

POLITECNICO DI MILANO

Dipartimento di Architettura, Ingegneria delle Costruzioni e  
Ambiente Costruito



# JIANGUOMEN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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*analysis and definition of urban-architectural  
development of an area essential for the future  
composition of the historical city of Xi'an, China.*

*Jacques Maria Brandt*



*dedicated to YM*

## Abstract

*The new project located at the southeast corner of the historic walls of Xi'an city, is born with the aim of creating a model for a retraining approach to the inner city, capable of involving and transforming the different areas according to define a long vision of intervention.*

*A project therefore starts from the consideration of the inner city in its entirety, capable of relating to areas along the walls already transformed or undergoing transformation, able to build a continuity with the experiences that the normal visitor can collect through Shuncheng Lane. The inner city, especially the portion that runs along the walls, is devoid of a specific identity both at the functional and social level, although it is a key element for the historic preservation and future promotion of the city. There is therefore a need to think about the project in its entirety.*

*From an overall view of the city, the features of the project are expressed through resolving the main issues of the district through solutions that create a strong contextual relationship.*

*The neighborhood does not present any particular issues but fails to organize, develop the present economic activities and spaces for social interaction to create an environment that promotes the educational development of people.*

*From its very beginning, the project is inspired by the definition of public space in China to define new spaces that promote and enhance existing business activities and build the basis for future ones. Moreover, the fragmentation generated by the different volumes allows the space to have porosity and people to move freely, to relate continually to the industrial and commercial reality of the place, to establish a dialogue with the historical walls.*

*The new project also preserves the identity of the place, its market vocation, the soul of the people and who work constantly and have built a strong relationship with it over the years.*

*But it's not just about preserving the origin and its history. The project promotes the valorisation of its identity and adds a continuous series*



*of experiences that start from the idea of food, understood as raw material, as a valorisation of the transformation process it undergoes. In the new interior several levels characterized by organic and fluctuating shapes allow the visitor to come into contact with cultural spaces that allow to know the purchased product, its history and its different processes of transformation into new products. The last layer, on the other hand, allows to get in touch with the raw material through green islands where different plantations define a botanical garden, an opportunity for the educational enhancement of the site.*

*Keywords: Renovation, Identity, Vision, Experience, Economy, Culture*



## *Abstract*

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# 01

*Key elements  
of Xian*

*Xi'an lies on the banks of the Weihe River of the Guan-zhong Plain in the province of Shaanxi, which is bounded by Mount Qinling to the south, a hilly loess area north of the Weihe River to the north, Ling River and the Ba Yuan mountains to the east, and Mount Taibai and the Qinghua hilly loess area west of the Heihe River to the west. The Guanzhong Plain is one of the birthplaces of the Chinese nation and splendid culture, and the cradle of the city of Xi'an.*

*It was formed by the Weihe River, by the continuous sinking of the earth's crust and sedimentation. The first-, second- and third-level river terraces, flood land and the floodplain-alluvial fan visible today are the result of the depositing of mud and sand, and the accumulation of gravel. Since the dynasties of the Central Plains in the earlier days of Chinese history were often faced with the pressure of the minorities in the northwest border areas, and because Xi'an lay at the intersection between the borderlands and the central part of China, no other city was better positioned than Xi'an to be the capital at the time.*

*From the Han and Tang dynasties onward, Xi'an was the pivot of the famous Silk Road. The ancient Silk Road started at Chang'an (as Xi'an was called at the time), went through the He Xi Passage, passing the northern and southern part of Mount Tian, crossed middle and western Asia, and finally led to Europe. The traffic between Xi'an and the Central Plains was convenient either by water or overland. The superiority of the location for traffic made the Central Plains a place where various cultures co-existed and various minorities and political groups competed. The different cultures collided, clashed, had exchanges and synchronized, creating a vital new body that became the mainstream of Chinese culture.*

*The early part of Chinese history was a period when Xi'an, the key city of the Central Plains, played a leading role in politics, the economy and culture. The superiority of the location for traffic made the Central Plains a place where various cultures co-existed and various minori-*

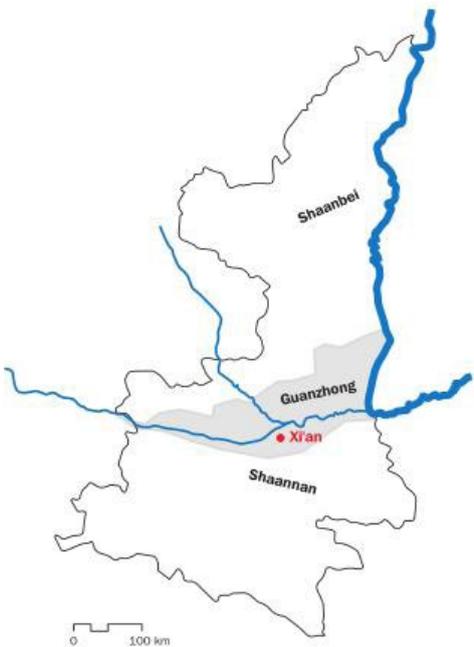
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*The early part of Chinese history was a period when Xi'an, the key city of the Central Plains, played a leading role in politics, the economy and culture. The Xi'an area is not only superior by its geographical position, strategically located, difficult to access, and convenient to traffic, it is also humanity's earliest habitat and the area in China where an economy was developed early. Thus good conditions were present for social and economic prosperity and the city development of ancient and modern Xi'an, while also laying a basis for the major cities emerging in the Guanzhong region role in politics, the economy and culture.*

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*Aerial view over the walls / image source: author self-composed*



*Xi'an geographical feature / image source: book, Xian an ancient city in a modern world, evolution of the urban form 1949-2000*

## 1.1 Xi'an historical conformation

*City building has a long tradition in East Asia. In China, cities were already in existence during the Xia dynasty, more than 4,000 years ago. During its long history of development, the Chinese city has seen major changes and minor transformations, sometimes brought about by the combination of a number of factors and at other times by the will of its ruler or the genius of its planners.*

### *Sui-Tang Chang'an*

*Sui-Tang Chang'an began its more than 300 years of glorious history in 582 during the Sui dynasty when Emperor Sui Wendi decided that he needed a new capital in preparation for his unification of China. Construction began in the sixth month of 582 with the building of the Palace City. While the construction of the palace took only nine months and the emperor moved in during the spring of 583, the building of the capital city took much longer. The city measured 9.21 km by 8.652 km covering an area of some 84.1 sq. km or about 32.5 sq. miles, larger than any city ever built prior to the modern world. The walls of the palace city were erected first, followed by those of the imperial city. A perimeter wall of rammed earth, 36.2 km in length, was built around the city. This wall, due to its immense scale, took many years to complete. Within the confines of the perimeter wall was a severe gridiron plan that arranged the city into clear functional zones. To begin with, twelve gates, three on each side, provided access to the city. Of these streets, the three N-S and three E-W streets that led to the gates were the principal avenues and were commonly referred to as "The Six Streets".*

*The north centre was a large fortified compound consisting of the Palace and Imperial Cities. It accounted for one-ninth of the total area of Chang'an. The rest of the city was divided into 108 residential walled wards and two fortified markets. The residential wards included houses, large and small, religious establishments and occasional government offices. Commercial activities were confined to two large fortress-like*

*East and West Markets and trading was permitted only during certain hours of the day. Situated at the eastern end of the Silk Road, Chang'an enjoyed brisk trading activity and was an international bazaar. The East and the West Markets, also known respectively as Duhui and Liren, were probably the busiest centres of commerce in the world at the time, packed with one- and two-storey structures and stocked with goods from all parts of China, Central Asia, and the South Seas.*

*Let us begin with the first tradition by reconstructing the layout that was prescribed earlier in Kaogongji. One could start with the most basic unit of land division practised in the jingtian or well-field system. In this system, eight families shared a basic unit or a square of land of one li or 300 paces on each side. This square is divided equally into nine smaller squares, resulting in a simple nine-square mandala. The sides of each of these smaller squares were 100 paces long. The centre square where the well was located was state land, tilled by all the eight families and the produce of which went to the state. By the same system one could construct a larger square, nine li on each side. The scale of Chang'an and Luoyang, however, is not only expressed through the widths of the avenues alone. The sheer dimensions of the city, the expanse of its walls, the extent of its moats, the size of its markets and wards and even of its population, were all breathtaking.*

### *From the Yuan to the late Qing dynasty*

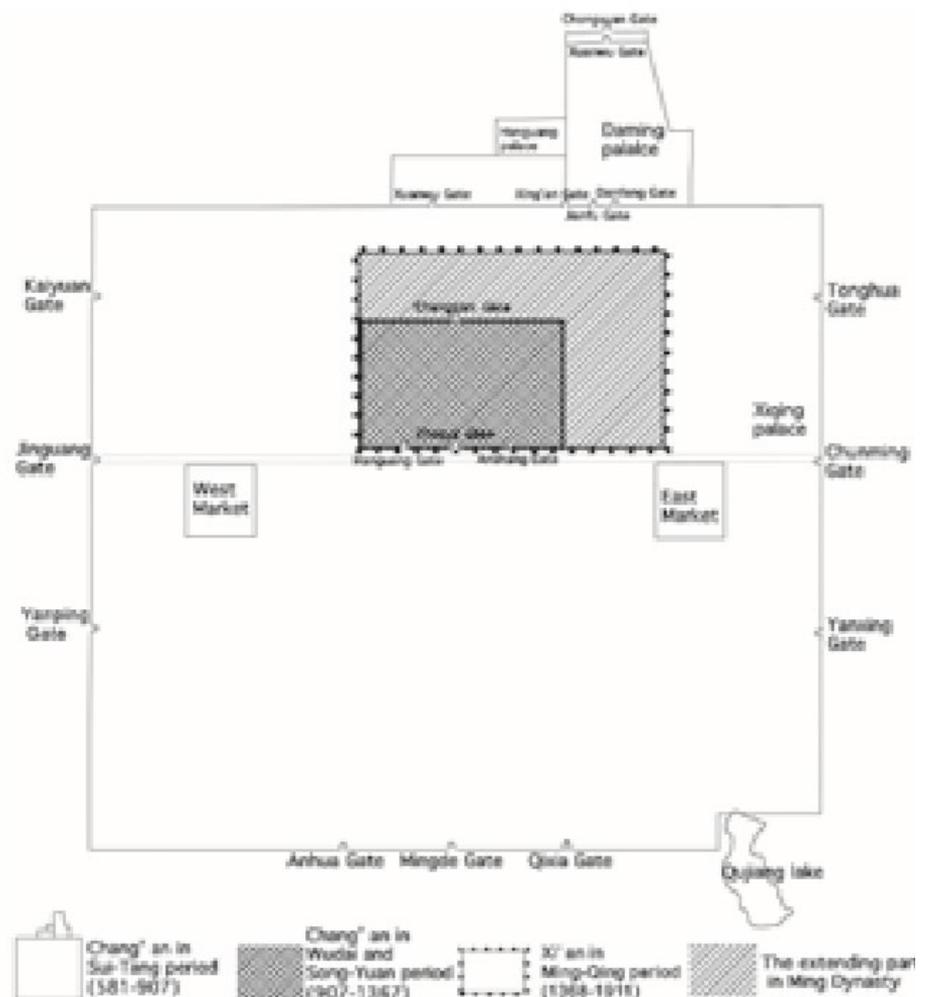
*Xi'an was called Fengyuancheng city during the Yuan dynasty, when it was the provincial capital of Feng Yuan Lu. The successor to Fengyuancheng city was the "new city", which was rebuilt on the foundations of the inner city in the late years of the Tang dynasty.*

*In 904 AD Zhu Wen compelled Emperor Zhao Zong of the Tang dynasty to move the capital to LuoYang, and from then on Chang'an city (Xi'an) was dismantled and gradually lost its position as capital. Palaces, official residences and civil houses were demolished, and the population declined sharply. Faced with this disastrous situation, Han Jian, a general and the mayor of Chang'an city, rebuilt the city for defense purposes. Throughout the long history of China, building city walls to guard the capital was a tradition in all the dynasties. For instance, the Chang'an city of the Han dynasty had double city walls and the capital of the Tang dynasty had triple city walls. Not only these unitary dynasties, but also the separatist states built thick city walls to guard their cities. The new city had double walls and the length from east to west was a little longer than the breadth from north to south. Meanwhile, for military purposes, Han Jian also built two small cities beside Chang'an city as the seats of Chang'an and Wan Nian counties.*

*They were located immediately adjacent to the big city on the east and west sides, like a mother and her sons. Undoubtedly, at the end of the Tang dynasty and the Five dynasties, this very unique form of the city strengthened the defending capacity of Chang'an city. The frame of the city was kept until the Yuan dynasty.*

*The three gates were opened in the south, east and west walls of the Zi Cheng city, according to the ancient city map. Except for official houses, there were a lot of schools, markets, temples and civil houses inside the new city after rebuilding. Zi Cheng city included official houses that were located at the center, the northwest of the city; the Imperial Ancestral Temple was located in the southeast of the city; the altar of the Gods of*

*Earth and Grain was situated in the southwest of the city, and the market was located in the north of the city. According to the Chang'an zhi tu, the government offices were situated in the center of the city in which the Ya Cheng city was located. The commercial district was located in the west of the city. There were some domestic animal markets such as the horse market and the sheep market near the north city gate because of the convenient communications there.*



*The gates, markets, northern palaces of the Sui-Tang capital (605 d.c.)*

*/ image source: book, The urban code of China, Birkhause Basel Oct. 2010*

### *Evolution of the frame and structure of Xi'an city during the Ming dynasty*

*During the Ming dynasty, the frame and structure of Xi'an city changed a lot. In the early years of the Ming dynasty, Xi'an city expanded to the east and north. This was so important in the history of this city that it laid the foundations for the city's later development. During the Ming and the Qing dynasties, Xi'an city became more splendid and stronger than it had been under the Song and Yuan dynasties. It became a very important city in northwest China and it was in the finished form that we can see today. It had four city gates It had four corner towers and ninety-eight rampart towers.*

*The rebuilt city used the original west and south walls of the city wall built by Han Jian, and its north and east walls were extended about one third of their original length.*

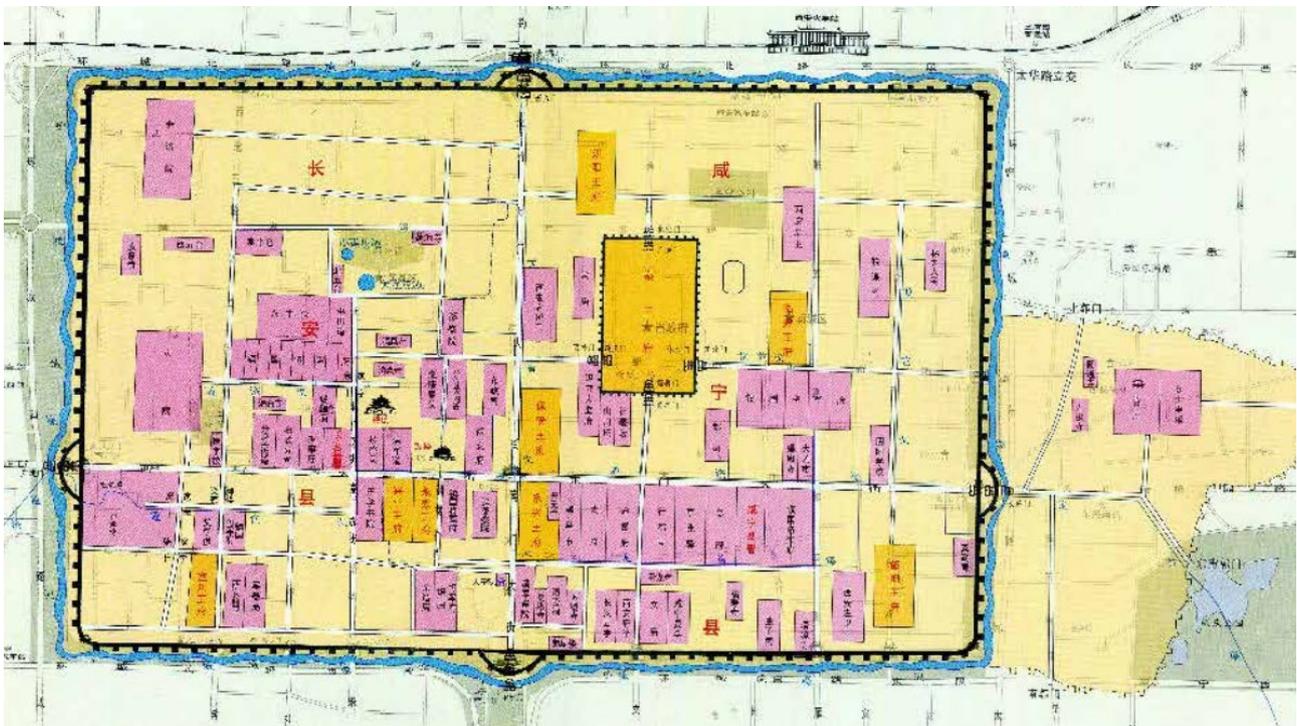
*Although Xi'an was no longer the capital of China under the Ming , it still kept a double city wall. Inside the outer city wall, there was a small city that was called the Qin Wangfu cheng city. Eight gates were opened. Four of them were in the inner city wall and the others were on the screen wall. It was during the middle or late Ming dynasty that the eastern outer city of Xi'an was built.*

*In 1869 and 1895, the government repaired and enlarged it. The wall was built of earth, rammed layer upon layer, and 914 Bu (Bu, an old measure of length, equivalent to 1.67 m) from north to south and 1,085 Bu from east to west.*

*It was an irregular rectangular city and the largest of the four outer cities. There were bridges that connected it to the outer city across the moat. Eleven streets divided the east outer city into twelve lanes. The southern outer city was built approximately from 1628 to 1644.*

*An earthen wall was built in the east, west and south measuring 350 Bu from north to south and 190 Bu from east to west. One gate was in the south wall and the other two were in the east and west walls. The*

southern outer city was built in 1628-1644. It belonged to Chang'an County. Earth walls were built in the west, north and south, 320 Bu from north to south and 880 Bu from east to west. In each of the outer cities there was a main road connecting the city gate and the main streets of Xian city. It divided the outer city into two equal sections. The other streets were distributed on either side of the main road. Except for the eastern outer city, there were few lanes or houses in the outer city. The large-scale expansion in the early Ming dynasty laid a foundation for later development. In 1582, the moving of the Bell Tower caused a series of changes in Xian city, and so this project was an important milestone in the history of Xian. From then on, the Bell Tower became the central point of the city and starting from there were four main streets extending in four directions. They divided the whole city into four districts.



*Xian city map in Ming dynasty (1368–1644)*

*/ image source: book, Flingerhuth, Carl. Learning from China. The Tao of the city. Birkhauser Verlag, 2004*

## *Evolution of the frame and structure of Xi'an city during the Qing dynasty*

*Xi'an city was a double city under the Qing as well as under the Ming. Within the big city, two small cities were built. To station the "Eight Banners" soldiers, the Man Cheng city was built on the foundations of the Qin Wang Fu Cheng city of the Ming dynasty. Another small city — Nan Cheng city — was located southeast of the Man Cheng city. It was a campsite for Han soldiers.*

*Therefore Xi'an city as a whole consisted of three cities. Because the Qing dynasty was a minority regime, then government had to control Xi'an city to conquer northwest and central China.*

*Because the Qing dynasty was a minority regime, the government had to control Xi'an city to conquer northwest and central China. The structure of the city changed a lot because of the establishment of the two small inner cities. It changed the communication and street arrangement, too. To a certain degree, the new emerging cities destroyed the original transportation system.*

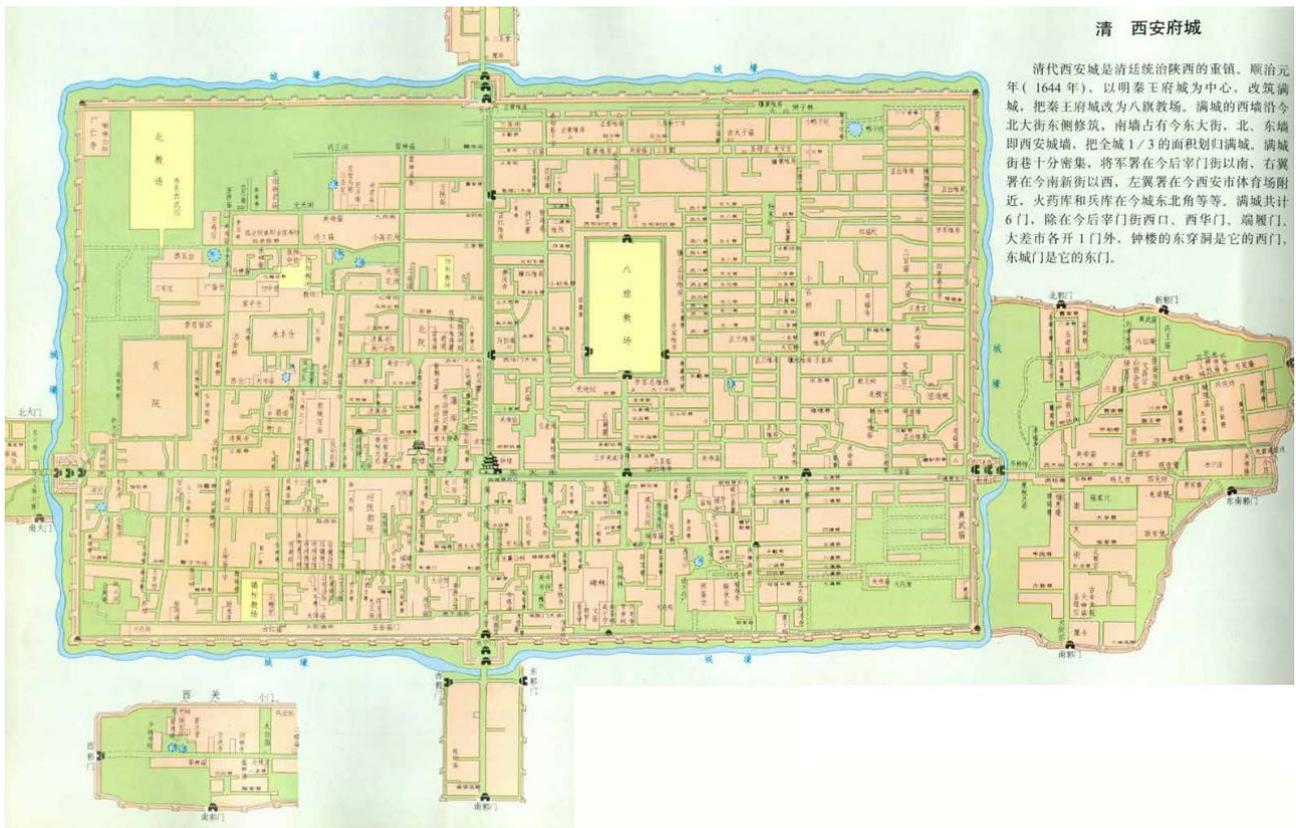
*For example, some streets left by the Ming dynasty no longer worked because the two inner cities cut them off.*

*During the Qing dynasty, the arrangement of the lanes and streets in Xi'an city was almost the same as in the Ming dynasty. The city was composed of a residential district, a commercial district, a cultural and educational district and a military district. During the Qing dynasty business in Xi'an was more prosperous than before. There were more than ten markets in the city. Most of them were established in Nan Yuan Men or Bei Yuan Men, and near the east city gate. The shops belonged to professions that were often kept together. Sometimes the commercial districts and the office districts coincided.*

*However, because business was forbidden in the Man Cheng city, there were no shops in this district.*

*The main markets were often located in the regions that had convenient*

*communications and a dense population. The markets with a zonal shape and the stores with a spot shape formed the basic frame of the commercial pattern in Xian during the Qing dynasty. The partition of trade was special. For some degree, the concentration of shops with the same profession greatly improved the development of Xian city's commercial areas.*



*The urban structure of Xi'an city in Qing dynasty (1644- 1912)*

*/ image source: book, Flingerhuth, Carl. Learning from China. The Tao of the city. Birkhauser Verlag, 2004*

## 1.2 The definition of the new modern city of Xi'an

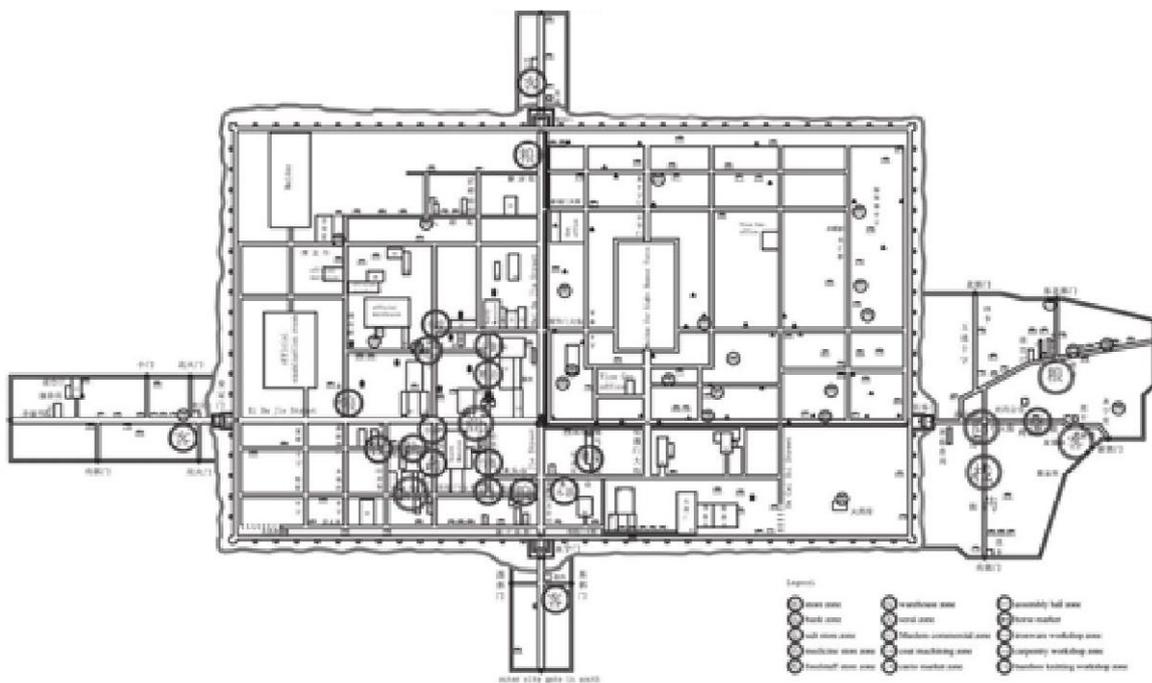
### *The evolution of the city's spatial form and the structure of Xi'an (1840 - 1949)*

*The century between 1840 and 1949, marked by the emergence of early modern industries, was a major transition period. It indicated the end of an agricultural society that had lasted for a very long time. Furthermore, the properties of Society began to change during this period. But the initial phases of the industrialization of Xi'an city were a very slow process and seem to have been hindered in their progress by wars, forced labor and natural disasters.*

*The new city at the end of the Tang Dynasty gradually became a regional center city after having been a national center. Furthermore, during the hundred years (1840-1949) that stretched from the Late Qing Dynasty to the dawn of the founding of the People's Republic of China, Xi'an city underwent a transition period in which it developed gradually from a pre-industrial society to an industrialized society.*

*But development during this period was very slow since it was repeatedly subject to the influences of armed conflicts such as the Westernization Movement, the Revolution of 1911, the warfare among the Northern Warlords and the Anti-Japan War, as well as the many peasant uprisings that occurred throughout this process. After the Revolution of 1911, a profound and longlasting influence gave rise to the modernization of Xi'an, since the political system was changed from a feudal monarchy to a national parliament.*

*The character of the city's spatial form was correspondingly altered, in order to turn it into a city of Diversity, Humanity and Openness as required for the character of a modern city with modern activities, such as industrial enterprises, commerce, finance, and a press.*



*Sketch Map for the Commercial Market Distributing of Xian City (1644 - 1912)*

*/ image source: book, Xian an ancient city in a modern world, evolution of the urban form 1949-2000*

### *The urban spatial forms' evolution in the late Qing dynasty period 1840-1911*

*The first important development period of the urban spatial form and structure of Xi'an lasted from 1840 to the Revolution of 1911. The modern military industry was established and the spatial form of the city was adapted to the requirements of military affairs and policies. It appears to have had the character of closure property, introversion property and defense property that were the premises for an early industrial society. During this stage, the public economy of Shaanxi suffered and people's lives were extremely hard owing to the heavy taxes and military cost of the war. As we can see, the economy of the Shaanxi society was severely affected by the wars during those times.*

*Modern industry had a very difficult start under such unfavorable conditions. During the Late Qing Dynasty, there was a major overhaul of the economic structure of China. The development of modern industry in Xi'an started much later than in the coastal trade cities of China.*

*Modernization in Xi'an was very slow precisely because of its location deep inland. The machine-manufacturing bureau of military affairs was founded in part according to principles of modern industrial organization. At this stage, the urban form of Xi'an city was still marked by military-defense property and the constant reinforcements for war that had to be made from the Ming to the end of the Qing dynastic periods. The city had been given the structure of a crossroads by using the Bell tower as the center, with Man Cheng city to the northeast of the city. Man Cheng covered an area of about 3 km<sup>2</sup> and occupied approximately 40 percent of Xi'an, and its ground belonged to the military.*

*There were three sections to the city, with the bell tower as a central point at the crossing of the main arteries. The first section was Man Cheng city in the northeast quadrant of the capital, with the former palace of the prince used as drill grounds by the army of Man nationality.*

*The second section of the city was the gradually coming into being, but*

*the existing layout characteristics, with Man Cheng city at the center, were maintained throughout this period in Xi'an.*

### *The evolution of the urban spatial form during the Min Guo period in Xi'an*

*After the Revolution of 1911, Man Cheng City, in which the armed forces subordinated to the emperor had lived for years, was dismantled. It was the era of Xi'an city's development in which form and structure were given characteristics that differed from the times of feudalism.*

*The urban pattern since the Late Qing Dynasty changed because of the dismantling of the city of Man Cheng. Dongdajie Street was widened to serve as the commercial street, thus establishing a new city as the center of the former Man Cheng.*

*But the development in the city was lacking in motivating energy due to the exactions of the conflicts between the warlords. In 1928, the local government of Xi'an turned Man Cheng into a new district, renovating, incorporating, widening and straightening roads and unifying their names, etc. A checkerboard type of road system was then established, enclosing 30 blocks measuring about 50 Mu.*

*At the same time the government demolished some buildings in order to meet the new traffic needs of the city, such as the outer gate that was attached to the city wall and the archway that was decorated at the end of the street. The government sold land along the streets at auction. It also built some new compounds and single-courtyard residences with the character of the traditional local-style dwelling house.*

*In the period 1912-1932, the characteristic of the urban form exhibited two features: firstly, the Zhong Lou Bell Tower marked the geometrical center of the Xi'an framework, as formed by the crossing of the four main thoroughfares: Dong Da Jie Street in the east, Xi Da Jie Street in the west, Nan Da Jie Street in the south and Bei Da Jie Street in the north.*

*Secondly, three new gates were opened in the city wall in order to adapt*

*to the traffic requirements of the populace, making the city more open than before. This means that the functional civil requirement of the city had become an important factor in the urban form, replacing the political and the military factors as driving forces.*

*The machine industry developed gradually after the building of the Long-Hai railway, which became a major east-west connection in China. Moreover, being in north-western China, at the rear of the theater of operations during the wartime period, Shaanxi became the new industrial region. Some of the modern industries of Xi'an were initially created during this period because factories were moved to Shaanxi Province, well beyond the enemy-occupied zones.*

*On January 28, 1932 (the 21 st year of Min Guo period), the Japanese government provoked and started a war incident in Shanghai, and threatened to attack Nanjing (capital of the Kuomintang government) and some other important towns along the Changjiang River. For reasons of safety the national government made a decision to move the handling of public affairs temporarily to Luoyang.*

*On March 5 of that same year, the Second Meeting, with all the committee members of the 4 th Kuomintang central executive committee, took the resolution that Xi'an should be made the vice-capital and be given the name "Xijing". At another meeting two days later, the Min Guo government decided to create a Xijing Preparatory Committee. During this period, the two committees completed at least three major projects. Firstly, surveying and drawing the maps of the city, investigating and compiling local chronicles of scenic spots and historic sites.*

*Secondly, most of the mud roads in the area just outside city gates were changed to crushed stone, coal cinder or brick-dregs roads. Groundwater ditches (specifically sewers) were built in some of the major streets. The city's infrastructure was improved. Thirdly, they carried out urban planning for Xijing with the help of the experience in urban planning of the Western world and suggestions from the population of Xi'an. It was*

*made clear that Xijing (the name given to Xi'an during its phase as vice-capital) would serve as a successor to the four generations of ancient capitals of the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang dynasties.*

*Under the pressure of contemporary events, Xi'an drew up a new urban concept with plans for the distribution of the roads, the partitioning and the development of the land, and the restoration of the Bell Tower, the Drum Tower and the roads around them.*

*In March 1943 (the 36<sup>th</sup> year of the Min Guo period), the Building Section of the Xi'an government drew up two formal reports for Xi'an's city planning. One was the Plan Report for the Division into Districts of Xi'an and its road system, and the other was a draft of the roads and functional zones of Xi'an city.*

*The basic principle of the planning was a sort of synthesis between the satellite-city and garden-city theories in the foundation of the city. The newer plans had taken some measures for the old city, such as widening the roads, increasing the green areas (including the parks, squares, the surface areas of the lakes), in order to suit the requirements of traffic and the requirements of the leisure life of the inhabitants. Moreover, in order to spread out the dense population of the city more evenly, a new town with garden areas was to be built outside of the city. Another measure was to build villa-type single-story houses to improve the rural area conditions and enlarge the green areas by planting trees along the rivers that led to the city, thus adjusting the climate.*

*The layout of green areas followed the principle of balanced distribution, including the parks, roads, squares, gardens and surface areas of the lakes. In order to make the citizens have easy access, the parks and stadiums would be evenly distributed, laying out small gardens rather than grand-duke-style gardens and large sports grounds.*

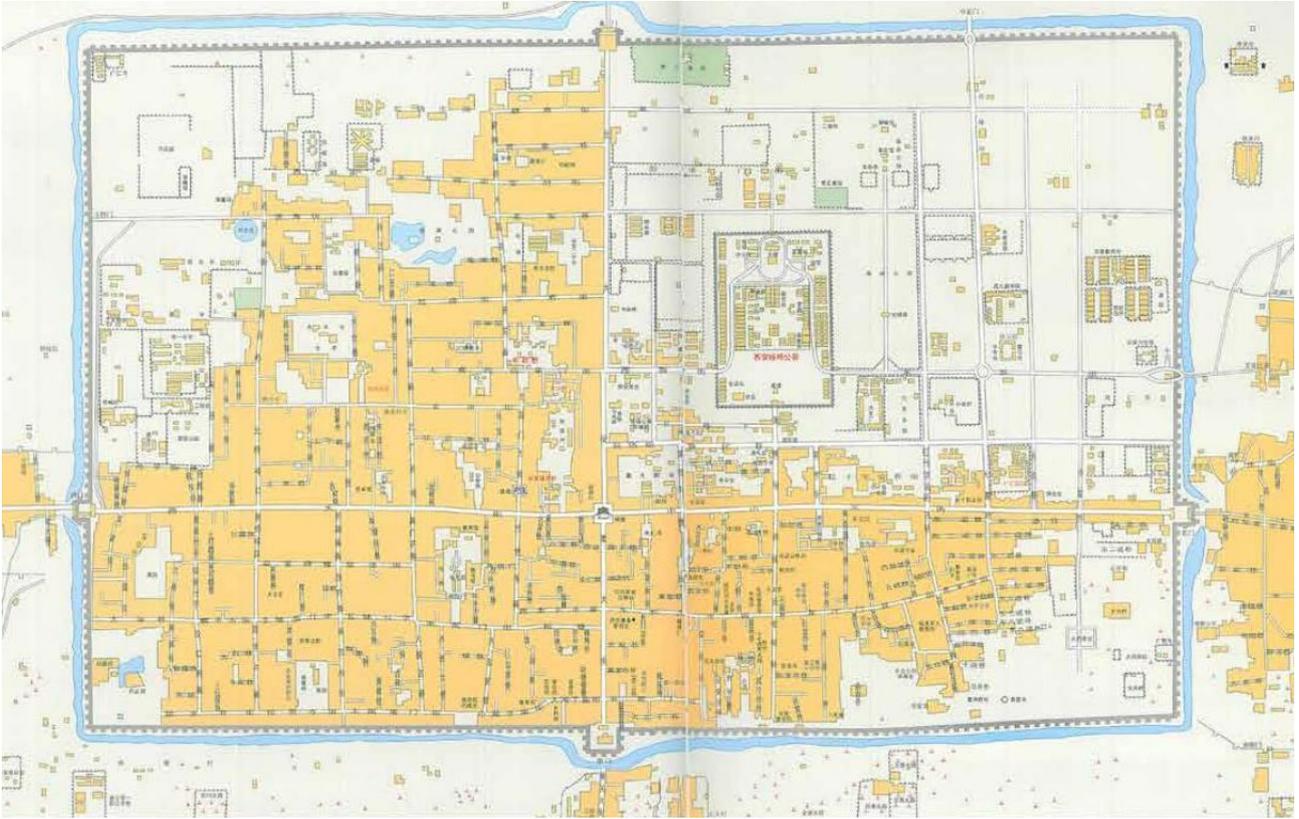
*The urban thinking was greatly influenced by the modern city planning theories and further developed during this period. But the process of industrialization was still very slow, even though the city, owing to its fa-*

*vourable geographical position, made it possible for modern industry to be developed to some extent in Xi'an during the postwar period. And yet the urbanization process of Xi'an was still hindered and delayed. During the period stretching from 1840 (Late Qing Dynasty) to 1949 (Min Guo period), the city developed to some extent, but it lacked sufficient motivational energy for development because of its location deep in inland China.*

*The rate of modern industrial development was very slow. Xi'an was merely a consumer-city before 1949, with a depressed economy, and in all respects it lagged far behind the eastern areas of China, as far as the commodity economy, creation of industry, communications and transportation infrastructures, and civil education were concerned.*

*The masterplans of Xi'an between 1953 and 1995 Xi'an, the regional capital of Shaanxi, was the object of three master plans between 1949 and the end of the 20th century (1953-1972, 1980-2000, 1995-2020). These three master plans were in keeping with the more general developments on a national level: the gridded socialist city of the 1950s, and starting in the 1980s, the post-socialist city designed according to a radioconcentric plan, proclaiming the market economy, the liberalization of competition and globalization, all the while integrating — not without difficulty — the concept of cultural heritage.*

*From 1984, cities considered as poles of economic development tended to concentrate their activities and to attract migrants, in particular at the level of a provincial metropolis like Xi'an.*



*Xian city map in 1933*

*/ image source: book, Xian an ancient city in a modern world, evolution of the urban form 1949-2000*

### *The first master plan (1953-1972) : a socialist city of inland industrial production*

*The Sino-Soviet treaty of friendship, alliance and mutual assistance was signed in February 1950 and marked the beginning of a period of Soviet assistance until 1958.*

*Within the framework of the First Five-Year Plan of economic development (1953-1957), the national policy of expansion toward the west and the northern centre was carried out from urban poles, pivots of an effective economic growth that included Luoyang (Henan), Xi'an and Lanzhou (Gansu) in the west.*

*The Shaanxi became the centre for industries involving the military, textiles, machine tools and electronic and optical equipment.*

*In 1950, 1951 and 1952, town planners prepared three projects for Xi'an, probably within the framework of the first town-planning administrations created after 1950, but none of the projects were accepted.*

*In the field of town planning, the implementation of nationalizing land reforms and the organization of the economy allowed the application of the modern Soviet city model in situ, in particular the development of functional and rational plans on a large scale, encroaching largely on agricultural land, as was the case in Xi'an.*

*The objective of the master plan was to define for each city, and more particularly for Xi'an, the boundaries of the main infrastructures and the localization of the functional zones.*

*In Xi'an, the plan of 1950 defined some principles mentioned again in the final Master Plan of 1953.*

*The design of the city was based on some simple ideas : the new city was coupled to the old city and developed from east to west. It was designed according to an orientation and an orthogonal grid that was to be continuous with the old city.*

*In the new city, the administrative and commercial centres were developed along a north-south corridor, and also integrated sports facilities.*

*The extensions of the plan were envisioned within a perimeter bounded by a ring road and reserved vast non-assigned areas.*

*The orthogonal grid was divided by a diagonal grid that took the inflection of the railway into account and connected the elements of centrality of the new city.*

*Beyond the ring road, two airports were planned in the northwest and southeast, together with zones of development and, in the south, a zone was devoted to culture and education (universities).*

*The industrial parks and warehouses were established in the north, west and east (textile factories) ; residential zones were planned in the southern part of the old city and next to the industrial parks in the west. Green spaces were distributed in the residential and urban sectors, integrating the irregularities of the hydrographic network.*

*In these three plans, the proposed grid was based only on the “elementary” grid of the road system projected on a large scale, organizing a network of infrastructures and reserving future step-by-step adjustments and secondary re-divisions of the land, in particular at the district level.*

### *The master plan of 1953*

*The Master Plan of 1953 was a complete project, presenting the “fully-realised” city in an area bounded to the west and east by two rivers. In the north, the slow urban development was constrained by the railway, which constituted a barrier beyond the ramparts at the time.*

*The latter influenced the zoning (industries and warehouses, residential working-class areas) and, to some extent, the limits and inflections of the plan. The historical city, recovering its central position in the composition, generated the vertical corridor (north-south) of the orthogonal grid of the plan.*

*The principle of the orthogonality of the plan provided reference marks for drawing up the grid of the road system that organised the territory*

*of the plan, while highlighting “the” urban monument through an outer ditch and an enclosed green strip of land. Inside the walled city, the monumental square marking the centre of the agglomeration was located on the north-south corridor of the old city.*

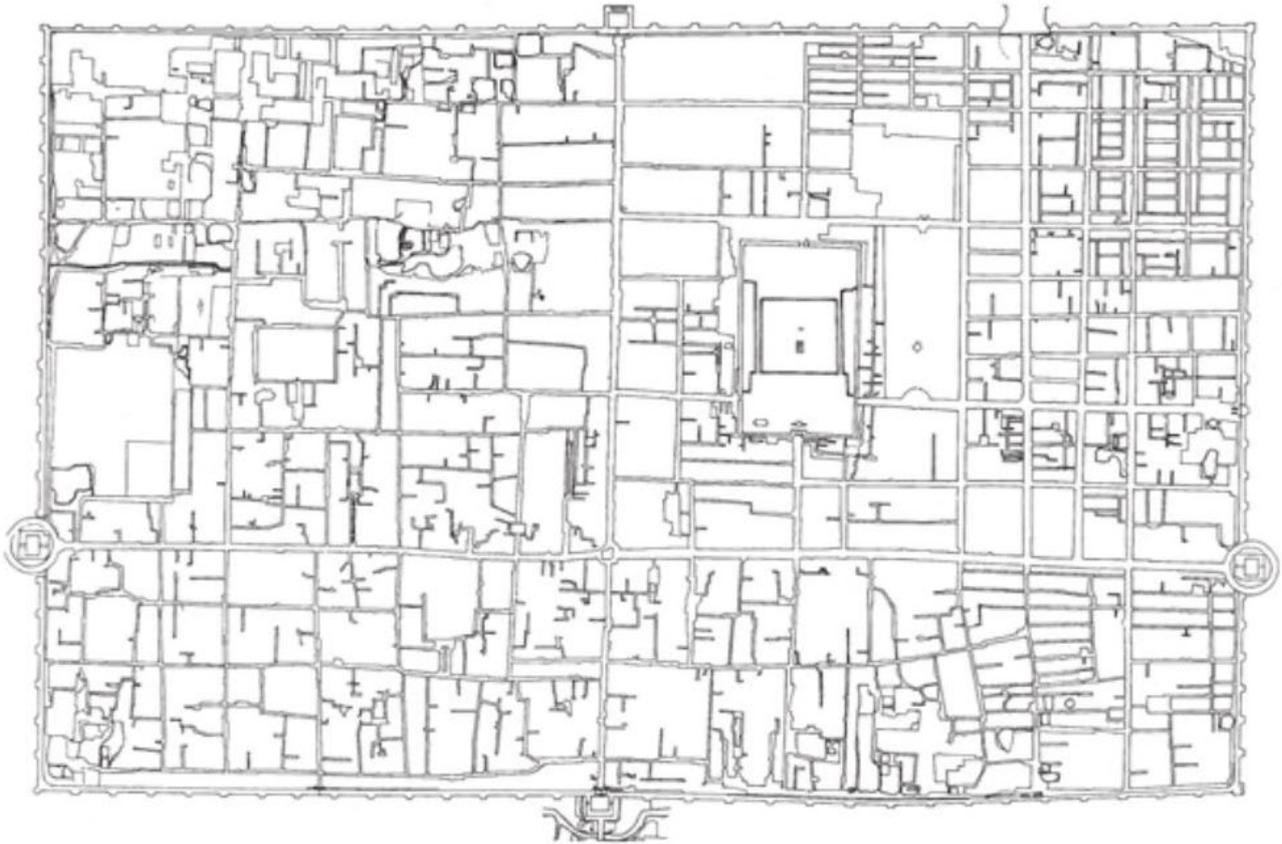
*Two diagonal roads connected the corners of the square, one to the northeast toward the square of the railway station ; the other to the northwest toward an opening in the ramparts made to connect the city to the new warehouse district.*

*This square was bordered in the south by a large median road that led to the ramparts in the east and west.*

*The repositioning of the historical city on an overall level by this plan is reminiscent of the “traditional” plan for the composition of the great Chinese capitals ; in this case the capital of the Tang.*

*In the same way, the transversal corridor of the city, passing by the East and West Gates, continued on to two public spaces at the heart of the new districts.*

*The road system grid of the new agglomeration was indeed generated by the continuation of the orthogonal network of the seven main crossroads, restructuring the urban fabric of the walled city and the quadrangle defined by the existence of the ramparts.*



*Map of the Xi'an in 1953*

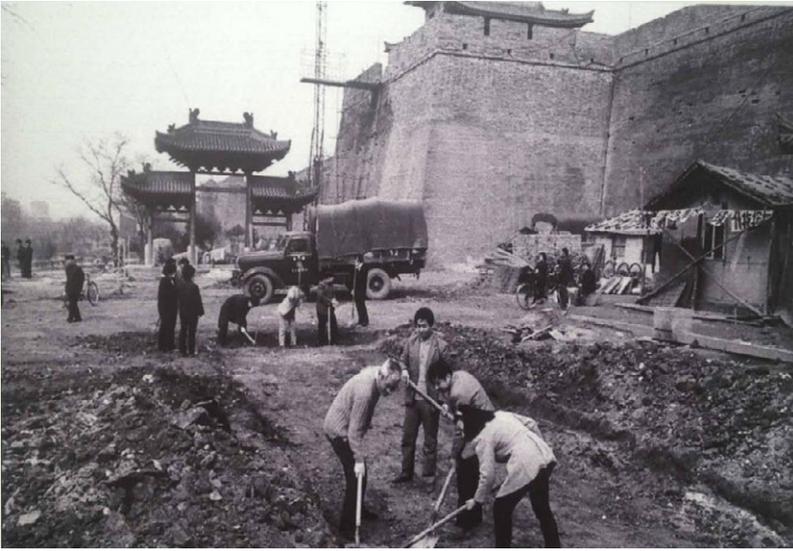
*/ image source: book, Logan, John, R. Urban China in transition. Willey & Sons, 2008*

### *The sketch-plan of Greater Xi'an in 1959*

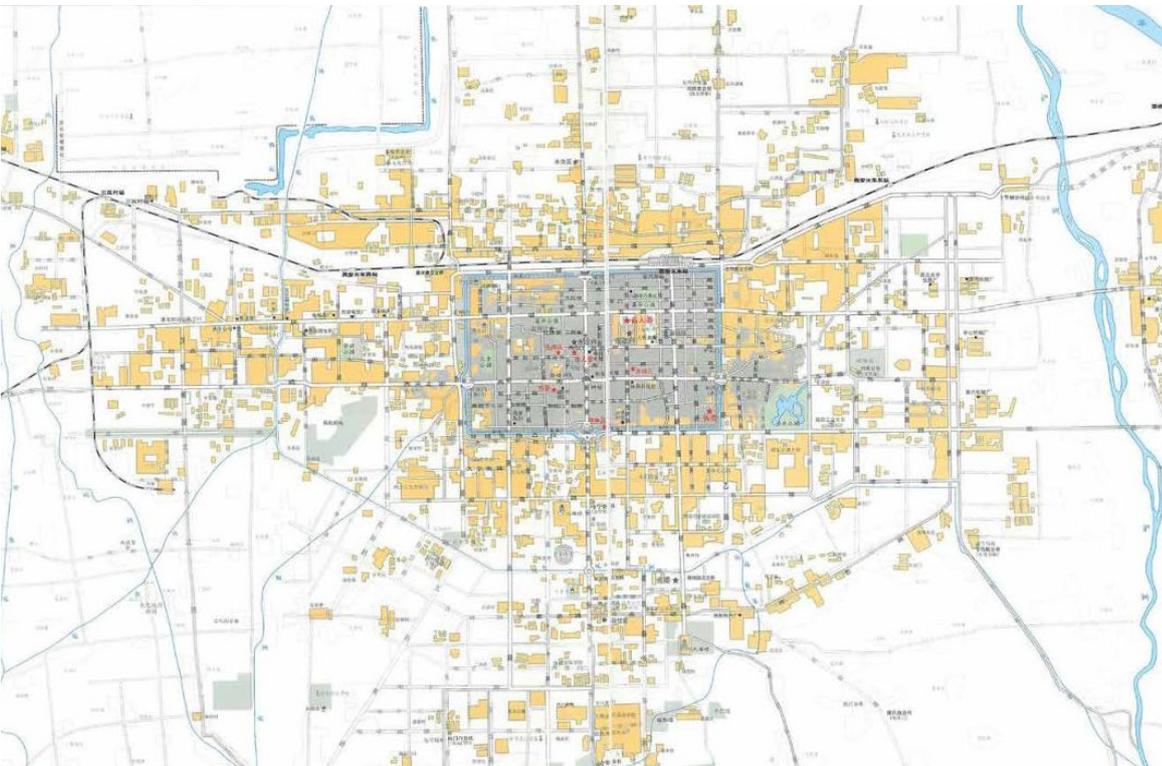
*In the 1950 s, the emphasis on heavy industry, for example in Xi'an, involved the transfer of industries and their personnel to new centres, which led to urban expansion.*

*In Xi'an, approximately 42 industrial companies were established within five years, causing regional and rural emigration that accounted for most of the increase in the urban population. The greater part of the urban budgets was invested in industrialization, resulting in a chronic housing shortage in the 1950 s. The interruption of Soviet assistance and the weakness of local governmental support contributed to encouraging and developing local initiatives. In Xi'an, this was translated into anticipated projects of two big industrial parks beyond the limits initially planned and by an enlargement of the textile industry zone.*

*Other projects were not carried out due to lack of investments. However, many small factories were established by the city government or the authorities of the ring road districts in the territories of their jurisdiction without any concern for the environment, and sometimes even in the midst of residential zones. In the old city itself, the authorities of the districts were free to establish their own streetside factories or workshops on the land available. This plan showed the hesitation concerning the priority given to industry in Xi'an at the time ; in particular to heavy industry and the steel works. The Master Plan of 1953 was judged inadequate because of the lack of space for new industrial needs : this led to the idea of the greater city and the creation of a new urban site (Hancheng) in the west. In its orientation, this plan envisioned (until about 1972) an important urban development to the north, east and west, whereas the centre (with its facilities) had to be transferred to the south.*



*Reconstruction of the city wall area / image source: book, Xian an ancient city in a modern world, evolution of the urban form 1949-2000*



*Project of the Master Plan, 1965 / image source: book, Xian an ancient city in a modern world, evolution of the urban form 1949-2000*

### *The master plan of 1980*

*In the 1960 s, within the framework of the “Third Line” policy, in the midst of the Vietnam War and the interruption of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, a strategic restructuring of industrial facilities was considered to meet the potentially escalating and threatening international situation.*

*The Master Plan of 1980-2000, approved by the Council of State within the framework of the sixth Five-Year plan (1981-1985), was developed in a completely new context, appearing at the outset of the policy of liberalisation. The new policy of market socialism, which put the economy in the foreground, involved a decentralization of the system and, for the long term, induced a recomposition of the local authorities in relation to the enterprises.*

*In 1983, Xi'an was on the list of the big cities endowed with the same power as those of the provinces concerning planning and exchanges with foreign countries. These provincial metropolises were directly linked to the centre with regard to investments and taxes, but remained subordinated at the political level to the provincial committee of the CCP. The rapid development of Xi'an resulted in the allocation of investments in the interest of the regional metropolis and to the detriment of the province as a whole in the long run. The objectives in this perspective concerned the launching of major infrastructural projects related to water, district heating and facilities.*

*The airport was moved approximately 30 km to the northwest (in Xianyang) in anticipation of greater international traffic. The development of electronic and mechanical industries integrating poles of scientific research was planned in new zones for high technology (in the north and south). Efforts aimed at a better environment resulted in the maintenance and creation of green buffer spaces and watercourses (the Han and Ba rivers). The major innovation involved the taking into account of the cultural heritage. This was done in order to promote the*

*development of cultural tourism on an international level, regarded as a potentially strong growth sector. To structure the urban fabric more clearly, a radio-concentric system of three ring roads was to be used: the first encircled the ramparts and the ditches, the route of the second took that of the channel in the south, but remained unfinished in the east and interrupted in the west because it was blocked by the railway in the north of the city.*

*The planned urban expansion, incorporating large territories without any zoning plans, was restrained by a third ring road that was connected to the others by several straight roads. This ring road consolidated the north-south axis of the master plan, which passed by the Bell Tower.*

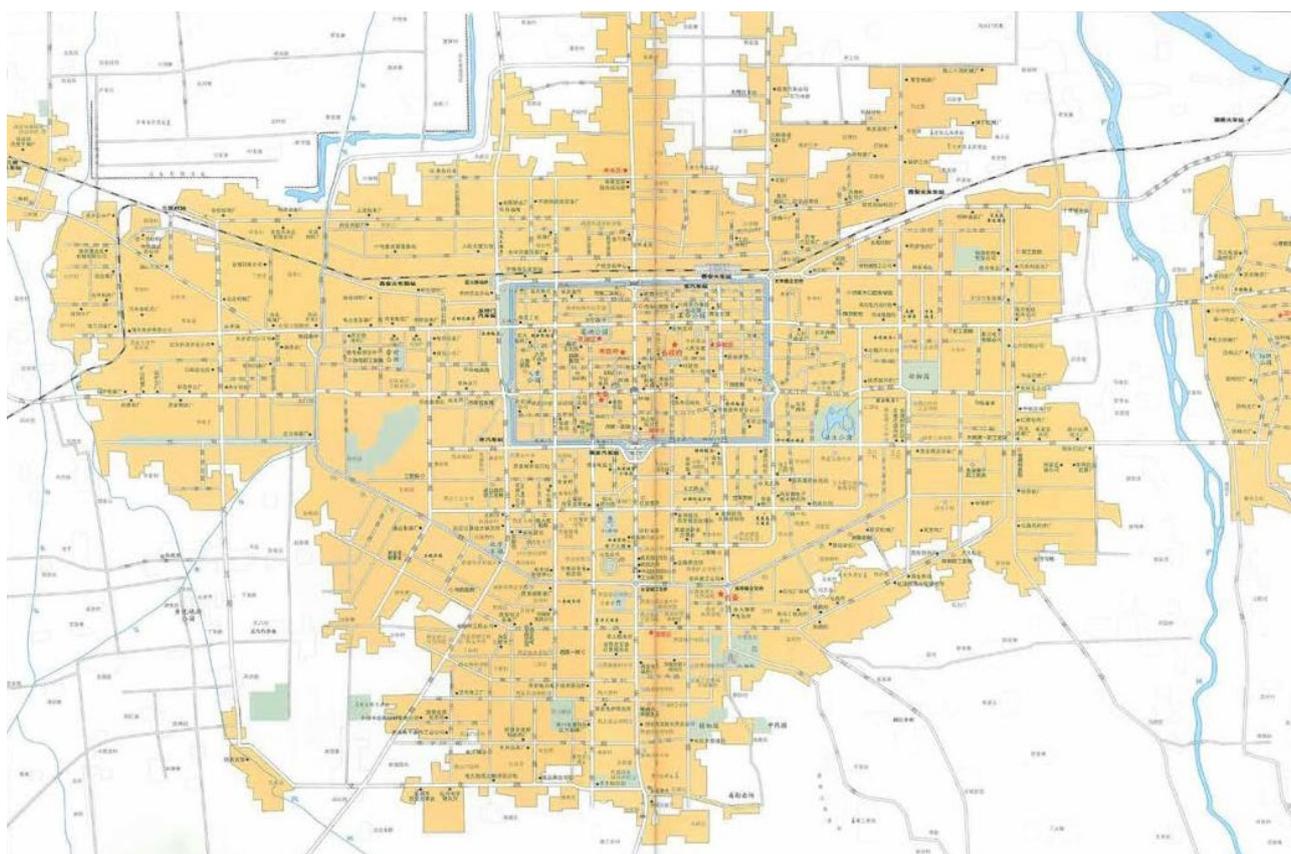
### *The master plan of 1995*

*The municipality initially had to meet an imperative : that of the rapid expansion of the most important city of the Chinese Northwest.*

*The objective announced was to make Xi'an a metro- polis of international standing with a reputation based on an image of modernity and industrial efficiency associated with a cultural heritage of international fame. This cultural heritage was regarded as an attractive "flagship tourist product", and its development and promotion were organised in terms of a tourist market to be conquered. Such an objective would finally make it possible to regain "the historical importance of old Chang'an". Here the historical argument legitimised the claimed status of an international centre of exchange and a key city between Europe and Asia, in particular through the reference to the ancient Silk Road. The development and improvement of infrastructures and the transportation and communication systems had to integrate the new scale of the satellite towns and allow better connections with Eastern China (including a network of highways, railways and new train stations, and expansion of the airports). If, from 1953 on, the plan showed an obvious continuity with the gridded plan (orthogonality, principle of zoning), the establishment of 11 satellite towns — with an average area of 200,000 ha. — along the main roads or on the outskirts of the city bounded by a third ring road disturbed this logic and reversed the hierarchies of the structuring of the space. This meant switching from an orthogonal grid plan to a radioconcentric plan. The new programmed sectors along the valley to the northeast and northwest of the city, beyond the ring road, balanced the thrust and continuous urban development to the south, which had reached the town of Chang'an. On the other hand, as far as the policy of green spaces was concerned, the plan re-adopted and amplified the existing programme of the outline of 1980 as the most effective way to protect the archaeological sites and mark the historic areas.*

*The innovation lay in the creation and development of four important*

*archaeological zones within the perimeter of the new agglomeration for the purposes of tourism. These zones were developed and arranged in wooded, green spaces in accordance with the creation of tourist and holiday resorts in the vicinity. The Ming city (called “inner city” or “aged city”), the densest part of the physical centre of the plan, remained the political, administrative and cultural centre of the metropolis, owing mainly to the development of the northern districts beyond the ramparts. The confrontation between modernity and the development of the cultural heritage constituted a new element in the development strategy and involved specific territories.*



*Xi'an City Map in 1996 / image source: book, Logan, John, R. Urban China in transition. Willey & Sons, 2008*

### *Evolution in progress and new perspectives*

*The Master Plan of 1995 anticipated large-scale national projects that were officially planned for the year 2000.*

*Xi'an was cited as one of the key cities in this programme (along with Chongqing and Chengdu) because of its contact with the provinces of Central China and its location on the strategic road and railway corridor between Eastern China and Central Asia.*

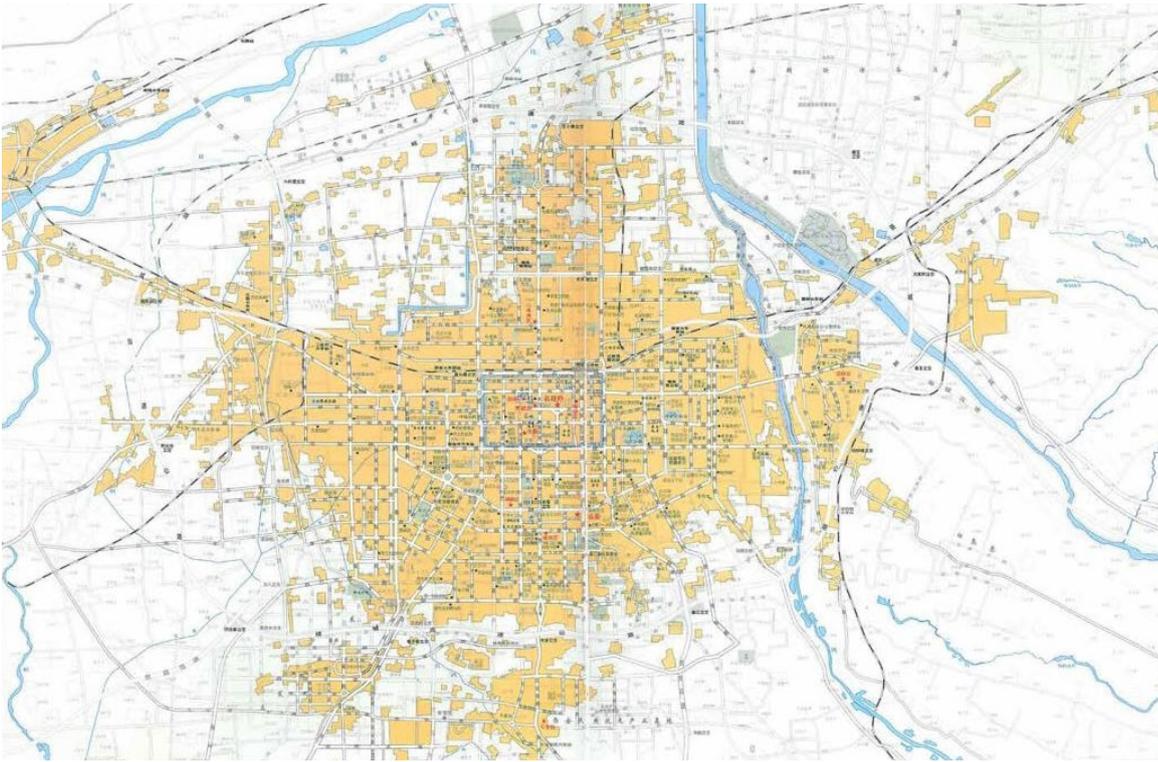
*The development objectives relative to Xi'an were defined by the fourth general municipal programme in March 2001, according to which the provincial capital had to become the "Grand Xi'an Metropolitan Circle", with a centre that included the central city region within the third ring road and four peripheral centres consisting of Xianyang, Lintong, Sanyuan and Weiqu. In 2000, this great development project around the metropolitan pole of Xi'an and Xianyang resulted in the launching of the industrial high-tech development areas of Guanzhong. The Master Plan of 2004-2020 applies the same scale as the programmes that have expanded the economic area of the Shaanxi metropolis since 1995. From 1995 on, the new radioconcentric model became essential for Xi'an, as for the other Chinese metropolises.*

*In this new context, the Ming city is a little more distant from its periphery. For the rest, certain public services (administration) central to the municipality are planned to approach the third ring road and be established, as the choice of the CBD site in 1995 already showed, in the recent mixed sections intended to enhance the modern image of the metropolis.*

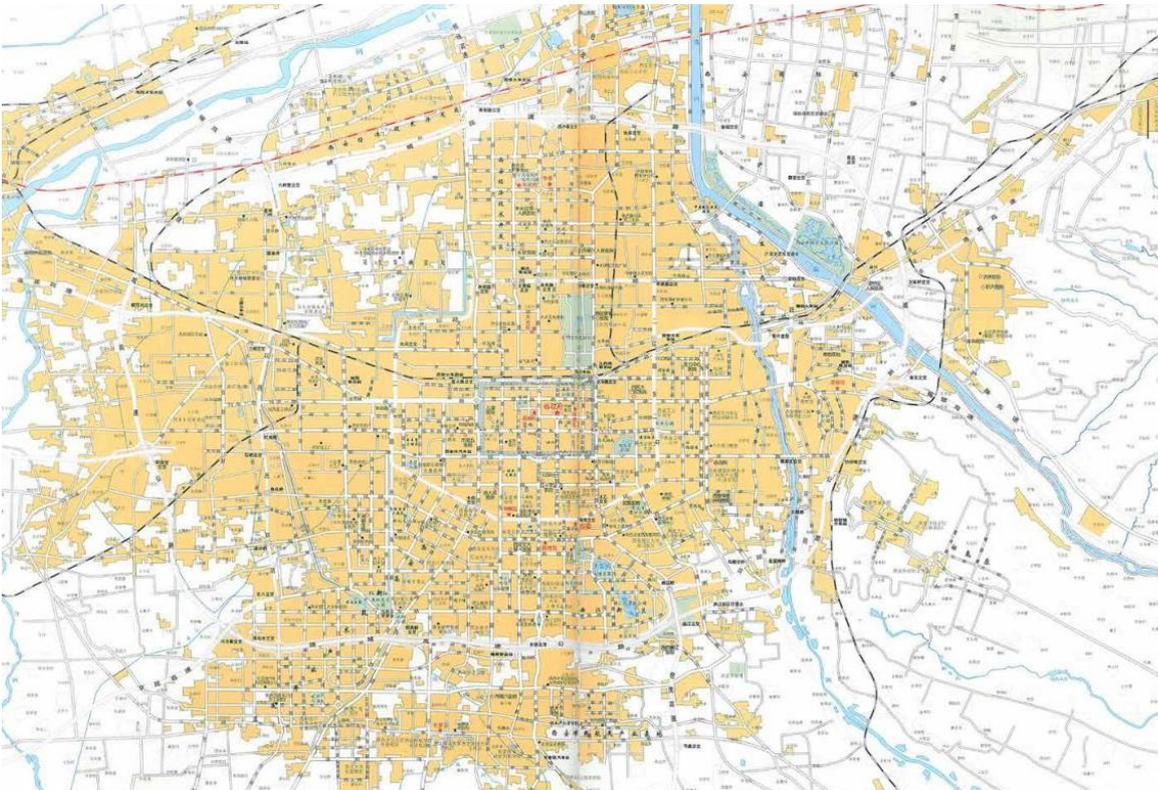
*From now on, urban development will take place in proximate zones and be linked to the network of express-ways and satellite towns. Insofar as the creation of these sectors comes within the context of a market economy, reinforcing competition at all levels, the risk of town planning with diffuse urban infill of vacant spaces will increase.*

*For 2007, a regrouping of the municipalities of Xianyang, to the north*

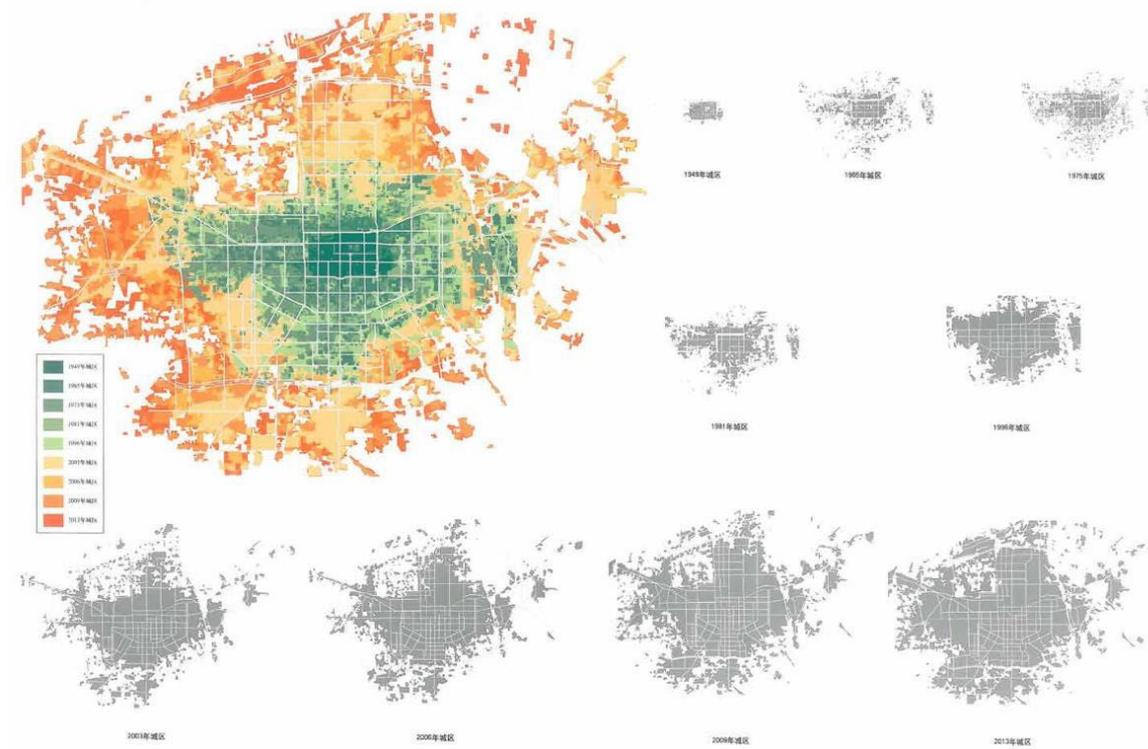
*of the Wei River, and Xian is planned. This change of scale of an entity occupying the two slopes of the valley should reinforce the hegemonic role of Xian in the Guanzhong and, a fortiori, on the scale of the province. Thereafter the reality of the development of the metro- polis will be carried out in accordance with this radiocon- centric model, crossed by a broad east-west thoroughfare that will induce the expansion of the area to be urbanised along the Wei Valley and confirm the long-term resistance of the geo-historic entity of the Guanzhong.*



*Xi'an city map in 2003 / image source: book, Logan, John, R. Urban China in transition. Willey & Sons, 2008*



*Xi'an city map in 2013 / image source: book, Logan, John, R. Urban China in transition. Willey & Sons, 2008*



*Xian city map evolution from 1949-2013*

*/ image source: book, Logan, John, R. Urban China in transition. Willey & Sons, 2008*

### 1.3 Culture Heritage

*All of the cities and towns of China undergoing rapid growth and development have to deal with their historic and tangible cultural heritage throughout the turbulent processes of modernization. Painful and comprehensive decisions have been made and still are to be taken : what to protect, what to conserve, what to discard of the remaining old buildings and urban tissue ? Why — and also how ? These questions are in no way unknown to any society.*

*The new orientations of the reform policy of 1978 regarding decentralization, the socialist market economy and a certain financial autonomy of the local governments, also took the issue of cultural heritage into account.*

*In 1961, the first list of “protected cultural heritage sites of national importance” was issued, while the first Master Plan of Xian was approved in 1954. ] Of the 21 sites listed in the province of Shaanxi, 11 were situated in areas within the jurisdiction of the municipality of Xian. Outside the walls, on the great site of the capital of the Tang, two pagodas (Big Wild Goose and Small Wild Goose, respectively 8 and 3 km to the south) were included in the first Master Plan, as was the Neolithic site of Banpo in the east (with museum) whose fortuitous discovery during the construction of industrial buildings fit particularly well in the framework of the plan. At the time, the large protected archaeological zones in the northwest and the west were agricultural areas : the site of the capital of the Han, Chang’an, in the northwest, was an “urbanizable” area on the periphery according to the plan envisioned in 1954, whereas the site of Daming Palace in the northeast was already partly enclosed by an industrial park to the north of the railway.*

*The sites of the Epang Palace (Qin) and the capitals of the Zhou (Feng, Hao) were located in rural areas. This issue was a particularly sensitive subject for Xian and the Shaanxi because of the impact of the discovery in 1974 of the terracotta army in the necropolis of Qin Shihuangdi in Lintong. This discovery of worldwide importance appeared like a signal*

*that marked the end of the dark years of the Cultural Revolution. The second list of “protected cultural heritage sites of national importance” of February 23, 1982 was opportunely published during the preparation of the second Master Plan, which was approved in 1983.*

*The expectancy of a rapid development of tourism, promoted by a policy of decentralization and implemented at the beginning of the 1980 s, pushed many cities to integrate this new opportunity in the orientations of their development. The Headquarters of the 8<sup>th</sup> army and the Great Mosque, both in the western part of the Ming city, were listed in 1988. From an economic point of view, this cultural heritage constitutes an unquestionable asset for the sub-region of Guanzhong and the metropolis. With a development rate of over 70 % in 1994, it already dominates the whole province, whose rate is otherwise relatively weak.*

*The development of the tourist sector benefitted from the favorable location and stimulated projects to develop the sites. Finally, starting in 1980 in the urban area of Xi'an, the status of State-listed monuments and sites created new constraints that were imposed by the successive regulations for the protection and development of the cultural heritage in a context of urban development.*

*However, the future appears less guaranteed for certain major archaeological sites because of the urban development and densification of the central districts.*

*Here, it is the scale of the territory — and sometimes the invisibility of the archaeological structures — that make these sites fragile from the point of view of the demand for land in the urban area.*

*The two large listed sites of the capital of the Tang left their imprint on the city of today : the Daming Palace, currently enclaved in the northeast of the Ming city, has just been restored.*

*Since the 1980 s, the protection of the archaeological sites — major or not — and the fate of the fortuitous discoveries at the time of large public works projects do not seem to be guaranteed over time.*

*Indeed, the new official ideology since the 1980 s tends to promote an “effective” protection system, associating protection and creation of activity by developing the archaeological sites in order to create a surplus value on the economic level is development of major protected sites of ancient capital cities seemed to be based on at least three requirements. On the one hand, as the national regulations stipulated, it was a question of planning developments adapted to a public use (parks, theme parks) that was considered economically feasible. On the other hand, the interest in such sites could be revived by the programming of archaeological research that was to be spread out over time. This strategy of renewal was possible if one intended in the course of classification to preserve the totality or near-totality of the sites, whatever its scale as determined by scientific expertise. This did not exclude the possibility of extending the zone of protection in the case of later discoveries. The development of archaeological research in China during these last years underlined this change of scale in the archaeological sites very well, in particular as far as the sites of the imperial capital and necropolises were concerned.*



*View on the city walls, Xi'an / image source: travelchina.com*

# 02

*Public  
Space*

### *What is the current situation of the model of public space in China?*

*When you look at China, you see a world power in ascendance. Here, everything is important; for instance, the production of urban space, its 'language', its 'grammar', and its 'syntax'. The most significant aspect of China's contemporary spatial urban development is the speed and depth with which the Old, poor, backward China is quite literally demolished, discarded, and replaced by a new, glittering China. In this forward-looking China, taking shape before our eyes in time-lapse speed, a nation's aspirations are reflected; a nation that is rediscovering itself and rising anew to former greatness after almost two centuries of revolutions, trials, and tribulations.*

*The opening of China, initiated roughly thirty-two years ago by legendary reformer Deng Xiao Ping, exposes the former 'middle kingdom' to a tremendous, limitless flood of influences from within, from China's own history, in part to be discovered and interpreted anew, but also from the outside. Through the nearly uncontrollable portals of the Internet, through the open window of television and film, and in tow of goods and services flooding the country through international trade, an influx of foreign ideas, symbols, images, styles, concepts, techniques and customs takes place.*

*Originating most of all in the USA, in the past the destination of many immigrants of Chinese origin whose descendents are today a part of American society, in Europe, and also in developed Asian neighbors farther towards the east, influences seep into the metropolises of the eastern coastal region, the north, and by now, the western Hinterland as well. The global sphere of communications also influence the use of language.*

*Today, the signs and signage systems in the 'public space' of China's cities can't be imagined Without English words and sentences, in contrast to comparatively introverted Germany.*

*Be it public notice, street sign, or signage for direction or advertisement, foreign guests can generally rely on an English translation.*

*Architectural styles and fashions, in addition to applied urban planning and design paradigms, seem of Western origin as well. Slab housing construction, propagated by early twentieth-century Modernist architects and dogmatically formulated within the Charter of Athens (1933) has been triumphant in China ever since its Soviet-dominated early communist phase. We can hardly imagine Chinese cities without it.*

*The new residential compounds of the ascending middle and upper classes, equipped with walls, fences, and gated entrances, are reminiscent of American 'gated communities'. Inspired by the example of the United States, every self-confident Chinese mega-city today wants to plan and build a new 'Central Business District'. These CBDS are filled with skyscrapers in the International Style, and every now and then loosened up a little by flagship architecture of Postmodern or even Deconstructivist origin.*

*For some time now, the metropolises of Beijing and Shanghai have been competing against each other for the most striking buildings designed by internationally renowned architects such as Rem Koolhaas, Arata Isozaki, Norman Foster, Richard Rogers, Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron, Paul Andreu, von Gerkan, Marg & Partner, Gunter Henn, Albert Speer, Zaha Hadid,*

*and many more. Most provincial capital cities have, in the meantime, enthusiastically joined the run for architectural brands. Also, the practice of functional differentiation (zoning), created in the West, has become wildly popular and been put in the service of increasing both local and regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP). We are therefore not surprised when we read and are told repeatedly that Western influence on Chinese development is big, yes, even far-reaching. Some people might, with a sinophilic tinge of regret, assume that China is becoming westernized — which means nothing other than that a country is surrendering*

*its identity, if only to a certain degree. Shanghai, former colonial metropolis and today world city, is considered the vanguard of this surrender of Chinese identity.*



*New urban public space in Chinese metropolitan cities / image source: archdaily.com*

## 2.1 The historic evolution of public space

*The evolving concept of Chinese public space Public space in the modern city is charged with meaning and with controversy. The concepts of the “public sphere” and “public space” have long been explored and contested vis-à-vis cities in Europe and America. As Peter Goheen has observed, there have been two “contrasting assessments of the significance of public space to the conduct of public life in the modern city”: that which celebrates public space as the locus for the dynamism of the public sphere, and that which laments the devaluation of public space under capitalism. Differing aspects of China’s emerging public space validate both of these oppositional stances.*

### *Urban public space in pre-1949 China*

*Chinese temples served a similar function, as they often represented the largest “open spaces” the public could enter, and they hosted periodic events such as temple fairs and religious festivals that afforded opportunities for participation in Chinese public life.*

*But even more than in Japan, traditional Chinese urban space was long rigorously defined and partitioned.*

*The high walls that surrounded and organised the space of China’s traditional cities precluded the existence of true public spaces.*

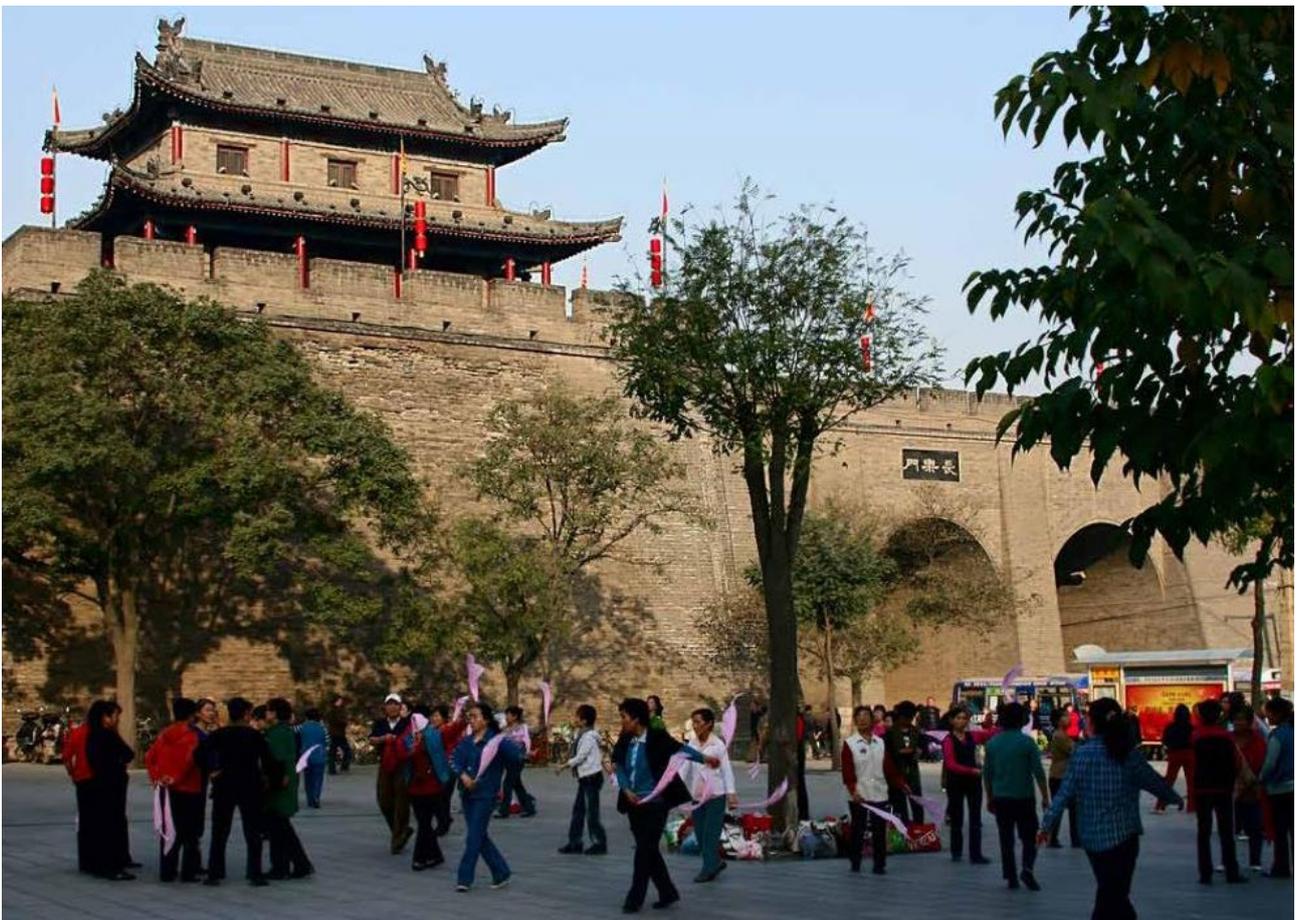
*These walls created solid, nested spaces – from the massive walls that surrounded entire cities, to those that surrounded wards, or districts, and those that enclosed courtyard houses within those districts.*

*Histories suggest that in the early incarnations of Chinese urban form, nearly every kind of urban activity took place inside the walled wards and markets of the city, and street-life was virtually non-existent.*

*Even when Chinese cities became more commercialised, from the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) onward, and emerging street markets defied the strict enclosure of city walls, the markets themselves were often controlled by guilds and nativeplace associations.*

*Yet perhaps even under these conditions there existed a vibrant public*

*life within the cities. Nonetheless, aside from agricultural lands, large outdoor urban spaces were largely cut off from the use and even the sight of most Chinese people. The spectacular landscaped gardens of China's eastern cities, for example, were the private, walled domains of the elite. Even with the initial introduction of modern spaces that accompanied the expansion of foreign "treaty ports" in nineteenth century China's eastern coastal cities, public parks were walled and gated.*



*In the history, temples and city wall were used as public space / image source: author self-composed*

### *Urban public space in Revolutionary China*

*With the 1949 revolution came a new vision of a public sphere predicated on socialism's participatory ideals. The massive changes wrought by the Socialist revolution and urban planning after 1949 included the construction of wider roads, open spaces, and public places in cities that had been largely mazes of closed space in earlier years. In some cases, Soviet advisors worked together with Chinese planners to produce plans not unlike their Soviet counterparts: grand public monuments, large public squares, and new city centres dominated the monumental landscape, while residential areas were formed on the low-density Soviet "superblock" principle.*

*Yet, to a large extent, even these changes failed to transform the walled-in nature of Chinese cities. In some ways public space was even more restrictive in the new China than it had been during the imperial era. Walls were retained when other aspects of traditional society were discarded in the aftermath of the Chinese revolution.*

*Most newly-constructed public institutions and production facilities were sited within compounds behind high walls or fences. Public parks were often walled, with limited access and gates locked in the evening. Moreover, the commercial and entertainment sectors within cities were sharply curtailed, further limiting the public life of urban residents.*

### *Urban public space in post-reform China*

*The reform era (1978) brought a new vision for Chinese cities: one that increasingly required the redevelopment of urban space toward international standards and models, and toward the accommodation of rapidly increasing economic activities and populations. .*

*During phase one (1978-1991), with the introduction of market reforms, the relatively limited pre-reform emphasis on large public squares was replaced with a new emphasis on landscaping and on fulfilling basic needs for redevelopment space. During the second phase, 1992-1999,*

*they argue, the impacts of globalisation were felt, with an emphasis on western styles, including the construction of new urban plazas and western-style pedestrian streets as fulfilment of sensory needs.*



*Market street became a key element for the definition of public space / image source: travelchina.com*

## *2.2 Squares: New life for revolutionary spaces*

*Open plazas have been described as the “quintessential public space” of pre-twentieth century western cities. In China, however, the open plaza only came to prominence in the latter half of the twentieth century. The most spectacular “new” type of public space to be introduced into the landscape of Chinese cities after 1949 was the public square.*

*These massive urban features, modelled after Moscow’s Red Square and other Soviet examples, were meant to house the scripted mass demonstrations of revolutionary fervour that characterised Maoist China. Whereas the centres of traditional Chinese cities were, more often than not, occupied by the exclusive, walled-in courtyards of the bureaucratic or religious elites, the new squares replaced the “forbidden” centre with an open space where the common people could gather.*

*Tiananmen Square was the most symbolic of these new spaces; replacing the offices of bureaucrats that flanked the road leading to the gates of the “forbidden city,” the square, suitable for thousands of people to gather, stands at the heart of Beijing, and in a symbolic sense, at the heart of the People’s Republic. Most cities throughout China followed Beijing’s example, creating massive paved squares either within the existing urban fabric or at its outskirts.*

*These squares had ephemeral lives as viable public space; during official events they filled with people, but at other times, these vast paved expanses either served as circulatory space – creating pedestrian/bicycle shortcuts – or, in many cases, simply acted as a void at the centre of the city. But the character of these open squares began to change in tandem with the evolution of China’s economic reforms during the 1980s. The squares began to serve as useable public space, especially for urban residents escaping the confines of their homes on hot summer nights. With the liberalisation of the service economy, vendors offering a wide range of services, from snacks and balloons to children’s tricycle rides, began to frequent the squares, which in turn, perhaps, drew more local residents to the squares.*

*During the reform era, the function of large squares in Chinese cities has evolved, for the most part, into the locus of recreational activities – particularly for concessions offering entertainment and/or snacks. The squares do continue to be used occasionally for public functions as well. Thus open squares that once served as the hallmark of the cities of new China are themselves undergoing a major transformation.*

### *2.3 Commercialising the public experience: The shopping mall as street*

*The contemporary transformation of civic to consumer spaces and the subsequent loss of true “public” space is a common theme in the literature on western cities. As Chinese urban space is increasingly commercialised, these issues arise for China as well. Six of the 25 largest enclosed shopping malls in the world are located in China; all were opened within the past five years.*

*As with shopping malls throughout the world, many of these commercial spaces are conceived as foci for entertainment and other “public” activities, as well as for the buying and selling of goods. But although many shoppers may perceive these spaces as public, they are highly regulated, controlled, and surveilled environments. In Chinese cities, there has been a rapid proliferation of shopping malls, shopping centres, and other concentrations of commercial retail activity in recent years.*



*Commercial area combined with public space in Chengdu / image source: author self-composed*

## 2.4 Signs of the streets, edges between public and private

*Along the sidewalk, clotheslines were tied between trees, fences, and lamp posts, and an entire household's laundry ranging from bed sheets via shirts and pants to underwear was nonchalantly flapping about in the dusty and exhaust-polluted city wind. This heterotopic, idyllic streetscape forced everyone to step off the sidewalk and continue walking on the street, only to flee from the bustling traffic back to the safety of the sidewalk a few steps later.*

*This aspect represent a unique innocence in dealing with this urban space that we tend to describe as public; a careless transgression of the border that separates private, personal space from the open urban theatre stage. There are plenty of opportunities to watch people having a nap on the sidewalk next to their little soup kitchen, on a discarded car seat, or sitting around an upside-down fruit crate, playing mah-jongg or a card game.*

*Audible clearing of throats and spitting belongs here as well. Without much to do, almost all functions of dwelling are extended into the urban streetscape, just as in a village. The sidewalk serves as kitchen, bedroom, living room, as a place of candid 'intimidation'.*

*The sidewalk, that much becomes Clear, is only in a beginning stage of becoming a 'public' sidewalk. It is a proto-public space.*

*Another indicator for the ease of crossing the border between private and public is the custom of music being played through mostly visible, but occasionally hidden loudspeakers in green spaces, in public gardens and parks. In Italy, this involuntary 'public address' would be considered a nuisance and seen as an act of audible environmental pollution. In China, a country unusually tolerant of noise, music in public green spaces is seen as a contribution to the ambience, comparable to the 'beautification' of entry plazas with plastic flower beds, plastic palm trees, and plastic bamboo. It is also similar to the everyday 'enchantment' of flowers, bushes, and trees through intensely colourful spotlights or extravagant lighting fixtures by night.*

*Typically Chinese! Or maybe not? But not only functions of private dwelling, also those of the workshop or store counter are exported into the streetscape.*

*Everything is transformed into a workbench for repairing bikes, motorcycles, TV sets, and shoes; or a workshop for assembling doors and Windows; or a storefront advertising decorative pet fish, songbirds, and cats; Where dumplings, jiaozi, and pancakes are prepared and sold; and a mobile barber shop is opened. Not even counting the myriad of traders and farmers who transform the sidewalks into veritable informal bazaars with an almost endless product range, late at night, when the police aren't on duty. But the opposite happens as well. Some of the residential compounds of the new middle class include, even though categorized as purely residential within land use plans, an astonishing number of offices, stores, and service providers of all kinds, ranging from architectural office to brokerage firm to multifunctional wedding planners, combining barber shop, make-up studio, wedding video and photography, master of ceremonies, and limo drivers into one comprehensive service.*



*The urban space is continually transformed in place for activities  
/ image source: the urban code of china*

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*Customers stream past the guarded entrance, gate, and fences and carry a hefty dose of 'publicness' into the otherwise rather introverted residential areas.*

*China's lack of concern and even negligence in dealing with urban space generally assumed to be public is reflected in the still limited number of such spaces within cities and, if present at all, their condition. There is a remarkable amount of more or less designed places, especially open urban spaces in and at shopping centers, devoid of any kind of amenities. In the meantime, piazzas under open skies or glazed arcades have become a popular and ubiquitous design element in China.*

*But the dormant potential they offer as public space is either not recognized or not considered worthy of appreciation. In contrast, they are highly interesting to commercial enterprises, who aim to utilize every little bit of them. If you want to sit down and rest, you'll have to do so in a restaurant or café — which are, by now, omnipresent.*

*The low degree of attention that public urban spaces receive is also demonstrated by the visual and sanitary condition of many small-scale green spaces situated along streets of all sizes. They are often covered with trash and refuse, unkempt, filthy, beaten down. The streetcleaners don't make a particularly good impression either. Which visitor to China has not seen them? Poor women (occasionally also men) wearing face or breathing mask, with large straw hats, equipped with a primitive broom made of twigs of the eight-leaved broom flower, rice straw, or something similar, swirling street dust around for minimum pay. If, nowadays, you*

*can find many well-kept green spaces in the large metropolises of the East, then it is because of an increasingly professional waste removal service dedicated to the sanitary character and beautification of the city's visual appearance, diligently picking up what others had discarded earlier without thought or care.*

*Public urban spaces with a welcoming character, purposely designed for encounter, meeting, communication, scheduled and spontaneous gathering, for playing, or simply for seeing and being seen, are still scarce in China — especially in less favoured, old urban areas. The scarcity of public urban space becomes apparent when a larger number of people seeks entertainment together, be it for gymnastics such as taiji (tai chi or taijiquan), for fun, for play, or also very popular, for evening dancing after work and when temperatures have decreased to tolerable levels. The Chinese love doing these things; they are a cheerful, casual, sociable, and peaceful people. However, due to lack of suitable places, we see people exercising, playing, or dancing beneath highway bridges, on abandoned parking lots, or noisy traffic islands.*



*Night time dance close to the city wall / image source: travelchina.com*

*Public space is urgently needed, especially against the background of a continuously growing middle and upper class with related lifestyles and spatial demands. However, there is little 'publicly' usable space available in China, and its condition is often so deplorable because there are no traditions of how to deal with it. Behaviour is ambivalent: people want this kind of space, because they need it; but they reject it, because it speaks a spatial language that they don't understand. Community space, neighbourhood space, family space: yes! Space for civil society: what is that? The pattern of dealing with what we term public space can thus be described as torn between rejection and desire.*

*The claim that the way of dealing with public space in China is either careless, inattentive, or rather disrespectful, is based on the assumption that this kind of space is actually perceived as 'public'. This assumption is, however, not correct. For the Chinese, the space beyond the places enclosed by walls and fences in which they live and work and teach and learn, the space beyond family and community, is still primarily a 'nonspace' or 'non-place', an urban void or 'blank' which at best has a functional meaning, for instance as traffic space. We define this space as open space. Open space is a space that needs to be traversed or passed in order to enter another meaningful space 'out there'. In one of his writings on the urban history of Suzhou, the former 'Venice of the East', Xu Yinong notes that open urban space in China has been, since time immemorial, associated with disorder, with a space beyond the attention and care of Chinese society. What does disorder as a characteristic of public space mean? Simply take a look at the hyperactive character of metropolitan street life. Despite all traffic regulations in force in China as well, the law of the strongest prevails — with a clear pecking order: from pedestrian to bike, motorcycle, car, bus, truck, to limousines of the high and mighty, painted black and with tinted windows. Pedestrian markings on the streets are mere decoration, horns are honked, push comes to shove, overtaking on the right side, driving on the left side —*

*no matter whether legal or not!. In the northern Chinese metropolis of Harbin, we could watch how taxi drivers, among others, turned the sidewalks into additional street lanes during the obligatory traffic jam at 4 pm. Whoever might think that pedestrians would try to resist this just has to witness how they are literally driven away by honking horns and threatening gestures, like chickens on the dirt road of a country hamlet. The sidewalk is not an unconditional 'public' space. However, generally meaningless open space is attributed importance when it is appropriated by the living practices of family and community; when it becomes an extension of the kitchen, of the dining room, of the store counter or workshop. Especially highly mobile labour migrants, flooding into the metropolises of the eastern part of the country in vast numbers, consider urban residual spaces in their countless forms as an opportunity for informal appropriation (and survival). Through the activities of this floating population group, yet also through commercial and non-commercial uses of local residents, these spaces are socially programmed in a way highly informative for urban planning.*



*The sidewalk is continually transformed for the necessities  
/ image source: author self-composed*

*Without the appreciation provided by family and community, by everyday life, or commerce this open space remains grey, empty, without content, and devoid of meaning. What thus appears as vagueness in defining the borderline between private and public is in truth only an expression of the cultural hegemony of the family or the community. The clothesline along the sidewalk is nothing other than private land appropriation that gives space with little or limited sense at least a temporary meaning.*

*Public urban space on the other hand is a term that incorporates Western norms such as civil society, democracy, participation, 'freedom to the city', and similar concepts. In this regard, the use of the term public space in the case of China is limited to the degree that China is moving closer to adopting the corresponding norms. However, a hermeneutics of the Chinese city should, for now, be based on a strategic concept of the dualism of open and closed urban space.*

*Chinese urban planners are absolutely aware of the problems regarding the lack in quality of open spaces and the absence of a culture of how to use them. Significant efforts have been undertaken to define open spaces as public spaces. As a result, the subject matter of public space receives increased attention in professional circles. Numerous publications and conferences deal with the subject — even though, in the absence of an enlightened public culture of debate, little is actually being discussed. A number of actions have been taken: in Shanghai, honking has been prohibited by law.*

*With the EXPO 2010 in mind, wearing pajamas 'in public' is also no longer permitted. Indicators and benchmarks have been developed and corresponding monitoring systems have been installed. The largest cities, for instance, attempt to increase the amount of green space per capita from about 3 to 6 square meters. The southern Chinese coastal city of Zhuhai boasts a record-breaking 30 square meters per capita, and Shanghai has set itself the goal of providing 10 square meters per inha-*

*bitant before the World Exposition begins in 2010. However, the treetops along the avenues, the green strips alongside the heavily used main roads, unusable as leisure or recreational space, private golf courses and parkson university campuses, hotel complexes, and government resorts had to be included — or, as in the case of Shanghai, the near-complete conversion of the agrarian counties into districts (i.e. urban areas with a resulting high degree of green space), in order to meet the envisioned quota.*

*Whether parks or green spaces are open at all is, by the way, debatable. In general, visitors have to pay an admission fee. This is specifically the case in public parks that surround Imperial burial grounds (for instance, Bei Ling and Dong Ling in Shenyang), as well as for the gardens of rich trader families and the gardens of the Mandarin palaces and villas, formerly inaccessible to the general populace. Without paying the admission fee, there is no entry. Shanghai's new central Century Park in Pudong too can only be entered after buying a ticket — not exactly typical for a public space in Europe. Passing Shi Ji Park at daytime, observers may be amazed by watching numerous joggers run around the park, along sidewalks and bike paths, in order to avoid paying the admission fee of 30 RMB and still benefit a little from the advantages of Pudong's 'green lung'.*

*As reaction to increasing criticism of admission fees for 'public' parks, Shanghai has responded and decommissioned the gate houses of some parks. Entrance is now free. At the same time, restrictions on areas for commercial use by vendors inside the park have generally been loosened. Visitors no longer pay an entry fee, but now have to circumnavigate stands and food stalls — and are sometimes quite surprised that they leave more money in the park than when they still had to pay the entry fee. We shall return to commercialization as the most important factor in the use and design of open urban space later in detail. Interests of political representation and private land appropriations as noted above follow, yet at a distance.*

*Let us summarize. What Western observers seek to interpret and classify as public space is, for the most part, open urban space. In the understanding of the Chinese, this space does not deserve respectful treatment. It is the city's pack mule, is abused, beaten up, and worn out. The only alternative to this misery are the smaller or bigger community based — political, commercial, and non-commercial — land appropriations through which empty space is transformed into a socially relevant space. There is actually no real use for public space (at least not yet); the reason being that the telos of any activity in urban space is family and community — and not the individual and society. In order to do business, attract customers, and secure delivery of goods, open urban space is necessary. But public space?*



*Many metropolitan cities has registered an increase number of new parks  
/ image source: author self-composed*

## 2.5 Open and public urban space

*British colonial architecture of the Bund. This old-fashioned European backdrop forms a most exciting contrast to the hyper-modern skyline of the new China on the other side of the river, thus staging a unique spatial narration of modern Chinese history.*

*On the other hand, especially these spatial characteristics promote a rapid as well as thorough commercialization of the area.*

*The 'commercial' urban place uses any media that attract attention in order to draw customers into restaurants, cafés, bars, tea houses, boutiques, and galleries. Most of all aside from music, neon signs for advertisement, video screens, and the exotic character of the foreign turned into images — an emerging medium that we could describe as urban ambience seems to serve this purpose best. This medium is composed of images that may, for example, combine the intimacy of a mediterranean piazza and the extroversion of a European market square with the brand logos of American coffee shops and fast food franchise restaurant as well as the qipaos of Chinese waitresses in front of the numerous restaurants into a multicultural, theatrical stage backdrop.*

*In this kind of narrative space production — to be described as 'citytainment' — commerce is the driving force of placemaking by doing so, it preferably employs the charisma of an urban spatial milieu. Thus, we regularly encounter this place type also in the context of shopping centers, mushrooming everywhere, in which more or less awkward attempts are made to generate urban ambience by simulating Western examples. In most of the equally brand new pedestrian areas, we can also find linear versions of the open commercial place, with the shopping avenue Nanjing Lu in Shanghai as most prominent example, bathed in a delicious sea of lights after sunset. Both place types, the 'noble' and the 'commercial', can be classified as open urban spaces. They reflect the dualism of centralistic state authority and economic liberalism, both leaving their mark on the nation today. Designated by authority or commercial interest, open space is subject to a creation of sense and meaning that*

*transcends mere functionality, weakness of meaning, and neglect.*

*This designation as public space or civil space is, however, barely related to the attribution of meaning mentioned further above. We say barely, because saying nothing would disregard the 'public' potential of these spaces. Take, for instance, commercial space. It provides space for exchange processes. These actions take place beyond the social immediacy of family and community. Exchange processes as such are therefore not formative of community.*

*Rather, they are, as form of interaction of economic subjects, equal with respect to the law (isonomic), constitutive of society (as a nexus of individuals). Commercialization is thus indispensable for the genealogy of civil — and therefore public — spaces. The market always has been the crucial precondition for public space, and the market square (Marktplatz, Piazza, Plaza) is its prototypical reification.*



*The Bund in Shanghai, considered as a variation of noble space*

*/ image source: fullwonders.com*

*Also, in China we must acknowledge that the institutions of community (family, national collective) are the driving forces of a sensemaking that transcends 'society'. This is most of all apparent in commercially driven valorization of open space, as business transactions are controlled by families or family substitutes.*

*This form of community used commercialization has been described as 'Confucian' capitalism, which indicates that the success of business and trade is preferably internalized on the level of community and not on the level of society.*

*Since the opening of China, significant efforts have been invested in designing high-quality public urban spaces. But achieving this goal still seems to be difficult, as numerous examples show, for instance the Municipal Square in Shenyang or the Big Wild Goose pagoda Square in Xi'an. When it comes to open urban places, designers are quick to orient themselves on Beijing, where Tian An Men Square, located south of the Forbidden City, has been expanded into a square of tremendous dimensions, as ordered by Mao Zedong in the late 1950s.*

*He created a model for today's Chinese urban square, object of admiration of powerful city leaders. Tian An Men Square, featuring the Chairman Mao Memorial, a replica of Lincoln Memorial, became the pinnacle of the 'noble' square, a desirable object of self-promotion of great men — and resulted in a corresponding number of copies.*

*In its dimensions and appearance, Tian An Men is the opposite of a civil place. It is neither market place nor plaza nor square, but a demonstration of power reminiscent of Baroque spatial design, a communist version of the Champs de Mars (a parade and drill ground) or a place Royal. It is a place that denotes centralized authority, the spatialization of the claim to power, which we can recognize without difficulty as rooted in the tradition of the Empire. If Tian An Men Square still occasionally hints at vestiges of 'human scale, then it is due to the incredible masses of people, city dwellers as well as tourists and guests both domestic and*

*international, who assemble here before the gates of the Forbidden City, the National Museum, or the Memorial of Mao Zedong. It is these people who alleviate some of the square's strictness with their spontaneous and unplanned movements, their getting together, their drifting apart, their colorful attire, and their different hair and skin colors.*

*At the same time, the Big Wild Goose Pagoda Square — as many comparable 'noble' places in the country — benefits the city's inhabitants, as it offers all kinds of small and big advantages of urban life they can use and enjoy: for encounters and relaxation, for taiji and jogging, for dancing, playing games, wheeling and dealing, and of course, not to forget, for flying kites. The Municipal Square in Shenyang or the People's Square in Shanghai are not really different. These places achieve a character in the city that could be described as proto-public.*

*Whereas in the China of old there had been no freely accessible public places at all (except for temple squares or bridgeheads), the 'noble' squares, similar to the commercial places, come close to the idea of public urban places. In general, they are open to a corresponding appropriation by city dwellers.*



*Big Wild Goose pagoda Square, Xi'an  
/ image source: author self-composed*

*In current development plans for the urban periphery, commercial neighborhood centers or community centers next to residential compounds are frequently completed by adding a new type of public space, the open neighborhood or community places, often also conceived as open community park. While neighborhood parks in older urban areas are completely enclosed by fences, can be locked up, and are generally only accessible after paying an entry fee, the neighborhood or community places are, in contrast, usually openly accessible, not fenced in, and mostly non-commercial.*

*In spatial terms, these places relate to the neighborhood similarly as commercial neighborhood or community centers do. Just as in these, a low or high number of corresponding neighborhoods defines whether they are 'neighborhood' or 'community' centers. The neighborhood or community place is the open antithesis to the closed neighborhood courtyard.*

*The rise of neighborhood and community places in China is equally as unsuspecting as it is important. It denotes nothing less than a gradual emergence of public space. As a result, this type of space signals the introduction of elements of civil society, i.e. the strengthening of society (Ge and the individual as opposed to community and family).*

*These neighborhood and community places comprise thoroughly designed landscape architecture, include grassy knolls, tree groups, flower beds, and bushes in a balanced relation, and occasionally feature pavilions and pergolas, sufficiently equipped with furniture or other amenities and areas for recreation. The degree of coverage is high compared to European city or community parks, which hints at Chinese influences.*

*The open community places and parks are a recent development, which is why we find them only in new developments. Inquiring on their lifespan or sustainability is still merely academic. In any case, they offer a plethora of benefits especially sought by families with children in a metropolis, space for sitting and talking (the grownups), or for playing*

*hide-and-seek (the kids), and so forth. At the same time we can see that maintaining these spaces is not as simple as it seems. This isn't even because of deficits in public sanitation (frequency of cleaning and maintenance operations) — although, in a country with a still nascent culture of civil institutions, such a diagnosis may not come as a surprise. Reasons are rather based on type of use.*

*The condition of neighborhood courtyards or closed community places, both located inside residential compounds, is the responsibility of so-called neighborhood committees, representing the municipal authorities on the neighborhood level. As a result, the appearance of these enclosed spaces is clean and orderly. Also, regardless of this particular responsibility, the inhabitants of the surrounding area treat these spaces respectfully.*

*Inhabitants of 'compounds' feel responsible for their care and take action of their own volition. In contrast, use of open or rather public neighborhood and community places is less respectful: waste paper, bottles, cigarette butts, and other kinds of trash are carelessly left behind after the evening picnic, often exacerbated by a significant lack of available trash cans.*



*Neighborhood park in Shanghai*

*/ image source: author self-composed*

*In China today, a mature urban culture of how to use public spaces has not yet developed — at least not in the enlightened European understanding of space for the citizenry, for democracy, or for civil society.*

*The general and still deeply rooted disregard for open space is antithetical to this. If family space intervenes into open space in the way described at the beginning of this chapter, extends its dominion in to it, and overwhelms it, then this indicates that community and society can be interpreted as in a State of incomplete separation. At best, we can speak of a stage of proto-publicness.*

*In the middle kingdom, since time immemorial, it is and has been the family that decisively determines social life — and therefore life in those spaces that we generally consider to be public. Even social interactions based on and defined by institutions, contracts, and legal codes are preferably intermingled with community interaction, for instance networks (guanxi), which are much more significant here than social networks in Europe. Any businessman can confirm how important a joint dinner is for successful contractual negotiations. Only by initializing community and friendship at the dinner table, can contracts (as social-formal act) receive a community-related legitimacy (analogous to the family), without which they are not worth the paper they are written on. This kind of intervention of the community-related into the society-related is also relevant in spatial terms.*

*We refer to the siting of the Chinese restaurant — or even, food temple — within open urban space. Open spaces in the city are analogous to written contracts. We find the explanation for the indifference of city dwellers towards them within the dominant reality of community and family.*

*However, this nonchalant attitude soon turns in to careful consideration when open space is valorized by the presence of the family, the community, or the political symbolism of its dramatization, and most of all by commercialization of its use.*

*This kind of valorization transforms the Cinderella of 'open space' into the princess of Chinese urban space.*



*Urban space along the wall used for activities, Xi'an  
/ image source: author self-composed*

## 2.6 Rocks and plants

*The text left behind by today's designers of public spaces, gardens, parks, and open spaces of all kinds does not permit easy reading. Not necessarily because of the presence of countless individual signatures, but because of the simultaneity of different Western and Eastern spatial languages. Thus, we have to take another look. And then we discover that Chinese urban gardens seem, in general, to possess an increased artificial character, more decoration, and a higher power of imagery than comparable Western examples.*

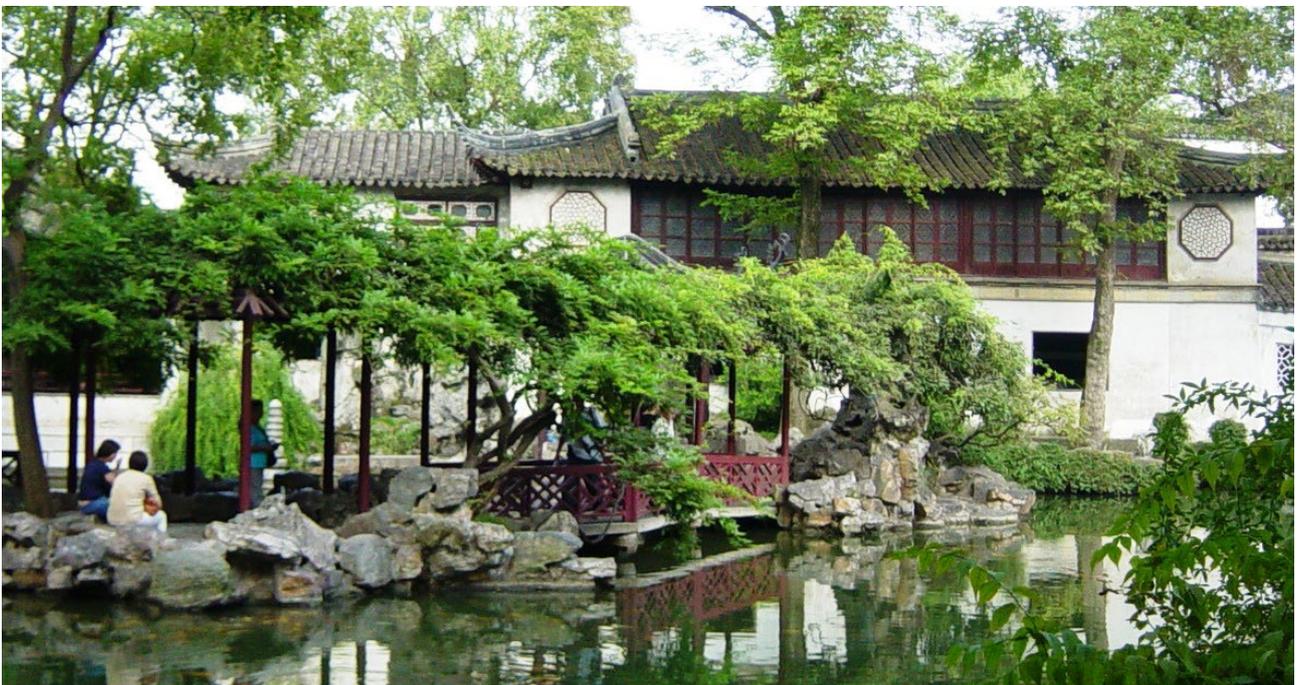
*There seem to be generally more paved areas, more luxurious furniture, and a greater number of covered areas. More often than in Western examples, bridges, pavilions, pergolas, plazas, and rock formations are present, many and broad paved walkways, more concrete, stones, and gravel, more technical equipment with lighting of all kinds, as well as loudspeakers that ceaselessly bathe the ambience in music.*

*Plans for these spaces preferably feature organically curved shapes, trees are placed casually into groups, occasionally on suggested hilltops — these green spaces appear to be in the tradition of Picturesque gardening.*

*At the same time, the setting seems informed by Baroque style: there are axial pathways and geometrical formations, numerous trimmed hedges, shrubs, and trees — and repeatedly, rectangular bamboo beds.*

*What the French and English garden separate, is united here: the Chinese garden demonstrates a completely artificial character, and at the same time seems perfectly natural. It doesn't hide its artificial character, its cultural origin, i.e. the human ability to control nature and transform it. Equally, it does not veil its 'naturalness'. Rather, it demonstrates an exaggerated and therefore completely 'natural nature'. The task is the materialization of an all-encompassing unity of culture and nature. Thus, the Chinese garden displays an idea of the Picturesque in which the artificial and the natural, the rational and the emotional are in a state of perfect harmony.*

*In the history of the Chinese garden, the organic is immersed by the artificial, the natural by the synthetic, in a way that a priori defied differentiation — completely the opposite to the European tradition of the art of gardening, oscillating between the concepts of the geometric Baroque garden and organic picturesque garden. Whereas the Baroque garden denies nature precisely what is intrinsic to its character, i.e. its capriciousness and remoteness, the picturesque garden rejects the idea of an artificial- synthetic 'second nature' as cultural endeavor. The practice of the picturesque garden places itself in the service of a presumed objective aesthetics of nature. English and French gardens are thus the exact opposite — and therefore display something genuinely European: the conceptualization of dialectics as battle, conflict, as antithesis.*



*Water, rocks, plants and pavillions are the key elements of the garden  
/ image source: author self-composed*

*Thus, the art of gardening becomes a battlefield of conflict between culture and nature while at the same time ignoring that the one (culture) is always present in the other (nature). Only the awareness of this unity of contradiction within a design process will be able to generate a design language appropriate to its task. In the Chinese garden, as in no other type of architecture, the artificial appears absolutely natural, the natural, however, equally artificial.*

*There is no differentiation between man and world; nothing can impair the 'pre-stabilized' harmony of culture and nature.*

*When materialized, this world view is articulated in a doubly coded dramatization: on the one hand, in the form of an assembly of natural elements, artificial to the highest degree; where unhewn blocks of natural stone are shaped into wildly romantic landscapes comprised of miniature pinnacles, terraces, canyons; and where, in its crevasses, adventurous plants withstand imaginary storms. On the other hand, we have an equally natural composition of completely artificial elements.*

*We find little pavilions, pergolas, waterways, or little plazas that are encircled by trees cut similarly to bonsais into forms reminiscent of mountain ridges. The result is the merging and interweaving of the natural and the artificial in a way that makes differentiation completely impossible, and this means that it turns the process of differentiation into a purely analytical or academic exercise, into a question of knowledge.*

*However, the Chinese garden isn't about knowledge, nor about the commitment to a specific design concept in the light of possible alternatives. Rather, the appropriation or consumption of the space of Chinese gardens is about contemplation, i.e. the 'perfection of knowledge or rather cognition', as Goethe stated, no stranger to Sinology.*

*The contemplative immersion into the aesthetics of the Chinese garden lets us experience our selves as beings that encompass nature in their thoughts and actions, while being encompassed by it in our natural and cultural existence.*

*The classical Chinese garden is a courtyard garden. It is exclusive and introverted. Beyond Imperial residences, only patricians, high-ranking officials, and rich traders were capable of affording such properties. Naturally, access was only granted to invited, prominent guests. Nothing remotely comparable was available to the 'public'. Of course, by now, this has changed, and numerous previously exclusive Chinese gardens can generally be accessed by paying an entry fee.*

*However, we do not find courtyard gardens in public space. Today, landscape architects design public space, and their design process is structurally related to the design practice of architects. They create image-heavy spaces that are more akin to eclectic style collections than the classical Chinese art of gardening. Yet it seems that elements and perhaps quotations from the classical Chinese art of gardening influence these designs. And even if not, a kind of basic mantra still persists, reflected in the already mentioned high degree of coverage and the preference for an image-laden character. It expresses a traditional inclination towards considering form and function as equal and indivisible within the design. The Western division and separation of these dimensions, which only enables their opposition or hierarchization in the first place, is something that has remained alien to the Chinese perspective, despite all alleged Westernization. This applies to architecture in general, including landscape architecture.*

*European architects and urban planners tend, due to a highly advanced functionalist perspective informing their design practice, to separate function from meaning and thus from form.*

*The formula of 'form follows function' is something that is alien to the Chinese concept of harmony. Here, architectural form and functional building volume are conceptualized synchronically and assembled to a state in which the capacity to distinguish collapses.*

## 2.7 *The composition of the buildings generates the structure of today's public spaces*

*We could almost have the impression that the urban design principles of the Charter of Athens weren't actually invented in Europe, but instead, in China.*

*No other country in the world has built so many Siedlung-type residential slab housing settlements, with their north—south orientation, their residual setback green spaces — in China, often also 'grey areas', especially when setbacks between slabs are covered with asphalt or concrete pavers — and their small-scale functional differentiation. Not in Europe, and not even the countries within the Soviet sphere of influence after World War II until 1989.*

*Evidently, the country's geoclimatic conditions, expanding north and south of 35 degrees latitude, are of decisive importance for this pronounced practice of orientation, and always have been." Orientation of residential housing to the west or the east is not recommended due to sun angle and declination.*

*In the case of east or west orientation, the sun's low position after sunrise and before sunset would cause excessive heat gains in apartments. However, in the case of south orientation, vertical surfaces provide ample protection to sunlight due to the sun's high position at noon.*

*On the other hand, in winter, the sun's position is less steep and shallow enough in the south for sunlight and thus warmth to enter apartments. Orientation to the north is not relevant to residential construction in the northern hemisphere above 30 degrees latitude — as opposed to industrial buildings, where shed roof skylights permit intake of desired natural, diffused daylight from the north.*

*At this point, we only need to consider that contemporary Chinese urban planning — in this regard, similar to European practice also makes use of free orientation of the above mentioned basic functions for a design-related and functional valorization of urban space: by creating borders for neighborhood compounds, by providing local supply infrastructure, or as welcome emission buffer between street and residential*

*area. However, in China we do not see flexibility in using detached linear structures for a perimeter block typology in residential construction comparable to European practice.*

*Instead, the ideals of the Charter of Athens are enforced much more rigorously. Aerial views of Chinese cities clearly demonstrate this. When zooming on to a Chinese metropolis in Google Earth or viewing it from the top of a TV tower or a skyscraper, we recognize that the expansive urban texture still looks a little bit like a parade ground.*



*Housing construction in Shanghai*

*/ image source: cscecos.com*

*Reminiscent of rank and file soldiers, the buildings of the city seem pretty much completely oriented to the south. Similar to magnetically charged iron filings, linear housing structures generally follow an east—west axis. The number of exceptions only rises in the extreme north (Harbin) and even more clearly in the country's south (e.g. in Guangzhou).*

*This pattern even persists in the expansive topical housing estates of the new middle class. These are located in an exterior urban ring, circumscribing the previous generation of Fordist housing estates. Here we find oddly curvilinear housing structures that, from a bird's eye view, appear like meandering chains made of grey and brown strips and blocks.*

*However, orientation is by no means abandoned, as by and large the now swinging and dancing housing chains still follow an east—west direction. The magnetic powers of north—south-orientation remain in effect. As a result, the organic basic patterns of the new settlements are limited to structures that are oriented to the south.*

*In Europe and America — for instance within the urban planning schemes of New Urbanism — architects and urban designers started to abandon the orientation paradigm in housing estate construction (which was never really that strong in the first place), in order to dedicate themselves to perimeter block construction, to reinforcement of urban centrality, and to preservation of built cultural heritage, by making use of the potential of advanced technology and construction materials. In China, there is no comparable development.*

*And this is the case regardless of New Urbanism, also popular as a fashion in China, and regardless of numerous European themed urban fictions — as all these imported urban constructs serve exclusively to decorate commercial spaces, where they are not bound to the orientation paradigm.*

*The future of Chinese residential housing obviously lies in residential high-rise construction — and Fordism offers the relevant propositions in architectural-conceptual terms. But this isn't the only reason. Most of*

*all, history offers an explanation for the radical character of this compliance with orientation in residential architecture: in the placement of historic Chinese dwellings, orientation to the south has always played an eminent role. The hutong system, present in northern China and having received sad recognition due to its large-scale demolition, may serve as an example. On a checkerboard-like floor plan, the hutong provides an organizing system for families and neighborhoods. Ever since the Zhou dynasty (Eastern Zhou 770—256 BC), a rule has been in force according to which a particular number of families forms a neighborhood (ling or bi). A further defined number of neighborhoods, ling, form a quarter (li) and yet another defined number of quarters constitute a district (Zhu). If a neighborhood consists of five families, the quarter is comprised of five neighborhoods, and the district features four quarters, a Zhu can assemble 100 soldiers if each family provides a son. In the li, everyone could be held responsible for everyone else's actions — under the threat of execution.*



*Siheyuan dwelling*

*/ image source: gettyimages.com*

*The family or clan lives in a courtyard house structure, a sihéyuǎn. The interior courtyards of the hierarchically structured sihéyuǎn are closed off on all four sides by buildings: 'si' means 'four'; 'hé' refers to a multi-generational household, and 'yuán' is the Chinese word for courtyard. The entry gate can be found on the structure's southern perimeter. The parental main house is the largest building in the structure and always accommodates the eldest generation.*

*It is placed in the north and oriented to the south, to the courtyard. This permits a linking spatial arrangement to the high-ranking status of parents within the family hierarchy.*

*While comparable structures also correspond to traditional spatial concepts of other regions, southern orientation and the size of dwelling in China are connected to a fundamental expression of social status in a way that is still valid and hasn't diminished to this day. In the new residential compounds of the middle and upper class, we can observe this interaction of orientation and size without difficulty. Almost without exception, a Chinese middle class apartment is not only oriented towards the south, it is on average also much larger than a comparable apartment in Europe.*

*Viewed from a bird's eye perspective, the Chinese city is no longer the city of lǐs and zhūs. It is now the Fordist city, introduced to China through Soviet agency. While the Charter of Athens, with its ideals of prefabricated, affordable social housing, fell onto fertile soil in the communist Soviet Union, the soil of communist China proved no less fertile.*

*Here, orientation to the south as a result of sanitary considerations, including demands for light, air, and sun, permitted a seamless integration with the ancient Chinese tradition of southern orientation and the prestige it is linked with.*

*Within Fordist urban planning and design, a piece of the old China was always perpetuated — beyond inexpensive construction methods and high densities achieved by compact building volumes, the best precon-*

*dition for the phenomenal success of modern residential housing development.*

*In order to make better use of light intake and views to the exterior while at the same time optimizing density (for instance, floor space ratio), we can often find a tiered, cascade-like or grandstand-like placement of buildings, in which the number of building floors increases northwards by two to four steps (mostly three, depending on the average size of blocks). Hence two to three story villas stand in front, the building type with five to eight stories is in the middle, and the 'masses', i.e. the high-rise buildings with nine, ten or more stories, are placed to the back. However, high-rise housing towers can stand in each other's way, especially regarding desired orientation to sunlight. Thus, software-based shadow mapping is nowadays in widespread use to continuously improve the tiered setback model. The tiered gradation permits small-scale differentiation of site quality within the development.*

*The resulting arrangement therefore also reflects the financial means of the inhabitants. The upper middle class lives in the 'front row', the middle class is 'in-between', and the lower middle class is on the 'cheap seats' at the back.*

*But elevation isn't the only factor for differentiation. Placement in relation to parking lots, playgrounds, and setbacks to streets or green spaces influences real estate value as well. Even magic street numbers can be of great importance. Despite the gradually tiered arrangement, planners never forget to place buildings around a central green space, thus expressing the Chinese tradition of introversion. In China, it is necessary to generate high densities and, as a result, buildings require a corresponding number of floors. Residential high-rise construction with twenty to thirty stories and more isn't rare. In many places, residential high-rise construction is mandatory by law, in order to prevent using too much agrarian land for urban development.*

*In summary, we can say that China has adopted the heritage of Fordism*

— which is, however, transcended and even advanced in a post-Fordist way by the swinging lines and dancing dots of the new Chinese housing estates. In the light of the dramatically increasing degree of urbanization worldwide, it may not be long before China takes on a leading role in urban design with its type of settlement planning. Already today, in the mega-urban landscapes of the Pearl River Delta, the Yangzi Jiang Delta, the metropolitan region Beijing-Tianjin, the northern axis of Dalian via Shenyang, Changchun, to Harbin and along the Yangzi Jiang, spatial models of settlement are designed and implemented that offer solutions for the future, in the form of high-density, vertical, yet highly livable mega-cities.

Because poverty is traditionally stigmatized in Chinese culture, creativity in urban design is mainly focused on the growing middle and upper class. In this regard, Confucian China differs distinctly e.g. from Catholic Latin America, where society sees poverty as far less offensive. Here, the social acceptance of poverty offers a reason for the increased attention that particular population groups receive from architects and urban planners.

In China, the focus is on upward social mobility. Run-down, poor urban settlements are regarded as transitional environments, mainly inhabited by the so-called 'floating population' and labor migrants. Therefore, not much thought is invested in how to deal with these spaces.

It doesn't have to stay this way, though. But it is striking that the formalization and valorization of informal dwellings (favelas) and the advancement of social housing construction and housing for the poor constitutes a permanent focus of urbanist theory and practice in Latin America.



*Between the high density of buildings, residents always try to find space for their own activities  
/ image source: author self-composed*

## 2.8 Closed urban space / closed neighborhoods

*Exclusion is a key word in the text of the contemporary Chinese city. It is, in fact, a closed city, consisting of omnipresent walls, fences, and gates; a cellular landscape of partial spaces cut off from one another: spaces of production and service industries, public facilities such as court buildings, city administration, and agencies of all kinds, educational facilities (e.g. schools, universities), social facilities (e.g. kindergartens, hospitals) — and most of all housing estates, the so-called residential ‘compounds’. In the metropolises of contemporary China, the majority of residential compounds is enclosed. This is hardly surprising, considering that the Chinese word for housing estate (zhū zhài xī’ò q) is translated as ‘closed neighborhood’. Enclosure is elemental to the understanding of the word neighborhood or residential district and is materialized in the creation of residential compounds. In a certain sense, these closed neighborhoods represent villages within the city; they are rural elements that constitute the Chinese city.*

*In spatial terms, the MRDS (MRD —Micro Residential District, a synonym for residential ‘compound’ D.H.) are precisely defined areas which are not only limited by walls, fences, or buildings, but are deliberately provided an insular character through streets and green spaces. As the courtyard houses and the old danwei before them, the modern residential districts not only define exact borders, but also a clear separation of interior and exterior. As a result, their interior access pattern is not part of the urban street infrastructure. Also, they always feature a core whether it be a school, a cultural center, or simply a large green space, which symbolically establishes the differentiation between interior and exterior. Housing estates are not only enclosed spatially by walls, fences, commercial strip buildings, etc., but are also organized towards exclusivity in social terms. Every residential compound is required by law to form a neighborhood committee. These committees, situated at the lowest level of the hierarchically structured urban administrative system, consist of representatives of so-called living or house groups, ge-*

*nerally four to five persons. Their tasks include providing support to management on the neighborhood level in guaranteeing security, sanitary conditions, and integrity of the premises.*

*House groups are separated from each other by the internal access system and green spaces and can thus be distinctly identified within space. But the Chinese city today is also an open city. It features open areas and generally accessible open spaces. Almost everything related to trade and mobility is located within this open space. We can generally consider streets and places in the urban centers and sub centers as open spaces that relate to the closed spaces of the city just like trunk and branches of a tree to its dense foliage. In the open spaces serving for trade, the predominant part of interaction between economic subjects takes place, and they thus become the spatial point of origin for the formation of a Chinese bourgeois society of the future. From an urbanist perspective, the open city should be evaluated as a great accomplishment of contemporary Chinese history.*



*Hutong access road*

*/ image source: author self-composed*

*Dwelling is exclusive, trade is inclusive. Closed and open spaces are the two defining spatial elements of the contemporary Chinese city — their binary code, so to speak. In the following, we will focus our attention on these two aspects: first, the closed Chinese city, the foliage; and then the open city, the trunk and the branches, reaching out in all directions.*

*Even more distinctly than the contemporary city, the Imperial city was a complex of omnipresent walls, a hierarchically structured cellular pattern segregated along social strata and comprised of family and neighborhood units with defined 'cellular membranes.' In this system, we can identify the spatial representation of a 'hypermoral' society based on community morals informed by Confucianism. Each level in the hierarchic system of family — neighborhood — quarter — district is divided by walls from each successive level.*

*The quarters (ling) were closed off at night, just like the city itself. Depending on the city's status, additional interior walls could complement the external city walls. Each wall represented the Imperial order. The greater the length and quantity of city walls, the more important a city was and the higher its status in the state hierarchy.*

*This definition indicates that the historic Chinese city is significantly different from the European city in history, where walls generally delineated an independent, self-governed legal domain, often almost complete independence from feudal authority.*

*This more or less articulated autonomy of the old city comprises the historic roots for its contemporary legal status as local authority or regional administrative body and its corresponding planning competence.*

*In Imperial China, nothing comparable existed. Chinese cities were never corporate entities with their own legislative bodies. According to Friedmann, as local administrations found themselves confronted with mounting difficulties due to the country's size and population number, a government of "benign neglect" developed that delegated policies of local well-being to local elites — except for tasks such as the implemen-*

*tation of big governmental projects or the onerous collection of taxes. In regard to the degree of enclosure, the Imperial capital city of Beijing was surpassed by no other Chinese city, except perhaps the historic Chang'an (Xi'an).*

*Beijing consisted of four hierarchically structured partial cities enclosed by walls: the palace city (the 'Forbidden City' with its internal hierarchical structure), the Emperor's city, the capital city, and the southern city (as the developed part of an originally planned outer city).*



*Pingyao, the city walls are preserved  
/ image source: chinahighlights.com*

*As Imperial residence, the Forbidden City was inaccessible to mere mortals. The same is true also for the massively walled and heavily guarded Emperor's city with its concentric layout. It comprised something akin to a government district and was not open to regular city dwellers without permission. The nine gates of the third city, also concentrically built around the Emperor's city and the capital city and secured by walls 12 meters in height, were closed at night — as all other gates as well. The fourth city finally, a fragment of the never to be completed fourth concentric city, had the function of an interface to the exterior, to the countryside. It was walled and guarded as well.*

*City walls in Beijing and elsewhere were widely demolished and removed from the streetscape during the Mao era. What has remained are the closed areas — initially in the form of closed producers' cooperatives or production units, the so-called danwei, and later the 'gated communities' of the new middle and upper classes, the residential 'compounds', and all the other closed spaces of production, service, and education mentioned above. The danwei, or rather dayuan, are urban versions of agrarian production cooperatives. As walled and introverted cells, they turned their backs on open urban space. Thus, they express the fact that urban open space simply isn't public space. The danwei embody the attempt to create a comprehensive spatial unity of dwelling and working. These producers' cooperatives include dwelling, work space, plan economy distribution outlets, kindergartens, schools, health care centers, and recreational facilities: "The Chinese concept intended for all inhabitants to be completely self-sustaining within their dayuan, the urban planning area unit of the danwei, so that they actually would never have to leave them.*

*This means that the cities continued to grow additively in the form of walled units, which were, for their members, not only replacement collectives, but also offered them new territorial communities".*

*Since the early 1990s, i.e. in the of the general economic opening of Chi-*

*na, the danwei were, however, gradually depreciated and disbanded. Their functional Structure disintegrated and was differentiated by means of zoning into a variety of functionally specialized urban spaces for housing, working, shopping, learning, recreation etc. As institutions of collective social life, they had already to a large extent vanished towards the end of the old millennium. In this respect they have been replaced by the new 'gated communities', the residential 'compounds'.*

*After looking at the danwei, our conclusion is that the ancient tradition of enclosed quarters persists without significant historic interruption within the current practice of residential development.*

*In Chinese cities today, housing is exclusively planned, built, and marketed in the form of gated neighborhoods. The residential area secured by walls and gates is still the standard in China today — and not, as in e.g. Western Europe, an insignificant exception. There are probably no other metropolises in the world with a comparable amount of barriers than in the land of the Forbidden City.*

*Residential compounds are completely closed off by walls, iron fences, hedges, and similar means, and Often additionally equipped with video cameras, infrared sensors, and comparable security technology. Access to residential compounds is similar to entrances of military installations with their gates, speed bumps, rolling gates, and booms, their guard personnel with quasi-military uniforms, their guardhouses and sentry boxes.*

*The interior access system of neighborhoods is completely cut off from the traffic infrastructure of open urban space. However, this appears more martial than is actually the case: the level of security control varies. According to a nationwide survey of community management in 2005, only one third of residential areas are strictly control led. About 4-3% allows only homeowners to get in; about 26.3% have strict control and require no-owners to register; and 37.6% only have nominal control, and others had very loose gate control.*

*The data featured here may indicate a relaxed attitude in the guarding of residential compounds. And in fact, these compounds are often much more open than they seem at first glance. Quite often, as already mentioned before, these dwellings are even used as places for all kinds of commercial activity. It's quite possible to find laundry services, mom-and-pop stores, and brokerages within compounds, in ground floor ateliers specifically dedicated to such uses.*

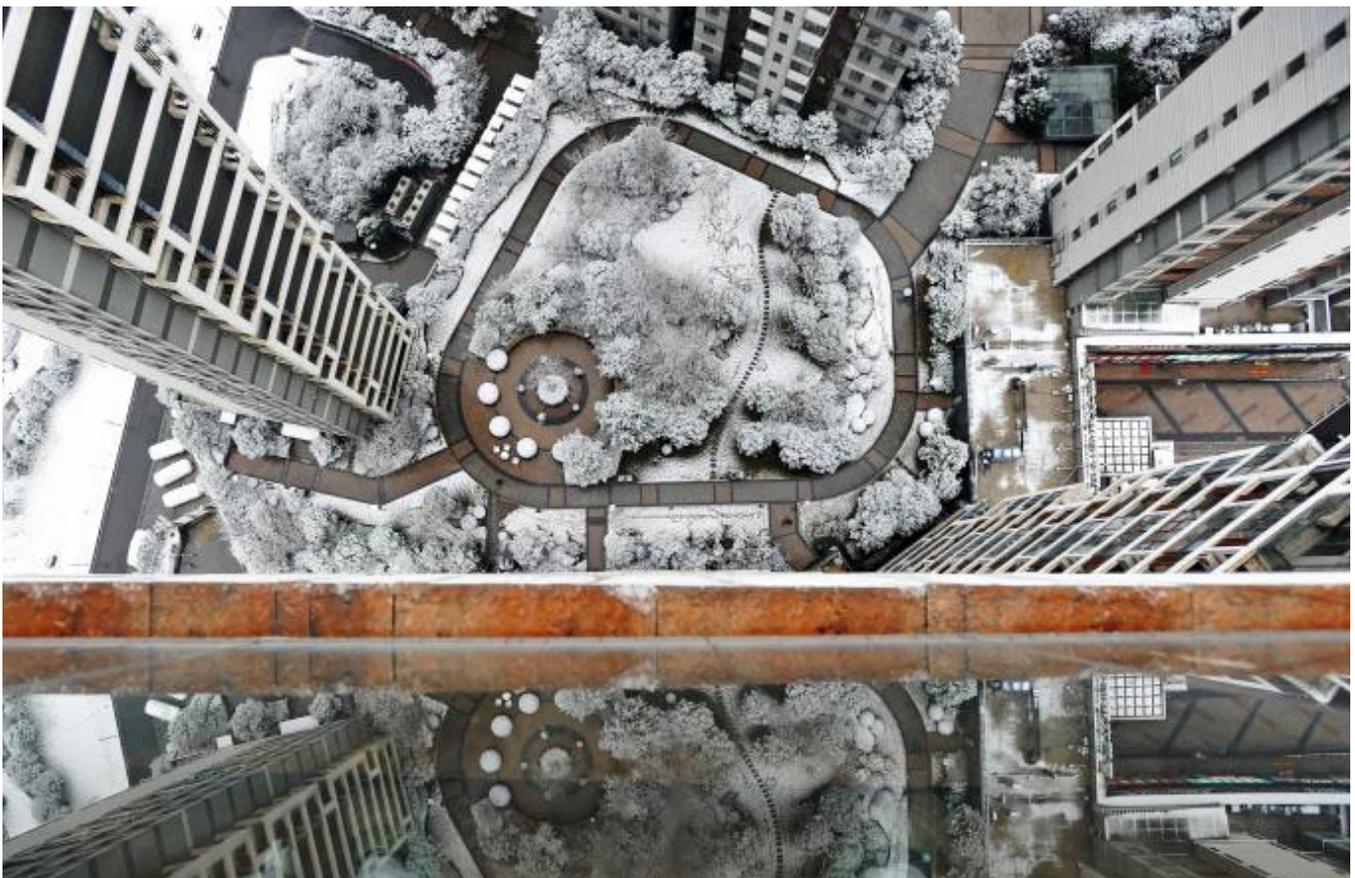
*In order to bridge the gap before they move in or until they have sold their previous property, apartment buyers often let labor migrants rent their unfinished apartments — without discernibly aggravating their neighbors or the compound management. Visitors receive a friendly greeting from the guards, and cars can enter without specific controls. However, license plate numbers and date of arrival are registered, because only short term free parking is permitted in many neighborhoods. In due time, closed neighborhoods would transform into pure residential zones, and would therefore become more akin to Western or rather American 'gated communities'. Yet, there would be important differences. The Chinese neighborhood, which could be described as a product of a gradual historic development, was not only accepted by people from all walks of life and social strata, but shared as a way of life. In other words the Chinese closed neighborhood as such would denote no tendencies towards social segregation.*

*What a startling and poignant contrast to the situation in the United States would this be! We could then interpret American 'gated communities' as a spatial reaction to increasing social polarization and resulting tensions in a historically spatially open society.*

*While residential quarters in China were subject to functional specialization and thus transposed a number of uses into open urban space, the trend in the USA was headed in the opposite direction: an increasing number of functions was introduced into these exclusive spaces.*

*The closed neighborhood is 'natural' to China, for the historic reasons*

*described above. It is neither questioned, nor are there any alternatives. At the same time, influences from North American 'gated communities' on Chinese closed neighborhoods can't be completely dismissed. The medium for this influence seems to be the American 'way Of life', widely admired in China — and, in the eyes of the Chinese middle and luxury classes, with the 'gated community' as seemingly important component. The United States, we are told again and again, are a successful nation. To be successful as well, it appears to be a wise choice to follow its example. If successful Americans live in gated communities, living in such a closed neighborhood as well seems like a good idea.*



*Residential compound*

*/ image source: The urban code of China, Birkhause Basel Oct. 2010*

*According to a Chinese planner's statement on this subject, there are further reasons for the resilience of the 'gated neighborhood' in China. This form corresponds to the needs of governmental or private developers in a number of ways.*

*For one, the format matches the plot sizes, i.e. the area blocks that are the result of site development. In addition, each block, for purposes of successful marketing, is supposed to display the developer's signature and feature unique sales propositions. Each quarter attains the status of a product with a brand identity, at the same time offering the promise of association for the compound's residents.*

*Therefore, the equation one block — one compound — one brand — one identity is formulated. In order to adequately dramatize the uniqueness of the particular quarter, the task is to provide it with an unmistakable character. And separating it from the environment contributes to this task just as much as 'branding' through repetitive decoration, color choice, architectural 'signatures', or uniform roof decoration. However, within the term 'closing off from the environment' we detect the influence of something different, perhaps much more decisive. The word 'environment' is the key, in this case referring to the open urban space beyond the gated space. This open space has remained irrelevant, even alien to Chinese mentality, until today. Within a world view deeply informed by family or rather community, open space is at best a functional space, a space in the shadows of the Chinese way of life characterized by the precedence of community and widespread absence of (individualistic) society.*

*It is crossed, passed, and transgressed by car, bus, bicycle or on foot, in order to reach the other side of it, the inviting, tempting side where all important things happen: family, relatives, friends, topped with a fine dinner, because dinner is heavenly.*



*Public space for the community within the residential compound*

*/ image source: author self-composed*

## *2.9 Specific example of urban space: Wangfujing, a market street transformed*

*Wangfujing was a relatively undistinguished neighbourhood in Beijing until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), when it became known for a number of large mansion or palace complexes built in the area. Long before its incarnation as a busy early twentieth century shopping street, the Wangfujing area became a focus for Beijing's contact with the non-Chinese world, especially after the Jesuits established the first Catholic church in China there in the mid-seventeenth century. Wangfujing was transformed into a "modern" shopping street lined with fashionable shops in the early twentieth century. But Wangfujing also retained an open-air bazaar known as the "Dong An," established in 1902, which has been the most persistent "reinvented" element of the street. ) After 1949, Wangfujing was transformed from its early twentieth century commercial hustle and bustle to a relatively quiet selection of state-run stores and bureaus. The stalls and shops that huddled within the Dong An bazaar interior could not compete with the free markets and the flood of new shopping centres that began to transform the city's retailing. The redevelopment of Wangfujing as a commercial centre began in 1996. The former site of the Dong An bazaar was incorporated into the construction of a massive new 120,000 square metre multifunctional development: the Oriental Plaza, which incorporates a large enclosed shopping mall. In the year 2000, the busiest (southern) end of Wangfujing was transformed into a pedestrian mall, carefully designed with street art, benches, and space for coffee stands and entertainment. High-end hotels occupy the adjacent blocks. as Xian, Lhasa, Zhengzhou, Nanjing, Luoyang, and Chengdu have all redeveloped former commercial areas in recent years using the Wangfujing approach: a blend of mixed-use commercial development and traditional iconography, and the creation of event-oriented pedestrian space supported by massive infusions of highend foreign capital. Although Wangfujing was not necessarily the first redevelopment project to introduce any of these single measures, the combination of approaches set a compelling example.*



*Wangfujing, Beijing / image source: gettyimages.com*



*Muslim district in Xi'an has adopted the same characteristic of Wangfujing / image source: gettyimages.com*

# 03

*Definition of  
the project*

*During the definition of the project, particular importance has been given to the consideration of some general aspects that define the inner city of Xi'an. The project bases its foundations in a design vision that combines the general complexities of the city Ming, neighbourhood identity and contextual issues. Through the interweaving of these three layers, a project has been defined to enable new economic and social solutions for the design area as well as a concrete opportunity to experiment different modes of entertainment in a particular and important point of the city of Xi'an. The project area is considered not only as an element but as a continuation of the experiences that people can enjoy walking along the road that surrounds the walls. An area therefore offers not only a solution to the contextual problems but relates to the adjacent areas offering different moments and experiences originating from the identity of the context.*

*The composition of the project originates in the search for a close relationship between the characteristics of the city in its entirety, the identity of the project area and its main properties in terms of the issues to be solved.*

### *3.1 Analysis of the relationship between city and project area*

*The internal city of xian is subject to a future urban planning that sees the city divided into areas for public use and residential areas for the community. The city is also cut orthogonally from main and secondary public transport axes. The project area located near the southeast corner of the historic walls is destined to be space for the community with areas for public use by visitors .*

*The functional distribution of the spaces near the south side of the historic walls, currently provides a fragmentation that does not define a specific identity for the individual districts. The functions are therefore the result of an unplanned change, therefore incapable of defining a precise development over the years able to raise the quality of life of people and attract tourists who visit the historic city of xian.*

*The research continues with the analysis of the road structure of the inner city. A system that is made by 18 gates that allow cars and public transport to easily cut Ming City.*

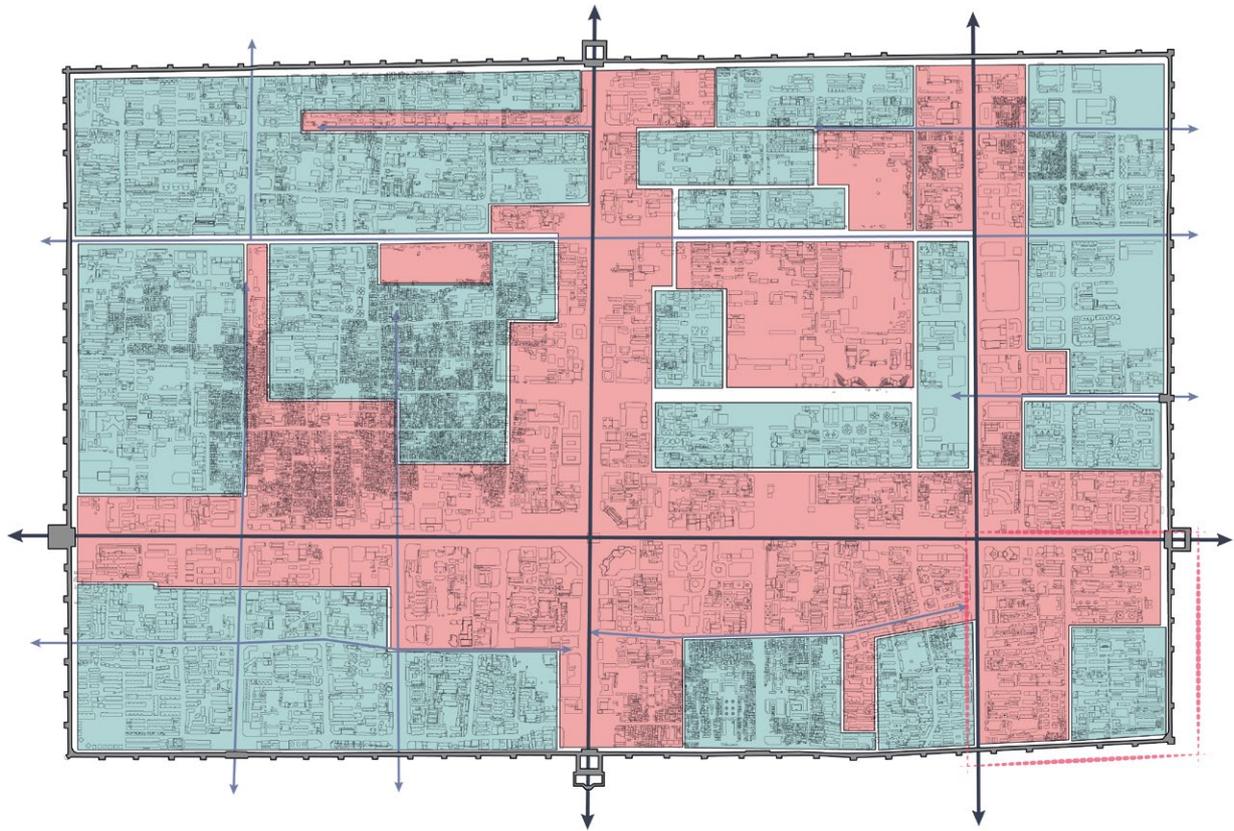
*A system that is sliding but does not consider and has not developed during the years the importance of the pedestrian cross-section of the districts.*

*In fact, the gateways should be connected not only by fast-moving roads, but also by routes that allow the individual to move through the various portions of the territory within the urbanized fabric.*

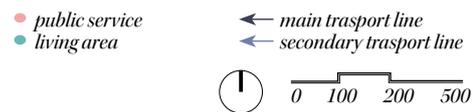
*The green system that characterizes the city is an inconsistent system that defines the outer edge of the walls with a wide and varied linear park but forgets to reproduce this fluidity and movement within the city.*

*The composition of the public space and green area are punctual elements that not define specific relationships with people's lives.*

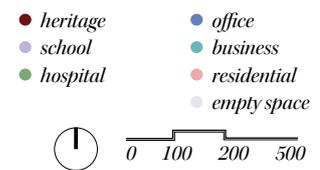
*Green spaces should therefore move and characterize every single district of the place through a provision that accompanies the resident or visitor on a continuous basis.*



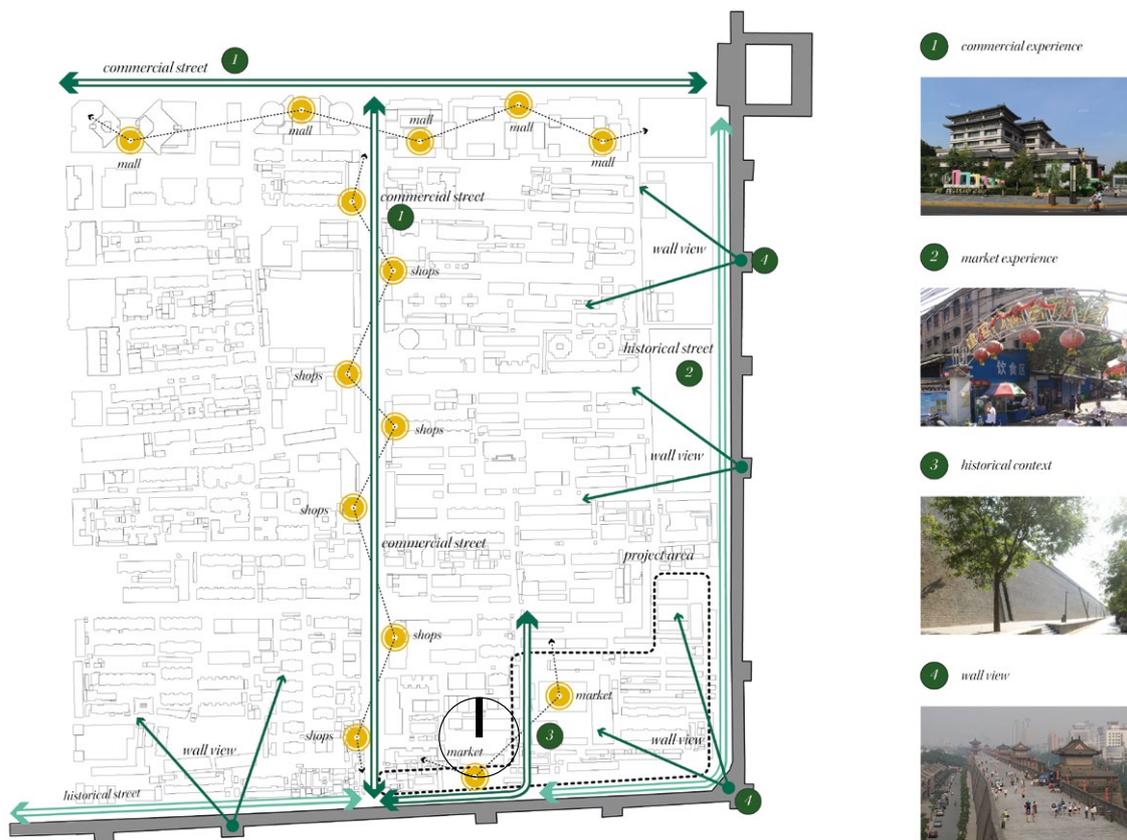
strategic functional planning by the public administration (2010) / image source: muzuo studio Xi'an university of architecture and technology



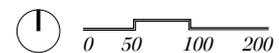
experiences and functions along the city walls image source (2017): muzuo studio Xi'an university of architecture and technology

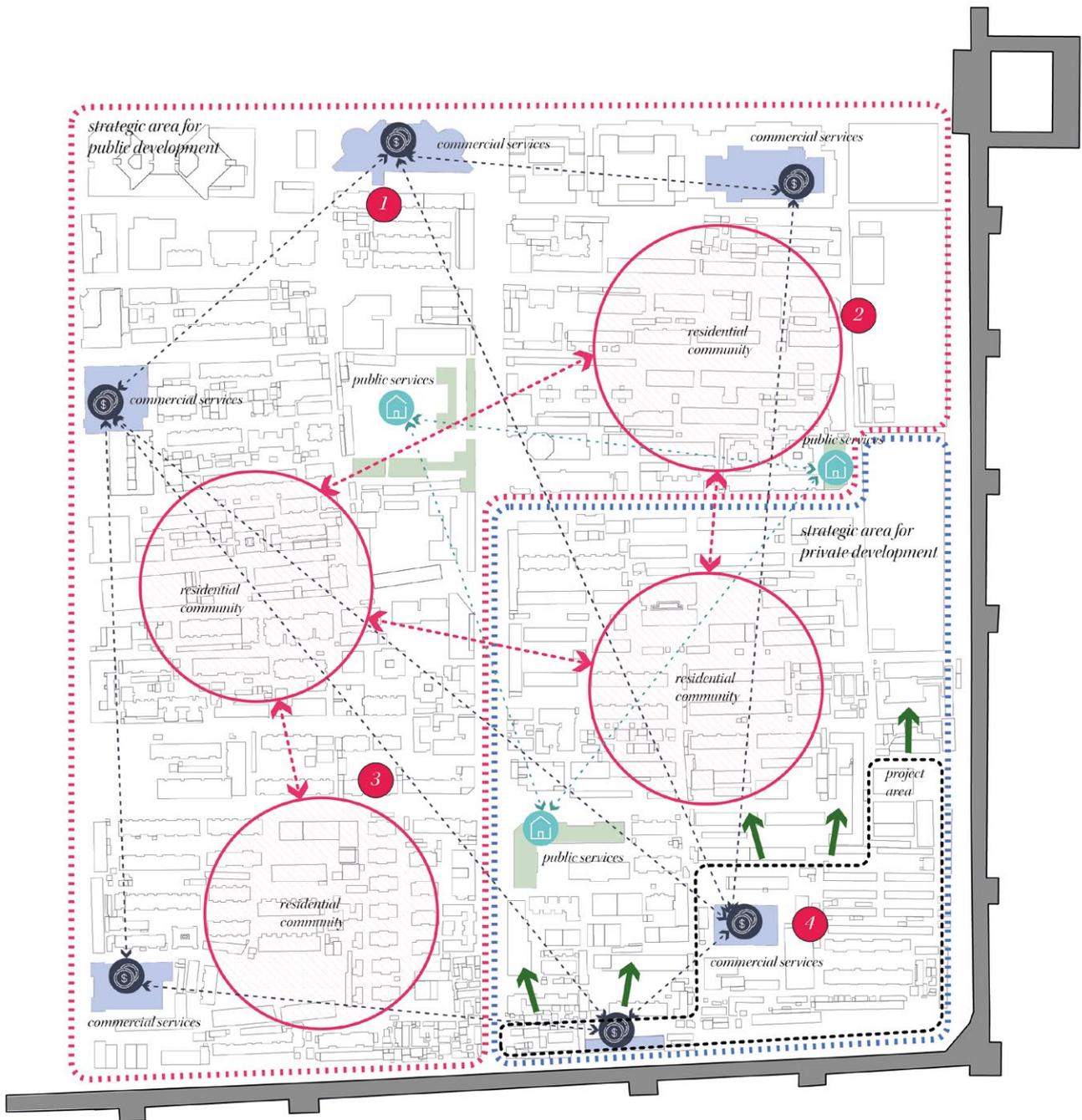


The government strategy related to the project area, provides for the recomposition of the district in purely residential areas, preserving the only area of economic interest that is the market along the walls. The project therefore needs the consideration of enhancing the project area by conserving and expanding local economies, creating a project that also knows how to combine public spaces for the many communities living nearby. In the analysis of the experiences that visitors can make, the expansion of commercial and entertainment offers, but also the historical relationship with the city walls is certainly important.

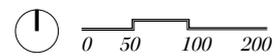


potential experiences and relationships in the project area (2017) / image source: muzuo studio Xi'an university of architecture and technology



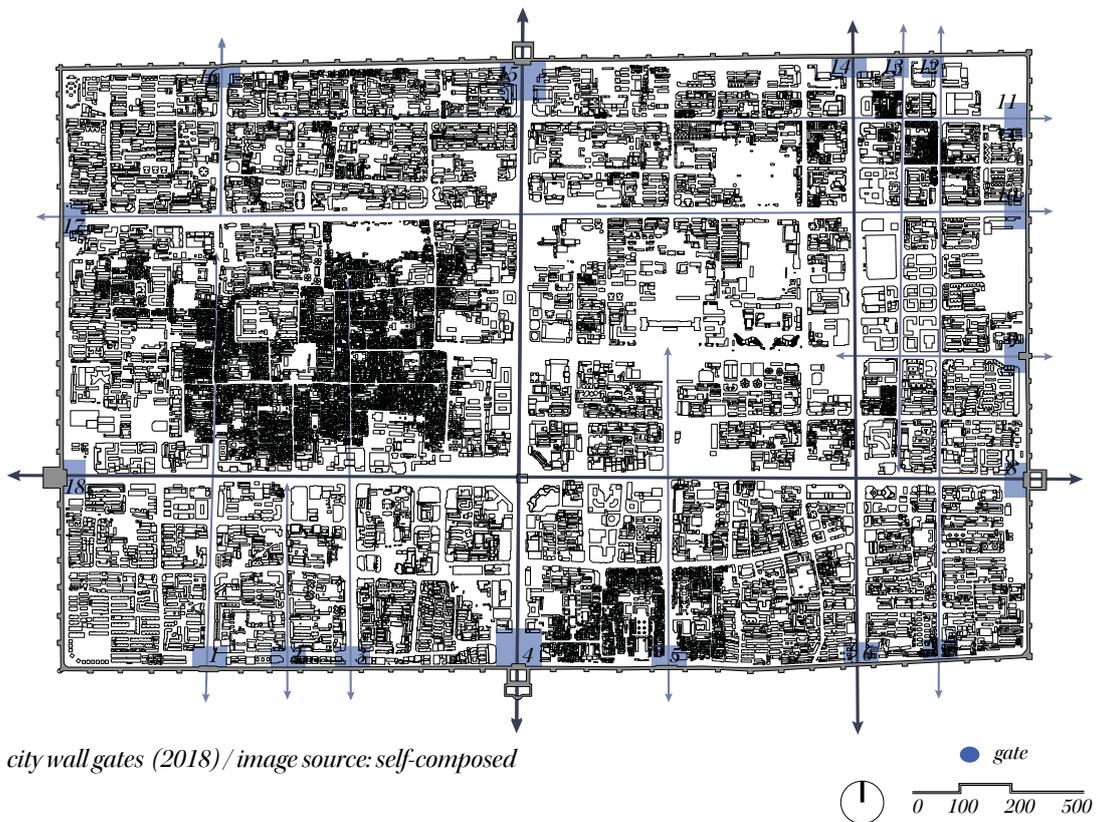


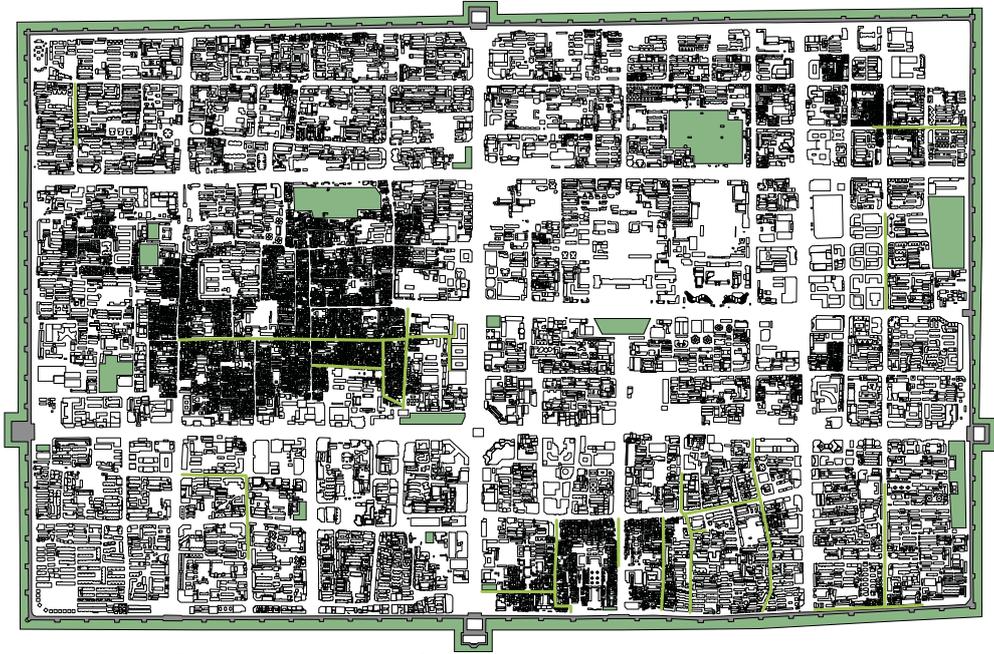
government planning and strategic relationship in the project area (2010): image source: muzuo studio Xian university of architecture and technology



*A system that draws on the fragmented fabric of the district, which is continually associated with the urban environment of the inner city.*

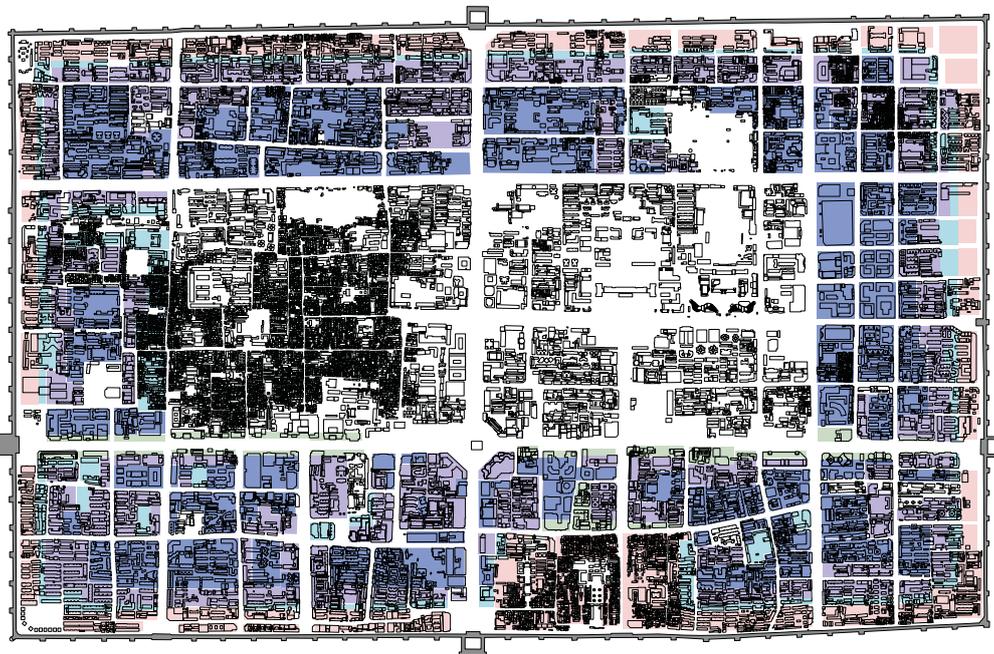
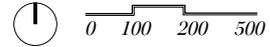
*Moving to the height limit constraint analysis to control the verticalization of buildings, it is possible to consider for the first time the design of an intervention that has not only vertical elements but extends horizontally by defining continuous relations with the surrounding context.*





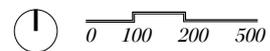
green distribution (2018) / image source: self-composed

← green axis      ● green area



high limitation based on the distance from the walls (2010) / image source: self-composed, muzuo studio Xi'an university of architecture and technology

● 9m      ● 15m  
● 12m      ● 18m  
● 24m

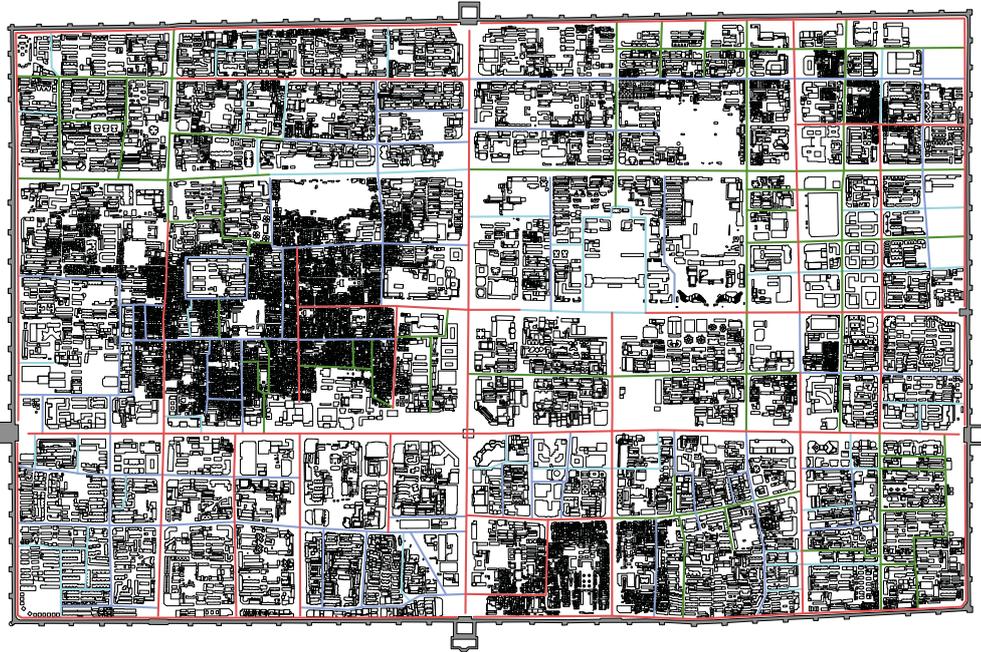


*The government has also released over the years some of the key issues to be faced and respected in building the project around the area around the walls. There are three topics to consider:*

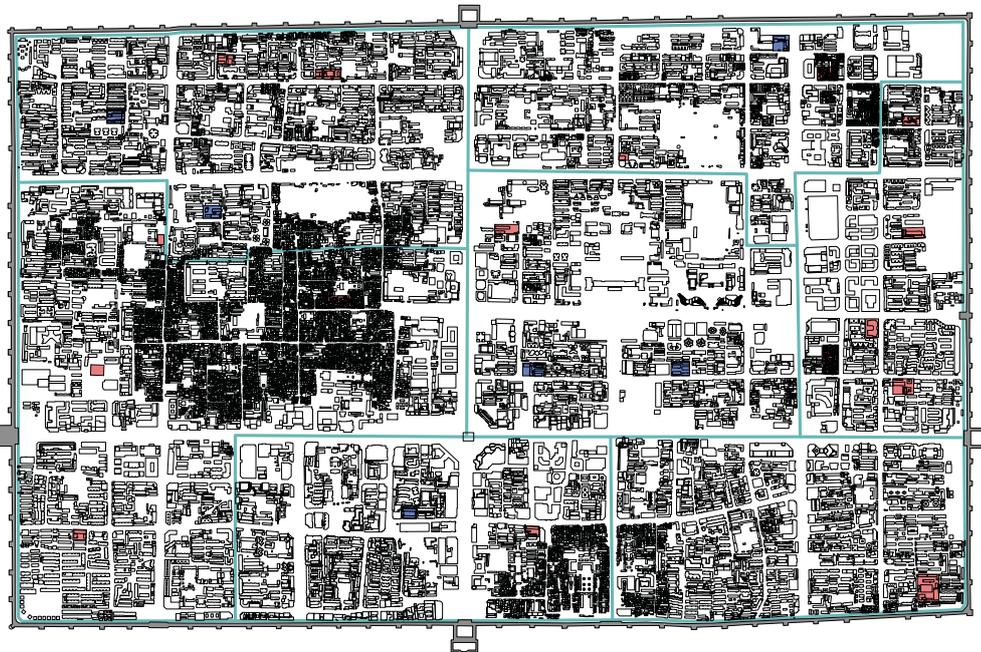
*1 - Five area connected: to Shuncheng Lane road as a link to the along the Xiangzi Temple, College Gate, three school Street, Forest of Stone Tablets Museum, Wolong Temple, Changle Gate and other cultural attractions and historical blocks vertical and horizontal connection. The area proposed integrated service facilities, so that living, office, education, business services integration. For the residents and tourists to provide shopping and entertainment, leisure and other services.*

*2 - The old city protection and renewal plan to take “only demolition is not built, more demolition and less construction” measures, and gradually reduce the living within the city wall population density, relocation administrative organs, reduce the old city traffic pressure, relying on the old city of cultural relics and Historic District, the development of commerce, tourism, cultural industries, improve the living environment, improve the quality of life, to maintain the vitality of the old city.*

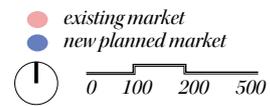
*3 - Historical and cultural city protection: to maintain Xi'an “world famous ancient capital” status, follow the “sustainable development” principle, highlight the essence of the ancient city, mining cultural connotation, shaping the city characteristics, enhance urban quality.*

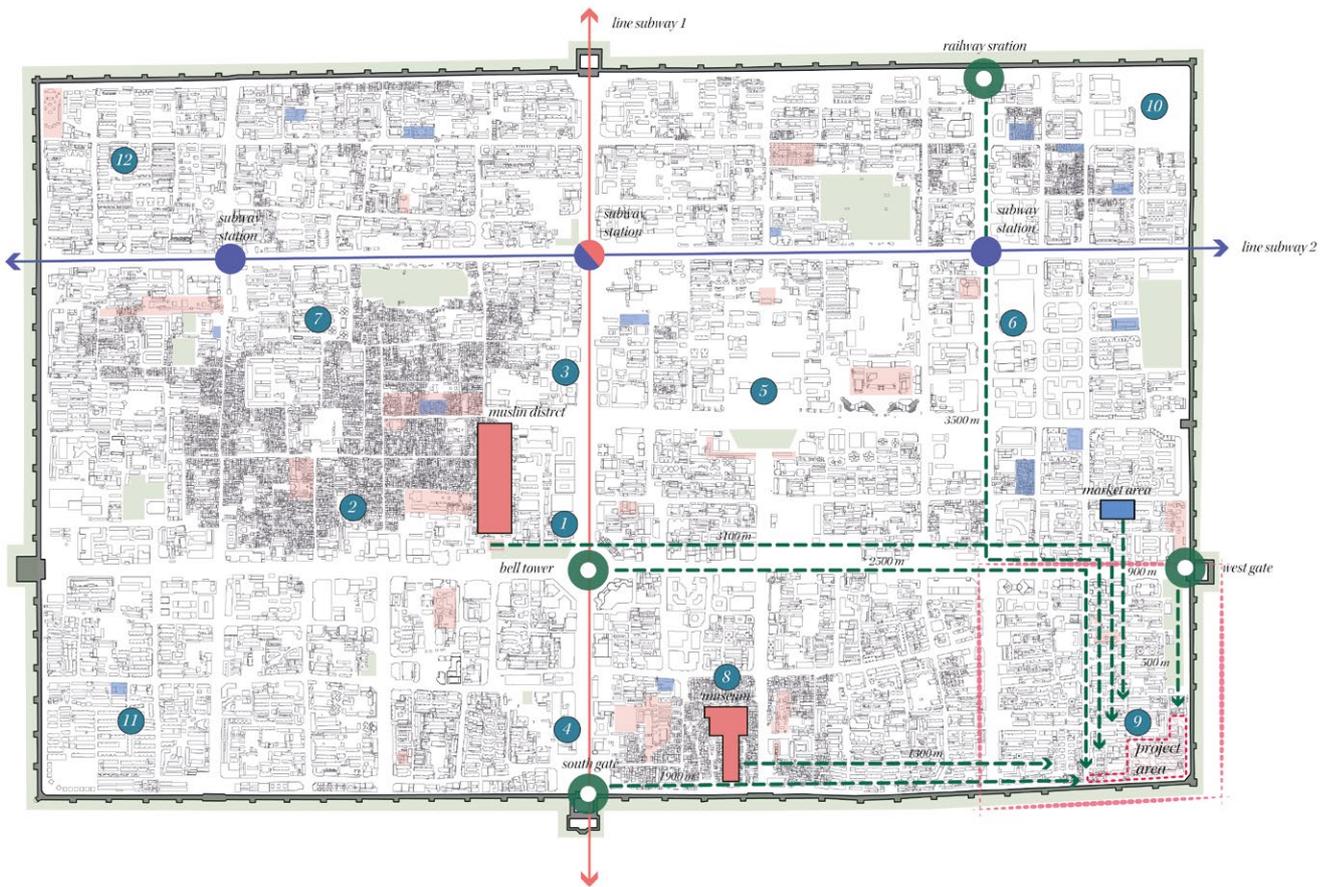


types of roads (2010) / image source: self-composed, muzuo studio Xi'an university of architecture and technology

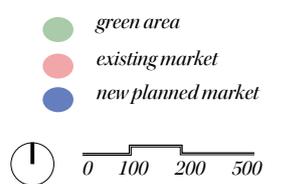


market distribution (2018) / image source: self-composed





distance and relationships between the site project and the main building in the inner city /  
 image source: self-composed



1 bell tower



2 muslim commercial district



3 bell tower commercial complex



4 south gate area



5 shaanxi government complex



6 wanda commercial complex



7 muslim residential area



8 san xue residential area



9 jian guo residential area



10 weimin community area



11 yingchun community area



12 golden bridge residential complex



*views of the main residential, commercial and culture /  
image source: self-composed area*

### 3.2 Analysis of the project area

*Moving to the contextual analysis of the project area, it is important to note its proximity to some of the most important areas of the inner city.*

*The distance to the Bell Tower is quite small so easily reachable through the main public transport. The project area is also closely related to the two gates relating to the south-east corner of the walls.*

*The area is therefore easily accessible, but still has many difficulties in its cross-country and liability at the level of people. Indeed, the two gates should be easily connected through spatial fragmentation and forgiveness.*

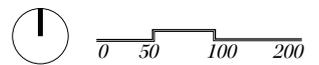
*It is not guaranteed for large residential blocks that can not be crossed, for the wall walls that divide unexpectedly and for the absence of public spaces that should lead the citizen or visitor to the area.*

*The area also attracts many visitors and citizens for the low price of goods sold and studying the attendance of other markets present inside and outside the walls, is the one with the most intense flow of people. The close proximity to the walls also allows non-regular visitors to pass through the gates and let themselves be captured by the intense economic activity on the market. The area is therefore not only destined for citizens and district workers, but also to many outdoor visitors. In the planning of the urban context it emerges that there is a strong relationship between the commercial economic fabric and the residential component. Many of the residents are also the main public area retailers in the area. While the market area extends horizontally from the south door and wobbles in the context of the old industrial building, the residential fabric envelops it with large blocks of 4-5 floors without spaces for social activities.*

*The area is also characterized by industrial complexes transfor-*



*urban context and project area/ image source: self-composed*



*med from premises into temporary residences.*

*Some government buildings emerge from very thick tissue, with large complexes used for hospital and home to the communist party. The west side of the road passing through the south gate is characterized by schools and kindergartens.*

*There is also the complete lack of public spaces for young people and the elderly, leaving an urbanized environment that offers few opportunities for socialization.*

*Continuing the context analysis it is important to note the conformation of the buildings.*

*Many of them were built before the 1960s and are now in precarious conditions, mostly abandoned industrial complexes. The most remote area is characterized by buildings with a maximum age of 20 years and mainly built in reinforced concrete.*

*It is also important during the definition of the project to communicate with the structural complexities of the context by considering the possibility of regenerating of obsolete structures by adding new elements and volumes.*



*functions distribution/  
image source: self-composed*



0 50 100 200

- |               |              |                |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| ● heritage    | ● government | ● p. school    |
| ● residential | ● hotel      | ● s. school    |
| ● market      | ● hospital   | ● kindergarden |
| ● old fabric  | ● office     |                |



buildings material/  
 image source: self-composed

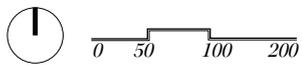


0 50 100 200

- brick - concrete structure
- concrete reinforced structure
- brick - wood structure



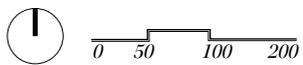
quality of buildings/  
 image source: self-composed



- low
- middle
- high



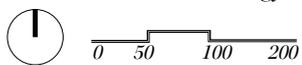
number of floors/  
 image source: self-composed



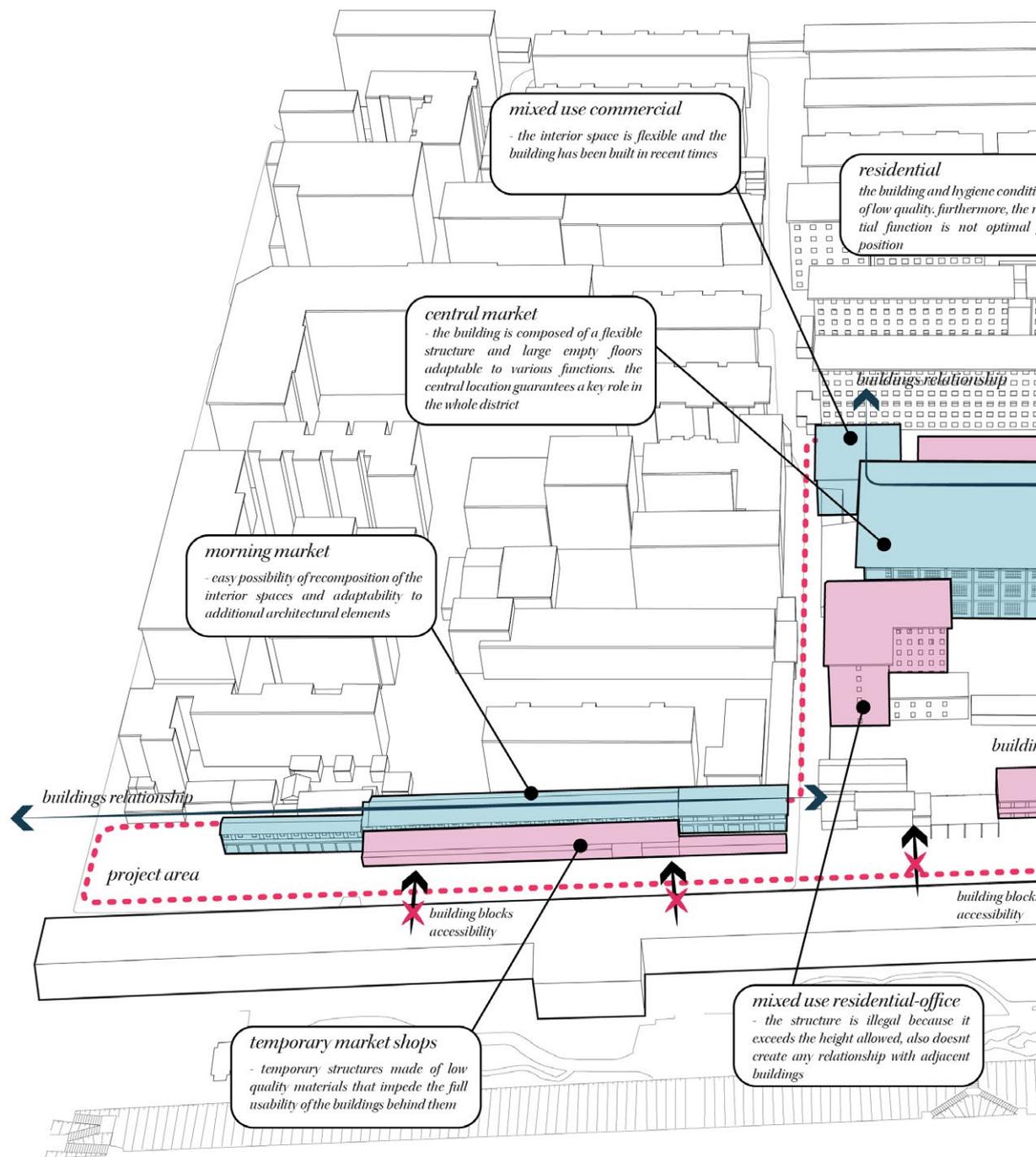
- |      |      |       |
|------|------|-------|
| ● 1f | ● 5f | ● 9f  |
| ● 2f | ● 6f | ● 10f |
| ● 3f | ● 7f |       |
| ● 4f | ● 8f |       |



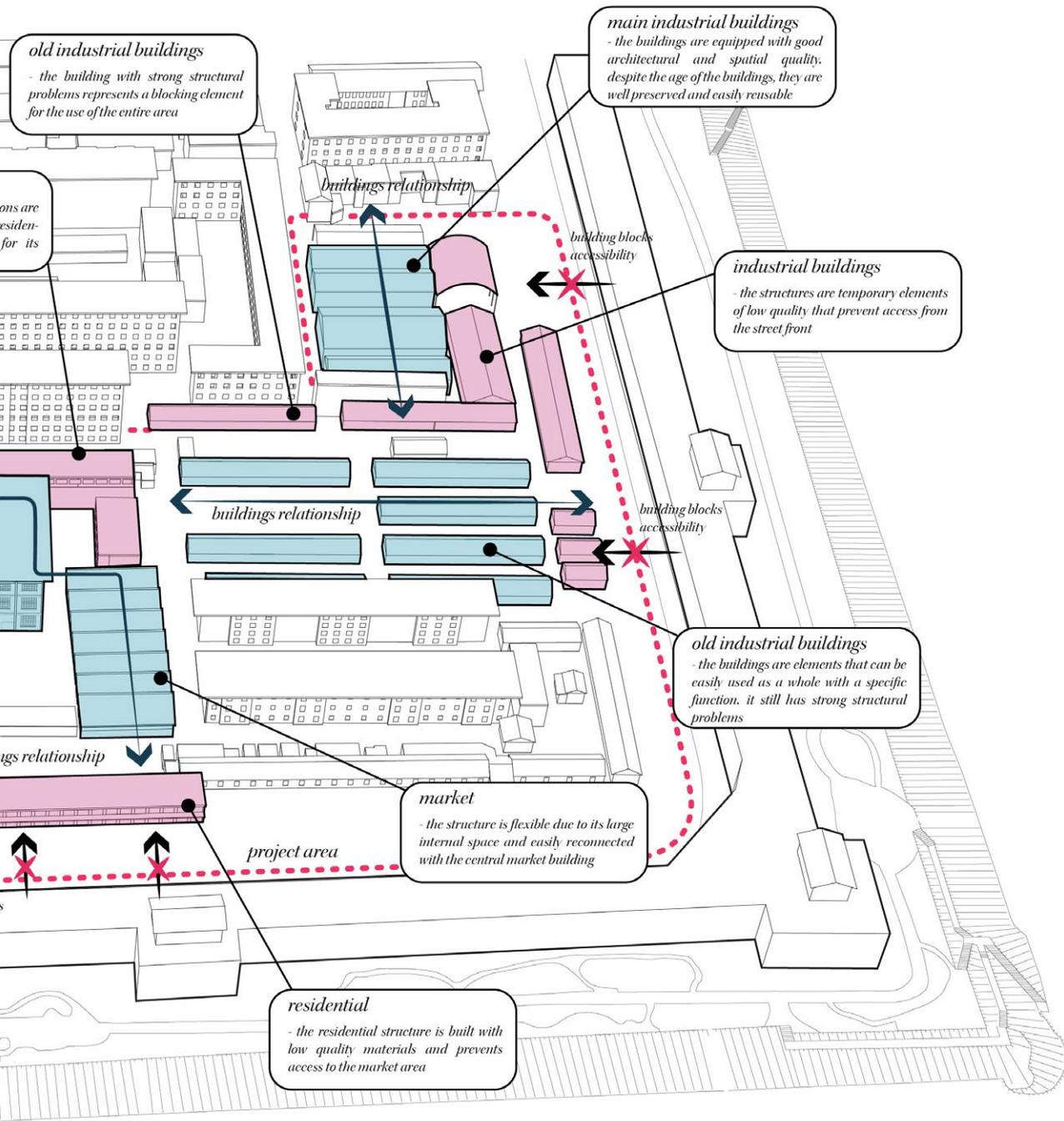
*density of apartments in residential community/  
 image source: self-composed, muzuo studio Xi'an university of  
 architecture and technology*



- <200 apartments
- <100 apartments
- <50 apartments



strategic analysis for the urban composition of the project/  
image source: self-composed



*The distribution of green area within the district denotes the lack of public spaces for different group of people.*

*Green area within the neighborhood is almost punctual and delimits only the border areas of the area through tree-lined rows and some monumental trees that emphasize the beauty of some inner courtyards.*

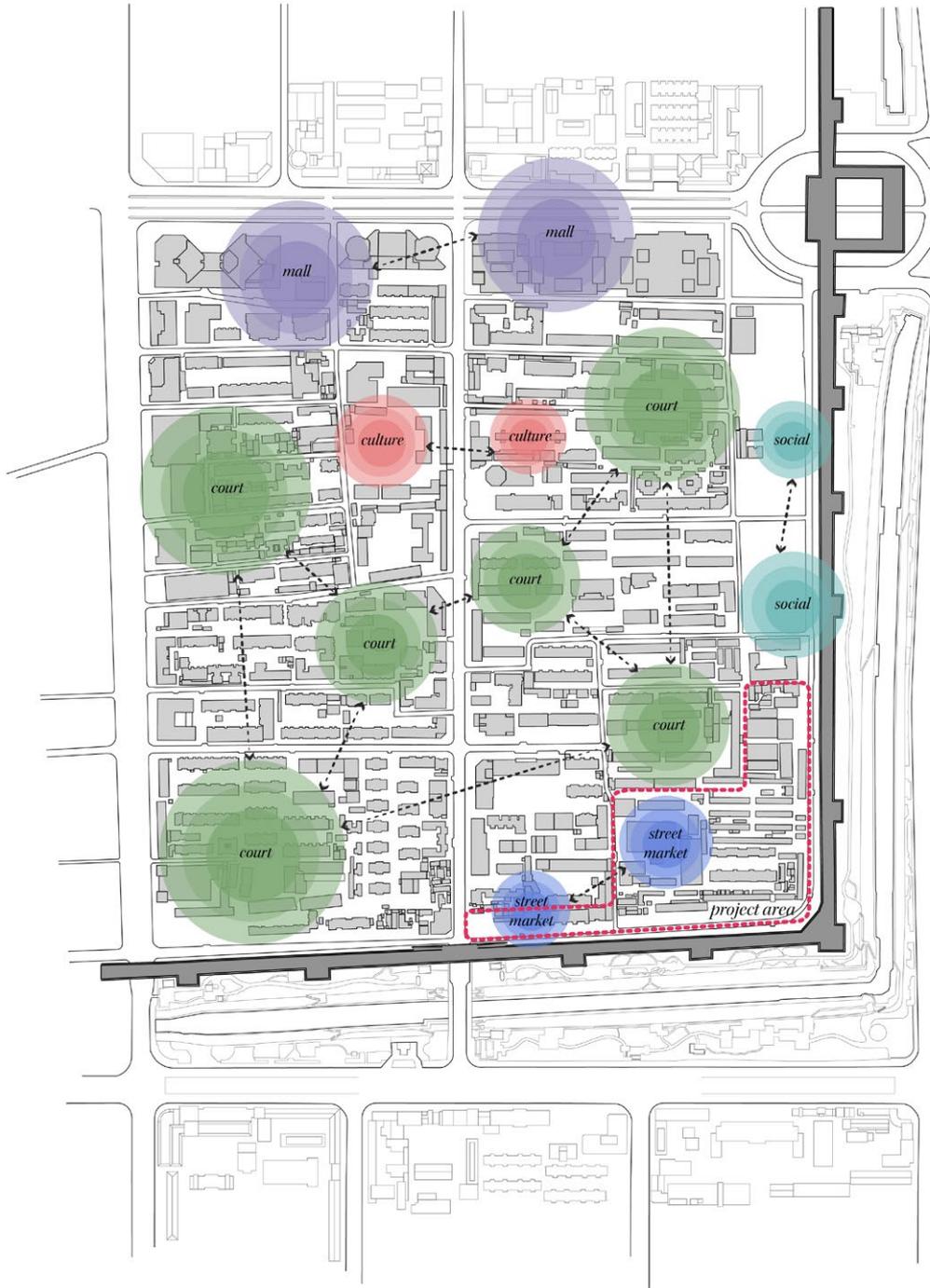
*Green spaces are not even present inside residential spaces that in most cases are locked blocks that prevent people from getting to know and relate.*

*Green instead should be considered and thought of as a constant element that moves within the space, merge the little and main spaces of life, lead the visitor within the district.*

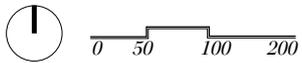
*The analysis of the composition of road types plays a key role in defining the economic strategy and in promoting the continuation of the identity of individual spaces. The main roads are characterized by commercial shops.*

*Only the largest and most popular streets have some office buildings. It is important to point out that almost all roads are discontinued in offering services and end without offering continuity with neighboring ones. It is therefore important to be able to create continuity and to create a uniform and well-distributed system.*

*From the point of view of public transport, the district is well-defined but, as mentioned earlier, there is not a system of pedestrian roads that allows the citizen to move freely in space. This difficulty is also defined by the presence of residential spaces enclosed by high wall walls that prevent the citizen from moving to court.*



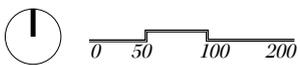
life activities/  
image source: self-composed



- mall
- social
- market
- court
- culture



types of public area/  
 image source: self-composed

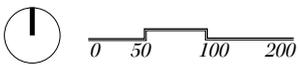


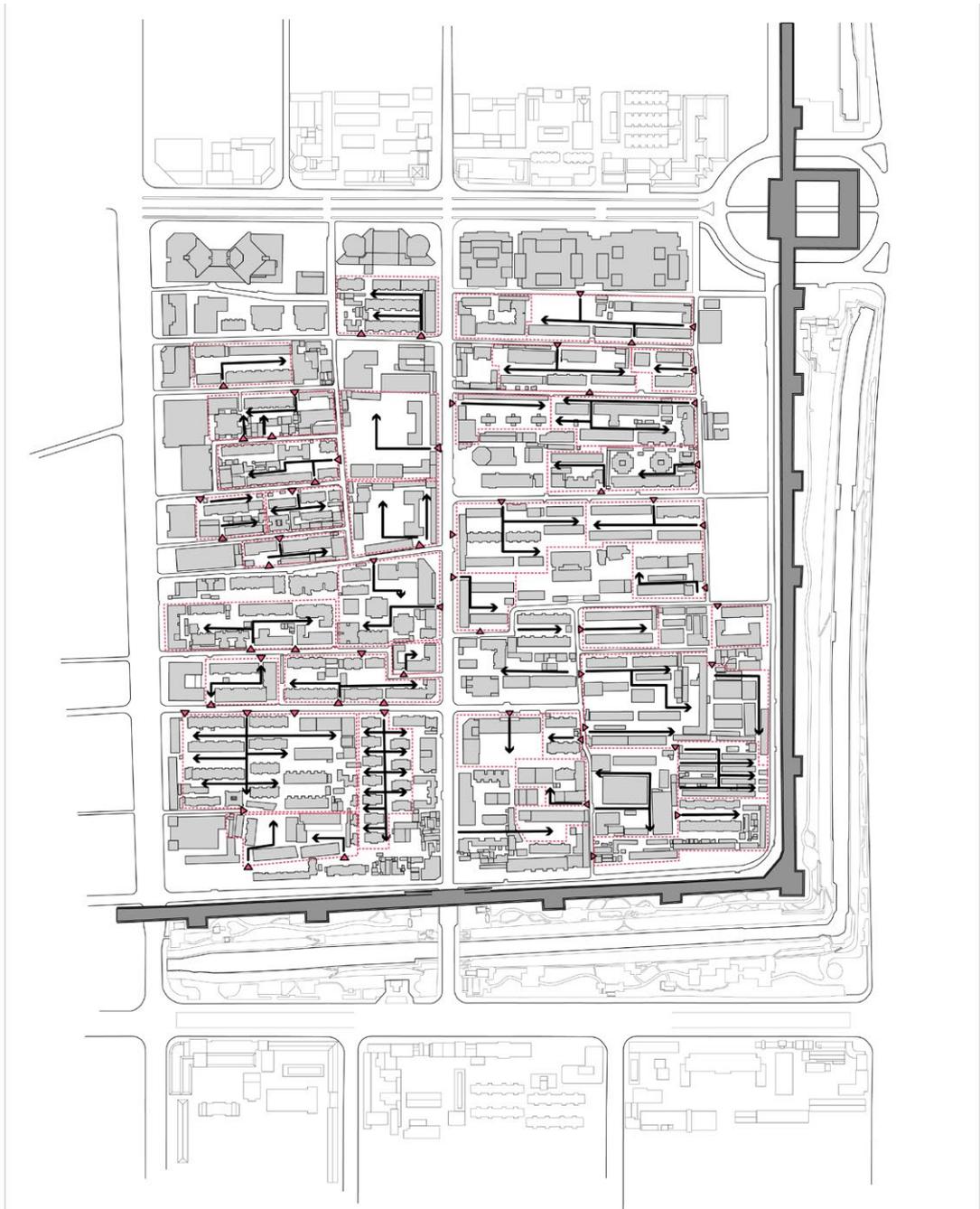
- meeting
- fitness
- toilet
- garden



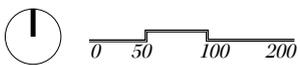
green distribution/  
 image source: self-composed

● tree





*inner courtyards/  
image source: self-composed*

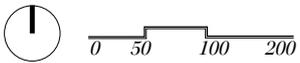


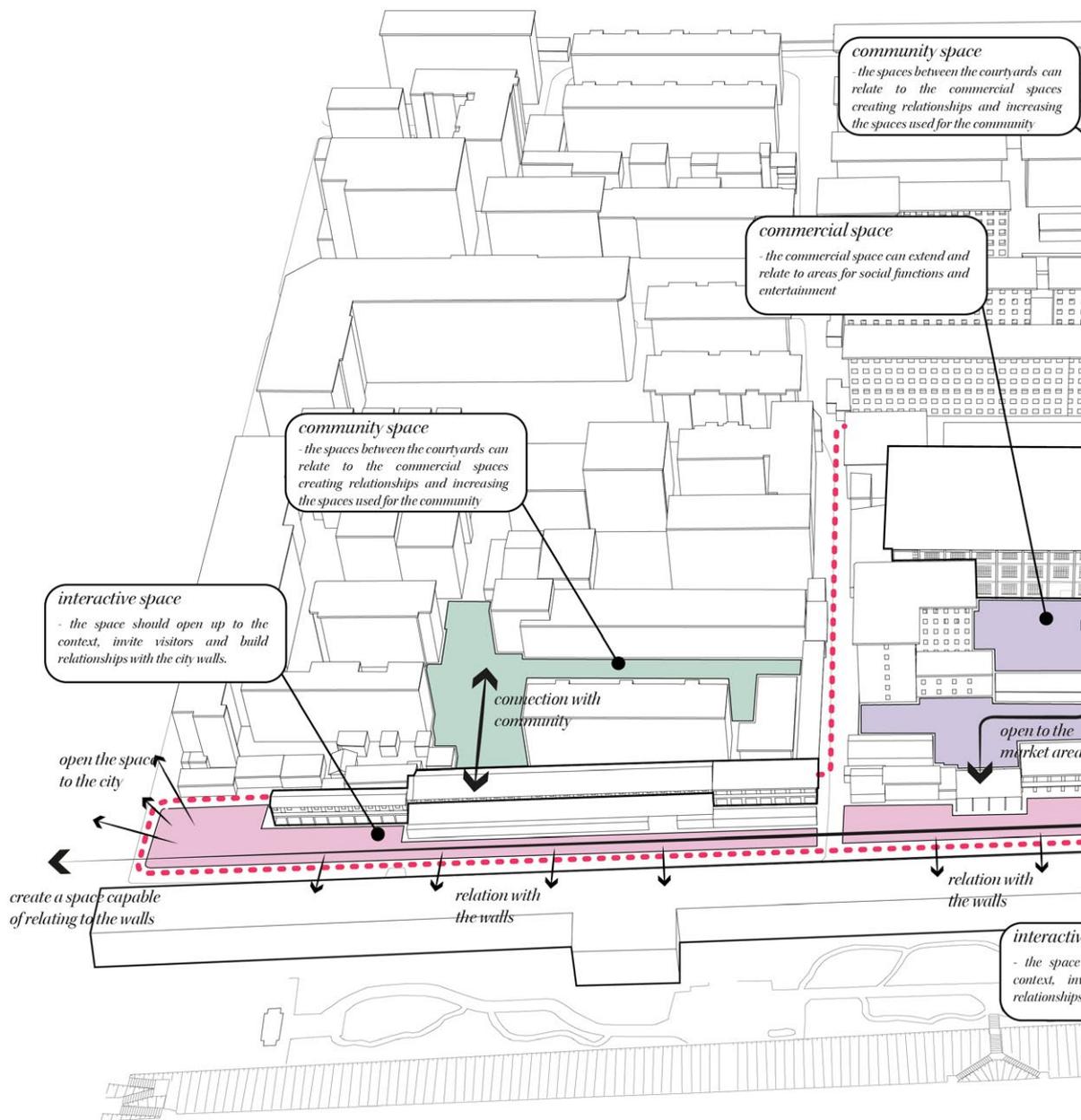
← courtyard boundary  
← internal flow



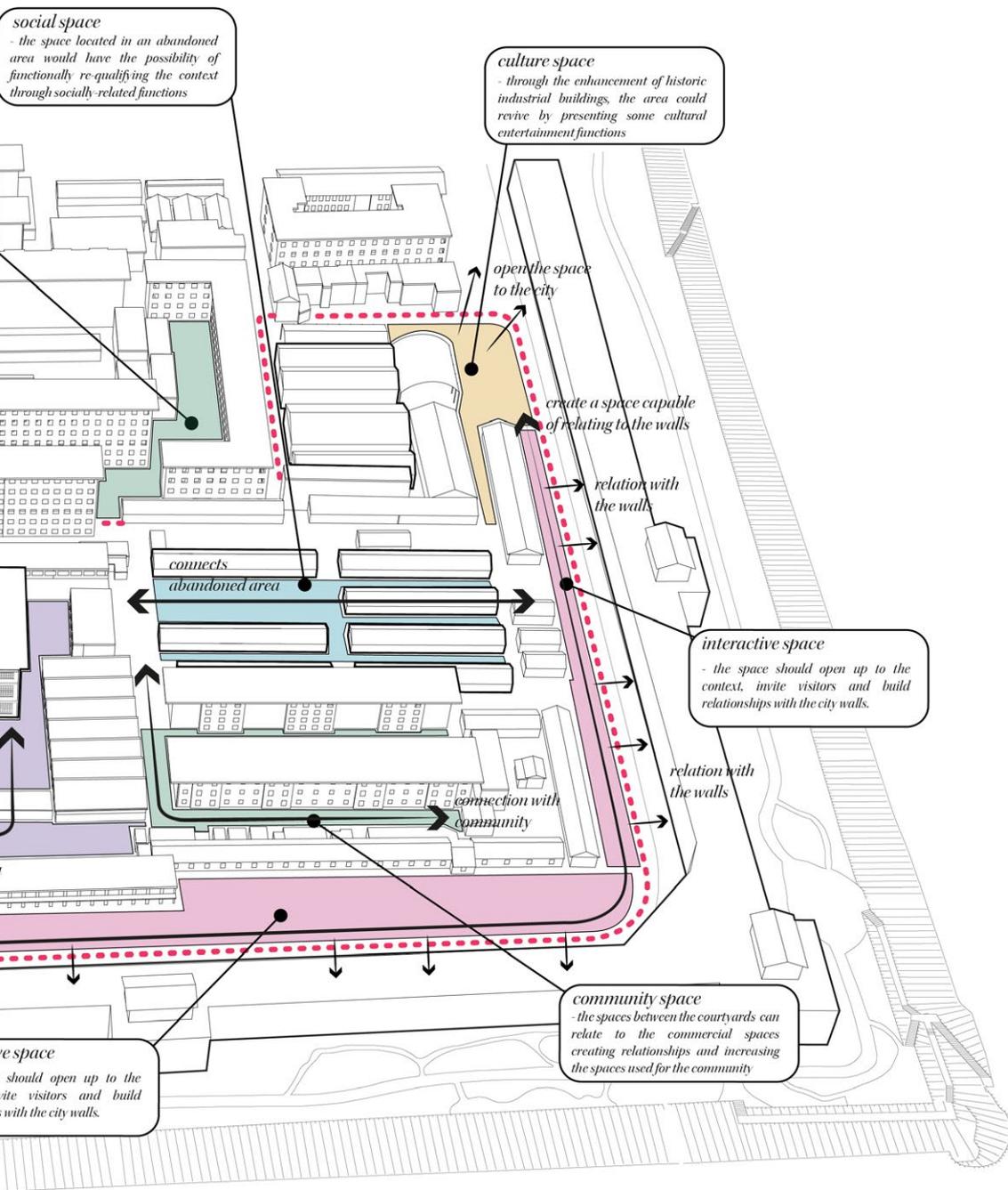
inner courtyards/  
image source: self-composed

● community space





strategic analysis for the public spaces of the project/  
 image source: self-composed



*From the analysis of public transport and usable spaces, we move to the distribution of parking lots for cars and van. The parking spaces are punctual and poorly distributed.*

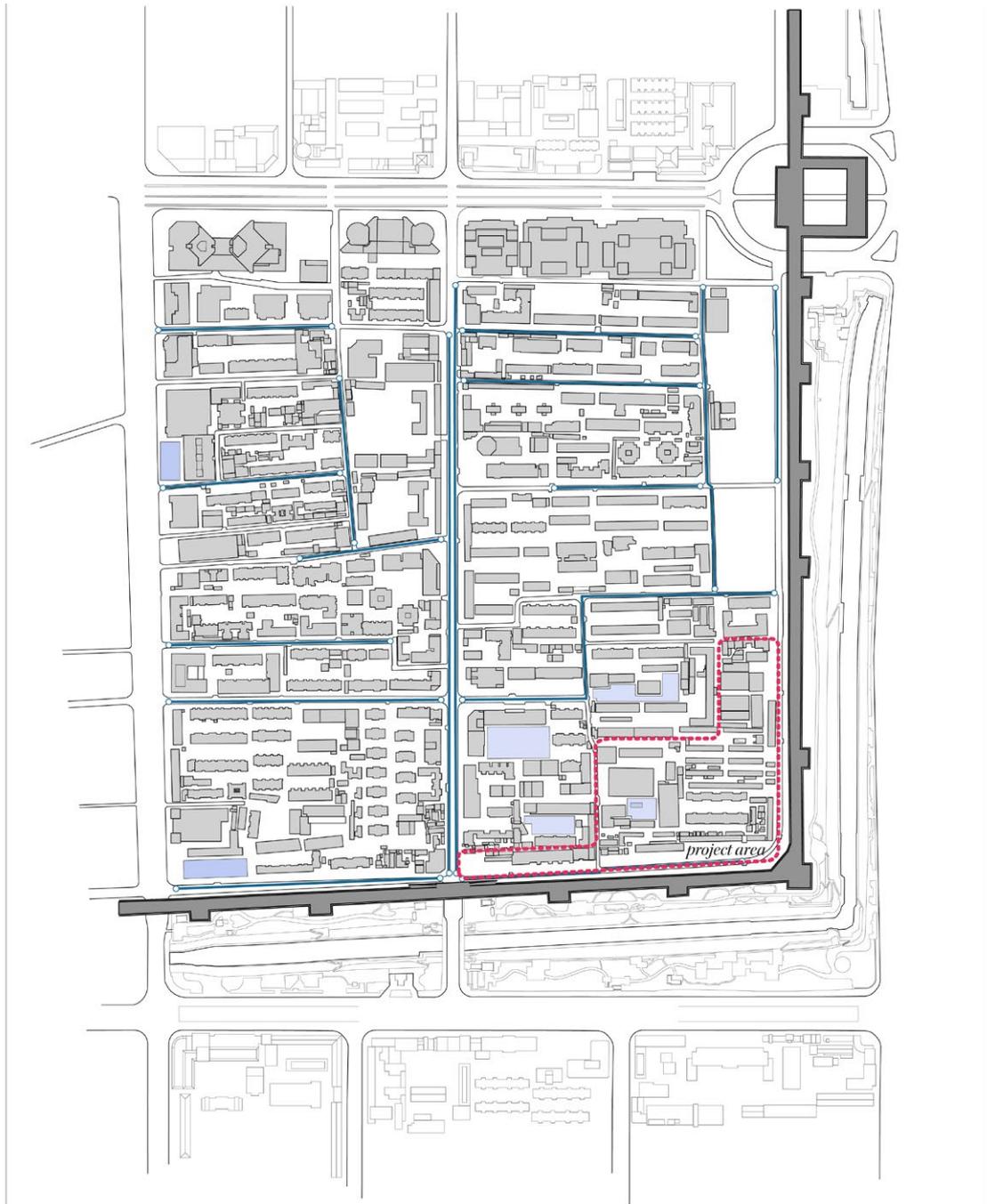
*Moreover, the presence of the market accentuates the difficulty of space available for cars and cargo and unloading of goods. The street facing the walls is therefore targeted by traders as a space to unload goods, park their vehicles and often used as a place of sale. It is therefore necessary not only to offer car spaces, but to think of a market project in which the sales spaces are flexible, transformable into fixed places for commerce and satisfy and organize all the economic activities present.*

*The research then goes to the direct analysis of the buildings and to the heights reached by each of them.*

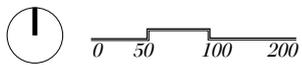
*The heights are varied but limited at the walls due to the present regulation. The number of floors near the walls is limited to two or three and exceeds the 5 are for some buildings that in a future project would be demolished to ensure a more uniform system.*

*This would create a project that could extend horizontally in different directions, capable of dialogue with the existing one.*

*Finally, contextual analysis concludes with the identification of the main public services. Fitness areas, meeting venues, bathrooms and public gardens and gardens do not reflect the needs and current features of the place.*



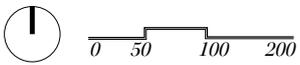
*parking area/  
image source: self-composed*



← street  
● area



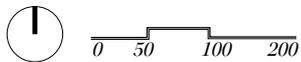
*mobility/  
image source: self-composed*



-  *boundary residential block*
-  *main street*
-  *bus stop*



*typology street/  
image source: self-composed*



- ← residential streets
- ← pedestrian links
- ← urban streets

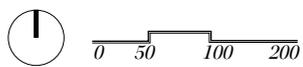
*The analysis of people's flows leads to establishing the main relationships between local residents and economic activities and buildings.*

*The movement of people follows the economic nature of the place and must also adapt to the complexities and architectural limitations of the place.*

*Walls, intermediate spaces, separation barriers limit the movement of people by creating islands of high attendance and very often chaotic and others where the presence of people is very small. It is therefore necessary to think again about the distribution of flows through a project that allows people to fully enjoy the space and distributing their business activities in an organized way.*



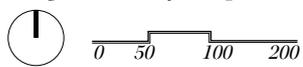
*flow people - morning/  
image source: self-composed*



- seller
- local buyer
- outsider buyer



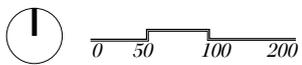
*flow people - afternoon/  
image source: self-composed*



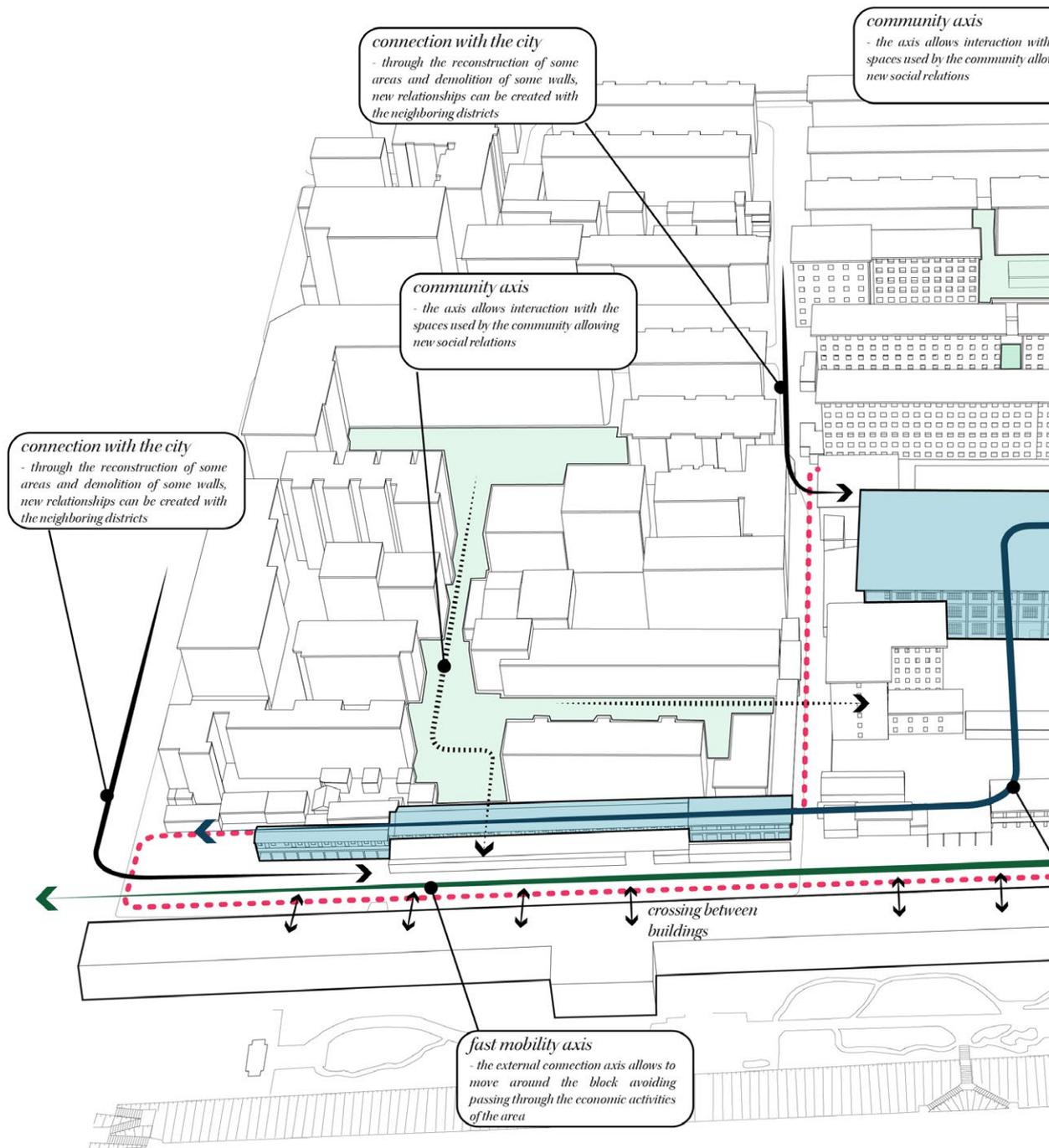
- seller
- local buyer
- outsider buyer



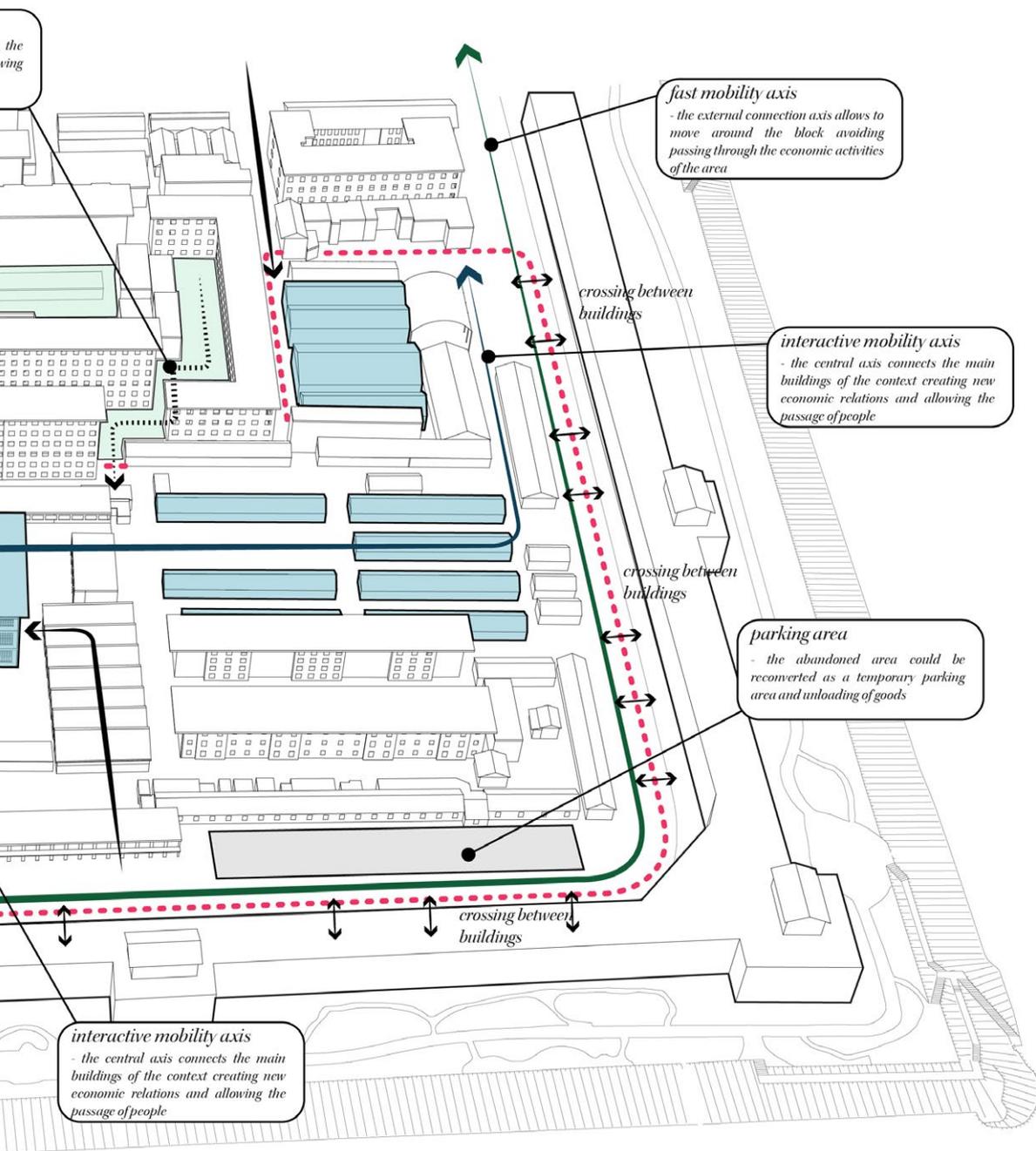
*flow people - evening/  
image source: self-composed*



- seller
- local buyer
- outsider buyer



strategic analysis for the new mobility system of the project/  
image source: self-composed



*In the last section, the main problems of the area.*

*1\_ Southeast City corner and the vegetable market of Shuncheng Lane bring a lot of people, for the interesting position they are placed but the site is characterized by lot of chaos, traffic inconvenience, traffic flow and the lack of public places*

*2\_ The site is sufferening the absence of enough functional places be and just the food market permit to the people to interact in the area*

*3\_ The site has a large number of old houses and abandoned factories*

*4\_ The area of the market is chaotic. Traffic congestion is an important factor that doesnt permite the correct development of the area. . The presence of a large number of mobile vendors is the main reason for the chaotic environment*

*5\_ The lack of community activities and place for communication (lack of space, lack of organization). The park around the wall become for the residents the place for daily recreation*

*6\_ Residents' economic income relies on the sale of cheap products, with low economic income*

*7\_ Public service facilities have not been used effectively. City walls are free of charge, municipal facilities (public greening, fitness equipment, etc.) are destroyed*

*8\_ the image of urban space is poor, the public spaces are not in*

*relation together and for the old city did not create a positive role*

*9\_ The different markets that are placed in the area are not standardized and cannot permit the right improvement of urban space quality. Interesting things in diverse communities are not well organized and shown*

*10\_ The sellers operations are a serious problems, blocking traffic*

*11\_ Poor health conditions and cannot satisfy the high demand of the people*

*12\_ The basic public facilities are not perfect*

*13\_ The large vegetable market lighting ventilation is not good, low utilization of vertical space*

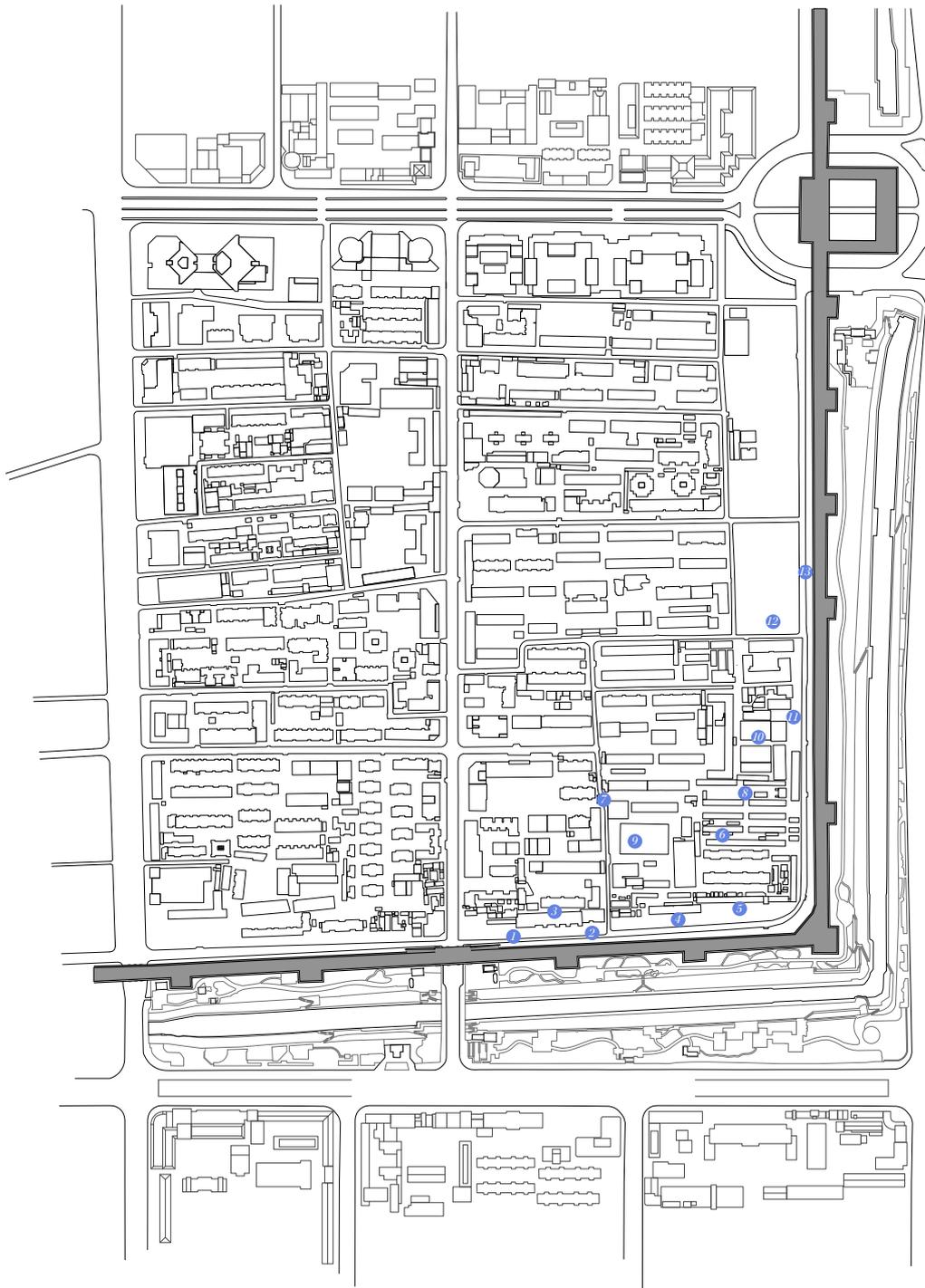
*14\_ the composition of the space of the aquatic market is not well done*

*15\_ The basic design is not perfect (garbage disposal, drainage, bathroom, etc.)*

*16\_ The poor conditions of the buildings create disorganization in the composition of the environment*

*17\_ Small housing area, lack of function, can not meet the needs of modern life*

*18\_ The flow of people is not organized. The vegetable market is divided into two parts and the shoppers come from different entran-*



*weak points of the are project/  
image source: self-composed*



0 50 100 200



*roadside stall business*



*lack of organization of selling space*



*low quality space*



*high boundaries*



*poor sanitary condition*



*illegal additions*



*congestion*



*lack of public space*



*lack of illumination*



*narrow spaces*



*low quality green space*



*abandoned areas*

# 04

*Composition  
design*

## 4.1 Concept definition

*In the definition of the project, particular importance has been given to the consideration of some general aspects that define the inner city of Xian.*

*The project bases its foundations in a design vision that combines the general complexities of the city Ming, neighbourhood identity and contextual issues.*

*Through the interweaving of these three layers, a project has been defined to enable new economic and social solutions for the design area as well as a concrete opportunity to experiment different modes of entertainment in a particular and important point of the city of Xian.*

*The project area is considered not only as an element but as a continuation of the experiences that people can enjoy walking along the road that surrounds the walls.*

*So an area therefore offers not only a solution to the contextual problems but relates to the adjacent areas offering different moments and experiences originating from the identity of the context. Moving to the contextual analysis of the project area, it is important to note its proximity to some of the most important areas of the inner city.*

*The distance to the Bell Tower is quite small so easily reachable through the main public transport.*

*The project area is also closely related to the two gates relating to the south-east corner of the walls. The area is therefore easily accessible, but still has many difficulties in its cross-country and liability at the level of people. Indeed, the two gates should be easily connected through spatial fragmentation and forgiveness.*

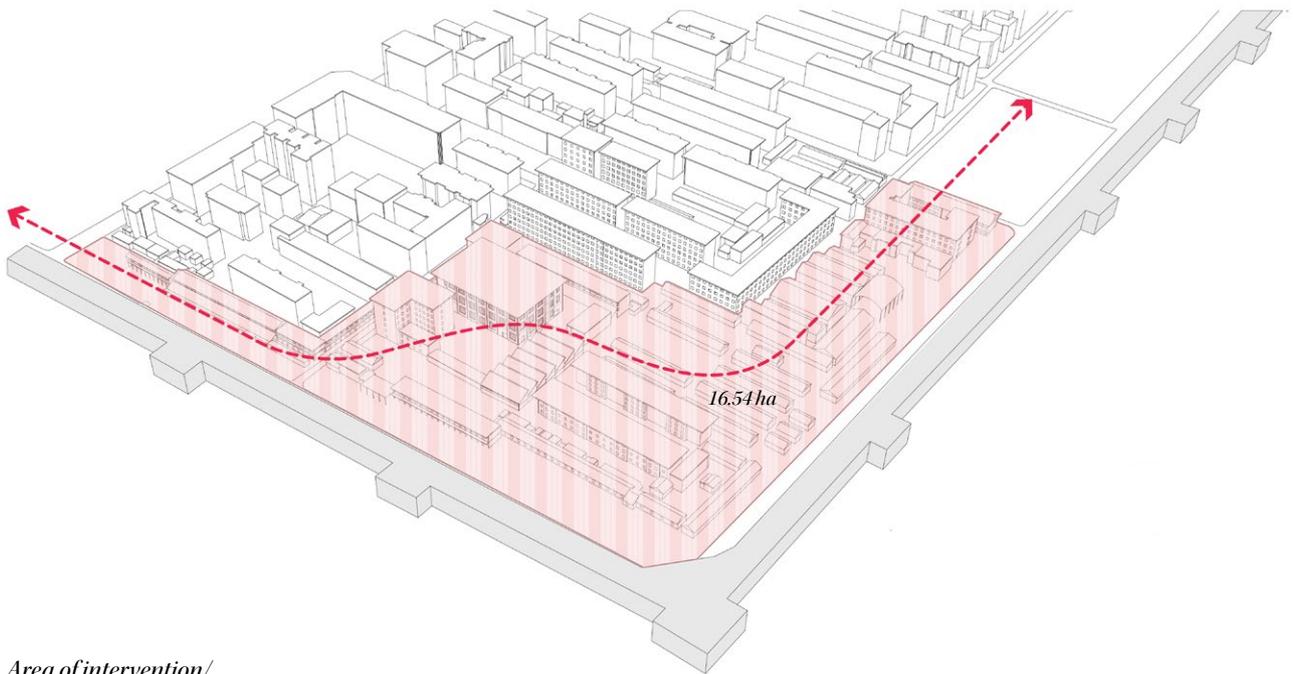
*It is not guaranteed for large residential blocks that can not be crossed, for the walls that divide unexpectedly and for the absence of public spaces that should lead the citizen or visitor to the area.*

*The composition of the project originates in the search for a close*

*relationship between the characteristics of the city in its entirety, the identity of the project area and its main properties in terms of the issues to be solved. A layer overlay that allows the area to be transformed considering its single aspect in the different steps of intervention.*

*Starting from the consideration of the existence of portions of cities around the low permeable walls, the project seeks its porosity and its permeability through the fragmentation of spaces allowing to relate to other portions of the city and to reach the gates across the entire area in question.*

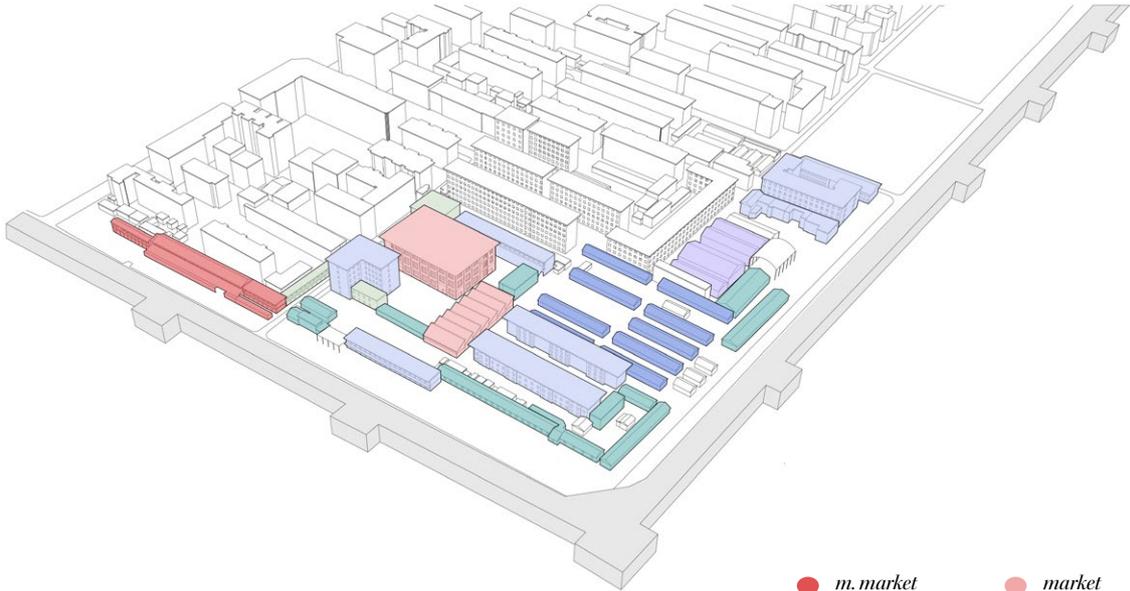
*The enhancement of the site's identity defines the second key theme by proposing space and functional compositions that enhance the market idea through proposals that aggregate economy and culture. Neighborhood issues have also been considered in terms of spatial organization, composition and quality of public spaces to provide citizens and workers in the area with a space that can increase economic relations and provide an environment for personal growth of individuals.*



*Area of intervention/  
image source: self-composed*

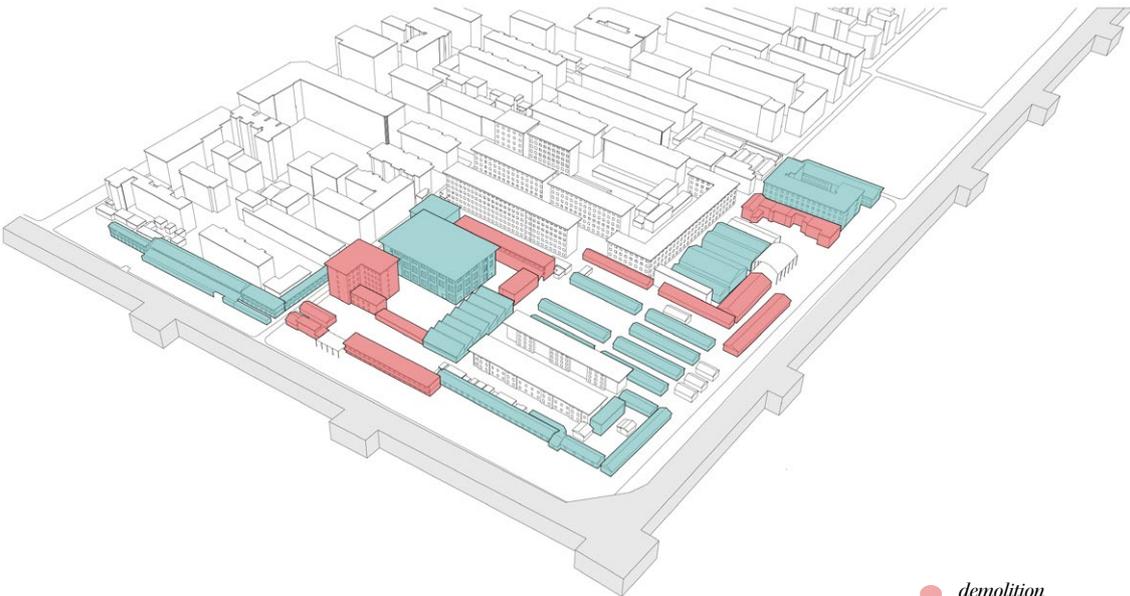


*Relationship between the space and the wall/  
image source: self-composed*



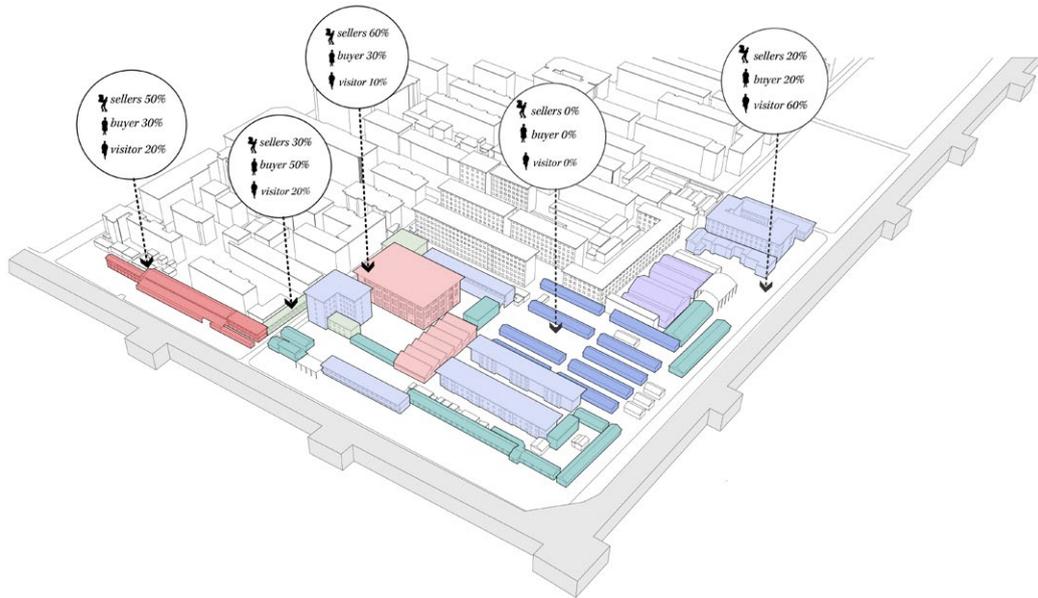
*functions/  
image source: self-composed*

- *m. market*
- *storage*
- *shop*
- *market*
- *residential*
- *industry*
- *illegal block*

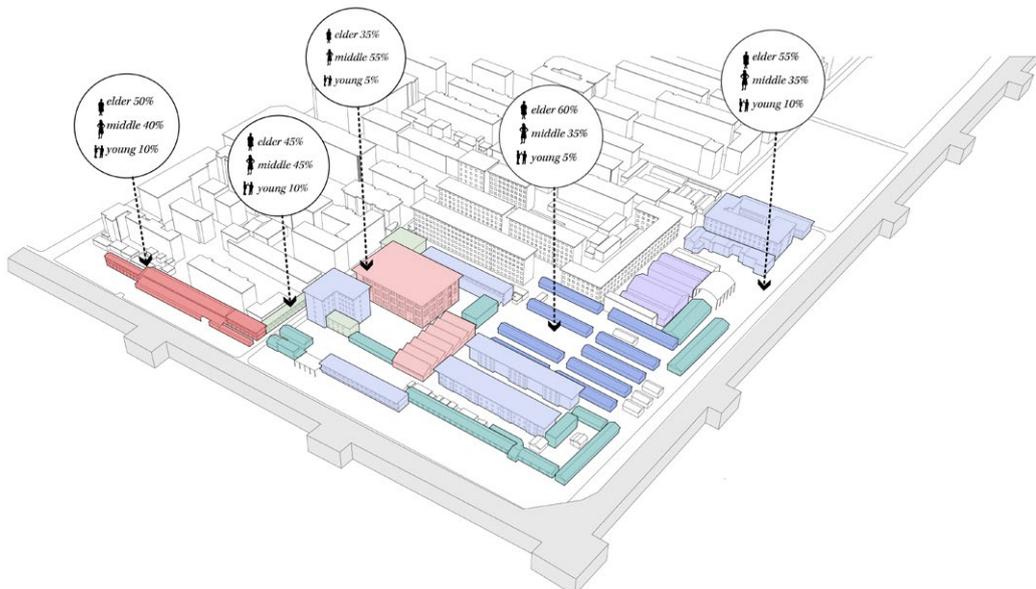


*demolition and conservation/  
image source: self-composed*

- *demolition*
- *conservation*

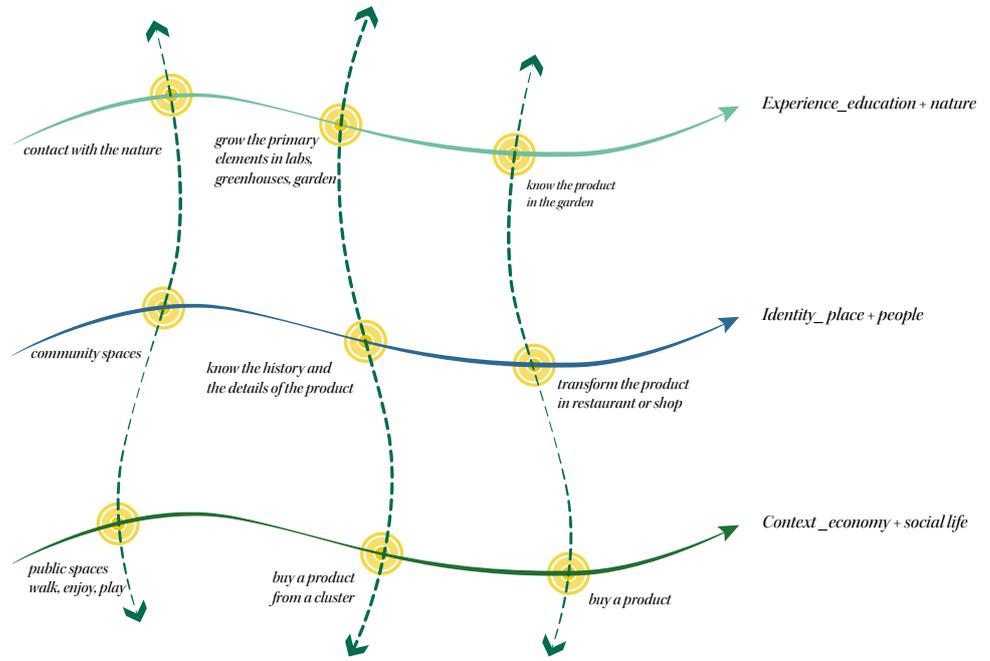


*economy relationship/  
image source: self-composed*



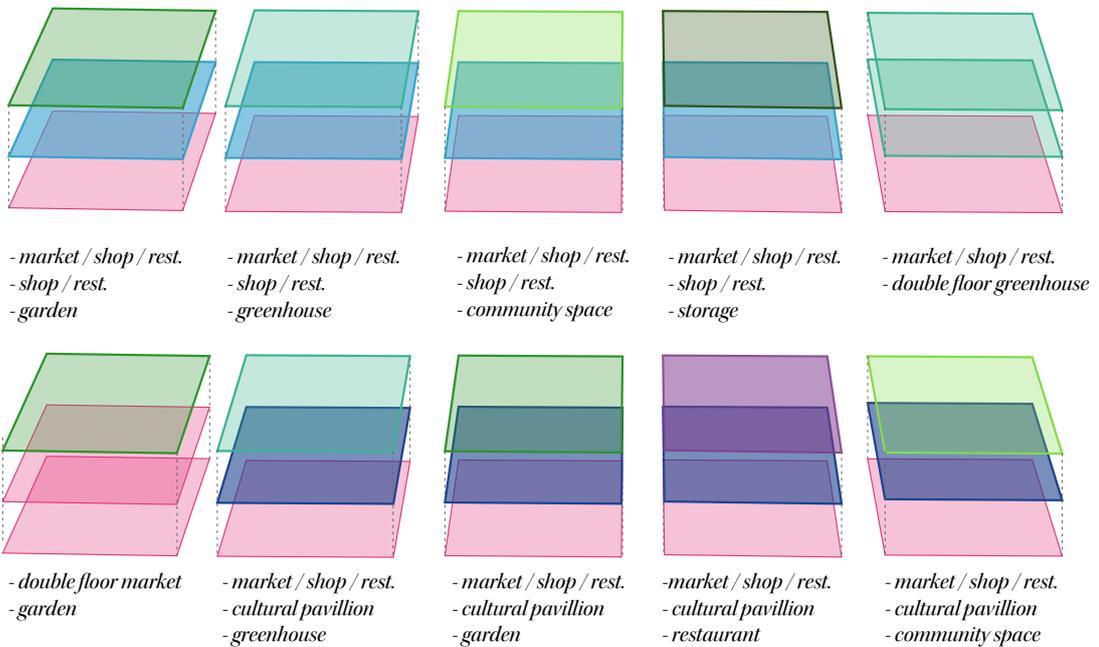
*type of people/  
image source: self-composed*

*The composition of the project is built according to three essential principles. The first corresponds to the contextual relation, that is the realization of a project of intervention able to offer solutions to contextual problems, to raise the possibility of relationship between people, to offer high quality spaces for the residents of the place. At the same time the contextual relation is linked to the identity of the place or of the market. The economic reality and the possibilities of interaction are increased through the composition of spaces that allows sellers to increase the possibilities of economic relationship. Finally the possibility of living an experience. Every single area around the city walls is special because of its position so it is essential to adapt the project site with a solution that would allow its visitors to experience different moments. The opportunity to relate to the subject, to know the products sold, to come into contact with a natural environment, is repeated in the last level of the project, where botanical gardens and urban gardens can be visited to allow its visitors to fully interact with the identity of the place*



idea

overlap



composition of volumes

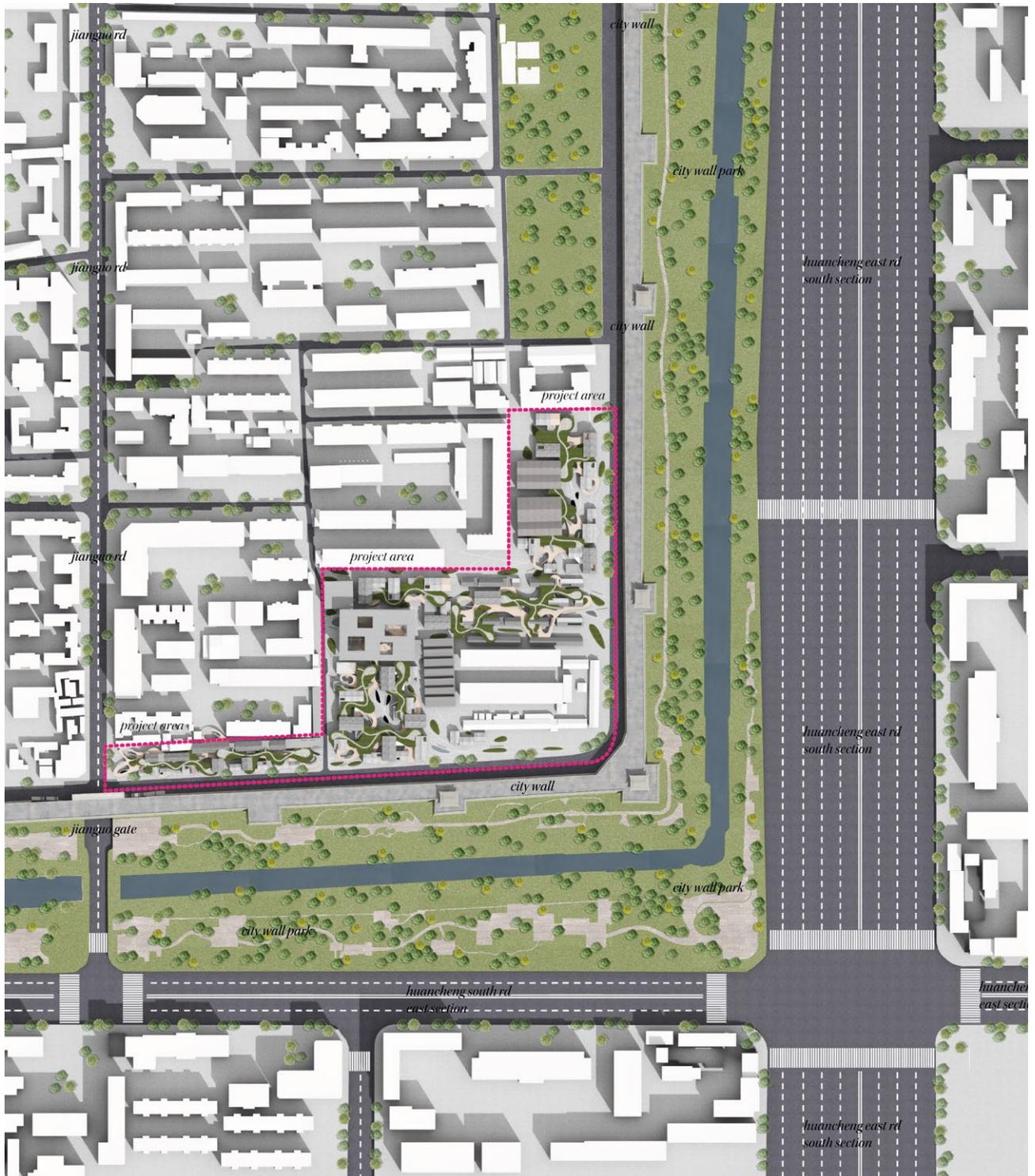
*In the definition of the masterplan it was given a great deal of importance to the relationship with the context. The new project of intervention is untangled along the area, filling out openings and opening glimpses by building relationships with neighboring buildings. The idea of the project, or its subdivision in 3 layers, is also proposed in the design composition: plates that join new commercial spaces combined with recovered buildings, extend from gate to gate, fragment along the path and create different situations along all the area. The applied organic forms allow to adapt easily to the rigid and orthogonal ones of the existing buildings, creating open spaces alternating with the closed ones. The spatial fragmentation given by the plates and the small buildings designed for the economic relationship, are arranged along the whole lot allowing the residents to interact continuously with the different spaces, to the traders to have available an attractive area suited to their needs and visitors to take part in an unrepeatable experience anywhere else in the city.*

*In the preliminary definition of the master plan, it was necessary to study the formal and compositional relationship of the 3 layers applied to the project.*

*The first layer provides for the composition and distribution of new elements, arranged in a fragmented way within the context but at the same time arranged to create spaces of relationship between citizens, opportunities for economic interaction between merchant and passer-by, open and semi-enclosed courts as spaces of freedom.*

*Some of the new facilities are also designed to create internal continuity and allow sellers to freely combine their space. Many of the buildings are also recovered to enhance the context and not lose the relationship with the identity of the area.*

*The second layer takes on more organic forms, adapts to the exi-*



*project overview/ context relationship*



*sting and creates relationships with the new buildings.*

*The spaces that are created are mainly arranged as an element of cultural relationship, in which pavilions, greenhouses, shops and restaurants create the identity relationship with the place. The organic forms lead the visitor along the whole project area allowing to relate with the different parts.*

*The last layer is also organic but defined by green terraces, hanging gardens, greenhouses, and entertainment spaces.*

*All you need to create a relationship with the place and allow visitors to live an experience in a particular part of the city.*



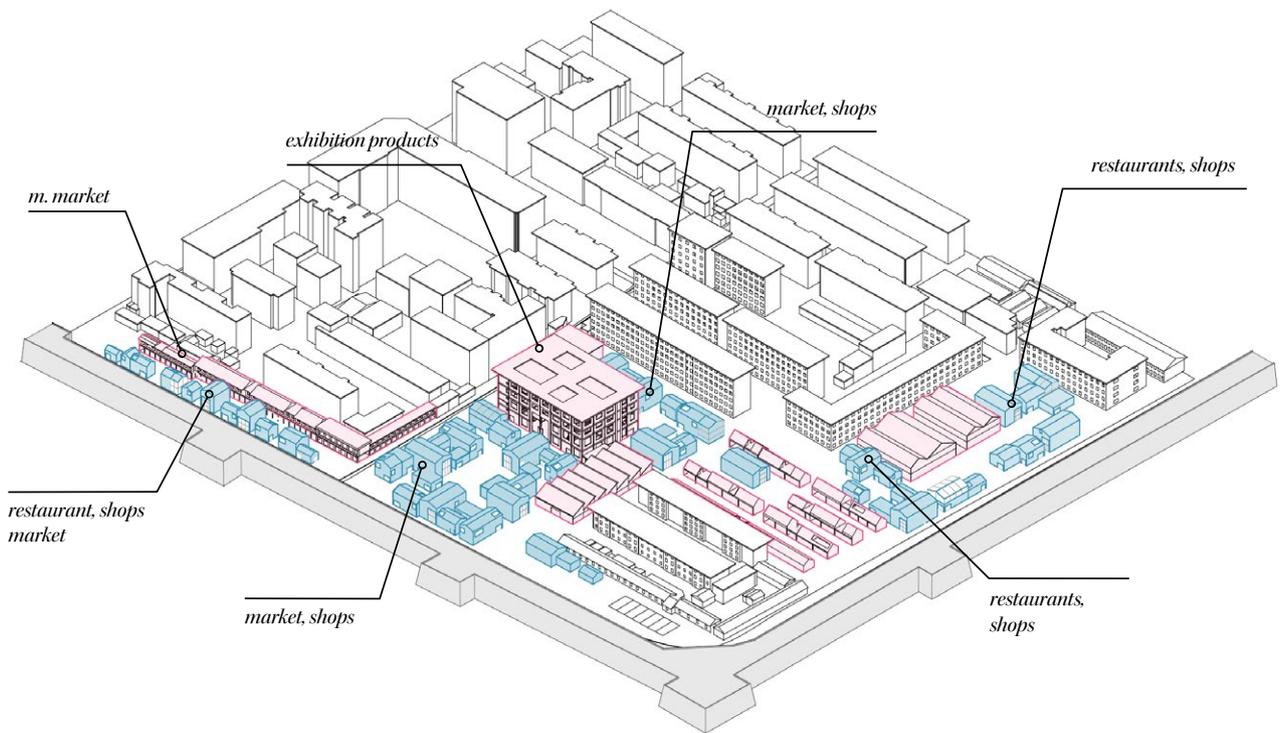
*View of the main square*



*View of the market complex*



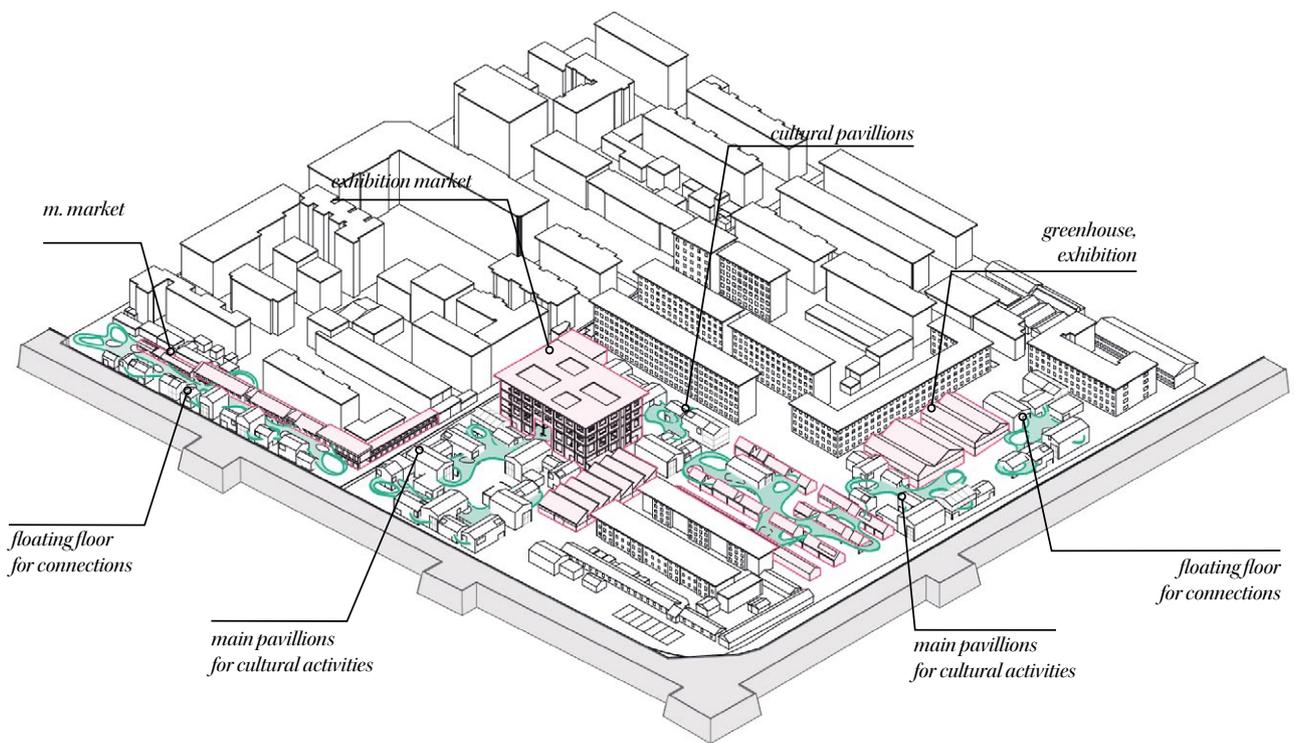
*View of the inner courtyards*



*1 layer / economy relationship*



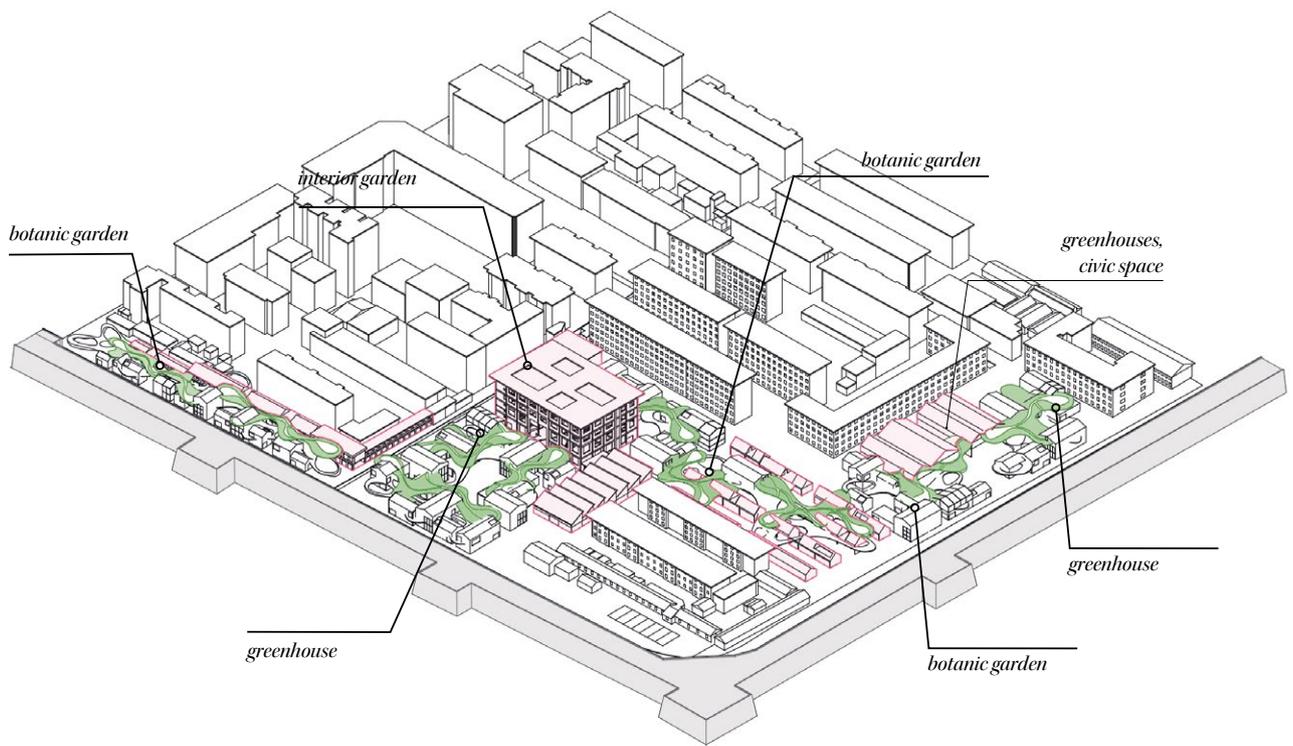
*economy interactions*



*2 layer / cultural relationship*



*cultural interactions*



*3 layer / experience relationship*



*experience interactions*

### 4.3 Shape definition

*The form of the new entries in the project area is based on the historical context of San Xue. The historical area consists of a composition of courts that have undergone a formal evolution over time to adapt to the needs of citizens.*

*The temporal variation recorded from 2006 to 2017, shows how the conformation of the interior spaces of the courts has undergone expansions, modifications of façade portions, spatial arrangement and material composition.*

*The concept of spatial interpretation of the courts has been reinterpreted in the urban configuration of the project.*

*The new volumes have been positioned on the lot considering the historical conformation of the courts and through new combinations, the volumes have been adapted to the commercial requirements required. The new urban fabric then recalls the historical context, through the creation of short and narrow streets that recall the typical composition of the Chinese public space.*



reference historical context \_ San Xue street



courtyards boundary

- ← courtyard boundary
- courtyards site



courtyards shape

- ← courtyard property
- buildings



property

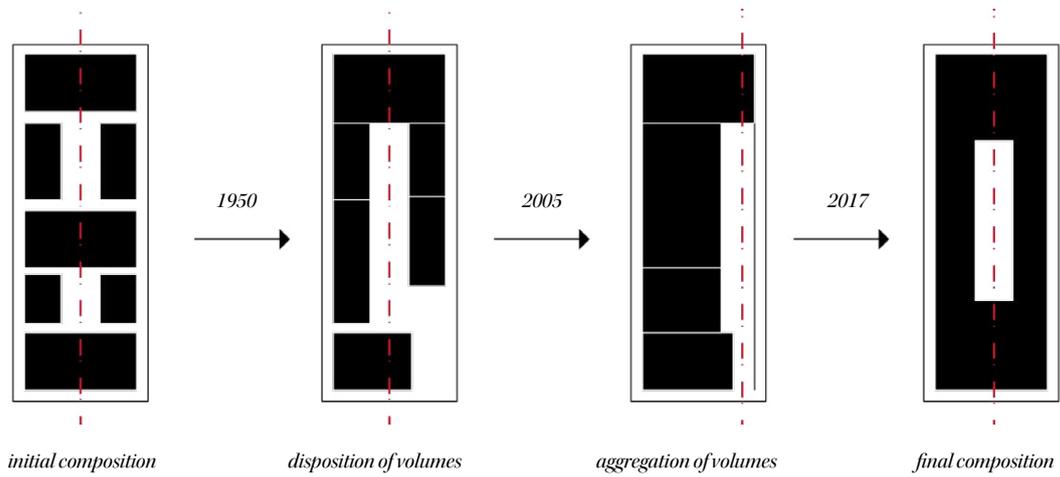
- common property
- private property



floors

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

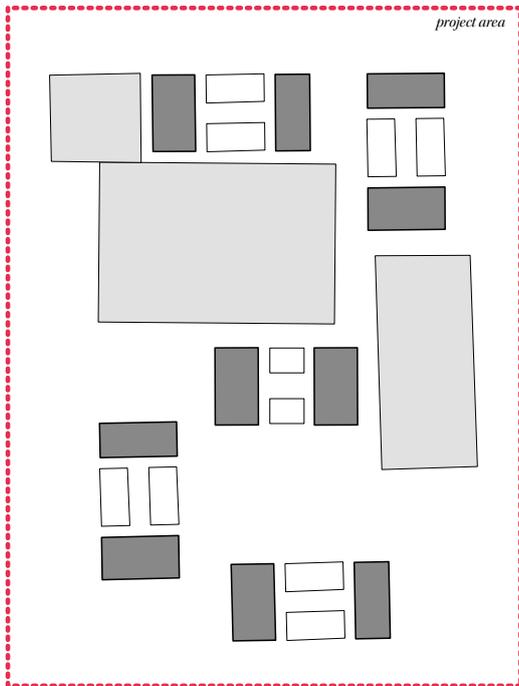
*San Xue historical site \_general scheme of time evolution of courtyards*



*example of evolution of courtyards during the years*

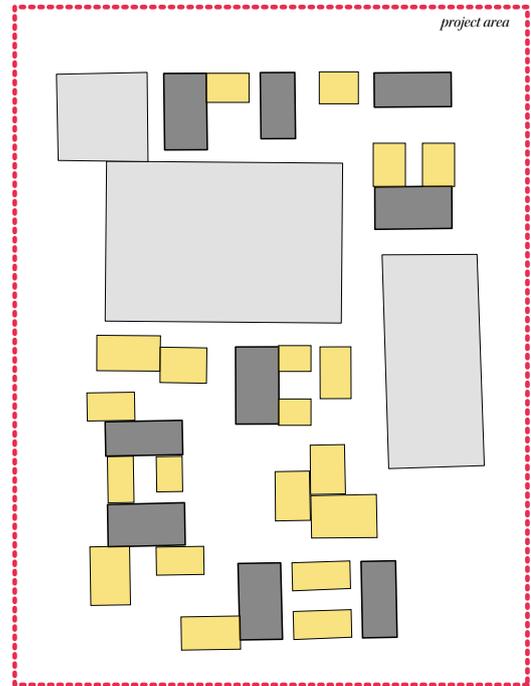


*interpretation of site project*



*traditional blocks composition*

- existing building
- traditional volume



*new blocks composition*

- existing building
- traditional volume
- new volume aggregation



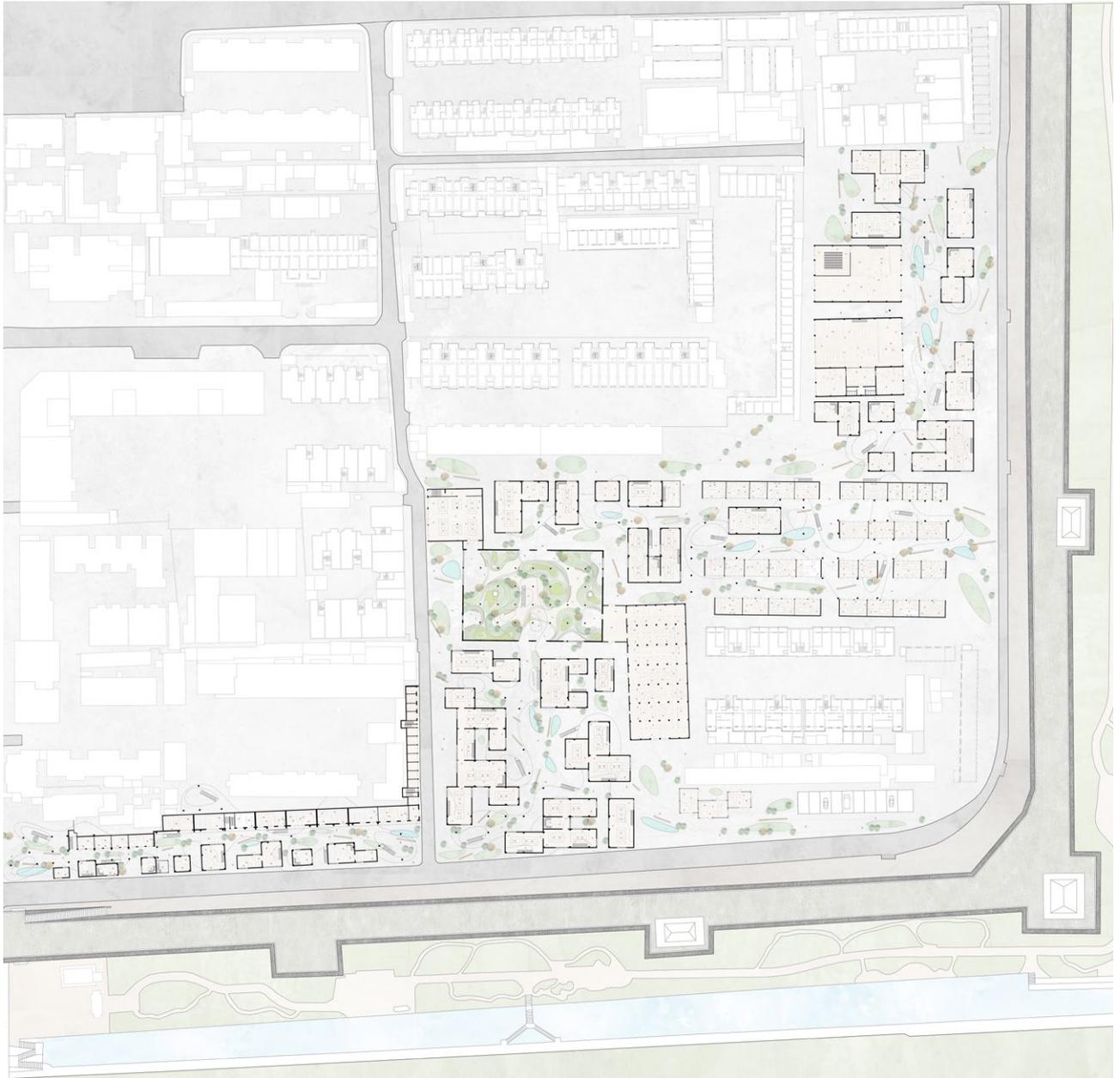
*view of the new combination of volumes*

#### 4.4 Design definition

*As already mentioned above, the composition of the forms plays on the relationship between fluid and organic spaces and rigid and fragmented spaces arranged throughout the project area. The relationship with the walls is continuous allowing people to live horizontally, at the same height and throughout the area, the relationship with the city's historic walls. In the functional definition of the project, most of the area is set up for the economic sale of products through the rigid structures of the area. The main entrance area performs an attractive function through restaurants, shops and some areas for the sale of products. The central area represents the heart of the project, where existing and new functions combine to create a market area open to all. The old factories are instead turning into educational spaces and for entertainment.*



*View of the street market area*



Ground floor plan

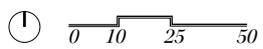




*View from the platform*



*1st floor plan*

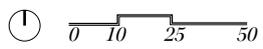




*View of the interior garden*



2nd floor plan

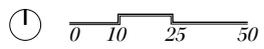




*View from the platform*



3rd floor plan





*View from the sky garden*



4th floor plan





*View over the old fabrics*



*Roof view plan*



## 4.5 Design focus area 1

*The initial part of the project is mainly defined by spaces that are able to attract the visitor and understand the characteristics and the general identity of the context.*

*The existing buildings that make up the main front have been re-designed to new functions, mainly shops and restaurants. On the opposite front, new buildings are arranged in a fragmented way, leaving the possibility to glimpse in evergreen with the city walls.*

*The new spaces are mainly of a commercial nature. The organic forms placed above allow the light to penetrate the lower level. Commercial and cultural spaces are arranged on the first floor while botanical gardens on the top floor.*



Section E-E'

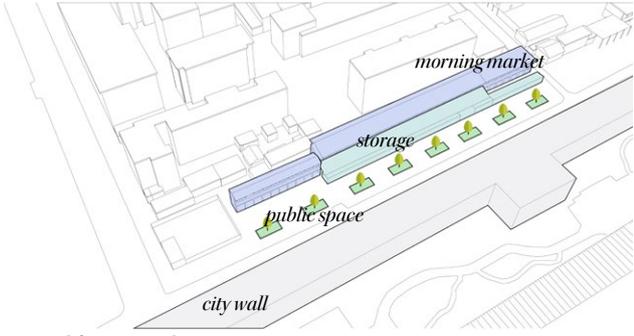
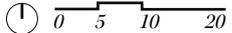


Bird view

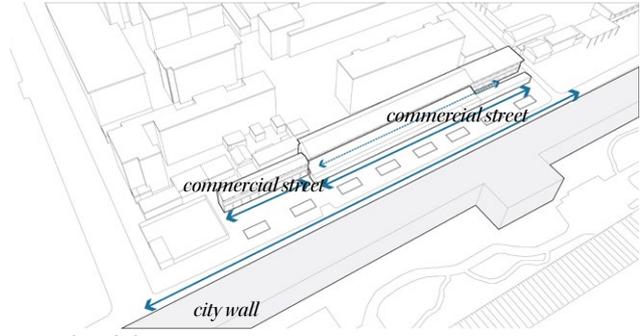




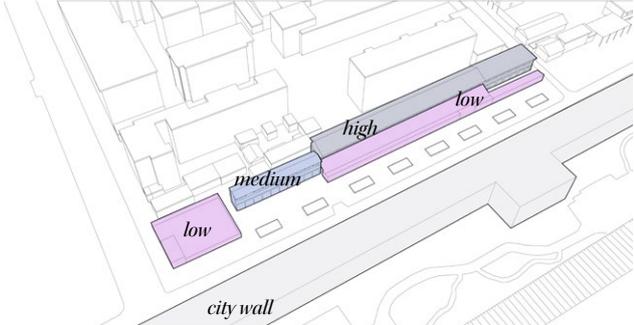
groundfloor plan of the original situation



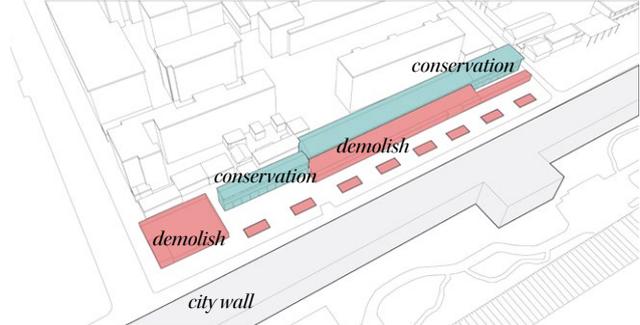
actual functional composition



actual mobility composition



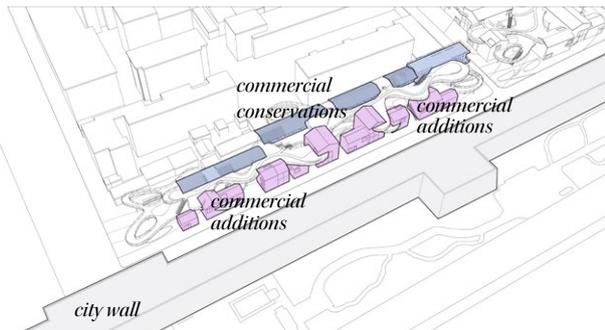
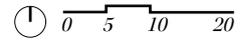
actual quality of the buildings



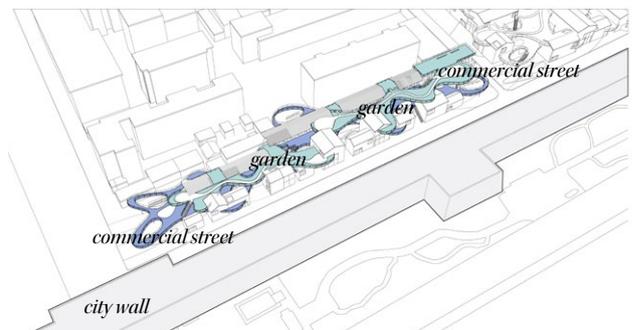
demolition and conservation



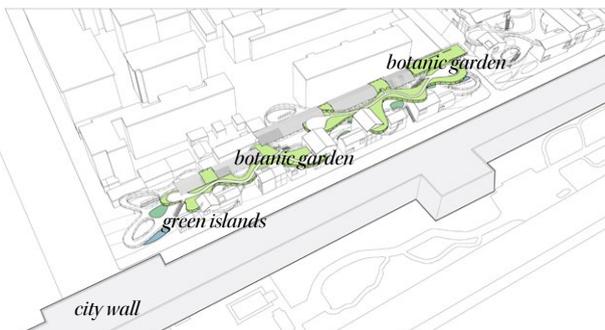
ground floor plan for the new project solution



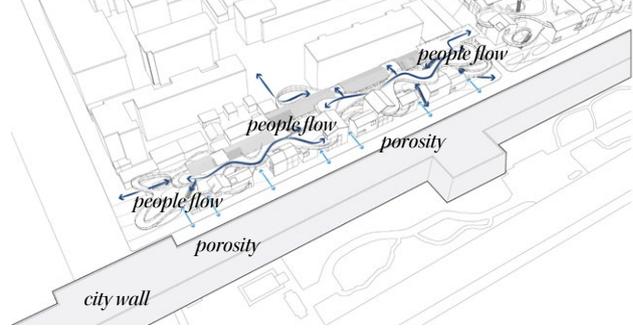
functional program



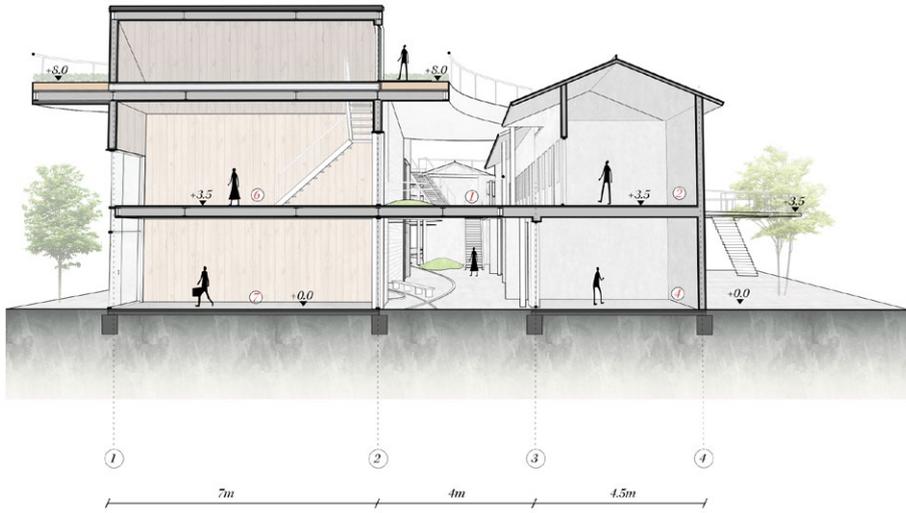
platforms functions



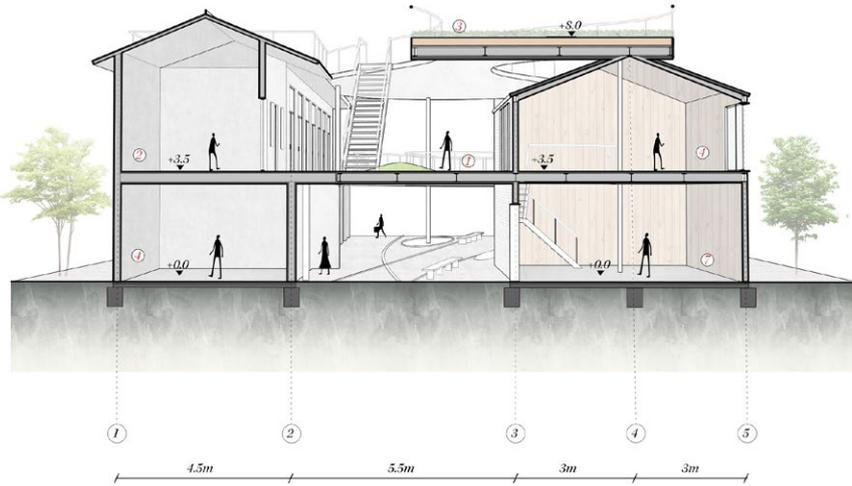
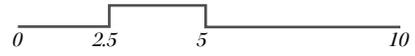
green distribution



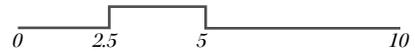
mobility and relationships

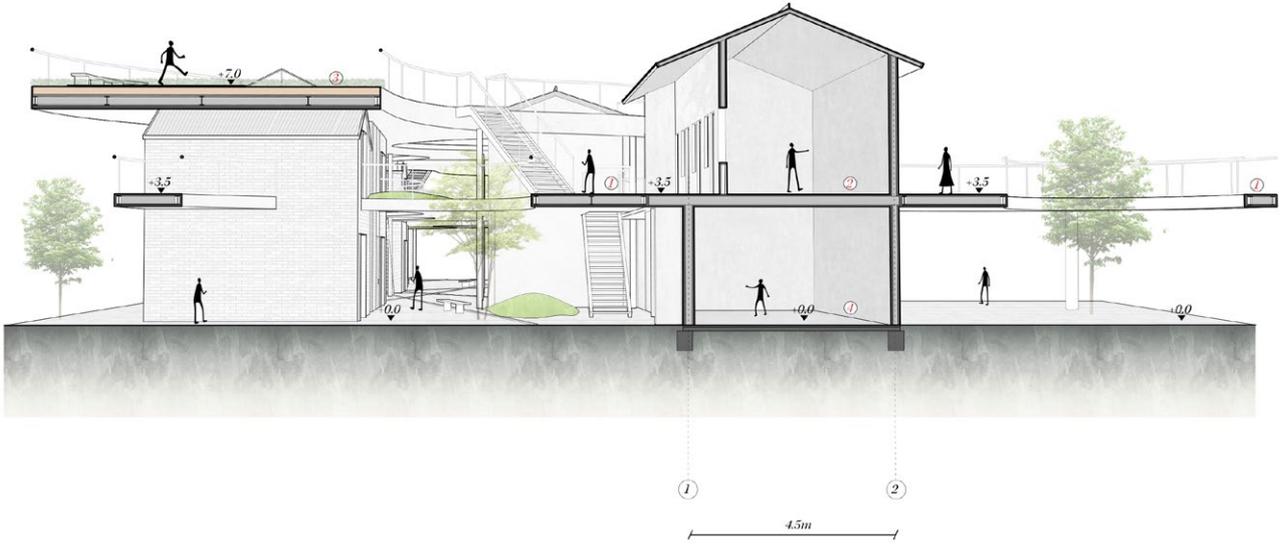


Section A-A'

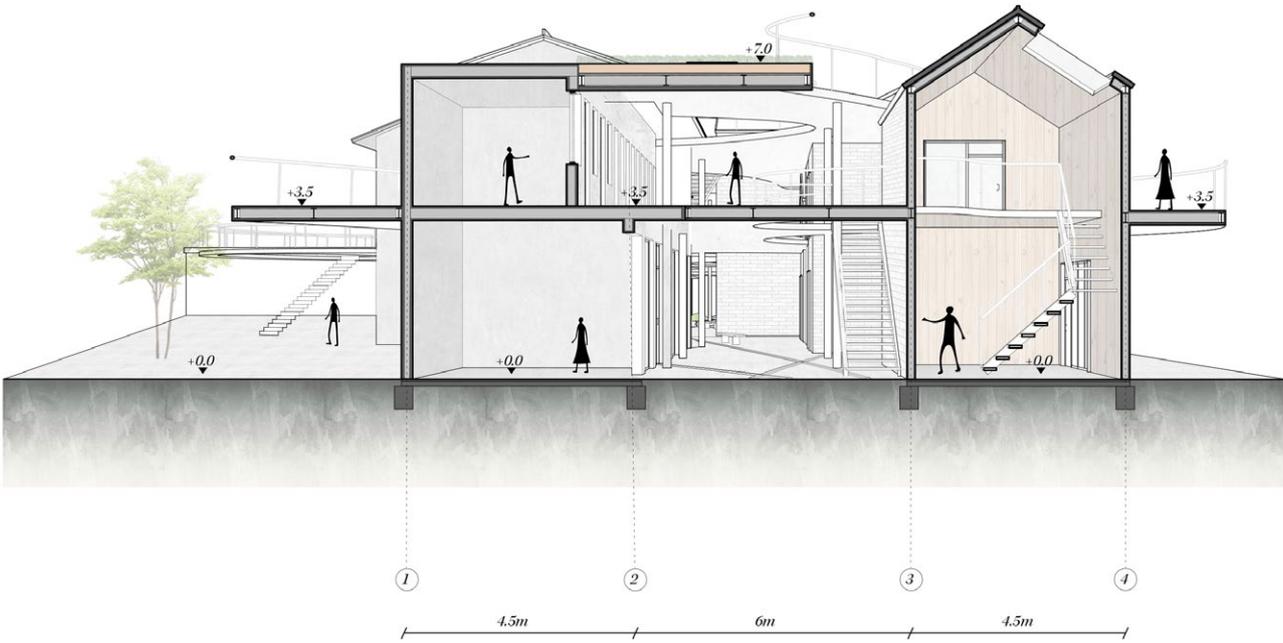
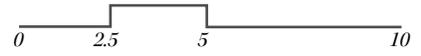


Section B-B'

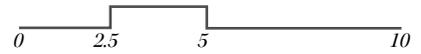




Section C-C'



Section D-D'



## 4.6 Design focus area 2

*The second area represents the heart of the project, both formally and functionally. The new commercial spaces arranged on the floor form adjoining clusters, characterized by open courts and a flexible arrangement that allows merchants to move and freely compose the sales space.*

*People can thus move on different levels connected in more points. The central space, now decommissioned, has instead been transformed into a space for the specialized sale of products.*

*The existing floors have been cut and inside inserted spaces that fit the existing structure and grow in height creating a central void. The spaces completely in glass, letting light pass through the openings of existing walls.*

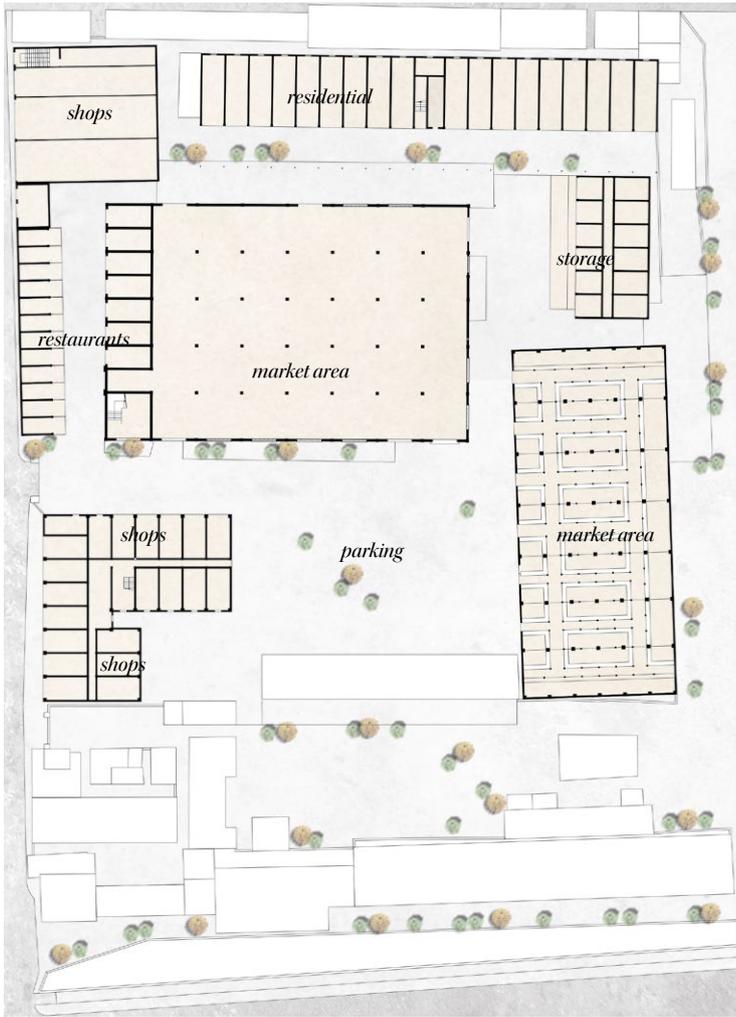


Section B-B'



Bird view/functional detail





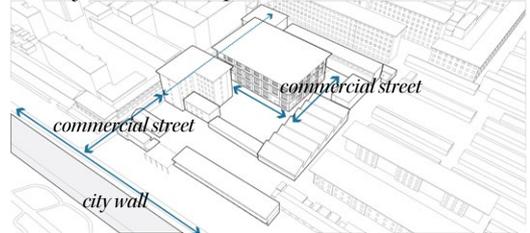
groundfloor plan of the original situation



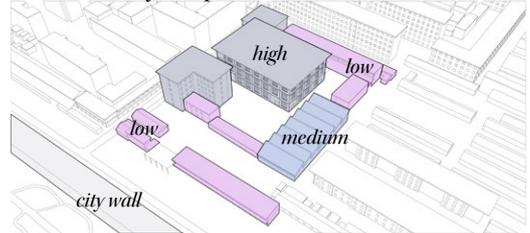
0 5 10 20



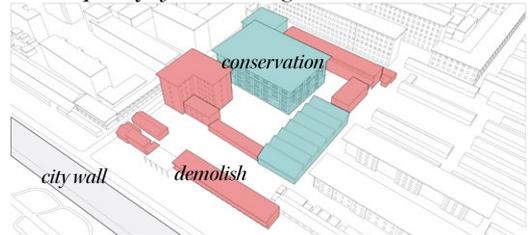
actual functional composition



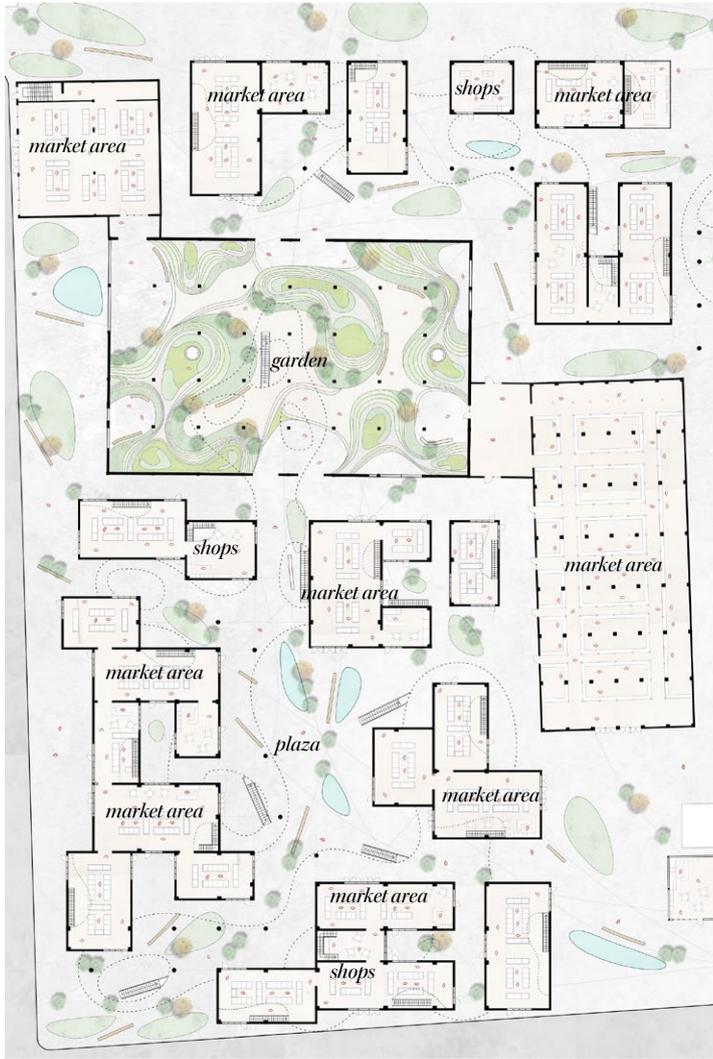
actual mobility composition



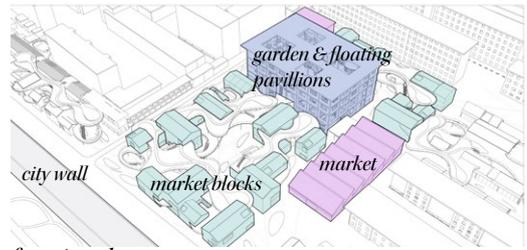
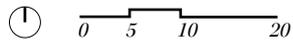
actual quality of the buildings



demolition and conservation



groundfloor plan for the new project solution



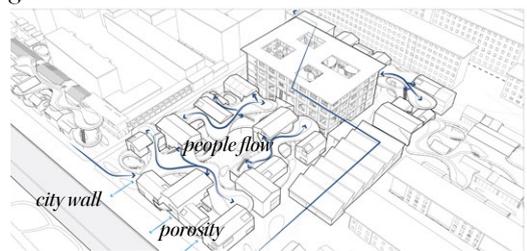
functional program



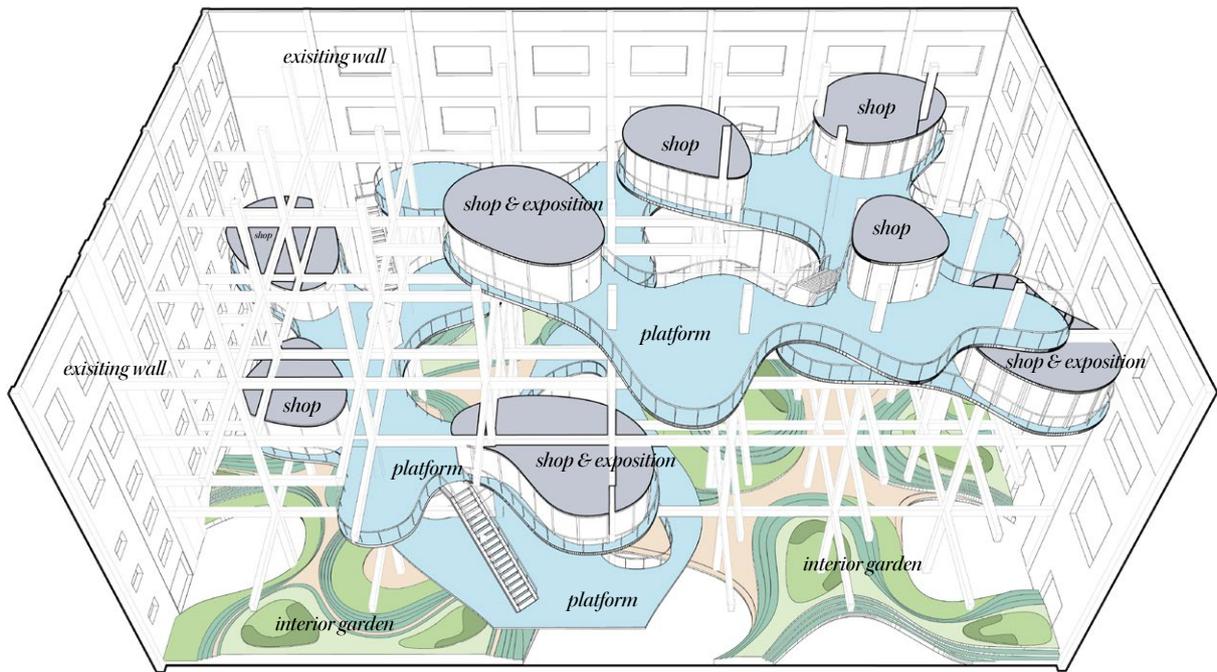
platforms functions



green distribution



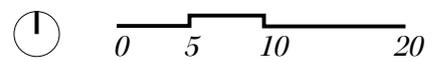
mobility and relationships



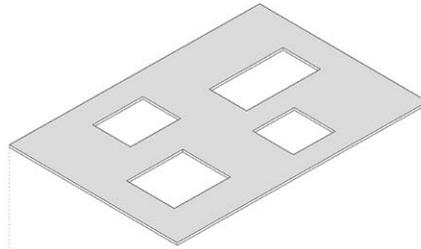
central building functional composition



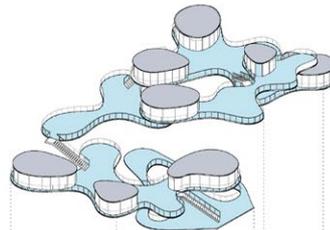
Section D-D'



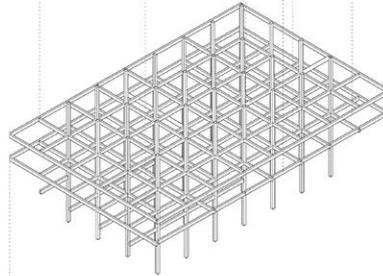
*roof*



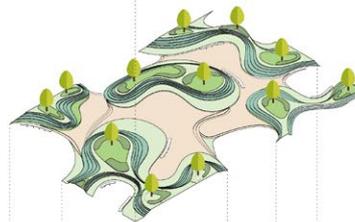
*platforms &  
shops/ exposition*



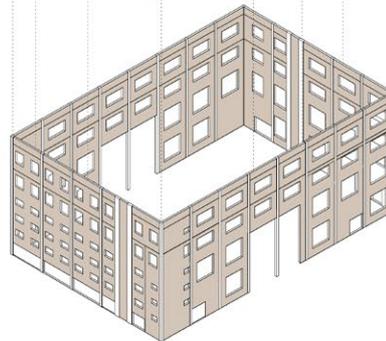
*existing structure*



*interior garden*



*existing walls*



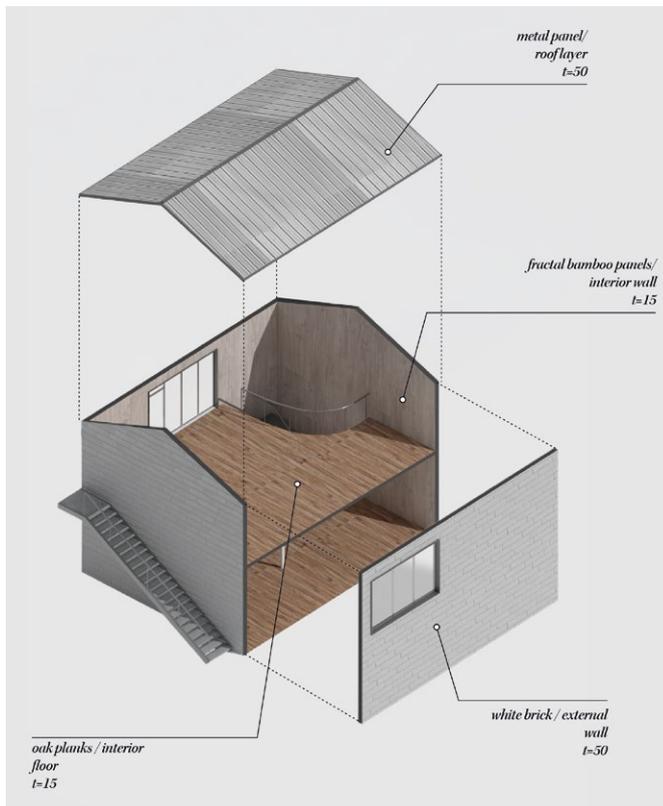
*explode elements composition*

## 4.4 Technical design

*The composition of the volumes, the connecting platforms and the floors hosting the green terraces have been studied in detail for the energetic optimization and for the careful choice of materials.*

*The construction materials chosen mainly concern steel structures and only in the case of regeneration of existing volumes, an intervention is favored through the use of brick or reinforced concrete.*

*The facade materials of the new volumes are the light brick for the structures used for the market and the use of stone in the case of the pavilions with cultural functions. The interiors have been treated preferring wood.*



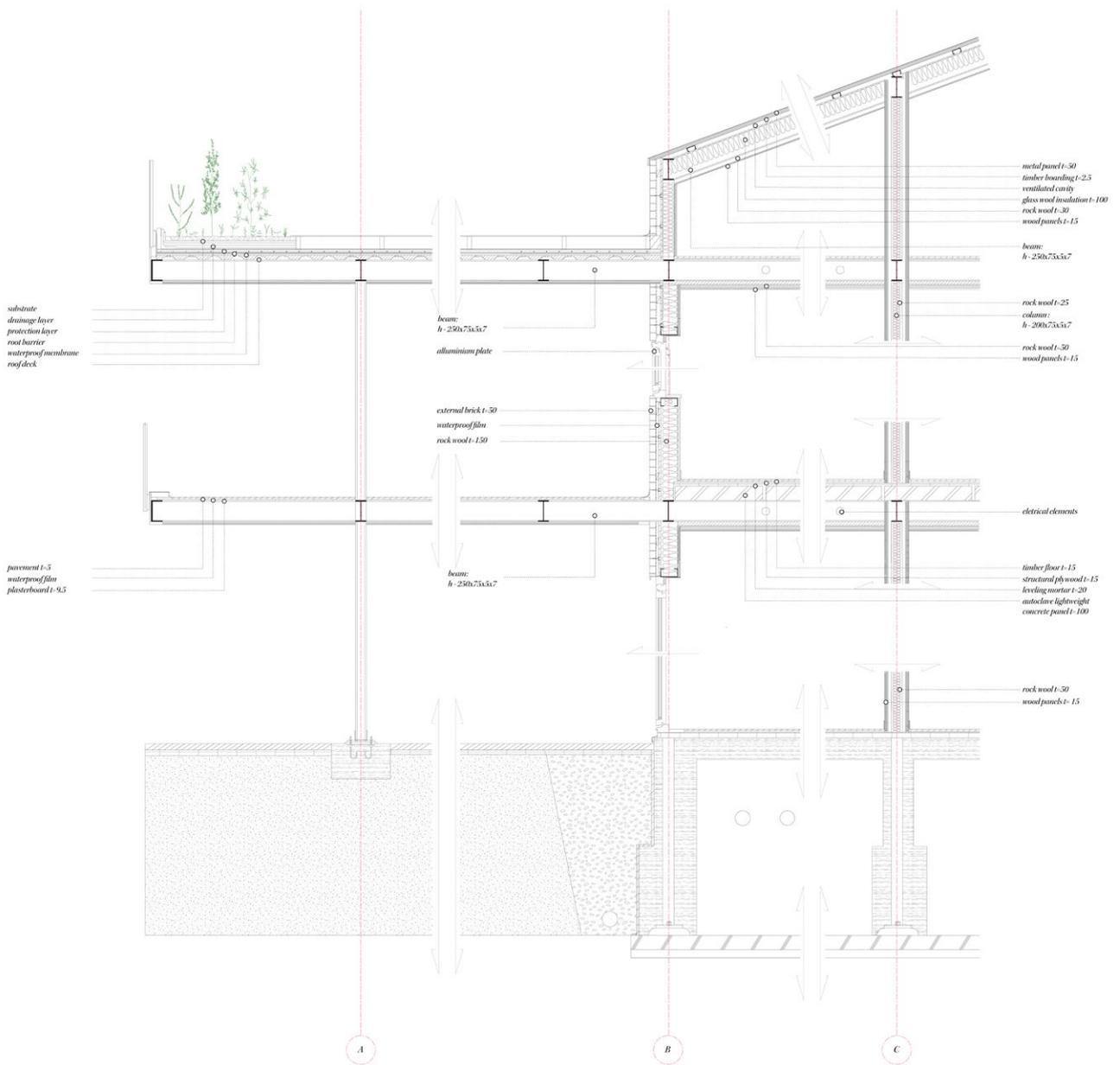
*composition of interior material*



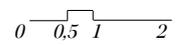
*shop interior proposal*



*shop interior proposal*



Construction detail



# 05

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