

BORDERS

TRANSFORMING FORGOTTEN LINES
| The case of a divided Mitrovica in Kosovo |

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SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN
POLITECNICO DI MILANO

"We are not defined by our borders, but by our bonds".
- BARACK OBAMA -

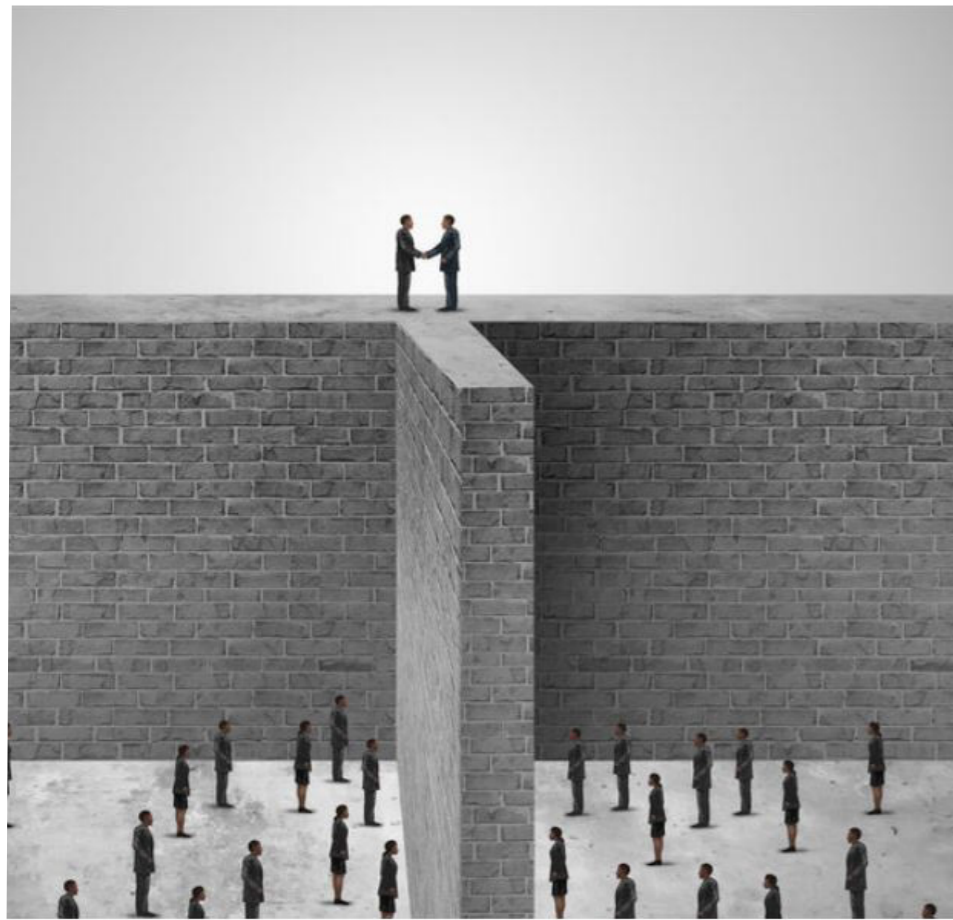


*picture taken from the archives of the Kosovo War of 1999

BRIEF

Borders must be bridges for the humankind, and connections between our civilizations; however, what we have seen during the last decades is something completely different. Borders around the world have become a symbol of conflict, racism, fear, inequity, and division. One single line could divide between opportunity and hope and poverty and oblivion.

What if we change that concept through architecture?

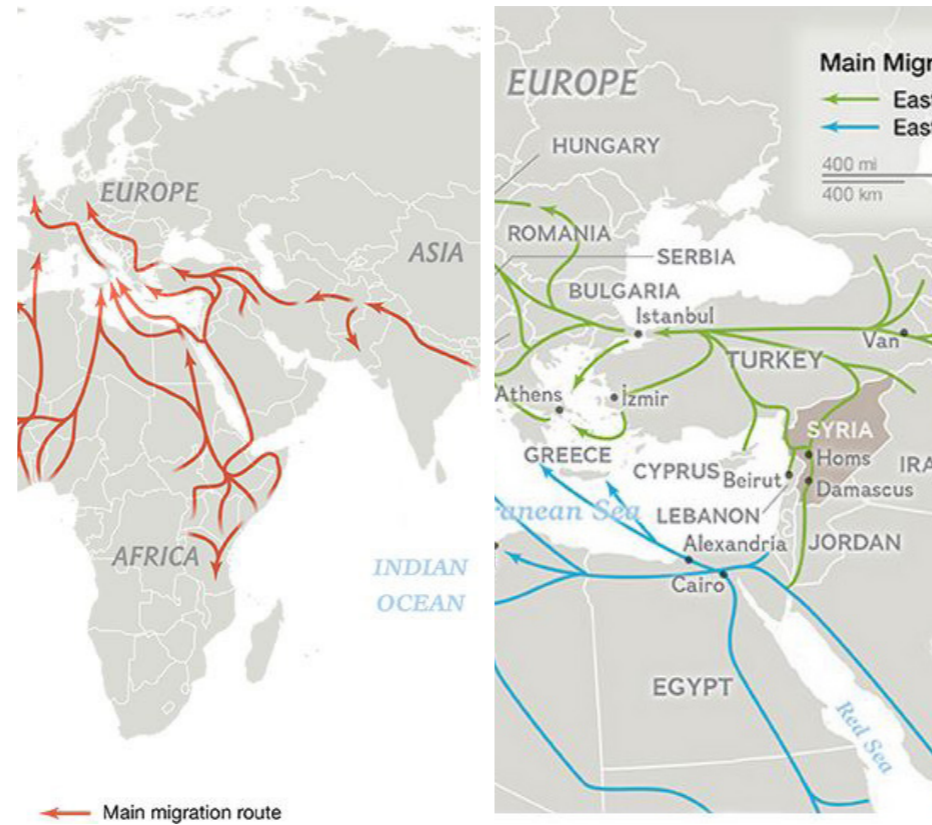


The Problem

Borders urgently need to be transformed.

What comes to the mind of people when they talk about borders? Around the world, borders have a negative connotation. Usually, international crossings are witness of abusive immigration forces, restrictive laws, lack of human rights, spots of inequity, and people margined by racism, cultural differences, language and economic issues.

By the other side, the pandemic has caused the international travel to be limited too severely. This could also create a worse scenario for immigration, foreign travel and for the meaning of crossing borders around the globe. The humankind faces a scenario where borders are seen as a place of threat. Many politicians and people use them as a symbol of division, a justified reason of discrimination and nationalist ideologies, and a place to blame immigrants for the domestic problems.



The immigration factor

But there is another side of the story. The borders across the world are the scenario of multiple movements of migration during the last decades. These flows show that international crossings are more than just lines dividing two nations; they are cultural and economic spots where different cultures converge, where business exchange happens, and where cities, towns and villages are home for millions of migrants to live every year.

According to the UN, there is an estimation of 279 millions of migrants that were moving around the world in 2019. Migrants moved through international crossings by land, sea or air. Those crossings are witness of transcendental cultural changes and political issues. For many politicians and groups, borders are equal to illegal immigration, that is why we have seen an increase of initiatives to reinforce those crossings with more surveillance, special forces and restricted laws, but not as spots of economic and cultural growth, not from a human and social perspective, and not as bridges of opportunity to improve lifestyle of people, refugees, and entrepreneurs which could boost these regional economies.



Forgotten lines

From the architectural and social perspective, international borders have become threats in forgotten regions. Cities, communities and villages face deep problems like the lack of essential services, cities with highest rate crime, places under the control of powerful criminal organizations for human-trafficking and control drug routes, as well as refugee camps in crisis.

By the same way, corruption and nationalism have transformed those borders into red spots of war where everyday people are living in a dystopian reality. Just as a quick example, one of the most marginalized borders in the world is the one between Mexico and the US. Think of the irony; California is one of the wealthiest states of the US, where lifestyle in San Francisco or LA allows to pay the highest mortgage nationwide. Just a few kilometers from the border is located Tijuana in the Mexican's side with some of the poorest neighborhoods in the country, and the highest crime rates from all the continent.

Architecture has played a crucial role in transforming cities, societies and problems into solutions. What if we re-think borders? What if we use architecture as a tool to bring fresh ideas and reform these lines into bridges of opportunity, prosperity and cultural convergence?

THE CHALLENGE

To transform a crossing border through a visionary architectural project with a human perspective.

To explore ideas that change the concept of a crossing border and bring fresh ideas about how borders between nations are not threats, but bridges of opportunities and growth, and bridges for our humankind.

THE PURPOSE

To design an architectural project able to transform a crossing border, to join cultures, people, and create a vital spot for economic growth for all sides.

To transform the crossing border into a place that unites and promotes cultural diversity. At the same time, the project will create a friendly atmosphere for the encounter of two or more nations, and an attraction for business and different economic sectors.

PROJECT CRITERIA

Promote cultural diversity

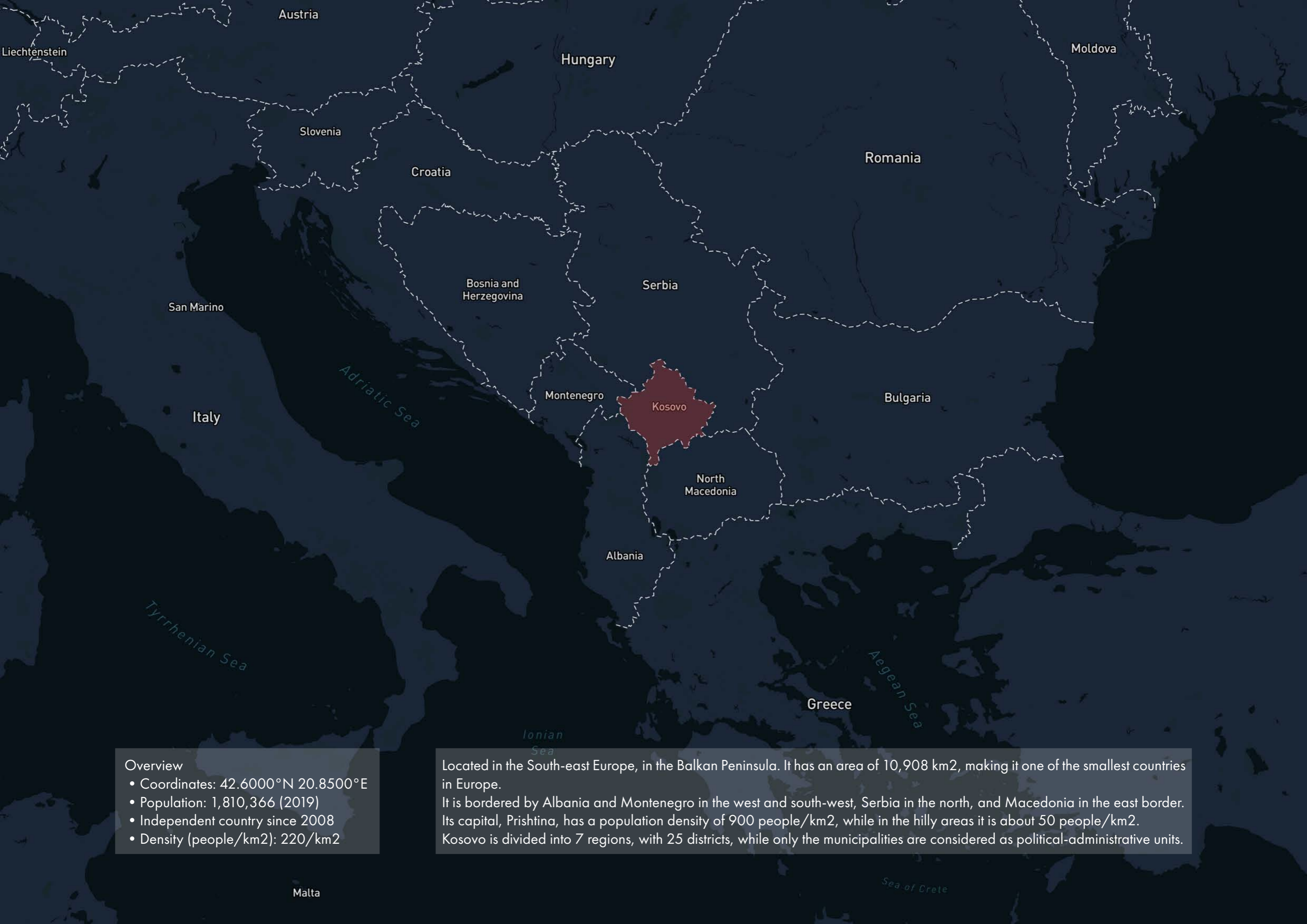
Create bridges between nations, cultures and languages.

Avoid the stigma of walls, limits and divisions.

Innovative programme and original architectural design.

Create an attractive spot for investors, governments and entrepreneurs.





Overview

- Coordinates: 42.6000°N 20.8500°E
- Population: 1,810,366 (2019)
- Independent country since 2008
- Density (people/km²): 220/km²

Located in the South-east Europe, in the Balkan Peninsula. It has an area of 10,908 km², making it one of the smallest countries in Europe.

It is bordered by Albania and Montenegro in the west and south-west, Serbia in the north, and Macedonia in the east border. Its capital, Prishtina, has a population density of 900 people/km², while in the hilly areas it is about 50 people/km². Kosovo is divided into 7 regions, with 25 districts, while only the municipalities are considered as political-administrative units.

YUGOSLAVIA

A former federal republic in south-eastern Europe, in the Balkans.

THEN AND NOW - a brief history

1974

Kosovo was granted extended autonomy, enabling it to have its very own organization, gathering and legal executive framework.

1981

Massive demonstrations took place in the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo, an area of Yugoslavia inhabited mainly by ethnic Albanians, to demand republican status within the Yugoslav Federation

1989

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic utilizes the 600th commemoration of the Battle of Kosovo, when the Ottomans defeated the Serbs, to warn that Serbs will never yield control of the area. He begins stripping ceaselessly its autonomy.

1990

Ethnic Albanian administrators declare Kosovo independent. Belgrade dissolves Kosovo's autonomous assembly.

1998

Fighting between the Kosovo Liberation Army and Serbian forces begins. Serbia conducted a brutal counterinsurgency campaign that resulted in massacres and massive expulsions of ethnic Albanians (some 800,000 ethnic Albanians were forced from their homes in Kosovo.)

1999

March 18-19 - Peace talks in France end in failure. March 24 - NATO begins bombing Yugoslavia. June 10 - Slobodan Milosevic agrees to withdraw troops from Kosovo and NATO ends bombing. About 45,000 NATO troops begin entering Kosovo a day later as Serbian forces pull out. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 placed Kosovo under a transitional administration, the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), pending a determination of Kosovo's future status.

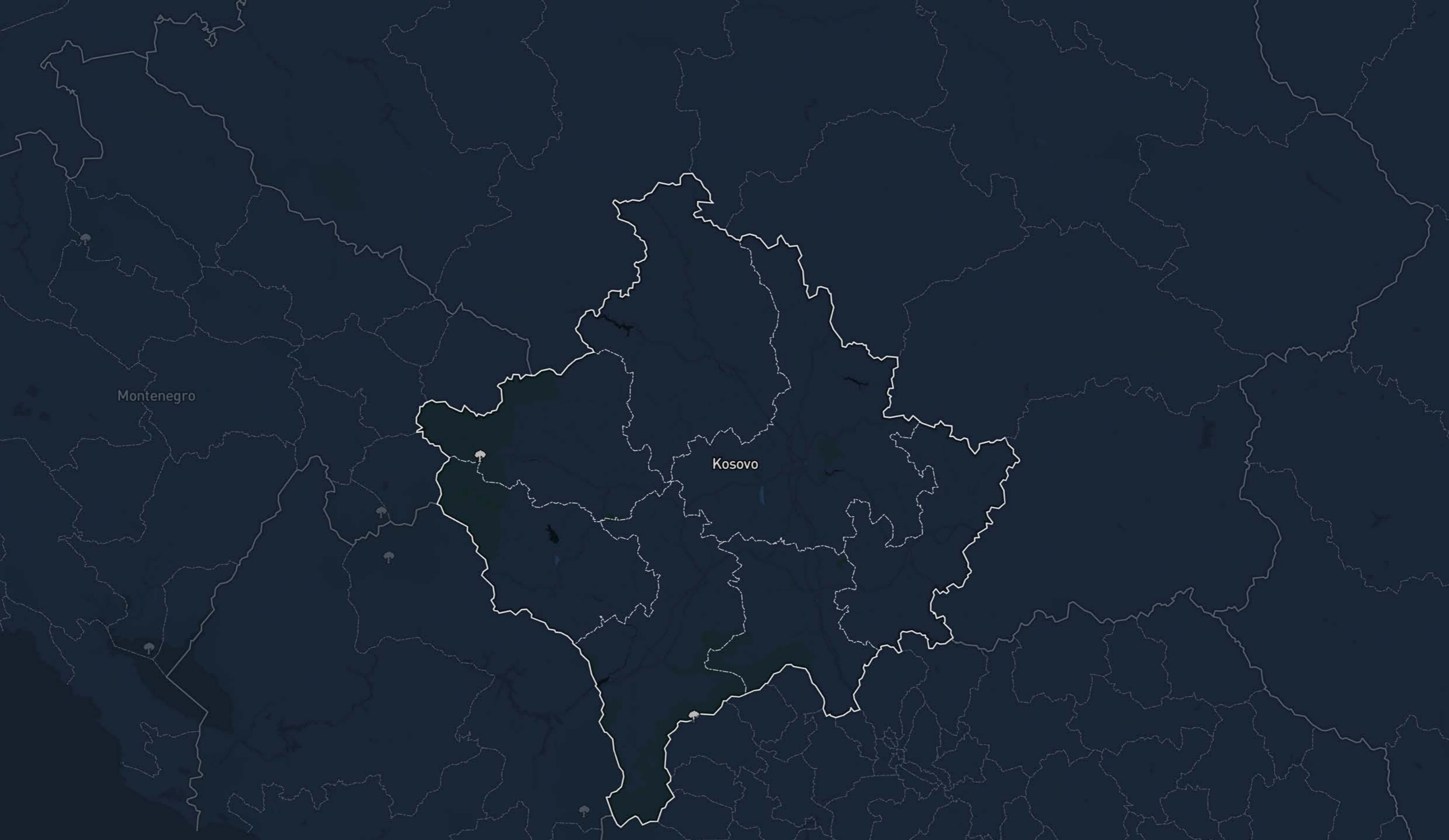
2008

Kosovo declares independence. Serbia says declaration is illegal. Europe's major powers and the United States recognize the independence.

Yugoslavia - formed as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes -end of First World War. It comprised Serbia, Montenegro and the former South Slavic provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and took the name of Yugoslavia (the land of the Southern Slavs) in 1929, its capital was Belgrade.

After the II. World War, during which Yugoslavia was invaded by Nazi Germany, following the Partisans led anti-fascist struggle, the country emerged as a socialist federal republic under Marshal Josip Broz Tito. Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia consisted of six republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) and two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo).





Montenegro

Kosovo

DEMOGRAPHICS (estimates taken from year 2019)

KOSOVO
Population 1,810,366
[Natality 25,795 -
Deaths 10,501]
Natural growth 15,284

[International Emigration (neto) -28,845
National migration (from one city to another) 9,132]
Overall growth -28,845
with a decrease on the residential population
of Kosovo by 13,551.

Age Structure
0-14 years 25.8%
15-64 67.2%
65 and over 7.0%

Nationality
Kosovar/Kosovan
Major Ethnic Albanians 95%
Minor Ethnic Bosniaks 2%, Serbs 1%, others (Turks,
Gorani, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians) 2%

Language
Official - Albanian
Spoken - Albanian 95% ,
language of the minorities 5%

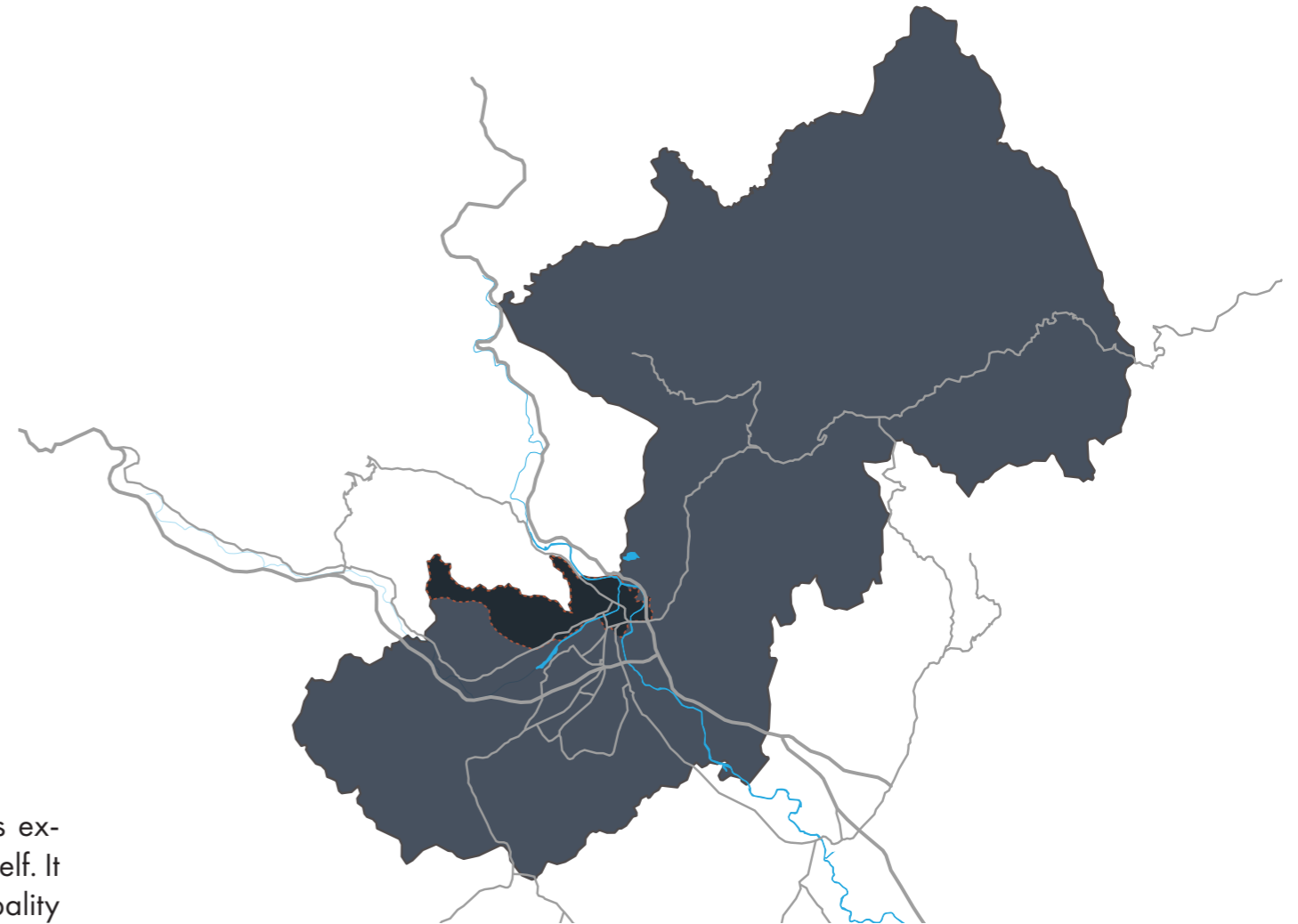
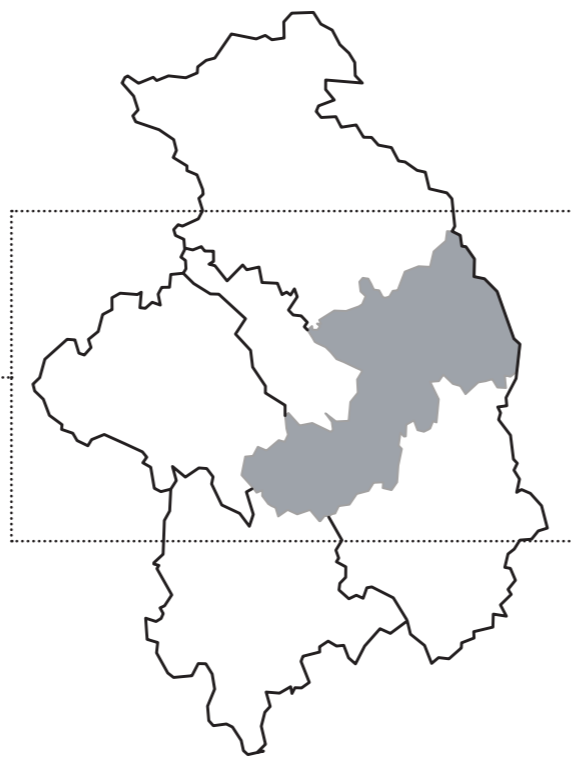
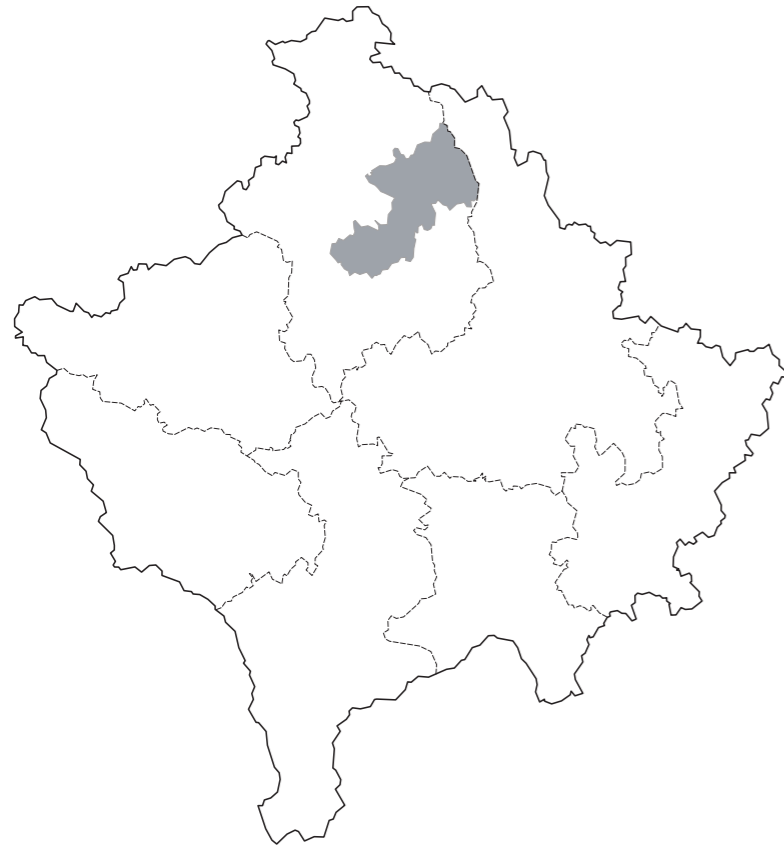
ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

Kosovo is divided into 7 regions, with 25 districts, while only the municipalities are considered as political-administrative units.

Kosovo's capital, Prishtina, has a population density of 900 people/km², while in the hilly areas it is about 50 people/km².

Mitrovica, as a region has 6 municipalities in total :Vushtrri, Skenderaj, Zvecan, Leposaviq, Zubin Potok and Mitrovica as the center of the region.

The border of the city of Mitrovica includes the city and 49 villages, with an area of 350 km².



Mitrovica throughout the recent years, has experienced changes to its original borders itself. It has undergone a division from one municipality to three separate ones, two of them proclaiming themselves as Serbian municipalities (Zvecan and Zubin Potok).



The border of Mitrovica municipality until 1987
Surface area 791km²



The border of Mitrovica municipality until 1993
Surface area 460km²



The border of Mitrovica municipality today
Surface area 350km²

XL CITY OF MITROVICA

Surface area 350km²

Population 71,601

(estimates taken from year 2011)

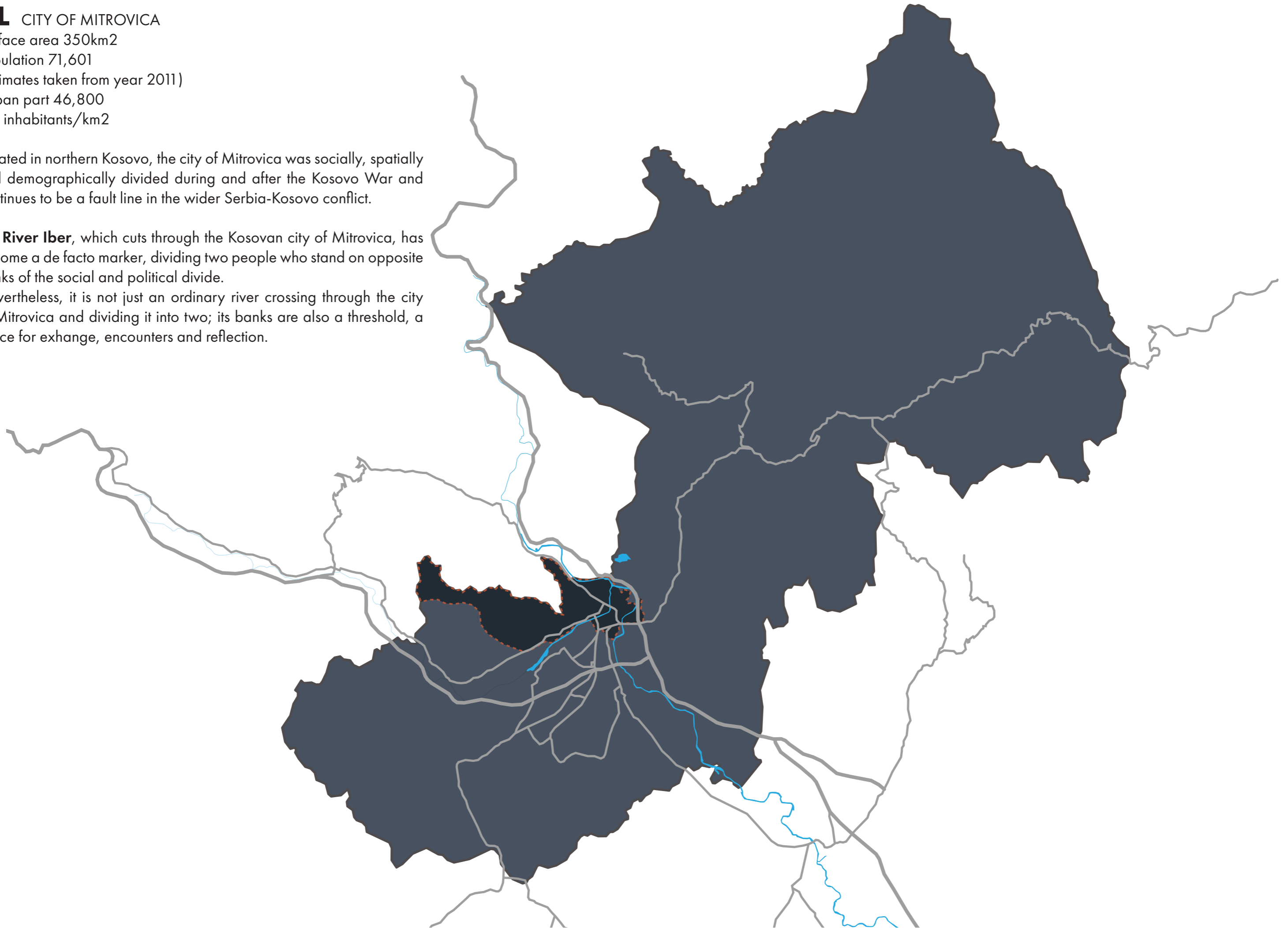
-urban part 46,800

213 inhabitants/km²

Located in northern Kosovo, the city of Mitrovica was socially, spatially and demographically divided during and after the Kosovo War and continues to be a fault line in the wider Serbia-Kosovo conflict.

The **River Iber**, which cuts through the Kosovan city of Mitrovica, has become a de facto marker, dividing two people who stand on opposite banks of the social and political divide.

Nevertheless, it is not just an ordinary river crossing through the city of Mitrovica and dividing it into two; its banks are also a threshold, a space for exchange, encounters and reflection.



L THE DIVISION OF MITROVICA

Focusing on Mitrovica as a post-war city, centring on the partitioning of Mitrovica, boundaries and divisions in the cityscape, governmentality and urban conflicts over peace, statehood and place-making, and frictional peacebuilding.



NORTH MITROVICA

SOUTH MITROVICA



M URBAN SPRAWL -
SOLIDS AND VOIDS

"All grids are fields, but not all fields are grids. One of the potentials of the field is to redefine the relation between figure and ground. If we think of the figure not as a demarcated object read against a stable field, but as an effect emerging from the field itself – as moments of intensity, as peaks or valley within a continuous field – then it might be possible to imagine figure and field as more closely allied.(...)"

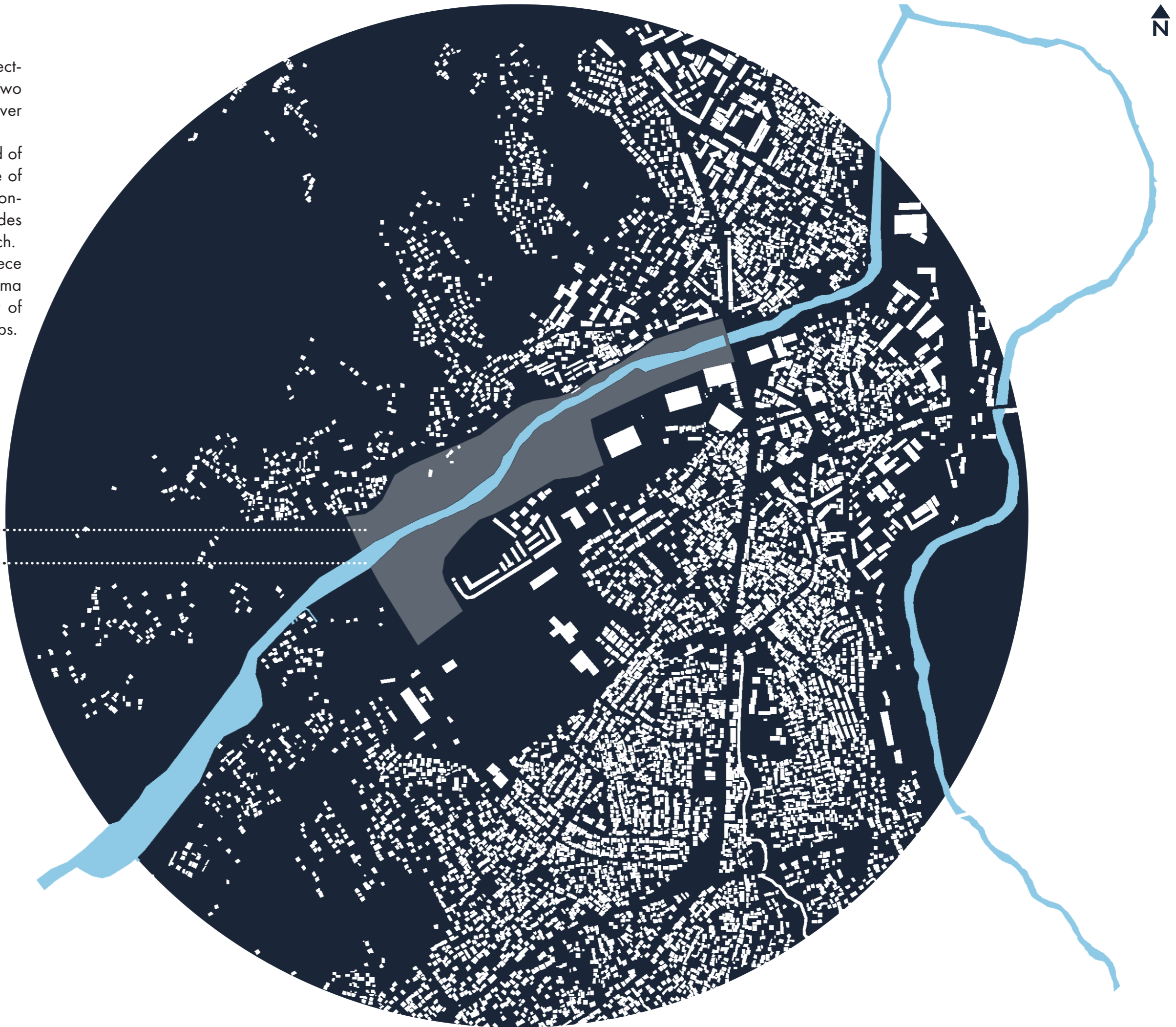


M SITE LOCATION

The site is an area comprised of about 40 hectares of barren land, tucked in between the two sides of the city of Mitrovica, divided by River Ibri.

There is a clear contrast in the figure ground of both sides that there is an untouched piece of land that leaves a clear opportunity to be considered as a potential for uniting these two sides through an urban and architectural approach. The reason for the negligence towards this piece of land is perhaps for the fact that the Roma community live in that area, a community of color that has always gone through hardships.

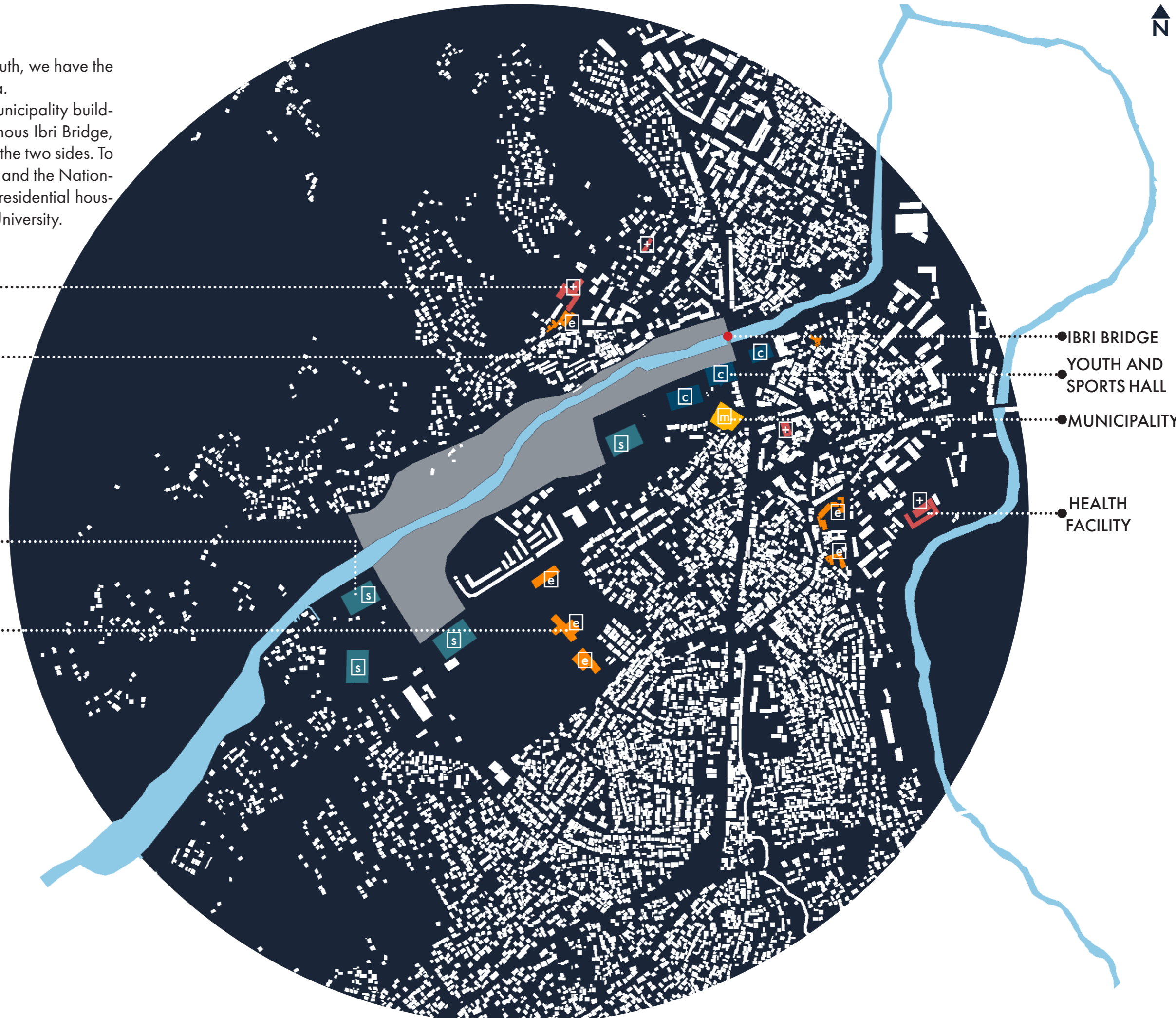
SITE ●
RIVER IBRI ●



M SITE SURROUNDINGS

In close proximity to the site, towards the south, we have the campus of the Public University of Mitrovica.

To the east, we have the City center, the Municipality building, the Youth and Sports Hall, and the famous Ibri Bridge, that is a node or landmark of the division of the two sides. To the west, we have the public "river beach", and the National Football stadium. To the north, we have residential houses, and the North Mitrovica Hospital and University.



NORTH MITROVICA
HOSPITAL

NORTH MITROVICA
PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL FOOTBALL
STADIUM

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY OF
MITROVICA

The university plot is destined
as a botanical garden

IBRI BRIDGE
YOUTH AND
SPORTS HALL

MUNICIPALITY

HEALTH
FACILITY

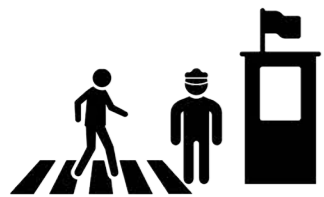
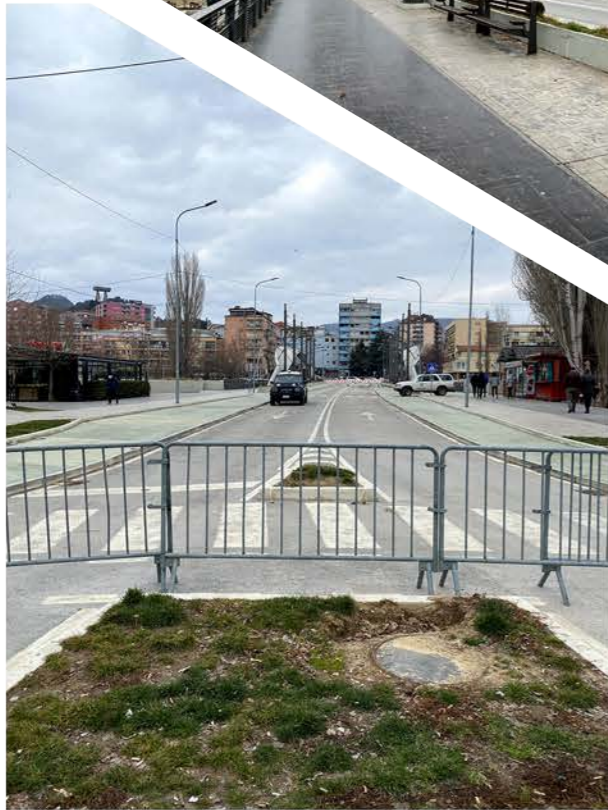
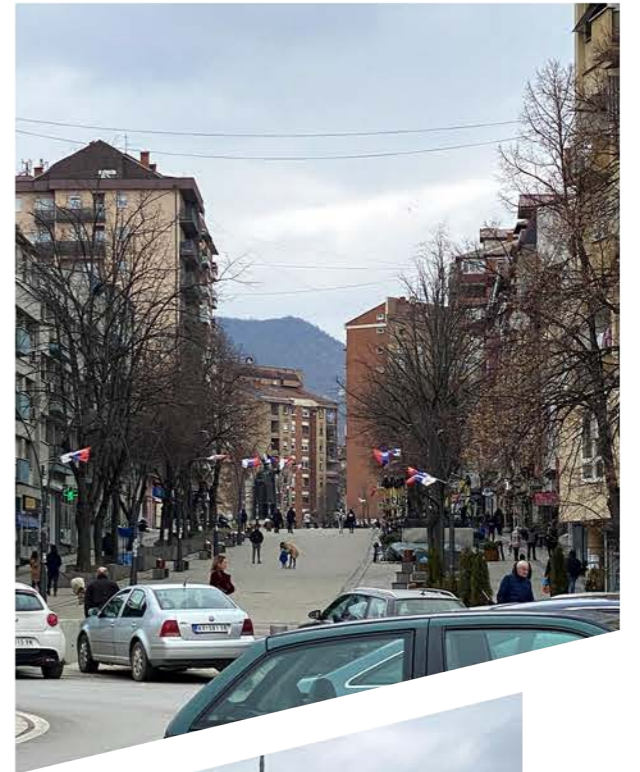
- [+] Health Facility [hospital, ambulance]
- [s] Sports Facility [stadium, football fields]
- [e] Educational Facility [university, school]
- [m] Municipality of Mitrovica
- [c] Cultural Facility [concert hall, sports field]

PHYSICAL PERCEPTION

VIEW, SOUND, SMELL,
AROUND THE RIVER IBRI



WATER POLLUTION
ILLEGAL WASTE DUMPING
SMELL OF SOIL














BORDER POLICE
COLD SURROUNDING
SOCIAL TENSION



ABANDONED BUILDINGS
NEGLECTED PUBLIC SPACES
POOR MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE

KEY POINT QUALITIES OF RIVER IBRI

NEGATIVE QUALITIES OF THE RIVER IBRI AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

-  MARGINAL UNSAFE ZONES IN THE ABANDONED TERRITORIES
-  NOT FUNCTIONING INDUSTRIAL SITES
-  RELATIVELY LARGE URBAN BLOCKS WITH AN UNDEVELOPED PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM
-  LACK OF CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND POINT OF INTEREST IN THE NORTH PART OF THE STUDY
-  NARROW EMBANKMENTS WITH PRIORITY TO CAR ROAD
-  ABSENCE OF BIKE ROUTES
-  LACK OF BRIDGES AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TWO BANKS OF RIVER IBRI
-  LOW LEVEL OF ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT
-  HILLY AREAS ALONG PARTS OF THE RIVER
-  HIGH EMBANKMENTS WITH NO ACCESS TO WATER
-  RIVER POLLUTION

POSITIVE QUALITIES OF THE RIVER IBRI AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

-  EXISTING VAST PUBLIC GREEN AREAS AT BOTH SIDES OF THE STUDY AREA
-  RICH HISTORICAL HERITAGE
-  EXISTING POINT OF INTEREST
-  LOW HEIGHT BUILDINGS
-  QUIET STREETS
-  THE UNIQUE LANDSCAPE ALONG THE WATERFRONT
-  PICTURESQUE SETTING AND VIEW FROM RIVER TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS

MASTERPLAN OBJECTIVES

● URBAN LINKAGE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Opening up the blocked bridges, and creating new pedestrian bridges to connect the two sides of the city;
Integrating the urban public transport between the two sides, by improving the infrastructure of roads; creating cycle paths, pedestrianized paths;
Creating new parking spaces to serve the users but to also lessen the density of vehicles along the streets in the city center.

● FUNCTIONALITY

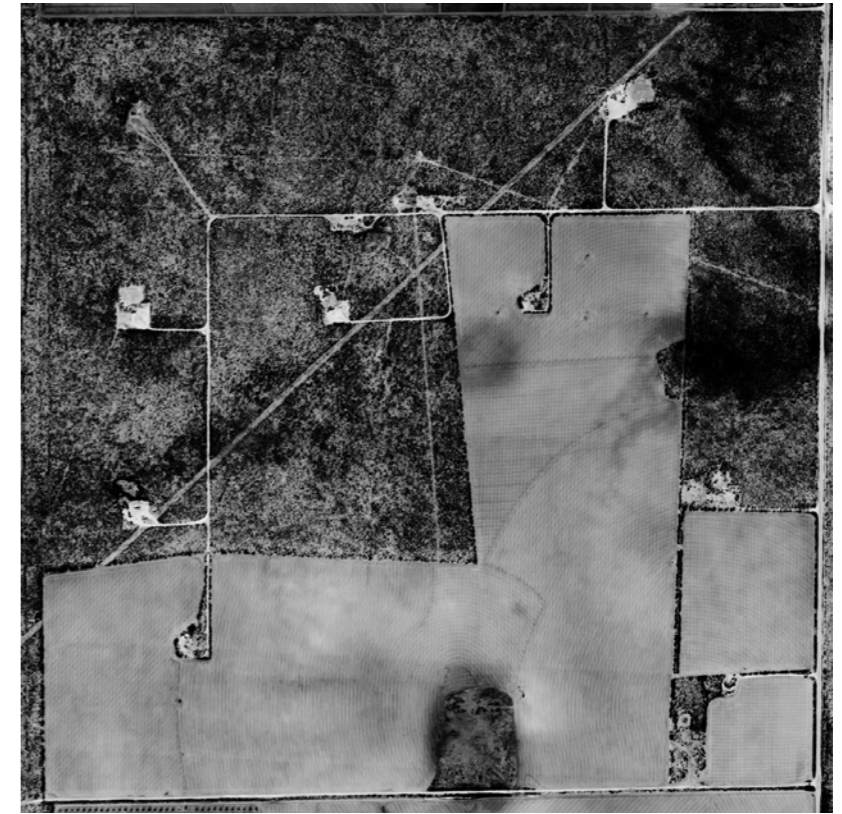
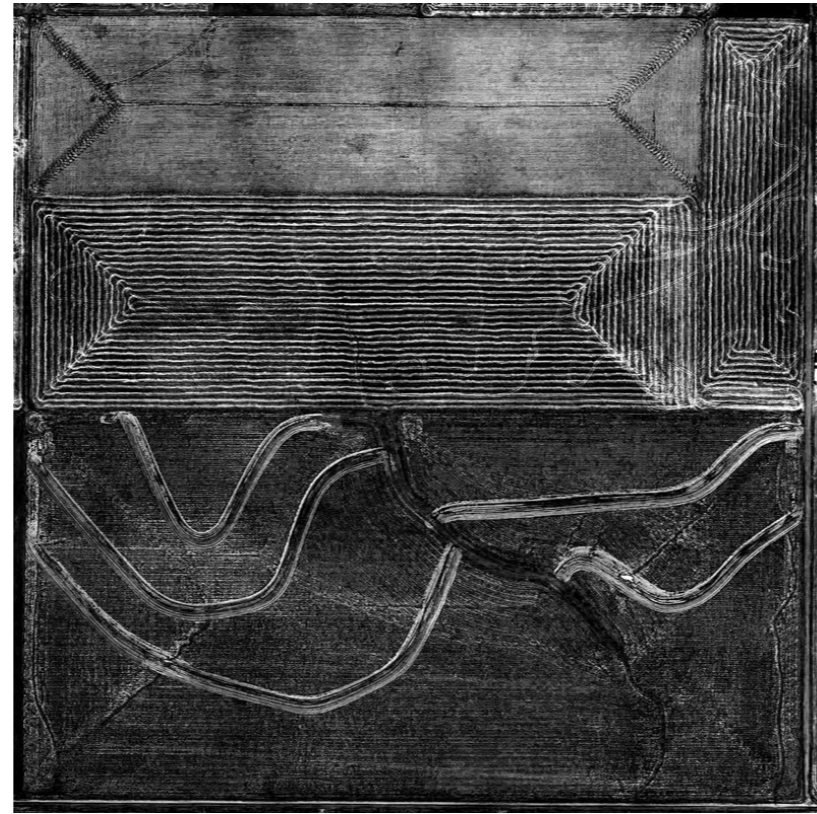
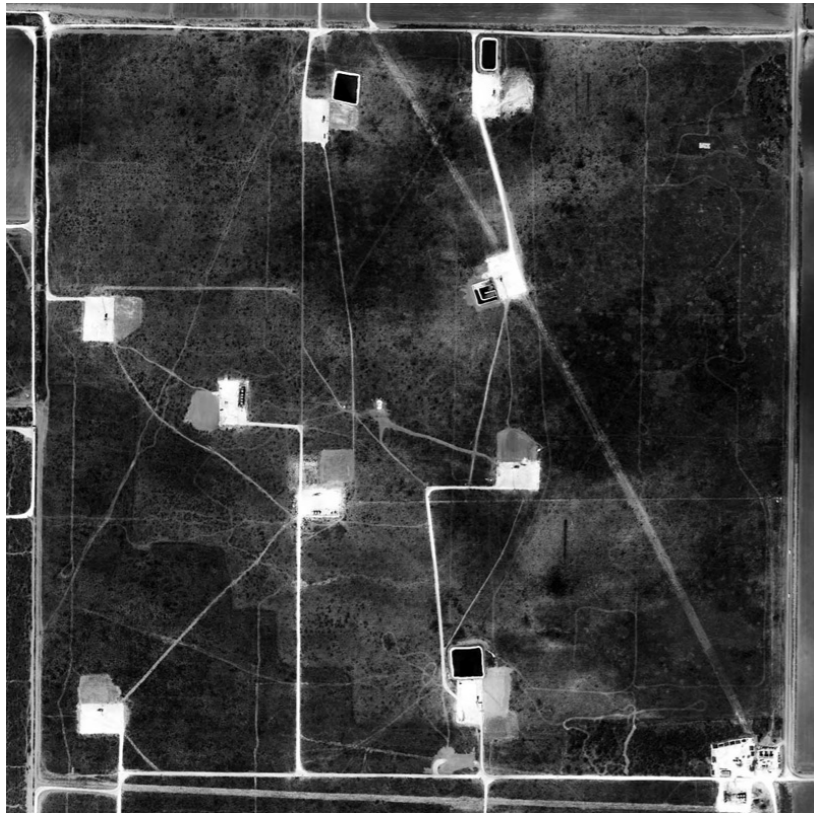
Creating a new peri-urban village, a micro-cosmos for the citizens.
Creating new working places for the inhabitants of the area, as a vital point of the growth of the economy of the city.
Creating workshops that have to do with metalurgy and teaching the art of mining, agriculture etc.
Constructing housing units of different typologies in respect to the diversity of users.

● SUSTAINABILITY AND ECOLOGY

Creating an eco-village that is self-sustainable and zero-waste.
Working towards less land consumption by creating vertical gardens
Improving energy efficiency and minimizing the carbon emissions.
Working with water permeable materials and creating a drainage system that acts as a circular system for the whole village.
Integrating greenery in the buildings.

Concept

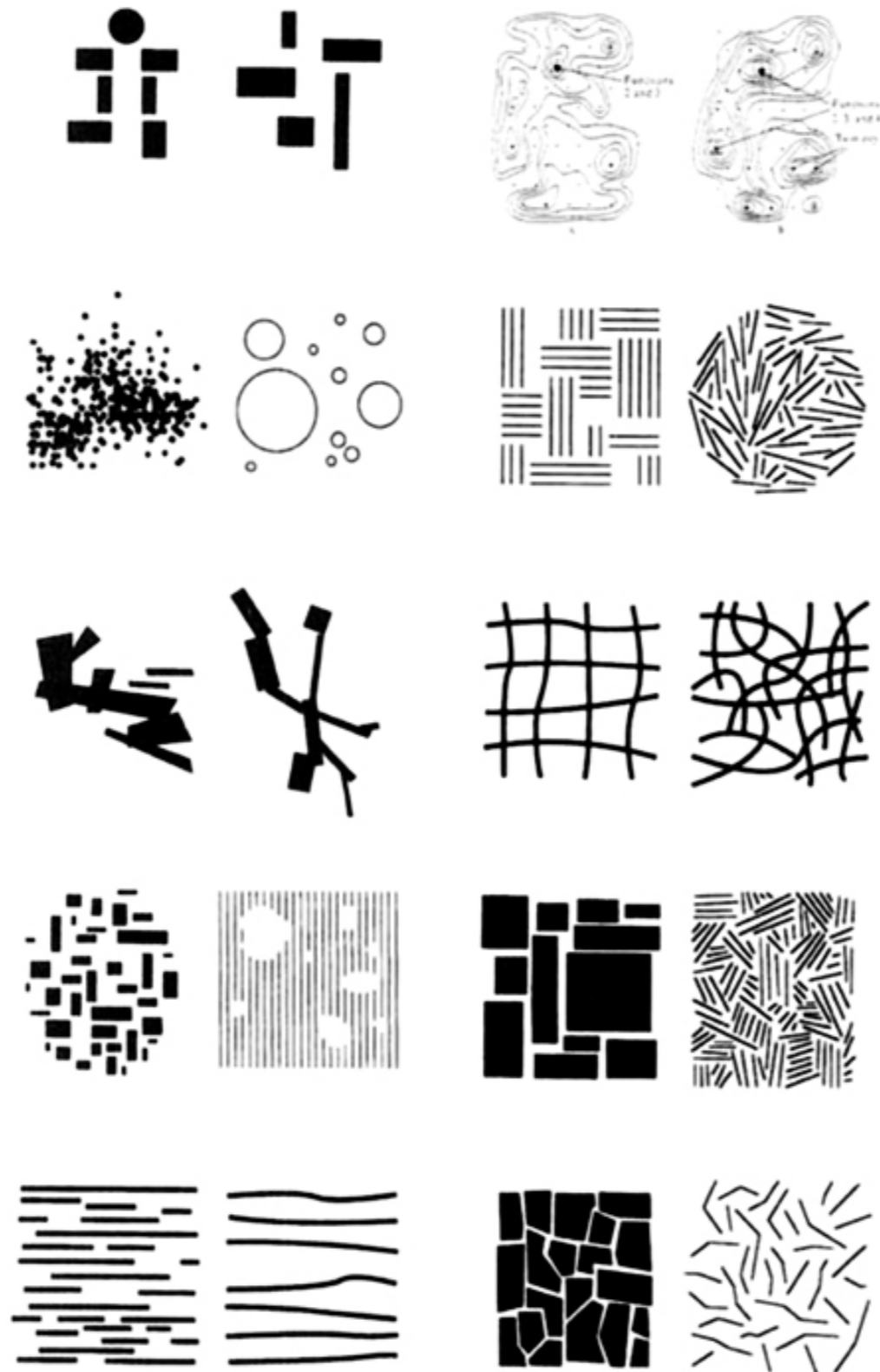
PALIMPSEST



AGAIN I SCRAPE

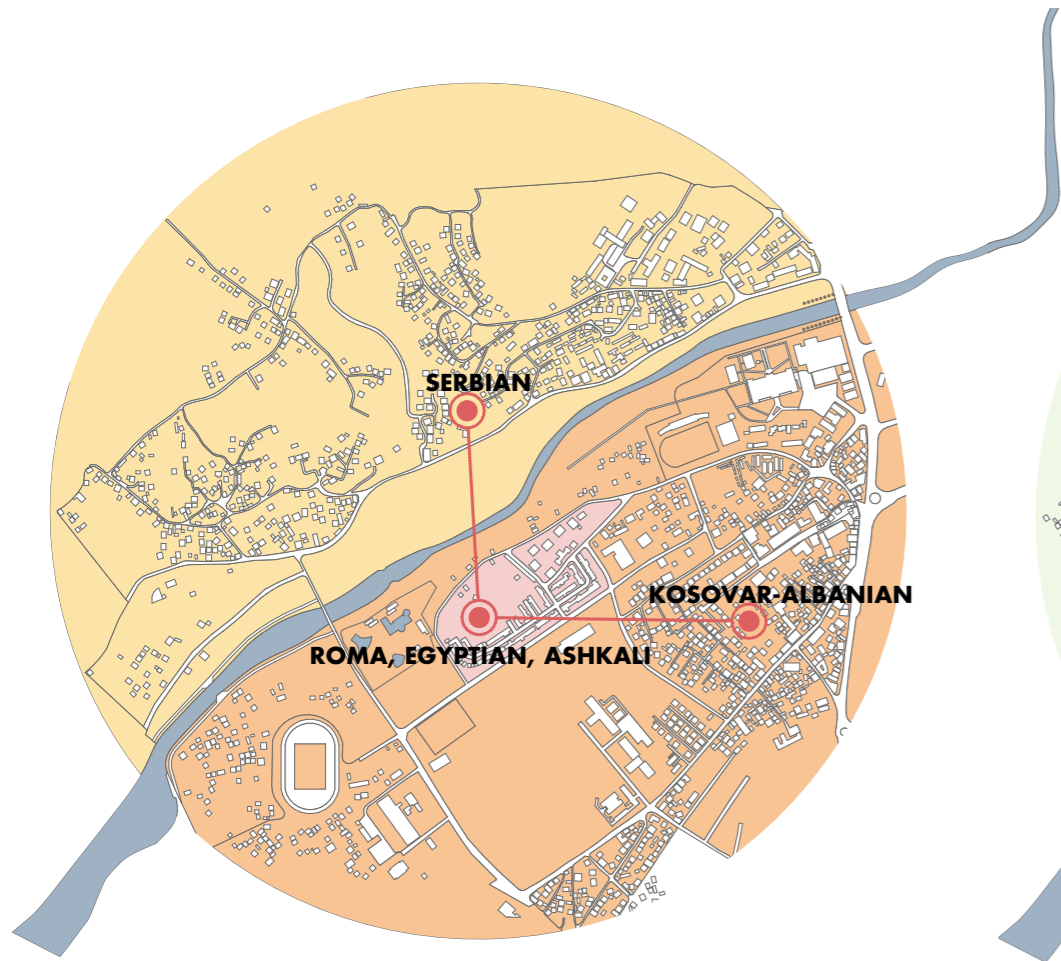
Every inhabited landscape is a palimpsest , its original parchment nearly blackened with the cross-hatching of successive generations of the past, claiming this place as their own and imposing their designs on it, as if their temporary interpretations would stand forever

SYMBIOSIS



Each surface is an interface between two environments that is ruled by a constant activity in the form of an exchange between the two substances placed in contact with one another.

STRATEGY



5 communities :
 North (Serbian)
 Middle (Roma, Egyptian, Ashkali)
 South (Albanians)
 Connecting these people through middle ground interventions.



Green infrastructure
 Connecting the existing city park through a north-to-south and east-to-west extension.



- Potential meetings points
- School
- Sports
- Connecting existing botanical garden w. future
- Planned pedestrian connections
- Mosque
- Marketplace
- Hospital
- University campus
- Roma Mahala (neighborhood)
- Municipality grounds
- Private investor (public pool)
- Riverside buffer zone

MASTERPLAN



FOCUS 1
SOCIAL NODE

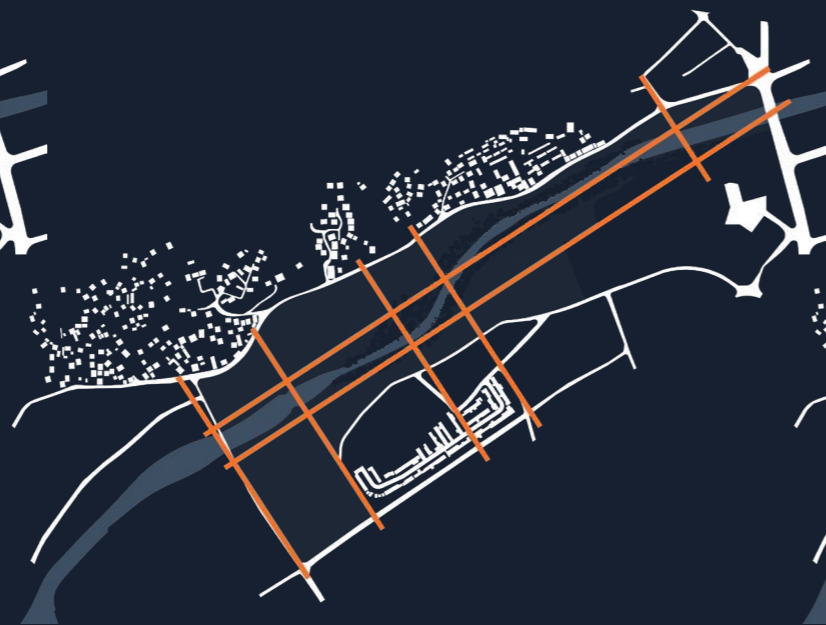
FOCUS 3
COMMUNITY NODE

FOCUS 2
LANDSCAPE NODE

SOCIAL NODE WORKFLOW DIAGRAMS



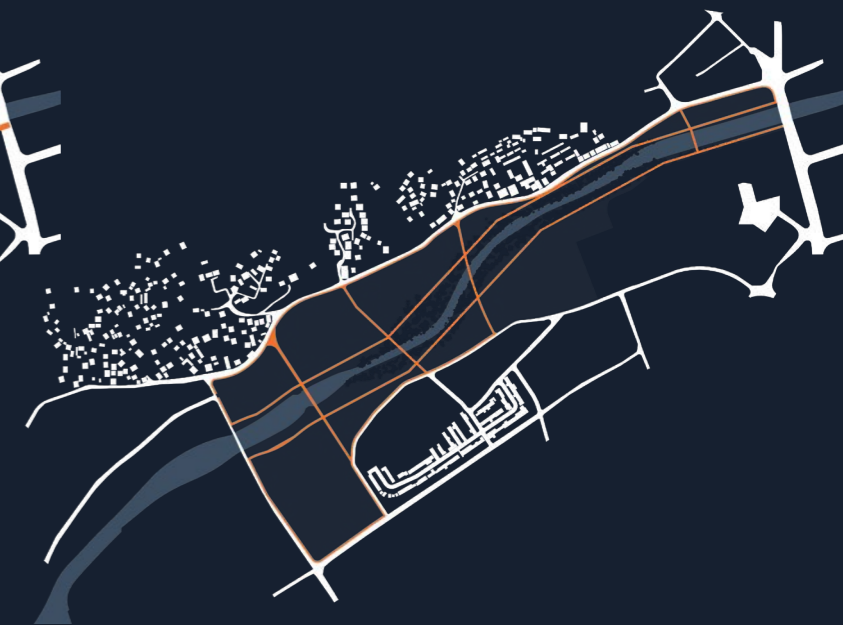
STEP 1. READ THE SURROUNDING



STEP 2. CREATE CONNECTIONS



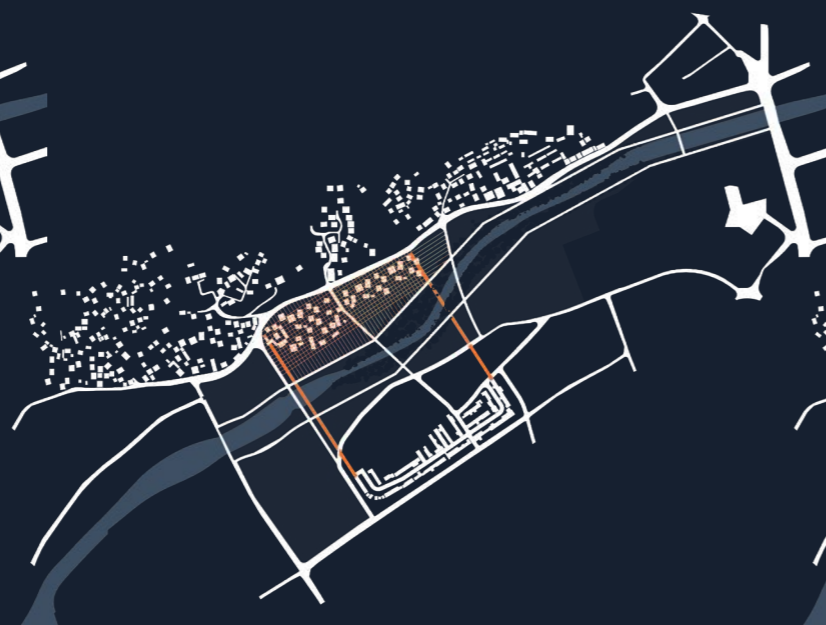
STEP 3. ADAPT PATHS BY
CONNECTING STREET NETWORKS



STEP 4. LAY OUT PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLE
FRIENDLY PATHS



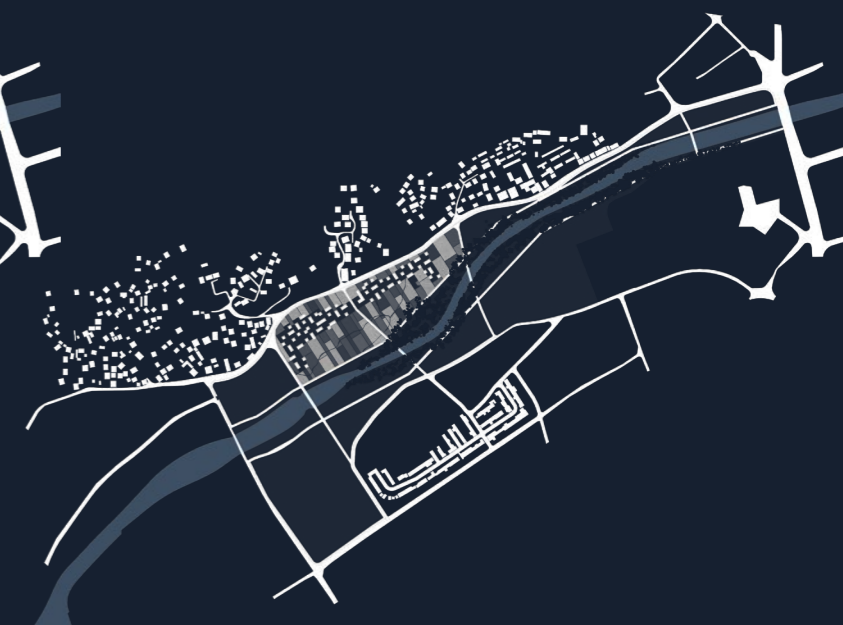
STEP 5. CONTINUE SPRAWL BY ADDING
VOLUMES



STEP 6. CREATE GRID SYSTEM TO
RESPOND TO ROMA MAHALA
NEIGHBORHOOD TYPOLOGY



STEP 7. 8x8m CONSTRUCTION
SYSTEM MODULE FOR MIXED USE
NEIGHBORHOOD

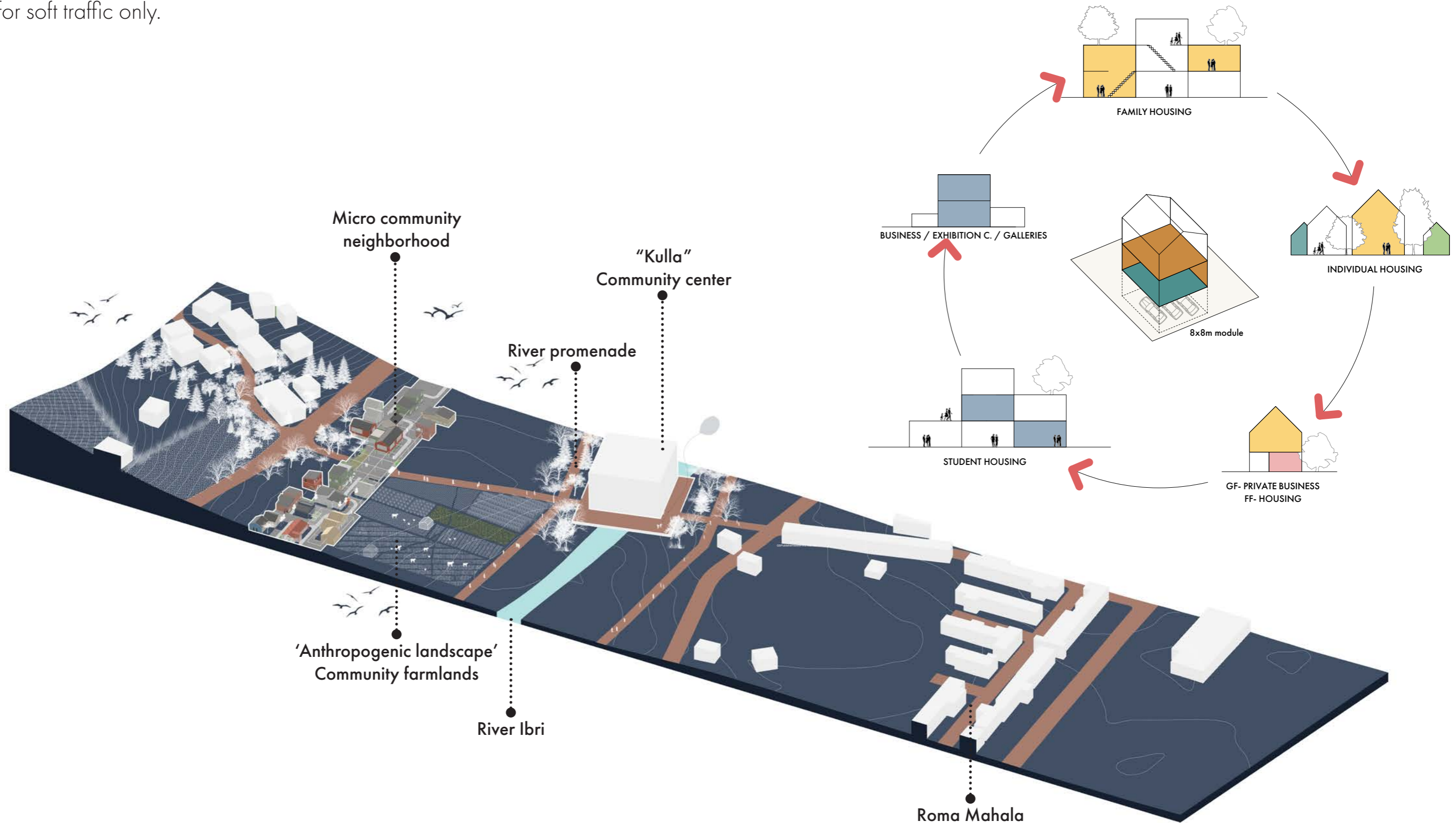


8. USE GRID TO LAY OUT ANTHROPO-
GENIC LANDSCAPING

SOCIAL NODE

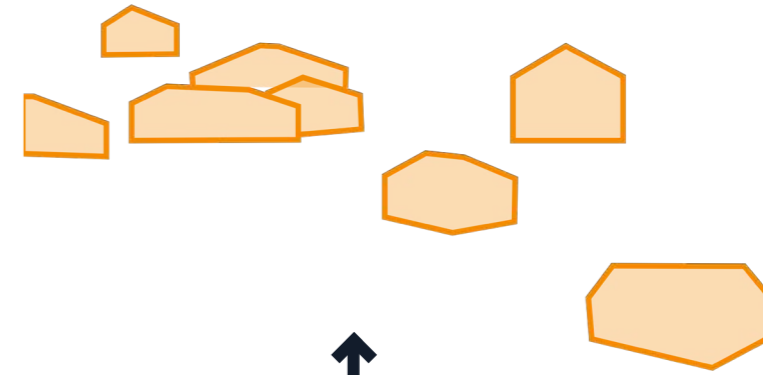
Fostering access over ownership

The village concept integrated in a smooth-sloping landscape creates a small community with a range of spatial and landscape qualities. The various buildings will be constructed in an 8x8m construction system module and is built as a generic structure that could be used for other typologies than just homes. Small squares, sensing gardens, pocket parks, playground and blue-green biotopes create plenty opportunities for social exchange as well as contemplation. There is space for having animals and growing vegetables -activities that contribute to the therapy of separated communities. The landscape is strategically planned to help "nudge" people to stay in the area in a friendly way, which is important for the safety of these marginalized people. Cars are kept on the periphery of the masterplan, making the central area safe and slow space for soft traffic only.

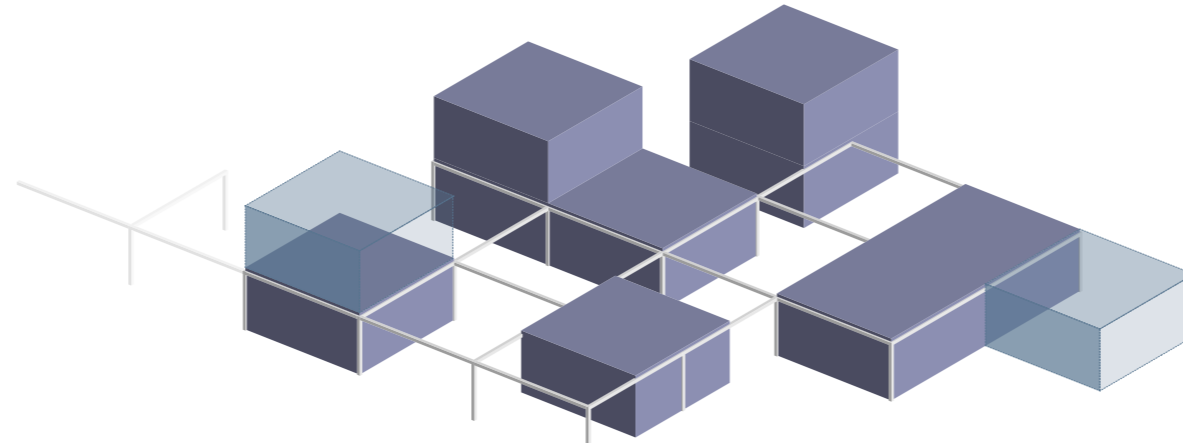


SOCIAL NODE

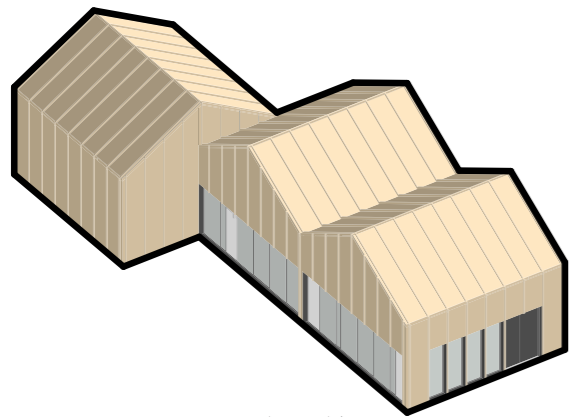
Community at heart



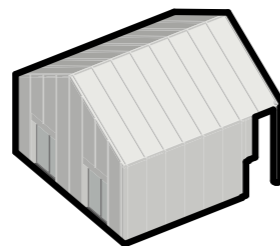
By observing the architecture of the past, elements were taken from the village homes in Kosovo such as their basic geometries and roof shapes, which all derive from the geographical and environmental conditions of the country.



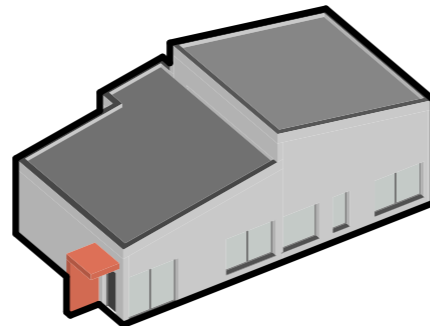
A MODULAR CONSTRUCTION THAT CAN GROW EXPONENTIALLY BASED ON THE USERS NEEDS



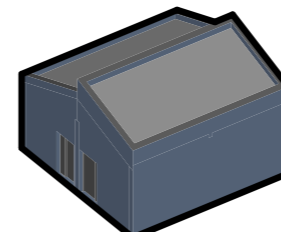
RESTAURANT



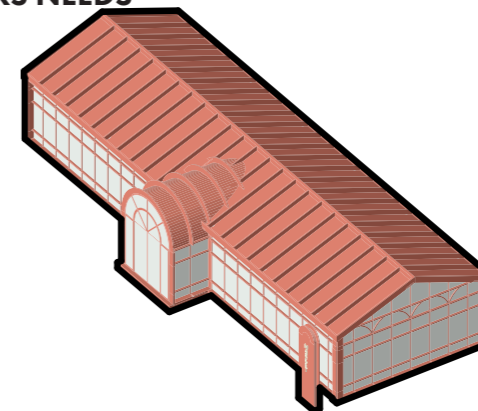
HOUSE (2p)



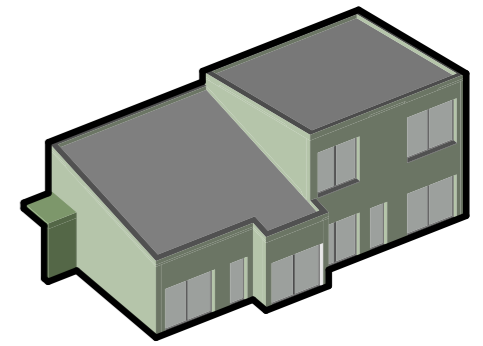
L FAMILY HOUSE



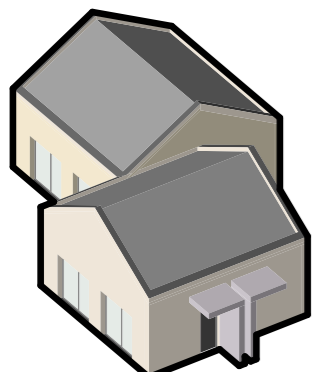
GUEST HOUSE



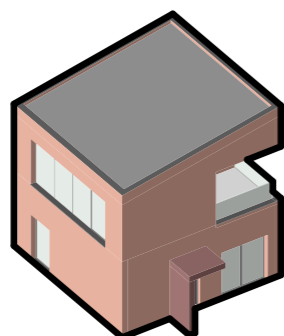
GROCERY MARKET



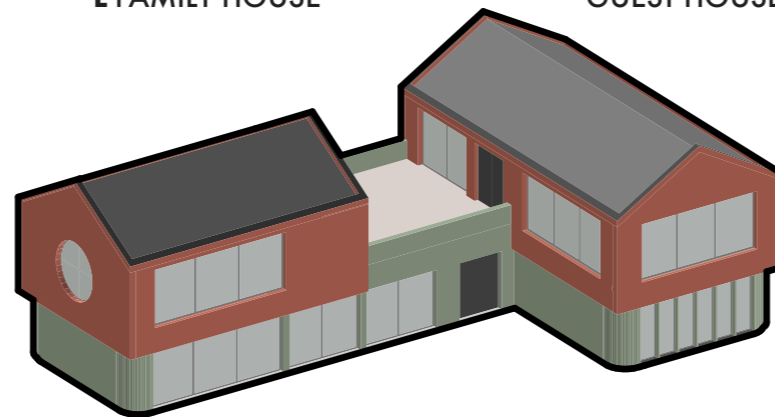
HOUSE FOR ELDERLY



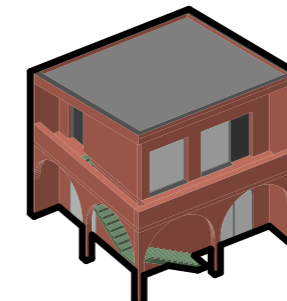
STUDENT HOUSES



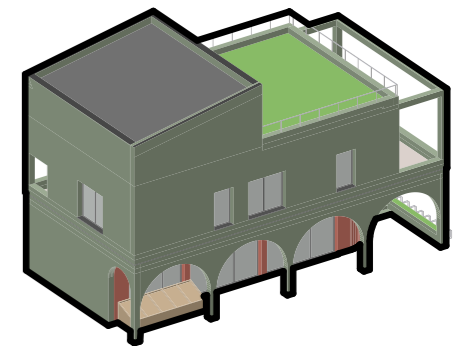
DUPLEX HOUSE



DAY CARE & LIBRARY

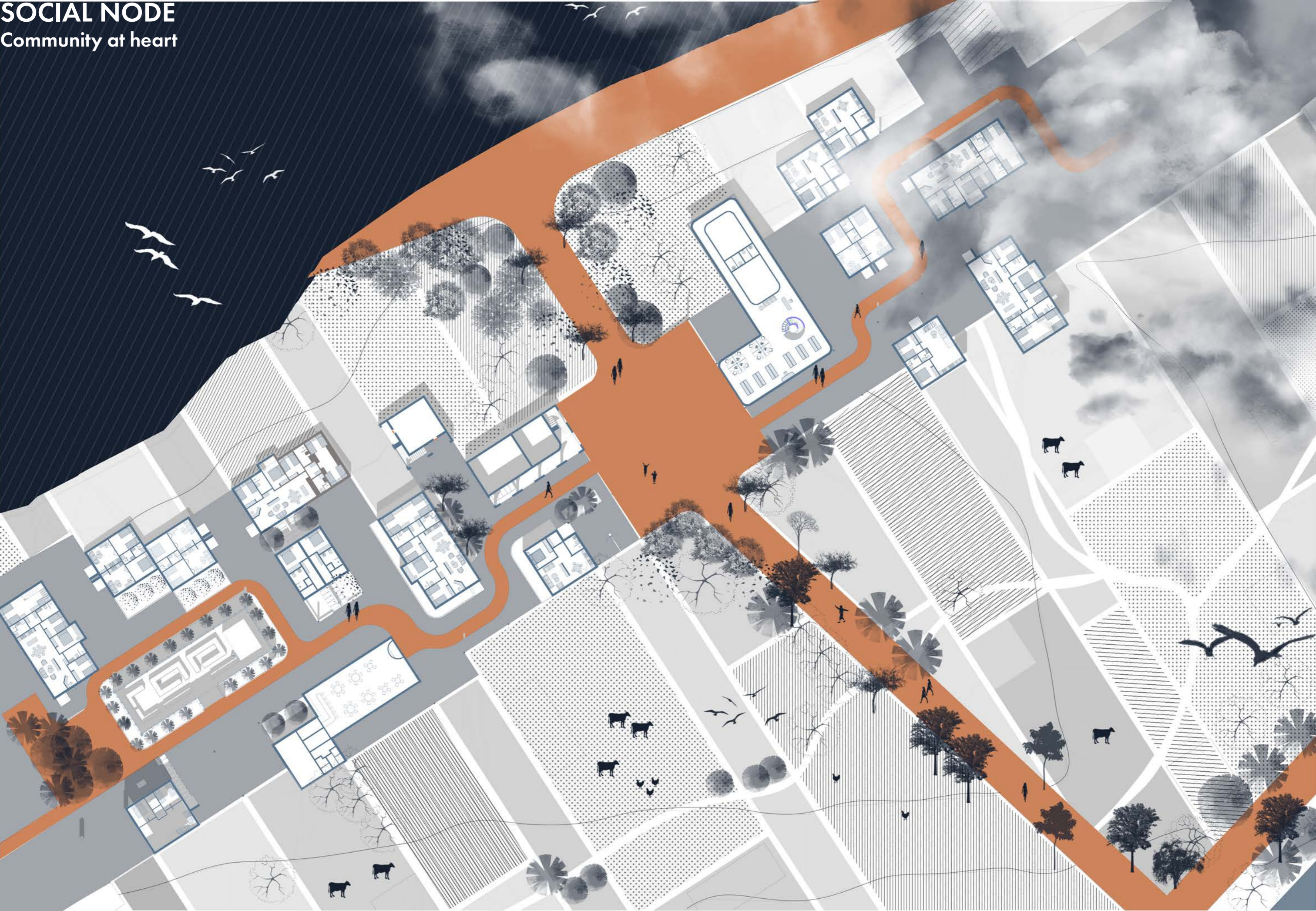


GALLERY & GUEST HOUSE



SHOPS & L SIZE HOUSE

SOCIAL NODE
Community at heart

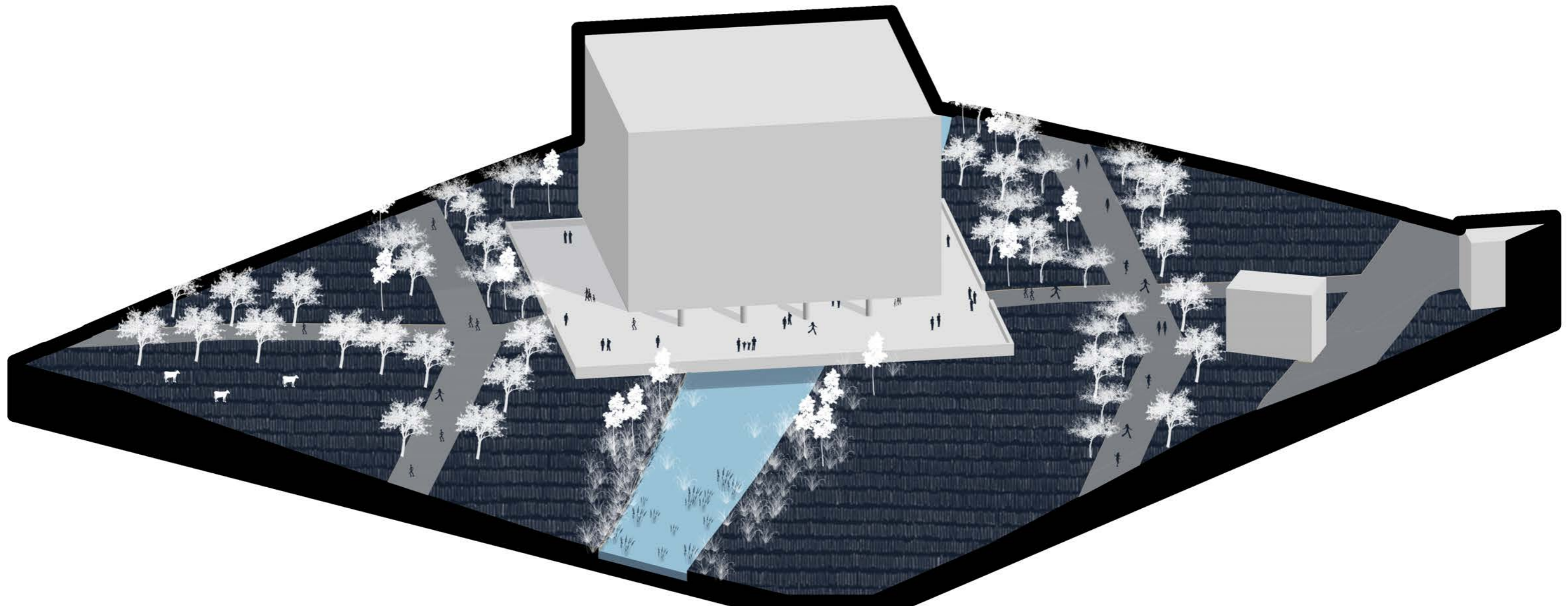


COMMUNITY NODE

Bridge as building | Building as bridge

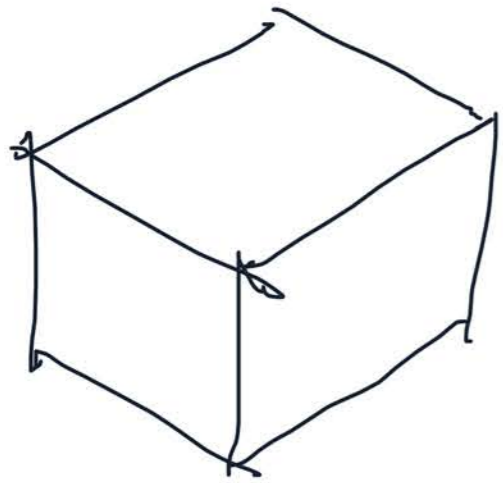


Kulla – are distinctive stone homes (known as kullë/kulla) that, in many ways, resemble miniature fortresses. In accordance with the customs of the kanun (ancient laws that governed all aspects of mountain life in the north until communism), the owner of a kullë was obliged to open his home to any stranger who came to the door in need of help or risk bringing shame to his family and community.

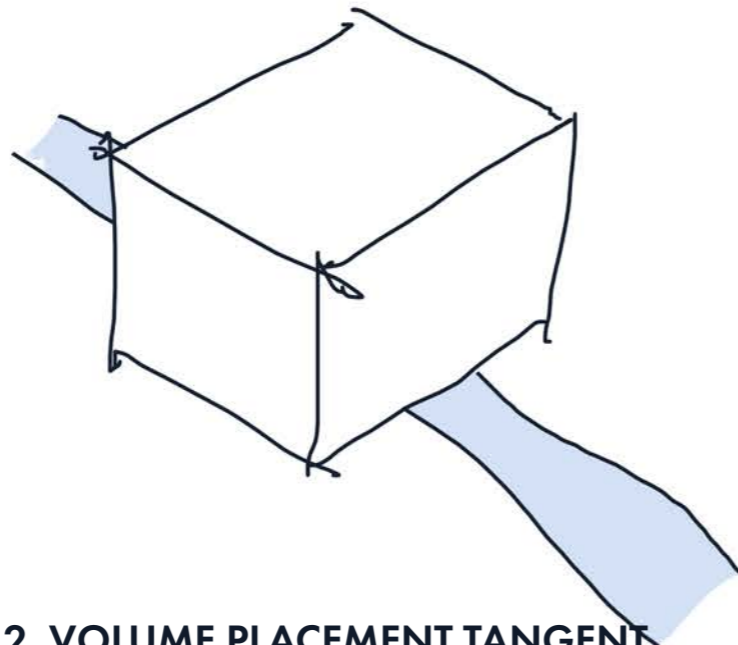


COMMUNITY NODE

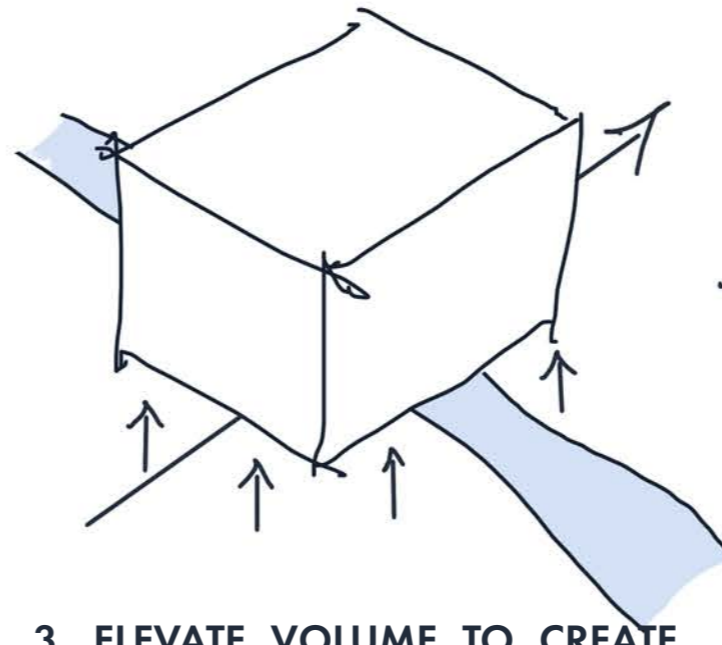
Bridge as building | Building as bridge



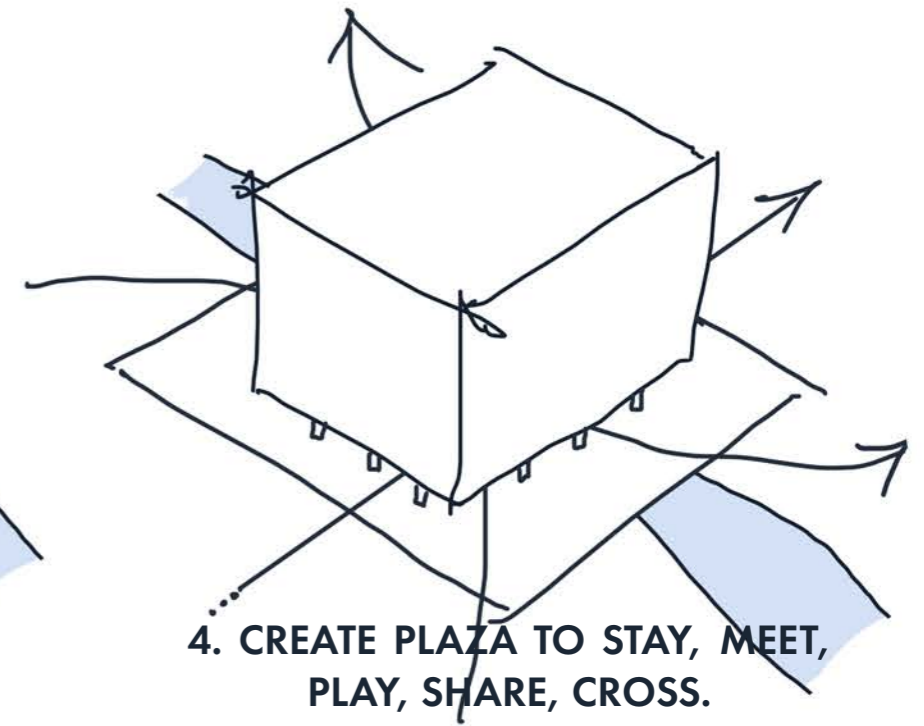
1. BASIC VOLUME
INSPIRED FROM "KULLA"



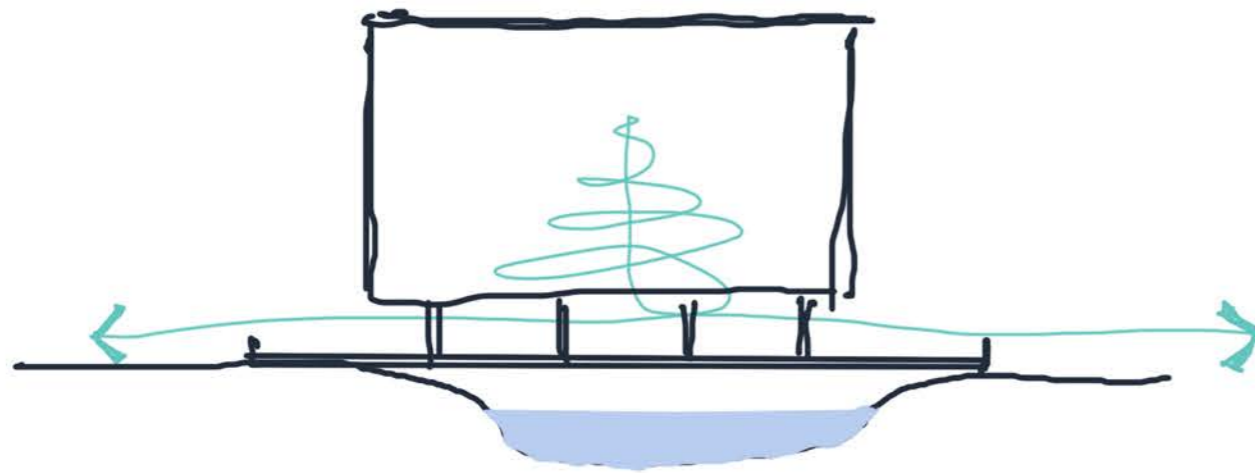
2. VOLUME PLACEMENT TANGENT
TO PATHWAYS & CUTTING RIVER



3. ELEVATE VOLUME TO CREATE
THRESHOLD



4. CREATE PLAZA TO STAY, MEET,
PLAY, SHARE, CROSS.



BY ELEVATING VOLUME, THERE
IS AIR CIRCULATION THAT ALSO
GOES INSIDE THE BUILDING'S
OPEN ATRIUM FROM BENEATH

