

Urban fragmentation and reconfiguration: a multi-scale analysis of post-socialist Oradea

Daria Sarca, Iasmina Onescu

Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania

INTRODUCTION & AIM

Cities are complex spatial organisms shaped by long-term historical, political, socio-economic or geographic factors. Urban form reflects successive phases of development that correspond to broader historical and ideological contexts. Over time, a wide range of approaches has been developed to analyse urban form and urban context, including historical approaches, analytical, or recently historic urban landscape frameworks. However, the debate about post-socialist cities remain a long-term debate regarding the term *per se* or its urban form.

Urban development is intrinsically linked to the shifting political and economic paradigms of different historical epochs. In this context, urbanisation during communist era is understood as a comprehensive phenomenon rather than a mere architectural program. It was shaped by a complex interplay of political ideology, economic directives, and socio-cultural ambitions that defined the Communist Party's agenda. These objectives were profoundly reflected in the spatial organization and architectural language of the city. Ultimately, urban expansion was fueled by a confluence of rapid industrialization, the mass deployment of collective housing, and the pervasive "New Man" ideology.

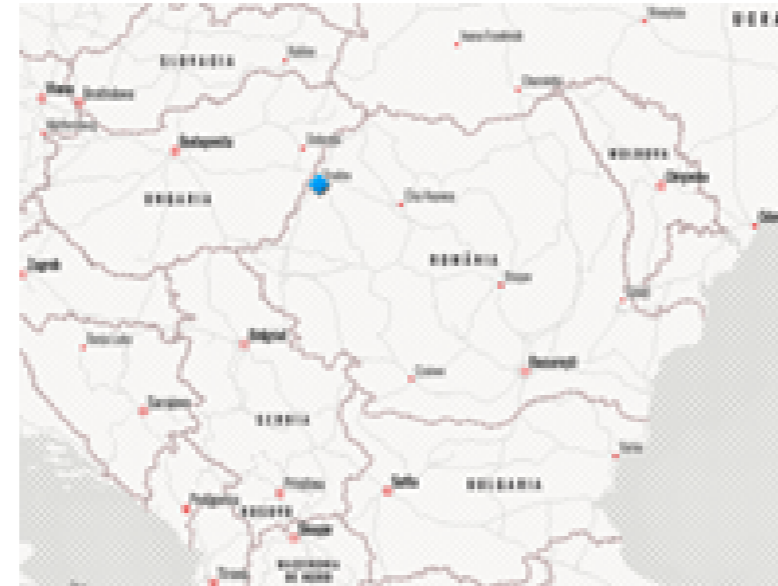


Fig. 1. Localization of Oradea city, Romania
source: author



Fig. 2. site construction in communist period, Oradea, Romania
source: <https://www.oradeaimag.ro/din-trecut/sistemizarea-oradei-intre-1960-1989/#foobox-1/0/Intersectia-Decebal-Dacia.jpg>



Fig. 3. public spaces and the new centre of the city in communist period, Oradea, Romania
source: <https://www.oradeaimag.ro/din-trecut/sistemizarea-oradei-intre-1960-1989/#foobox-1/3/Centrul-politico-administrativ-Plata-Gojdu-1024x671.jpg>

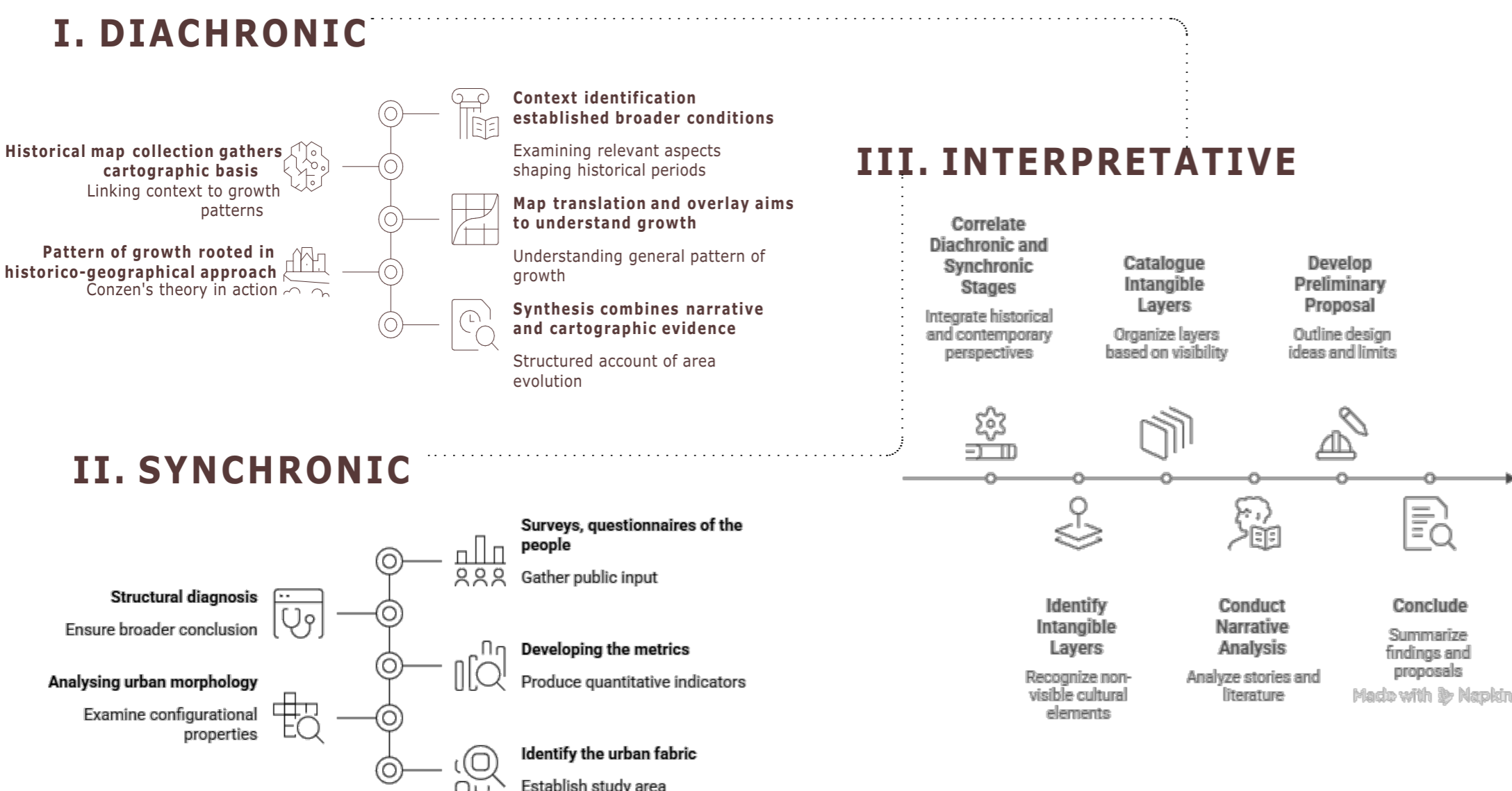
METHOD

Research design is constructed on three research questions:

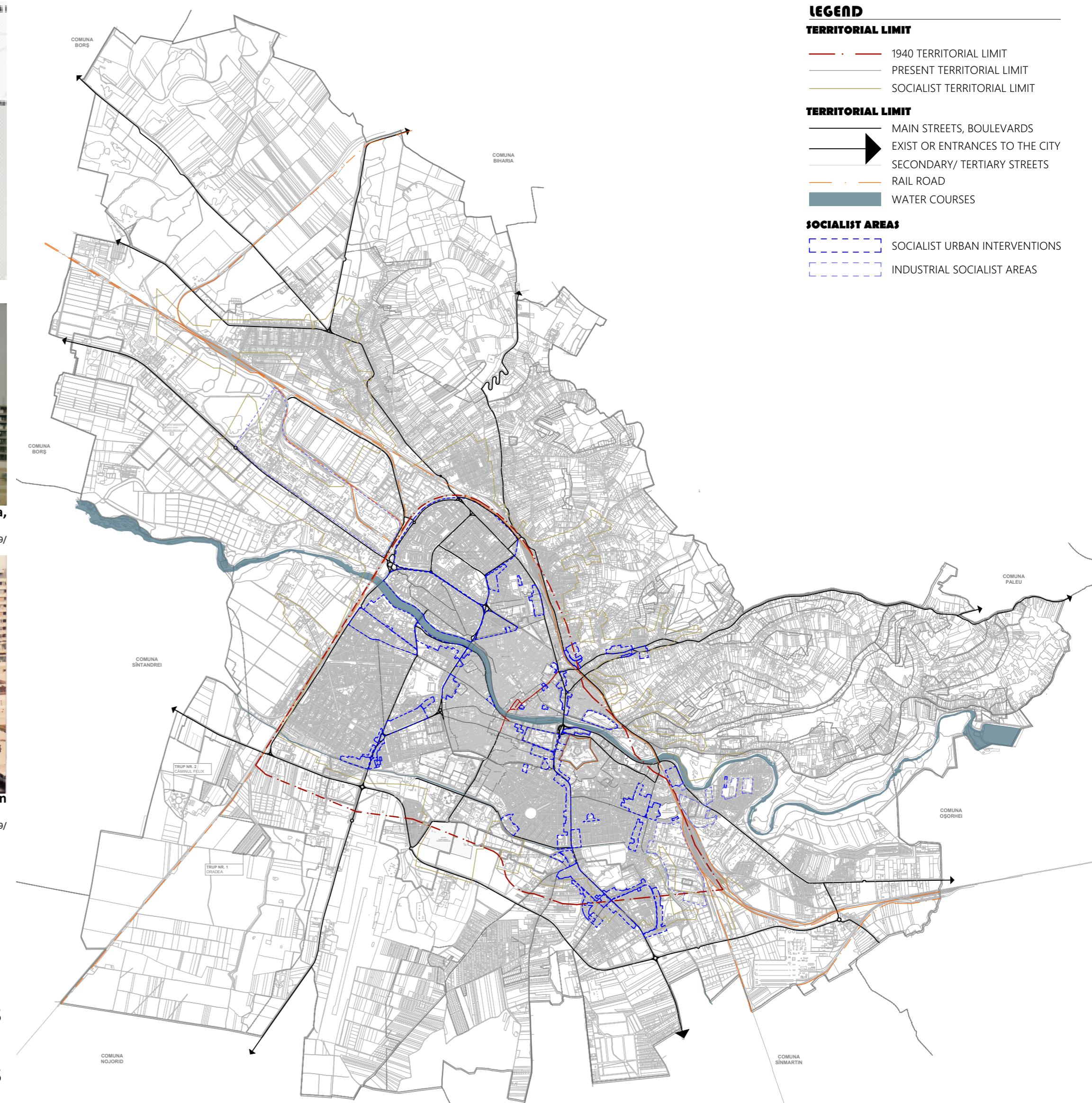
- RQ1: How can we understand the present city? How can we link the historical stages of development to the present form of the city?
RQ2: What cultural meanings are embedded in the spatial forms and historical layers of the urban landscape?
RQ3: How did Oradea develop from an urban perspective in the socialist Era?

Based on a systematic literature review, previous work consisted in developing a taxonomy regarding the urban planning examination of heritage areas. The findings are as stated: a great number of papers approached the subject in a diachronic manner, around the same number of documents approached the subject in an analytical way, and few articles related to an interpretative way of examination. The present study tries to apply the sequence as a pilot-case in order to test the viability of a framework developed around the taxonomy proposed. Fig 2. present the logical order of the proposed sequence: diachronic, synchronic and interpretative.

By systematically linking these stages - from historical development to present-day configurations and cultural meanings - this framework addresses a critical gap in urban studies, where traditional analysis often prioritises either quantitative spatial metrics or qualitative narratives, without a cohesive methodological bridge.



RESULTS & DISCUSSION



The transition post-1972 in Oradea serves as a profound case study in morphological disruption. The shift from a centralized but relatively expansive model to one of intensive systematization ignited a fundamental conflict between the inherited Austro-Hungarian urban fabric and the socialist fabric.

By demolishing existing low-density houses and gardens (such as the old Seleuş area or the fringes of the central core), the regime effectively erased the individualistic "city-garden" character of Oradea to impose the collective logic of the micraoraion.

As observed in the diachronic mapping of 1940 versus the post-socialist era, the "remodeling" was not limited to buildings. The canalization of the Crişul Repede and the shifting of railway footprints were necessary precursors to squeezing high-density blocks into a restricted buildable perimeter. This created contemporary "urban barriers"—monumental boulevards like Dacia or Magheru that, while offering grand socialist vistas, effectively severed the pedestrian permeability of the historical city.

The socialist planners did not merely expand the city to reach these points; they "swallowed" them, replacing their organic, radial-rural morphology with a rigid, functionalist grid designed for maximum sun exposure and collective efficiency. This created the "fringe belt" disruptions that modern urban planners in Oradea still struggle to reconcile today, as the city attempts to re-connect these densified "islands" back into a cohesive urban palimpsest.

CONCLUSION

The paper addresses a structural problem in the HUL approach, that is the absence of a unified methodology for interpreting tangible and intangible layers. While classifying existing methodologies and sub-category fields of disciplines, a three-step process has been proposed, with the aim of establishing a structural order that addresses what to analyse and in what order.

However, the paper lacks in addressing the city from an analytical approach. While examining the data, it became increasingly clear that the sequence must be iterative.

FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES

Future work should test the applicability of the study at all stages and test the iteration process.

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