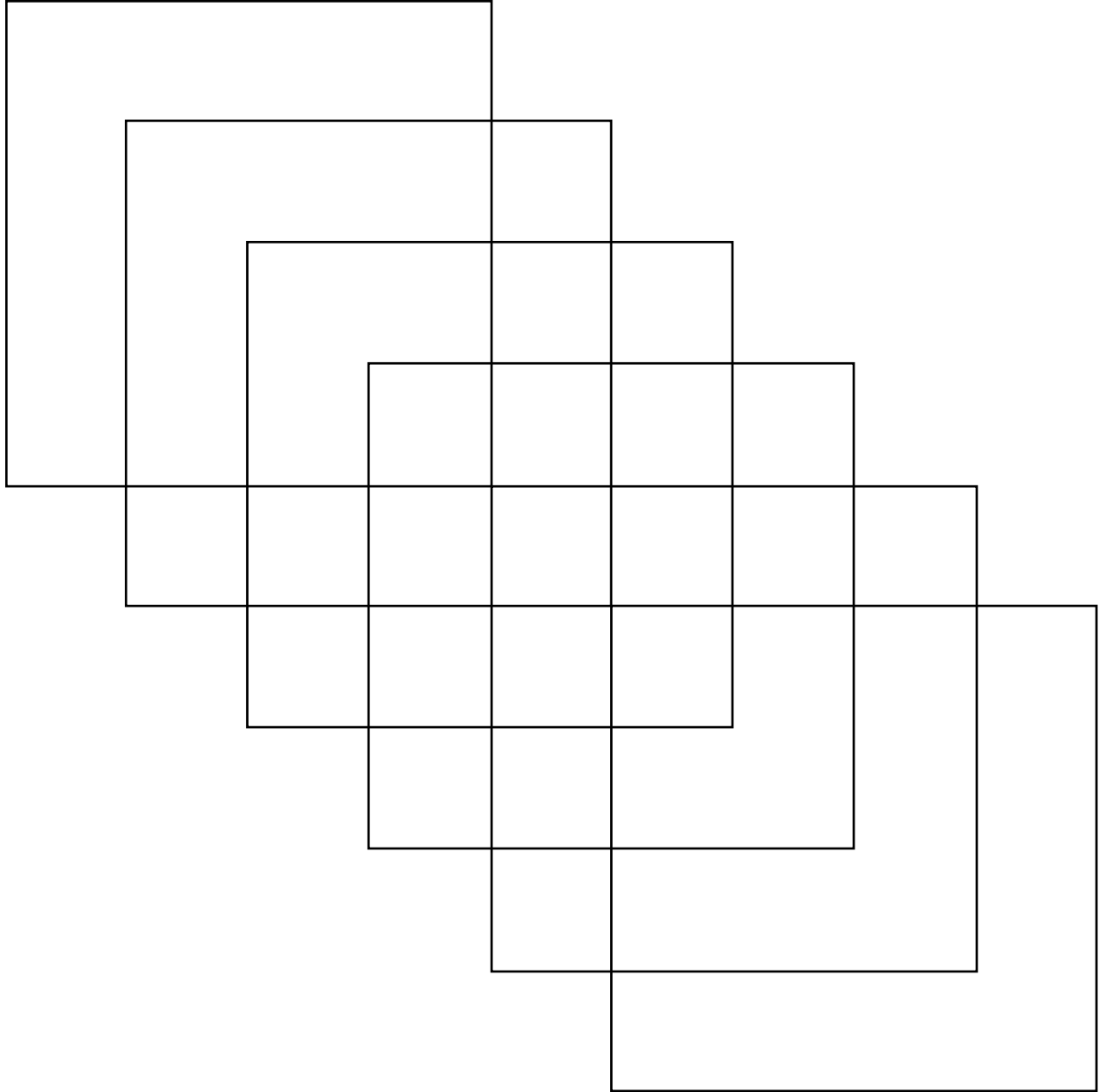


The Invisible City

**Neoliberal Landscapes in
Post-Industrial Canadian Cities**



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Laidlaw Research Proposal

Research Question

How does the establishment of Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) policy shape a post-industrial city's built environment and public realm?



Abandoned buildings are a common symptom of the post-industrial transition. The structure above is located in the heart of Canada's automotive manufacturing lands in Windsor, Ontario. / Photo by Author

RATIONALE

In contemporary urban life, the global market has become a ubiquitous part of the everyday.

From the consumption of imported groceries to clothing worn and devices used. While these material goods are a highly concrete aspect of international trade, other factors manifested in sociopolitical patterns and decisions affect cities around the world. The market renders some actors in the urban environment highly visible while others remain invisible: seamlessly operating the machine that manufactures and exports the components of our daily lives. Such a pattern is manifested in cities as well.

Today's cities exist under the pretense of neoliberalism, the hegemonic domination of the free market beyond the economic realm (Harvey, 2007; Walks & Raco, 2020). Spatially manifested in the privatization of formerly public places and infrastructure, neoliberal policy and planning allow major players in the market to make integral decisions formerly consolidated by democratically-elected governments. Patterns of neoliberal urbanization occur differently across global contexts; however, inequality on the basis of wealth remains a consistent marker of the free-market ideology (Kaminer et. al, 2011). Where global cities undergo waves of investment, manifesting in trends of gentrification and housing crises, their invisible counterparts remain under the radar. Post-industrial cities, processing much of the wealth directed within larger urban centers, have experienced economic disinvestment and decline since the end of the Fordist era. These cities have remained integral nodes within a global network of logistics that ensure the steady growth of the free market (Waldheim & Berger, 2008; Cowen, 2010).

An urban regional structure within the global neoliberal structure is the free-trade zone. The zone can be defined as a geographically designated area that exists under special jurisdiction to encourage international trade (Sousa, 2018, p. 4-5). It is often

critiqued for its 'enclavistic' nature (Easterling, 2014; Felsen, 2013), as its local policy and legal frameworks allow them to develop independently from surrounding urban conditions, while common arrangements, such as tax incentives and breaks, divert public funds back into the hands of international corporations.

In the Canadian context, policy for the zone was first tested in 2008 before being broadly established as a national economic strategy in 2013 (Sousa, 2018; Ferguson & Steverango, 2013). This marks a landmark shift in Canadian economic policy, as the nation adopts a standardized blueprint for logistical processing and free trade. Such policy promises the creation of thousands of local jobs while drawing foreign investment and optimizing existing flows.

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Within a decade of enactment, Canada has created sixteen Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) points, many of which have a history as industrial cities. This is significant, as FTZ point status will allow these post-industrial areas to attract greater investment while taking advantage of underutilized or abandoned industrial infrastructures. Windsor, Ontario is especially notable, due to its critical location on the American border, as well as its history of automobile manufacturing in relation to Detroit. Windsor's local economy processes roughly a quarter of all Canadian imports and exports, ranging from \$500-750 million daily (Sousa, 2018); however, the local economy remains disinvested with large percentages of the urban population below the poverty line (Kotsis, 2022). As such, this project seeks to visualize the flow and spatial distribution of wealth within the region itself, questioning how much of this privatized wealth is re-invested in Windsor's public sector through a critical examination of infrastructure and public space.

METHOD & TIMELINE

This study will develop a visual analysis of the study area by combining statistical data, historical research, and morpho-typological analysis of selected urban conditions to evaluate the evolution of public infra-structural space since the establishment of FTZ point status in Windsor, ON. The timeline below outlines a three-part plan, consisting of initial preparation and analysis, field research, and a final stretch of analysis to evaluate collected data and draw connections.

Preparation (Weeks 1-2)

This study will begin with a literature review of existing scholarship on (1) current logistical landscapes and post-industrial cities, (2) urban trends in foreign trade zones, (3) methods of spatial analysis, focusing on actor-network theory as a relevant discursive tool for describing the relationship between infrastructure and the production of public space (Brenner et al, 2012; Easterling, 2014). Census and neighborhood data will then be analyzed for socioeconomic trends, alongside the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and mapping techniques to identify the spatial manifestation of these patterns.

Field Research (Weeks 3-4)

Site observations will be crucial to this research. An intensive two-week study of Windsor will allow me adequate time (60-80 hours) to evaluate experiential dimensions of the space from a ground-up perspective. I will be visiting key sites identified in prior research, photographing, drawing, and grouping these into architectural typologies by program and form—such as industrial buildings, public housing, and foreclosures—in order to identify broader urban morphologies—produced by vacancy, land speculation, and fragmentation (H. Park & S. van Berkel, 2011).

Further Analysis & Representation (Weeks 5-6)

Upon return to Toronto, I will consolidate my site findings and prior research to draw comprehensive conclusions about short-term patterns in Windsor's development.

OUTCOMES, APPLICATIONS, & RESOURCES

Through this research, I will identify patterns of existing economic inequality, as well as ways in which these discrepancies may have been alleviated or exacerbated by Windsor's FTZ point status. These findings will be combined with a field guide: a visual catalog of architectural and infrastructural typologies that increases public awareness and literacy of this FTZ's spatial code.

International & Interdisciplinary Implications

This study is inherently connected to a global trade network, making this research methodology potentially replicable across Ontario, Canada, and the world. Using a diverse array of methods from social sciences and design also draws connections between these disciplines, addressing relevant discourses from urban geography and architecture.

Research Advisors

I am excited to work with two professors within my faculty—both with teaching and research experience in spatial and visual techniques and backgrounds in urbanism and architecture. Prof. Lukas Pauer and Prof. Roberto Damini will meet with me on alternating weeks to discuss the findings of my research and analysis, as well as guide my conclusions.

Note on later topic change: Building on the topic of this proposal, my subsequent research looked more specifically at one building typology and sector within the broader industrial ecology of Windsor, Ontario. Many of the literature read for this proposal was helpful in developing investigative methods and frameworks.

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