



POLITECNICO  
DI TORINO

# Honors thesis

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COURSE OF ARCHITECTURE  
MSc ARCHITECTURE CONSTRUCTION AND CITY

*Abstract*

**“NOTHING WORKS,  
BUT EVERYTHING MIGHT”**

**Detroit’s residents as a resource for the  
Revitalization of its neighborhoods**

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Shrinking cities are a common theme of interest in different fields of studies. In fact, since the second half of twentieth century, urban planners, sociologists, economists and geographers, have addressed this phenomenon. In spite of this, the large majority of studies focused on the causes and effects of shrinkage, mostly due to globalization and its economical characteristics, and in most cases accounting it as a wholly negative urban process; consequently, several planning strategies keep focusing on growth, relying upon the common perception that a successful and desirable city can only grow.

Actually, in addressing shrinkage, authors converge on the importance of focusing on stabilization and acting at a local scale that means to relate tightly to the context, not only in terms of physical space but also in terms of socio-economic characteristics. In the small scale urban action, the important role of residents in the revitalization process is evident; residents are in fact not only the beneficiaries of the project, but above all the leading experts of the area.

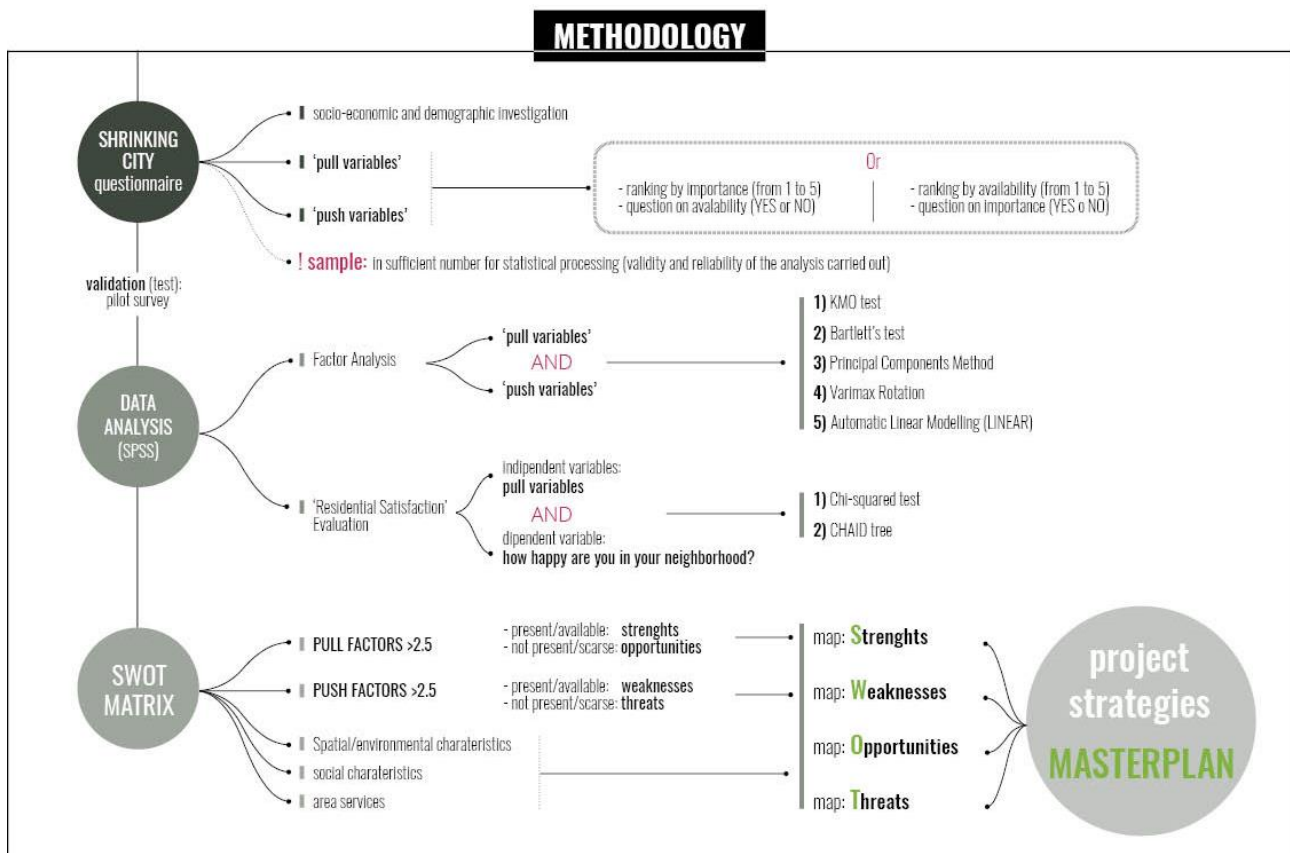


FIG.1 Layout of the proposed method, with all phases and analysis performed.

Starting from these assumptions, this study suggest a new method based on a participatory approach to develop strategies in shrinking urban contexts; a statistical method, based on the distribution of a semi-structured questionnaire to a sample of inhabitants, was applied to arrive at the construction of an empirically defined and spatialized SWOT matrix composed of a series of indicators hierarchized by importance, on the basis of which develop intervention strategies. The method rely on the evaluation of a series of push and pull variables, useful in understanding what are the main reasons that pull residents to choose to stay in their current place of residence or push them to move elsewhere.

## PUSH&PULL VARIABLES DEFINITION

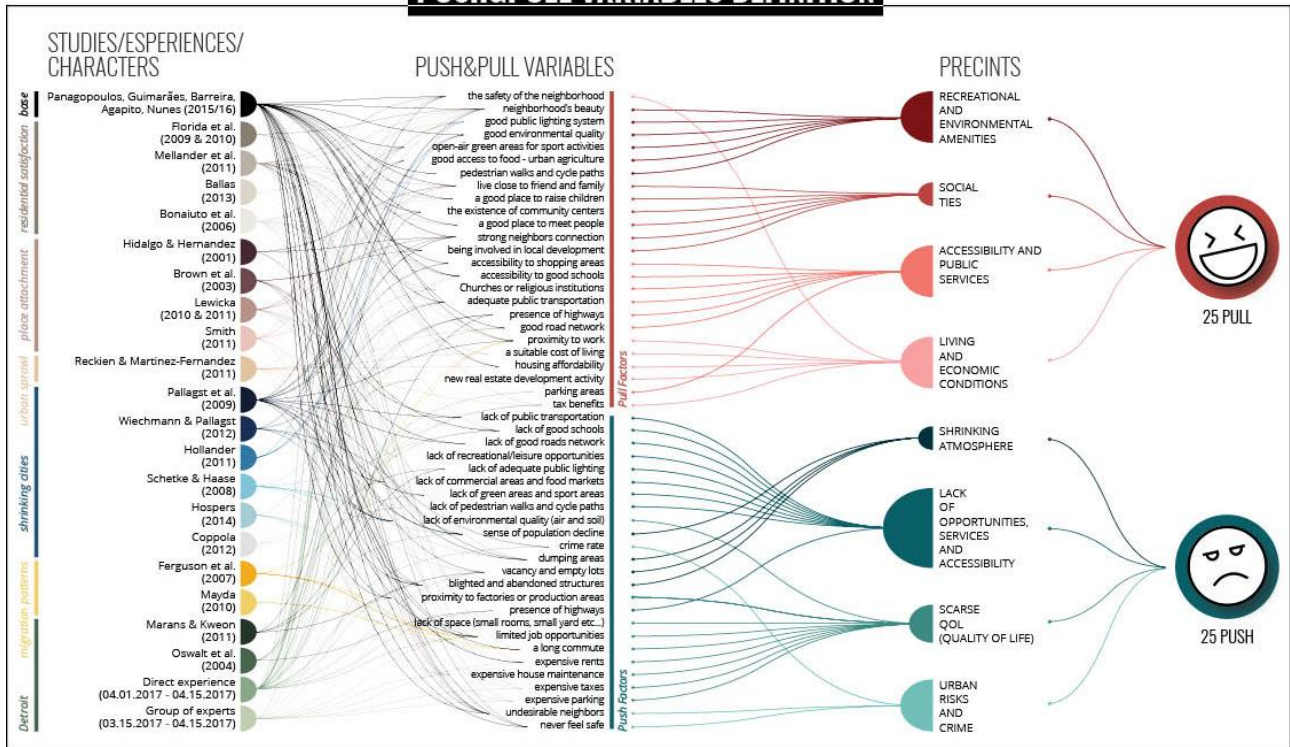


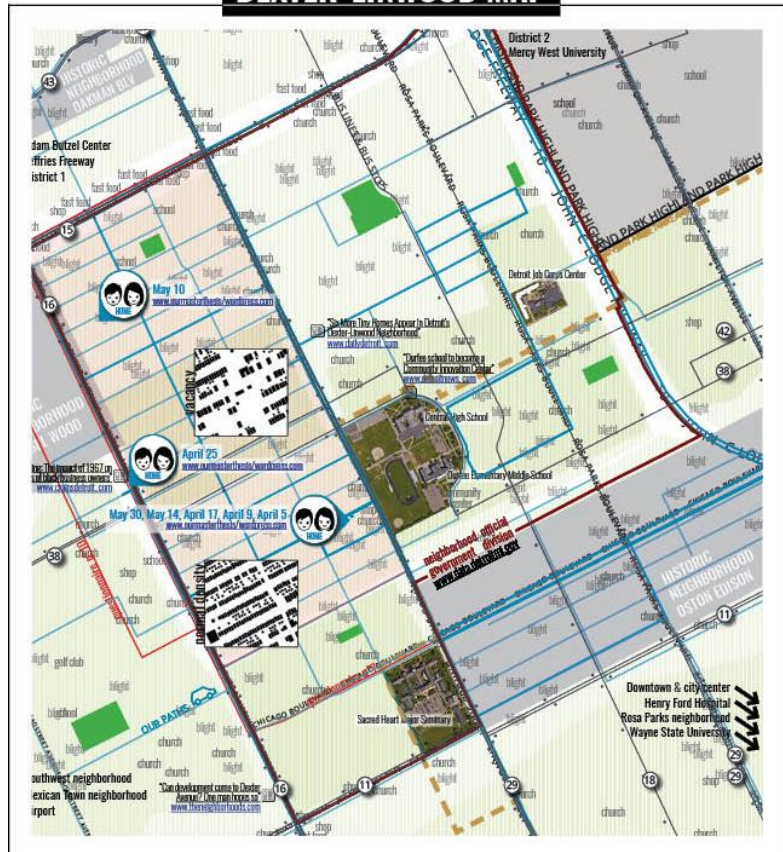
FIG.2 Phases and arguments of the definition of all 25 pull and 25 push variables.

In order to test the designed methodology, it was decided to apply the study to the city of Detroit (Michigan), one of the most badly affected by shrinkage city in the entire world. In particular, as regards the distribution of the questionnaire, the application was carried out on the entire urban territory, to provide an overall picture of the city and of the wishes of its residents, while the definition of the SWOT matrix and its spatialization has been put into practice for only one neighbourhood, called Dexter-Linwood.

Among the objectives, this study aims in particular to (1) understand how and how much the social, economic, urban and built environment characteristics affect the perception of the city and the desire to reside in it or move elsewhere, and (2) provide policy makers and urban planners with a tool to approach the revitalization project that focus on the needs and wishes of the residents concerned, trying to ensure a better change to deal with shrinkage and get success.

FIG.3 Map of the Dexter Linwood neighbourhood, useful for the construction of the SWOT matrix.

## DEXTER-LINWOOD MAP



Briefly, this work is subdivided in five sections:

- In the first chapter is provided a little introduction to the shrinkage phenomenon, focus on causes, effects, solutions and current condition;
- Secondly, we present in short the American context and the case study city, Detroit, accompanying the text with a timeline and some data;
- In the third section are presented the two important groups of actors involved in the revitalization of the city, the municipality on one hand and residents and associations on the other;
- In the fourth chapter, the main part of the study carried out, we applied the methodology suggested, arriving to the definition of the SWOT matrix for one Detroit neighbourhood;
- Finally, in chapter five, we discussed about neighbourhoods and borders, trying to define if the choice of this scale of analysis has been correct or if others (like district) could be better, referring to a series of maps and considerations.

To better carry out the study itself and the analysis, in an attached dossier are provided the eight deepening about the neighbourhoods in which the analysis was performed, each made by a brief description, principal data, some photos of the area, and a subjective map.

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