

# Heike Kaiser

## Metamorphoses of the City – Studying Tel Aviv's Urban Transformation by Analyzing its Multifaceted Drivers (*working title*)

**Research area A:** Complexity of urban metamorphoses analyzing its multifaceted drivers, i.e. changes of urban and infrastructural planning, urban lifestyles, socio-cultural and economic structures, urban governance, etc.

**International case study:** Tel Aviv-Jaffa

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### Abstract

The city of Tel Aviv, established in 1909 as the garden suburb of Jaffa, now forms the gateway to Israel. Embracing an abundance of multi-ethnic cultures and lifestyles, Tel Aviv is the first modern Jewish city, a laboratory for the State of Israel and therefore the center of its cultural identity.

In this doctoral thesis, the reader gains an interdisciplinary viewpoint on this ‘most-talked about city’ and its transformation from an unspectacular sand dune into a fascinating magnet for specific groups of people in the short course of only one hundred years. Aim of this study is to address multifaceted drivers being crucial for initiating an overall complexity of major changes in urban and infrastructural planning, socio-cultural and economic structures as well as urban governance and lifestyles.

By a three-fold approach – the review, analysis and evaluation of material from various sources (e.g. historic photographs, GIS maps, literature, media etc.); interviews with inhabitants and experts of different socio-cultural and professional backgrounds; the method of Strollology by Lucius Burckhardt – Tel Aviv is studied from its origins up to the present day, as a center of immigration containing reminders of every immigrant’s mother country, and as a catalyst between East and West.

Tel Aviv’s urban development has taken a fresh and open-minded role in the Middle East. At the same time, the city that always wanted to live ‘without history’ has started to become interested in its own past. For these and many other reasons, this study is especially timely.

**Keywords:** Metropolitan Area, Mediterranean Landscape, Cultural Landscape, Sense of Place, Local and Regional Identity, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Bauhaus Architecture, Urban Development, Urban Sprawl, Green Infrastructure, Quality of Life, Rural Depopulation, Immigration, Globalization, Multi-cultural Society, Middle East, Israel

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### Research objective

With about 400,000 inhabitants and an area of 51.4 km<sup>2</sup>, Tel Aviv-Jaffa is the second largest city in Israel. Together with the neighboring cities of Ramt Gan, Giv’atayim, Holon, Bat Yam and Bnei Brak, it forms the Gush Dan Metropolitan Area where roughly 3.3 million people live in 1,516 km<sup>2</sup> (CBS 2010).

Apart from buildings, green spaces and public squares, its urban grid basically consists of a network of streets – like the Roman Cado (or the Manhattan grid) – that run to and from the water, randomly disposed and unromantic. At first sight, no feature of special interest meets the eye. Yet the streets themselves are beautiful, and it is only by wandering through them again and again – curious, observant and aiming for nowhere in particular – that one can truly get to know Tel Aviv.

An attentive walk in the city – what Lucius Burckhardt used to do with the perceptive mind of a professional and even proclaimed as ‘Strollology’, and what György Konrád has called the ‘little étude of the daytime stroll’, composed by anyone capable of opening their eyes and using their feet – can best be undertaken in the very hours following sunrise and sunset since on the eastern Mediterranean coast the sun rises early, and it also sets early.

In the heat of the day Tel Aviv seems like any other city on the globe – blazing, noisy, dirty. But before the hustle and bustle of the day begins and after it has subsided, the city seems to open up and has – alike the Mediterranean light – a surprisingly gentle quality. This miracle occurs every day, and yet it never loses its sensational, sensuous effect. Even those who dislike Tel Aviv admit that this city has a special way of

engaging all the senses: it enhances our seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling and touching – and also our imagination. It arouses curiosity and stages an abundant mix of impressions which seems greater than the city itself. Its impact on the senses makes one strongly suspect that the streets, squares, parks and buildings of this city have more to tell.

To understand urban transformation processes and foreign socio-cultural, political and economic structures, observing is important; even better is participating. Indeed, it is important to walk the streets and boulevards in Tel Aviv, do picnics in the parks, sit in street cafés, restaurants or private gardens, look out from balconies and roof top terraces, stroll along the promenade and the port, spend days at the beach, celebrate public holidays, and attend open air music festivals, street parades and public debates on the urban squares.

Through my numerous visits to Tel Aviv since 2005, I have had the chance to explore and experience the unique atmosphere of the city. I will never have the deep feeling and native relationship of one who grew up in Tel Aviv (or its metropolitan area). Still, I have always done my best to understand, to listen carefully and observe closely. I have talked with many people – among them architects, engineers, planners, artists, journalists, social workers, and students of various subjects. Everyone had more suggestions of places to see, events to visit, things to read.

The outsider's viewpoint certainly has its dilemmas but obviously, sometimes, it also offers chances: Foreign eyes might see what others may have ignored, visitors might ask questions that everyone takes for granted, or offer comparisons not previously imagined. I often wandered around the city, following in the footsteps of those who have described it, reading whatever I could find in literature and additional media, always in search of the right questions.

### **Research questions and hypotheses**

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Following, major questions are listed that I would like to ask about Tel Aviv-Jaffa as a city in a complex web of relations, connections and contiguities:

- as the point of arrival and the new home of immigrants whose memories of their homelands became part of the cultural landscape, e.g. in how far did/do the various ethnic groups of immigrants have an impact on the urban landscape? Are there neighborhoods that have been implemented by certain ethnic groups?
- as a stage in Jewish history, a place where different traditions came face to face, e.g. how were/are elements of Jewish culture integrated into the urban landscape?
- as a place to live on the eastern Mediterranean coast, in the Orient, looking for an identity in an often hostile environment, e.g. what are typical Mediterranean and/or Oriental elements and drivers that have influenced the urban landscape of Tel Aviv?
- as a city among other cities, as a trial-and-error ground for multifaceted and complex processes of urban sprawl and metropolitan development, e. g. what reasons did exist for choosing the unfertile land near Jaffa to built Tel Aviv? What drivers influence Tel Aviv's urban transformation at present? What are present and near future intra-urban and peri-urban development projects? What drivers will most likely be crucial for Tel Aviv's future development? Are there any 'long-term drivers'?
- and finally the position of Tel Aviv in the context of Israel identities and urban lifestyles, e.g. what makes Tel Aviv an interesting place to live, especially for young Israelis, compared to Jerusalem and Haifa? What are the drivers for people to leave the surrounding and move into downtown Tel Aviv – and vice versa?

The city, which I find most fascinating and at times alarming, is the Tel Aviv-Jaffa of today. I wished that more of the many people in Western Europe who engage in debate about Israel and the Middle Eastern conflict would make contact with this contemporary city, would question it and at the same time listen to it. They will not be able to understand present day Tel Aviv, however, without knowing its history. Therefore, my aim is to build up a 'visible past' of the city out of the dialogue between those who were and are startled and surprised by Tel Aviv, those who were and are still appalled by it, those who fought over it – and those who live there today.

One emphasis will be placed on the years before 1948 (mainly: 1900-1920), when it was still uncertain whether this city could achieve the transition from model to reality. Another emphasis will be placed on the present day and near future developments (mainly: 2000-2020), and apart from that, there will be an outlook into long-term future concepts, assumptions and fears (from 2050).

An account simply of the material history of the city would be doomed to failure. Tel Aviv acquires a real existence only through the reactions of its visitors and inhabitants, its cultural landscape comes alive in the multiplicity of descriptions.

From the moment of its foundation Tel Aviv was called into question by those who built it and voiced conflicting views about its future, by visitors who came with certain expectations and could not believe what they saw, by its enemies, who made a point of writing its name in inverted commas. But Tel Aviv lived and has developed, and by its very existence it poses further questions for this doctoral thesis:

- about the ability of immigrants to settle successfully, e.g. which neighborhoods face problems related to different ethnic groups? What measures could be taken to improve the situation in those areas?
- about the course and the portrayal of Jewish history, which here faced a new challenge, e.g. what places bear a special historic burden in the urban landscape?
- about the city's neighbors and their ability to tolerate its existence since more than almost any other city, Tel Aviv has inspired both, affection and hatred – e. g. how were/are these feelings expressed in everyday life? How is the common history of Jaffa and Tel Aviv communicated in public? How are the socio-political relations to Jaffa today?
- about our assumptions and the methods we normally use when thinking about and studying large cities and metropolitan areas, e.g. how do other metropolitan areas, such as Boston, the German Ruhr Area or Istanbul, deal with future challenges regarding urban sprawl, climate change, green infrastructure etc.?

### **Choice of quotes about Tel Aviv**

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“I wander around Tel Aviv, searching for a word which would capture the character of this unusual city.”  
(Wolfgang von Weisl, 1925:217)

“So bear with me and let me be as incoherent as Tel-Aviv. For if anyone wraps up this city neatly and hands it to you, he has lied in the name of coherency.” (Dorothy R. Kahn, 1936:110)

“At night I used to lie on the terrace courting sleep through deep joy. Sometimes it came. And sometimes deep joy overcame sleep. So I dressed again and walked the streets pushed by the passion which the passion of these people stirred in me.” (Dorothy R. Kahn, 1936:132f.)

“Just be merciful with this city, tell her a kind word.” (Meir Wieseltier, 1989)

“Tel Aviv and Jaffa are two towns which grew side by side: the one – a modern city in European style; the other – a typical oriental town, one of the most ancient in the world. The War of Independence merged them into one – Tel Aviv- Jaffa, combining the ancient and the modern. Jaffa has been the arena of international events for thousands of years; Tel Aviv witnessed the foundation of the Jewish independence. Both towns existed side by side for forty years as aliens and sometimes as enemies until they were merged into one.” (Nachum Guttman, 1979)

### **Current state of research**

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Regarding the history of Tel Aviv, the archives are complete, the material history of the city is well documented, and apart from that, there are many Zionist legends about the city's foundation and sentimental stories by Jewish pioneers about the early years.

Especially in the context of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city, there has been a public interest to foster research and renovation about the listed Bauhaus structures of the ‘White City’ (UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2003) and to build cultural awareness towards historic events that took place in the urban landscape.

There was an exhibition sponsored mainly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Division of Cultural and Scientific Affairs and the Israel Institute of Architects and Town Planners in 2003 called ‘The Transformation of Israeli Cities’ illustrating the different ways in which architects have addressed the challenge of urban transformation in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv over the last decades (e.g. European, Middle-Eastern eclectic, “Bauhaus”, Socialist Utopian, International Commercial).

There is an abundant amount of newspaper articles (e.g. Haaretz) about current environmental projects (e.g. Bauhaus Tel Aviv, Hiriya Dump Site and Ariel Sharon Regional Park).

To gain a more thorough overview, however, more time is needed for review. The list of the current state of literature at the end of this proposal provides additional information.

## Methodological concept (shortened)

In cities we look for what is distinctive, the special character ('genius loci') that sets one place apart from each other. As a rule, the urban centers which we examine are hundreds or thousands of years old, they have a long cultural tradition, and their buildings reflect that history. Historical research into cities and their transformation over time always includes archeological work in the extensive field of urban mentalities, work and communication patterns and ways of life.

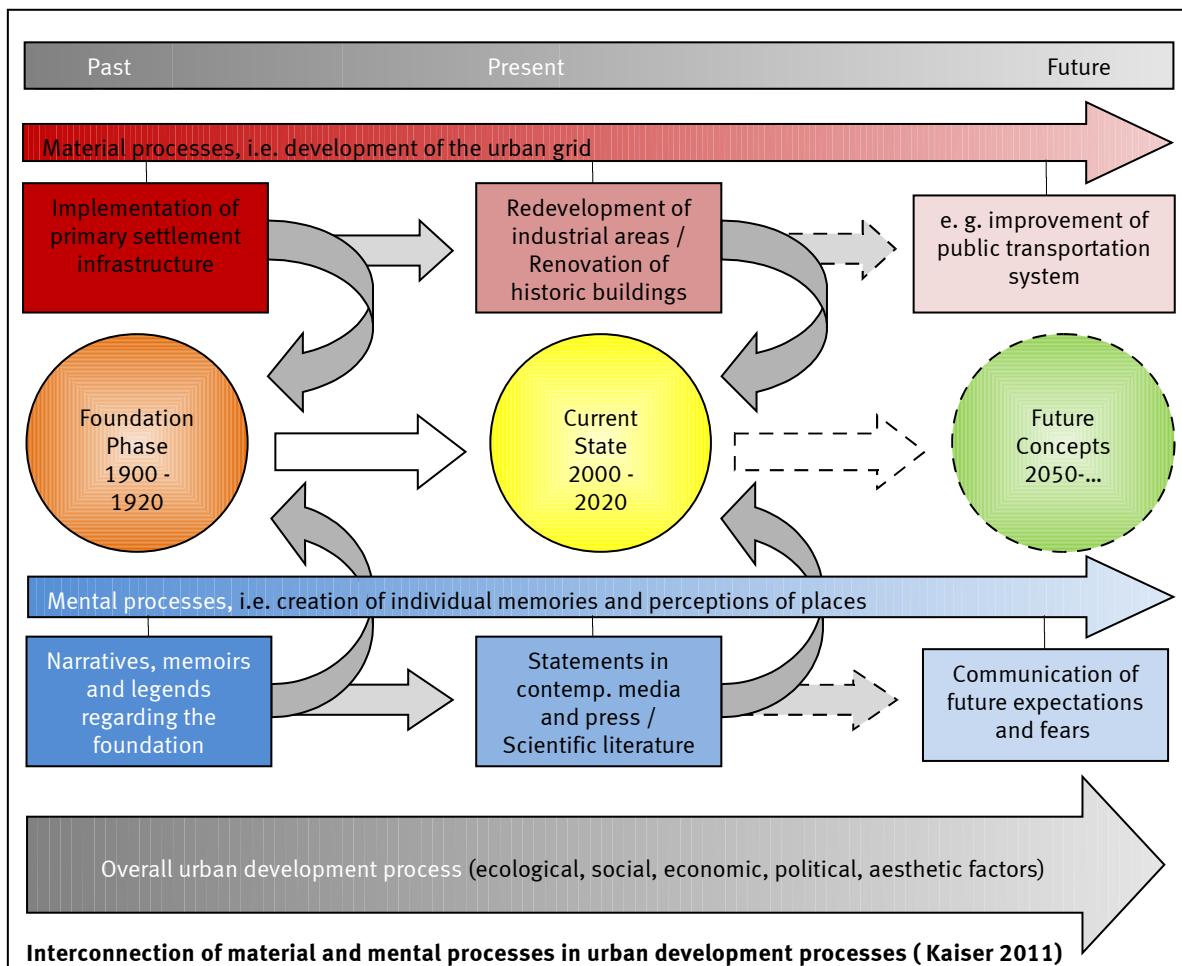
Tel Aviv, founded in 1909 as a garden suburb of the biblical town of Jaffa, however, still might have some residents who are older than the city itself, and if you dig too far down, you strike sand. This is a boon to researchers, and together with legends about its foundation and sentimental stories of the early years, this only adds to the interest of the research. The landscape of Tel Aviv-Jaffa can be 'read' as a microcosm of which one can easily gain an overview, both chronological and spatial. The city has undergone a rapid development, almost like a speeded-up film, from sand dune over garden suburb to metropolis, and the transformation will be studied in this doctoral thesis in a three-fold approach:

- One is to focus on the concrete process of urbanization: how did the growth take place, what phases and periods did it pass through, when and how were the houses, streets, squares, parks etc. built, and who lived and worked in which neighborhood? What plans are about to be implemented at present? Which concepts are considered for the future?

This part will be achieved by a landscape analysis regarding urban development planning via expert literature, historic maps, municipal plans and concepts, GIS mapping, aerial photography, etc.

- A second approach is more concerned with people's mental concepts, narratives and memories: how did/does this development appear to contemporaries, what were/are their comments and reactions on it, what terms did/do they use to describe what they saw/see taking place around them, what did/does this development mean to them?

To gain insight into the mental processes, a biographical literature and additional media research (mainly English, in addition: Hebrew and German) will be undertaken in combination with interviewing experts and inhabitants of different socio-cultural and professional backgrounds.



As illustrated on the previous page, these two approaches cannot easily be separated – why should a house be seen as possessing greater ‘reality’ than the significance which it has for those who lived/live in it? Why is a street more ‘concrete’ than the feeling that one can walk freely along it?

Every city has its own atmosphere which distinguishes it from others. What is special about Tel Aviv-Jaffa can be summed up in a phrase: it is ‘*ha-ir ha-ivrit ha-rishona*’, the first - modern - Hebrew city.

One element in modern cities is a public transportation system. Like any other large city in the world, Tel Aviv faces dramatic problems regarding unnecessary long, complicated and infrequent bus lines, rush hour traffic and lack of parking in the city center as well as in residential areas. Each individual household is estimated to have at least one private vehicle, i.e. car, motorcycle, scooter. Most people know the urban landscape in everyday life only through driving from home to work / supermarket / gym and back.

In this context and by setting a sharp contrast to the common behavioral patterns of transportation, I would like to study Tel Aviv’s urban cultural landscape as follows:

- A third approach is the so-called method of ‘Strollology’ invented by Lucius Burckhardt and based on the theory that “the environment is not sensible, and if so – only on the basis of mental images that are formed in the mind of the observer and that have already formed. ... The walker traverses a number of places: parking lots, suburban housing estates, factories, garbage dumps, highway crossings, but also meadows, forests, river valleys, farms. Having returned home in the end, the walker tells what he saw. He describes the scenery as depending on the city - from which he started and which he came back to. ... He does not describe the distinct places passed through, e.g. the forest, the river valley, and certainly not the factory or the dump, but he describes integrated landscape sceneries.”(University of Applied Sciences Kassel, 1994)

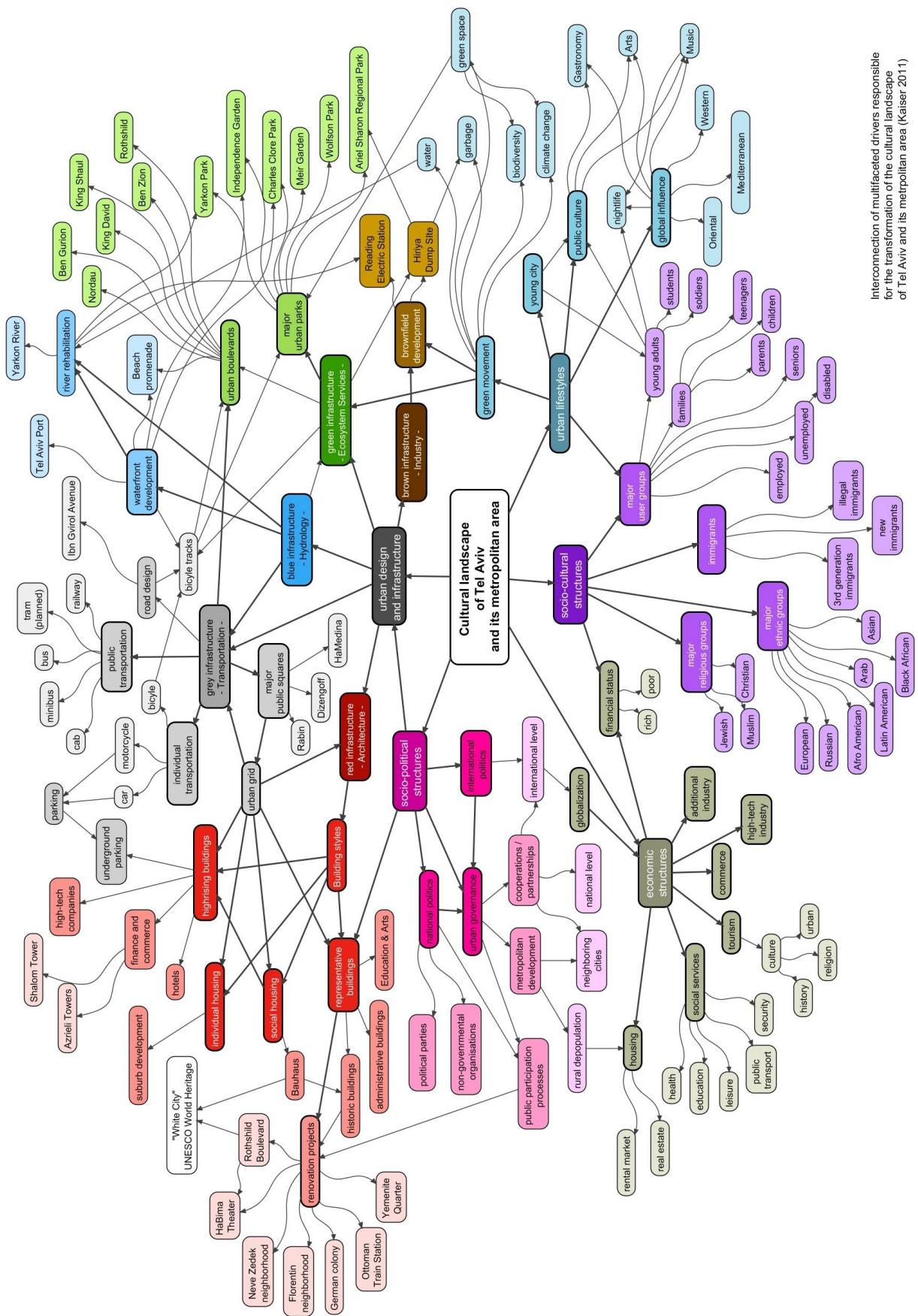
### **Choice of proposed fields to be studied in-depth**

It goes without saying that the entire urban transformation process of a city cannot be studied in one single doctoral thesis. In order to gain an overview about the various driving forces, I created a mind map (please see the following page).

Out of the amount of items in the different thematic fields (i.e. urban planning and infrastructure, socio-cultural structures, political structures, economic structures, urban lifestyles), I address the following as suitable subjects to become core aspects for an in-depth analysis:

- Green Infrastructure (**green**)
- Brownfield development and green movement (**brown**)
- Waterfront development (**blue**)
- Public transportation (**grey**)
- Bauhaus architecture and UNESCO World Heritage (**red**)
- Urban Governance and Participatory Planning (**pink**)
- Spread of ethnic groups (**purple**)
- Lifestyles of the young city dwellers (**turquoise**)
- Global influence (**olive**)

After a first field trip and an analysis of the area on large scale, I am planning to chose a few of them for in-depth analysis and evaluation.



## Current state of preparation

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At present, I do a broad literature review, taking place both in the form of books (bought or borrowed) and in the form of digital research in the internet, e. g. history of Tel Aviv, Bauhaus, current development projects in Tel Aviv and surrounding; future concepts for cultural landscapes; Strollology. After having submitted my application documents, I will deepen my research towards expert literature and additional media. Please see the following table for further information regarding my proposed schedule, and the list of current literature.

## Proposed timetable

Steps of action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Literature review / research proposal and application process	■													
Extended review of literature and additional media		■	■			■	■			■	■			
Preparation of first field trip: Overview of action steps, schedule, funding, contact people etc.			■											
<b>First field trip:</b> Analysis of metropolitan area (large scale, GIS maps, historic maps, visit of urban planning department etc.)				■	■									
Assessment and evaluation of data, <b>first draft</b>					■	■								
Location of sites for in-depth analysis						■	■							
Preparation of second field trip: Elaboration of questionnaire and expert questions, contact experts, locate missing data							■	■						
<b>Second field trip:</b> In-depth analysis of selected emphases (small scale, Promenadology, sketches, historic photos, interviews)								■	■	■				
Expert interviews and distribution of questionnaire (trial and final versions)								■	■					
Further analysis and evaluation of data									■	■				
Completion of <b>first draft</b>					■	■	■	■	■	■				
Completion of missing data, conclusion, <b>second draft</b>										■				
External review of second draft											■			
<b>Final draft</b>												■		

## Current list of literature

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#### **Additional material (incomplete)**

National Outline Plan of Israel No. 35