

## APPLICATION OF GUERRILLA SUBURBANISM

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Infrastructures are a part of the landscape. Urban, suburban, and rural conditions are landscapes in their own right. This article focuses on suburban and rural landscapes and their infrastructures through the lens of Guerilla Suburbanism. The idea encourages the densification and heterogeneity of uses within suburban and rural areas. With an ambition to mediate between nature and urban conditions in a sensitive way. It seeks to maximize natural environments while increasing the quality of living. It is a continuation of a theory, sketched out in a previous article published at favelissues.com (an online journal focused on informal developments). In that article I defined “Guerilla Suburbanism [as] the adaptation, creative reuse, and/or reinvention of rural and suburban realities and conceptions. The purpose of the effort (Guerilla Suburbanism) is to create an improved quality of life through substantial increase in spatial efficiency, effectiveness.”[1] As the previous article outlined the idea, this article will focus on illuminating applications of the theory. There is difficulty in trying to use a single solution for global challenges. It doesn’t work very often. But the ideas and the sentiment can transfer. In order to elucidate the idea we can explore applications. To show examples of how Guerilla Suburbanism might be applied in different contexts we will examine several case studies.

Two environments I would like to use are single family suburbia in the United States, which is predominantly post war development focused on the efficiencies of the automobile. The other is the situation here in Zhejiang China. In this province and throughout Eastern China the predominant method of transition from village infrastructure toward denser more urban conditions utilize, a very abrupt, tabula rasa approach resulting in a nearly homogeneous redevelopment. This still creates a car dependent environment for most residences, as whatever local shops, and social infrastructure, integrated into the new development are not nearly enough to accommodate working conditions for the majority of the residence. We will examine projects from these two contexts. The ambition

1. Steenblik, Ralph Spencer. “Guerilla Suburbanism in the Age of Covid-19.” {FAVEL Issues}, 25 Oct. 2020, favelissues.com/2020/10/16/ guerilla-suburbanism-in-the-age-of-covid-19/.

2. Looby, Marissa. “The New Radical Pragmatist (On Validation).” Australian Design Review, 23 Nov. 2016, www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/the-new-radical-pragmatist/.

3. Bozickovic, Alex. “A Touch of Radical Pragmatism.” The Globe and Mail, vol. R.3, 2016, p. 3.

4. Even with the expressed decreased cost associated with the precast material, the bespoke nature of the solution proved too costly, even more costly than a more traditional addition approach simply due to contractor familiarity with traditional approaches.

is that the reader can take the principles explored through these case studies and apply them to different environments entirely. It is interesting to think of these ruminations in the context of radical pragmatism.[2] [3]

### Examples in the Western United States

The western United States has had the lion share of its development and population growth after world war II. According to US Census data, Arizona more than doubled its population from under half a million in 1940 to over one million in 1960. California nearly tripled its population in the same time period from under seven million to almost sixteen million. Planning implementations played to the automobile as the most effective mode of transportation and followed the trend through segregation of uses, working hard to propel the vision of the american dream as a single family home in suburbia. In order to encourage a mixing of uses, a more efficient use of housing stock, and a conscious effort to diminish automobile dependency, communities need to employ measures to allow for a natural, uninhibited densification. A densification and diversification driven by individual property owners (possibly incentivized by municipalities). The following projects come from this background and the underlying contexts are clear examples of this, although the projects foci were not singular.

Bryner House is an attempt at suburban diversification and densification. The iteration of the project seen in the illustration focused on the use of precast, industrial double “T” construction in an effort to reduce costs associated with the project. The addition was originally proposed as an increase in area dedicated to single family living, but after further consultation with the architect the owner reconsidered the use of the space in favor of a non-profit community art space they were housing elsewhere. Regardless of the designed use the space is designed with versatility to allow for a multiplicity of uses including residence or art space.

This project is made feasible due to the deep lot available to the client. Although the client has a clean contemporary aesthetic, they were also interested in maintaining the existing street front presence. Allowing the existing building autonomy, while at the same time allowing for the addition to have it’s own identity.[4]

Figure 1.

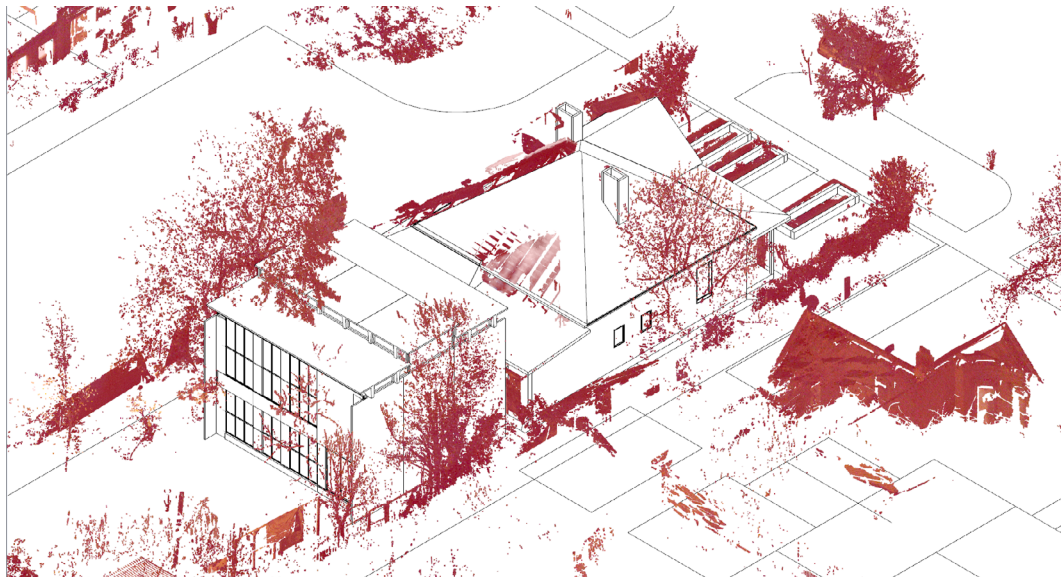
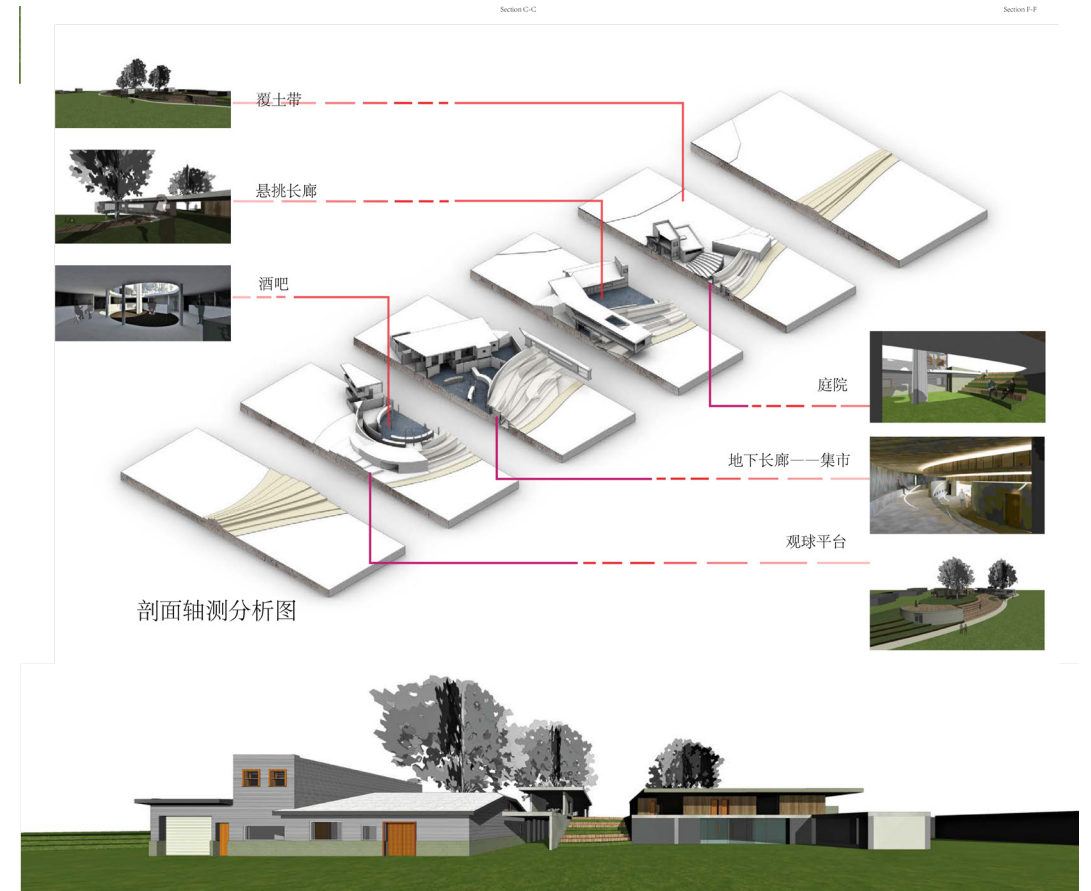


Figure 2.



Acknowledging the difficulty of existing conditions this project utilized a lidar scan as a means of limiting the errors from documenting existing conditions. This technological approach isn't a magic bullet but it does decrease the margins of error and increase the level of detail associated with the documentation of the existing conditions for a more comprehensive integration of interventions.

1440 Leadville Ave is an interesting project with an unusually long history. It is working on its second century with one single family maintaining ownership. Starting as a single family residence, the building became a dairy milk processing facility. This warranted an addition of a more commercial typology. The addition took one end of the single storied dutch gabled structure and replaced it with a two story flat roofed section and another single story garage to accommodate the milk truck. Over time the building evolved as the needs and the tools of the business changed. Finally the milk business was sold and the building lay vacant for decades. The current inheritors use the adjacent property for organic farming. The building is currently being used only as a storage shed supporting the gardening activities. The owners have ambitions to restore some of the previous glory of the dairy while accommodating new uses.

The ambition has been to play into the agro-tourism trend through the combination of commercial produce processing kitchen, guest

rooms and a farmers market. One of the schemes from the team included the unconventional approach of combining two single family homes to create new opportunities.

The site is unique in that it is situated in somewhat of a back alley way and adjacent to a park on its back. The park is full on summer weekends. The architect took advantage of this site-ing in order to preserve the current front facing historical facade and remove the fence in an effort to open the previous back yard into an open and welcoming community space to help interface between the agro-tourism aspects of the project including primarily the farmers market component to the project.

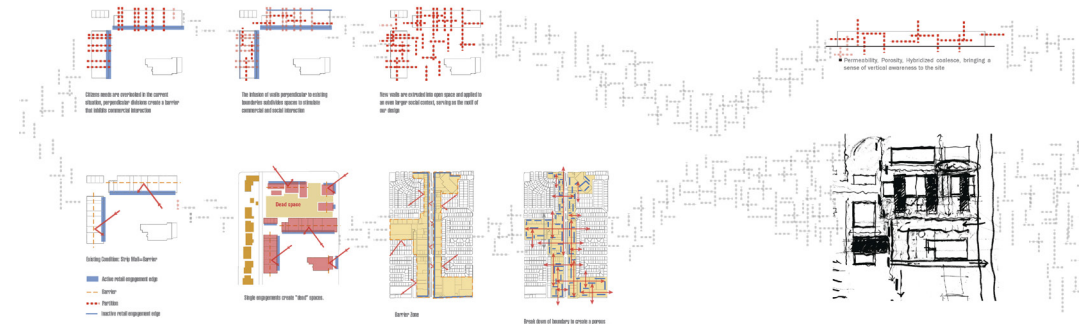
The Flip-a-Strip competition initiated by the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) invited my team from OWP/P (now a part of Cannon Design) to submit an entry. The entry "Stripped Mall" was later featured in an exhibition there as an honorable mention. The challenge was rethinking the stripmall typology. One of the main thoroughfares in Scottsdale Arizona is aptly named Scottsdale Road. This road in a sense is a microcosm of western suburban sprawl. Scottsdale used to be its own, but has become a suburb of Phoenix. It has the characteristics of suburban life: fast moving arterial streets lined with small scale retail, encasing the residential in isolation (archipelago). [5] Our opportunity was to create incisions in the existing environment to create a pedestrian

5. McMorrough, John. "MOS Movies, or The Phantasmagoria Of Discipline." Log, no. 24, 2012, pp. 111-115. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41765477. Accessed 16 Nov. 2020.

Figure 3.



Figure 4.



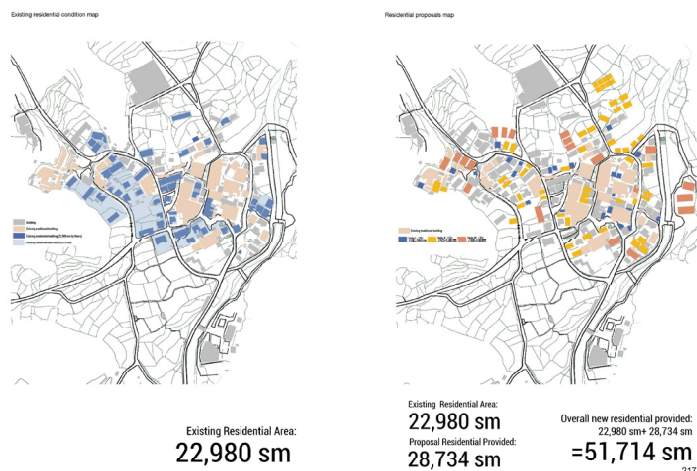


connection from the residential neighborhoods to the commercial centers lining Scottsdale Road. This creates a dialog that had not been there previously, and in doing so allows for additional vibrance and new life in what now becomes a more public and gathering place. The easier it is for people to get to these retail destinations the more incentive and opportunity for the retailers to help create an experience. As was stated in the project description: “The stripmall encourages a linear consumer process. NEED - TRAVEL - PURCHASE There is no opportunity for interaction, convenience overshadows the experience. This is tragic because “the essence of life is experience”. The most successful retail models are destinations, a place that is inviting, where people want to come. Steps must be taken to retake the stripmall [as a ] community destination, a place where people want to be.”

Another element of densification takes place through precision second story additions considering structural capabilities of the existing structure along with programmatic feasibility. Increasing the density acts as a socially magnetic catalyst. Through these two methods the suburban fabric is disrupted. Improving the quality of residence through increased connectivity, and access to social and community opportunities with their walkable circle. It also provides a much stronger spatial identity. This in turn produces the sense of belonging for the residence.

Although it may be perceived as simple, possibly even the most

Figure 5.

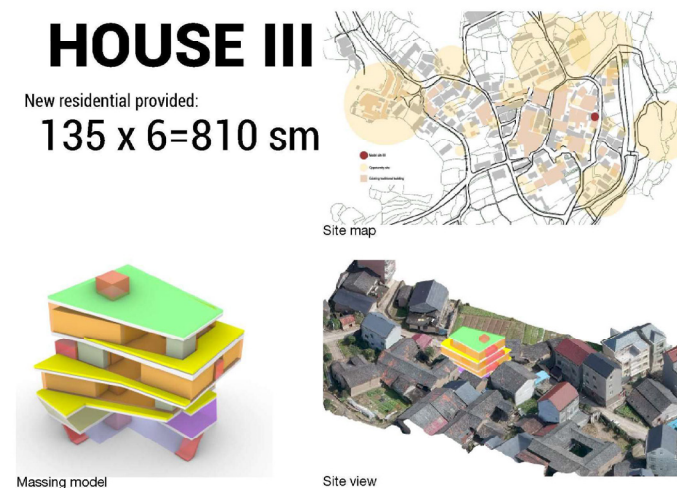


expeditious solutions, these gestures accumulate to transform the community fabric. There are many examples of creative reuses of existing infrastructures, etc. within the urban environment. People are driven to innovation almost as a necessity, due to spatial limitations. This spatial limitation is not nearly as strong within suburban and rural contexts, yet the opportunities are just as readily available. I consider this the suburban mental block. Underpasses, fence lines, backyards, etc. each of these could become exceptional opportunities for creating place, densifying, and improving quality of life.

### Examples in Eastern China

China is in an epic state of transformation. Moving the standard of living for more than a billion people takes massive effort and a lot of growing pains. Due to the rapid growth there are missed opportunities. In the words of some of my students in their recent entry into the design contest entitled “Architecture, Culture, and Agriculture: The challenges of urbanization”, they state the problem in this way: “In parallel to decades of urbanization, the binary conflict between countryside and city is becoming severe. Natural and constructed, carefree and restrained, peasant and urban worker, physical and mental”. They go on to say “On the one hand, the city is under the great burden of high density, overpopulation, and pollution. On the other hand, intending to urbanize the countryside, the actual countryside is losing its population, farmland and unique

Figure 6.



quality of prosperity." [6]

In an academic design studio Bo Lin and I worked with students and the municipality of XinWu Village in rural Zhejiang China near LiShui, which is a part of the origins that make up the Ou River watershed. The party leader of the village was interested in revitalizing and creating new vibrance. They had commissioned a previous plan to increase housing stock and create a communist history tourist destination, yet the plan fell into many of the traps of the status quo for redevelopments within the region: density without identity and, similar to suburban challenges in places like the United States, segregation of uses.

Our studio took on the challenge of producing a second revitalization plan. As a result of our work, a book entitled "A Manifesto for XinWu Village" was produced encompassing our research and proposal. The team worked tirelessly for months producing large physical models and integrated proposals for a comprehensive plan. The village leadership was happy to receive our proposal. One of our students Wang Zirui (Enoch) championed the densification problem. Together we were able to propose a doubling of the housing stock from roughly twenty-three thousand square meters to nearly fifty-two thousand square meters, without increasing the effective footprint of the existing condition. The previous proposal aimed to carve away large portions of a near-by mountain to make room for additional large towers of residences. This would eliminate any of the existing village charm.

Our approach was contrastingly an integrated one, with creative incisions in the existing residential fabric of the village, our plan looked for opportunities others might overlook as not feasible or too challenging. This type of resourcefulness is necessary in order to densify within an existing village fabric while at the same time maintaining the same walkability which has already existed for generations. Another part of our proposal was a ring road, a dedicated transportation hub toward the entry point of the village, and minimizing automobile traffic in the village itself. There were other interventions including waste and water treatment facilities, education, research, and health facilities. Each of these attempted to limit the additional footprint of the village in an effort to minimize the impact of the growth on the surrounding environment, being very

Careful to avoid sprawl. This is particularly important in a pristine mountain valley such as the environment of this village.

In the before mentioned competition, "Architecture, Culture, and Agriculture", the winning entry entitled, "Points of Departure", by some of my students, Zoe (Tieru Huang), Rose(Ruzhen Zhao), River(Jiayu Bao), Charlotte (Chen Yi), Ryan (Renyuan Liu), villanelle (Ziyu Li), proposed a thoughtful and comprehensive solution to the urban boundary problems the world is now facing. Their proposal was a mediated one, backed by extensive research and data leading them to create strategies on three scales: Urban/regional, local, and on the micro, architectural scale. There were many components to consider in the competition site, Wangzhai Village. The village is adjacent to Wenzhou-Kean University and has been vacated for redevelopment. The students proposal included a thoughtful selection of existing buildings for preservation and then proposed an adjustment to the existing road network to accommodate wider pedestrian friendly walking commercial streets. Their proposal focused on precision yet mediated density, integrating moderate density within the rural landscape. Allowing for the density to be broken up by integrated gardens, open space on the first floor in the Corbusian style. At the same time creating public spaces above ground. These moments of density allow for the garden landscape to persist even amidst the tireless onslaught of urbanism, by supporting the people necessary to maintain their agrarian lifestyle while accommodating the additional population necessary in an era of population growth.

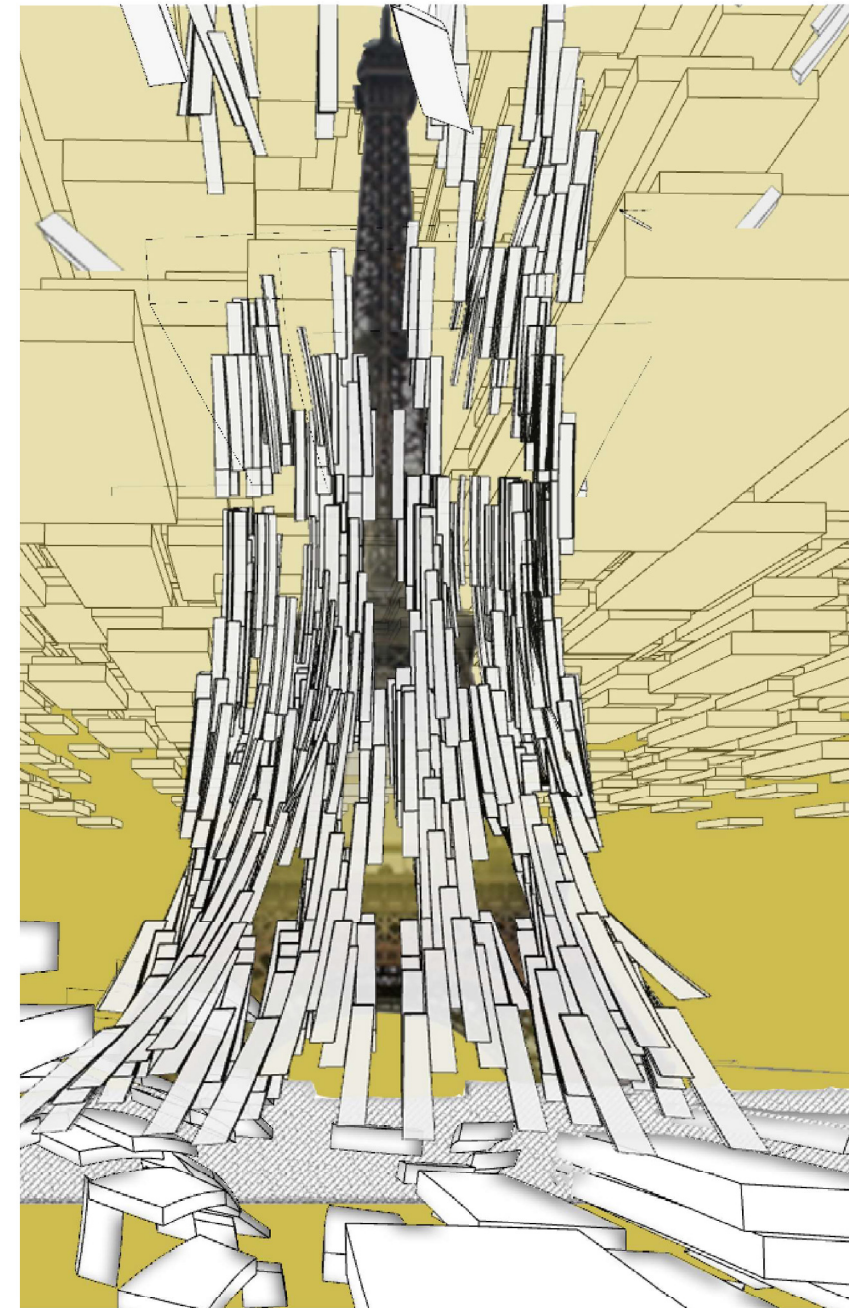
Beyond the strategic high density interventions, the team introduced some lower density programs in replacement of some of the building stock with a low value and poor building quality. For example on the existing fringes of the village they introduced single story agro-tourism programs, and moving toward the mass their solution provided low rise multi-storey mediations to make the taller proposed buildings feel more integrated and natural. This is important because it allows the low density village to seamlessly integrate with the landscape, so that a patron will not be affected by an abrupt transition between nature and the built environment. Overall their solution went a long way toward creating an environment that is sensitive to the rural existing conditions and yet allows for densification, which in turn can provide support for the agricul-

tural roots of the region.

One might now consider how the two divergent locations considered in this article are related. The answer to this question lies in characteristics of the context. Consistent in some important fundamental ways: low density, acting as a buffer between more dense urban conditions and natural conditions, scaled solutions (meaning that the typology provides a substantial percentage of the housing stock for the region), local pressure to densify, and ideally the individual has the ability to take initiative in improving the environment. All of the considered locations generally fit within these characteristics. Identifying suburban is problematic (particularly in regard to population data, and other analytical figures, what is the end of urban and the beginning of suburban?), yet I believe that a large portion, possibly the majority, of the global population lives in suburbs of one kind or another. Thus illustrating the magnitude and gravity of mediated density. This is the goal of guerilla suburbanism: substantial increase in spatial efficiency, effectiveness for better mediation between density and more natural environments.

Density is important as a function of cooperation, collaboration, and communication. Isolation accentuates differences. Density with compelling and strategic public gathering spaces creates community, real connected unabashed community. Community that supports each other, a neighbor in the good and the hard times. Of course this can happen in ubiquitous suburban neighborhoods, but through densification, heterogeneous uses, creative reuse, and reinvention of rural and suburban realities we can improve the quality of life.

Figure 7.



Early concept art for densification inspiration