



# Framing a counter-city: The story of *Sheffield Otherwise*

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## ABSTRACT

Urban planning and design have often been complicit in perpetuating the systems of oppression embedded in colonial, capitalist, hetero-patriarchal, and racist spatial structures. Amid the current civilizational crisis, how can we enable possibilities for emancipatory and counter-hegemonic planning (Friedmann, 1989) and design? In order for new possibilities to emerge, we need to unmake what we know and look for radical approaches and practices that allow us to understand our responsibility to create counter-cities that nurture radical hope. This article presents the project *Sheffield Otherwise*, an exploration using research-design practices to shape a counter-city. Through a learning alliance, we partner with two community organisations working with diasporic and queer communities to reveal and frame their legacies and stories as part of the living heritage of Sheffield. We use counter-archiving and counter-mapping methodologies to engage with these counterpublics that have been excluded from official narratives, urban policies, and public space representations. In doing so, this project challenges hegemonic narratives about stigma and questions hegemonic planning and design practices that often lack understanding of the spatial heritage of diverse communities. Based on this experience, we argue that Counter-City constitutes a radical approach to imagining spatial justice that requires crystallising counter-hegemonic planning and design practices with subaltern counterpublics using methods such as counter-archiving and counter-mapping.

## 1. Introduction

“The future is no one’s property; no need to shackle it. Not otherwise as in, the political horizon awaits; otherwise as in, a firm embrace of the unknowable; the unknowable as in, a well of infinity I want us to fall down together...Otherwise: the future is now and all those political promises we make to one another, all the wishing and hoping in earnest”

(Olufemi, 2021, p. 34)

Olufemi’s take on the future requires us to look at our past and the practices that shape our present. Urban planning and design have often been complicit in perpetuating the systems of oppression embedded in colonial, capitalist, hetero-patriarchal, and racist spatial structures (Escobar, 2019). For new possibilities to emerge, we need to unmake what we know, to look for radical approaches and practices that allow us to understand our responsibilities in creating counter-cities that nurture radical hope. This article presents a collective reflection on the design-based research project *Sheffield Otherwise* as a critical urban pedagogical intervention (Ortiz & Millan, 2022) to explore strategies that shape

urban design practice through different lenses.

Drawing on (Tonkiss, 2013), we understand urban design in a multidimensional fashion, as an ensemble of practices taking place in a wide domain –involving political infrastructures, social institutions, policy processes, economic relations, distribution of wealth, legal entitlements and, we add, counter-hegemonic dynamics of right-claiming in urban space. Urban space here refers not only to its physical dimension but to the interactions and interrelations that comprise it. Through this understanding, we focus on the potential to allow and enhance the co-existence of heterogeneous trajectories and narratives, while being always in a state of becoming (Massey, 2005). That is, “the stratified space [– the palimpsest –] in which relationships are crafted and reciprocal adaptation between the territory and population occur” (Viganò, 2020, p. 169).

In engaging with such complexity and multiplicity, and with the power relations embedded in the interactions that produce urban space, we embrace Rosner’s ethos, seeing design as “investigative and activist, personal and culturally situated, responsive and responsible” (2018, p. 1). From this perspective, *Sheffield Otherwise* emerged as a pedagogical

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exploration of the possibilities for research-design practice to shape a counter-city. We imagine possibilities for emancipatory and counter-hegemonic planning (Friedmann, 1989) and design by focusing on the place-based living heritage of diaspora and queer communities in the UK context. We argue that a counter-city constitutes a radical approach to imagining spatial justice that requires crystallising counter-hegemonic planning and design practices with counterpublics using methods such as counter-archiving and counter-mapping.

This article is driven by the question “How do we recalibrate learning settings to imagine counter-cities?” If we want to understand the potential that the concept of a counter-city entails, we need to revisit the genealogy of similar efforts from the urban planning and design fields and expand the epistemological and methodological repertoires that can be explored. To do so we first engage with critical design approaches to contest Western-centric framings around spatial imagination (Abdulla, 2018; Escobar, 2019; Fry & Nocek, 2021; Mareis & Paim, 2021; Sitas, 2020; Tunstall, 2023). Second, we draw from long-term debates around the transformative potential of counter-hegemonic planning (Friedmann, 1987, 1989, 1992; Purcell, 2009), insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2009; Sandercock, 1998; Swyngedouw, 2014), or the interrelation of both (Beard, 2002, 2003; Friedmann, 2000, 2003; Irazábal & Foley, 2010; Siemiatycki, 2012). Third, we engage with the notion of living heritage from critical heritage studies to challenge the narrative about often stigmatised communities and places (Harrison, 2013; Meskell, 2015; Poulos, 2014; Smith, 2006, 2012; Wijesuriya, 2015).

Ethico-politically we are committed to an engaged urbanism (Campkin & Duijzings, 2016) that operates in solidarity with stigmatised groups. Through a learning alliance (Moreno et al., 2020; Ortiz, 2022a), we, as the UCL MSc Building and Urban Design in Development [BUDD] partner with *Resolve Collective*, an interdisciplinary design collective and two local community organisations, *SADACCA*, working with Caribbean diasporic publics, and *Gut Level* working with queer communities in Sheffield. We use the notion of counterpublics to frame the organisations’ ethos. Even though counterpublic as a concept is contested (DeVerteuil & Kiener, 2022), it allows us to pinpoint groups that “have been structurally and discursively excluded from the dominant (often bourgeois, masculinist, heterosexual, white, and/or ‘western’) public sphere(s)” (Gordy, 2014, p. 1). *Sheffield Otherwise* aimed to reveal and frame their legacies and stories as part of the living heritage of the city by focusing on the living heritage of diaspora and queer communities around the continuities of systems of care, community connections, use and livelihoods, and memory. In doing so, we challenge narratives about stigma, making visible the practices and knowledges that these communities have used to produce space and to navigate the territories they inhabit. We use a research-based design to link counter-archiving and counter-mapping methodologies to engage with these counterpublics that have been left out from official narratives, urban policies, and public space representations. These methodologies allow us to explore how mapping and archiving practices can become tools to counter stereotyping, discrimination, and deprivation.

This article is structured in five parts. The first frames the notion of a counter-city by linking debates on critical design, counter-hegemonic planning, and critical heritage approaches to living heritage. The second delves into the methodological approaches to engage with counterpublics through learning alliances exploring jointly counter-mapping and counter-archives practices. The third explains the context of the *Sheffield Otherwise* project, exposing the city as a site to contest heteronormativity and racism. The fourth analyses the empirical findings of the research-based design project on the counter-archiving of Caribbean diasporic practices of care and memory and the counter-mapping of queer do-it-yourself spaces around joy and sound. Finally, the conclusion presents some lessons on how to shape counter-cities for imagining collective urban futures. These lessons are our contribution to conceptually frame and anchor the notion of a counter-city in an empirical reality of two different counterpublics at the margins of a northern city, and the concrete pedagogical mechanisms used to imagine the city

otherwise.

## 2. Framing the counter-city

In this section, we explain how we have conceptualised the idea of the counter-city by linking three intertwined intellectual strands: critical design, counter-hegemonic planning, and critical heritage. These strands, from different foci, both question and advance possibilities for the emancipatory transformation of normalised structures of oppression.

### 2.1. Critical design to decolonise spatial imagination

Building the notion of a counter-city taps into the potential to disrupt the spaces produced by a global neoliberal colonial design. Initial efforts have discussed the praxis and pedagogy of Critical Design as a praxis that “uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions about the role products play in everyday life. Its opposite is affirmative design; design that reinforces the status quo” (Dunne & Raby, 2007, p. 1). Similarly, critical and speculative design (CSD) has been defined as a way to generate new methods of design that are decentred from market value or as a hegemonic solution for contemporary problems (Johannessen et al., 2019). Ward argues that CSD “acts as an approach to furnish students with a set of skills and experiences, allowing them to understand the role, power and process of design” (2019, p. np). However, those efforts fall short of addressing the imperatives of tackling colonial harms and the complexities of the urban realm.

Critical design from a decolonial perspective is grounded in the premise that “all design creates a ‘world-within-the-world’ in which we are designed by what we design as subjects. We are all designers, and we are all designed” (Escobar, 2018, p. 133). Urban design has played a significant role in shaping the spatial reproduction of privilege and oppression, yet a recalibrated practice is imperative to re-imagine how spatial justice can be achieved in tandem with racial justice. The emergent field of critical design from a decolonial perspective offers opportunities to experiment and practice design “beyond the dominant Western solutionist and anthropocentric model of thought” (Mareis & Paim, 2021, p. 12). Addressing this challenge entails spatializing actions of solidarity and interconnectedness as well as the assertions of cultural self and collectivism that tend to travel with people through global manifestations of alternative world-making.

Critical design urges us to “transform design itself and its role within the shifting realities of a planetary crisis” (Fry & Nocek, 2021, p. 3) and align its inquiries with decolonisation struggles and the risks of its banalization. As Abdulla reminds us, decolonising design entails “a subversion and transformation of Eurocentric thinking and knowledge; a knowledge produced *with* and *from* rather than *about*” (2018, p. 89). This implies a practice that engages with the collective will and voices of traditionally marginalised groups and facilitates the prefiguration of other spatial imaginations for self-determination. This practice addresses the harms of coloniality “by recentring its theory and practice in global Indigenous cultures and histories” (Tunstall, 2023, p. 4) and thinks together how to enact and foster emancipatory spatial practices grounded in poetics of place and artefactual making. For these forms of practice to emerge, transformative pedagogical projects become the central arenas for rehearsing ‘becoming otherwise’ while working with other ways of knowing (Abdulla, 2018; Escobar, 2007; Ortiz, 2022c; Sitas, 2020). Learning from this perspective and framing a counter-city requires drawing from a collective spatial imagination otherwise that can be fostered through critical pedagogy.

### 2.2. Counter-hegemonic planning to critique the status quo of city-making

The counter in “counter-city” refers explicitly to disarticulating the material and symbolical hegemonic formations of city-making. Several decades ago, Friedmann called for counter-hegemonic planning as a

form of active resistance to the forces that have subjugated life and focus on collective action in the self-production of life and livelihood. From this perspective, minoritized communities operate as active political subjects in “a form of collective resistance, supported... but nevertheless autonomous in its search for its own ‘development from within’” (1989, p. 16). More recently, it has been argued that collaborative approaches in planning give political legitimacy to neoliberal powers and therefore, social movements should be considered the main counter-hegemonic planners (Purcell, 2009).

Similarly, Sandercock has framed insurgent planning histories as essential to bringing the erasures of modernist planning to the foreground. These stories expose the repertoire of insurgent planning including “mobilising constituencies, protests, strikes, acts of civil disobedience, community organisation, professional advocacy and research, publicity, as well as the proposing and drafting of new laws and new programs of social intervention” (1998, p. 204). In later discourses, Mirafab (2004, 2009) proposes insurgent planning as a realm of political imagination that can contribute to decolonizing<sup>1</sup> the future by moving from the binary of invited/invented spaces of engagement. The main focus of insurgent planning is the agency and epistemic privilege of marginalised social groups (Huq, 2022) which, in a counter-city, involves learning from the context-specific practices that challenge historic oppressions embedded in space.

### 2.3. Critical heritage to decentre what is valued

Framing of the notion of the counter-city requires us to decentre what and who is valued in the city-making processes. By focusing on heritage, which often attaches ‘belonging’ to some but ‘not-belonging’ to others, we question what identity expressions are valued in city-making. Building on critical heritage understanding of heritage as a political resource (Smith, 2012) and its concern with the recognition and dissonance of the plurality and diversity of values and understandings of heritage (Smith, 2006, 2012; Winter, 2013), we frame heritage as an act of resistance, a generative tool for power beyond the nation-state (Silva & Santos, 2012). Issues of power and prestige, and how heritage became a source of power, are at the core of critical heritage (Harrison, 2013; Meskell, 2015). This approach is also concerned with minorities and indigenous groups’ rights and how the recognition or claiming of their heritage is a tool for them to gain and generate power (De Cesari, 2010; Elshahed, 2015; Franquesa, 2013; Panetta, 2020; Silva, 2011).

Critical heritage offers “living heritage” as a concept to challenge the narrative about often stigmatised communities and places. Different from a material and values-based approach to heritage conservation, the “living heritage approach concentrates on the community’s original connection with heritage (continuity), and safeguards heritage within this connection” (Poulios, 2014, p. 23). Thus, living heritage emphasises the intangible connection of the community with heritage “even if in certain occasions the fabric might be harmed” (2014, p. 23). The approach focuses on the recognition of the role of the community in the care of heritage allowing communities to become active political subjects of a wider process of socio-cultural change. Wijesuriya (2015) asserts that living heritage can be characterised by continuity: continuity of use (as a function); continuity of community connections; continuity of cultural expressions (both tangible and intangible) and continuity of care (through traditional or established means). Thus, a counter-city focuses on the living heritage of the plurality of spatial practices of marginalised collectives.

<sup>1</sup> This idea also resonates with different efforts to frame decolonial planning (Barry & Agyeman, 2020; Porter & Barry, 2016; Porter & Yiftachel, 2019; Rankin, 2010; Roy, 2008; Sweet, 2021; Watson, 2003).

### 3. Engaging with counterpublics

The Sheffield Otherwise learning alliance brings together BUDD, Resolve Collective, SADACCA, and Gut Level in a strategic partnership to experiment with research-based design approaches. To unpack how to recalibrate learning settings to imagine counter-cities, this alliance serves as a pedagogical tool to learn from diasporic and queer communities’ legacies and stories to question traditional practices of urban design which often lack understanding of the spatial heritage of diverse communities. Furthermore, this specific alliance functions as “a collective space for enabling an ecology of knowledges as a learned struggle” (Ortiz, 2022b, p. 408). A space working towards cognitive justice (Gaventa & Bivens, 2014) and seeking the creation of alternative forms of participation and speech to oppose traditional public discourses about these counterpublics’ experiences of urban transformation, affordability, livelihoods, and gentrification in Sheffield. Rather than thinking of an inclusionary city where stigmatised groups are ‘assimilated’, the lenses of counterpublics allow us to embrace their dissent and the ways in which these groups challenge systemic spatial injustices.

In 2022, for over 3 months, we engaged with the partner organisations to agree on the terms of reference of the learning alliance and on the preparation of the 2-weeks engagement practice that took place in April–May 2022. As part of this learning alliance, we worked with students to get familiar with the conceptual grounds and the partner organisations’ priorities and challenges. In BUDD<sup>2</sup> the priority is to explore how to co-create spatial strategies that question how to decolonise our scholarship and practice while fostering spatial, epistemic and racial justice. This is reflected in the ethical review process we shaped along with both partners and students while abiding by three key principles: confidentiality, informed consent and benefit-not-harm.<sup>3</sup> We emphasised how the terms of reference of the partnership were drafted in a dialogic fashion across all involved parties, and how the ‘benefit’ dimension emerged precisely from such a process of co-production of knowledge, ultimately leading to designing strategies conducive to raising public awareness, achieving empowerment, and to peer-to-peer urban learning. We will quote these strategies at length in the final part of the article.

Resolve Collective considered that “sharing knowledges and experiences between places is for us a critical way in which we can work to value local tacit knowledges as the most popular form of ‘placemaking’” (personal communication, February 20, 2022). For SADACCA the main interest is “to enable our members to see and feel their worth and contribution to this city... To reaffirm our belongingness to where many call ‘home’... Being forcibly displaced to the plantations means some of us still have issues of identity” (personal communication, February 20, 2022). For Gut Level, their priority is to secure a “place, more specifically an accessible place, (both physically and financially) is imperative to build a community, particularly of marginalised genders and the queer community who don’t necessarily feel safe in other spaces” (Partner from Gut Level, 2022). SADACCA and Gut Level shared the threat of eviction of the historic buildings they were using and securing a stable source for their livelihoods. Hence, the broader purpose of the co-creation of spatial strategies had also a very concrete imperative to address those challenges. In parallel, through learning portfolios, students were invited to reflect constantly on their positionalities in relation to the challenges encountered in Sheffield’s contested spaces, and as a key component of our approach to ethics.

We frame our partner organisations as counterpublics. That is, a

<sup>2</sup> For the BUDD programme this alliance occurred as part of the module focusing on a Practice Engagement. This module is an embodied experience of knowledge co-production to advance spatial justice. It helps to understand the connections between different communities to enhance learning processes by connecting teaching, research and ‘real world’ communities.

<sup>3</sup> As per DPU departmental ethics review framework.

parallel space where traditionally excluded, stigmatised, oppressed groups come together to conceive alternative forms of describing themselves and the social reality as they experience it (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Gordy, 2014). In doing so, these counterpublics engage in 'other' forms of association, deliberation, practice, etc., that oppose dominant discourses embedded in colonial, capitalist, heteropatriarchal, and racist structures. They "expand the range of people who have access to public spheres, and expand the available styles and topical concerns of public address." (Iveson, 2007, p. 25). By understanding our partners as counterpublics, we reveal issues of stigmatisation and exclusion from urban life and from the production of the contemporary urban space in Sheffield. We also recognise strategies and manifestations of "everyday equalities" (Fincher et al., 2019) that emphasise spaces of care as a foundation for asserting their political demands and for developing diverse forms of public address. By engaging in a learning alliance with them, we participate in the circulation of counter-discourses that "formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) while co-creating strategies for spatial justice that challenge narratives about stigmatised communities and places and question modern colonial approaches to urban design and heritage. Fig. 1 shows how we operationalise our framing of the counter-city and guide our pedagogical intervention.

We had a 2-week exchange in Sheffield where 4 teams with members of the 4 organisations were formed, two working with each local partner. We started and closed our engagement with open events presenting queer black poets to set the tone of our encounter. We use a research-based design approach to link counter-mapping and counter-archiving methodologies with a threefold intent. This approach consists of an iterative process of systematic engagement with a core urban challenge that is informed by collective reflexivity and is driven by spatial imaginations (Astolfo et al., 2015; Hoadley & Campos, 2022). First, to understand our partner's identity formation based on their experiences of oppression and exclusion from dominant spheres. We did this by joining SADACCA and Gut Level in their weekly activities open to the public, having conversations around the spatialities of everyday activities, and

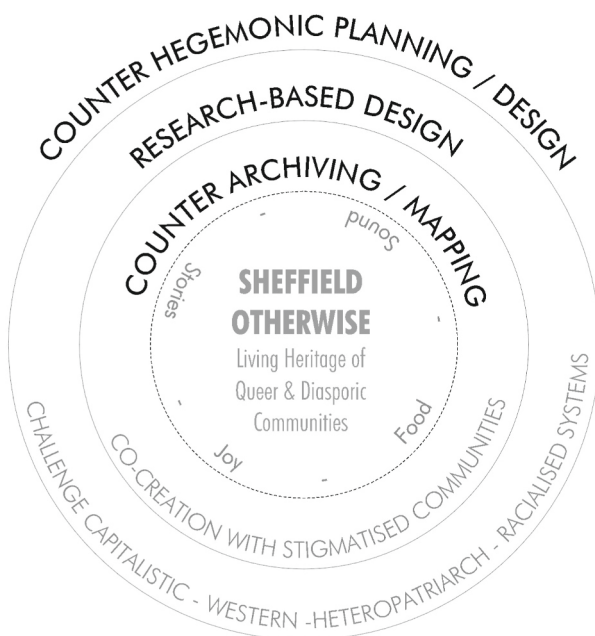
holding open events with guests that embodied different experiences of the creative drive of diasporic and queer communities. Second, to document the ways in which they seek to transform discourses of stigmatisation while challenging and resisting hegemonic structures, we set up several sessions for making sense of the narratives about what partners valued, and the empirical grounds to frame the co-creation of strategies. Third, to explore how mapping and archiving practices can become tools to counter stereotyping, discrimination, and deprivation; and to reveal productive tensions that could articulate not only particular identities but also particularly grounded spatialities, we participated in guided walks to see the often-invisible relevant spaces for queer and diasporic communities and engage in artefact making. These spatialities retain counterpublics experiences and intangible connections to the territory and recognise their existing cultural practices, knowledge, and skills as a basis for imagining socio-spatial strategies of intervention.

Through counter-mapping, we challenge the logics of ordering and fixed geographies and modes of representation that do not account for temporality, experiences, memory, relations, stories, narratives, etc., (Awan, 2020; Maharawal & McElroy, 2018). By documenting the experiences and practices of those who inhabit space we expose broader relations of power and collaboration within, and between, communities as well as with other urban actors that are at the centre of the production of space. From this perspective, the products of counter-mapping are no longer final fixed representations, but tools to weave the experiences of the past into a multiplicity of imagined futures. We worked with Gut Level on tracing queer joy and safety. We focused on their queer DIY living heritage's continuity of use and community connections. Continuity of use for Gut Level is about their identity and livelihoods that are fundamentally linked to the spatialisation of their joy through sound. The continuity of community connections also includes other forms of collectivism that allow Gut Level to envision and create networks of safe spaces.

Through counter-archiving we seek to re-centre life and living heritage based on relational forms of thinking and being that allow for the co-existence and recognition of multiple experiences of the past exposing dialogues across generations (Imagining Futures, 2019). These dialogues constitute outlets to disrupt conventional narratives through accounts of everyday interactions, a polyphony of (hi)stories, and the multiplicity of spatial practices often silenced. These accounts are vital to mobilise emancipatory transformation and through alternative archival practices, they can expand the limits of what is considered heritage while devising strategies to create new archives outside of the framework of Modernity (Muniz-Reed, 2017; Trouillot & Carby, 2015). We worked with SADACCA on the accessibility of a broader audience of the Bantu Archive Programme (BAP) and the role that food plays in community care. We focused on their diasporic living heritage's continuity of cultural expressions and care. For SADACCA, continuity of cultural expressions is a continuous practice of weaving living memories with the multiple trajectories of their past. The continuity of care in this case is traced through food and its role in supporting and connecting the socio-spatial structures of care within SADACCA.

Central to our methodological design was to document and publicly disseminate issues that are relevant to challenging narratives about stigma while contributing to mobilising our partners' counter-hegemonic project through discursive as well as creative contestation. This public conversation, debating, engagement, and acknowledging of the projects' collaborative process and outcomes had a threefold upshot. First, it helped expose our partners' concerns as issues of wider common concern. Second, it questioned the traditional roles of experts in identifying and defining heritage and the use of creative and participatory processes to trace living heritage practices. Third, it opened spaces for self-reflection and stirred the partners' imagination of what a counter-city could be.

Overall, these methods offer a way to expose a critique of hegemonic values from the standpoint of our partner counterpublics and their experiences as marginalised groups in society. Starting from



**Fig. 1.** Framing of the Sheffield Otherwise project: Living Heritage of Queer & Diaspora communities. The framework relies on counter-archiving and counter-mapping to pursue Research-Based Design.

Source: Own elaboration.



“Documentation and Recognition” of a particular layer, memory or asset that is worth highlighting; we move through a “Co-creation” stage that involves partner counterpublics in new forms of documentation and design intervention; towards an “Intervention” that takes a particular layer of the everyday practices as a tool of transformation. Through this process, we show that different dimensions of methods based on the different forms and intensities of participation can shift the attention to strategies that allow our partners to exercise a variety of options for the preservation of their living heritage.

#### 4. Exploring Sheffield: a site to contest heteronormativity and racism

Dominant narratives of heritage sites tend to reproduce heteropatriarchal and racist assumptions. Consider, for example the countless squares in the UK that exhibit colonialist's statues as a symbol of national identity. Yet, in times of reckoning with racial justice and gendered oppressions, heritage also serves minorities and indigenous groups to advance their rights, gain recognition and generate power (De Cesari, 2010; Panetta, 2020; Silva, 2011). *Sheffield Otherwise* looks at living heritage as an approach to uncovering the legacies of diaspora and queer communities. The collaboration with Resolve Collective, SADACCA and Gut Level has allowed a meaningful engagement with local communities, witnessing the struggles for recognition that are faced by particularly marginalised groups such as the African-Caribbean diaspora and the LGBTQ+ community. The role that these organisations play in working with diaspora and queer communities across the city is crucial considering Sheffield's significant inequality between neighbourhoods (see Fig. 2). They contribute to the activation and re-imagining of counterpublic spaces that foster new social narratives, such as queer safe spaces and infrastructures of care and the transmission of memory. Despite not often being considered an unequal city, in Sheffield, 116 neighbourhoods feature among England's 20 % most deprived on income and 81 neighbourhoods are part of the country's 20 % least deprived (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Understanding how the work of grass-roots organisations sits within a city-wide tapestry of racial disparity and socio-economic inequality is of key significance to this project's research aims.

Sheffield, also called the Steel City, is known for the legacy of its metallurgy industry. Being geographically surrounded by hills and green areas, the city has been built on the hillsides, facing the city centre inwards. Sheffield played a crucial role during the Industrial Revolution by gaining an international reputation for metallurgy, becoming the country's industrial powerhouse during the 18th Century. The economic recession of 1973–1975 hampered the metallurgy industry of the city producing significant negative impacts on socio-economic conditions. For years, the industrial built heritage of the city was neglected, particularly the ex-industrial areas on the east side of the city. These areas still struggle to overcome neglect and have remained deprived compared to the “historically wealthier and cleaner west” (Mears et al., 2019). Such a strong west-east gradient of spatial inequalities is very much present in the current configuration of the city, and it traces the contours of a complex landscape from both sides of the economic dividing line (Taylor, 2019).

After a long period of recession, Sheffield has seen a revival of its economy, and several declining industrial areas are now thriving through redevelopment projects and new business models. However, existing urban policies fail to recognise minority groups such as the Afro-Caribbean and queer communities as active makers of the city legacy and its present and many areas. The evolution of the industrial heritage in Sheffield has also been accompanied by processes of displacement for marginalised communities and many areas see the spectre of gentrification rising from the foundation of new sites (Gerrard, 2017). With the rise of new regeneration projects, it is critical to rethink and reinvent the urban fabric in a diverse and inclusive manner, capable of influencing the public debate about diasporic and queer communities' spatial

practices. Despite the several efforts made by academia, LGBTQ+ groups and black civil society groups, more joint actions are needed to create new visions and spaces that include all excluded communities as part of the larger sentiment of recognition. Their legacy and their contribution to questioning traditional practices of spatial design is seen as a tool to think urban design otherwise.

##### 4.1. The Windrush generation and the Caribbean diaspora

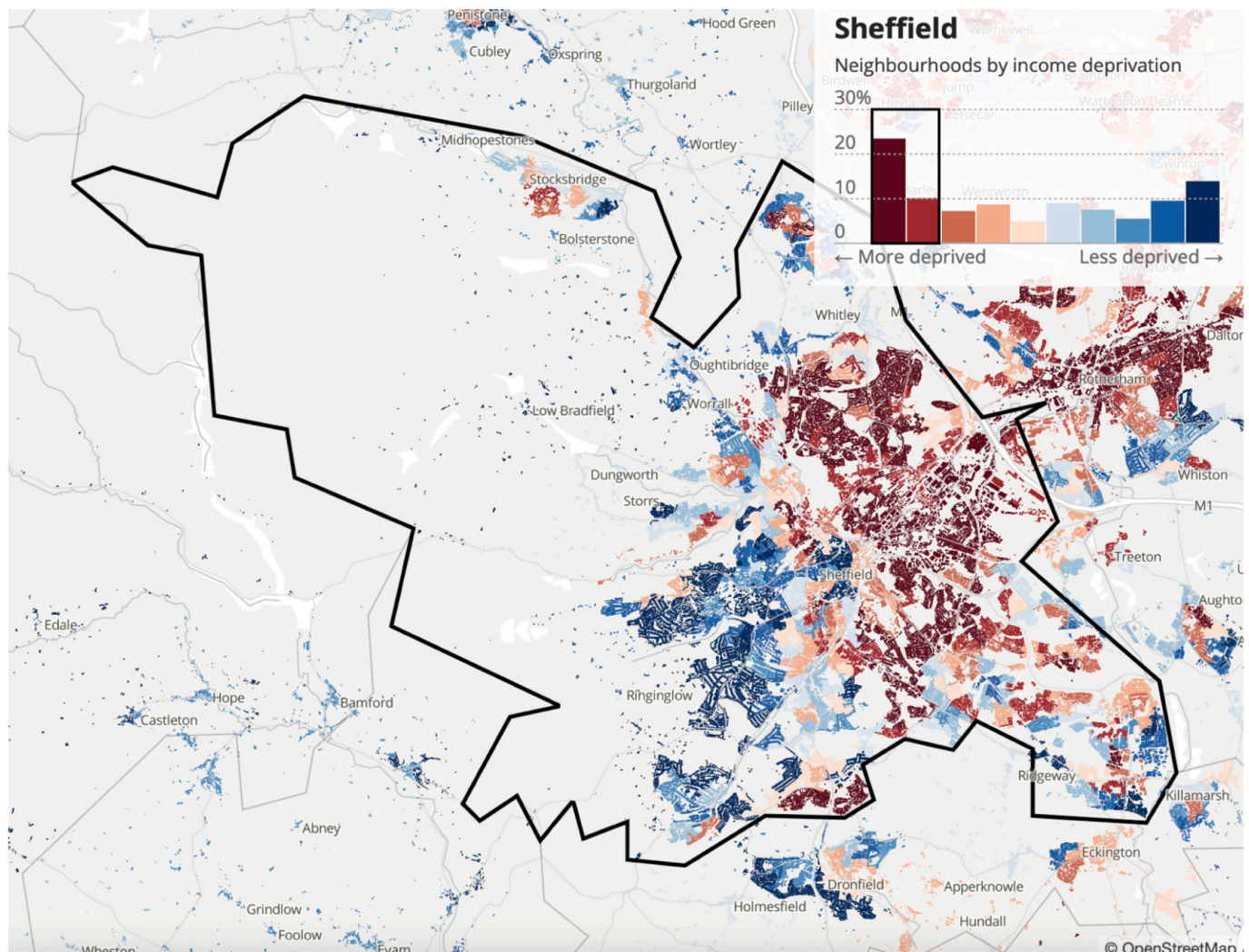
The population of African and Caribbean ethnicity in Sheffield amounts to roughly 17,000 individuals according to the latest census data (Sheffield City Council, 2018), with about one-third of those being of Caribbean origin or descent. Of these, many identify as the so-called Windrush generation, which has become a label for those people arriving in the UK from Caribbean countries between 1948 and 1971.<sup>4</sup> This first generation of Afro-Caribbean migrants in Sheffield founded the Sheffield West Indian Association in 1955. In 1986, this organisation became SADACCA, the Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association (Douglas, 2019), and since then it has played an important role in countering dynamics of socio-spatial exclusion for the African-Caribbean community and in nurturing its sense of belonging to the city.

SADACCA was established in the Wicker building, formerly part of a steel factory near the river and, notably, in a part of the city that was no longer deemed desirable for locals. At the time, the building was in a state of disrepair: volunteers from SADACCA repaired it intending to host a range of community-oriented activities – women's support groups, an archive, day care groups (for both elders and children), health and mental health services, gardening and cooking classes, parties. After facing severe financial issues due to debt, SADACCA has been trying to access project grants, working with the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. Such partnerships are also meant to support a dialogue with the city council to renew the lease of the Wicker building, which is set to expire in 2027, after 36 years of occupancy. While the risk of eviction is increasing (and has recently included explicit threats), SADACCA understands how the loss of the Wicker building would impact the African-Caribbean community in Sheffield, in terms of both identity and sense of belonging to (and physical and visual presence in) the territory.

##### 4.2. DIY culture and queer communities

In the context of the UK, as in many other geographies, queer spaces have been forcibly created inwards. Urban planners and designers have directly or indirectly denied safe public spaces, as well as amenities, and housing to LGBTQ+ groups (Doan, 2015). Today, in an act of resistance, queer communities reclaim spaces to be visible and safe. Urban space and social infrastructures are central to their claims for spatial justice. As Campkin and Marshall have pointed out “LGBTQ+ venues function as vital infrastructure for these groups, providing spaces of care and community against wider contexts of oppression and violence” (2018, p. 82). As a strategy to refuse a normative world, queer communities challenge existing power relations through collective actions and DIY initiatives that contribute to creating “individual and group identities and emotional attachments” in a safe and secure environment (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2017). Each context differs, and the stories about the Queer DIY culture we engaged with are place-based and culturally specific. In Sheffield, the need for LGBTQ+ venues and safe queer spaces

<sup>4</sup> In 1971, the Immigration Act stated that both a work permit and proof of a parent or grandparent being born in the UK were needed to settle in the UK, de facto ending mass immigration from the Caribbean. The Windrush generation is named after the ship MV Empire Windrush, which was used in 1948 to bring workers from Jamaica and other islands to help fill post-war UK labour shortages.



**Fig. 2.** Sheffield Income Deprivation Map. As it can be observed in the map, the unbalanced distribution of wealth is significant when comparing the central and east areas of the city with the western periphery.

Source: [Office for National Statistics \(2021\)](#).

has been dismissed by heteropatriarchal discourses and mainstream planning policies, forcing queer communities to live behind. Because of this, grassroots organisations have advocated for more inclusive and safer spaces for queer communities. As a response to the lack of “financially accessible and queer friendly night venues in Sheffield” ([Gut Level, 2019](#)), Gut Level was created in 2019 as a DIY space and collective. Being part of a broader ecosystem of DIY groups in Sheffield, Gut Level believes in mutual exchanges and self-agency, offering a platform for individuals from under-represented groups to be initiated in the music industry. Within the enlarged LGBTQ+ net of connectivity, there are several organisations cooperating alongside Gut Level. Among others, Dina Bar, where several events are collaboratively held, Working Them’s and Flaw Collective provide spaces and events for the queer community in Sheffield.

DIY culture became popular around the 1970s, associated with the rebellious punk movement, but rapidly influenced the LGBTQ+ scene as a form of resistance and resilience. Among current DIY organisations, Gut Level is a community and DIY event space focused on a shared passion for dance music and creativity. Their activities, which are mostly focused on club events and seminars, provide a platform for those who are underrepresented in the music industry, such as queer/ LGBTQ+, women, and non-binary persons. Throughout their independent practice and the DIY approach, Gut Level wants to break out

binaries and provide a space where individuals can feel safe in expressing their multiple identities. The DIY ethos, for Gut Level and other queer communities, means not only ‘to do it for yourself’ and ‘to provide for yourself’ but also not to do it for profit and, rather, do it for the larger community. Thus, the production of queer space as a collective lived experience is the result of a relational practice and it becomes central to urban design to capture and consider the queer experiences of the city ([Warin, 2018](#)). Such spaces are key in understanding how social acceptance or rejection takes place at several scales of the city, and what is the potential to meaningfully include the LGBTQ+ community in the production of inclusive public spaces ([Gorman-Murray et al., 2008](#)).

## 5. Imagining the counter-city: diaspora and queer’s living heritage

We believe in the agency of grassroots organisations to tailor community connections with transformative spatial implications. Our pedagogical project aims to find different ways to operationalise the methodologies of critical urban design by focusing on the spatial practices of the living heritage of our partner organisations. To document and disseminate the living heritage of Gut Level and SADACCA, we focus on these connections with places understanding their roles as drivers of urban interventions, rather than objects of urban interventions.



Exposing both the tangible and intangible connections they have with the urban fabric serves to recognise their role in its production, transformation, and care. In this context, design becomes an alternative to creatively strategize the transformative potential of interventions, that in any specific time and space has a twofold obligation. It facilitates a comprehensive imagination of transformation and change that engages explicitly with the struggles and debates around decolonial design and racial justice, and it implies a practice that listens to and aligns with the alternative discourses and voices of these counterpublics.

Addressing this transformation entails characterising and spatializing actions of solidarity and interconnectedness as well as the assertions of cultural self and collectivism that tend to travel with people through global manifestations of community. Hence, the living heritage approach and the ‘counter’ methods. We built on and adapted Poullos’ (2014) living heritage approach to develop the analytical lenses that guided the counter-mapping and counter-archiving processes. In this process our partners have become active political subjects in a wider process of socio-cultural change, characterised by continuity of use, community connections, cultural expressions, and care.

### 5.1. Counter-mapping Queer DIY living heritage

“Club spaces are where the community is formed. Where people get to find and express themselves, where young creatives get to be heard, be inspired, and collaborate. Friendships are formed on the dance floor and continue to become family.”

(Gut Level, 2022)

To reveal the continuity of use we worked with Gut Level around the analytical themes of identity and livelihoods of queer spaces. Using the analytical lens of identity and livelihoods, one group of students<sup>5</sup> chose sound as a mechanism to challenge and illustrate the deficiencies of safe spaces that exist within Sheffield for queer communities. Through sound, they explored the interaction between people and the city to form an illustration of the value of queer and DIY spaces where the city sees none. They explored forms of accessibility and affordability that could provide direct support to ensure the continuity of Gut Level’s livelihoods. Their goal was to recognise and disseminate Gut Level’s practices as living heritage, to keep nurturing this creative community and their continuity in Sheffield (BUDD, 2022). A second group of students<sup>6</sup> explored the practices that Gut Level, as a queer organisation, uses to build and maintain community connections and to inspire collectivism as a response to concerns about safety. They explored notions of safety from the experiences of queer communities, based on their individual stories and collective perspectives in the city. By learning about the impact of insecure tenure of their physical space, and the lack of inclusive spaces in Sheffield, this group exposed the notion of safety as the grounding aspect for maintaining and enhancing Gut Level’s community connectedness and spaces of joy (BUDD, 2022).

#### 5.1.1. Spatialising queer sonic joy

Processes of gentrification in the formerly industrial edges of Sheffield, the politics of noise in the city, and the lack of stable financial support have made it hard to find a secure permanent space and to maintain Gut Level’s practices. The lack of autonomy in space makes any effort to create inclusive and safe spaces harder and limits the possibility of carrying out their DIY spirit. A respondent wanting to remain anonymous, tells us that “[t]here are not many spaces for the queer

community. So, growing up in Sheffield sometimes feels uncomfortable. [...] We deserve something like finding a place where we won’t be judged by people, being yourself really” (Anonymous, 2022). This limitation overlaps with the difficulties of generating enough income to ensure long-term sustainability for the continuity of their practice. In this context, space becomes more than a container, but the means to secure a practice that creates community and allows for the formation and growth of friendships, creative cooperation, access to equipment and skills, and the platforming of marginalised individuals. Gut Level and other cultural organisations (see Fig. 3) function as community connectors, where cultural expressions and their systems of care/maintenance create and allow the continuity of the living heritage of queer space. “I think being physically together is very important. To get to know each other, to have the chance to know new people. [...] People start to feel more comfortable and it’s kind of homie, they also feel less anxious because they know they can always come back and have some activities outside, sharing music, and dancing [...]. Definitely, feeling safe for us means being together physically” (personal communication, February 20, 2022). The DIY ethos of these practices opens a more complex understanding of space where the social production of safety becomes central to their practices of community making as well as empowerment through spaces of co-creation.

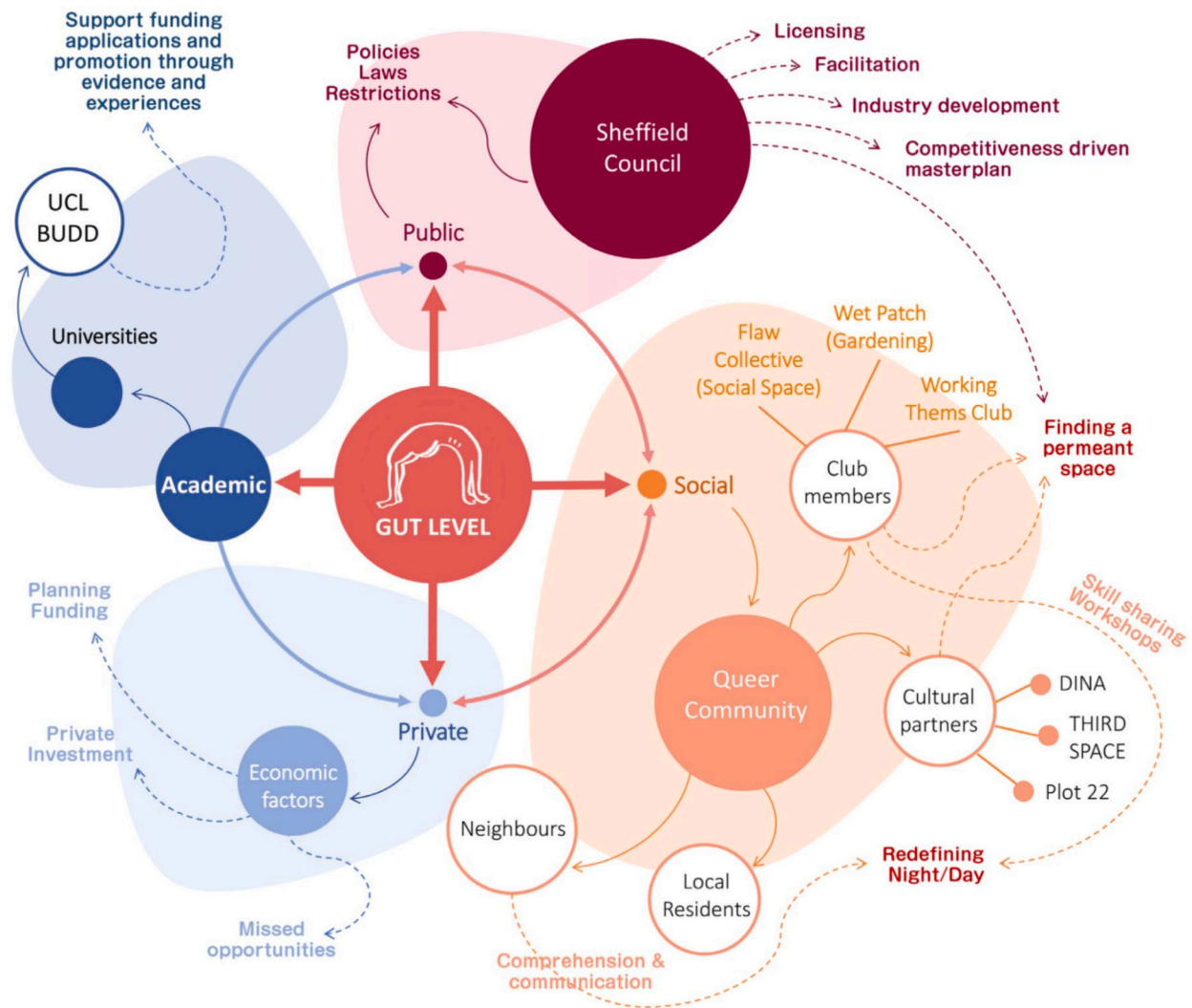
While understanding the spatial limitations affecting Gut Level and many similar other queer spaces was important, recognising Gut Level’s connection to sound was powerful. Sounds emerge as the material and expressive force that floods space, a practice that reveals the living heritage of Gut Level and other queer communities in Sheffield. Through music and sound, Gut Level not only creates identity but also finds the mechanism to imagine a counter-city and legitimise one of its counterpublics. Thus, sound became, for a group of students, a tool to develop research-design strategies to uncover opportunities for Gut Level’s identity and livelihood. Students focused on examining responses to sounds, their interaction with movement and the body’s spatial boundaries (Fig. 4). Through mapping sounds, emotions, and relations, students created a soundscape to reveal the interweaving human and non-human forces that are challenging the current hegemonic dynamics of city-making. This archive of community-generating activities, and their interconnectedness with other players in the city, became a medium to transform gaps into spaces of possibilities to co-create a set of strategies aiming to open funding opportunities and new alliances, across counterpublics and other stakeholders, allowing for greater opportunities to make a living, to make a sound (BUDD, 2022).

The soundscape translated into the co-creation of a ‘Sonic Guide of Sheffield’. A virtual space where Gut Level could situate their practices as sound and get feedback from the public to better understand their reaction towards their practice. As a space of interaction, this ‘sonic guide’ provides insights into the uncertain and ever-shifting visceral responses that shape orientations, identifications, choices, and social interactions, as well as human and non-human relations that configure everyday life. The guide is represented in the form of a mapping platform that captures the multiple ways in which time-space unfolds. As a platform, the guide also forms the basis of our data collection that will allow Gut Level to illustrate the scale of their impact when engaging prospective partners and finding additional funding avenues in the future. Additionally, this dynamic virtual space will allow members of the queer community to populate the Sonic Guide, and to map the relevance of spaces in the city, or lack thereof (BUDD, 2022).

Another strategy, queering the city, fosters understanding within the public of queer community activities as a cultural space for individuals to express themselves. Students designed a QR code to be used as a media of solidarity to enhance the relationship between the public and queer communities by sharing the narrative story of queer activists and making visible their practices through a safe space on a digital platform. These strategies encapsulate the way in which a counterpublic such as Gut Level mobilises a shift in the hegemonic, often stigmatised narrative about their practices and modes of operation, and move towards a

<sup>5</sup> This group was composed by Sofia De La Guerra Rivas, Umar Buckus, Xinyue Hao, Yeshica Theresia, and Zhuoqi Chen. Their group report was included in the final OPE report: (BUDD, 2022, pp. 16–51).

<sup>6</sup> This group was composed by Rosa Paredes, Qinchun Hu, Wenge Hu, Yueqi Liu, and Daniel Pastor Arellano. Their group report was included in the final OPE report: (BUDD, 2022, pp. 52–93).



**Fig. 3.** Gut Level's actor mapping. The 'Identity and Livelihoods' group analysed Sheffield's underground scene through the connections between Gut Level and DIY Groups, grassroots organisations and other institutions.  
Source: (BUDD, 2022, p. 27).

counter-city grounded in practices of care and joy within safe spaces (BUDD, 2022).

### 5.1.2. Networking safe spaces

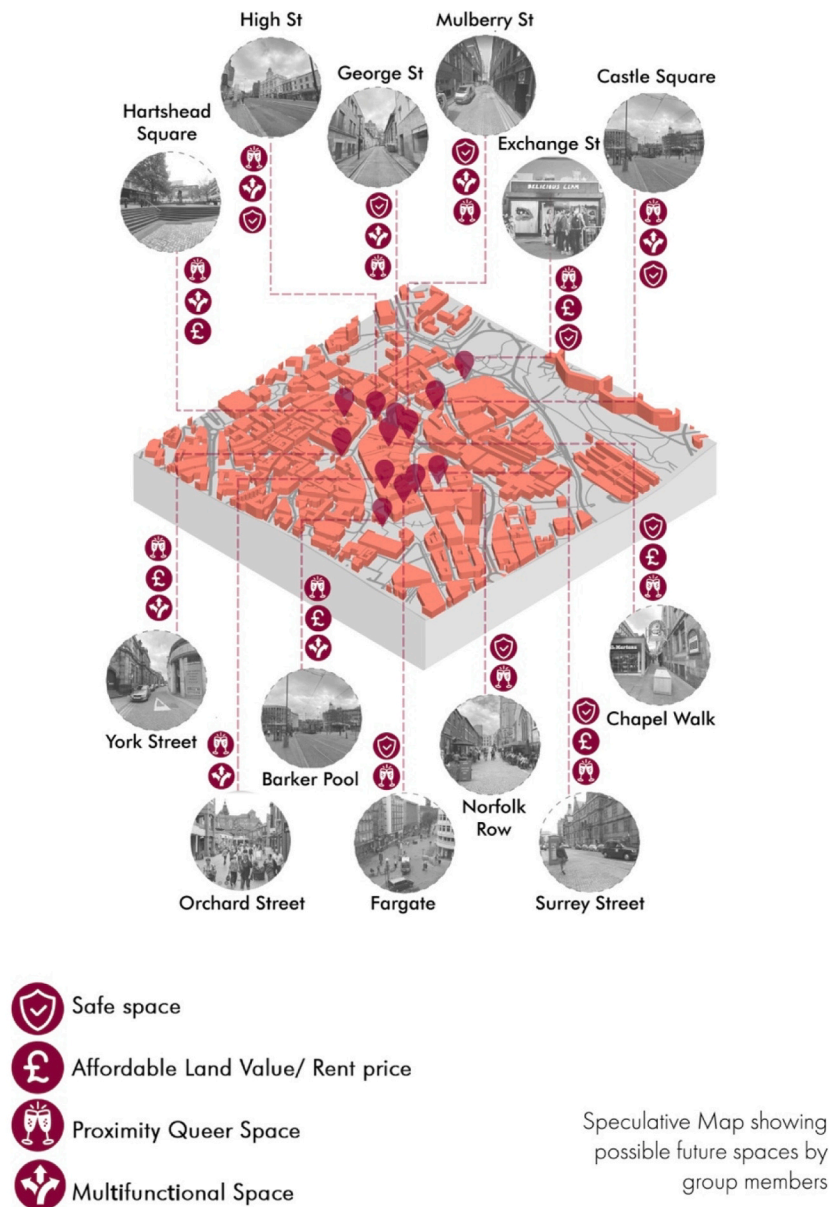
In Sheffield, ex-industrial spaces have usually been an asset to provide available and affordable spaces for different collectives. According to Gut Level, this situation has been changing drastically over the last few years due to processes of gentrification and urban transformation. They have also expressed that the council has increased legal surveillance for DIY venues, which results in less friendly and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ collectives. Mapping the connectivity among several queer organisations in the urban fabric, a group of students focused on the role of queer communities in the co-creation of a sense of safety. In this ecosystem of connectivity, Gut Level operates as a queer organisation that shares the DIY ethos regarding self-agencies and mutual exchanges between members. Taking the notion of safety as a core component in Gut Level's ethos, students built a methodology to explore safety from the individual experience and up to the scale of the collective.

Departing from both the individual and collective scale, the latter was linked to the LGBTQ+ community's experience of safety at the urban scale, while the former focused on Gut Level's security of tenure

or the 'home' sphere. As such, the concept of safety was framed between these two parameters, while simultaneously exploring the agency of community connectivity as relevant for the organisation's sense of safety. In attempting to frame the partner's priorities, students identified the demands and challenges faced by Gut Level. Several interviews were conducted both with the team of Gut Level and with other members of the community, to map both emotional notions of safety and their spatial influence (Fig. 5). In these interviews, one respondent told us that when "passers-by subconsciously comment on my dress, maybe not maliciously, but it makes me want to run away" (Anonymous, 2022) while another one expressed that "safety is where the dance floor and the Queer community activities could happen" (Anonymous, 2022).

In addition to the interviews, several sensorial mapping activities were carried out during a gardening workshop held at the Gut Level headquarters. These were focused on the urban context of Sheffield, to discover ways of defining, identifying, and perceiving the role of their spatial agency and 'queer utopias' in the construction of safety (BUDD, 2022). Students then focused on exploring diverse methods to ensure the continuity of Gut Level's organisation in a secured physical space. Such a physical location is essential in the co-creation of spaces that are physically and psychologically filled with a sense of belonging. Gut Level's





**Fig. 4.** Mapping possibilities of space and accepted spaces for sound. Using sound as a mechanism, the group developed a speculative mapping of Sheffield revolving around the future possibilities of Gut Level to access other city spaces.  
Source: (BUDD, 2022, p. 39).

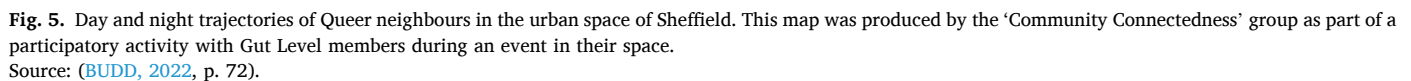
vision is to build an experience of safety starting from their spaces, but with the possibility of expanding queer living heritage beyond those, to disrupt profit-driven and exclusionary urbanisation. As such, the experience of the city is only safe if understood as intersectional and collective, both during the day and at night (BUDD, 2022).

Students proposed “The Queer Tool Kit: A set of tools for building up progressively Queer living safe spaces in Sheffield”, which was articulated in three stages – from devising a process to achieve security of tenure of Gut Level’s ‘home’; to re-imagining Gut Level’s agencies in the iconic urban spaces of the city, in both day and night; to, finally, creating a web archive platform collecting and integrating evidence that could support negotiation for secure tenure with the city council (Fig. 6) (BUDD, 2022). These proposals reveal the potential of the so-called spatial agencies and the co-creation of imaginary spaces from the queer communities, challenging the current narratives of the city around safety and belonging. As a result of the analysis, they concluded that constructing “safe spaces” is grounded in the intersectional, day and

night, collective, digital, and physical spheres, and above all centralises the desire to build up a sense of community.

## 5.2. Counter-archiving Caribbean diasporic living heritage

By midday the sun came out and it was lovely and warm  
And there were loads of young people on the streets  
And they immediately welcomed me  
My first word was, ‘Is this England?’  
That’s exactly what I said  
I could not believe it!  
It was a pleasant surprise coming to live in Sheffield  
and that changed my idea, my thinking about Britain  
I suppose,  
because  
I met with more Black people  
And life changed considerably for me

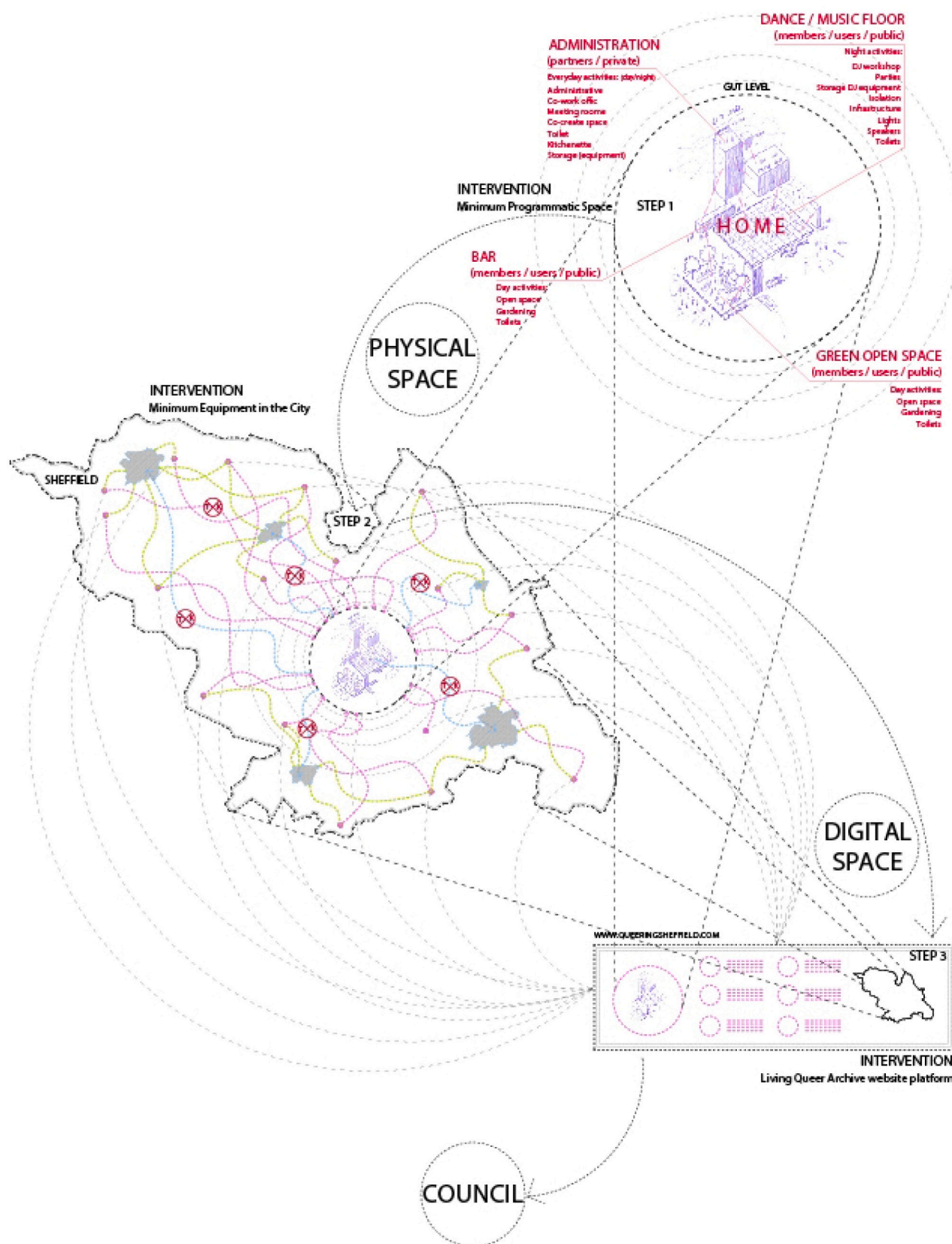


To explore the potential of counter-archiving practices, students interacted with SADACCA and researched their spaces and practices through the analytical lenses of memory and care. Engaging with archives brings about “contested views of history, and around the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in library and archival praxis” (Thorpe, 2019, p. np) and therefore “there is a clash of ways of knowing, being, and doing which intersect constantly around issues of information management” (Thorpe, 2019, p. np). For the theme of memory,<sup>7</sup> students started from acknowledging how migrations “may involve a fundamental transformation of the experience of spaces and places and their close links to the social and cultural meanings of home, belonging and memory” (Arnold-de-Simine, 2012, p. 1). For the theme of care,<sup>8</sup> students understood the concept as “an affective connective tissue between an inner self and an outer world” (Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 2), that can manifest in urban spaces and everyday practices through maintenance, continuity and repair (Williams, 2020). A group of

<sup>8</sup> This group was composed by Akemi Higa, Maria Paulina Giraldo, Nancy Arbogast, Natalie Cho, and Daniela Arvizu. Their group report was included in the final OPE report: (BUDD, 2022, pp. 124–157).

### 5.2.1. Weaving living memories

10



**Fig. 6.** Intervention on living Queer archive website platform. The proposal aims to integrate the evidence into a Living Queer Archive Website that allows communities to negotiate with the Council and to build up the starting point of safety.

Source: (BUDD, 2022, p. 89).



then taken into consideration throughout other research-design initiatives, in collaboration again with the University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, Ark Sheffield and Skin Deep.

The group of students working around memory understood BAP in its design significance, in its potential to support a heritage-driven participatory transformation of SADACCA's programme and the Wicker Building as living palimpsest of the African-Caribbean community (see Fig. 7). Overall, these actions contributed to the production of a living counter-archive that, through practices of storytelling, could act as a catalyst for change, through the articulation of new collective narratives of city-making. As one of the leaders of SADACCA told us: "in each journey people move with their culture. In this journey the archive is about bringing the stories of a culture that is still alive, that changes but is alive, it is about telling everyday stories but also is about telling the stories in our own way" (personal communication, February 20, 2022). Students conceived the enhancement of the Bantu Archive Programme through a series of strategies that could further expose the work of SADACCA, and the histories and practices of its community. Students proposed to increase the intensity of activities within the Wicker building, enhancing its living archive potential, by proposing some areas such as the bar, the staircase, and the repurposed 'G-Mill' to host permanent and temporary exhibits. For such exhibits, students proposed a series of themes emerging out of the BAP team's research and representing the joys and struggles of the community – along with instances of collective and intangible manifestations of the culture (BUDD, 2022).

At the neighbourhood scale, students proposed a 'talking streets' intervention, to let the stories from within the Wicker building become apparent outside of it. This happens through artistic representations of the community journeys on the façades, and through appropriating existing street furniture around the neighbourhood – displaying drawings, diagrams, and maps relating to the archive. In this regard, a living archive is referred to as a place which still holds traces of history (Cresswell, 2011) and the practices and environments that connect the organisation, curation and transmission of memory with present-bound creative, performative, and participatory processes (Sabiescu, 2020). Similarly to the groups working on queer identities, students thought of including QR codes that would link back to SADACCA's website and to BAP's digital archive (See Fig. 8) (BUDD, 2022).

At the city level, students understood the potential of the existing BAP's walking tours, and proposed a zine as a companion to it, translating into print and digital form through counter-archiving strategies of graphic representation and delivery – collages, poems, and diagrams, which become examples of embodied urban cartographies. The zine's potential lies in its flexibility in terms of design, production and

frequency, and in fact, it could easily expose intertwined multiple elements of the Bantu Archive. An iconic tote bag was designed to support this process of incremental visibility for SADACCA and BAP, building upon the work of the sewing club renting one of the spaces of the Wicker building. In doing so, students proposed a series of partnerships that could contribute to scaling up such processes – eventually generating income through the sewing clubs through the production of tote bags and other items whose patterns could recall the material and visual heritage of African-Caribbean communities (BUDD, 2022).

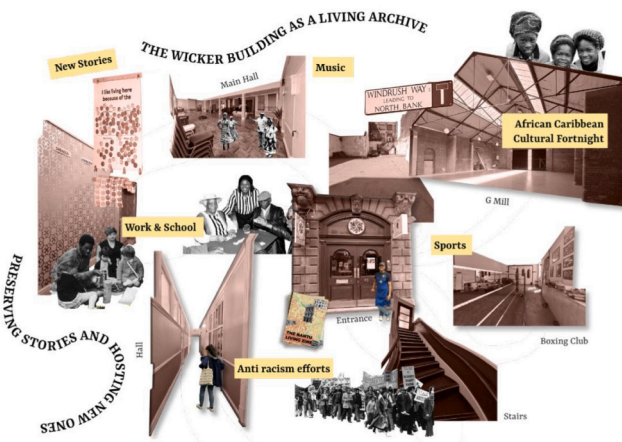
### 5.2.2. Tracing care through food

The observation of everyday practices within the Wicker Building and the wider African-Caribbean community in Sheffield led another group of students to put food at the centre of their reflections on care dynamics. Attention to food systems came from the acknowledgement of food as important in understanding diasporic spaces, with our partners from Resolve Collective suggesting how space is often thought through our mouths (Scafe-Smith, 2020), and the leader of SADACCA stating that "[l]aughter and food go hand in hand but so does memory. It opens a floodgate. People are more open to talk and from there we understand what they need" (personal communication, February 20, 2022). Students realised accordingly how food resonates in storytelling, with the positionality of the storyteller contributing to the formation of collective identity and collected food stories while mapping out food-related care systems.

Existing care infrastructure within Sheffield tends to exclude marginalised groups, such as elders and people with a history of mental illness. SADACCA and two organisations renting space within the Wicker building (SACMHA Health & Social Care, and Flourish Sheffield) contribute to filling these gaps (see Fig. 10), with an emphasis on "the need to reassess current practices to support people in a more holistic way, [and the use of] counter-narrative approaches to enhance mental health support" (personal communication, February 20, 2022). At the same time, however, students highlighted the fragmentation between such organisations and external care-providing parties and a disjuncture between older and younger generations within SADACCA that rendered the care mechanisms in place less effective. In collaboration with SADACCA's members, students identified three design priorities: to secure the future of the Wicker building as an anchor for the production and provision of care services; to develop safe care spaces and service further, strengthening intergenerational bonds and a connection with the wider community; to ultimately re-frame the sense of belonging and value for SADACCA and the African-Caribbean diaspora to the wider city. With these objectives, four strategic interventions were proposed. Three of these aimed to enhance and partially reconfigure existing spaces within the Wicker Building perimeter, through the creation of a community garden, a day-care garden, and a sky deck garden. The fourth strategy was meant as an overarching attempt to consolidate and expand SADACCA's partnerships with other urban actors, starting from an actor diagramming of current relationships, alliances, and conflicts, in an overall effort to scale up care practices as a response to an otherwise exclusionary urban transformation process (BUDD, 2022).

A community market was proposed as a possibility for retrofitting the space of the so-called G-Mill and its rear parking lot, both adjacent to the Wicker building (see Fig. 9). The team envisioned such spaces becoming a market hosting African-Caribbean food vendors, traders and handicrafts while providing communal seating, dining spaces, and a public garden to replace the current parking lot. The market was envisioned as a multi-purpose space, featuring items and stories of the above-mentioned Bantu Archive, featuring a small stage for live music performances or events, and possibly hosting movie nights (BUDD, 2022).

The day care garden and the sky deck garden were conceived to support the charitable works of SADACCA and the activities of Flourish Sheffield and SACMHA Health & Social Care while encouraging intergenerational engagement and spreading community knowledge about nutrition. The gardens take place respectively on the ground floor and



**Fig. 7.** Diagram of the Wicker building turned into a living archive. The Wicker building is the headquarter of Sadacca's organisation, and the conceptual collage shows the main spaces of the building and its symbolic significance. Source: Memory group final presentation, May 2022.





**Fig. 8.** Urban proposal representation. The proposal ‘Talking Streets’ wants to expand the Bantu Archive beyond the spaces of Sadacca’s headquarters. Source: Memory group final presentation, May 2022.



**Fig. 9.** Visualisations of the day and night market in the G Mill building, intending to motivate the activation of the multi-purpose space. The proposals’ focus revolves around food while contributing to the spreading of the Bantu Archive. Source: (BUDD, 2022, p. 114).

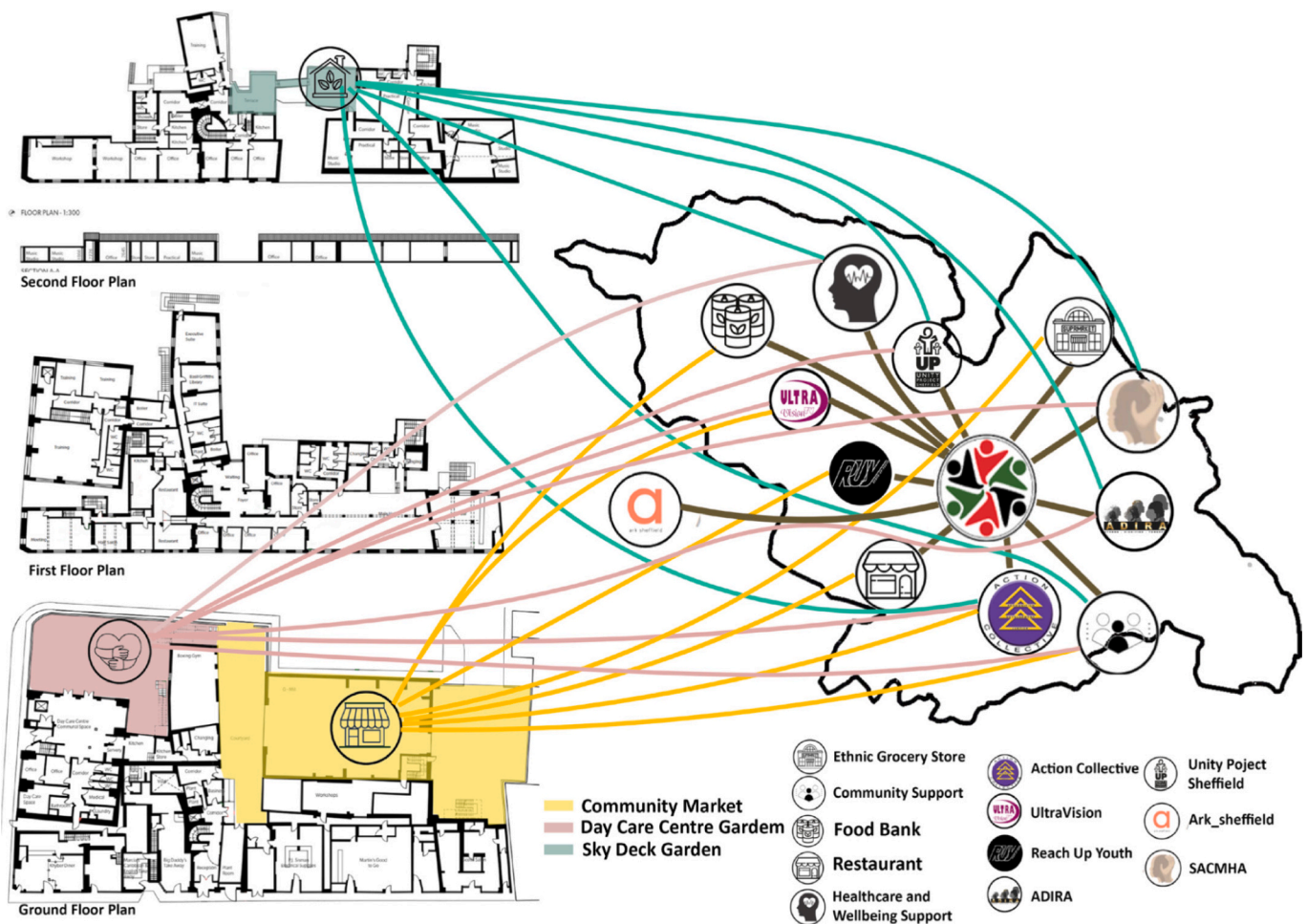


Fig. 10. Alliances and partnerships map. The 'Solidarity and Systems of Care' group developed an actor mapping that connects SADACCA with other organisations in Sheffield, to strengthen local networks while contributing to amplifying their capacity building.

Source: (BUDD, 2022, p. 119).

on a second-floor terrace of the Wicker Building, repurposing currently under-utilised spaces. The team envisioned a series of horizontal and vertical gardening structures, serving as miniature allotments for cultivating herbs and vegetables, and included seating spaces to allow gathering in stress-free environments – spatialities that reinforce our statement against solely profit-driven urbanisation and towards the creation of spaces where to enact co-responsibility, care, and collectivism (BUDD, 2022).

## 6. Shaping the counter-city

After one year of engagement, both Gut Level and SADACCA have continued demonstrating the centrality of living heritage as a tool to challenge the narrative about often stigmatised communities and places. Besides being displaced from their DIY space in Snow Lane due to redevelopment and the uncertainty about the future, Gut Level developed strategies of continuity rooted in community connectedness and collective joy. Beyond the initial lack of space, Gut Level collaborated with other organisations of the broader ecosystem of the queer community in Sheffield to organise campaigns and activities that ensure safe spaces for their members and growing community. Gut Level's efforts continue today in their new location where they provide safe spaces for self-expression. Similarly, SADACCA has continued and expanded its use of the Wicker building as a strategy of continuity of memory and care by mobilising diverse alliances to continue and develop strategies to explore their roots and futures while promoting debate about relevant

policy issues in the African diaspora community in Sheffield.

In this article, we have argued that a counter-city needs to question the spatial structures that reproduce heteronormativity and racism. For doing so, the project *Sheffield Otherwise*<sup>9</sup> explores avenues to decentre what counts as heritage, foster collective spatial imagination, and look at practices disrupting profit-driven urbanisation. Conceptually, we have relied on critical design, critical heritage and counter-hegemonic planning to flesh out the framing of the notion of a counter-city. This pedagogical intervention taught us that to recalibrate learning settings to imagine counter-cities we need to cultivate alliances with counter-publics based on an ethos grounded in care and co-responsibility. In sum, using the notion of a counter-city as an entry point foregrounds four aspects to disarticulate the material and symbolic hegemonic formations of city-making.

First, deepening collective joy is a pathway to liberation. For urban practitioners to uncover a counter-city requires locating practices and methodologies that harness sources of collective joy such as music and food. The gatherings in the improvised dance floor for Gut Level members in the Snow Lane space or the collective meals for elders in the garden for the Wicker building epitomise this. For students, joining a DJ workshop or going grocery shopping for collective meals was the type of

<sup>9</sup> The process and results of the project can be seen at <https://sheffieldotherwise.wordpress.com> and <https://fillinginthegaps.site/fillinginthegaphome.html>.



'fieldwork' required to understand the spatial practices that underpin the moments of collective joy.

Second, urban cartographies are embodied. For urban practitioners to enact a counter-city implies not only tracing the spatialities of memory through walking and storytelling but also articulating new collective narratives of city-making. Initiatives such as the city tour and website led by the Steel City Queer History group or the change of name of the street in front of SADACCA to Windrush Street are examples of how this can be achieved. Counterpublics' stories are inscribed in streets and the digital space. For us, urban walks based on the testimonies of the Bantu Archive Programme and the website to map the sonic landscapes of queer safe spaces are steps in this direction.

Third, oculocentric western perspectives in urban design obscure other ways of knowing. For urban practitioners to imagine a counter-city requires expanding the repertoire of methodologies of representation to embrace the tacit knowledge in oral testimonies, sonic landscapes, and poetry. We learned on our first day from Sheffield poet laureate, Otis Mensah, that inhabiting the city as queer diaspora is mediated by 'the alchemy of rap and the culture of hip hop' or on our last day, that the sonic installations of Ark Sheffield create a powerful polyphonic space. Our students created a poem assembling some key parts of the testimonies of the archive to craft a collective testimony and others focused on contesting the politics of noise through the sonic guide to start exploring other ways of imagining space.

Finally, shared struggles put in motion intersectional alliances. For urban practitioners to imagine a counter-city involves forging synergies among solidarity networks to fight against eviction and achieve recognition. Sheffield Otherwise is an example of the potential to work across queer and diasporic communities to harness alliances among them and universities. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that the driving forces of speculative urban development behind the eviction threats for SADACCA and Gut Level need a wider political strategy to counteract them. To gain political legitimacy and find concrete ways to support their livelihoods and continuity in the spaces can be triggered by mobilising their claims for spatial justice contained in legacies unlocked by the counter-cities approach we proposed here.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

Catalina Ortiz - Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing, review and editing.

Natalia Villamizar-Duarte - Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing, review and editing.

Laia Garcia - Investigation, data curation, writing.

Giorgio Talocci - Investigation, data curation, writing.

#### Declaration of competing interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

#### Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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TORIES & MEMORY: Akemi Higa, Maria Paulina Giraldo, Nancy Arbogast, Natalie Cho, Daniela Arvizu. The team on SYSTEMS OF CARE: Annelise Jenson, Dima Raijo, Iman Abdulkadir, Jalyka Niu, Qianwen Zheng. Our collaborators from the Sheffield Hallam University and Urban Ark project: Alex Delittle, Tom Payne, Julia Udall. Our inspiring guests: Otis Mensah, Ella Tembarret, Tomekah George, Ashley Holmes, Sandra Baker, Finn Warman. Last but not least we would like to thank to the Centre of Critical Heritage Studies - UCL for their small grant and to The Bartlett Development Planning Unit - UCL for funding the practice engagement that made the project 'Sheffield Otherwise' possible.

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