

## CHAPTER III

### EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 Henri Lefebvre's Production of Space

The theory of the production of space, developed by Henri Lefebvre, approaches space as a social product that shapes and is shaped by human activity simultaneously (Lefebvre, 1991:26). Space actualizes social relations and reflects the organization of society by extending further than its material dimension to include symbolic, political, and economic aspects (Lefebvre, 1991:30–31). Each society generates its own distinct space. The space is shaped by its social structures, practices, and power relations, which cannot be fully understood solely through its physical form or as a purely conceptual idea (Lefebvre, 1991:31–33).

Lefebvre's framework is appropriate in analyzing how social structures, the structure of power, and everyday practices are inscribed in and experienced through space, rendering it suitable for studying the organization, meaning, and social implications of urban spaces. While it has consistent dimensions through which to study a particular society or context, it focuses on the production and structuring of space and does not reduce space to a single, one-size-fits-all form or method, as each society generates its own distinct spatial organization (Lefebvre, 1991:26–33). At least three dimensions of space make up the spatial triad.

##### 3.1.1 Spatial Practices (Perceived Space)

Spatial practices show the perception of space through routines, movements, and interactions. It refers to the physical use of space in everyday life that maintains social cohesion and order. This points the material and practical activities that

people engage in to occupy and move through space. In other words, perceived space is tied to the observable and lived routines that define social existence (Lefebvre, 1991:38).

Spatial practice is the most immediately recognizable dimension due to its concerns toward the rhythms of everyday life. Commuting, shopping, and patterns of leisure form a repetition that makes the city function. These activities follow paths and networks of existing social structures. For example, the layout of streets and transport systems channels routines into routes that are predictable, which makes a social order (Lefebvre, 1991:38). Although daily routines shape perceived space, it develops an autonomy of its own, structuring rhythms and social relations, including aspects of labor and family life (Lefebvre, 1991:26; 31–33). Through these repeated actions, space becomes a practical coherence that is rarely questioned, despite being deeply connected to political and economic forces (Lefebvre, 1991:39).

### **3.1.2 Representations of Space (Conceived Space)**

Representations of space are the space of planners, architects, and authorities where they impose controls and structures onto physical environments. These are the dominant space in society, as it is produced through maps, plans, and official discourses. Conceived space represents how institutions and experts dictate the organization of urban areas. This type of space is abstract, strategic, and tied to power relations (Lefebvre, 1991:38–39).

Conceived space is identified as the most powerful of the triad because it reflects the interests of those who design and control urban environments. It is

where space is reduced to codes, blueprints, and rational plans that possibly ignore the complicated rhythms of everyday life. Urban planning, zoning, and policy documents fall within the category as instruments through which the state and institutions maintain authority (Lefebvre, 1991:41). Conceived space appears neutral or objective, yet it reinforces particular ideologies about how people should live and interact. Its authority defines the “official” reality of space, even when lived experiences contradict it (Lefebvre, 1991:42). Conceived space serves strategic purposes that arranges and classifies social groups by the reinforcement of class hierarchies and alignment of public space with private or hegemonic interests (Lefebvre, 1991:374–376).

### **3.1.3 Representational Spaces (Lived Space)**

The third dimension, representational space, is where space is directly lived through images, symbols, and emotions. Lived space is driven by imagination, memory, and resistance that are not fully controllable by official structures. It actualizes the ways people invest and dominate spaces and use them for their own expressions. It is the transformation of material environments into places of identity and experience (Lefebvre, 1991:38).

As the most complex and dynamic triad, it combines subjective experience and collective imagination. Art, memory, temperament, and everyday practices redefine built environment outside the intentions of planners. One instance is a public square that is intended to function officially as a place for circulation becomes a site of protest, performance, or cultural celebration (Lefebvre, 1991:39). Contradictions appear most visibly as communities rework or resist meanings to

create their own sense of belonging. Lived space are reich in historical traces that enable communities to reproduce, reinterpret, or resist the order imposed by the perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991:36–37; 377).

### 3.2 Los Angeles as a Space

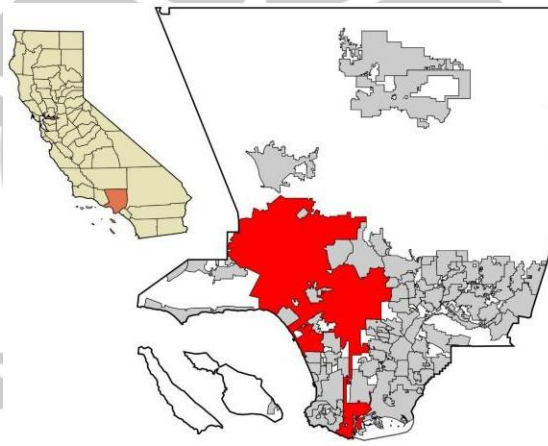
Space is both produced by and productive of social relations (Lefebvre, 1991:26–27). Space emerges through processes of production and interaction, while also functions to shape the conditions that make those relations possible (Lefebvre, 1991:142). Therefore, the discourse of space requires attending to the relations, meanings, and functions that take shape within it. In this sense, space is intertwined with how social life is organized.

Los Angeles is the principal city in Los Angeles County and is located on the western side of the United States, in the southern part of California (Pitt, 2026). Los Angeles was founded on September 4, 1781 under the name El Pueblo de la Reina de los Angeles after settlers were allocated house lots and planting fields on the river Porciúncula (Caughney & Caughney, 1977:74).



Picture 3.1 Location of Los Angeles, California, marked on a map of the mainland United States. Retrieved from Expert AuPair (2016). <https://expertaupair.wordpress.com/2016/09/13/los-angeles-ca/>

The area covers around 469 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.) and has 114 neighborhoods (Los Angeles Times, 2009). The Greater Los Angeles is an expansive region economically and urbanistically covering five counties. These are the Los Angeles County itself, Orange, Ventura, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. The area is considered one of the largest metropolitan cities in the world (Soja, 1989:191). Los Angeles is therefore understood here as a broader urban space that extends beyond the administrative city proper to include immediately contiguous districts, adjacent municipalities, and surrounding subregions that form part of the same continuous metropolitan landscape. Within this broader urban context, the City of Los Angeles itself has 3.9 million residents with the density of 8,304 people per square mile. Los Angeles County on the other hand has over 10 million residents with 2,466 persons per square mile, while California as a whole has more than 39 million inhabitants per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

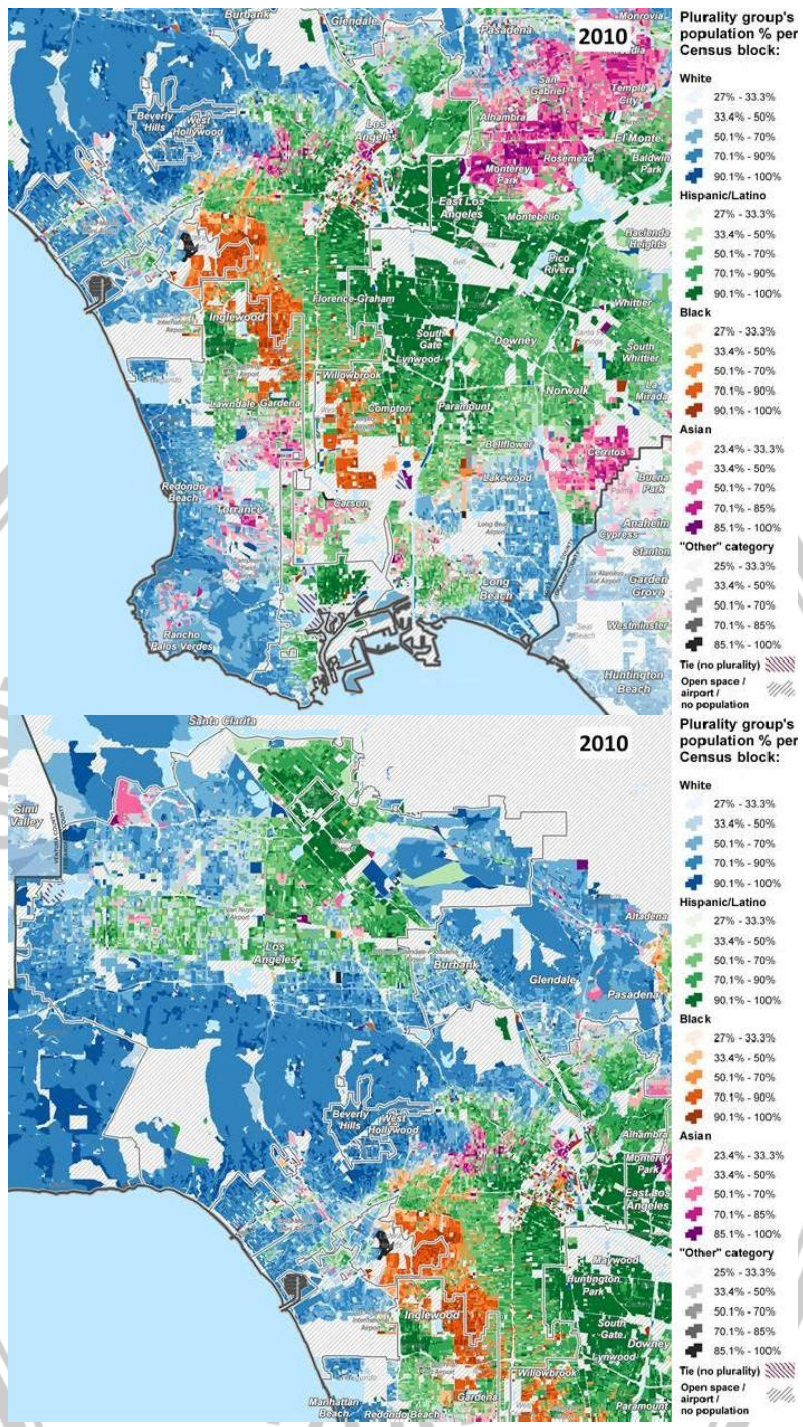


Picture 3.2 Location of Los Angeles city within Los Angeles County, California.  
*Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons (2007).*  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LA\\_County\\_Incorporated\\_Areas\\_Los\\_Angeles\\_highlighted.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LA_County_Incorporated_Areas_Los_Angeles_highlighted.svg)

According to Urban Research Maps (2011), Los Angeles urban area is a region of racially distinct neighborhoods, where different communities occupy

distinct and largely separate parts of the urban landscape. White residents are concentrated in the northern suburbs and wealthy coastal neighborhoods. Hispanic and Latino residents on the other hand form a broad and dense belt across the urban core from East Los Angeles through Compton. Black residents are clustered primarily around Inglewood and South Los Angeles, and Asian communities are largely settled in the eastern San Gabriel Valley. Hollywood and West Hollywood reflect this broader pattern in miniature. The hills and wealthier western pockets are predominantly White, while the flatter streets of Hollywood and East Hollywood are more diverse, with predominantly Hispanic and Latino communities and smaller Asian communities present along corridors like Thai Town and Little Armenia. The geography of the area, in other words, broadly maps onto the geography of race.

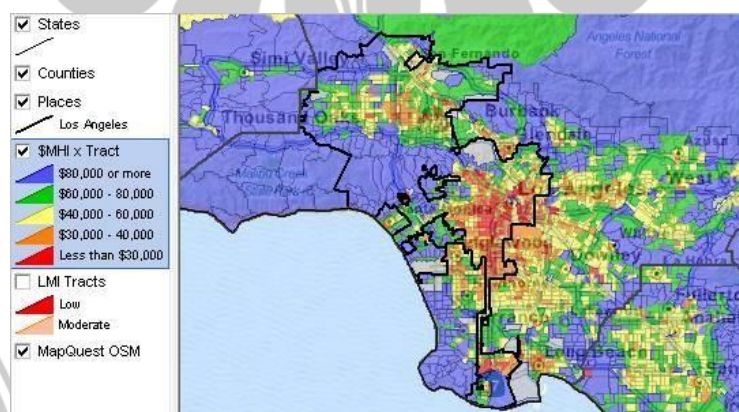




Picture 3.3 Spatial distribution of racial and ethnic groups by census block in Los Angeles (2010): (a) central Los Angeles; (b) northern Los Angeles. Retrieved from Urban Research Maps (2011).

<https://www.urbanresearchmaps.org/plurality/othercitymaps.htm>

According to ProximityOne (2026), the economic geography of the Los Angeles urban area broadly mirrors its racial geography. High-income households earning \$80,000 or more are concentrated around the hillside and coastal neighborhoods of the city's western edge, notably in areas such as Bel Air, Brentwood, and Pacific Palisades where, blue census tracts dominate the map. Whereas low-income households earning below \$40,000 create a dense and continuous band across the urban core and cover much of South and East Los Angeles, in areas that correspond closely with the predominantly Hispanic, Latino, and Black neighborhoods identified in the previous map. Hollywood and West Hollywood again reflect the city's broader gradient in miniature, where western and hillside portions register mid-to-high incomes while the flatter streets of Hollywood and East Hollywood fall into lower income brackets. It emphasizes how economic inequality in the Los Angeles urban landscape is as much a matter of elevation and geography as it is of anything else.



Picture 3.4 Map of economic prosperity in the Los Angeles area based on median household income (MHI) by census tract, with Los Angeles city marked by a bold brown boundary. Retrieved from ProximityOne (2026).

[https://proximityone.com/dmi/ca\\_losangeles.htm](https://proximityone.com/dmi/ca_losangeles.htm)

Alongside the economic dynamism, The urban area of Los Angeles is evident of internal contrasts. Concentrations of investment and employment exist at the same time with job displacement, precarious labor, housing instability, and intensified social segregation. The advancement of technological sectors also operate in close proximity to low-wage service and manufacturing work. Uneven patterns of development are consistent through the high levels of residential segregation. Such conditions intersect with elevated rates of violence, criminalization, drug use, and informal economies that creates a huge contrast of experiences of safety, mobility, and everyday life across the area. Such juxtapositions constitute a defining feature of Los Angeles as an urban space, where multiple processes of restructuring remain simultaneously visible and operative (Soja, 1989: 192–193).

### **3.3 Marginalized Communities in Urban Los Angeles**

Urban inequality is examined through the lives of communities that are often pushed aside in social and spatial life. To provide focus, four groups are considered: transgender individuals, sex workers, people of color, and immigrants..

#### **3.3.1 Transgender Individuals**

Transgender individuals in Los Angeles move through the urban space under conditions that are shaped by strict and harmful gender norms that tend to render public environments unsafe or exclusionary. Everyday activities, such as walking through neighborhoods, accessing services, or using public facilities are accompanied by the risk of recurring harassment or psychological harm. This is particularly prevalent in institution spaces structured around binary expectations of

gender. Pressures accumulate over time and later create vulnerability that make safety a recurring concern within the area (Brunet-Fuertes, 2022:3).

In response, queer and transgender community spaces in Los Angeles provide emotional and spatial support as well as practical resources. Community centers such as Trans Wellness Center, Bienestar Human Services, and The Wall Las Memorias function as sites of circulation for trans collective knowledge and as places for individuals to learn how to face legal systems, employment, and daily institutional interactions that tend to marginalize non-conforming identities (Brunet-Fuertes, 2022:3). These spaces are crucial for transgender individuals that face housing instability, domestic violence, or migration-related precarity as they offer a form of collective grounding within an otherwise hostile urban landscape (Brunet-Fuertes, 2022:2).

Structural inequalities further contribute in forming the environment of transgender life in the city. Studies of transgender women in Los Angeles show high levels of health vulnerability. This is including elevated rates of substance use and HIV, alongside economic marginalization marked by unemployment and reliance on temporary or institutional housing despite relatively high educational attainment (Reback et al., 2018; Takahashi et al., 2022:237). Racialized transgender women, particularly Black and Latina individuals, are more severely impacted by these conditions (Thompson et al., 2022:9). Gender-based inequities overlap with racial and economic discriminations Thompson et al., 2022:9).

Trans experiences are also heavily regulated through policing and the criminal legal system. Transgender women in Los Angeles, particularly the women

of color, report regular encounters with carceral violence, and with the process that includes harassment, abuse, and institutional misgendering by law enforcement. These amplify to them the sense that access to public space is conditional, uneven, and shaped by surveillance and exclusion (Winiker, 2023:159).

### **3.3.2 Sex Workers**

Criminalization works wonder in shaping the experience of sex workers in Los Angeles and pushing them into informal and underground economies. State law frames sex work majorly through punitive measures that make participation and support practices legally as risky. This legal environment does not contribute in eliminating sex work in the area. It instead reorganizes it around evasion, secrecy, and vulnerability that increase sex workers to exposure of violence while also constraining their ability to seek protection (Fuentes, 2022:226–227).

Sex workers in Los Angeles experience stratification both from outside institutions and within the community itself. Research identifies an internal hierarchy that is referred to as a “whorearchy,” through which workers are ranked based on perceived respectability, legality, race, gender identity, and work setting (Fuentes, 2022:224). Criminalization reinforces this hierarchy by building distrust and discouraging solidarity, as workers fear legal consequences or social exposure if they share information or seek collective support. This environment sustains silence and isolation that weaken the potential for collective care (Fuentes, 2022:236).

These dynamics significantly harm sex workers, whose identities are already stigmatized, including Black, transgender, and undocumented workers.

Criminalization exacerbates racial and gender inequalities by positioning certain bodies as inherently suspicious, resulting in increased surveillance and exposure to policing. Despite the emergence of collective care practices as harm-reduction strategies within sex worker communities, their effectiveness is still constrained by carceral and policy frameworks that prioritize control over protection (Fuentes, 2022:238).

Economic precarity is a central condition that opens the entry into sex work in the city. Poverty, unemployment, housing insecurity, and limited educational access are factors that push individuals into the sex trade, particularly in neighborhoods marked by economic decline and high crime rates. For many, sex work is a pragmatic response to urgent financial needs. This is especially prevalent in areas of Los Angeles where informal economies are visible and accessible (Kappos, 2014:12).

Health risks additionally become another challenge in sex workers' urban experiences. The underground nature complicates the access to healthcare and increases their exposure to sexually transmitted infections, substance use, and physical harm for both workers and clients (Galván et al., 2009). Market pressures can also shape risk-taking practices, as the economic incentives often outweigh health considerations in contexts, and health protection and regulation are absent or inaccessible (Arunachalam & Shah, 2013:347). The conditions position sex work in Los Angeles as a form of labor rooted in spatial inequality, legal exclusion, and economic survival.

### 3.3.3 Immigrants

Issues of legal status, labor stratification, and uneven access to institutions contribute to the formation of immigrant life in Los Angeles. Immigration status determines the kinds of authorization individuals have to live and work in the United States that reshape their exposure to surveillance and precarity (Redfield et al., 2025:8). The conditions are intensified by the city's role as one of the largest immigrant destinations in the country and how the city draws populations with widely varying educational and economic backgrounds.

However, the Los Angeles labor market has historically absorbed large numbers of low-skilled immigrants. Research shows that immigrants in Los Angeles are more likely than in other urban centers to have limited formal education, which places them at a structural disadvantage in terms of long-term mobility and wage growth (Waldinger, 1999:260). At the same time, the economic structure of Los Angeles City has continued to generate demand for low-skilled labor, with manufacturing, service, and domestic sectors in particular. The situation allows immigrants to secure employment even as opportunities for upward mobility remain constrained (Waldinger, 1999:261–262). This pattern creates a paradox in which work is available but poorly paid, unstable, and lacking basic labor protections (Waldinger, 1999:271).

Legal and institutional insecurity further forms immigrant experiences of urban space, as considerable numbers of immigrants in Los Angeles report discomfort or fear when interacting with law enforcement. The reactions are driven by concerns about harassment, disrespect, or the possibility that immigration status

could expose them or their families to arrest or detention. These built-up anxieties later limit their access to public services and reduce trust in state institutions and create a sense of conditional belonging within the city (Redfield et al., 2025:5).

Despite these constraints being faced, immigrants contribute actively in shaping the social and cultural geography of Los Angeles. Ethnic enclaves and ethnoburbs lay out spaces for cultural identity, economic activity, and political influence can be sustained across generations. Los Angeles has become a major center of Armenian diasporic populations in the world outside Armenia. The group comprises multiple migration waves with distinct historical and political backgrounds. Cultural artistic production and community-based initiatives support the preservation of ethnic identity that lets immigrants ingrain their presence in the city (Machowska, 2021:57). Immigrants negotiate marginalization by producing localized forms of belonging within a bigger context of legal and economic precarity.

#### **3.3.4 People of Color**

People of color in Los Angeles experience systemic inequalities that are shaped by long-standing patterns of exclusion, race, and class. Black and Latinx communities in particular have been disproportionately exposed to structural failure, poverty, limited access to quality education, environmental risk, and uneven public investment, which reflects existing structural conditions (Massey, 1990:329). Such inequalities are sustained through discriminatory housing practices that historically restricted access to mortgage credit and homeownership, which results in persistent racial disparities (Immergluck, 2004:36).

Residential patterns contribute significantly to how these inequalities are lived. Neighborhoods associated with communities of color tend to be marked more frequently by racialized assumptions about safety, respectability, and social order. This influences how the residents are perceived and how the resources are distributed (Ong et al., 2016:2). While economic status contributes to the divisions, racial and ethnic segregation in Los Angeles exceeds what income differences alone can explain, indicating the continued salience of race in structuring opportunity and constraint (Ong et al., 2016:18).

Housing insecurity is a further form of vulnerability faced by the communities of color. Despite only forming a small share of the city's population, black residents are disproportionately represented among the unhoused. There are intersecting barriers related to employment, healthcare access, and historical displacement (Hemmans, 2022:2). Latinx communities deal with related forms of housing instability, shaped by low-wage labor, exclusion from social safety nets, and structural precarity rather than individual choice (Chinchilla & Gabrielian, 2021:173). Besides visible homelessness, numbers of Latinx households live in overcrowding and doubled-up living arrangements. It remains undercounted yet still signals widespread housing insecurity (Chinchilla et al., 2023:8).

The experiences of people of color in Los Angeles are also shaped by migration histories and racial classification. The Latinx population has grown through successive waves of migration due to political and economic instability as well as family reunification. This leads to the formation of ethnic neighborhoods that function as sites of community and survival (Gutiérrez, 2016). At the same

time, Latinx communities are positioned within a racial hierarchy that is marked by colorism and stigmatizing narratives that turns sense of belonging as conditional (Frank et al., 2018). The city is not immune to symbolic and material boundaries.

