Kitsch, City Planning and New Urbanism

This paper explores the cultural spread of kitsch in urban spaces in relation to disintegration and urban replanning. Understanding the attributes and absorption of kitsch in city planning is crucial because it reveals how aesthetic choices impact the functionality, identity, and social dynamics of urban planning and their effect on urban environments. Although several studies have linked kitsch to architecture, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding its relationship to urban planning. Specifically, few if any works have addressed levels of urban planning from neighborhood design to apartment layouts or compared the manifestations of kitsch with respect to the planning of new neighborhoods for heterogeneous populations. We show how the cultural attributes of kitsch influence urban spaces and impact their physical form and the lived experiences of their residents.

Introduction

We focus on three new neighborhoods in Israel that were built on undeveloped land in one fell swoop. Each of these neighborhoods constitutes an expansion of a city and was designed to meet the needs of specific populations: the Nofei Yam neighborhood in the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa serves the general Jewish population, the Hazon Ovadia neighborhood in the city of Ramat Beit Shemesh serves ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, and the HaGalil neighborhood in the city of Nazareth serves the Arab community. We analyze how these urban spaces imitate existing architectural styles while incorporating new, artificial, and manipulative elements. This analysis leads to a new definition of kitsch that emphasizes its potential to merge styles and materials within new urban environments. The findings underscore the complex relationship between kitsch, urban planning, and cultural identity, and furnish new insights into the implications of kitsch for both individual and collective urban experiences.

This study thus contributes to the fields of urbanism and architectural theory by systematically exploring the relationship between kitsch and urban planning. It is the first to apply the cultural philosophy debate on kitsch to the evolving urban landscape. We delve into land use, connectivity, and mixed-use developments in neighborhoods designed for diverse demographic groups. We chart the impact of pervasive layers of disintegration and fragmentation across overarching strategies to the minutiae of individual building and apartment designs, thus highlighting the disjointed and often incoherent nature of contemporary urban development. More generally we exemplify the critical tension between the democratizing influence of kitsch, as conceptualized by Adorno, and the standardization inherent to modern architectural practices.

This standardization, a hallmark of large-scale urban development, often results in environments which, while aesthetically pleasing, lack genuine diversity and functional integration. Restrictive municipal spatial guidelines foster the proliferation of standardized, generic buildings, which intensify feelings of alienation and disconnection among residents—an idea resonating with the philosophical reflections of Heidegger and Derrida. The widespread use of kitsch in urban planning and architecture generates environments which despite their visual appeal, are fundamentally disconnected from the surrounding urban fabric and devoid of a distinct local identity.

Kitsch: A Theory of Culture

The theory of kitsch has been explored in multiple schools of thought. The Frankfurt School, as represented by Theodor Adorno, critiqued kitsch as a product of the cultural industry that reinforces dominant cultural norms through standardized, commodified culture and threatens authentic cultural expression. Kitsch serves as a form of cultural repression that is designed to appeal to the lowest common denominator, and its popularity serves to reinforce the dominant cultural norms and values. For Adorno, kitsch creates a false consciousness that masks the true nature of reality. This simplified, sentimentalized version of reality prevents people from engaging with the complexities and contradictions of their everyday lives. Kitsch culture is viewed as a threat to authentic culture, which is characterized by critical engagement, complexity, and aesthetic innovation. Kitsch represents a regression from elitist authentic culture, and its popularity undermines the possibility of genuine cultural expression.

Critical Theory, as extended by Walter Benjamin (1934) endorsed this view, although he saw it as part of a larger trend towards mass-produced cultures and consumerism as secondary forms of "artificial" beauty that can be appreciated for their own sake (Benjamin 1935, 1970). Benjamin argued in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1934), that kitsch should be viewed as a democratizing aesthetics because it is accessible to everyone from the exclusive domain of the elite. Later, in "The Author as Producer" (1982), he discussed kitsch's power to challenge and subvert dominant cultural norms, thus preventing critical engagement and reaffirming dominant cultural values.

In line with Adorno's and Benjamin’s arguments that kitsch can be harnessed for political manipulation, Sontag (1969) showed that kitsch can serve also as a distraction from pressing social and political issues of the day by offering an escape into sentimentalized, idealized versions of the world. In her essay "Notes on Camp", she argued that camp, a form that embraces kitsch and exaggeration, can act as a subversive critical force against dominant cultural norms

and values (Sontag 2018). In her view, by celebrating artifice and exaggerated qualities, kitsch breaks down the rigid boundaries between high and low culture and opens up new possibilities for expression.

By contrast Modernist Criticism, led by Clement Greenberg viewed kitsch as a form of bad taste that represented a regression from the innovations of the modernist movement (Greenberg 1939). Kitsch, according to Greenberg, represents a populist and sentimentalized version of culture that is antithetical to the radical experimentation of modernism, and constitutes a form of mass-produced culture that is inherently vulgar and commercialized.

Andreas Huyssen and Umberto Eco examined the role of kitsch in nostalgia, cultural resistance, and its adaptation for commercial purposes. They suggested that while kitsch offers continuity in times of cultural dislocation, it also risks perpetuating harmful stereotypes and cultural appropriation (Huyssen, 2003). According to Huyssen (2013), kitsch represents nostalgia for a long-lost past, a desire to go back to simpler and more authentic times. Huyssen argued that the rise of kitsch in the 20th century was a response to rapid changes brought about by modernization and industrialization. The displacement of traditional cultural forms by mass-produced culture led to feelings of dislocation and loss, and kitsch offered a way to reclaim continuity and stability. Huyssen noted, however, that kitsch can also represent an idealized and distorted view of history that ignores the complexity and diversity of reality and reinforces conservative and reactionary attitudes. In this context, kitsch can also be seen as a form of cultural resistance, in which marginalized groups use kitsch to reclaim or re-appropriate elements of popular culture that have been ignored or dismissed by mainstream culture. Umberto Eco (1986, 1989), drawing on Dwight MacDonald (1953), proposed a distinction between mass culture and middle culture, and claimed that kitsch is constantly renewing itself and adapting to commercial purposes. The "product" is an experiencing, chattering, theatrical and extroverted subject characterized by congestion, lack of measure, communicativeness, flattery of taste, and aesthetically pretentious settings. This "product" harbors troubling implications in terms of cultural appropriation and authenticity (Stewart, 1993) by erasing cultural distinctions and perpetuating harmful stereotypes (Jewsiewicki et al., 2013) and is ethically problematic in that it perpetuates cultural imperialism, which eradicates the unique contributions of different cultures Scruton (2016).

Kitsch and urban studies

Kitsch and urban studies have a complex relationship that reflects and reacts to dominant architectural trends and styles (Dorfles and McHale 1969; Holleran, 2021). In the postmodern 1980s and 1990s, many architects incorporated elements of kitsch into their work to challenge the

perceived seriousness and rigidity of modernist architecture, and to add interest and character to bland or generic buildings. The result was a revival of interest in historic and vernacular styles, as well as a renewed emphasis on ornamentation, also as a domestic interior act (Weinthal, 2005).. The urban literature has primarily examined kitsch in the context of urban popular art (Olalquiaga, 1998), where non-traditional materials and techniques are used to create "in situ" events and works that engage with the urban environment and its inhabitants (Meecham and Sheldon, 2013). However, kitsch can also be controversial in the context of urban studies, because it can undermine the integrity and coherence of architectural design and contribute to a sense of tackiness or superficiality.

Banham (2009) noted that many architects incorporate brightly colored panels and decorative motifs to make their buildings more accessible and attractive. He argued that kitsch was often associated with sentimentality, and hence could create a sense of community and identity in an increasingly fragmented and alienating world. At the same time, Banham argued that using kitsch elements in architectural design could undermine its coherence and integrity. Rather than using superficial or decorative elements to create emotional responses, he insisted that architecture should be judged on its own merits (2009).

In Venturi's and Brown's view (2004), kitsch elements in urban design can be used effectively as a means of communicating with the public and creating a sense of place. Many contemporary buildings look sterile and uninviting because they lack ornamentation and symbolic content. Kitsch features such as oversized signs, bright colors, and playful decorative motifs can establish a building's place in the urban environment and give it a sense of identity. In this sense, kitsch engages with popular culture and incorporates the desires and tastes of the general public in architectural design. An inclusive and democratically built environment can be created by using kitsch elements to subvert the traditional hierarchy of architectural styles. However, Venturi and Brown distinguished between "good" and "bad" kitsch in architecture: "good" kitsch is characterized by playfulness, irony, and self-awareness, whereas "bad" kitsch is superficial and sentimental. Kitsch elements in architecture must be grounded in a strong understanding of their cultural context and significance. Venturi's and Brown's kitsch theory thus differed significantly from the prevailing modernist aesthetic of his time, which emphasized strict functionalism and minimalism.

In line with Venturi's and Brown's work that challenged traditional notions of taste and value in architectural design, Naomi Stead (2018) examined the role of kitsch in urban regeneration projects and its impact on community identity. She discussed how kitsch elements are often used in urban renewal projects to evoke nostalgia and foster community. She cited specific examples

of kitsch aesthetics used to create landmarks that resonate with local histories and identities, thereby playing a crucial role in urban revitalization.

Overall, these studies highlight the ongoing relevance of kitsch in understanding the dynamics of contemporary urban landscapes and cultural practices. They demonstrate how kitsch can be used to critique urban daily life but also to foster community identity and cohesion in urban settings. By exploring kitsch's integration into urban planning, architecture, and regeneration, these works contribute to a broader understanding of how aesthetic and cultural elements shape city life. Below, we provide a comprehensive look at kitsch in urban planning in Israel, and how it relates to architecture and design. Understanding the similarities between kitsch patterns in neighborhoods intended for different populations sheds light on the power of kitsch to facilitate cultural exchange and develop cultural similarities. Unlike previous works that have primarily focused on the theoretical and cultural implications of kitsch, this study examines its practical applications and effects within different urban contexts.

Method

Drawing on Adorno's assertion that kitsch "lurks within art itself, waiting for any opportunity to break out" (Adorno, 1997), we examined how kitsch elements are embedded within the urban fabric to reflect and accommodate local cultural and social dynamics. Our analysis centered on three newly established neighborhoods in Israel, each designed for distinct groups: Nofei Yam in Tel Aviv-Jaffa (fig. 1), catering to the general Jewish population, Hazon Ovadia in Ramat Beit Shemesh, (fig. 2), serving ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, and HaGalil in Nazareth (fig. 3),, designed for the Arab community. The research area of Nofei Yam Neighborhood in Tel Aviv-Yafo contains 3410 housing units in mostly 8-story buildings and 30 detached homes. Plan TA/1111 /A/1 for the area encompasses 498,000 sqm. The research area of C-2 - Chazon Ovadia in Ramat Beit Shemesh contains about 1700 housing units in mostly 8-story buildings. Plan BS/160/A for the area encompasses 764,000 sqm. The research area of Hagalil neighborhood in Nazareth contains about 2300 housing units in mostly 8-story buildings. Plan C/4952 for the area encompasses 668,000 sqm.

Figures 1-3 about here

These neighborhoods, though serving diverse populations, are extensions of well-established urban centers and were planned concurrently on undeveloped land, thus providing a controlled comparative context for our study. The selection of these neighborhoods offers a unique

opportunity to investigate how neighborhood planning and architectural styles are influenced by the cultural and social dynamics of their respective communities. We categorized their planning principles based on an analysis of master plans and policy documents into three key themes: neighborhood identity and character, connectivity and car dependency in "balloon neighborhoods," and mixing policy (encompassing both the mixing of uses and users). We also conducted in-depth fieldwork in each neighborhood to document architecture and interior design. This included comprehensive tours, during which spontaneous interviews were conducted with residents. Through snowball sampling we recruited 5 other residents who consented to provide in-depth open-ended interviews in their homes, which provided rich qualitative data. The residents articulated their perceptions of how neighborhood planning and accessibility issues impact their daily lives. As part of our examination of the architecture and interior design of the residential projects and apartments, we not only captured residents' lived experiences but also gained insights into how kitsch manifests itself in urban environments.

Planning Kitsch Spaces

Given the scant work on kitsch and planning, the analysis below constitutes a preliminary examination of how kitsch interacts with the socio-spatial practices involved in creating residential complexes for general Jewish, ultra-Orthodox, and Arab populations in three neighborhoods.

Planning Kitsch

Nofei Yam, Hazon Ovadia, and Galilee were built on undeveloped lands in three old cities but are spatially and contextually detached from the urban fabric. Nofei Yam is isolated from the surrounding urban area, Hazon Ovadia is mostly surrounded by open spaces, and the Galilee neighborhood is bordered by major highways. These neighborhoods share more similarities with each other than with the cities to which they belong.

Table 1 about here

1.Kitsch and the Formation of "A New Local Identity"

In these neighborhoods, physical and social features create a pervasive sense of suffocating boredom and a generic suburban atmosphere. This lack of local identity that could "provide distinctive features to such small-scaled places" (Shao et al, 2017) leads to an alignment between

the formal conditions of knowledge and the social and aesthetic conditions within the new order of late capitalism. Adorno's concept of kitsch is evident in the forced artificiality and superficial aesthetic of these neighborhoods. Kitsch, in this context, serves as a "beautiful lie," masking the underlying anxiety, uncertainty, and lack of consensus resulting from the homogeneous, replicated buildings.

The disconnection from the cities weakens the local identity of the larger urban centers and highlights the ironic stance of kitsch in terms of concepts such as "truth," "identity," and "borders." Beyond meeting basic functional requirements for housing units and open spaces, the plans for these new neighborhoods embody kitsch by presenting an illusion of coherence and unity while actually fostering fragmentation and dissolution. This is done by picking and choosing symbols and ideas from the past and present (Jogendranath and Sarma, 2023). This usage raises questions about the relationship between the neighborhood and its parent city since it more closely resembles distant neighborhoods, different cities or other populations.

Bourdieu (1990) argued that the process of establishing a recognized order is associated with the naturalization of arbitrariness. In this case, the planning process can be seen as a doxa—a political attempt to arbitrarily link social and political practice with the natural state. The orthodoxy of planning thus becomes a political tool for demarcation by outlining hierarchies and creating manipulations as a function of the boundaries and the era when the neighborhood was built. This underscores how kitsch, as defined by Adorno, operates within urban planning to create urban spaces that are superficially appealing but fundamentally disjointed and devoid of genuine local identity.

2.Connectivity in "Balloon Neighborhoods"

Neighborhoods that prioritize the accessibility of private cars are often termed "balloon neighborhoods" where an insufficient number of entrances and exits create traffic jams. These neighborhoods are characterized by a lack of dense street networks and their severing from the surrounding urban areas. The three neighborhoods investigated here - Nofei Yam, Hazon Ovadia, and Galilee - are isolated from their older urban spaces by major traffic arteries. They also lack municipal services and mixed-use developments, and thus fail to meet all the residents' needs. This planning necessitates frequent car use, leading to bottlenecks.

All three neighborhoods took an eclectic and narrative approach to urban planning by using distinctive styles such as the rhombic buildings around the inner courtyards in Nofei Yam, winding roads following the topography in Hazon Ovadia, and a separation of large land-use patterns in the Galilee neighborhood. These resulted in an extroverted dramatization of the urban

layouts and their envelopes. This eclecticism can also be seen as a hallmark of kitsch, where diverse elements are combined to create an aesthetically pleasing but fundamentally superficial appearance. These balloon neighborhoods are "clean," "complete," and "representative" but depart from the rational logic of urban planning. Unlike the heritage of complex, networked urban planning, these neighborhoods eliminate and at times deny the historical and contextual continuity of space. Instead, they embody a geometric hashing that hinders spatial orientation and coherence. Adorno argued that kitsch features thrive on the presentation of artifice and superficial beauty by masking deeper issues of authenticity and functionality (Adorno, 1997). The kitsch aesthetics of these three neighborhoods exemplify this by creating visually appealing yet impractical and disconnected urban spaces. Foucault's descriptions of hierarchical stratifications help show that these planned environments reflect primary versus branching, in the sense of the authoritative versus the rebellious. These features highlight the tensions between appearance and reality, control and chaos.

Public transportation is rarely efficient in balloon neighborhoods because the public cost of providing services to comparatively few residents is prohibitive. Thus, residents get used to having private vehicles clog the roads and the extra burden on their cost of living, and even nearby neighborhoods will often be built in a similar way as the planners and residents get used to them. The plans for the three neighborhoods appear to have been drawn using a caliper rather than a ruler: the roads are designed as spirals and twists instead of straight lines intersecting at short distances. This kitsch-like approach to planning—favoring aesthetics over practicality—results in layouts that prioritize vehicle travel over walking, which takes longer in these circular neighborhoods without networked roads. The low density and sprawling design of these three neighborhoods further impact the frequency of public transportation lines, necessitating longer bus routes and reducing service efficiency. In the interviews, residents complained about the infrequency of buses, the dangers of crossing busy roads, the absence of bike lanes, and the need to rely on one if not two cars.

This lack of integration and foresight in planning underscores the kitsch component of these developments and plans, where the allure of new, visually distinctive neighborhoods overshadowed the essential need for cohesive and functional urban spaces. In these three neighborhoods, the performative dimension of space narrows the gap between an abstract definition of planning culture and a practical one. The plans become a subject of experience, chattering, theatricality, and extroversion. In the Hazon Ovadia neighborhood, multiple public buildings were built for distinct subgroups (such as different houses of worship for the Sabbath

and weekdays, and gender-separate classrooms for different ultra-Orthodox subsects, leading to fewer children in each class) which has created complex and paradoxical behavior patterns. This "provocative" consumption of socio-religious products encourages consumer conformity, while facilitating improvisational consumer interactions.

3. Embedded kitsch in the Mixing Policy

This section differentiates between the mixing of uses and the mixing of users. The term mixed-uses refers to the adaptation of mixed public services to the needs of the population (e.g., where the same building houses offices, a library, and residential units). Mixing residential construction, commerce, public institutions, and even light industry within the same lot or complex creates an active and vibrant environment throughout the day. By mixing uses, residents can get to daily services easily by walking or cycling, thereby reducing the need for cars and pollution. The three neighborhoods here exhibit a low mix of urban uses, because they prioritize aesthetic but fragmented and disjointed appeal over practical, functional and cohesive design. The Hazon Ovadia and the Galilee neighborhoods, for example, do not have any buildings that combine residences and commerce, although Nofei Yam has some commercial street frontage. Despite this design, which was intended to encourage walkability, the lack of mixed uses and the need to walk long distances between amenities in unshaded areas ultimately encourages car travel even for short distances. As a result, the sense of community is undermined because the visual spectacle has been prioritized over functional and social cohesion. These neighborhoods were primarily designed for families with children, with kindergartens nearby. However, they do not adequately consider older children and residents in their later years. These neighborhoods thus fail to respond to the current population's more long-term needs. Residents noted in the interviews that the neighborhoods have no places of employment, no cultural institutions and no places of entertainment. There is no place to have a drink, eat in a restaurant, or go to a movie.

Mixing users refers to planning in such a way that people of different ages, genders, and backgrounds can be accommodated in the same space and can interact and collaborate. Economic considerations influence mixing users when it comes to the composition and size of apartments. The three parent cities (Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Beit Shemesh, and Nazareth) enacted a policy of building large apartments in their new neighborhoods to strengthen the city. As a result of the Planning Administration's requirement for a diverse mix of apartments, there is a limited supply of small 2 room apartments in the Galilee neighborhood, and 3 room apartments in Nofei Yam and Hazon Ovadia.

Kitsch in architecture

The architecture in the three neighborhoods replicates itself, by creating a significant form-similarity within an infinite variety of buildings. This replication reflects what Adorno describes as the hallmark of kitsch as a superficial aesthetic that offers immediate gratification and comfort but is devoid of deeper meaning or originality. Adorno criticized kitsch for its tendency to reproduce standardized, formulaic designs that cater to popular taste without challenging the viewer or encouraging critical thought (Adorno, 1997). Throughout these neighborhoods, the dismantling at the level of individual buildings functions as a processor of their own reproductions by transforming into a local version that provides "aesthetic pleasure" and carnival escapism from the overbearing spirit of modernism. Clement Greenberg suggested that kitsch mimics the effects of high art while lacking its substance, and hence ultimately serves as a distraction rather than an enrichment (Greenberg, 1939; Kampmann, Elisabeth, and Kindlers 2020). Eco's concept of the "hyperreal" helps understand how reproduced architectural forms create a sense of reality that is more convincing and appealing than the original. This hyperreality offers an escape from the complexities and challenges of modern urban life by providing a sanitized and idealized version of reality (Eco, 1986). These replicated forms contribute to a kitsch aesthetic which while visually pleasing, ultimately undermines the potential for authentic, meaningful engagement with the urban environment. The result is an environment that emphasizes visual coherence and surface beauty over diversity, functionality, and deeper cultural significance (Dorfles & McHale, 1969; Greenberg, 1939; Olalquiaga, 1998).

With its foundation in the language of the banal, comprising a set of stylistic effects and easily recognizable signifiers, kitsch serves as empirical evidence of the emptying out of the meanings of signs. New buildings cluster together to create a familiar space that maintains continuity with various aesthetic features of the old city. An ironic worldview towards concepts such as "truth", "identity" and "border" accompanies the creation of a new space that the new tenants will view as having characteristics "like the old one" which is always perceived as more authentic: the structure-like urban blocks, an arcade-like structure that is not used as a passage but rather consists of a sequence of arches without supporting columns (the columns are decorative rather than structural components), and the horizontal and symmetrical lines despite the fact that the symmetry does not arise from function. Thus, kitsch architecture reflects a dead language that has been ripped from its original context and reinstalled in an artificial setting that emphasizes its

manipulation. The absence of ironic awareness leads to a formulaic effect that replaces the simple and clear geometry with excerpts and quotations.

The high proportion of large apartments in the new neighborhoods also reflects these concepts. Most buildings contain apartments with four or more rooms. This captures the rising standard of living, but also reflects the wishes of local authorities to attract a "strong population". Most small apartments are located in old buildings that are being demolished and rebuilt. The Director General of the Ministry of the Interior issued a circular in 2010 limiting small apartments to 20% of all housing projects. Given the lack of an unequivocal definition of a small apartment, a ‘small’ apartment can often occupy 80-90 square meters.

All three neighborhoods comply with the directives of the "Plan 2020 uniform procedure". These directives were meant to create a nationwide uniform way of submitting plans by addressing three objectives: creating a uniform planning language in Israel, automating the plan submission and handling process, and making sure that planning meets legal and planning requirements. However, this procedure limits architects' creativity and discretion and makes H-shaped buildings with three air directions for each apartment obligatory. This restriction, which was motivated by the need to ventilate apartments, is no longer relevant in Israel since most people use air conditioners throughout the year. As noted by Heidegger and Derrida who examined disorder and alienation in artwork itself, limitations on architects’ decision-making and creativity lead to formal uncertainty in buildings, a lack of consensus, and the adoption of an eclectic and narrative approach that makes use of different volumetric styles. Heidegger explored the essence of building and the notion of place and suggested that a true dwelling requires a deep engagement with the essence of the environment, something that is often lost in standardized, mass-produced architecture (Heidegger and Hofstadter, 1975). Derrida highlighted the instability and multiplicity of meaning within structures, and the ways in which alienness can pervade architectural forms (Derrida, 1974).

In addition, due to changes in planning and construction laws, municipalities have established restrictive spatial guidelines, down to minute details such as the length of railings, balcony sizes, and others. These restrictions encourage architects to replicate buildings with minimal necessary adjustments to new locations, resulting in generic buildings at best or unattractive buildings at worst. The architect Michal Yokla of Studio MIA pointed out the difficulty of dealing with developer's rights: "The problem is that I have to maximize the construction volumes so that the developer gets all the construction rights he deserves, and this hardly allows me to play an

architectural game. Almost everything that remains for me is painting on the facades" (Riba, 2018). These constraints not only stifle architectural creativity but also exacerbate the sense of alienation and disconnection described by Heidegger and Derrida. The resulting architecture is often characterized by a lack of place and belonging, reinforcing the commodification of urban spaces and the dominance of kitsch aesthetics over genuine cultural engagement.

Design Kitsch at the Apartment Level

In 1973, at the 'Industry and Economy' exhibition to mark the25th anniversary of founding of the State of Israel, models of real-size apartments were presented. These were innovative because they had flexible spaces, which made it easy to alter the interior of the apartments. Today, in addition to the need for immediate residential solutions, flexible planning is still a relevant goal. Nuclear families with a father, mother and two or three children are still the norm in Israel, but other family models are now not considered exceptions, including single-parent families and shared parenting families. Often, these families have more difficulties finding an apartment that suits their needs because the Israeli real estate market is geared towards young couples and families with traditional structures. Many apartments, however, are not flexible and the living space cannot be adapted optimally to the lifecycle of the family structure.

Analysis of apartment plans in the three neighborhoods showed that they had rigid spaces which define the functions of each and where the furniture should be placed. It is evident that space has been utilized to its maximum potential. Despite the different target audiences, the relationship between the public space and the private space was uniform across apartment types. All the apartments feature a spacious living room connected to the kitchen and the outdoor space (mainly the balcony). By deliberately sacrificing private spaces for the size of the public space, a “wow effect" is created. In fact, all the apartments in the neighborhoods have rooms with dimensions that correspond to the minimum area; namely, 250cm in width x 360 cm in length. The bedroom is often reinforced to be the apartment bomb shelter.

Ground floor garden apartments have private access to the garden while all the other apartments have balconies that lead out onto the apartment's public areas. These relatively small balconies are used as functional complements to public spaces and provide a space for a sukkah (or "booth") a temporary hut constructed for use during the week-long Jewish festival of Sukkot. Marketing campaigns often feature these balconies to emulate the luxurious characteristics of glamorous buildings by creating a facade of leisure, comfort and abundance. Thus, the balconies become kitsch elements that provide the illusion of luxury but are adapted for mass housing.

Another pattern observed in these apartments is the allocation of a smaller bathroom to the parents' room and a larger bathroom to the children's room. In some plans, there are guest rooms near the living room. In other cases, the entrance to the children's bathroom is built adjacent to the guest space. These design choices, while seemingly practical, further illustrate the kitsch tendency to replicate elements of luxury living in a way that caters to popular taste but lacks genuine substance and coherence. This approach to design highlights the tension between democratization and standardization, since the kitsch elements aim to make small apartments appear more luxurious and desirable, albeit in a superficial and often impractical way.

Naturally, there is a tendency towards eclecticism and greater flexibility in the interior design of the apartments. During the Covid-19 period, global home design trends shifted from modern and monochromatic minimalism to a more enveloping and relaxing style. In addition to the economic, social, and environmental crises, the geopolitical instability contributed to Pantone's selection of Peach Fuzz as the color for 2024. As can be seen in the demo apartments in the three neighborhoods, this combination of bright orange and pale pink prompted the world of design to respond to the "right color".

Humans' need to create a sense of belonging, and hence sharing is reflected in the global trend of statement pieces that correspond to gatherings and hospitality indoors. The idea is to place one significant item in view that has an interesting story that can be discussed. Often, families place photos or furniture that gives the layout a personal touch. Another trend is the revival of vintage details that can also be seen in the black and white flooring and carpets that constitute a nod to the design of the seventies. This communicative element feels playful and nostalgic. When "dressing up" the apartments, kitsch functions as an element of detached aesthetic pretentiousness, whose ironic and absurd representation is indicative of the voiding of reality of its natural and self-evident meanings.

Discussion

This study of three new neighborhoods reveals that while the reconstruction of new urban spaces may draw its inspiration from established architectural models of spaces, it often involves a popular, disjointed, and imitative aesthetic that we identify as urban kitsch. The neighborhoods all have a similarity in form within an infinite variety of buildings, reflecting Theodor Adorno's critique of kitsch as a superficial aesthetic that prioritizes immediate gratification over meaningful engagement. The tension between democratization and standardization in these neighborhoods reflects an intercultural and interdisciplinary reckoning with identities. There are recurring elements in all three neighborhoods. The first is the imbalance between built-up areas and open

spaces. The excessive number of built-up areas and unbalanced proportions between built-up and open areas can be seen in the very large parks and the absence of pocket gardens and shade on the streets. The second has to do with aesthetic pretension and flattery of popular taste. (MacDonald, 1953, 1962), as seen in the decision to leave an "original piece of nature" fenced off and identified, with the aesthetic pretension that it constitutes the "real environment". This also emerges in the abundance of balconies on every facade in Hazon Ovadia or the preference for the separation of uses in the Galilee neighborhood, that do not address the problems with these choices. The third is the decision to ignore resident diversity in neighborhood planning. The lack of a critical stance toward the plans has resulted in "new modern neighborhoods" that do not take key characteristic differences between residents into account but rather focuses on the "unique character" of each neighborhood despite the dissonance it is likely to create.

All the buildings reflect the kitsch elements that were intentionally incorporated into an architectural work through the use of popular or mass-produced imagery. These include the excessively eclectic crowding of the masses of the buildings, where the architectural game appears as a system of options and styles without a rigid hierarchy. The dramatic shell and surface area emphasize visibility and exteriority. The upper floors are also plastered in an inelegant manner, giving the buildings an ugly mushroom appearance. The oversaturated fronts also reflect kitsch. Whereas modernism rejected the decorative architectural styles that preceded it and advocated for a simple facade free of decorations, the buildings in the three neighborhoods reflect the anxiety resulting from "abandoning aesthetic perceptions of the machine". With no culturally embedded aesthetic guidelines, the front of the building is again emphasized, but this time is saturated, with balconies protruding and facades that disregard their surroundings.
The buildings are also aesthetically pretentious in that they implement a parasitic system that "steals" characteristics from previous periods and impersonates the "real". In addition to distorting and disconnecting them from their function (for example, columns that do not support, horizontal lines that do not reflect symmetry), these design features attempt to market themselves as new and original.
Overall, these neighborhoods endorse the kitschy requirement that every object - from land uses to building structure and interior design - be "correct" as defined by kitsch, but also exciting and outward-facing to reach large target audiences through familiar effects that have already undergone naturalization and adaptation to current market tastes. These elements present kitsch as a characteristic feature of contemporary consumer society: planning is seen as another product in the commodity market (Jameson, [1984] 2002) with a conscious addiction to conventional

wisdom (Gurevich, 1997). Even the artificial landscape surrounding the buildings (rocks, waterfalls, synthetic grass) externalizes the message without emphasizing its problems.

Conclusion

This article showed how kitsch is influencing urban planning and the consolidation of local identities in contemporary urban spaces. The three neighborhoods provide an example of the ways in which people shape and are shaped by constant interactions with their living environment. Although the neighborhoods are intended for completely different populations, the enormous similarity between them, more so than between each neighborhood and the main city in terms of planning of the neighborhood, the architecture and the interior design of the apartments raises interesting questions about the daily life of people living in these neighborhoods. Is there a similarity in their lifestyles? Does kitsch play a role in constructing spatial-cultural similarities? Is kitsch the new common vernacular in new Israeli neighborhoods?

Three newly established neighborhoods in Israel were selected as case studies: Nofei Yam in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Hazon Ovadia in Ramat Beit Shemesh, and the Galilee neighborhood in Nazareth. By studying these neighborhoods, we aimed to better understand how their design and planning reflect kitsch elements and the tension between democratization and standardization. The findings suggest that while the construction of new urban spaces may draw its inspiration from established architectural models of spaces, it often involves a popular, disjointed, and imitative aesthetic that we identify as urban kitsch. These neighborhoods exhibit a significant form-similarity within an infinite variety of buildings, reflecting Theodor Adorno's critique of kitsch as a superficial aesthetic that prioritizes immediate gratification over meaningful engagement. These findings extend Eco’s application of kitsch philosophy to the renewed Israeli space that sustains accumulations of disintegration and fragmentation on multiple levels from urban planning to the building and to the apartment itself. The neighborhoods illustrate the performative dimension of thinking that narrows the gap between the abstract definition of culture and its performative definition. The local middle culture "steals" effects from the high culture as represented in the international style and modernism, by appropriating them in a way that activates kitsch. The precarious status of signs as conveyors of meaning describes the reality of Israeli capitalist mass society in which kitsch is a regular player.

By analyzing master plans and their policy documents, conducting field observations, and interviewing residents, we captured the subtle ways in which kitsch manifests in the urban fabric. We found that the plans of these neighborhoods were replicated across all three neighborhoods.

In terms of urban planning, the internalization of ironic worldviews with respect to concepts such as "identity" and "border" creates many regimes of "truth". In these three neighborhoods, it resulted in a generic space for Jews, ultra-Orthodox sects, and Arabs that ignored their specific characteristics. This duplicated image dismisses the identity of the residents in the neighborhood, while providing "aesthetic pleasure" and a carnivalesque escape from the vernacular identity of space. In terms of architecture, the findings showed that the restrictive spatial guidelines result in standardized, generic buildings that lack creativity and originality. This replication reflects Umberto Eco's notion that kitsch continually renews itself to suit commercial purposes. The architecture in these neighborhoods serves as a chattering, theatrical subject characterized by congestion, lack of measure, communicativeness, flattery of taste, and aesthetic pretentiousness. This is evident in the eclectic and narrative approach to volumetric styles, the dramatic and extroverted building facades, and the superficial incorporation of luxurious elements like balconies and garden spaces. In terms of interior design at the apartment level and in line with Theodor Adorno's critique of kitsch, it reflects an aesthetic that prioritizes immediate gratification over deep meaningful engagement. The designs demonstrate a performative dimension of thinking that narrows the gap between abstract cultural definitions and their performative expressions.

This study contributes to the literature by applying kitsch philosophy to the renewed Israeli space, and by highlighting the accumulation of disintegration and fragmentation at multiple levels from urban planning to individual buildings to apartments. We demonstrate how the local middle culture appropriates elements from high culture, thus activating kitsch's structure to create urban environments that are visually appealing but lack substantive engagement with the residents' identities and needs. Specifically, we extend Adorno's and Eco's theories on kitsch to urban planning by depicting how kitsch aesthetics influence the design and functionality of contemporary urban spaces. The analysis of kitsch in urban planning also looked at neighborhood identity and character, connectivity, and reliance on private vehicles in "balloon neighborhoods", where the mixing of uses and users is low. We also pointed to the ways in which kitsch architecture highlights the tension between the code of democratization and the ideal of standardization in hyper-modern architecture, where kitsch elements aim to make small apartments in dense building blocks appear luxurious, albeit in a superficial and impractical way. Finally, we discussed the disintegration of private spaces by providing empirical evidence of how kitsch aesthetics result in fragmented and disintegrated private spaces and encourage common taste when the personal becomes trite and cheap, thus impacting residents' sense of place and identity.

The dodgy category of kitsch gives a Janus-face to urban spaces, and echoes mythical economic, political, and cultural clashes. However, it also makes the genre a locus for insight into how elusive forms of social tension and change can be mediated as a unifying factor across cultures. On the one hand, they highlight the opportunities inherent in more thoughtful and inclusive urban planning approaches that move beyond kitsch aesthetics to create truly functional and engaging urban spaces for diverse populations. On the other hand, creating a language, a common spatial identity at different scales, even if it is kitsch, may be a source of optimism as to the ability to cooperate and share space in future generations. Since a neighborhood and its buildings are designed to last for decades, planning implications are important. However, further research is needed to assess the 'pure externality' by which this most recent (re)kitsch-ing of urban space has weakened its constitutive tensions and threatens to dissolve them entirely.

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