

ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis was to develop a process in which historical land use can be tracked in order to gain a better understanding of an area's history. The study area, Long Island City (LIC) is historically an industrial neighborhood within Queens County of New York City. By documenting its land use shifts from 1891 to 1950, it is possible to visualize and analyze the changes that occurred as industrialization took place.

This study compiles a digital historical narrative to provide a foundation for understanding the data, as well as a reference for making new conclusions from the results of the analysis. Old fire insurance maps provide building footprints categorized by use. These were used to digitize locations of interest as points that were catalogued under five different categories: Cultural, Industrial, Residential, Shop, and Vacant at each of five time periods. The resulting spatiotemporal database makes it possible to track a single building and its use through a period of 59 years.

The methodology developed for this thesis collects and classifies building use as points so as to develop efficiently and quickly an accurate historical dataset. In doing so, the project tracked the cultural development of LIC through an examination of a set of key buildings, as well as the overall land use change of a sub-neighborhood, Hunter's Point. It determined that by tracking the use of every building through every map year, one gets a better historical analysis. Such methods can be used not only to help support previously known historical narratives, but also to allow for new conclusions to be drawn.