

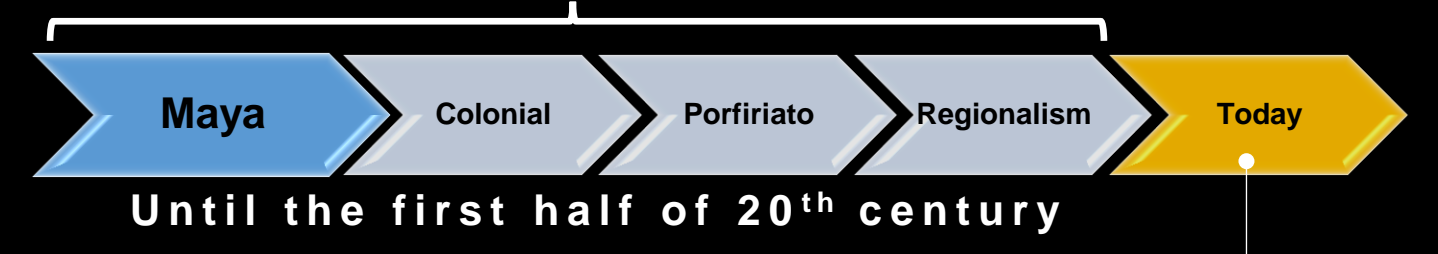


**Sheila Isabel Irigoyen Zozaya**  
 Director of studies:  
**Prof. Georgja B. Watson**  
 Supervisor:  
**Prof. Laura Novo de Azevedo**  
 Oxford Brookes University

School of the Built Environment/Urban Design, Faculty of Technology, Design and Technology

## Historical Development

Deep sense of community and sustainability



# Defining and restoring Cultural landscapes and place-identity of historic cities: the case of Mérida, Yucatán, México

## Abstract

The city of Mérida, Yucatán, is a typical example of Mexican cities where new settlements coexist with heritage areas. In the past, the Solar Maya as a basic plot unit within the Maya tradition in Yucatan was the symbol of sustainable design and identity that shaped the development of the local cultural landscape for centuries. Even though the Mayan cultural landscape has been transformed, key heritage values have remained, evolved and mixed with new cultural trends that enriched the local cultural landscape until the first half of the twentieth century.

Today nevertheless, unsustainable solutions in architecture and urban design are being produced that leads to the homogenization of the cultural landscape in Merida. This erosion is a major concern for the residents and various professional groups, who are seeking new ways to preserve their heritage in order to rediscover their identity and to achieve sustainable solutions at the urban level. Therefore, the challenge will be to promote an innovative approach in urban design that re-evaluates and integrates the essential components of the local cultural landscape and place-identity, to preserve the heritage and to find equilibrium between nostalgia of the past and progress.

## Aims

To develop a conceptual framework and methodology to define the cultural landscape and place-identity in the city of Merida, Yucatan and to develop theoretical and urban design propositions to achieve a positive and sustainable place-identity.

- ## Objectives
- To develop a theoretical and conceptual framework for analyzing the cultural landscape and place-identity of Merida.
  - To develop a methodology to collect data and analyze the cultural landscape and place-identity based on urban transformations at different scales of the city, planning and urban design strategies, and roles of key actors.
  - To analyze the findings in order to identify key heritage values of Mérida.
  - To develop theoretical concepts, urban design strategies and recommendations for an integrated approach that links cultural landscape and place-identity.
  - To test propositions with key actors in selected urban areas of Merida.
  - To define contributions to new knowledge and recommendations for theory and urban design practice.

## Research questions

- What **key values or principles** are necessary to define and restore the cultural landscape and place-identity of Merida?
- Can we use the **key values** to achieve sustainable urban design?
- How can the **key values** be incorporated into local urban practice and have an impact on place-identity?



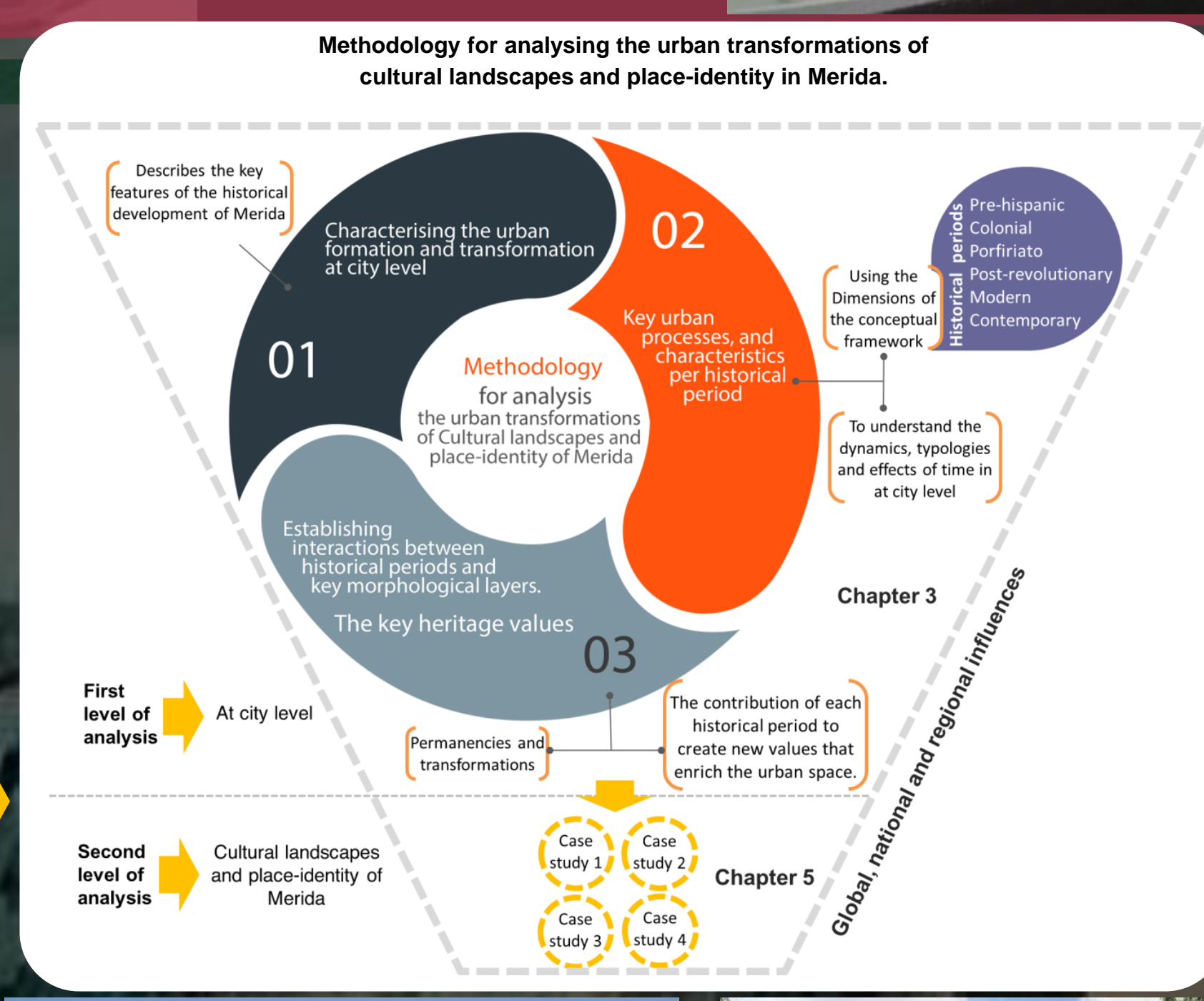
## Methodology

It is well-known the rich history of Mexico per se and the historical background of Merida it is not an exception. Merida has the third largest historic Centre in the Americas, surpassed by Mexico City and the Havana, Cuba. The size and complexity of what still remains of its historic centre are a testimony of the importance of the city once had worldwide.

Furthermore, its particular topography, climate conditions, plantlife, wildlife, and the merge of different cultural races created a distinctive identity from the rest of the country. The present urban fabric of Merida is a resultant of generations of people who left their print and continue to do so.

The city has **Mayan roots**, but since the Spanish colonisation, there were at least 15 other migrants from different nationalities who also settled in Yucatan. Influences from Spanish, French, Asian, African, Italian, German, English, Islamic, USA, Cubans, Canaries and Danish have shape the Yucatan area today. Despite the rich mosaic of cultures, Merida still concentrates the largest Mayan population descendants in Mexico (INEGI, 2010).

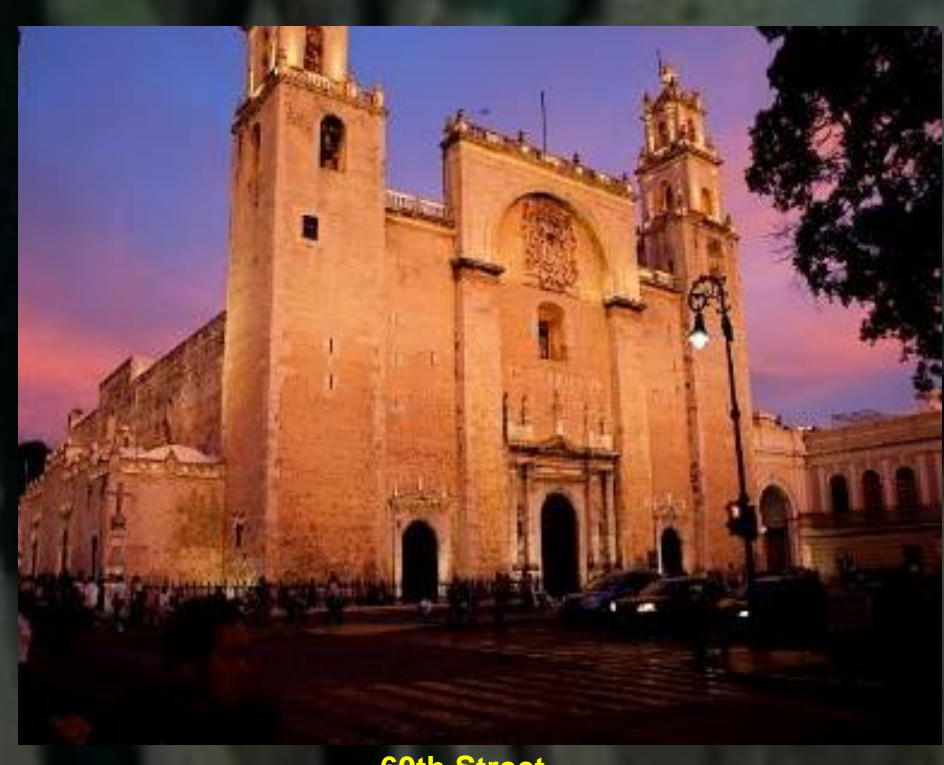
Therefore, the historical analysis of a city is a **complex matter**. It must have a purpose that requires a specific method and levels of analysis for its correct investigation (Bolio Arceo, 2012; Terán Bonilla, 1991).



## 4 case studies



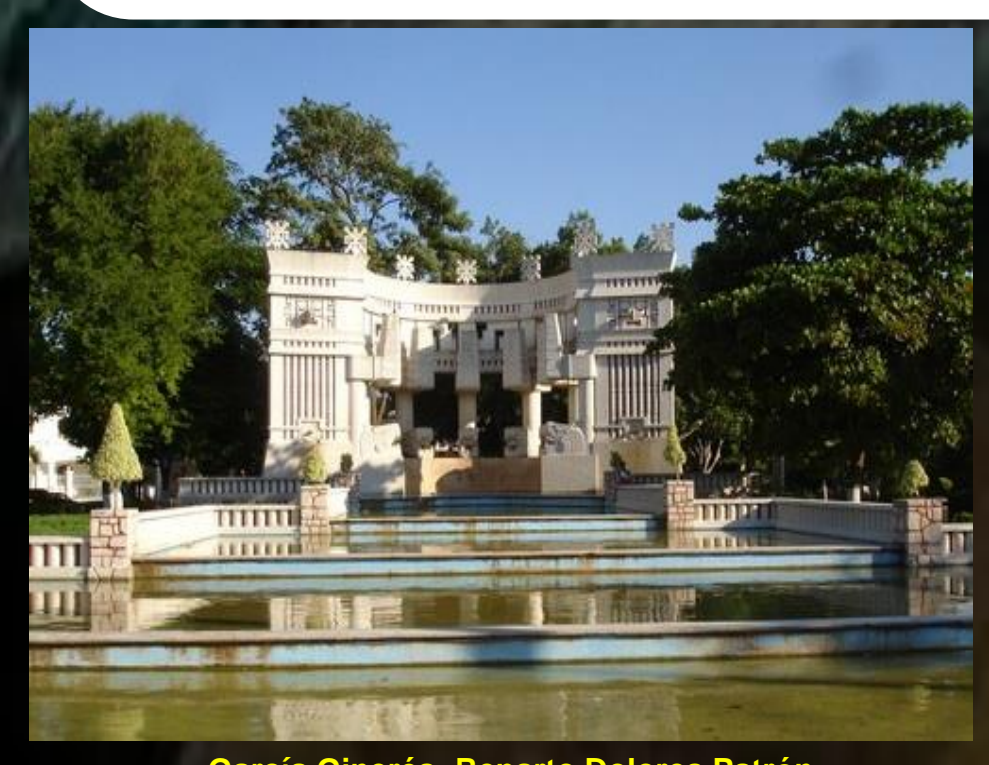
A Mayan lady (Mestiza) thinking about her heritage. Ink and Watercolour. Author, 2015.



60th Street



Test propositions in Paseo de Montejo

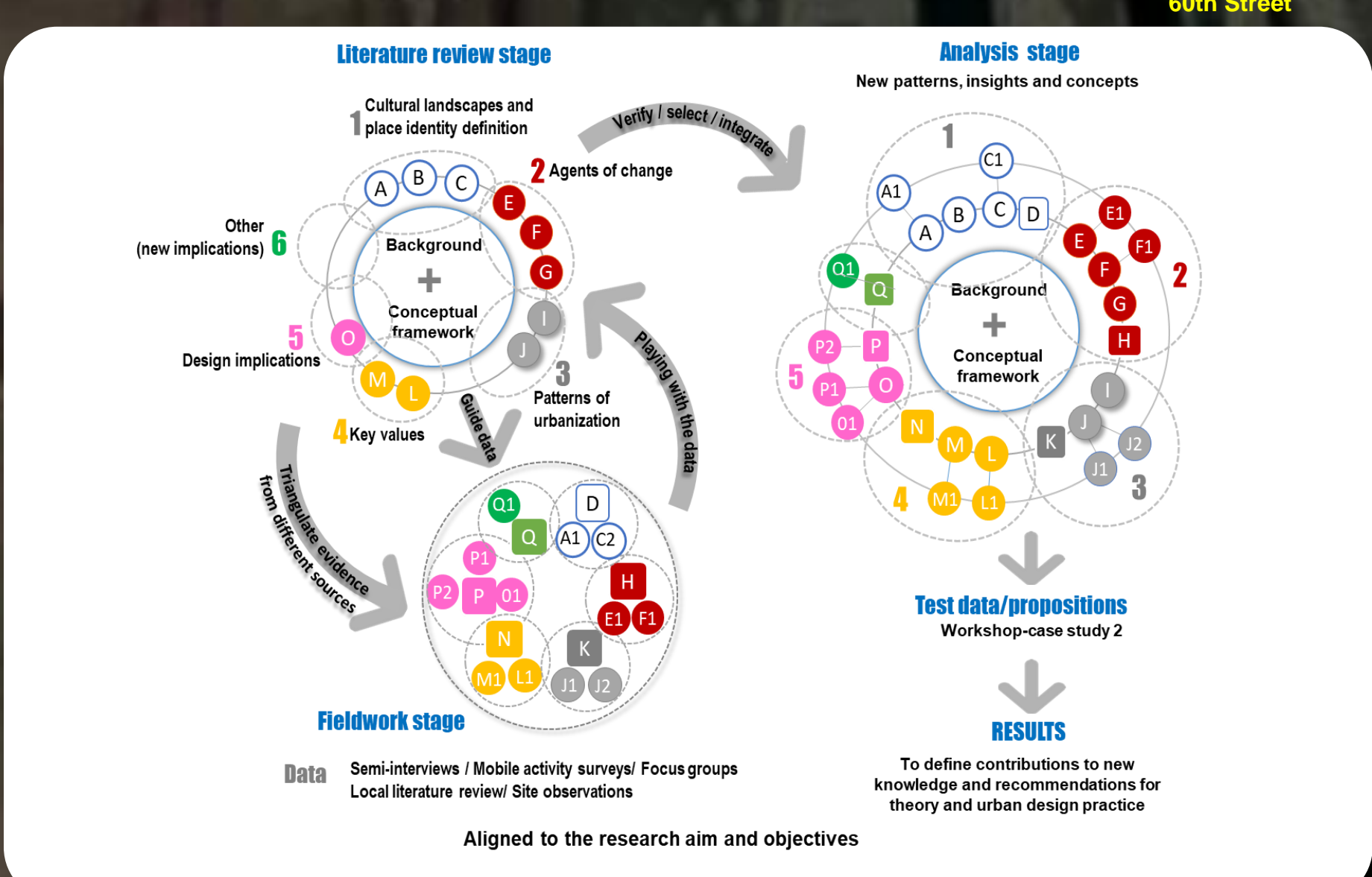


García Ginerés- Reparto Dolores Patrón



Chuburná de Hidalgo

## Evolving framework of analysis



## Key actors



## MOBILE ACTIVITY-SURVEY, FOCUS GROUPS AND A WORKSHOP

