 city-owned vacant properties and an additional 24,000 privately-owned properties that are both vacant and tax delinquent. Thus, in total, there are about 32,000 potential Land Bank properties. In our view, the Land Bank represents a double-edged sword when facilitating the acquisition of land, as it provides tax incentives and other subsidies to attract private investment and its benefits won't be directed towards low-income and vulnerable populations and future generations. Months before the publication of the Strategic Plan, we visited John Carpenter, the executive director of this initiative, and expressed our concerns and initial vision and ideas for the South District. The City Council had recently passed its ordinance, and consolidation of land was underway. He explained the initiative was eager to transfer or lease public land to responsible landlords who would use land for the benefit of the community, especially in low-income urban areas such as the eastern part of the South District. He answered some of our inquiries at the meeting, and others were clarified when the plan was officially published. We identified potential opportunities for our project within the goals of this plan.

GOAL 1: RETURN INDIVIDUAL VACANT LOTS AND BUILDINGS ACROSS THE CITY TO PRODUCTIVE USE

The strategic plan states that, from the 32,000 potential Land Bank Properties, about 23,000 are individual lots. This condition is representative of

the eastern South District. The plan promotes individual development opportunities for these lots, the transfer of vacant lots to adjacent homeowners for use as a side yard or parking space, as well as the preservation of existing gardens that have community support and a track record of maintenance.

The Land Bank will consolidate property ownership where gardens are using land in the hands of multiple proprietors and will work with leaders to determine the best entity for preservation. This is an incredible opportunity for community groups to save and expand at-risk community gardens and other spaces in east South Philadelphia. [See section 4.2](#)

GOAL 2: PROMOTE EQUITABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The strategic plan aims to support the City Council's 2,000 Affordable Housing Units Initiative, especially in areas undergoing change. The eastern part of South Philadelphia is considered a priority area for expansion of affordable housing and promotion of equitable development, but mostly in the northern area above Washington Avenue.

Public land is concentrated mostly in the blocks above and below Snyder Avenue. These are potential areas for affordable housing development but also for community facilities and green spaces highly coveted by the community. [See sections 4.1 & 4.2](#)

GOAL 3: EXTEND PRIVATE INVESTMENT

The plan aims to help provide land for viable, market-rate investment, especially in developments incorporating affordable housing.

Private investment could revitalize the area and provide housing opportunities to long-term residents only if affordable housing is made mandatory for developers acquiring Land Bank properties. Otherwise, market-rate development will continue raising prices and displacing low-income residents. Market-rate housing development already exists in this area; what is needed is affordable housing. [See section 4.1](#)



GOAL 4: CONTRIBUTE TO LONG-TERM ECONOMIC VITALITY

The plan supports existing businesses and neighborhood commercial corridors by assembling and conveying marketable sites for new commercial development and expanding existing establishments. The plan targets a number of commercial areas. In eastern South Philadelphia, South 6th and 7th Streets, Oregon Avenue, and other scattered spots including the southeast and north ends of East Passyunk are considered prime opportunities.

Business owners, community members, community-based organizations, and Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) have the opportunity to partner with this initiative to generate a local plan to create and improve local economies and community development opportunities in eastern South Philadelphia. Business owners in these corridors already seek economic vitality. [see section 4.5](#)

GOAL 5: REINFORCE OPEN SPACE AND URBAN AGRICULTURE

The plan aims to maximize opportunities for partnerships in greening to improve and repurpose vacant land and to identify, acquire, and/or dispose of vacant land where there is demonstrated need for more or improved space.

Eastern South Philadelphia is considered an area of great possibilities for acquisition of land and disposition of open space based on local conditions and capacity, especially in the southern area between Snyder and Oregon Avenues. This represents a great opportunity to address the community's lack of green and other community spaces. [see section 4.2](#)

GOAL 6: SUPPORT CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT LAND BANK OPERATIONS

The plan aims to follow the strategies set forth in Philadelphia2035 and the approved neighborhood plans and to reinforce public initiatives and investment. Additionally, it seeks to provide ways for public engagement in Land Bank decision-making. For every property considered for disposition, the Land

Bank must provide an on-site notice, notify RCOs serving in the property area, and invite public comment.

The South District plan does not have a specific proviso for Land Bank properties. This opens an opportunity for the different communities and organizations in the area to be part of the decision-making process and define development according to their needs and priorities.

GOAL 7: ACTIVELY MARKET LAND BANK PROPERTIES

The plan intends to establish a track record of success and to utilize targeted acquisition of land to enhance the marketability of existing publicly-owned vacant property, especially in neighborhoods with deterioration and weak markets that do not attract public investment. In such cases, the Land Bank aims to acquire land around existing publicly-owned vacant land to create marketable sites for the development of affordable housing or other uses such as urban agriculture and community gardens.

These conditions exist in eastern South Philadelphia, as publicly-owned vacant lots lie side by side with neglected privately-owned vacant lots. This vacant land can be consolidated and put in service to the community according to their needs and priorities.

For more information please visit: <http://philadelphialandbank.org/index.html>

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS AND REGISTERED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

The city's 1960's Zoning code was revised from 2007-2012, and the new code was adopted during the current administration. Bringing things up to date with the changes of the last 60 years and planning in areas that experienced declines in population and industries are both difficult tasks. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission and the City Council are working towards aligning community

preferences with zoning changes. Thus, resident involvement is highly desired and encouraged with assistance from Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) and community development corporations (CDCs). These entities are key partners in achieving this ambitious goal.

We delved into the role of the Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) as well as their locations and boundaries across the city. These organizations receive the benefit of early notice of significant zoning proposals in their neighborhoods. Zoning changes have a widespread impact on communities and the built environment in general. Thus, learning about the processes these organizations use to inform residents and the way community members are involved became important for our research. In the South District, there have been some conflicts between RCOs related to the coverage and leadership of South 7th Street. These conflicts have made this area something of a no man's land. [see section 4.6](#)

Since community development corporations are involved in planning, zoning, and proposing new laws promoting economic and urban development in Philadelphia, we met with Beth McConnell, Policy Director at Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC). McConnell, who lives in the South District, discussed the way this entity and their members are pushing for equitable development in the city as well as the innovative tools they are promoting, the Land Bank in particular (see above). CDCs are actively involved in affordable housing development in many city districts. Unfortunately, the research revealed that there is no CDC actively involved in the eastern side of the South District. [see section 4.1](#)

During our fieldwork, we discovered that community organizations in the West and the Lower North Districts were highly organized and funded in comparison with the ones in the South District. We assumed that many of these initiatives have brought funding promoting the development of local plans and initiatives as well as the proliferation of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and community development

corporations (CDPs), but also assumed there was local competition between these organizations. We investigated these assumptions further, as well as the way the South District's community-based organizations have emerged and their challenges to organizing and bringing change in their community. [see section 3.1](#)

CDCs are actively involved in affordable housing development in many city districts. Unfortunately, the research revealed that there is no CDC actively involved in the eastern side of the South District.



In the South District, there have been some conflicts between RCOs related to the coverage and leadership of South 7th Street. These conflicts have made this area something of a no man's land.

2. SITE SELECTION PARAMETERS AND THE SOUTH SEVEN AREA

Cohabitation Strategies has developed 15 parameters to aid in the selection process of an area for any future Restored Spaces project. The parameters emerged from CohStra's qualitative and quantitative research in Philadelphia for the development of this report and from the project *Playgrounds for Useful Knowledge* for the action-research component. The selected urban area of interest was determined by an aggregation of particular criteria that emerged from the analysis of Philadelphia's social, cultural, economic, political, and spatial conditions. These parameters describe the South Seven. This urban area is framed by Washington Avenue to the north, South Broad Street to the west, Oregon Avenue to the south, and South Front Street to the east. The applied preliminary trans-disciplinary research framework consisted of site fieldwork; structured and open interviews; relational spatial analyses; GIS data distribution; statistical inference; power mapping; economic, historical and other bibliographical studies; as well as different forms of archival and action research.

These parameters can be used as a tool to engage with potential intervention sites and offer multiple segues to understanding an urban environment. By no means are these parameters absolute or all-encompassing, but each offers a unique entry point into a neighborhood. Applying these parameters provides a strong foundation to create more relevant and sustainable urban/cultural projects and interventions. Some of the key themes that emerge from the parameters manifest in physical elements and social conditions borne out of political and economic realities. These include the concentration of civic organizations and minorities, existing entrepreneurial economic activities and street markets, the impending economic and social transformation of an area, city-owned and vacant land, and

cultural manifestations including past Mural Arts Program involvement and tenure security.

1. DIVERGENT SOCIO-SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

Socio-spatial boundaries include physical, permeable, and invisible lines that constitute the different social, economic, and political territories in an urban environment. These layers dissolve and merge in various areas to generate divergent imaginaries that provide a fertile ground for the Restored Spaces Initiative and the Mural Arts Program to co-produce a project that captures them. In this context, imaginaries are particularly relevant, as they inform how spaces are lived in and experienced by the people occupying them. The tensions between these distinct imaginaries are heightened in areas where boundaries overlap or collide. Bringing these fissures to the forefront can be productive and can allow for more representative citizen engagement and sustained social practices that are initiated by the Restored Spaces Initiative.

Within the South Seven area, the following boundaries overlap:

1. Strong buffers against impending economic and social upscaling of an area.
2. Overlapping Registered Community Organizations and areas of civic activity.
3. Contrasting densities of vacant land.
4. Porous cultural boundaries and multiple ethnic identities.
5. Existing community plans and areas lacking formalized proposals.
6. Divergent city-wide initiatives and community visions.

These socio-spatial boundaries exist at multiple scales including the street, city, and region, and they reveal existing differences and invisible conflicts that are particularly important when implementing a new cultural project that can have lasting impact.

2. CONCENTRATED (SMALL) CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Civic participation can manifest in multiple ways, including collective cultural expression, community gardening, shadow economies, and social justice advocacy groups. These actions greatly contribute to activating spaces outside institutionalized or private practices.

Seeking spaces entangled with diverse social, cultural, and political activities beyond that of large area-based non-profit organizations allows for the inclusion of alternative endeavors and visions. For example, in contrast with other areas of Philadelphia, where large and long-standing nonprofits have an entrenched command over non-governmental development resources, the South Seven area is a more flexible and relatively unclaimed territory, ripe for development of and experimentation with non-institutionalized approaches. Such approaches can work towards addressing the socio-spatial problems that define the area. Some of the various small organizations existing in the South Seven include:

1. Passyunk Square Civic Association, PSCA, works to enhance the quality of life in the neighborhood, to preserve the neighborhood's unique historic character, and to promote a cohesive community of residents, businesses, and institutions.
2. East Passyunk Avenue Business Improvement District.
3. Southeast by Southeast, a project by Mural Arts celebrating the diversity and resilience of new immigrants from all over the world, focusing on South Philadelphia's growing Bhutanese and Burmese communities.
4. Growing Home Gardens, a community-led gardening group located in South Philadelphia that caters to the needs of refugee communities for Southeast Asia.
5. Juntos, a Latino immigrant community-led organization in Philadelphia fighting for the human rights of Hispanic and Latino community members as workers, parents, youth, and immigrants.
6. Friends of Mifflin Square Park, a community organization dedicated

- to creating events, restoring the park, and maintaining culturally diverse events at Mifflin Square.
7. Phra Buddha Ransi Temple, the Khmer Buddhist Temple located in the Mifflin Square area.
8. Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia, the foundational association for Cambodian individuals and families throughout Philadelphia.
9. Bhutanese American Organization-Philadelphia, a Bhutanese-run organization catering to the needs of Bhutanese community.
10. Free Library, Donatucci Branch. ([see figure 2.1.1](#)).

3. CONCENTRATED MINORITIES

When an area hosts various concentrated minorities, this signals its membership in a diverse set of economic, cultural, and civic activities. This condition allows for greater flexibility and access to shared agency over common resources, rather than putting forth a single dominating vision for the neighborhood.

These existing networks and organizational structures provide a strong foundation for partnerships on any future Restored Spaces projects with sustained engagement and impact. Diverse groups and membership also create favorable conditions for fostering projects involving and reflecting Philadelphia's heterogeneity, stepping away from homogenous cultural representations. Mural Arts' focus on projects that service a larger movement around equity, fairness, and progress across all of society can be particularly relevant in areas like the South Seven that house a wealth of cultural and ethnic difference.

4. ORGANIZED (SMALL) ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The presence of a local economy, one not necessarily tied to larger cycles of capital, can benefit a new arts project, as a local economy can reflect an existing network of self-sustaining entrepreneurship.

A local economy can be harnessed and expanded to reach



★★