



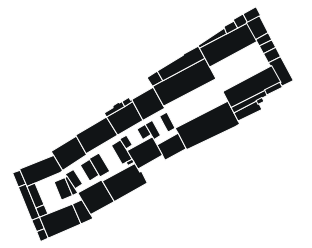
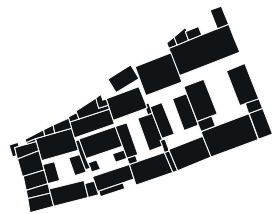
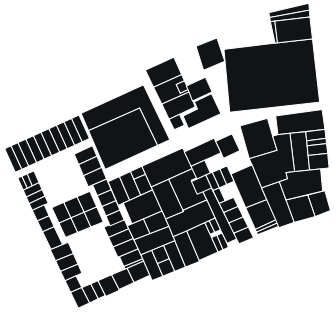
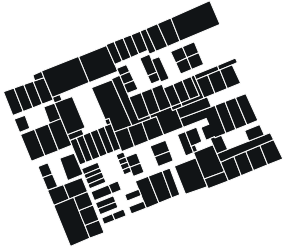
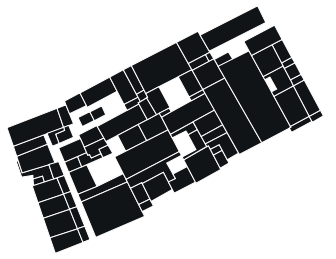
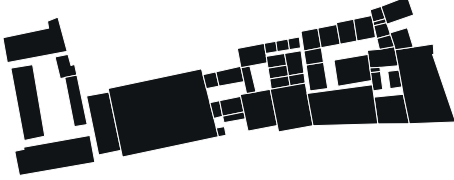
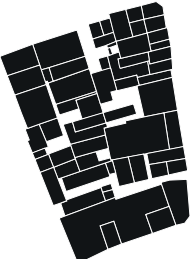
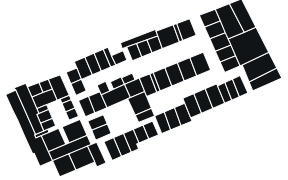
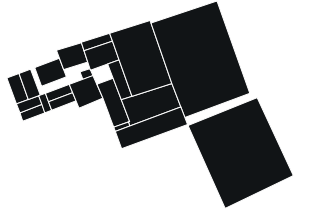
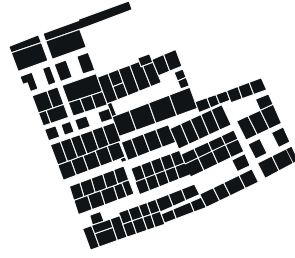
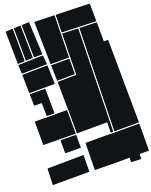
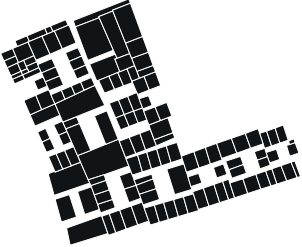
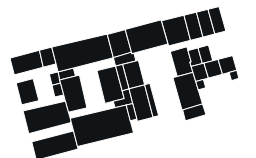
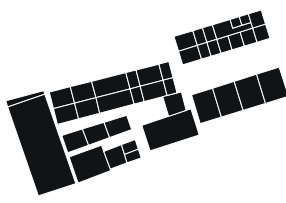
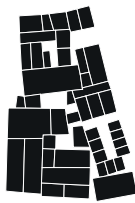
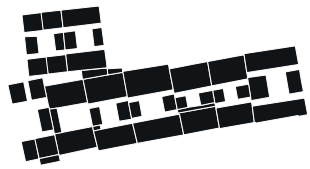
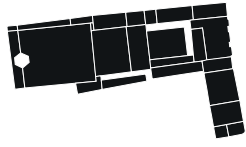
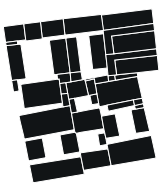
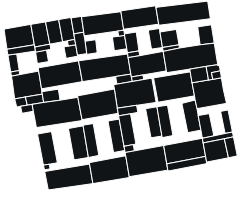
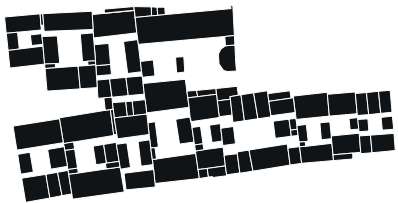
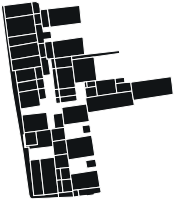
POLITECNICO DI MILANO
Scuola di Architettura e Società
Corso di Laurea in Architettura
A.A. 2013 - 2014

Tutor: Prof. Remo Dorigati
Co-tutor: Arch. Laura Lupini
Student: Margherita Orsini 782146

DASHILAR

HUTONG

大石栏儿胡同



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DASHILAR HUTONG

To Nancy and Rini, the best thesis buddies I could ever have.

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Beijing hutongs have been undergoing a massive process of **gentrification** during the last 10-15 years. This process often consists in demolishing traditional dwellings called *siheyuan* and replacing them either with high-rise developments or with fake carbon copies of the original *siheyuan*. Not only this process wipes away the last few traces of a historically valuable part of old Beijing, but it also destroys the strong **community** of residents who traditionally were the real soul of the place. New residents, who are mostly very wealthy and live in high-rise luxury buildings or in big fancy detached dwellings, are not willing to recreate that local community that was such an important part of the hutong's tradition. Unfortunately the current situation in hutongs is no longer sustainable as it is: the **living conditions** of most of residents are much below national standards, because of poverty, overcrowding, lack of electricity, private toilets, heating, tap water and sewage system.

Dashilar hutong seems to be on its way to become the new "hip" artistic district in Beijing, thanks to art galleries, design offices and cultural activities that lately have been appearing at a fast pace. Keeping this tendency in consideration, this research aims to propose a **flexible strategy** that can both support the commercial development of the area and address the needs of Dashilar residents.

A new **pedestrian circulation** is the backbone of the urban intervention, that turns the area from a very fragmented and inaccessible neighborhood into a porous urban fabric that allows people to walk freely through it. Small public spaces articulated along the pedestrian pathway offer a chance for people to move their daily social interaction from the unsafe space of the street. The project also includes a **catalogue** of small interventions targeting the border between pedestrian circulation and existing urban fabric, with the goal of improving the livability of the district for its own residents.

The project works on many levels of interpretation, attempting to tackle the **urban, social and cultural complexity** of a neighborhood with a very long story. In fact, it is the author's firm belief that the only way to successfully cope with such a multi-layered reality is to carefully observe it, respect it and recognize its intrinsic value.

“

One thing that tourism shows in Dashilar from outside there is no real interest increased in tourism in that area, because they have all this tourism, but they have not really get the benefits they thought they would, so what the main goal is just to bring the people from the rest of the Beijing to go back and to that area, that is really what the growth or marker is, instead of people from Beijing coming back and buying things there.

(...)

This comes out from the idea of preservation: the moment something become subject of preservation, it loses any kind of life anyway, loses reality and cease to exist, and one thing that is missing sometimes in this conversation is the agency of people who involves around who are living in this space, they may welcome the opportunity to develop this as a performance as a second modality to generate income, it is sheep farmers, they are making the living out of this, they do not really care, a lot of people question the authenticity, but that is because the spectacle is there for the tourists, the tourist is getting what they want, and someone is getting a living out of it, and to be honest, it is an economic modality, and a means of existence, which fundamentally works, it is just not the one that accords with the tourists' idea of what it might necessarily be real, but we already addressed this issue of authenticity and found it to be wanting in terms of any kind of real deep roots of intertwined models.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

Gli hutong di Pechino sono stati oggetto di un intenso processo di **gentrificazione** durante gli ultimi 10 - 15 anni. Questo processo consiste nella demolizione delle tradizionali abitazioni a corte chiamate *siheyuan*, che vengono sostituite o con complessi multi-piano. Questo processo non solo spazza via le ultime tracce di una parte di Pechino di grande valore storico, ma anche disgrega la **comunità** dei residenti degli hutong, da sempre la vera anima del luogo. I nuovi residenti, che sono per la maggior parte facoltosi, non sono disposti a condividere lo spazio e le strutture e quindi non ricreano una vera e propria comunità locale. È però impossibile negare che l'attuale situazione degli hutong non sia più sostenibile così com'è; le **condizioni di vita** della maggior parte dei residenti sono molto al di sotto degli standard nazionali, a causa della povertà, del sovraffollamento, della mancanza di elettricità, servizi igienici, acqua corrente e sistema fognario.

Dashilar hutong sembra stia diventando il quartiere "in" della città, grazie alle numerose gallerie d'arte, studi di design e attività culturali che hanno popolato l'area negli ultimi anni. Prendendo atto di questa tendenza, la ricerca si pone l'obiettivo di proporre una **strategia flessibile** per supportare sia lo sviluppo commerciale dell'area sia le esigenze della popolazione residente.

La nuova **circolazione pedonale** è la spina dorsale dell'intervento urbano, che rende il frammentato e inaccessibile quartiere di Dashilar un tessuto urbano poroso. Piccoli spazi pubblici si articolano lungo il tratto pedonale e offrono ai residenti la possibilità di spostare le loro quotidiane attività sociali dallo spazio della strada. Inoltre, il progetto include un **catalogo** di piccoli interventi rivolti ai bordi tra la circolazione pedonale e il tessuto urbano esistente, con l'obiettivo di migliorare la vivibilità del quartiere per i residenti.

Il progetto si articola su molti livelli di interpretazione, nel tentativo di affrontare la **complessità urbana, sociale e culturale** di un quartiere dalla lunga storia. Infatti, l'autore crede fermamente che l'unico modo di rapportarsi con una realtà così stratificata sia osservarla attentamente, rispettarla e riconoscerne l'intrinseco valore.

1 • beijing

In order to better understand the context where hutongs take place, some hints about Beijing may be useful. After a general overview about the city, this chapter features a brief description of the historical evolution of the capital, in order to help understand the connection between Beijing's history and the six phases of its urban planning, which is explored right afterwards. The chapter ends with a reflection about what Beijing may become in the coming future and how this future could impact on hutongs and the city's historical heritage.

Beijing is located on a flat land in North – East China, with hills backing the city up to the North – West. The ancient water-system that used to bring water from the Yu Quan Shan to the city centre was almost completely buried down, so now only few canals and lakes remain. Beijing's continental climate provides dramatic changes throughout the year, passing from intense cold during Winter (-10 C° day-time average) to hot and humid during Summer (32 C° day-time average): during Winter the wind blowing from North can be very strong, while during Spring sand storms are not unusual.

Currently around 20 million people live in Beijing (2012): an additional estimated 2 millions unregistered residents bring the total to 22 million circa. According to the last available census (2000) around 2 million people live within the historical area of Beijing, which mean within the old walls. The remaining historical hutongs are divided into two main areas, covering a total surface of 62 kmq: one is located within the old walls, the other one right outside (known as the "outer city").

During the last decade the incredibly fast economic growth that China experienced (hitting 17.5 % during 2007) deeply changed its capital: highways and skyscrapers became part of Beijing's landscape, while business opportunities attracted millions of people from China and abroad, turning Beijing into an international metropolis. Unfortunately, this change didn't come without consequences, as traffic jam is nowadays a serious problem for the capital and air pollution index keeps climbing up more and more, resulting into a overall worsening of the life quality of the city. At the same time the fast growth sacrificed much of Beijing's historical heritage for the sake of money and interests.



1. entrance of a courtyard, photo credits: <http://auxportesdelempire.com/>

“

*Old Beijing with the crowded Hutongs
Children playing in the blue sky
Young workers riding bikes with the ling ling sound
And old men playing chess in the shade of an old tree
There is still noise of people bargaining on the street as loud as a group of people protesting
This is a quiet and loud peaceful town
People are living joyfully*

A few years later Beijing has changed

*New Beijing is full of tall buildings instead of small courtyards
Rooms with air-conditioning instead of the shade of trees
Cars that go vroom vroom instead of bikes that go ling ling
The children are playing with modern technology
Suddenly the sky turns gray
The gray skies cover Beijing*

Have you ever thought whether the changes are worth it?

Steven Zheng, Changes of Beijing



2. Forbidden City, photo credits: www.famouswonders.com

history

While during the first one thousand years of Chinese imperial history Beijing was just a provincial city in the northern periphery of China, the city became capital of China for the first time in 1153 under the name of Zhongdu during the Jin Dynasty.

The city was invaded during 1215 by the Mongol army, but only during 1271 Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Kahn, once established the Yuan Dynasty, decided to change the city's name in Dadu and place the capital of his cosmopolitan kingdom there. During the Yuan Dynasty Beijing was developed enormously, as Kublai Kahn wanted it to be a showcase of his metropolitan empire. In 1368 Beijing lost the title of capital again but quickly got it back in 1403 with Ming Dynasty, that built most of the famous buildings and monuments of the city.

Ming Dynasty kept the power till 1629, when Li Zicheng launched a rebellion in North West China and managed to conquered the city, proclaiming himself emperor of the Shun Dynasty and Beijing the capital of his kingdom. In 1644 the Manchus invaded Beijing, moved their capital there and started the Qing Dynasty: during their kingdom, much of the original configuration of the city within the walls was maintained, although they built several palaces outside the walls.

During the Second Opium War in 1860 Anglo-French army defeated the Qing's one nearby Beijing: they ordered to burn the Old Summer Palace, but luckily they decided to save the Forbidden City. The Convention of Peking ended the war and the Qing government was forced to allow Western presence in order to establish permanent diplomatic presence in the city.

The Qing Dynasty was then overthrown during then Xinhai Revolution in 1911 but Beijing remained the capital of the just founded Republic of China. The successors of the revolutionary army ruled the republic from Beijing until 1928 when the Northern Expedition reunified the country, moving the capital to Nanjing: Beijing was then renamed Beiping.



3. the last Chinese emperor and empress, photo credits: www.wikipedia.com

In 1937, a clash between Chinese and Japanese armies just outside Beijing caused the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese created a government in northern China and changed the city's name back to Beijing to serve as capital for the regime. After Japan's surrender in 1945, the city returned to China and was again renamed Beijing. Right afterwards, during the civil war between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists, Beijing was peacefully moved under Communist control in 1949, renamed Beijing and became the capital of the People's Republic of China.

The Communist leadership immediately started establishing a new order in Beijing: within weeks from the beginning of the new government, prostitution and opium were banned in the city. As the symbol People's Republic's power, Beijing was transformed to reflect the ideals of socialist state: Tiananmen Square was enlarged, Monument to the People's Heroes, Great Hall of the People and the National Museum of China were all completed by 1959.

At the beginning of 1958 Mao Zedong kicked off an ambitious campaign to accelerate China's economic development. The Great Leap Forward was supposed to overcome China's shortage of capital through mass mobilization, using large-scale collectivized farms in order to boost agricultural product and food surplus so that labor could be used for industrial development. The campaign didn't succeed, resulting in famines and malnutrition throughout the whole country. Eight years later Mao also launched his Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, a social-political movement that aimed to enforce communism in the country by removing capitalist, traditional and cultural elements from Chinese society, and to impose Maoist orthodoxy within the Party. The movement paralyzed China politically and heavily affected the country both economically and socially.

After Mao's death in 1976, a change in the national leadership's course led to a short period of political openness known as Beijing Spring, which gave rise to a pro-democracy movement. In 1989 this movement ended up in Tiananmen Square with student-led demonstrations, which drew broad support from city residents, attracted worldwide attention and exposed deep divisions within the country's leadership: the protest was violently silenced from conservative leaders who ordered a military crackdown of unprecedented force.



4. Communist propaganda, photo credits: <http://www.theeastisred.com/>

“

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery. It cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.

(...)

Liberalism is extremely harmful in a revolutionary collective. It is a corrosive which eats away unity, undermines cohesion, causes apathy and creates dissension. It robs the revolutionary ranks of compact organization and strict discipline, prevents policies from being carried through and alienates the Party organizations from the masses which the Party leads. It is an extremely bad tendency.

Mao Zedong in *Combat Liberalism*

“

«You are dictatorial.» My dear sirs, you are right, that is just what we are. All the experience the Chinese people have accumulated through several decades teaches us to enforce the people's democratic dictatorship, that is, to deprive the reactionaries of the right to speak and let the people alone have that right.

Mao Zedong in *Combat Liberalism*

Afterwards, Nineties and the first decade of the new Century were a period of economic and demographic growth, that turned Beijing into what it is now; an enormous, modern, ever-changing metropolis with countless inhabitants, cars and skyscrapers, a place where constructions fields seem never to stop in a urge of making Beijing bigger, better and faster.



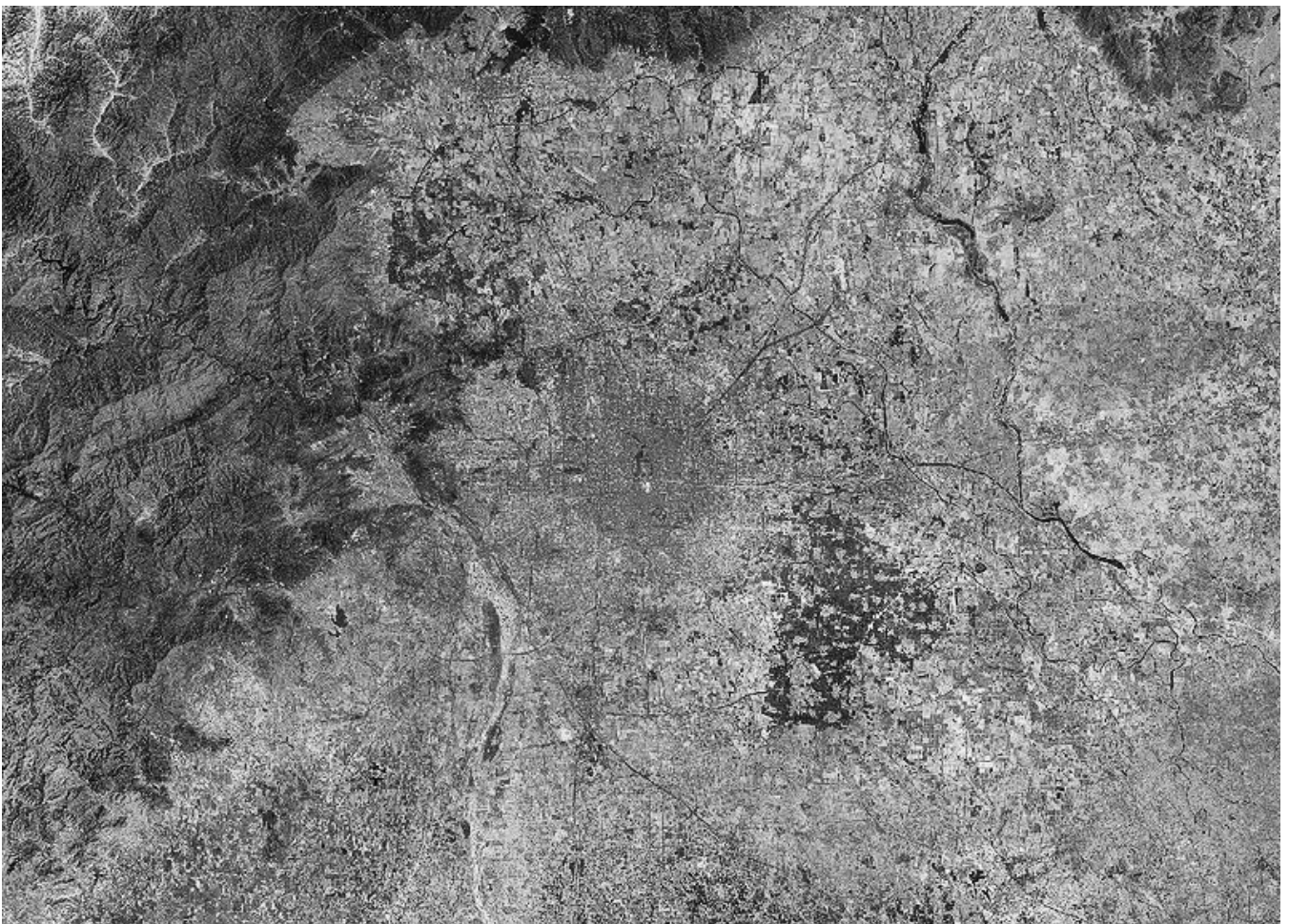
5. Dongzhimen district, Beijing, photo credits: <http://wikipedia.com>

urban planning and historic conservation

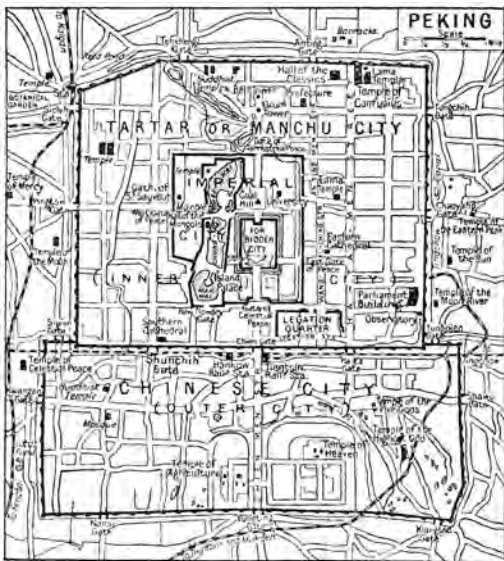
This section provides a brief overview of the evolution of urban planning and its relation to historic preservation in the city of Beijing. Beginning from Beijing's Old City, the chapter goes on to describe notable moments of urban development, trying to highlight how the growth was combined with historic preservation or lack of it. Historically, Beijing's political leaders were protagonist of the urban development of the city and of the preservation of its heritage: they were also entitled to determine what was worth preserving and what was not. The decision was never open to discussion.



6. Forbidden City, photo credits:
<http://photos.welcometochina.com.au/>



7. Beijing from satellite, photo credits:
<http://geology.com/>



8. Old map of Beijing from 1922, photo credits: <http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/>

/origins

The Old City of Beijing was founded during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), during a period when cities were planned according to traditional principles that emphasized symmetry, unity and hierarchy. Therefore, Beijing was conceived as a unique, three-dimensional system in order for it to resemble a work of art. As perfectly expressed by Liang Sicheng, a well known architect and expert in Chinese architectural history,

“we must first of all realize the value of the wonderful structure which gives the city its intrinsic character. Beijing’s architecture as an entire system is the most intact anywhere in the world and as a most extraordinary and precious work of art, it still retains its vitality and maintains its tradition. This should be the point of departure for any attempt to understand the city. The majority of monuments in fact are not free-standing buildings; rather they are often architectural complexes, each of which consists of quite a few buildings interrelated in a particular manner. This feature in itself is the city’s most valuable contribution to art and architecture.”¹

This architectural configuration essentially remained unaltered through the Ming (1369-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties, even though the location of the city was changed seven times. The physical continuity of the city was ensured by the respect of traditional Chinese planning principles paid by Ming and Qing’s rulers. Therefore, the imperial capital of Beijing under the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties all abided by a geometrical plan with a central axis running South to North that divided the city in half. All the most important buildings, such as the Imperial Palace, the Bell Tower, the Drum Tower, the Temple of Heaven and nine city gates, were placed along this 7.9 km long axis. The street layout was shaped in accordance to the central axis with major avenues running parallel to it, while minor streets ran from East to West. Because of this configuration, the street blocks were narrow rectangles: the arrangement was similar to a chessboard. The comparison to a chessboard greatly emphasizes the order of the city plan but also the hierarchy of a patriarchal social system represented in a urban plan.

¹ Liang Sicheng quoted in Wu, L. (1999). *Rehabilitating the Old City of Beijing: A Project in the Ju'er Hutong Neighborhood*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver.

² Pirazzoli-Serstevens, M. (1971) *Living Architecture: Chinese*, McDonald Press, London.



Peking is a jewel city, a jewel city such as the eyes of man have not seen before. It is a jewel city of gold and purple and royal blue roofs, of palaces and pavilions and lakes and parks and princes’ gardens. It is a jewel set with the purple sides of Western Hills and the blue girdle of the Jade Fountain stream and centuries-old cedars looking down on human being at the Central Park, the Temple of Heaven, and the Temple of Agriculture. In the city are nine parks and three imperial lakes, known as the “Three Seas,” now thrown open to the public. And Peking has such a blue sky and such a beautiful moon, such rainy Summers, such cool, crisp Autumns, and such dry, clear Winters!

Lin Yutang, in *With Love and Irony*

Therefore, imperial buildings were at the center, aristocracy lived in the majestic courtyard houses nearby the central axis, while regular folks lived in more basic courtyard houses further away from the central axis.

In this way, the organization of the city was based on relationships:

“the different types of buildings and complexes match each other perfectly; they have achieved a perfect relationship with the plan of Beijing as a whole”³

Moreover, the houses of ordinary folks had grey rooftops, so to provide a contrast with the yellow rooftops of imperial buildings. To perfection the harmony of the plan, Houhai and Beihai lakes very given their irregular shapes to complement the rectangular grid of the city. Si He Yuan, the traditional courtyard house, represents the vernacular architecture of Beijing: its layout is also based on hierarchical principles.

Therefore, the palatial compounds, street grid, natural landscape and vernacular architecture all contributed to implement Beijing’s plan’s perfection. However, this unique example of city planning was the result of a pre-modern feudal society where the symbolic meaning of the city’s spatial organization was valued as more important than its actual functionality. For this reason, the plan didn’t include provisions for a possible political change nor it left room for an organic growth of the city. Consequently, certain urban features of Beijing became points of contention in modern China.

Early Republic

The process of modernization of Beijing started under the influence of the “New Culture Movement” in May 1919. This intellectual movement attacked Chinese traditions and looked forward the Western world as reference model to transform China into a modern country. Urban planning of this period was primarily concerned about practical aspects such as constructing roads, surveying urban districts and improving public health.⁴

The modern age needed more roads, while the city walls surrounding the city were no longer useful: in fact, they blocked the traffic flow across the city. For these reasons,

“

...if you have once lived in Peking, if you have ever stayed here long enough to fall under the charm and interest of this splendid barbaric capital, if you have once seen the temples and glorious monuments of Chili, all other parts of China seem dull and second rate... when you have seen the best there is, everything else is anticlimax.

Ellen N. LaMotte, Peking Dust, 1919

³ Liang Sicheng quoted in Wu, L. (1999). *Rehabilitating the Old City of Beijing: A Project in the Ju'er Hutong Neighborhood*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver.

“

I had arrived on a drafting table, not a city. Here, airport, here cropland, here – running graphite along the edge of a ruler – the highway into town, here the city itself, at the heart, the Forbidden City and Tiananmen. Around that the city wall. Don't want a wall? All right, let's erase it. There!

Michael Meyer



9. outside the Forbidden City, photo credits: <http://meltjoeng.com/>

⁴ Wang, Y. (2002). *A Brief History of the Transformation of Beijing's Urban Fabric in the Twentieth century*, PhD paper, Cambridge University, Cambridge.

“

Peking has quiet. It is a city of homes, where every house has a courtyard, and every courtyard has a jar of goldfish and a pomegranate tree, where vegetables are fresh, and pears are pears and persimmons are persimmons. It is the ideal city, where there is space for everyone to breathe in, where rural quiet is matched with city comforts, where streets and alleys and canals are so arranged that one can find room for an orchard or a garden and glimpse the Western Hills while picking cabbage in the morning hours - a stone's throw from a big department store.

It has color-- color of the old and color of the new. It has the color of imperial grandeur, of historic age and of Mongolian plains. Mongolian and Chinese traders come with their camel caravans from Kalgan and Nankow and pass through its historic gates. It has miles upon miles of city walls, forty or fifty broad at the gates. It has gate towers and drum towers, which announce the evenings for the residents. It has temples, old gardens, and pagodas, where every stone and every tree and every bridge have a history and a legend....

Lin Yutang, in *With Love and Irony*

the Capital Administrative Office decided to remove the walls and replaced them with new urban highways. This removal disconnected the city gates from each other and destroyed a unique significant feature of Beijing's urban composition: the city gates now stand in isolation and look out of context. This demolition started the process of replacement of the historical features of Beijing with modern development.

Since in 1927 the Nationalist government moved the capital from Beijing to Nanjing, the urban development of the city slowed down considerably during the following decade. In July 1937 the Japanese occupation began and continued for twelve years before succumbing to the Chinese Civil War between 1945 and 1949. Since during those years very little progress was achieved either in developing the city or preserving the historic heritage, we can consider this period as a substantially stalemate in the history of Beijing's urban planning.



10. Japanese invasion in Beijing in 1937, photo credits: <http://historyimages.blogspot.it/>

/communist China (1949 - 1979)

The Soviet influence on Beijing's urban planning during the early 1950s has irreversible consequences on the development of the city and the preservation of its historic heritage. As members of the Beijing City Planning Committee, Liang Sicheng and his colleague Chen Changshiang proposed a new plan for the future development of the city. Their vision consisted in preserving the Old City of Beijing in its entirety and relocating the new administrative center in the western suburb of the city.

However, the Soviet team of experts believed in Joseph Stalin's view that

*"to replace the new city center at another place instead of the city center is an unpractical idea from the bourgeois"*⁵

Therefore, they managed to persuade Mao Tse Tung to locate the administrative hub within the Old City, at the western and southern sides of the Forbidden City.⁶ Moreover, the Chinese government did not have the financial resources to afford the relocation of the administrative center, so the Liang-Chen Plan was dismissed in 1956. The Communist government began right afterwards its "Ten Major Building Structures" program, that introduced socialist architecture to Beijing's Old City.

Mao's ideas were about culture legacy were based on the mottos "more present, less past" and "using the past to serve the present": both these statements are very representative of the attitude toward urban development and historic preservation during his regime. New buildings were designed according to the socialist architecture's principles and were supposed to become symbols of the regime's power and glory. On the other hand, historic heritage was only preserved when it could symbolically glorify the Communist government's achievements.

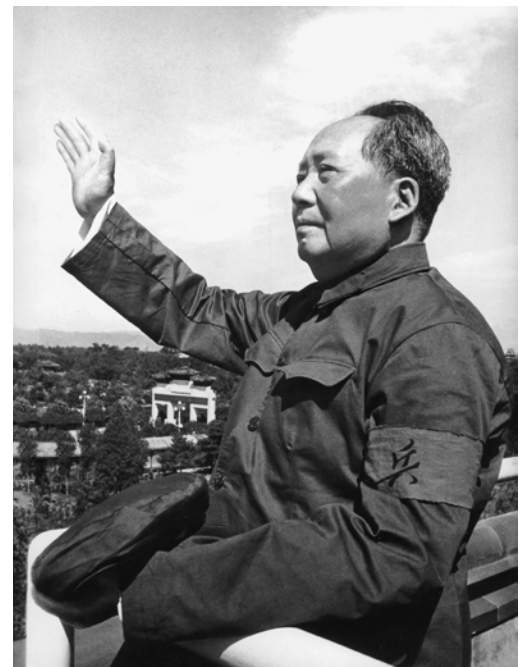
Since Mao chose the Forbidden City as a symbol of the communist power, this monumental heritage from the imperial age remained intact throughout the turmoil of the Chinese political changes. The Forbidden City could be



11. Communist propaganda, photo credits: <http://www.theeastisred.com/>

⁵ Wang, J. (2002). *A Historical Study of Liang and Chen's Beijing Project*, Dialogue, Issue 55.

⁶ Sit, V. (1996). *Soviet influence on urban planning in Beijing, 1949-1991*, The Town Planning Review.



12. Mao Zedong, photo credits: <http://canasiantimes.com/>

interpreted as a monumental space that symbolized the political authority and legitimacy of the Chinese nation. Turning the imperial palace into a national museum, the Communist party redefined the Forbidden City as the symbol of the power and identity of the modern Chinese nation.⁷

Since siheyuan couldn't be reinterpreted because of the feudal ideology they embodied, most of the traditional architecture features of Beijing's traditional courtyard houses were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In fact, Mao's ideology heavily attacked the "Four Olds": old ideas, old customs, traditional culture and old habits. The deep damage that courtyard houses received is still visible today. Moreover, hectares of residential areas where there were siheyuan were demolished under Mao's order in order to free some space for the construction of Tiananmen Square.⁸ In modern Communist China siheyuan had no representative value, hence they were targeted for destruction.

The survival of siheyuan were further threatened during the housing shortage crisis after the Cultural Revolution: the Beijing Municipal Government issued a policy that allowed work units to build new dwellings and additions in the courtyards of the Old City.⁹ Most of the new housing were designed according to socialist architecture's principles, so they were completely incompatible with the architectural context of hutong neighborhoods, while the informal additions were built with the cheapest materials, resulting in an overall damage to the siheyuan's original structure. The government's concern was to fight the housing shortage in Beijing and the preservation of the vernacular courtyard houses was not included in the priorities.



14. Communist China, photo credits: <http://redyouthuk.wordpress.com/>

⁷ Watson, R. (1995). *Palace, Museums, and Squares: Chinese National Spaces*, Museum Anthropology.

⁸ Reuber, P. (1998). *Beijing's Hutongs and Siheyuans*, Canadian Architect.

⁹ Wang, Y. (2002). *A Brief History of the Transformation of Beijing's Urban Fabric in the Twentieth century*, PhD paper, Cambridge University, Cambridge.



13. siheyuan courtyard, photo credits: www.famouswonders.com



*The east is red, the sun rises.
From China arises Mao Zedong.
He strives for the people's happiness,
Hurrah, he is the people's great savior!*

*Chairman Mao loves the people.
He is our guide
to building a new China
Hurrah, lead us forward!*

*The Communist Party is like the sun,
Wherever it shines, it is bright.
Wherever the Communist Party is,
Hurrah, there the people are liberated!*

The East is Red, Chinese revolutionary song

/reform era (1978-1980s)

While the open door policy and reform era began in 1980, the Central Committee redefined the role of Beijing as a capital:

*“Beijing was to be the political center of the nation and the center for China’s dealings with foreign countries and should be developed into one of the best cities of the world in social order and morality, cleanliness and hygiene, culture, technology and level of education, economic prosperity, convenience and stability.”*¹⁰

Following these directives, the Beijing Municipal Planning Commission redefined the planning principles of Beijing turning it from a “productive city” to the “political and cultural center of the nation”.¹¹ Therefore, the master plan for the city that was proposed in 1983 emphasized the historic preservation of the city’s heritage in a modernizing city: not only the plan highlighted the need of preserving historic architecture, but also its immediate surroundings. In a word, the plan focused on protecting yet developing Beijing’s unique character:

*“Beijing is the capital of our country as well as a historic and culturally significant city. The planning and reconstruction of the capital, Beijing ought to reflect the unique character of a nation with a long history and culture, a revolutionary tradition and a socialist political ideology. Historically significant architecture should be preserved and maintained. The surrounding are ought to complement the historically significant architecture. The old city should be reconstructed gradually and piece by piece. Via the reconstruction, the infrastructure of the old city will be improved to modern standards.”*¹²

The government issued a set of laws to preserve Beijing’s monuments with their surroundings. The Cultural Assets Protection Law, issued in 1982, gave landmarks different levels of historic significance: national, municipal and

“

As the Chinese conception of architectural beauty is serenity, rather than sublimity, and as the palace roofs are of the low and broad sweeping type, and as nobody other than the emperor was allowed to have houses with more than one story, the total effect is one of tremendous spaciousness.

Lin Yutang, in *With Love and Irony*

¹⁰ Sit, V. (1996). *Soviet influence on urban planning in Beijing, 1949-1991*, The Town Planning Review.

¹¹ Sit, V. (1996). *Soviet influence on urban planning in Beijing, 1949-1991*, The Town Planning Review.



15. Forbidden City from satellite, photo credits: <http://geoeyemediaportal.s3.amazonaws.com/>

¹² Beijing Municipal Planning Commission, (2002) *Conservation Planning of the 25 Historic Areas in Beijing’s Old City*, Yam Shan Press, Beijing.



16. Model Chinese middle class family in 1980, photo credits: <http://gailpellettproductions.com/>



17. hutong, photo credits: <http://auxportesdelempire.com/>

county. It was forbidden to demolish these significant landmarks, which were given the status of cultural asset protection areas. The government enacted two additional policies to protect Beijing's monuments from the over-development of the city: the Regulation on Building Heights (1985) and the Control of Land Use and Floor Area Ratio (1987).

While the main focus was posed on monuments, some vernacular architecture was also protected in order to preserve the character and appearance of historically significant landmarks. It is safe to say that without this set of regulations, it is unlikely that any vernacular architecture in the Old City of Beijing would have escaped destruction and survived all the way to the present time. It is also widely known that Si He Yuan still exist in Beijing because of the government's lack of funds for redevelopment before the 1980s.

In 1993 another master plan was issued and the goal of preserving the city's historic character was reiterated:

*"Beijing is a historic and culturally significant city and therefore its construction has to reflect the history and culture of Chinese civilization, the revolutionary and socialist tradition that made Beijing unique."*¹³

This master plan also introduced the concept of conservation district,

*"an area (street, settlement, town, village, building) that contains the traditional landscape and distinct local character of a particular historic area."*¹⁴

According to the plan, in order for Beijing to maintain its status of historically significant city, it was necessary to protect Beijing's monuments, historic areas as well as the city as a whole.

¹³ Zhu, Z. (1989). *New Exploration into the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Old Cities*, Building in China, issue 26.

¹⁴ Zhu, Z. (1989). *New Exploration into the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Old Cities*, Building in China, issue 26.



18. Poster advertising China's one-child policy in 1980, photo credits: <http://www.learner.org/>

In order to respect the specifications of this new master plan, the Beijing Municipal Government issued a list of 25 historic districts that were supposed to be protected from over-development. For the first time since Liang Sicheng proposed to preserve Beijing in its entirety, the preservation was suggested to be extended from individual buildings to entire areas. Many of the conservation sites were selected because of their proximity with cultural relics under either national or municipal protection. Moreover, the boundaries of the districts were not clearly defined as they list was only meant to be preliminary and open to further additions or changes. Nonetheless, before the Municipal Government could clearly define the boundaries of each area and issue a proper conservation plan, the redevelopment of the Old City intensified at an unanticipated rate. Therefore, the preservation goals of the master plan could not prevail against the emerging market forces of the 1990s.¹⁵

/redevelopment of the Old City

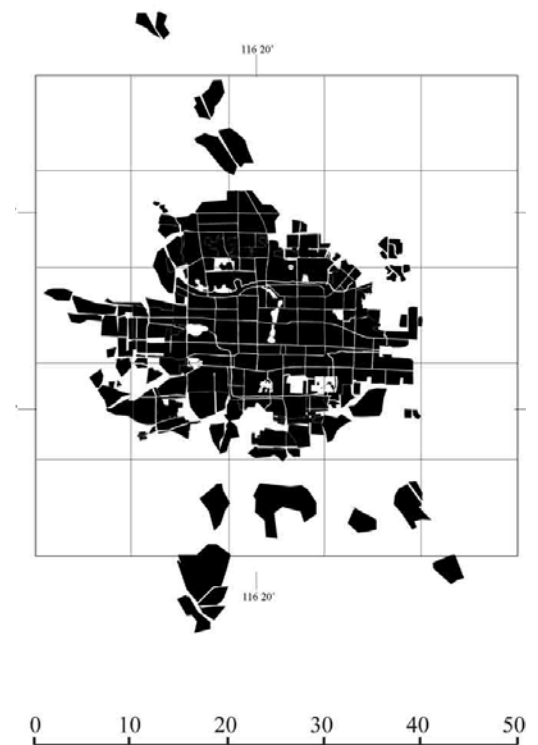
While the main goal of the redevelopment of the Old City was never to destroy the Old City itself, the official aim was to improve its appearance and transform Beijing into a modern metropolis while keeping its traditional characteristics. The Old and Dilapidated Housing Renewal Program, the redevelopment project issued in 1990, improving and upgrading old and dilapidated housing in Beijing was the right way to transform the city into a so-called “modern metropolis”.

After decades of neglect, most of the houses in the historic center were in miserable conditions and often the structure was deeply damaged: cracked walls, leaking roofs, rotten beams, were all frequent signs of the decay of most of siheyuan. According to housing census realized in 1990, up to 70% of the Si He Yuan were structurally unstable and could collapse without warning. Therefore, the Municipal Government announced in April 1990 the need to accelerate the housing renovation program: however, the government lacked the required funds to complete such a large-scale, ambitious project, so private investing from real estate developers was encouraged.



19. demolished hutong, photo credits: <http://oreamunoj.files.wordpress.com/>

¹⁵ Zhu, J. (2003). Director of Beijing Planning and Design Institute, Interview with J. Gidman.



20. Beijing in 1990, photo credits: <http://www.ced.berkeley.edu/>

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*Destroying hutongs,
selling off old people's heirlooms,
(he) has great skill in being without wisdom and in
failing (his) family.*

*Spending government funds,
erecting steles to laud (himself),
(he) feverishly works on projects to achieve much
in (his) official career.*

*(He) plays both sides for (his) own gain,
and in the entryway of the yamen* are many dirty
swine.*

Unknown author, protest poem written on the wall
of Dashilar hutong



21. Beijing in 2010, photo credits:
<http://www.ced.berkeley.edu/>

Government officials quickly understood that upgrading old courtyard houses in the Old City was not a profitable investment, so they created good incentives to attract investors. The deal was that once a developer agreed to upgrade a tract of land of the Old City, he also received a piece of undeveloped land outside the Old City where he could build more profitable high-rise residential or commercial complexes. Then, the developer was supposed to use the profits gained from the high-rise project to offset the financial loss from upgrading the siheyuan. Unfortunately, the government never issues specific planning requirements for these incentives so the original program was never realized.

As a result of the decentralization of land market, the district level government shared the costs of the Old and Dilapidated Housing Renewal Program: furthermore, the government had the responsibility of implementing the program. Since the funding was not sufficient and the pressure from the target set by the Municipal Government kept increasing, finally the District Government decided to sell the land use rights to developers, most of the times at discounted prices: the deal was that developers would install infrastructures and widen the streets of the area. Unfortunately, once the rights were sold the developers had undisputed power on the land so they just aimed to get the maximum profit out of it. Instead of upgrading the existing courtyard houses, developers forcedly relocated the original residents, demolished their dwellings and replaced them with high-rise residential buildings to be sold at market price. Needless to say, old residents could never afford to buy a flat where their siheyuan originally was, so they were forever confined in some suburb far away.

For the sake of modernization progress and profits, a huge part of Beijing's historic heritage was wiped away. Every day, original residents of the hutong communities would wake up fearing to find the Chinese character for "demolition" painted on their own house. This cycle of expropriation, relocation, demolition and redevelopment continued unrestricted for almost a decade: in fact, by the end of 1990s, a third of the historic urban fabric in Beijing's Old City was lost.

Furthermore, this process also meant the displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents to the outer skirts of the city, often with less than two weeks notice to move out. The ridiculous compensation they received was rarely enough for them to buy or even rent a new flat elsewhere; face with the risk of homelessness, many residents started protesting. Periodically, groups of siheyuan owners would gather at the Municipal Government office and demand fairer policies: they were very rarely successful. However, the protest caught the media attention and generated public outcry, especially from academics who criticized the wild development of the Old City in first place.¹⁶

/conservation plan of the 25 historic areas (2000s)

Finally, after a decade of what the Beijing Municipal Government calls “*unanticipated speed of redevelopment*”, government officials became increasingly aware that “*the traditional appearance of a city is a form of wealth rather than an impediment to its development*”.¹⁷ With this in mind, a more holistic concept of historic preservation emerged:

*“In this century, what to conserve has expanded from individual building to the surrounding environment. From buildings to natural landscape, from streets to cities, the scope of historic conservation has expanded and the content of preservation has become richer and richer. The focus of preservation has shifted from the physical preservation of the built environment and its appearance to the culture and the intangible aspects.”*¹⁸

The Municipal Government understood the need for a comprehensive conservation plan and gave the Beijing Municipal Planning Commission the duty to produce such a plan for the 25 designated historic districts. This Beijing Municipal Planning Commission is pretty much the administrative planning arm of the Municipal Government, whose first duty should be “*to promote the economic and social development of cities through allocating and managing urban land and urban space*”,¹⁹ according to the Planning Act



22. protest graffiti in the hutong, photo credits: <http://markhenley.photoshelter.com/>

¹⁶ Zhu, J. (2003). Director of Beijing Planning and Design Institute, Interview with J. Gidman.

¹⁷ Xinhua New Agency, (2003). New Beijing major speaks on housing, improving life for ordinary people, Beijing.

¹⁸ Wang, G. (2002). *The Preservation and Development of Beijing as a Historic and Culturally Significant City*, Xinhua Press, Beijing.

¹⁹ Zhang, T. (2003). *Challenges Facing Planners in Transitional China*, Journal of Planning, Education and Research.



23. Northeast Dongzhimen, comparison 2006 and now, photo credits: <http://www.angrypangolin.com/>

²⁰ Beijing Municipal Planning Commission.

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But what makes Peking so charming is the mode of life, organized so that one can have peace and quiet, while living close to a busy street. Living is cheap and life is enjoyable for all. While officials and rich men can dine in big restaurants, a poor ricksha coolie can buy, with two coppers, a perfect assortment of oil, salt, pepper, and vinegar for his cooking purposes, with a few leaves of some spicy plant to boot....

Lin Yutang, in *With Love and Irony*

²¹ Beijing Municipal Planning Commission.



24. resident who lost her home in the hutong, photo credits: <http://www.asianews.it/>

of China, 1989.

After a deep survey of the situation of the 25 historic districts, the Commission formulated guiding principles for the conservation plan based on two documents approved by the Beijing Municipal Government, the Regulatory Plan for the Urban Central Area and the Conservation and Control Scope Planning for the Historic Areas in the Old City of Beijing.

The guiding principles were:

- 1) To preserve the traditional cityscape and hutongs;
- 2) To ensure the authenticity of the preserved heritage;
- 3) To implement preservation using a gradual and measured method;
- 4) To improve the infrastructure and living conditions of the local residents;
- 5) To encourage public participation;²⁰

The commission also set regulatory guidelines for the conservation areas based on the principles above:

- 1) New or renovated buildings must be compatible with the style of the key conservation areas and cannot negatively impact the environment of the area to be conserved;
- 2) When embarking on renovation, careful consideration must be given to the nature of the land use, the height, the scale, forms and color of the architecture, as well as the floor area ratio and the proportion of green space;
- 3) Renovations must not result in large scale demolition and special attention must be paid to historic continuity;
- 4) Valuable historic architecture, hutongs and old trees must be preserved;²¹

Since the Beijing Municipal Government decided that the conservation plan had the maximum urgency, other institutions, such as the Chinese Academy for Planning and Design Research and Tsinghua University, were asked to collaborate in the project. In early November 2000, while the process of definition of the plan was still ongoing, the Beijing Municipal Planning Commission carried two preliminary evaluations of the plans. While meetings between members of the Commission and the other involved insti-

tutions were held, discussing proposals, posing questions, making recommendations. At the same time, the work of on conservation plan of the 25 historic districts was widely publicized in the media. Newspapers such as Beijing Youth Daily created a dedicated section entitled “Urban Spaces” to explain the guidelines, goals and taken measures of the plan. Experts were invited to comment on preservation while citizens were encouraged to share their views about the topic. Nevertheless, it was not clear whether the opinions expressed by people were seriously taken in consideration or not.

The plan was submitted to the experts consulting group and reviewed at the end of November. The team was composed of nineteen academics and professionals in architecture and urban planning. Finally, on November 30, the group announced their approval of the Conservation Plan of 25 Historic Areas by stating that the principles expressed in the plan were “reasonable and correct.” The plan was submitted to the Municipal Government for a final approval: in fact, the conservation project was going to be significant enough to warrant the attention of senior level Municipal Government officials, therefore the plan required a final approval at the mayoral level. However, in February 2002, the Municipal Government finally approved the plan.

“

The way the city is developed, so what this almost fairly enormously gentrified urban centers, that was the core space, 14,000 sqm developed for the living city, there are 3 phases of that and during the creation of the era, there are some pre-fab apartments installed outside that, kind of going concentric rings, and then in the last 20 years, because freedom of movement was not allowed until 1990s, after people could come into the city, people who were living a very rural life, basically still nomads, flocked into the city, so the only space they can live is in the gel on the pitches or somewhere, so the hillside around the city formed by 4 mountains, were just swelling with tents, there is no reason, in fact there is no reason to most of the urban planning in the city, so really the roads are problems, we have issues for flooding, sanitation, it is really problematic.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

25. resident looking at a demolished siheyuan, photo credits: <http://www.mscottbrauer.com/>





26. Nanluguoxiang hutong nowadays, photo credits: <http://www.beijingrelocation.com/>

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Paradoxical as it may be, the past decade of urban development has reflected that, the execution of an ideal of modernism's urban planning have, in turn, generated a reality to its opposite end – a far more complex condition even intensifies diversities. To the point that today the metropolis is nothing but a defined one.

The urban transformations that have come to pass around the world, in American, European, and above all, Asian are filled with wild mutations. In a way, the physical transformations of urban field consist of hamperings, congestions and violent eruptions in different directions. These emergences present something metaphorical about the structure of the order, or non-order, by which the cities actually grow.

The explosive urbanization in Beijing opens a new level of urban growth. Under the desire of development, the city is giving all way to consumer economy, leading to the relent relocation of inner-city inhabitants, disappearance of historical identity, rapid construction of monotonous world-class skyscrapers. But even the wildest reality contain certain profound quality. The urban as a complex situation involves the active participation of the masses. The question is how the overflow of density will land in a way that does not kill its unique vitality, constructing an alternative city based on multiplicity and heterogeneity.

Wild Beijing, MetaProject

today and tomorrow

As we all know, it's easier said than done. In this case the Chinese bureaucracy and lack of transparency were responsible for the fail in fulfilling the plan. Even though the approved conservation project stated very clearly the approach that was supposed to be applied to the renovation of the 25 historic areas of Beijing, in many cases the result didn't respect the intention.

Indeed, many hutong areas that were included in the list of 25 historic districts underwent expropriation, relocation, demolition and redevelopment. Comparing this process to the 1990s redevelopment of hutong areas was, the only difference was that most of the new developments were two-stories, traditional-looking buildings, designed to be copycats of the original siheyuan. These fake courtyard houses represented the attempt of developers to somehow respect some of the guidelines of the approved conservation plan, in order to generate less public discontent. Needless to say, all the residents were offered ridiculously low retribution and forcedly relocated elsewhere, destroying the community.

The reason why in many areas the project failed to satisfy the original principles of the plan is that a different group carried out each stage of the planning process: there was a group that made the plan, one that assessed it, another that implemented it. Furthermore, each of these groups were motivated by different interests. While generally academics were the ones that strongly sustained an as-deep-as-possible conservation, gradually carried out dwelling by dwelling, this solution didn't satisfy the political counterpart of the discussion was more interested in the financial feasibility of the project: for them the first priority was implementing the infrastructure of the hutongs, therefore the conservation project needed to generate revenue in order to financially support this much-needed upgrade. Moreover, for politicians, eager to advance in their political carrier, the small scale, gradual conservative approach seemed to insignificant to impress superior officials, therefore it didn't hold as much appeal as a lower cost alternative that could deliver immediate results in a shorter time. Real estate de-

velopers were the ones with the financial resources to buy, demolish and redevelop the land, hence they could quickly provide the profit that was needed for the upgrade of hutong infrastructure and a result that could be visible soon.

Therefore, it is safe to be said that the planning process in Beijing still remains fragmented and unregulated, so the outcomes are often unpredictable. Each stage of the planning process involves a different interest group driven by different motivations that led to divergent interpretation of conservation. These interpretations result in competing visions motivated by political, economic and social agendas that eliminate the notion of conservation from the equation. Since a legal system for planning does not exist, the plans are unable to provide legally binding regulations which means that the Municipal Planning Commission can't force the District Government to abide the objectives stated in the plan. In fact, the unregulated planning system allows political leadership to overrule existing plans.

Year after year China keeps growing into one of the globally leading powers and Beijing becomes one of the biggest and most relevant metropolis in the world, less than a third of the original siheyuan is now left in the Old City. This continuous process of demolition and redevelopment brought down the number of original courtyard houses from 3600 (1980) to less than 1000 (2013)²²: the survival of hutongs and siheyuan is now seriously endangered. Unfortunately, the situation doesn't seem to be on the edge of a serious change: while demolitions and redevelopments still regularly happen in the Old City, it seems like politic and economic interests keep prevailing on the preservation of Beijing's historic heritage.



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*Just another day in the city of the North
Some push foreign whips; some are just piss-poor.
Just another day in a city filled with schemes
Filled with teams who be dreaming of the cream,
so it seems.*

*I live in a city where the dust hits ya bones
Where to be heard, your words gotta use mega-phones
Where everybody smokes and it's killing them slow
Where you can sing out loud and nobody hears the tones
People tryna go hard, but they scared as hell
So they keep coming back like a carousel
no roots, so they move like a tumbling weed
Like police at the door while they bundling weed
They hear the knock outside and they stumble and flee
While I roam the city free like Grand Theft 3
There's poison in the air, so he's coughin up lungs
But he breathes in, the Spirit's got him speaking in tongues
Coughed up some blood, guess he is a little scared
But he made it this far, guess he's sposed to be here
A life well lived is a life without fear
Got more than 4 bars, am I coming through clear?*

Jason Wu, City of the North

²² York, G. (2013). *How Could They Demolish Them So Easily?*, The Globe and Mail.

27. family in the demolished hutong,
photo credits: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/>

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2 • hutongs

hutong

noun (plural same or hutongs)

- a narrow lane or alleyway in a traditional residential area of a Chinese city, especially Beijing.²³

The term is believed to be Mongolian in origin, since its first appearance in Beijing's Yuan Dynasty records: there are several theories behind the origin of the name, the most popular being that it means "water well". Yuan Dynasty's city plans show three kinds of streets: big streets (around 37.2m wide), small streets (18.6m wide) and hutongs (9.3m wide). Big and small streets mostly ran North-South, while hutongs mostly West-East.

With the time, hutongs and their siheyuan have become so bound up in both domestic and foreign perception of Beijing that are now almost synonymous with the city. These narrow lanes, originally built to provide access to residential siheyuan, have come to be considered as quintessentially representative of Beijing. This is true not only because they provide the ideal backdrop for Beijing's monuments and important buildings, but also because of the unique street life that developed within them. One journalist described a typical scene in a hutong:

*"an old woman sits in the corner of an old lane, sewing a shirt in the sunshine; a group of middle-aged residents beside the grey walls of old houses; a young man reads the newspaper on a traditional porch, inscribed with images of lilies and fish"*²⁴



²³ Oxford English Dictionary.



*There is a cypress tree
in the middle of the courtyard;
its sunken chest become hollow.
It is very old.*

*One day a starling passed by –
it was very cold –
and dropped a lunch berry
by mistake.*

*The berry fell down deep
deep down
into the dark cavern
of the cypress tree's age.*

*Now a mulberry tree grows there,
like a bashful dancer,
sprung straight from the
other tree's feet.*

Michael Wag, Hutong song

²⁴ York, G. (2013). *How Could They Demolish Them So Easily?*, The Globe and Mail.

28. hutong in beijing, photo credits:
<http://www.justinhillauthor.com/>



29. hutong, photo credits: <http://trip2blog.com/>

“

I think it is the fine grain nature of the Hutongs with the blocks that are so small that allows the conditions to emerge, I think a lot of Hutongs having the texture that is way way finer than the regular Beijing type of blocks, and in fact spacially it has to do with the scale, the space in Hutong themselves, and the interlocking interior spaces that are created by the Hutongs, more in an abstract way rather than the physical or physicality of the house itself that are the important element, that makes the Hutong so livable, and the fact the blocks are small enough to be taken advantage of.

... we are talking about the grid in terms of the fact that it is not very New York, but very open and it is quite amazed that it is very closed and these intersections emerge when they cut the street, there is a University in Chicago having done a research on the relation between density and walkability, they found that there is direct correlation between both: the more dense the more pedestrian pathways there are, the more formation, the more different types of communities there are. It comes from a very democratic Western ideal of how do you create community. But when you are talking about this Anhui community, which is very pedestrian-oriented, then it has certain critical mass developed at points: like one person from outside moves in and then the whole family moves here, creating a critical mass, a kind of emergency, but what is the magnetism of the phenomenon that creates this condition?

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

origins

During the Zhou Dynasty (1027-256 BC), emperors planned the city of Beijing and arranged the residential areas according to the social hierarchy. Historically, a hutong was once used as the lowest level of administrative geographical divisions within a city in ancient China, as in the *paifang* system: the largest division within a city in ancient China was a *fang*, equivalent to current day precinct. Walls or fences enclosed each *fang*, while the gates of these enclosures were shut and guarded every night, like a modern gated community. Each *fang* was further divided into several *pai*, which was equivalent to what a neighborhood is nowadays. Each *pai*, in turn, contained an area including several hutongs.

During the Ming Dynasty (early 15th century), Beijing was divided into a total of 36 *fang*: the center of the city was the Forbidden City, surrounded in concentric circles by the Inner City and Outer City. The higher social status, the closer to the imperial palace citizens were allowed to live. Therefore, aristocrats lived to the east and west of the Forbidden City. The large siheyuan of these high-ranking officials and wealthy merchants often featured beautifully carved and painted roof beams and pillars and carefully landscaped gardens. The hutongs they constituted were pleasant to look at, lined by spacious homes and walled gardens. Farther from the palace, and to its north and south, were merchants, craftsmen and workers: their siheyuan were much smaller in scale and simpler in design and decoration, while the hutongs were narrower and less orderly. Between the main hutongs, many tiny lanes ran north and south for convenient passage.

However, as the ancient Chinese urban administration division system turned onto population and household divisions instead of geographical divisions, the hutongs were no longer used as the lowest level of administrative geographical division and were replaced with other divisional approaches.

hutongs today

“Unless I am back in the lanes, I have not returned home. Home is inseparable from the alleys and lanes. Nor is Beijing separable from them. To a certain extent, the alleys and lanes are the soul of Beijing.”²⁵

For an unaccustomed eye Beijing’s hutongs can be somehow difficult to read, at least at first sight. Actually, what is visible from the street is only a small fraction of the universe of a hutong: these timeless spaces can be described as complex systems of architectural, social and cultural layers. Hutongs are the original urban public space that deals with the relationship between privacy and public and that represents the lifestyle of the city. Instead of squares, boulevards and parks as public spaces in western cities, hutongs are Beijing’s typical open spaces for social and commercial activities.

For generations, Beijingers have lived in a hutong’s culture: hutongs still represent the living culture of the city. For example, the names of the hutongs are closely related to people’s daily lives and reflected people’s relationships to the neighborhood in which they live: while the government tried to rename some hutongs in order to make them more easily recognizable for outsiders, most of the residents still use the original names. Even nowadays, after decades of demolition and redevelopment, it appears very clear how hutongs still hold the role of living symbol of the Beijing’s way of life. There is a very strong sense of belonging and tight relationships bound neighbors into a solid community.



30. hutong, photo credits:
<https://rememberingletters.wordpress.com>

²⁵ Lian Bingkun, *Alleys in Beijing*.

“The thing I feel is quite different here is really I think the future means different things for different generations, actually it means quite differently in even different people in Beijing, and then a lot of times even when we were doing this project, Bird asked me this question, “what do you think of the Hutong in 20 years?” I told him, not because I am overly pessimistic, “I do not even think there is a future for Hutong, even though we were doing this.” In a biological way, we are like a bunch of bio- scientists who are trying to study endangered species in the rainforest, trying to figure out if there is this quality, it is interesting that in some specific moments of history the speed has been for some reason fastened up, but if you really asked me what is the future of Hutong, as we are talking about it, but many things still do not have any legitimate tools to be protected; I think in the future the Hutong may become very upper-scaled, some very expensive property in Beijing for sure, but our future of interesting thing, which is what are talking about, of keeping the existing for the next 20 year, might not be coming, but in a way, it does not matter, we are not trying to freeze this moment forever, we just want to know, just now why I asked Youmi about transplanting values, just want to know through this transplanting discussion and looking into the current situation, is there sort of genes or mechanism we can learn from it in terms of fine grains of planning , so very simple rule can be unfolded into the future to point to something that is more interesting, rather than saying the Hutong is the most authentic and ancient thing and keep it forever.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject



31. hutong, photo credits:
<http://www.chinadiscovery.com/>

community

Hutong residents often see themselves as the true Beijingers, and they even speak their own dialect, which is quite different from Putonghua, with unique words, expressions and ways of greeting. In general residents tend to have cordial relationships and help each other out whenever necessary. People also like to spend their free time sitting on little stools in the alleys and talking to neighbors. Strolling through the hutongs, despite of overcrowded dilapidated courtyards and smelly public toilets, there is a special idyllic atmosphere of a community at ease with its environment.

Local vegetable markets and small shops take place in most of the hutongs: these provide convenient supply of daily necessities for residents and additional spots to meet and interact with neighbors. Most residents don't need to leave the hutong environment in order to fulfill their basic needs. Moreover, public sanitation and garbage collection is well operated by the government.

Another big advantage of living in the hutongs is that life is usually within walking distance: for example, residents can walk to the food market or any other local shop. Moreover, bicycle is still the most convenient way to move around hutongs and it remains an integral element of the transportation within the historic neighborhoods.

For all these reasons, residents express general satisfaction with their environment: daily transportation, shopping, garbage management system, relationships with neighbors and the prime location in the very city center are all aspects that residents hold in high consideration.²⁶ The only aspect that seems to bother hutongs residents is the traffic: most of residents don't own a car and they think that outsiders bring too much car traffic into the alleys, causing noise, pollution, danger, traffic jams and general disturbance of the otherwise serene environment. Moreover, hutongs were never designed to host car traffic and they are not wide enough to comfortably accommodate it.

Visitors immediately notice people chatting in the lanes, working out, sitting on small stools and playing mahjong (Chinese chess): despite the visible poverty, the bad hygienic conditions, the tatty shacks, hutongs are perceived as a pleasant environment, where people can relax just a street away from the metropolis's craziness.

²⁶ Alexander, A. & Azevedo, P. & Hirako, Y. (2004) *Beijing Hutong Conservation Plan*, Tibet Heritage Fund International, Beijing.



32. siheyuan courtyard, photo credits:
<http://alfredsadventure.files.wordpress.com/>

In conclusion, long-term residents are the core element of a community: they spent most of their lives within the neighborhood, are strongly attached to their home and represent continuity. The main problem of the current hutong's population is that most of the residents can't afford to take care of their own houses because of very low family incomes. Since most of their dwellings are historically valuable, the lack of proper maintenance represents a serious problem and a threat to the preservation of the area's value. At the same time, the mix of people who live in the hutongs is the result of the last fifty years of social development in Beijing: without such a social and cultural diversity, hutongs would be much more lifeless.

Therefore, it appears clear how the best solution for the future of hutongs should be a population that is able to provide proper care for siheyuan, yet maintaining the social diversity that keeps the community interesting and alive.

“

That is also what I was thinking, if you study the demolishing of Hutong, the biggest is in late 90s, in the middle 90s, we opened the market, and suddenly there were these new development plan and all the Hutong get demolished, that was at the point that there was no discussion, there is no debate on how and why we should demolish it, because it is basically because we have been closed so long and finally we were open, so why not open it and go for better resources.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject



33. hutong residents, photo credits:
<http://media1.imbresources.org/>



34. dilapidated hutong, photo credits:
<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/>

hutong = slums?

At a first sight, most of the hutongs that are left in Beijing appear like slums: even though few of them underwent an intrusive process of renewal that resulted into commercial and touristic copycats of the original ones, the majority still presents severely dilapidated conditions.

The streets are usually very dusty and dirty, with bugs and abandoned items at the side of the lane. Despite the narrow width of the hutongs, cars have free access to them, resulting in traffic jams and illegal parking that makes the street much less pedestrian-friendly than it is meant to be. Moreover, the many public toilets are so smelly that even walking in front of them is unpleasant: it is estimated that in average each public toilet is shared by seventy seven families.²⁷ Since private toilets are a rarity in hutongs, residents don't have any choice but using the public ones: even though the government operates the maintenance, the usage is so intense that these toilets are hardly in decent hygienic conditions.

The overcrowdings is a serious problem in the hutongs and the average living space per person of 4.2 mq is much below the China's official standard (20 mq per person).²⁸ Indeed, the average living space per residential unit, which we can define as a family, is two rooms (around 15 mq circa), with each family consisting of an average of 3.5 members. As a result of the extreme overcrowdings, the illegal additions that were built over time by residents in desperate need of space ruin the appearance of most of the siheyuan, that look more like decrepit shacks than historical courtyard houses. Officially it is necessary to get permission from the housing authorities to build such structures, but controls are not strict so in most of the cases residents can get away with the illegal addition. It is estimated that more than 70% of hutongs resident families has one or more illegal extension buildings, usually makeshift constructions out of bricks with asbestos or tin sheet roofs: these additional rooms are generally used as kitchens or storage.²⁹

Apart from the flimsiness of design and often hazardous nature of the materials, extension buildings have also filled

²⁷ Alexander, A. & Azevedo, P. & Hirako, Y. (2004) *Beijing Hutong Conservation Plan*, Tibet Heritage Fund International, Beijing.

²⁸ Alexander, A. & Azevedo, P. & Hirako, Y. (2004) *Beijing Hutong Conservation Plan*, Tibet Heritage Fund International, Beijing.

²⁹ Alexander, A. & Azevedo, P. & Hirako, Y. (2004) *Beijing Hutong Conservation Plan*, Tibet Heritage Fund International, Beijing.

most of the courtyards, blocking sunlight and causing a general slumification effect.

In conclusion, today's conditions of hutongs seriously threaten the preservation of both the areas as historically significant districts and the siheyuan as testifies of Beijing's vernacular architecture. For the most part it seems like the slumification effect derives from the fact that residents have too low incomes to avoid such a process to happen. The dirt, bad smell, chaos, overcrowding and lack of infrastructure seriously affects the appearance of hutongs, that day after day loose their charm and mystery to turn into tatty slums.

“

I think there is a hybrid, when we talked about earlier, when I was talking about the complex, I think the authenticity in Beijing is not a correct terminology in general, but there is these waves, like Dashilar area where the incentive is not to maximize the profits in that area, for they have a bunch of areas that they are developing, so the incentive is to do something good, for the interest to the community, may be in the case of Dongcheng Tourist Bureau, what they are looking is also to promote the image of Beijing, it is not trying to make as much money as they can, but it is trying to do something that has some culture significance to boost the image of the city, in those cases where the incentive is not maximize the profits, then you can have this relationships or set up or potentials with these local mum and papa stores or art and crafts people, it is really the incentive that is driving things, if it is money that drives everything, then it is a difficult thing to address, if it is not 100% financial, it would be culture served, may be that is where tourism becomes more friendly.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject



simonjamesonweston 2011

35. siheyuan, photo credits:
<http://media1.imbresources.org/>

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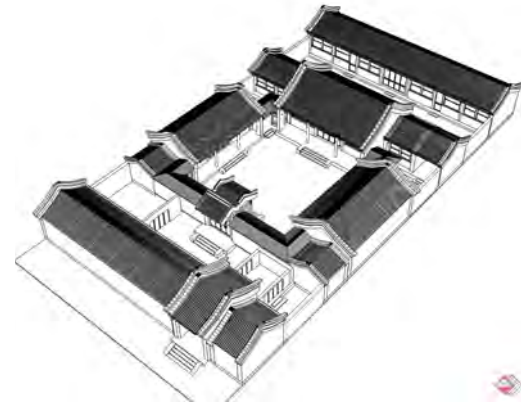
York, G. (2013) *How Could They Demolish Them So Easily?*, The Globe and Mail.

3 • siheyuan

siheyuan, the traditional Beijing courtyard houses, have long been considered as a classic example of Chinese vernacular architecture. The courtyard house is particularly renowned worldwide for the way it is an integral part of old Beijing's layout: it can be considered as the basic, micro-cosmic unit of a capital city plan that is itself cosmological in scale and intent. Indeed, the very complex hierarchy of the traditional Chinese family is perfectly mirrored in the siheyuan's layout as well as the urban organization of the whole city of Beijing reflects the social hierarchy of ancient China.

Nowadays the word siheyuan automatically refers to the traditional courtyard house: breaking up this term, "Si" mean four, which in this case is referred to the four cardinal points, East, West, North and South. "He" refers to the surrounding, meaning the four cardinal points are inscribed into a square. Its special shape resembles to a quadrangle with a garden in the center: the courtyard layout moves the focus of the house inwards and since there is only one gate to access the siheyuan, when it is closed the house is completely isolated and loses touch with the outside world.

This chapter aims to provide a over all view on the topic of the siheyuan: beginning with a short description of the courtyard house's historic background, the layout of the siheyuan will then be carefully analyzed and explained, in order to achieve a full understanding of the structure of this Chinese vernacular architecture. Finally, the most recurrent phenomena of decay and neglecting recently reported among the siheyuan will be described, so to provide a more precise idea of the current condition of the courtyard houses.



36. a typical siheyuan, photo credits: <http://file2.ddyuanlin.com/>



37. a siheyuan courtyard, photo credits: <http://johnthomsonchina.files.wordpress.com/>



I think the problem with the current situation of Beijing Hutong is that during the Tugai (Land Reform) and later the property given to the State, hence large part of Hutong area ended up belonging to work unit, and they locate way more families than the courtyard was designed for, so you get the conditions that one extended family have one courtyard, but with the condition of 3 or 4 smaller families too, but they went on to have their own children, so the condition in the Hutong deteriorated, and also because they do not have direct ownership of the Hutong, so when the things get dilapidated, they just do not care. They would think they would move away eventually; this is only a transitional time I am living here.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

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Beijing was totally different from any other city anywhere in the world. Other cities grow naturally. Beijing was designed – right down to every last brick.

Kang Xin, director of the China Art Construction Design and Research Institute (CACDRI)

²⁹ Unknown author (1978). *Evolution of Domestic House Form in China*, Master Thesis, University of Hong Kong.



38. a siheyuan courtyard, photo credits: <http://31.media.tumblr.com/>

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Everyday when I go into the city, all I see are construction sites, many in the name of 'cultural protection.' My understanding of their idea of 'protection,' is that if something is old, and has tourist value – can make someone rich, they dismantle it, and then build a brand new one, bigger and taller, without any explanation or notice. If it doesn't have tourist value, it's destroyed.

Kang Xin, director of the China Art Construction Design and Research Institute (CACDRI)

³⁰ Unknown author (1978). *Evolution of Domestic House Form in China*, Master Thesis, University of Hong Kong.

history

It is necessary to go back in time as far as the Shang Dynasty (1751-1111 BC) to recognize similarity between the dwelling of that time and the courtyard house we know nowadays. In fact,

“a rectangular dwelling site excavated by Chinese archeologists in 1954 in Xian, Shaanxi Province, showed that the entrance with a small entrance lobby had already been planned at the North facing southward.” ²⁹

The following features already existed in a Zhou Dynasty's (770-256 BC) official residence:

- a) a dominant North-South axis with South orientation
- b) axial planning of main entrance and hall raised with platform and steps
- c) symmetric layout with a central court
- d) living quarters on both sides of the court
- e) the court in Zhou period was mainly used for the ancestral tablet: this shows a strong influence of the cult of ancestral worship.

“On the foundation laid in the feudal period (1751-222 BC) the Chinese Empire created an original civilization that made great achievements in such fields as public administration, philosophy, literature and arts. For over two thousand years following the Qin conquest, China remained unified despite foreign invasions and sporadic outbursts of feudal warfare. It offers a unique example of political and cultural continuity stretching over more than four thousand years from the middle of the second millennium BC to contemporary China. This political and cultural continuity had produced a fairly static Chinese society and economy (broken briefly by internal upheavals at intervals only), which in turn enabled the continuous development of a particular Chinese house form – the courtyard house for over two thousand years from Zhou to Qing Dynasties.” ³⁰

The square and rectangular walled compounds are said to originate from the Han period (206 BC-220 AC). They

intended to create a spatial image of the world where man represented the central element. Indeed, the Chinese view of cosmos was derived from the Confucian culture, “the way of Heaven is be round, while the way of Earth is to be square. Squareness dominated darkness.”³¹

/axiality and symmetry

Though axiality and symmetry already appeared during Zhou Dynasty, they were still not common in the Han period’s courtyard house. The gained popularity since Sui (581-618 AC) and Tang (618-907 AC) Dynasties. From then on, these two features appeared both in aristocratic and common people’s houses.

/four inward facing pavilions around a courtyard

This specific organization stressed blood ties and family hierarchy. Indeed, the patriarch would stay in the main south-oriented pavilions; the oldest son would occupy the West wing that faces East, while the daughter would live in the East suites. The inwardness showed the strong bound and unity among the family members: most of this layout is inspired by the Confucian view of family’s hierarchy and ethics.

/solid and void

Architecturally speaking, the court is a negative space, a void contrasting the four masses of the buildings and the enclosing walls. While much of the rigid composition of the courtyard house is inspired by Confucian principles of family ethics, the relationship between void and solid was influenced by the philosophy of Laotze and Taoism.

*“Space and form of space were created and shaped by means of the enclosing elements. Hence the whole complex was regarded as a big void. By means of enclosing walls, different spaces for different functions were created. The void of the exterior spaces of the courtyard were thus formed by enclosing walls while the voids of interior spaces of the suites were created by means of both roofs and walls. The principle of being created by means of non-being and non being-out out of being was applied.”*³²

³¹ The *Huai Nan Tzu*, trans. By Derek Boddle.



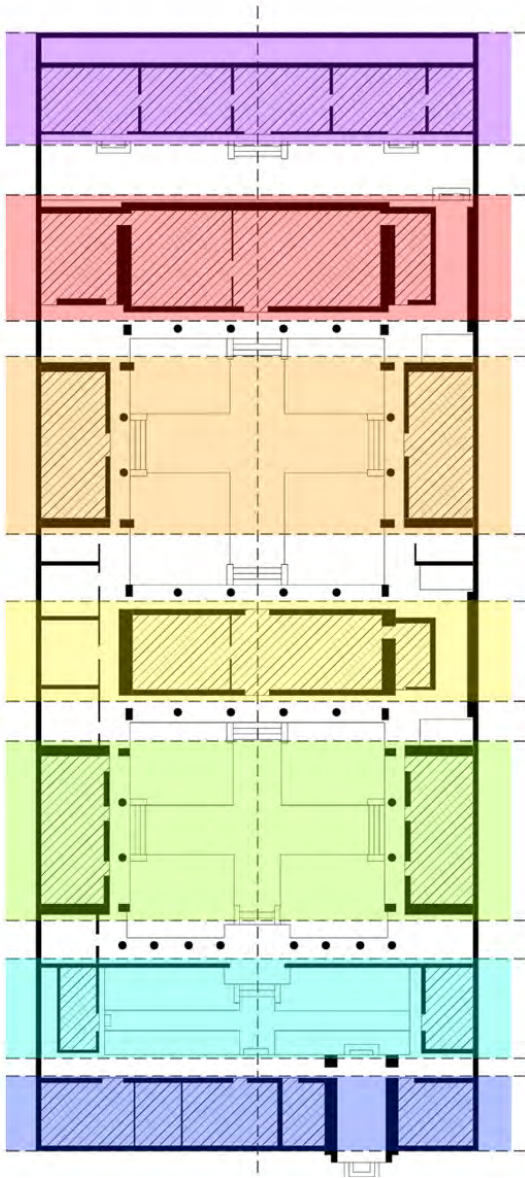
Another thing is too talking about the intervention, the developer’s tumbled attitudes of building these massive developments verses Hutong, which is very complicated systems of different interests, privately or government-mandated, Hutong is not so easy to quantifiable to this type of person, or this type of demographic, so you have a lot of different elements within it, but there is something about the resilience allowing more intervention than you might find in this mega interventions, so it is actually sad, they are more top-down, there is less you can do; but Hutong is still having this chaotic quality to allow for all these things to pop up and disappear, those things are a type of interventions too, may be it is like in comparison to other cities, there is this frame space that has not been set, they are still in massive flux, there is still stable elements there, like the occupation by the generals who make sure it exists or stays its existence, but then there are just other things that just come and go, that are illegal, like the house additions you showed, and huge pits dug on the street.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject



39. siheyuan courtyard, photo credits: <http://depeteryi.com/>

³² Unknown author (1978). *Evolution of Domestic House Form in China*, Master Thesis, University of Hong Kong.



40. siheyuan plan, photo credits:
<http://info.aia.org/>

layout

Three characteristics seem to be fundamental in the typical courtyard house: its introverted layout, its symmetry and its highly hierarchical structure. As the name *siheyuan* suggests, the Beijing courtyard house is traditionally composed of four pavilions surrounding a central courtyard: a perimetral wall encompasses the four buildings, closing up the complex from outside. Most of the layout of the *siheyuan* follows the theory of Feng Shui: for example, the gate giving access to the court is almost always located at the southeast, which is considered to be a positive orientation. Indeed, according to Feng Shui northeast is a less favorable direction, therefore the kitchen and other service rooms are usually placed there. The southwest corner is extremely inauspicious and only suitable to host latrines or storages.

During the winter, grey and dusty Beijing is cold and windy. The squared shape of the courtyard allows the sunlight to enter, while the wide overhanging roofs of pavilions provide a shelter from rain and snow. The wall surrounding the house is more than three meters high: it prevents unwelcome eyes from sneaking in and provides a good protection from annoying noise from outside. Moreover, it protects the house from the sharp wind of Beijing's winter. There were no windows in this exterior wall, except for the ones of a building in the back of the house: anyway these few openings were tiny and located in the upper part of the wall.

The gate is called Outer Gate and its size and decoration reflect the scholar gentry status of the owner: carved motifs in the upper corners above the red gate door expresses the fulfillment of wishes. The Outer Gate is opened in a perimetral wall and leads to the first court: the door faces a screen wall called *ying bi*, which is meant to stop indiscreet glances and unlucky influences. Sometimes the end wall of the side pavilion or a simple wooden screen served this function.

This first court is called Outer Courtyard and it has a long and narrow shape with East-West orientation. In the past, visitors were received there, because only relatives were al-

lowed through the Inner Gate. This courtyard hosts the da zuo fang pavilion whose windows all face North, which is the worst possible orientation according to the Feng Shui theory. Usually this pavilion has three or four rooms for male servants, distant relatives and poor members of the family.

From the Outer Courtyard, a second gate called chui hua men, meaning Hanging Flower Gate, allows the passage to the second court. This gate is the most important and richly decorated one as it is the main symbol of the status of the family: its name derives from the carved flowers at the end of two short posts “hanging” down from the beam. Inside the gate there is a closed screen door, on either side of which a doorway opens out onto a covered walkway: this screen has the some function of the one in the Outer Gate, which is protecting privacy but also preventing negative forces from entering the court according to Feng Shui discipline.

The second court, called Inner Courtyard, is a quadrangle formed by rows of rooms and covered walkways in the four cardinal directions. It is fundamental space of the house, where the family is meant to gather when the weather is warm. According to the Feng Shui theory, this void allows the positive energy to flow and fill all the surrounding pavilions. Usually this courtyard hosts miniature trees and fish tanks that make the space more pleasant.

Opposite the Hanging Flowers Gate, there is the Main Pavilion or *zheng fang*, where the most important components of the family lived: this means that usually the Grandparents inhabited the building, as they were the oldest members of the family. Inside the pavilion there is a room for calligraphy, painting, music and contemplation. When visitors became allowed to enter the Inner Courtyard, this was the place where they were received: for special occasions, such as Spring Festival, in this room screens were folded back and tables were set with offerings, so the family could gather here to pay their respects to ancestors. According to Feng Shui, this building has the best possible orientation, because it faces south. The two Ear Pavilions, called *er fang*, are built against the later walls of the Main Pavilion and host bedrooms and resting rooms: since they still face south they are considered very valu-



41. siheyuan model, photo credits: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/>



42. Chinese men greeting each other in front of a Outer Gate, photo credits: <http://wenming.iflove.com/>



43. Hanging Flower Gate, photo credits: <http://static.panoramio.com/>

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The construction was based on a perfect blueprint, which embodied the quintessence of a complete human cultural system. So far, in this respect, no other city in the world can compare with Beijing – replicating aesthetic elements of the old city's external form is possible, but the philosophical and social dimensions are inimitable.

Beijing is a very orderly square. Siheyuan (traditional courtyard housing) is also arranged in a square shape. The shape of the yard, the house, the hutong and the city are a part of the huge system, just like the relationship between a word, a phrase, a sentence and an article.

I think metaphysically, the changes in the city's design over the last 60-years have had a profound impact. To understand China – and by extension, Beijing – one first needs to understand these primary tenants of Chinese culture. What does the city's urban plan represent today? What is its philosophy? Sadly, most of those living in modern Beijing have no clue. Without understanding our culture, what hope can we have for the future?

Kang Xin, director of the China Art Construction Design and Research Institute (CACDRI)



44. Outer Gate, photo credits:
<http://auxportesdelempire.com/>

able hence they are still dedicated to the Grandparents.

On the east and west of the Inner Court there are the *xi-ang fang*, or Wing Rooms, where the second generation lived. Usually, the elder son inhabited the east one and the younger son the west one. Next to the Wing Rooms there is a kind of Ear Pavilion called *xiao ping tai* or *lu ding*. These are usually service rooms, kitchens, storages.

In most cases behind the Main Pavilion there is a small third courtyard called the Rear Courtyard, which is accessible from a doorway located at the east end side of the Main Pavilion: this court resembles to the Outer one in shape and orientation and was traditionally dedicated to unmarried daughters and their female servants. The strategic position at the back of the house allowed the women not to be seen easily by strangers. The court hosts the Rear Pavilion where the women of the family lived: at the side of the building there are the Rear Rooms for the younger girls of the family with their nursemaid and maidservants.

Around the Main and Rear Courtyards, a row of covered walkways connected all the building together: the passage provided shelter from the sun, rain, snow, or a place to rest and enjoy the view of the courtyard. In the corners between pavilions, behind the gallery, families often arranged a little garden called The Garden under the Dew, where rockeries are laid out with bamboo plants: the view of these corners from the center of the courtyard gives an impression of openness, making the space look larger and quieter. Indeed, inside the enclosed walls of the siheyuan the wild nature was reproduced: rockeries reflect a real landscape and plants are used to suggest the larger natural world. In this game of artificial and natural views, the mind of the visitor is encouraged to wander around: even though the courtyard is never vast, the juxtaposition of small open spaces and screens give a sense of infiniteness.

The fact that the layout of the Chinese traditional house is composed by pavilions that are separated from each other by a void helps give a sense of vastness: these opening between the buildings give a sense of depth to the whole complex. Moreover, the void underlines the solid mass of

the pavilions. This relationship between solid and void was fundamental in the Chinese tradition, as the Feng Shui discipline suggests that only when the two dimensions are in good balance the harmony and positive energy can flow into the house.

breaking it down

Since the siheyuan is a very complex system of spaces, surfaces and juxtapositions, it may be helpful to identify the set of basic physical elements that compose the traditional courtyard house and study each of them independently from the general context of the dwelling.

/walls

There are four categories of walls in the siheyuan:

- a) Perimetral wall: with an average eight of three meters, this wall presents almost no openings beside the main entrance (Outer Gate);
- b) Walls enclosing indoor spaces: they form the pavilions and are normally on three adjacent sides, without major openings;
- c) Walls dividing courtyards: they are always pierced by doorways that allow the communication between the two courtyards;
- d) Windowed walls: they close the space formed by walls b and are always oriented toward the center of the courtyard.

/columns, beams and roofs

These three elements are combined in different ways in order to create different spaces, as shown in the picture. A represents the main room, while B consists in semi-enclosed and covered space, like a sort of veranda. The roof is always the most visible element and is supported by columns and beams assembled without any triangulation. The overhanging roof is also meant to provide shelter from sun, rain and snow.

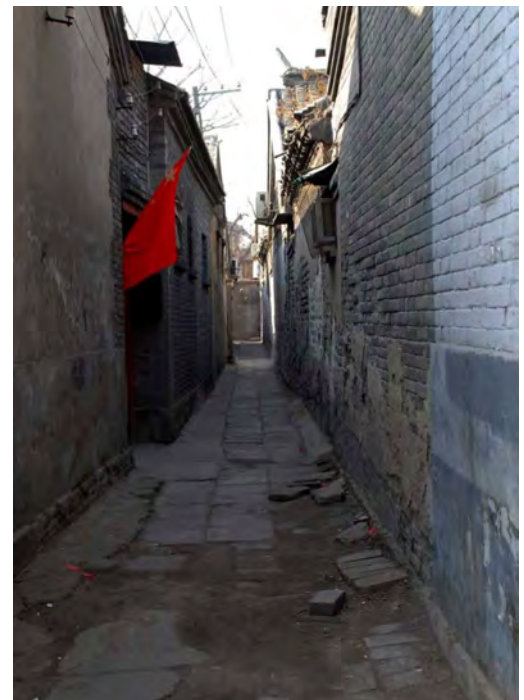


45. a demolished siheyuan, photo credits: <http://untappedcities.com/>



So like the Hutong gets more add-on structures, people build kitchen, yard, so the conditions you see Hutong today is vastly different from what they were intended for. This kind of historic authenticity.....there are only a handful of real courtyards left, so when we talked about historic authenticity, it simply does not exist.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject



46. hutong, photo credits: <http://www.china-tour.cn/>



47. young hutong resident looking at a siheyuan courtyard, photo credits: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/>

“

In the Hutong where I live, somebody made a shower on the street, basically there is a shower comes out the wall, and there is this curtain, just like this and they shower on the street, I think that is a performance, for me it is like.... I will never forget that, but I do not think that guy thinks he is performing, that is the charmer for me, everyday there is this crazy thing (improvisation) going on.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

/gates

A siheyuan presents two gates:

- a) Main Entrance: this is the largest gate in the house and separates the public sphere from the private. This door always has a roof, sometimes so big that the structure of the doorway creates its own hall that is used as a buffer space;
- b) Hanging Flower Gate: it is built in the wall that divides two outdoor spaces and it is always aligned with the Main Pavilion.

/indoor space

In a siheyuan the indoor space is a pavilion. All the pavilions are always one room deep, beside the Transparent Pavilion that is sometimes two rooms deep. It is possible to identify four different kinds of indoor space:

- a) Main and Wing Pavilion: these indoor spaces present a standard rectangular shape;
- b) Ear Pavilion: it is located on one or both sides of a major pavilion;
- c) Long and narrow pavilion: this indoor space is often located at both ends (north and south) of the complex and has the full width of the lot;
- d) Transparent Pavilion: this is a pavilion opened on two opposite sides and usually is located in the north-south axis. It is sometimes defined as “hall pavilion”, as it is open to two courtyards.

/semi-outdoor and outdoor covered space

- a) Veranda: located in front of the major pavilions;
- b) Gallery: it runs around the main courtyard in between the major pavilions.

/outdoor space

In a siheyuan the outdoor space corresponds to a courtyard.

a) Main Courtyard: it is always squared and can be enclosed by three pavilions and a wall or four pavilions;

b) Secondary courtyard: it is long and narrow and can be enclosed by two pavilions (the façade of one and the back of the other) and two walls (normally part of the perimetral wall), or by a pavilion and three walls (two sections of the perimetral wall and a wall separating two courtyards);

c) Tertiary courtyard: also called “Garden under the Dew”, it is located in the corners enclosed by two pavilions (a Ear Pavilion and the later side of a Wing Pavilion), a wall (part of the perimetral wall) and a gallery;

d) Small courtyard: it is place in between the wall dividing two courtyards and two pavilions (façade of the ear pavilion and the later side of a wing pavilion and a gallery).



48. a siheyuan courtyard, photo credits: <http://0.tqn.com/>



49. “Les Siheyuan”, photo credits: <http://auxportesdelempire.com/>



50. a siheyuan courtyard, photo credits: <http://www.beijinghutongtour.com/>

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The city has been like that for 50 years, why not have some change, like what Obama has said. But the pace slowed down, as the Olympics happened, they started to realize that there is this gigantic tourist opportunity for the city and of course they figure they have to keep something authentic, but then there is complexity of moving in, I think the pieces that are left now are the pieces that are really hard to take off, for example, my hutong, the reason I showed you, there is this gigantic poles digging in the ground, if you asked the owner why he is confident about doing this, he said no matter how much money he is throwing in, he is going to do it, in our hutong, there are 3 generals living in the Hutong, and because of those guys, the hutongs will not be demolished for the 20 years, there is no way to move them, they are military owned property, so he is very confident that in the 20 or 30 years it will not be demolished, so he is taking the opportunity to develop whatever he wants.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

unit

We will now consider a model that can we define as a basic unit. The purpose of such a model is to fully understand how all the elements previously analyzed are assembled together in the block.

/characters

We define a basic unit as:

- a) Enclosure: regardless of the shape or the size of the compound, a basic unit is always surrounded by a wall;
- b) Symmetric composition: the siheyuan's layout always follows the north-south axis;
- c) Set of masses and voids: a basic unit is always composed by four pavilions (masses) enclosing a courtyard (void);
- d) Introverted space: a siheyuan has the least possible openings to the outside, while all the pavilions open toward the center;
- e) Lucky orientation: according to Feng Shui, the buildings that face South are the more important;
- f) Hierarchical structure: the position and dimension of each building always reflect its importance and meaning: the highest building is the most important, the lowest the least. The closer a pavilion is to the Main Entrance, the more public it is: the deeper it is in the compound, the more private it is;
- g) Balance: since most of the Si He Yuan layout is inspired by Feng Shui principles, it also respects the importance of balance between opposites (Yin and Yang Theory). Therefore, a courtyard house is based on a balanced relationship between outdoor and indoor spaces;
- h) Height: each pavilion must be one story and it is built on a platform.

siheyuan today

In order to understand how to deal with a siheyuan today, it is important to take in consideration their current condition and the most recurrent phenomena of decay and damage. While an accurate survey of every single dwelling is hard to achieve, there are researches and studies about the general condition of the courtyard houses that can be taken as reference.

33

/structural issues and lack of maintenance

According to the survey realized during 2004 by a team of students and PhD researchers from Tsinghua University, the most recurrent structural issues in siheyuan were roof leaks, damage to the timber structure caused by bugs and rot, and ground humidity creeping up the walls. Most of these problems were caused by a lack of basic maintenance. Moreover, the poor lighting and ventilation increased the humidity problem. In most of the siheyuan analyzed, the roof required a deep renovation and a subsequent regular maintenance. In some cases, the facade was maintained and restored, while the rest of the courtyard was in much worse condition. In the siheyuan owned by the government, the condition is usually slightly better and some kind of basic maintenance, such as painting walls or repairing roof-leaks, was done. Most of the residents are unwilling to pay for any intervention on their own dwelling, as they feel like they could be forcedly relocated at any time, therefore they fear the investment could be a waste of money.

/infrastructure and facilities in the siheyuan

/water

While there was at least one water tap in every courtyard, most of the times it was shared by several families, with a common water meter: indeed, many residents extended waterlines into their home on their own. Most residents relied on public shower facilities (cost about 10 RMB per shower) and in some courtyards they built some basic solar shower systems that could be used during summer, but most of the times these devices were not used because of the lack of space and the lack of drainage system.



A lot of the city's newer buildings haven't given much consideration to traditional concepts like community and shared space. I think the challenge now is to try to connect what remains of the past with the city as it is today, instead of tearing stuff down or building these hyper-fake recreations.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

³³ Most of the datas reported in this section come from the survey conducted by Alexander Andre, Azevedo Pimpim and Hirako Yutaka, see note 27.



51. a dilapidated courtyard, photo credits: <http://www.chinacitysearch.com/>



52. a dilapidated courtyard, photo credits: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/>

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I think if we really want to talk about the history of Hutong, there are many layers, a couple of times of these raptures that had happened related to the ownership, the first may be in 1957, I am just speaking from my experiences with my grandpa who used to have this entirely courtyard, but in 1957 before this Great Forward, they have this encouragement or enforcement that if you have more than 200 sqm, then you should rent it out to the people, so it ended up the whole family was squeezing into 30 sqm room, so the rest they rent it out, and then in 1959, again there were a lot of sayings that if you rent it to other peoples, due to the fact that there were a lot of conflict of collecting rent, so you can go to this organization called Fangguanju (House Management Bureau), and they would take it over, instead of renting out yourself, they can help you to rent. But in the end, they collected all the ownership of that rented houses, and they never give that back to the owner. So it is really starting to split, so most of people begin to rent the house from the government called Gongfang which means public, actually the Hutong has 70% Gongfang (Public), 30% Sifang (private), they kept them for themselves, then it is the Culture Revolution, since during the Culture Revolution is that the poorer you were, the better it was, you can just beat up some rich people and just take over where they live, just beat them to death and then you take over, because you are not happy that they are richer than you. And that was another wave, then the next one was really scattered living conditions, then there was 1976 Tangshan Earthquake, because it really shattered a lot of the houses, so that was the first time it was allowed this kind of earthquake shelter to exist, then later they just legitimated all the earthquake shelters because the building was in dangerous situations, so the shelter was legitimated, then there was all this implosion built up inside, the earthquakes were 2 or 3 times more, I could not remember that clearly, then in the 50s and 60s, there were all these Danwei (Public Sectors) Which somehow took part of it, including the military, like in my Hutong, there are all these generals, even my courtyard belong to this Tuanji, which means a middle up level military guy, and he is able to purchase this courtyard, I do not know how much he spent on it, probably very cheap, then he owned it. So all these mixed up.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject

/sewage

The majority of courtyard houses had only very rudimental sewage facilities, with one drain hole connected to the street sewage. Many residents have built makeshift drains from their rooms to the drain hole.

/toilets

Up to 90% of resident used public toilets, usually located nearby their home. Traditionally, every courtyard had at least one composting toilet, but the system of manual collection was very inconvenient and the desperate need of space, so most the residents decided to use the space of composting toilet for building additional extensions. Very rarely siheyuan still have a composting toilet nowadays.

/heating

95% of siheyuan residents used coal heating during the winter season (in Beijing from November to March the temperature drops below zero). As the used system was not very efficient, it causes a lot of air pollution. The reason why resident relied on coal for their heating is that coal was cheap because it was subsidized by government. Other heating systems, such as electricity or oil based heating, were much less common because they were considerably more expensive compared to coal. Beijing government from 2000 on insisted on the substitution of coal heating with other more environmental-friendly techniques: nonetheless, it is still not unusual to find coal stoves in siheyuan.

Unknown author (1978). Evolution of Domestic House Form in China, Master Thesis, University of Hong Kong.

Alexander, A. & Azevedo & P. Hirako, Y. (2004). *Beijing Hutong Conservation Plan*, Tibet Heritage Fund International, Beijing.

The *Huai Nan Tzu*, trans. By Derek Boddle.

Chen, P. (2000). *A quadrangle in Beijing*, Hong Kong.

Li, T. (1992). *Meaning in the Traditional Chinese House and Garden*, Master Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Liu, D. (2004). *Brief Introduction of Chinese Residential Buildings*, Bai Hua Literature and Art Publishing House, Shanghai.

Ma, B. (1999). *Beijing Courtyard House Architecture*, Tian Jin University Publishing House, Tianjin.

Wang, Q. (1999). *Beijing Si He Yuan*, China Bookstore Press, Beijing.

Weng, L. (1997). *Beijing's Hutongs*, Yan Shan Publishing House, Beijing.

4 • Dashilar photoessay

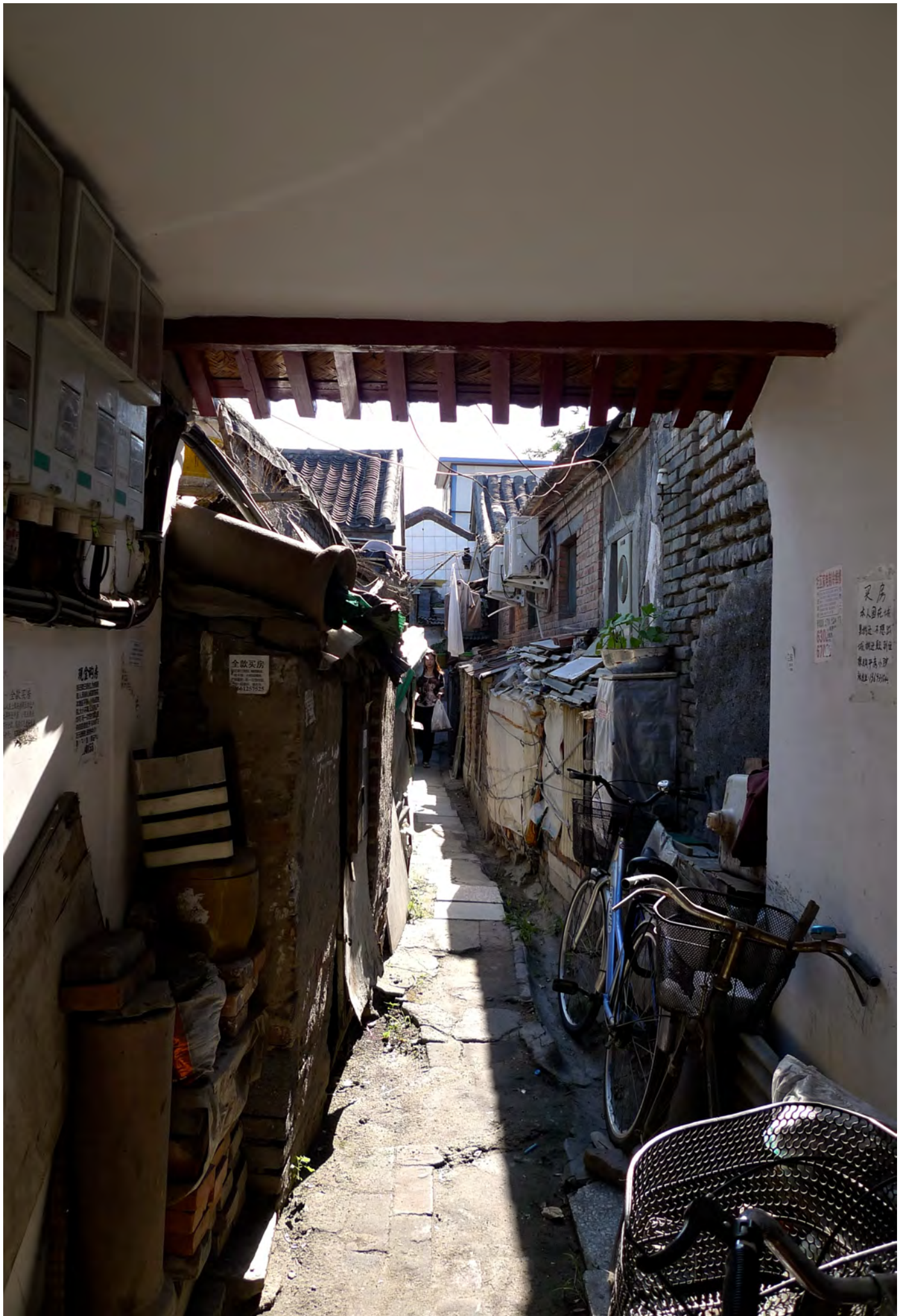
places

“

The hutongs in the center of Beijing produce themselves as an urban laboratory of innovative substances (...) the hutong has itself become another creature, an new urban vernacular inside the megacity.

Wild Beijing, Metaproject







2010 6 14

空调
打孔 移机
加氟 维修
高价回收空调

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双寺胡同
6

双寺胡同

花开富贵

“

Chinese cities look very messy and chaotic but they have energy; from this can derive something new and unconventional. It is a strange hybrid city but it may lead to a new, different model of urban planning.

Wang Shuo, founder of Metaproject













55

正常营业
13911960140

五金建材



“

There have been many expectations from the top about Chinese cities, but the real strength of Chinese cities is that they have not been following any model. Many good things can emerge from this uncertainty. It could also potentially lead to very gloomy situations, but I am sure there is a way to accompany the changes for the best.

Wang Shuo, founder of Metaproject





“

One thing that tourism shows in Dashilar from outside there is no real interest increased in tourism in that area, because they have all this tourism, but they have not really get the benefits they thought they would, so what the main goal is just to bring the people from the rest of the Beijing to go back and to that area, that is really what the growth or marker is, instead of people from Beijing coming back and buying things there.

(...)

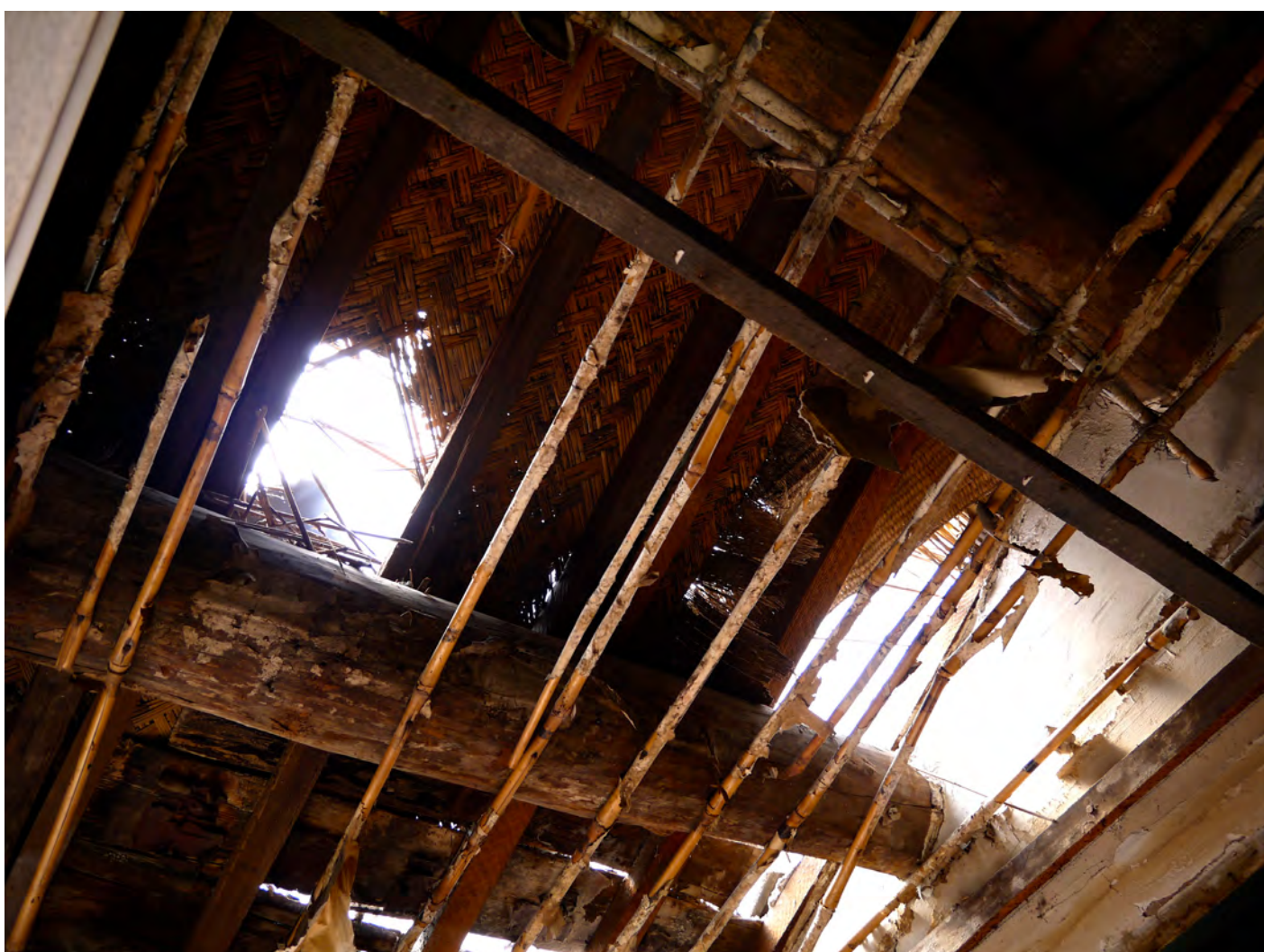
This comes out from the idea of preservation: the moment something become subject of preservation, it loses any kind of life anyway, loses reality and cease to exist, and one thing that is missing sometimes in this conversation is the agency of people who involves around who are living in this space, they may welcome the opportunity to develop this as a performance as a second modality to generate income, it is sheep farmers, they are making the living out of this, they do not really care, a lot of people question the authenticity, but that is because the spectacle is there for the tourists, the tourist is getting what they want, and someone is getting a living out of it, and to be honest, it is an economic modality, and a means of existence, which fundamentally works, it is just not the one that accords with the tourists' idea of what it might necessarily be real, but we already addressed this issue of authenticity and found it to be wanting in terms of any kind of real deep roots of intertwined models.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject



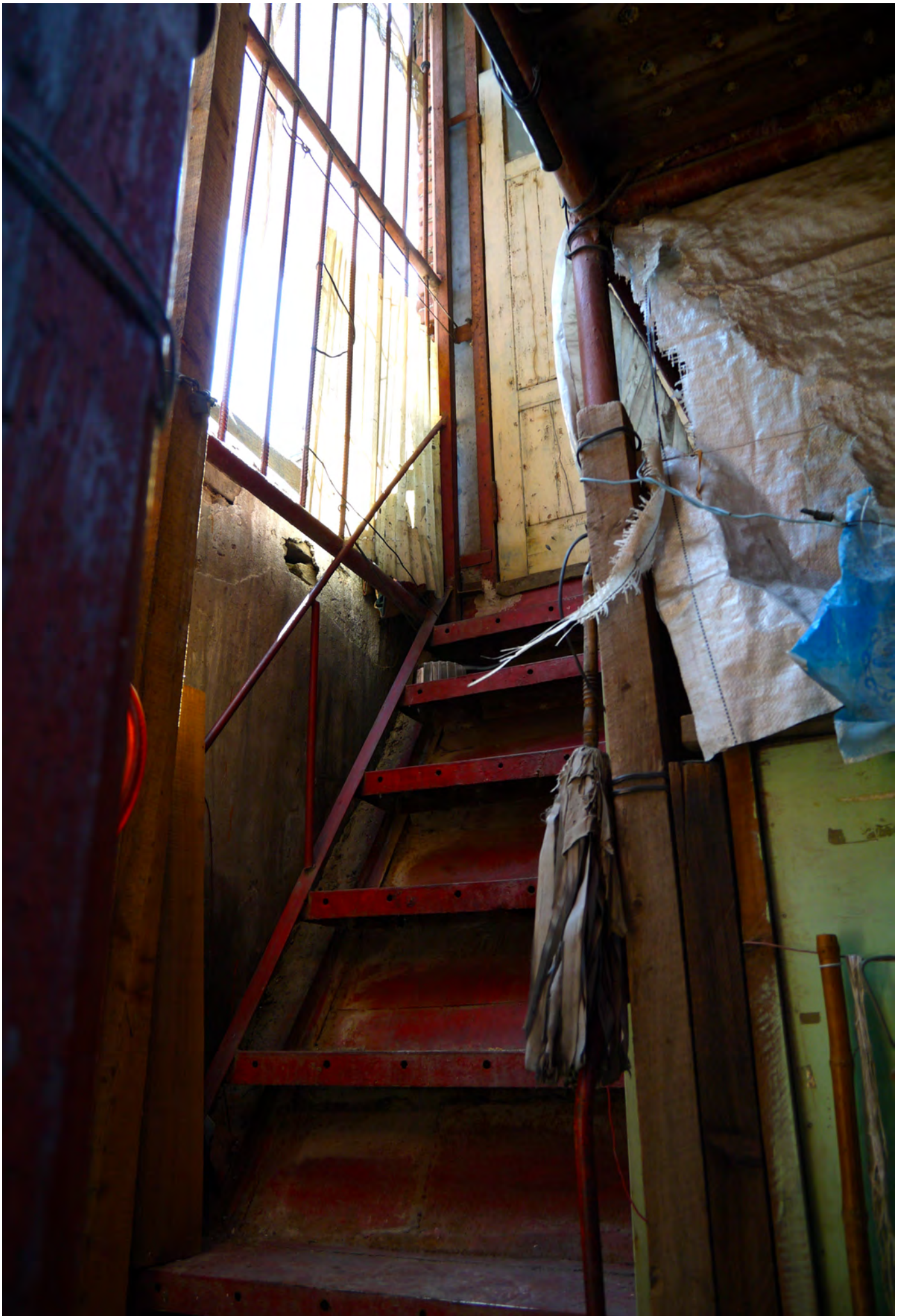












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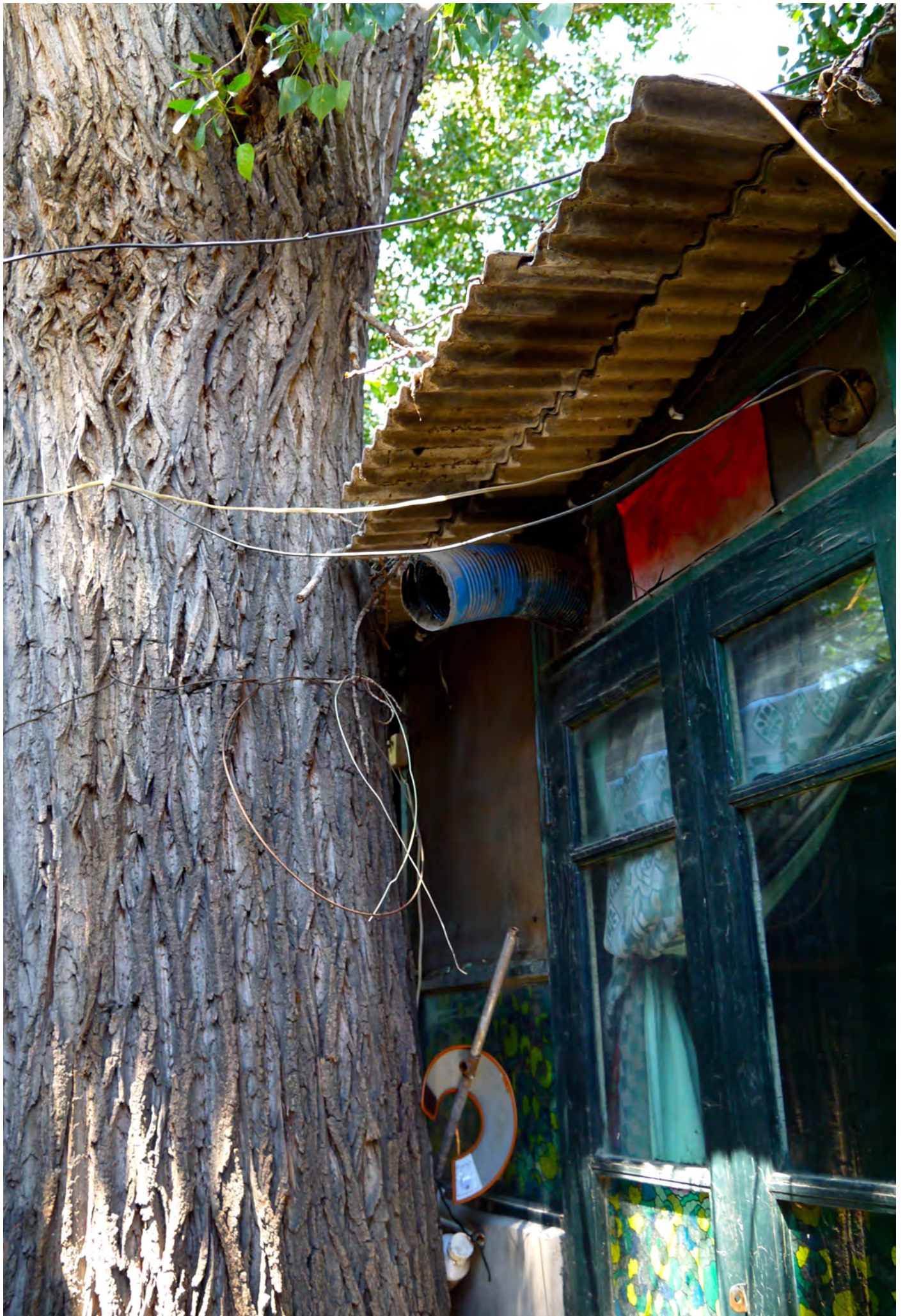
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In China ownership has been undergoing dramatic changes for the last 100 years. The urban space changed as a result of the changes of ownership. It resulted in very mixed situations on the ground. There is both good and bad sides about it. The bad side is that it is hard to give a red line to development plans. On the bright side, it creates a lot of uncertainty and this uncertainty might lead to some sort of new urban emergencies, which can be quite lively and give a hint on what a future city could be.

Wang Shuo, founder of Metaproject







faces







“

Just yesterday I heard a story actually, my girl's mother was visiting, she grew up in Beijing, and yesterday she decided for the first time in 30 years to revisit the place she grew up, but of course it was totally changed, so it did not bring back her memory of childhood, she is just lost in that area. So I am wondering if this kind of feeling is pretty common, to what extent do you think then this desperate search of authenticity for what a Beijinger should be can go, and how is that informing the gentrification or the projects that are going on in the Hutongs.

Round table zero discussion, MetaProject





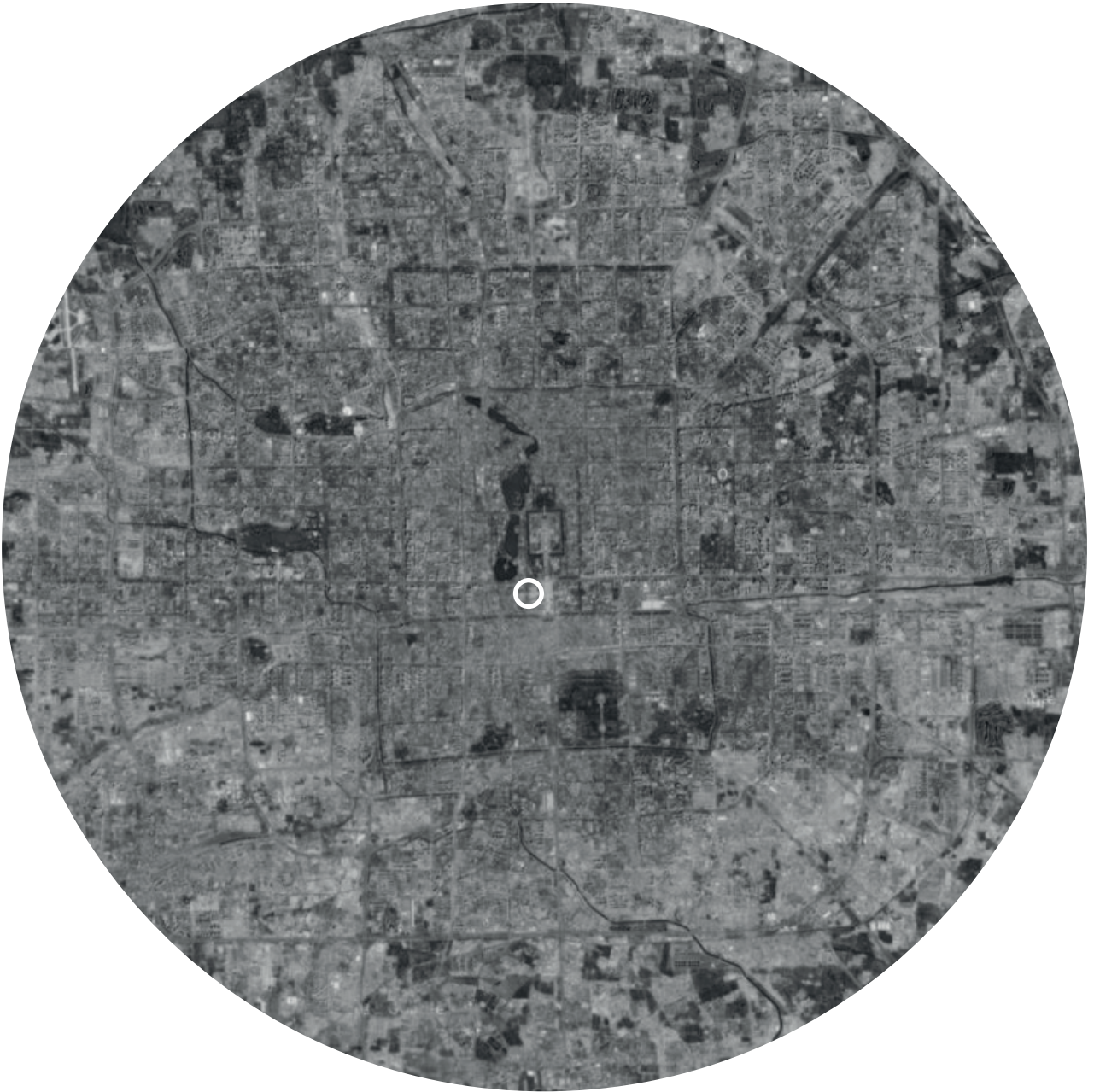


5 • Dashilar hutong

Qianmen Hutong is a system of several hutong including in the east side of Qianmen Dong Lu and Qianmen Dajie, the Cao Chang Hutong, Dajiang Hutong and the Xiaojiang Hutong, and Damochang Hutong. The most famous hutong among the Qianmen hutongs is on the west side of Qianmen Dajie and is known as Langfangsitiao or more commonly Dashilar or Dazhalan. Built during the Ming Dynasty as business and residence area for the palace's service workers, the district developed then into a rich shopping area as craftsmen opened stores to offer their wares to the public, especially around the commercial areas Qianmen Dajie and Dashilar Jie. Because of this phenomenon, the area became an attraction for thieves and the district was enclosed by the Emperor with a wooden fence surrounding hutongs and shopping streets. In fact in Chinese, Dashilar means "big wooden fence" and this name gradually replaced the previous Langfangsitiao.

Dashilar hutong is situated in the centre of the old city and represents an important element of Beijing South Axis. From the Ming Dynasty, this area developed into one of the best known commercial areas of Beijing. For 600 years, Dashilar was Beijing's most prosperous and well kept quarter. Conveniently located near Qianmen gate, Dashilar was the meeting point between royal and civil life, therefore this combination resulted into one of China's most vibrant commercial and entertainment districts, home of some of the country's oldest shops as well as theatres where Peking Opera is said to be born. Complex and incremental, Dashilar's growth throughout the years has created a palimpsest whose many of the layers are still visible. Because of its peculiar characteristics, Dashilar remained the centre of the city for most Beijingers until the middle of the last century. In recent years, the city's transformation affected this district and brought it to decline. The fast growth of the city's skyline nowadays contrasts with Dashilar dilapidated conditions. The emigrant population leaving the area as well as the lack of infrastructure and of organisation turned Dashilar into an isolated fragment of the city. Beijing's urban transformations during the last fifteen years and the consequential urban, social and environmental issues find in this area their expression through the continuous process of decline, destruction and reconstruction, leaving unanswered question about the relationship of this area with the new settlements of the city and the preservation of the historical value of this neighborhood.

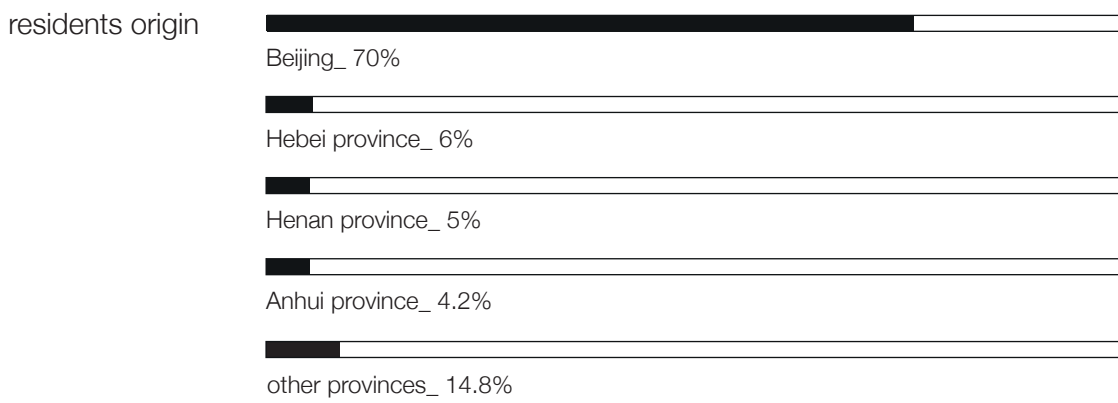
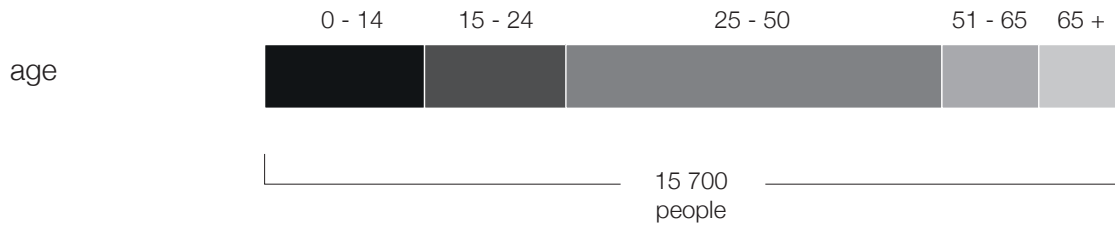
location



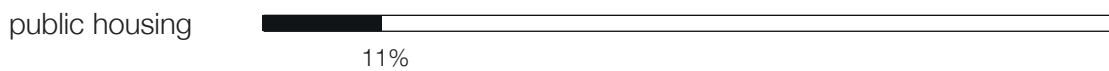
Dashilar hutong

39° 53' 35" S 116° 23' 26" O

demographics



ownership data



Government-owned buildings (mostly nationalized since the 1950s). The buildings are managed by the local housing office. The rents are subsidized and are only a fraction of rent for comparable housing on the private market.



Work units used to be government companies or institutions, and they often provided free or subsidized housing for their employees since the 1950s. Nowadays, there are still government-owned work-units, and some privatised companies are still retaining the practice of supplying housing to their employees.



There are still some residents living in their ancestral courtyard: others bought courtyards or received them from the government. The market value is much higher than in the public counterpart's case.

networks

The Dashilar area presents a great concentration of cultural and commercial activities, resulting into an overlapping of networks and pathways. It appears clear how the district is a space of transition and connection.



● art



● photography

networks



● music



● theatre - cinema



● tourism

networks



• entertainment



• culture



• tea

networks



● sport



● books



● handcraft



- ⊘ Dashilar district
- mainly cycle pedestrian street
- mainly vehicular street
- blocks



0 10 50 m

historical residential space



non historical residential space



0 10 50 m

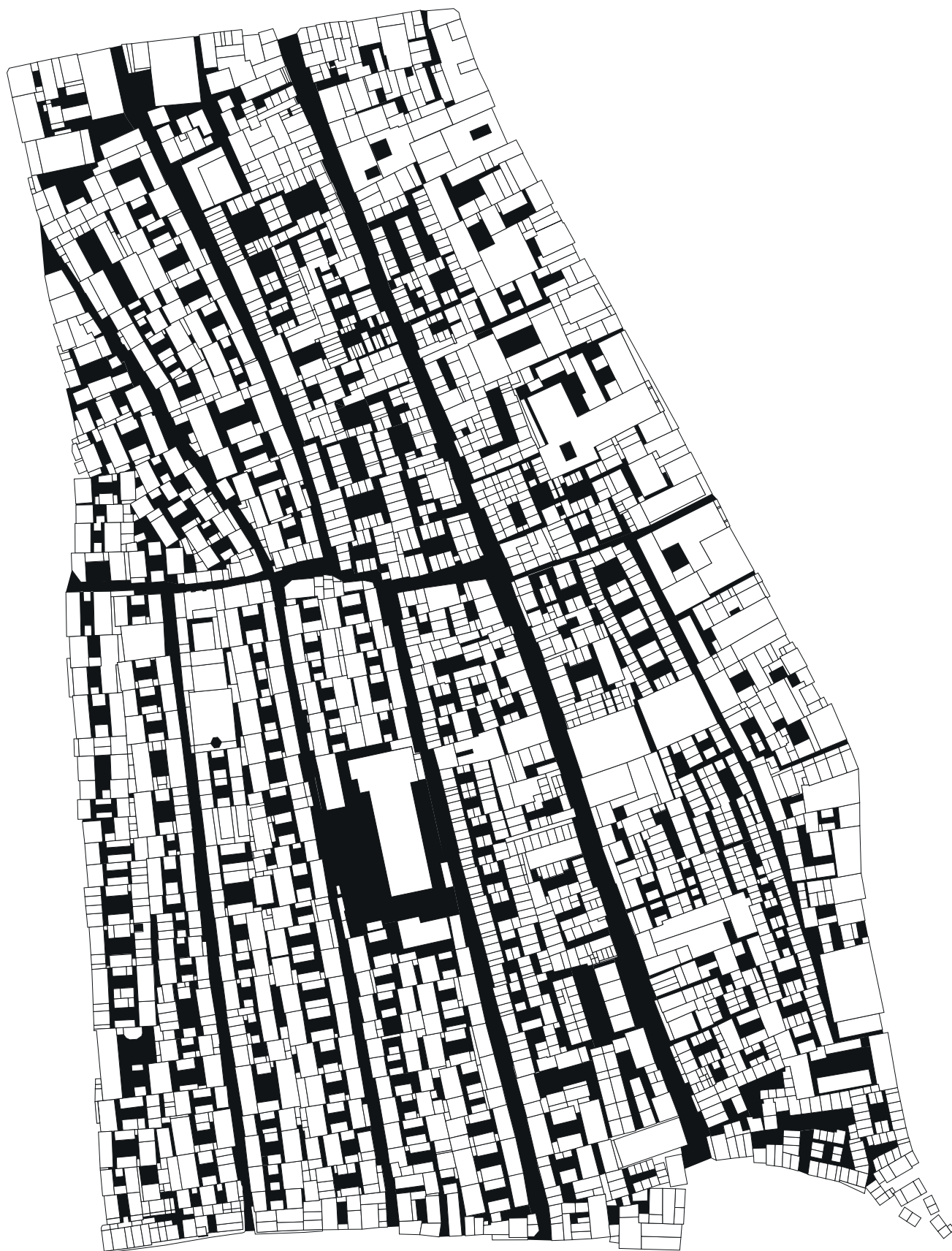
commercial space



0 10 50 m



open space



public open space



0 10 50 m

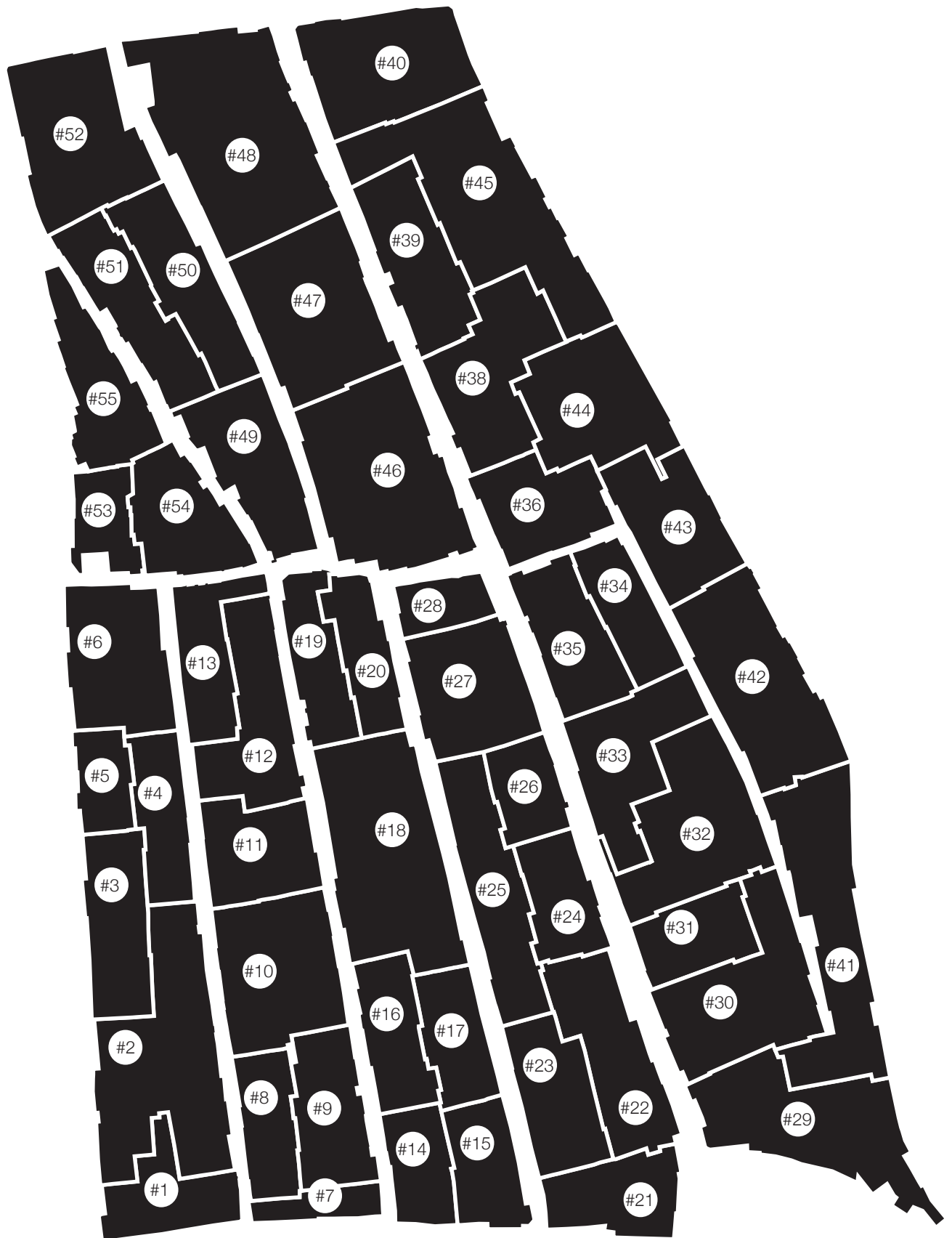
semi public open space



0 10 50 m

private open space





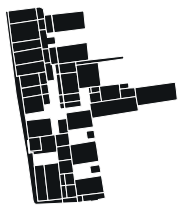
0 10 50 m

Walking around Dashilar area, it appears evident that the evolution of the urban fabric followed a spontaneous principle of community aggregation. Originally Dashilar presented the typical characters of Beijing's hutong, with enclosed and inward - facing siheyuan where each family lived privately and independently from the outside world. Gradually, the decline of the neighborhood during the Cultural revolution greatly increased the residential density of the district, resulting into the subdivision of each siheyuan into many different households. This process happened through illegal modifications of the existing urban structure, such as demolitions, superfetations, replacements and so on. Even though this phenomenon was uncontrolled, it is nowadays possible to notice that it resulted into the creation of informal clusters of households that create spontaneous communities of people sharing common spaces, circulation areas or accesses from the street.

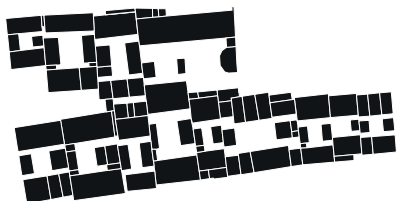
These communities vary greatly in shape, dimensions and characters, making the district lively and uneven: nonetheless, all these clusters present the common character of being a group of households informally sharing semi public spaces.

The survey of this spontaneous subdivision of the area is fundamental to fully understand the urban pattern and structure of the neighborhood in order to adapt the urban project to such a complex and multi layered area of the city.

community catalogue



#1



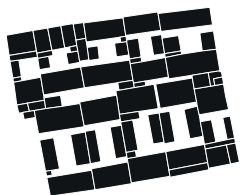
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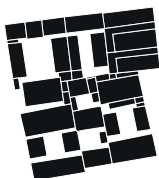
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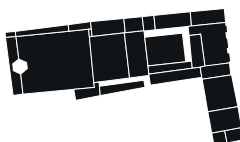
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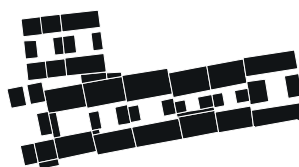
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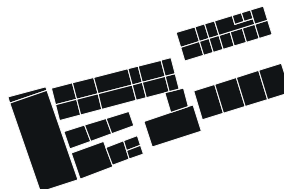
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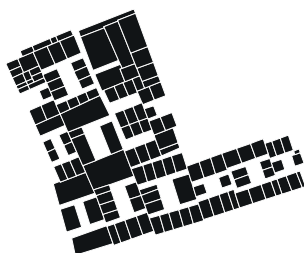
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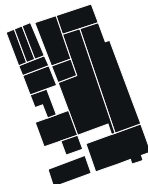
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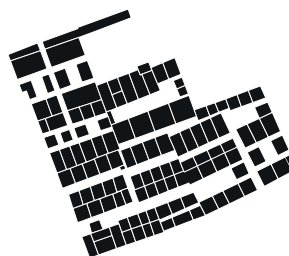
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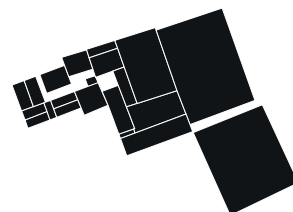
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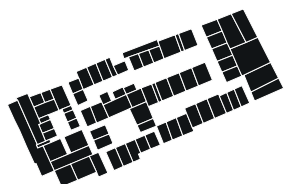
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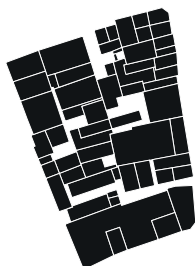
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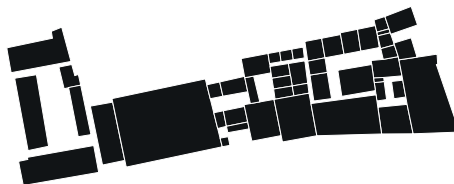
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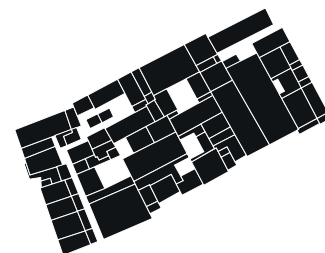
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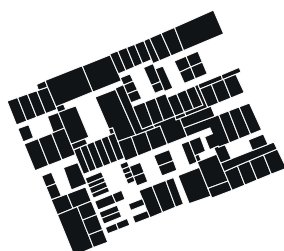
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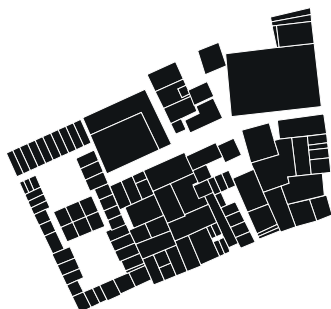
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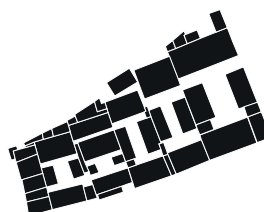
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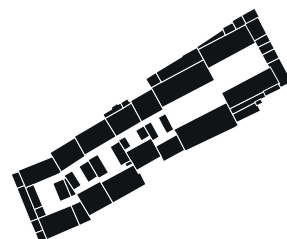
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#48



#49



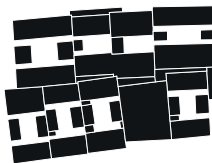
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community catalogue



#5



#6



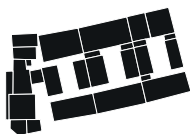
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#8



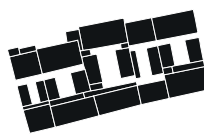
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#15



#16



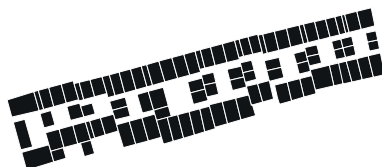
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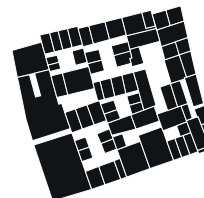
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#25



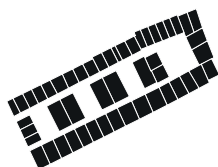
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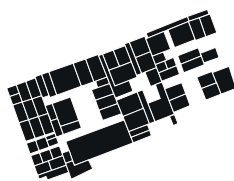
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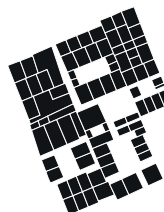
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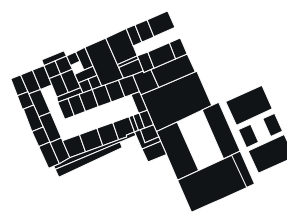
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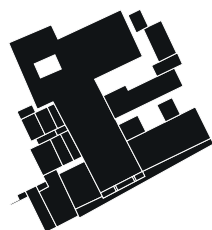
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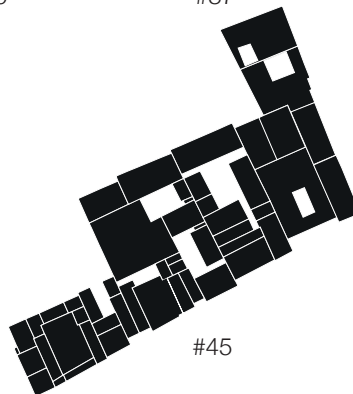
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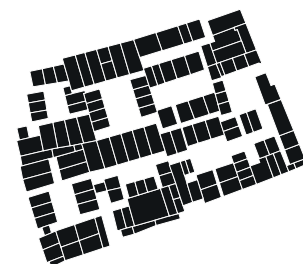
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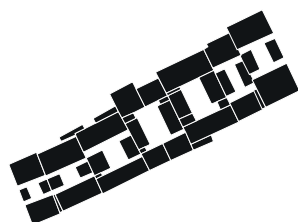
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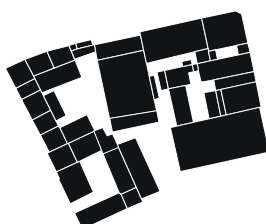
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#46



#51



#52



#53

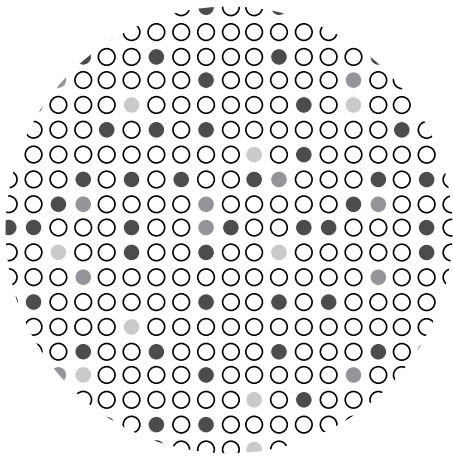


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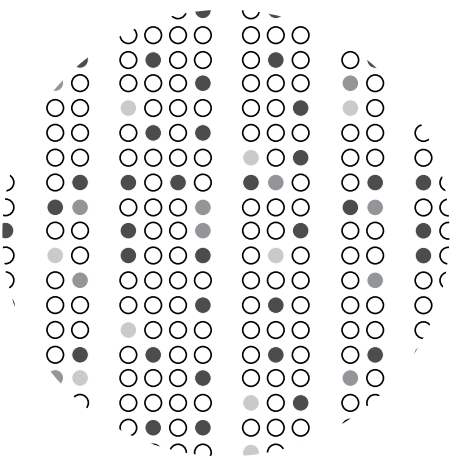


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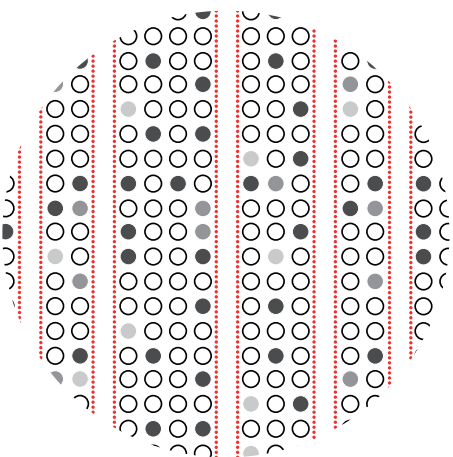
6 • public space in Dashilar



1• understanding the existing potential embedded in the urban fabric. Elements to be preserved, transformed and converted are identified. The latter represent existing buildings that are reused to host new activities for the community and the city.



2• pedestrian circulation as a structural frame for the intervention. Through punctual demolition a new pedestrian circulation is channeled into the urban fabric. This will unload the existing circulation that is currently overloaded with pedestrian, bikes and cars.

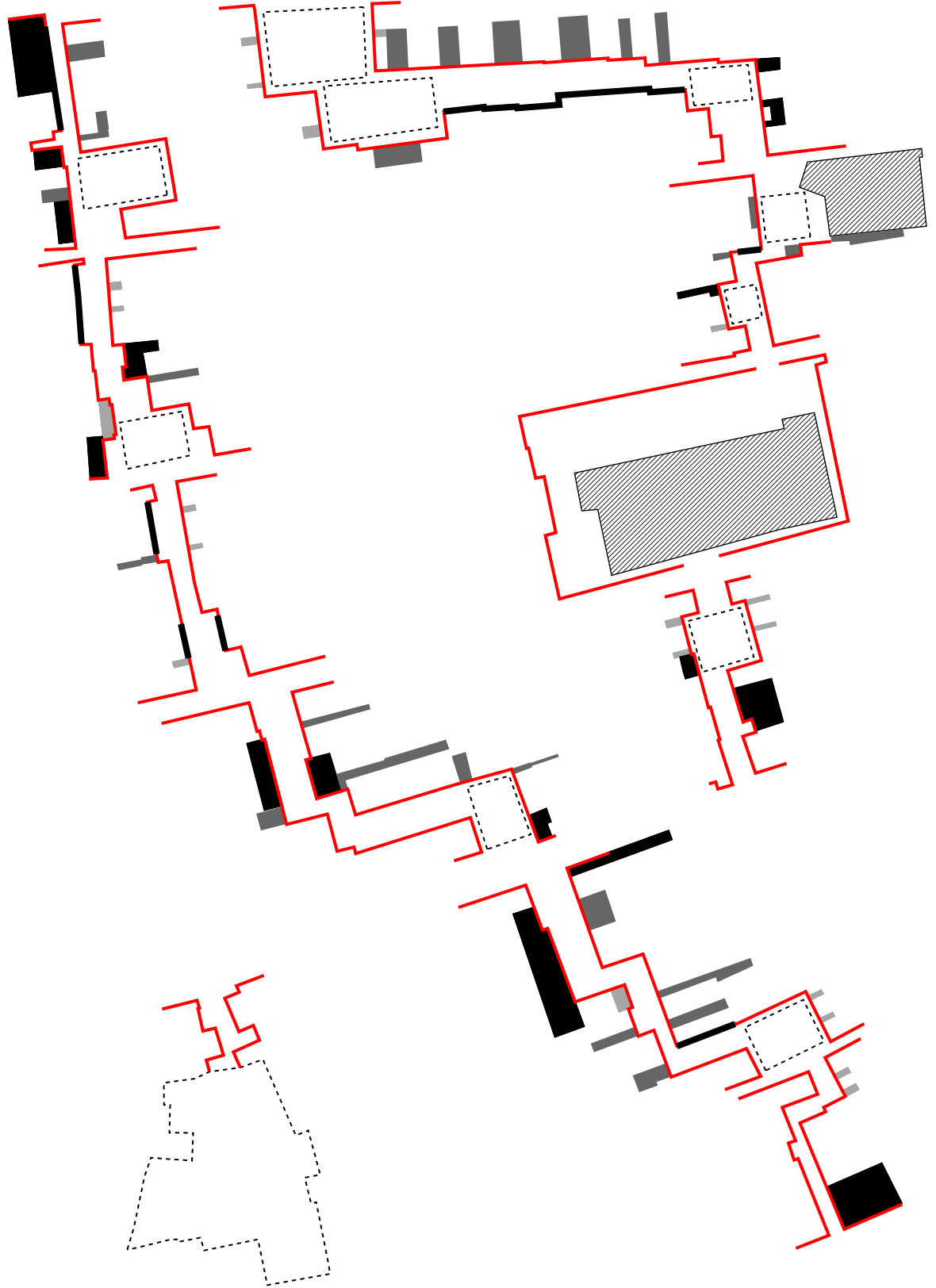


3• borders between pedestrian circulation and residential urban fabric. The new circulation will generate new densification along its edge with the existing urban fabric. Along this border, recurring type situations are identified in order to provide a catalog of architectural tools that can guide and support the future commercial and social densification and its resulting flows.

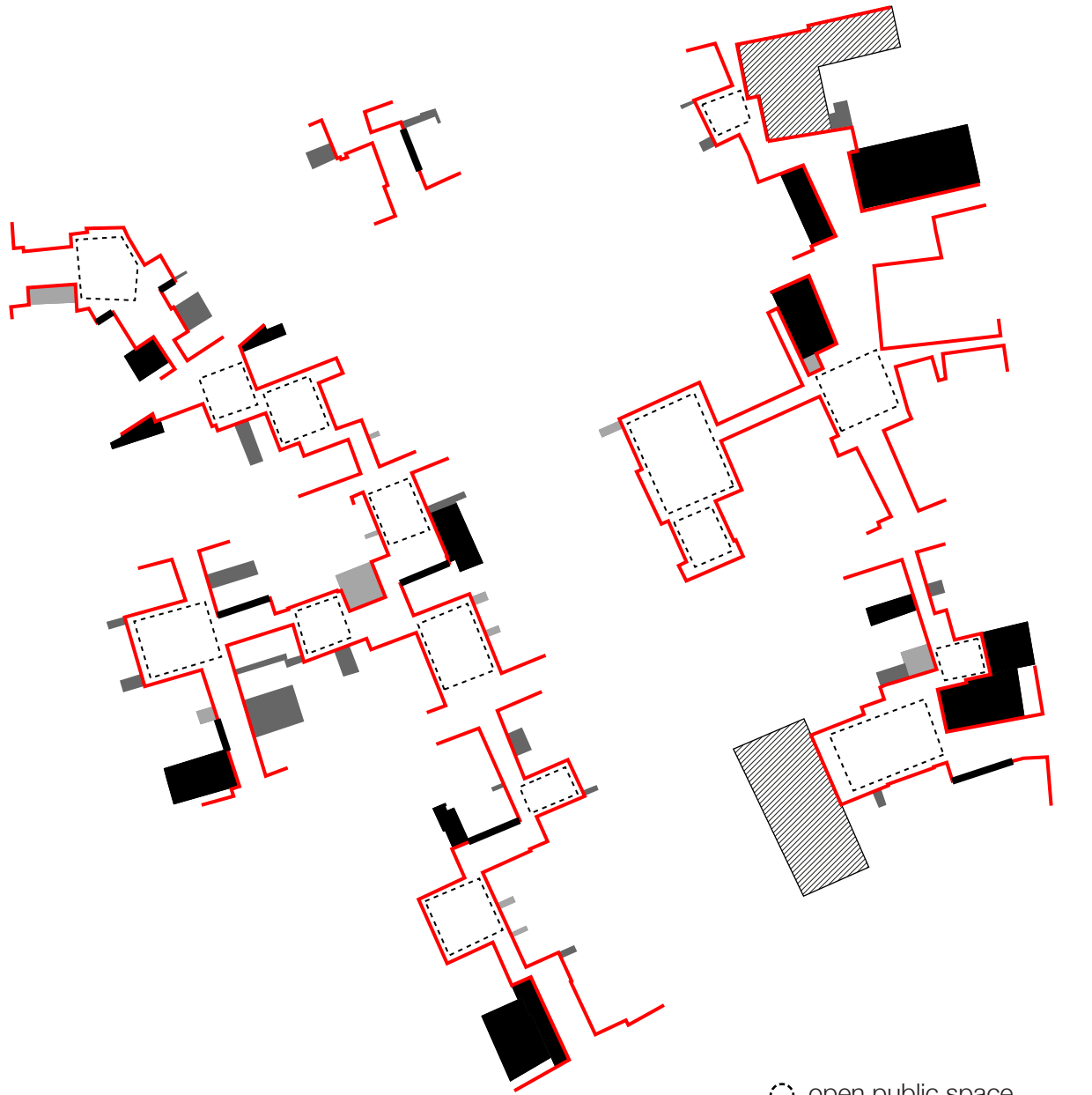
mapping the potential



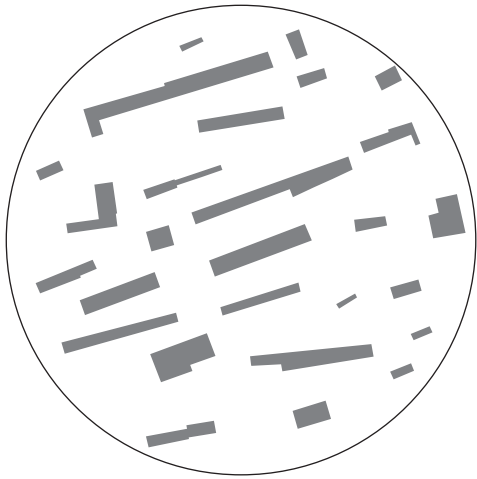
0 10 50 m



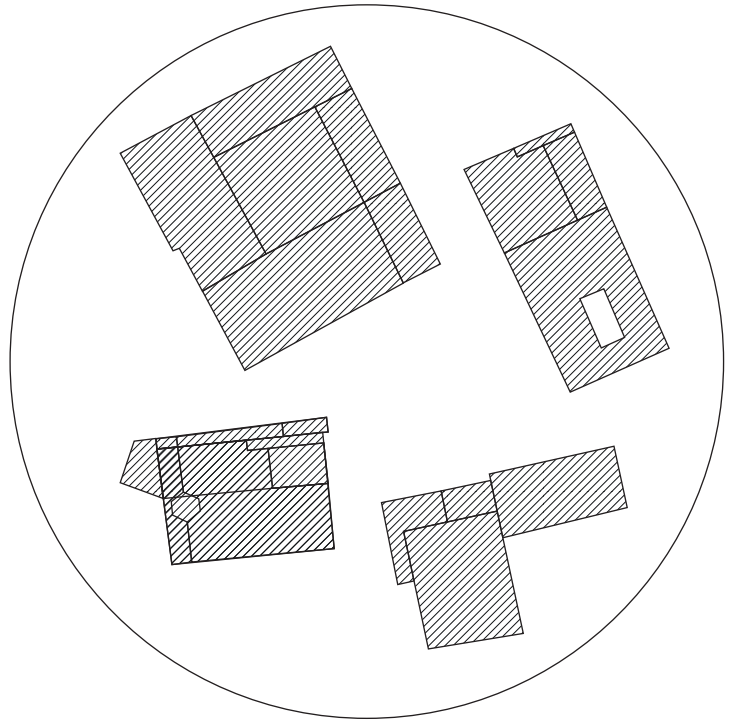
concept masterplan



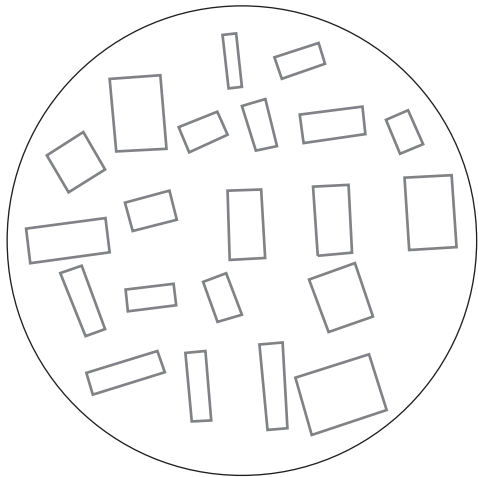
- open public space
- residential development
- semi public interventions
- commercial development
- ▨ building reuse
- pedestrian circulation



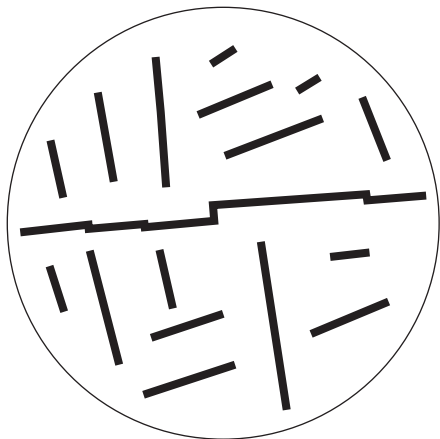
sp.1_semi public access



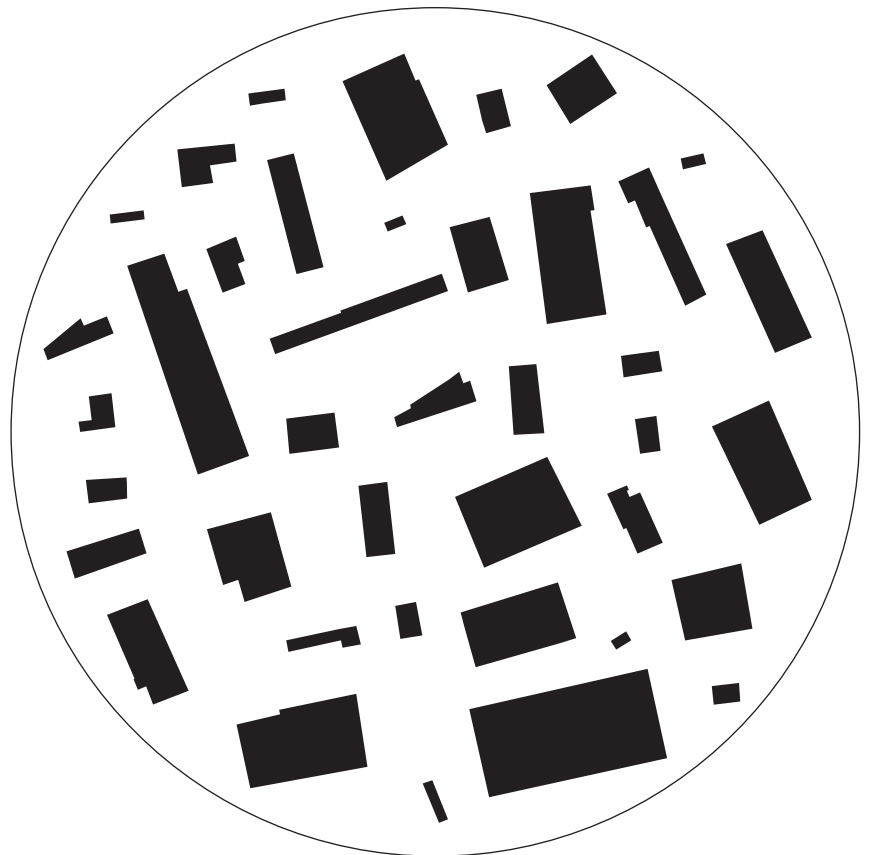
reuse_service



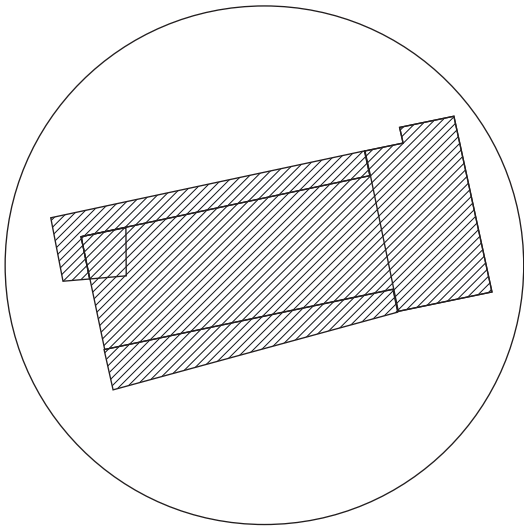
sp.2_semi public courtyard



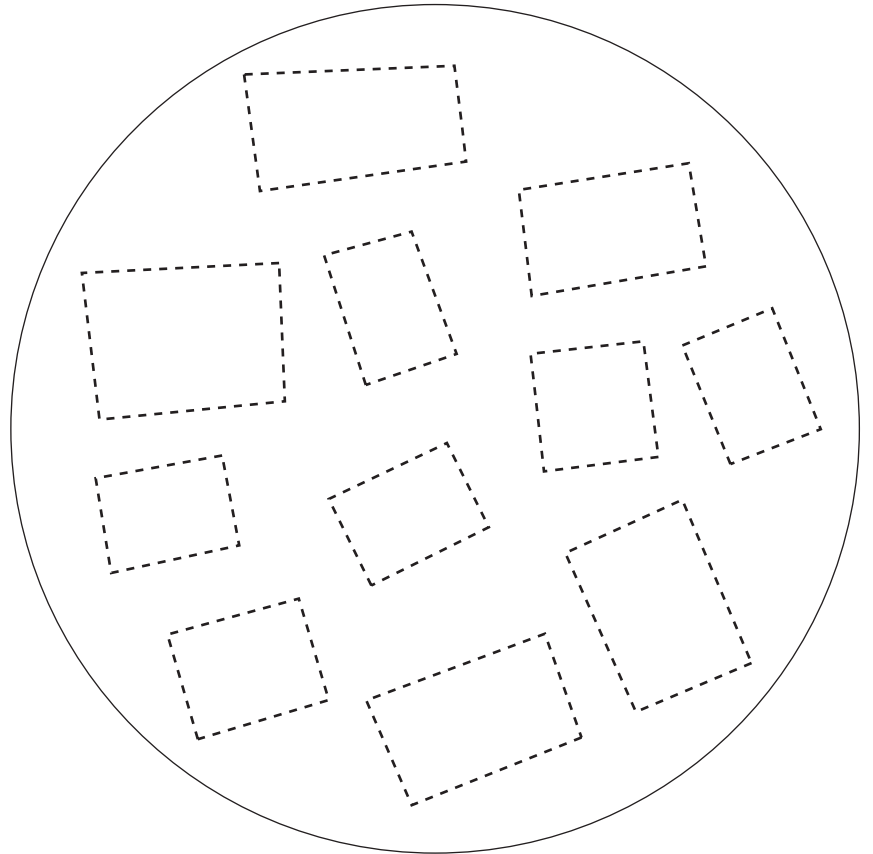
r.2_screen facade



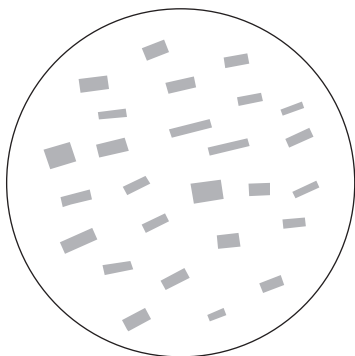
r.1_residential development



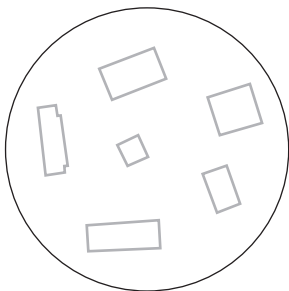
reuse_commercial



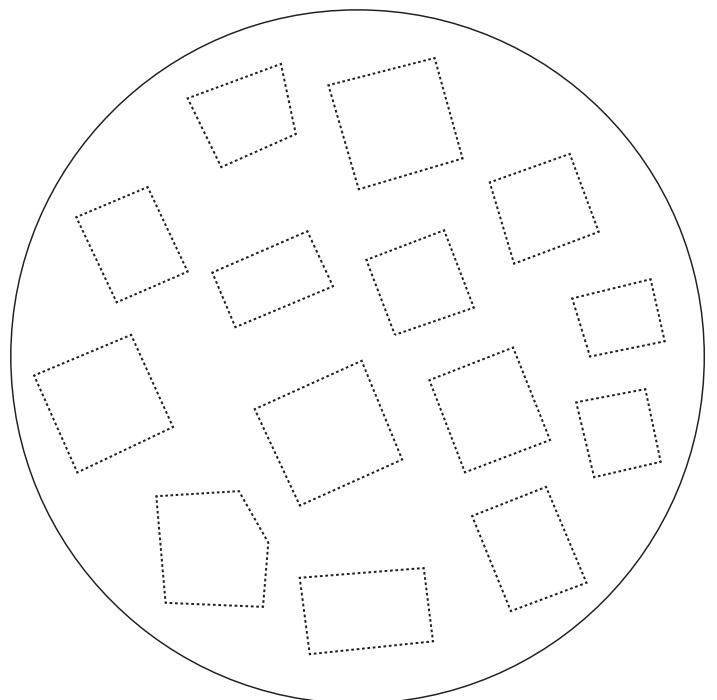
p.1_public square



c.2_minimum commerce



c.1_pilot for commercial development



p.1_public little square

program distribution



program distribution



demolition map



0 10 50 m

before and after_ public open space



before



after

before and after_ commercial space



before



after

before and after_ services



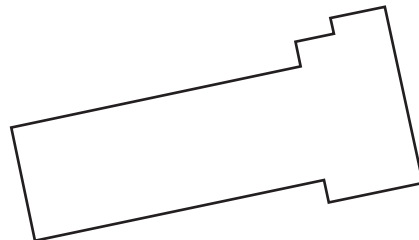
before



after

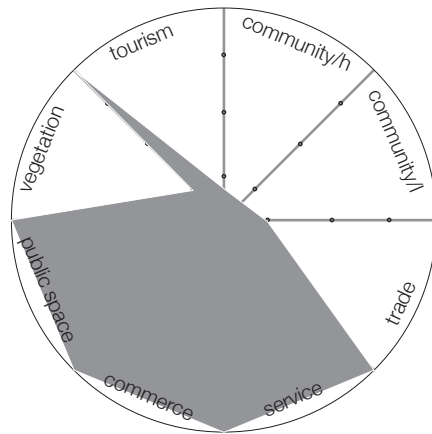
6 • urban catalogue

building reuse



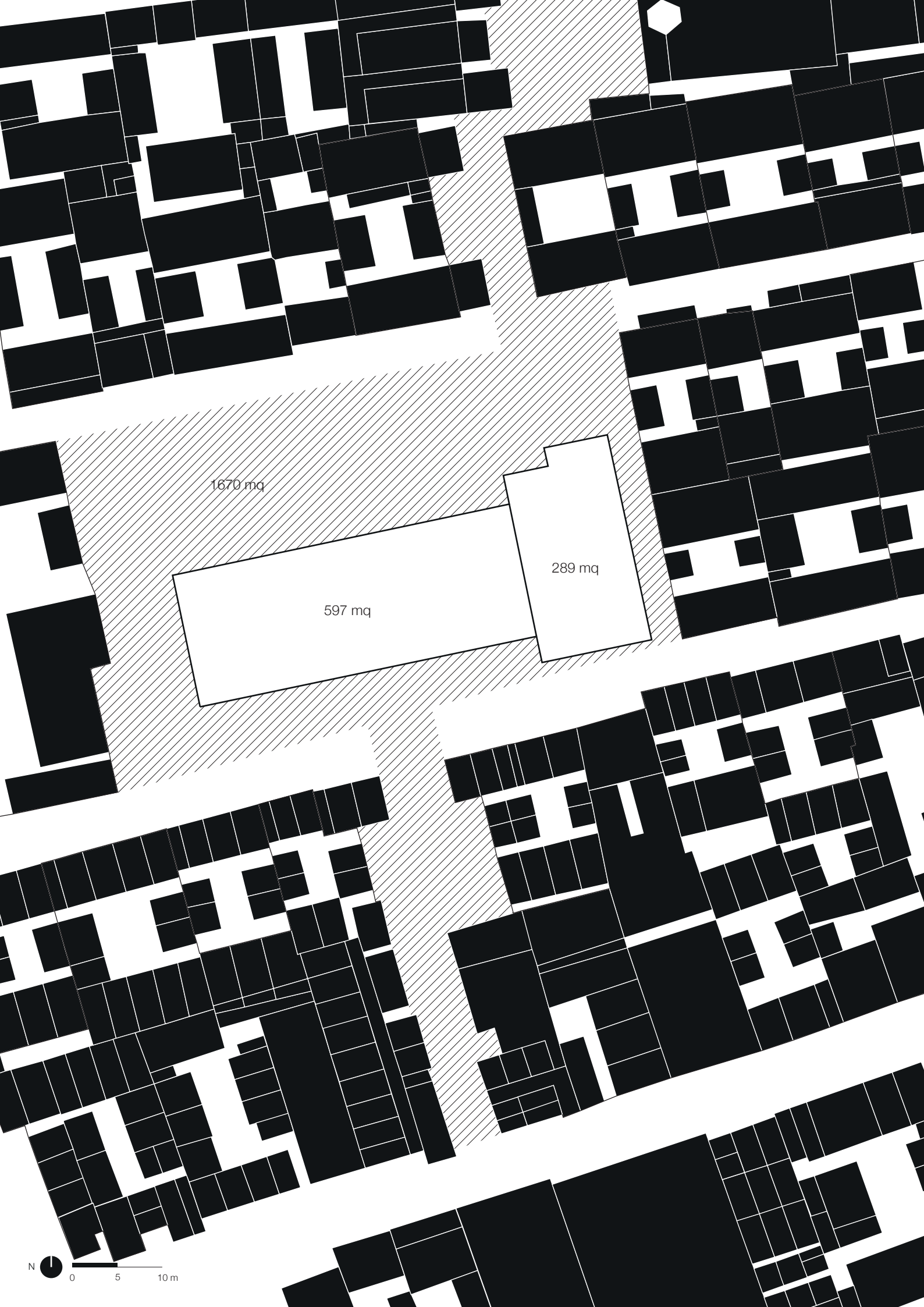


//sphere of influence



//objectives

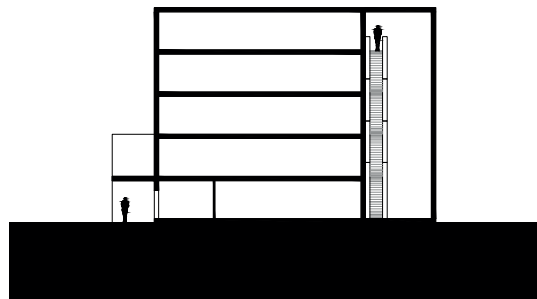
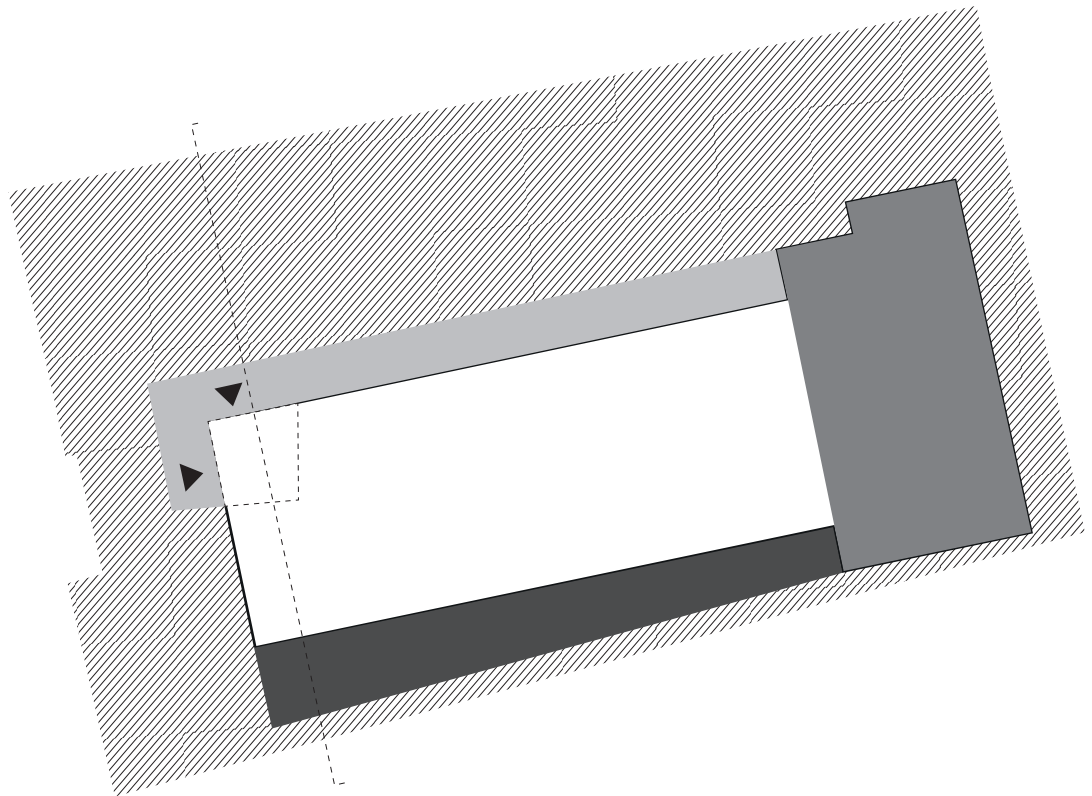
- _ providing an indoor market for food and other goods
- _ design a open public space that can support spontaneous trading
- _ defining front and back facades



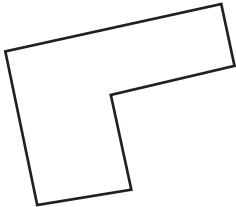
1670 mq

289 mq

597 mq



- indoor market_ 2900 mq
- ⊖ break - through entrance_ 45 mq
- covered outdoor space_ 125 mq
- food court_ 578 mq
- vertical distribution + toilette_ 665 mq
- ⊘ public plaza_ 1700 mq





//sphere of influence



//objectives

- _ providing a public service for residents
- _ attracting visitors from other districts



50 m²

140 m²

200 m²

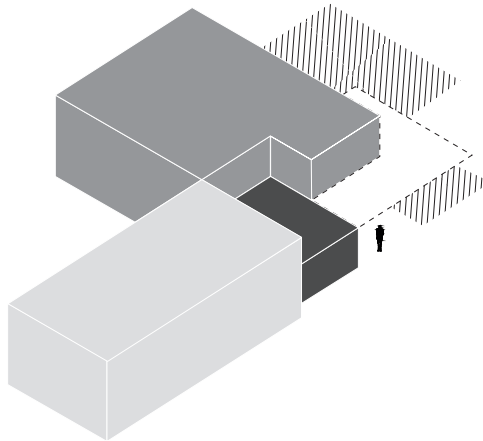
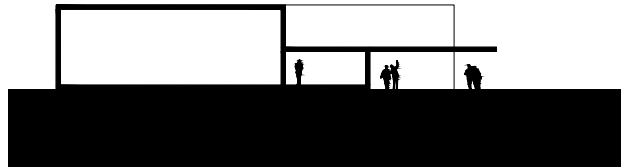
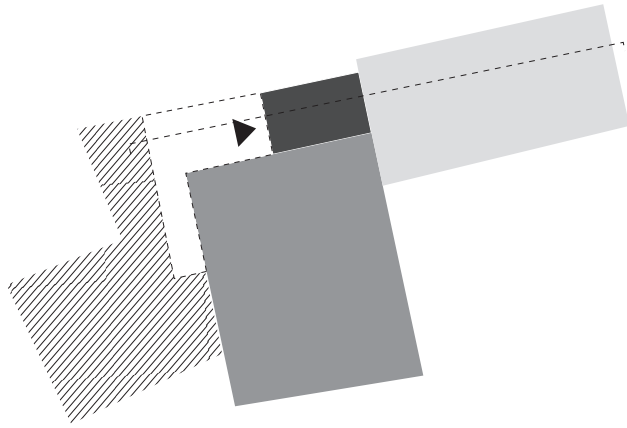


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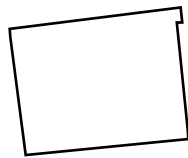
5

10 m

building reuse_ public library

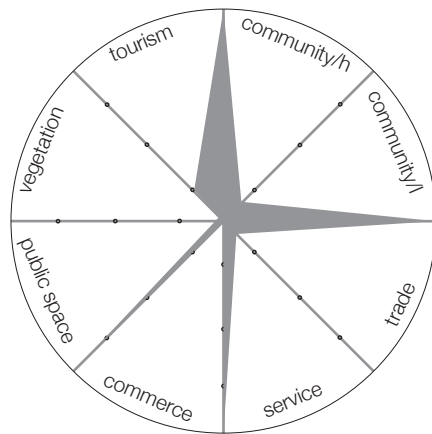


- covered outdoor space_ 55 mq
- entrance_ 35 mq
- library_ 150 mq
- reading room_ 130 mq
- ▨ public plaza_ 160 mq



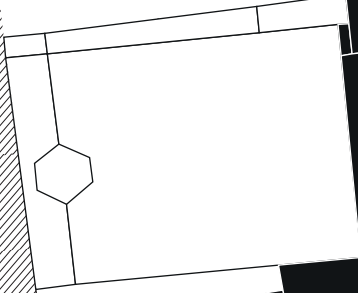


//sphere of influence

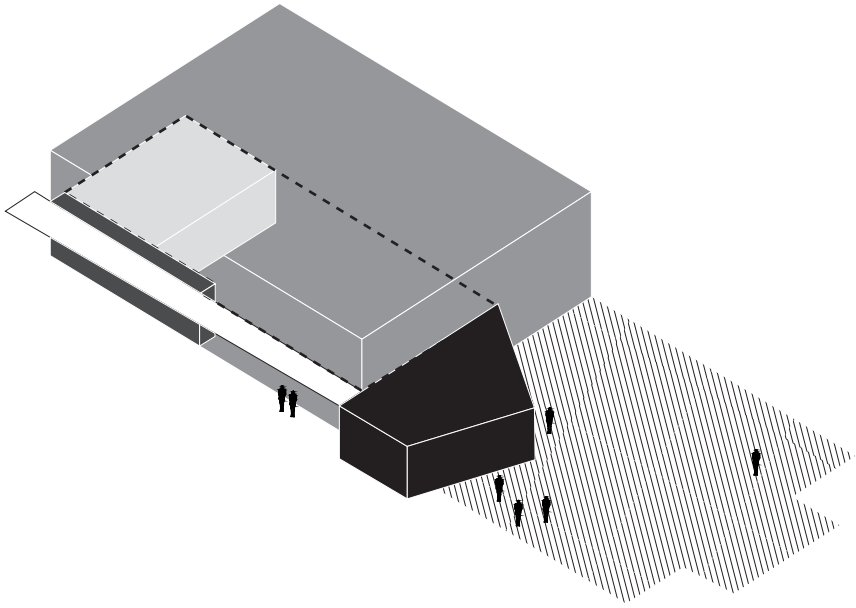
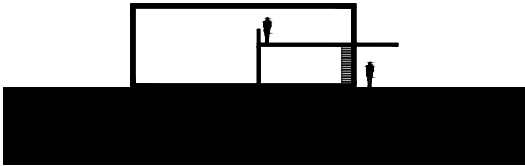
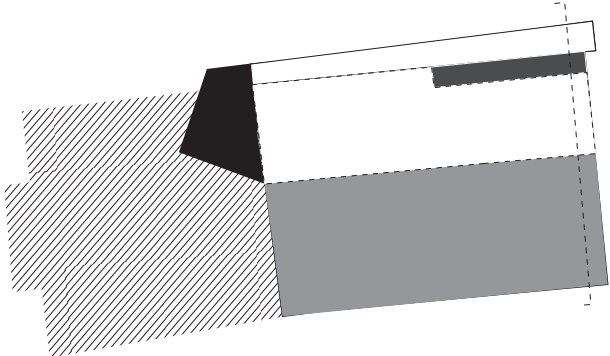


//objectives

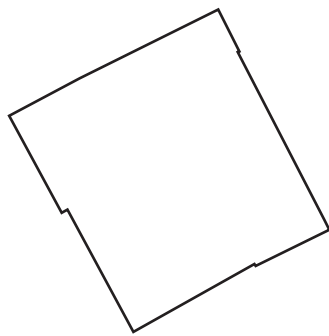
- _ providing a place for residents to gather and spend time together
- _ giving the chance to move outdoor activities inside
- _ offering to local students a place to study



building reuse_ community center



- covered bike park_ 35 mq
- study room_ 160 mq
- entrance_ 45 mq
- projection room_ 45 mq
- common area _ 280 mq
- vertical distribution_ 8 mq
- ▨ public plaza_ 270 mq





//sphere of influence

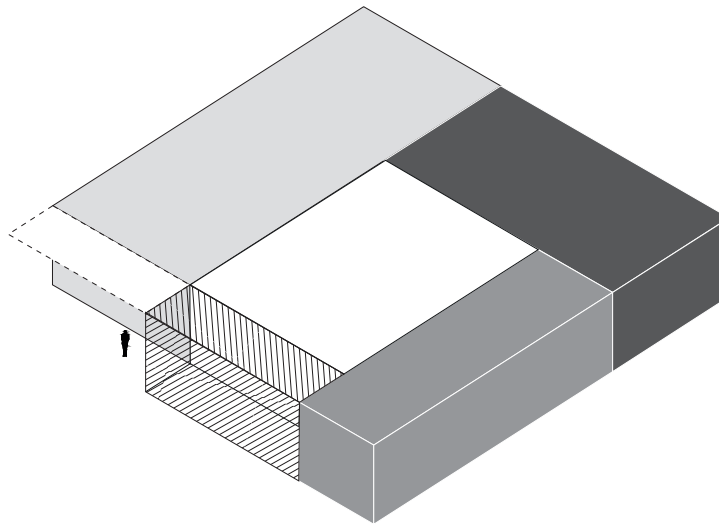
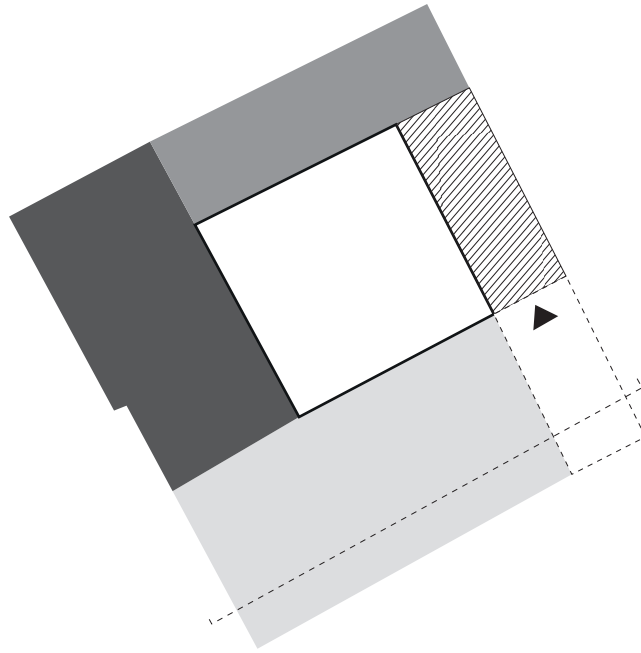


//objectives

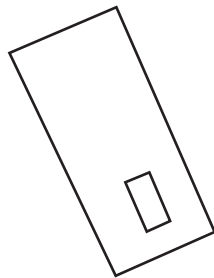
- _ promoting healthier lifestyle among residents
- _ educating locals and foreigners about the discipline of tai chi chuang



building reuse_ sport center



- gym_ 210 mq
- ⊖ covered outdoor space_ 42 mq
- ▨ hall_ 50 mq
- ◐ swiming pool_ 300 mq
- changing room + toilette_ 125 mq
- tai chi chuang rooms_ 185 mq





//sphere of influence



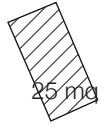
//objectives

- _ promoting knowledge about the hutong's history
- _ hosting Beijing Design Week's events every year
- _ attracting tourists to the area

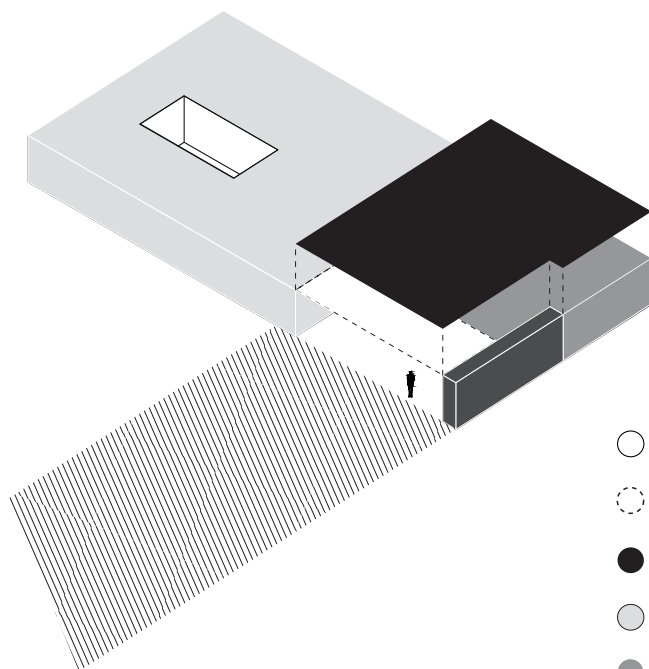
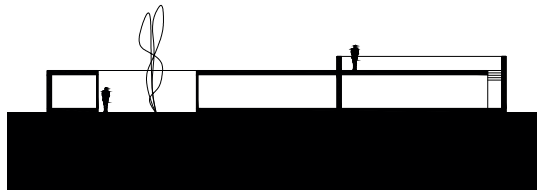
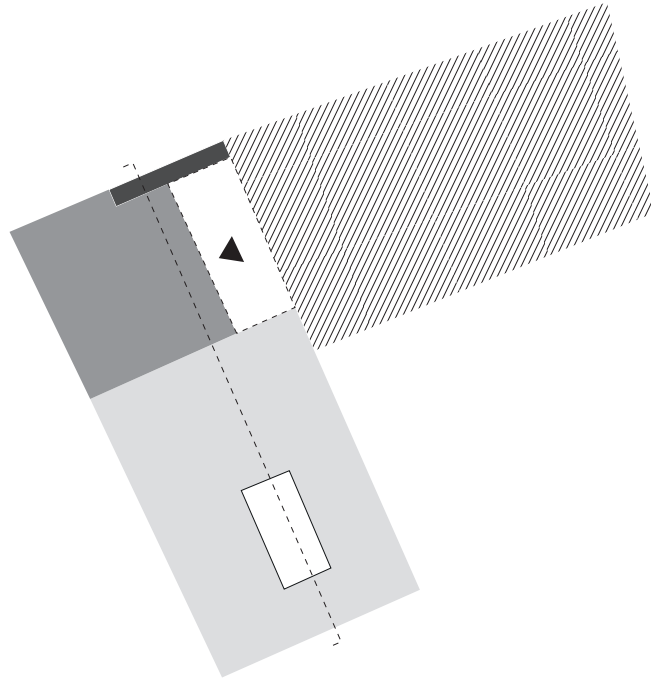


85 m² 100 m²

300 m²



building reuse_ hutong exhibition space



- court_ 25 mq
- covered outdoor space_ 45 mq
- panoramic terrace_ 150 mq
- exhibition space_ 265 mq
- entrance + toilette_ 112 mq
- vertical distribution_ 8 mq
- ▨ outdoor plaza_ 400 mq



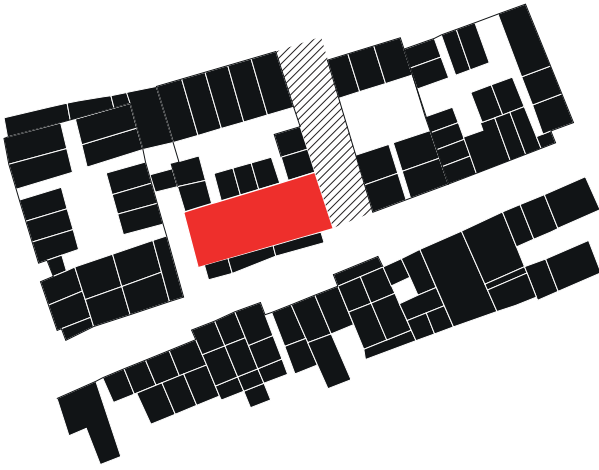
6 • urban catalogue

urban types



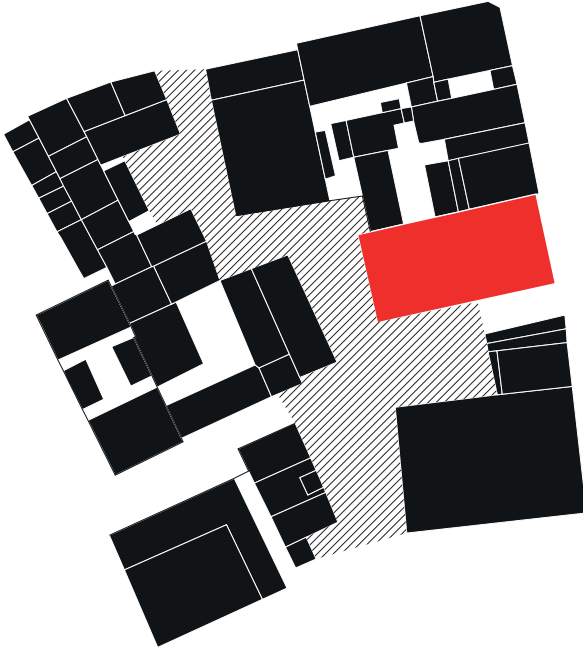


sample #1



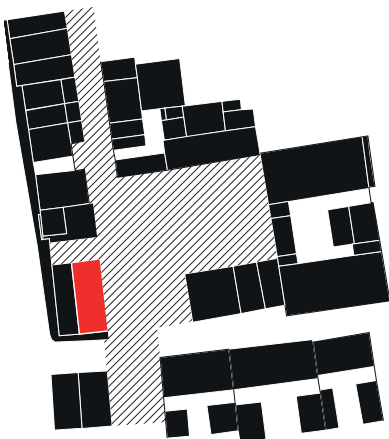
//area_ 105 mq
//width_ 14 m
//depth_ 7 m
//orientation_ South
//number of existing dwellings_ 4
//available surrounding open space_ 140 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #2



//area_ 150 mq
//width_ 16 m
//depth_ 8.5 m
//orientation_ South
//number of existing dwellings_ 6
//available surrounding open space_ 600 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 6 m

sample #3



//area_ 36 mq
//width_ 4 m
//depth_ 9,5 m
//orientation_ East
//number of existing dwellings_ 2
//available surrounding open space_ 380 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

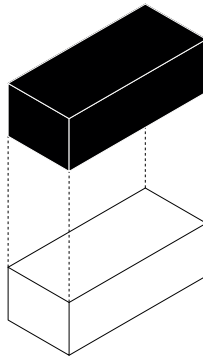
//objectives

- _ housing typology easily adaptable to the context
- _ private open space according to orientation
- _ cheap and easy to build

//sphere of influence



//strategy



a second floor is added on top of the existing dwelling, providing new housing units to replace those dwellings that are meant to be demolished in order to create the pedestrian circulation

//intervention



housing prototypes

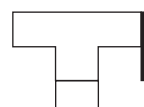
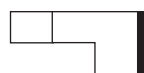
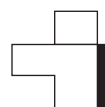
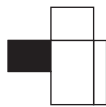
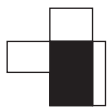
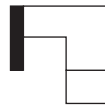
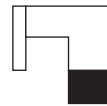
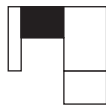
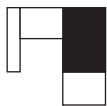
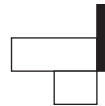
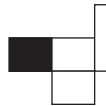
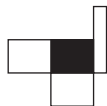
unit

day

night

terrace

circulation



housing prototypes

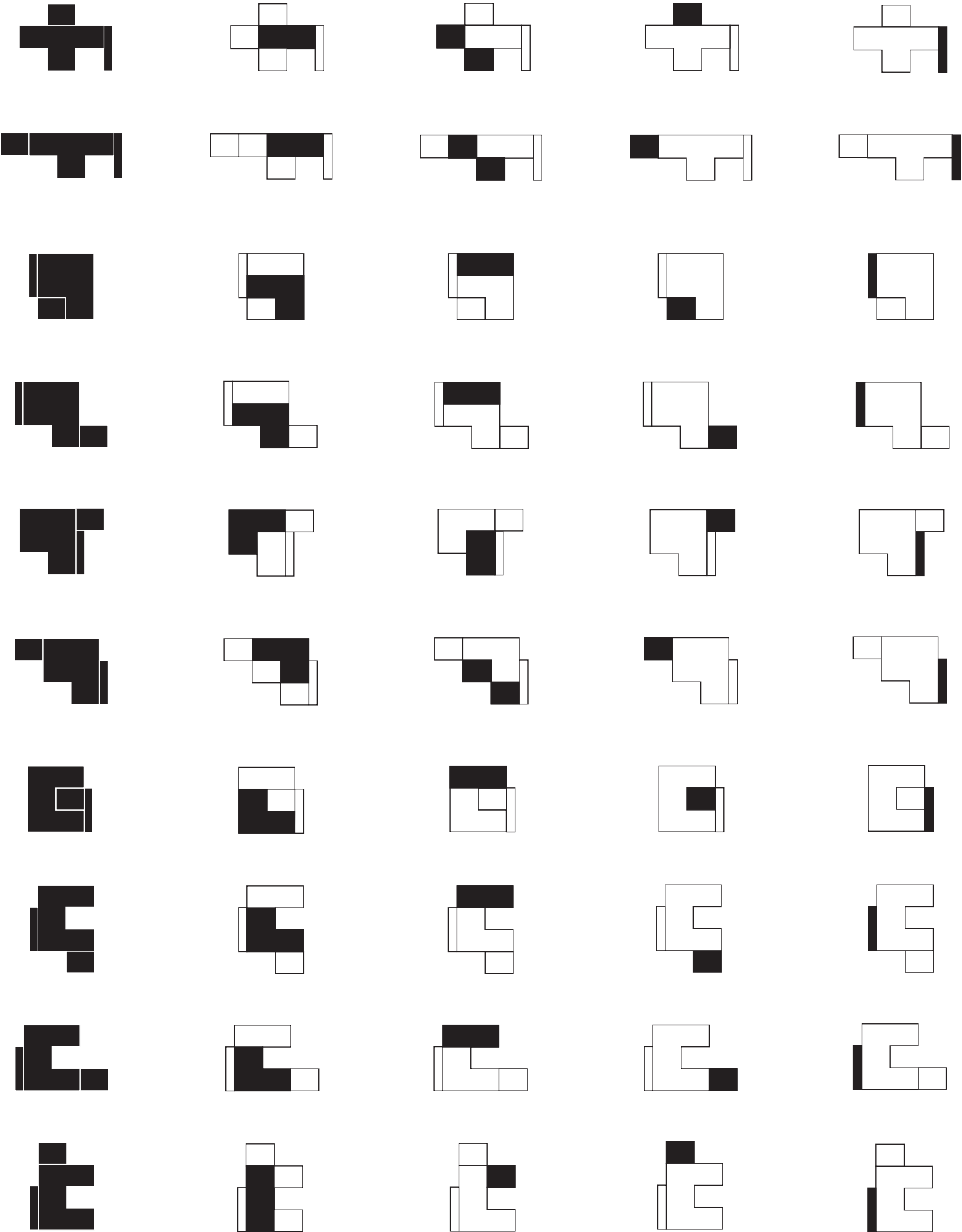
unit

day

night

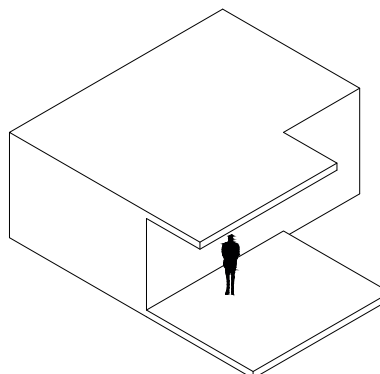
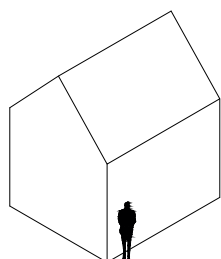
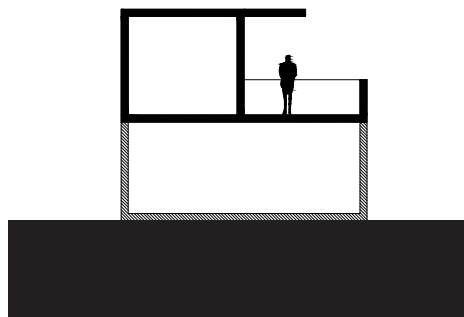
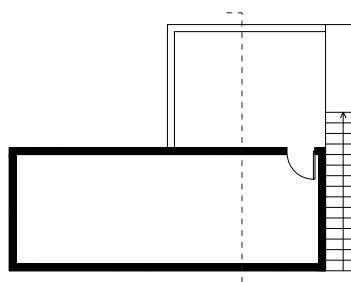
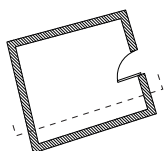
terrace

circulation



- total area_ 9 mq
- day_ 7 mq
- ▣ night_ 2 mq
- / open space_ none
- user_ family of 3

- total area_ 48 mq
- day_ 16 mq
- ▣ night_ 16 mq
- open space_ 16 mq
- intended user_ couple

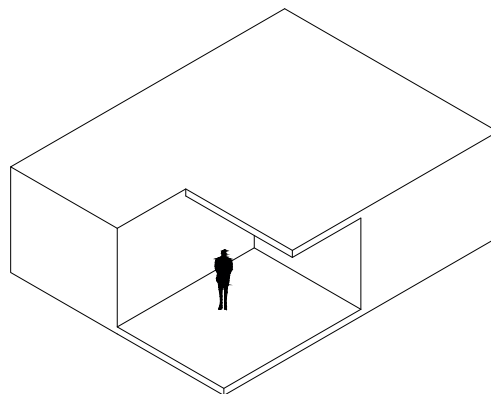
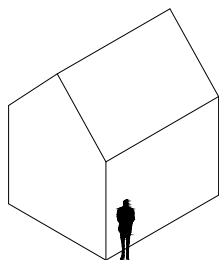
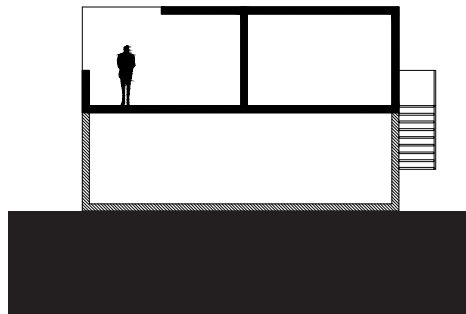
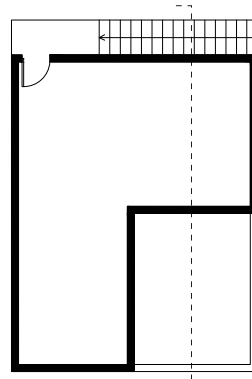
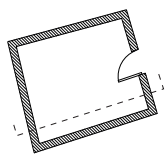


average hutong housing

housing prototype_size S

- total area_ 9 mq
- ▣ day_ 7 mq
- ▣ night_ 2 mq
- / open space_ none
- user_ family of 3

- total area_ 64 mq
- ▣ day_ 32 mq
- ▣ night_ 16 mq
- open space_ 16 mq
- intended user_ family of 3

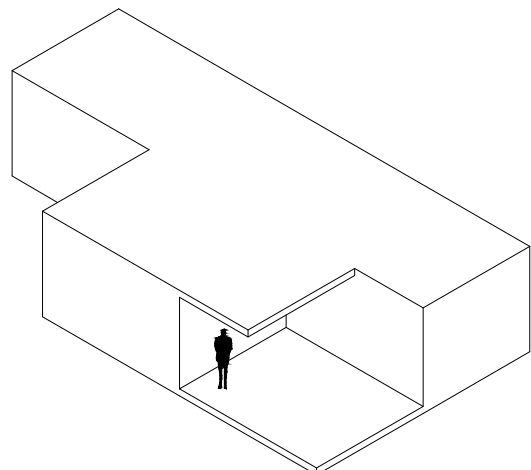
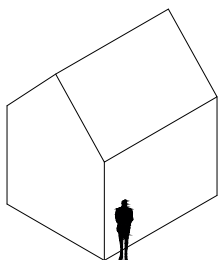
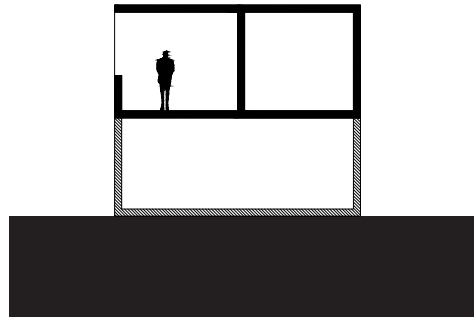
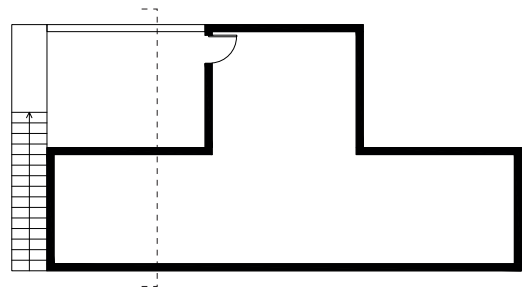
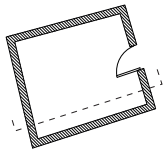


average hutong housing

housing prototype_size M

- total area_ 9 m²
- ◻ day_ 7 m²
- ◻ night_ 2 m²
- / open space_ none
- user_ family of 3

- total area_ 80 m²
- ◻ day_ 31 m²
- ◻ night_ 31 m²
- ◻ open space_ 16 m²
- intended user_ family of 4

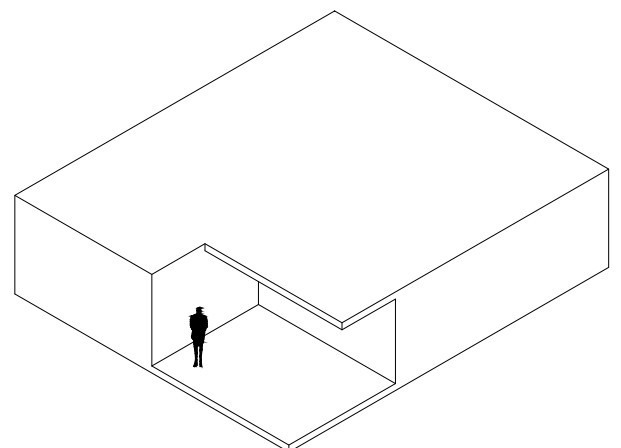
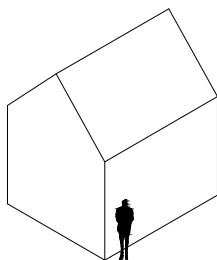
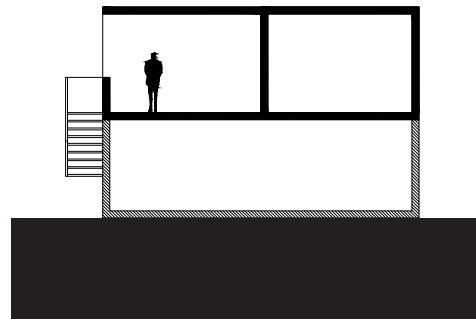
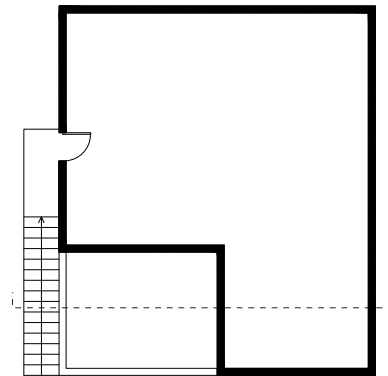
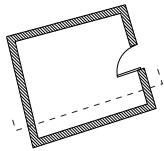


average hutong housing

housing prototype_ size L

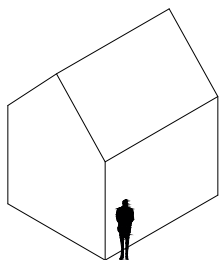
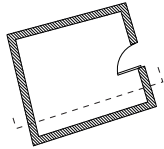
- total area_ 9 mq
- ▣ day_ 7 mq
- ▣ night_ 2 mq
- / open space_ none
- user_ family of 3

- total area_ 96 mq
- ▣ day_ 48 mq
- ▣ night_ 32 mq
- open space_ 16 mq
- intended user_ family of 4+



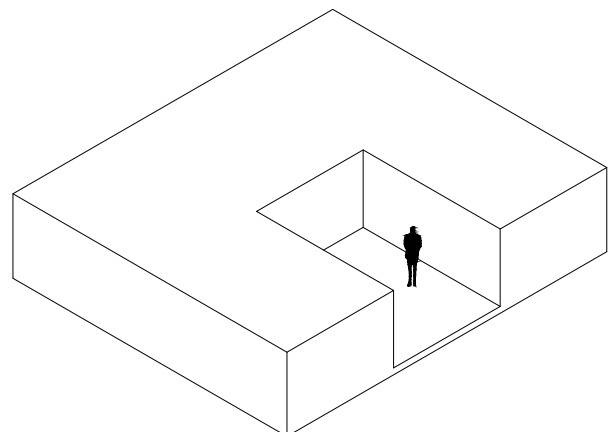
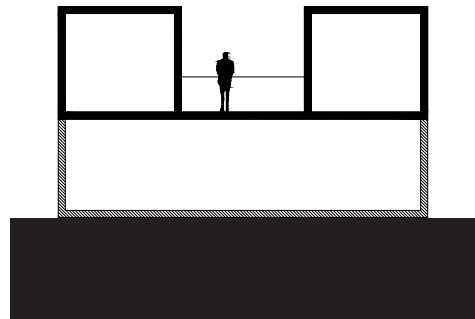
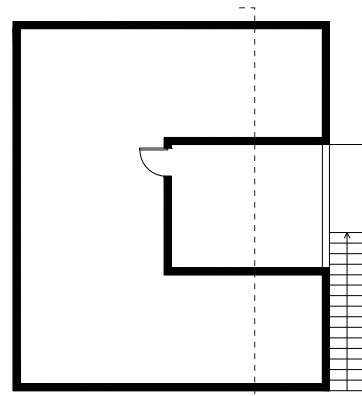
average hutong housing

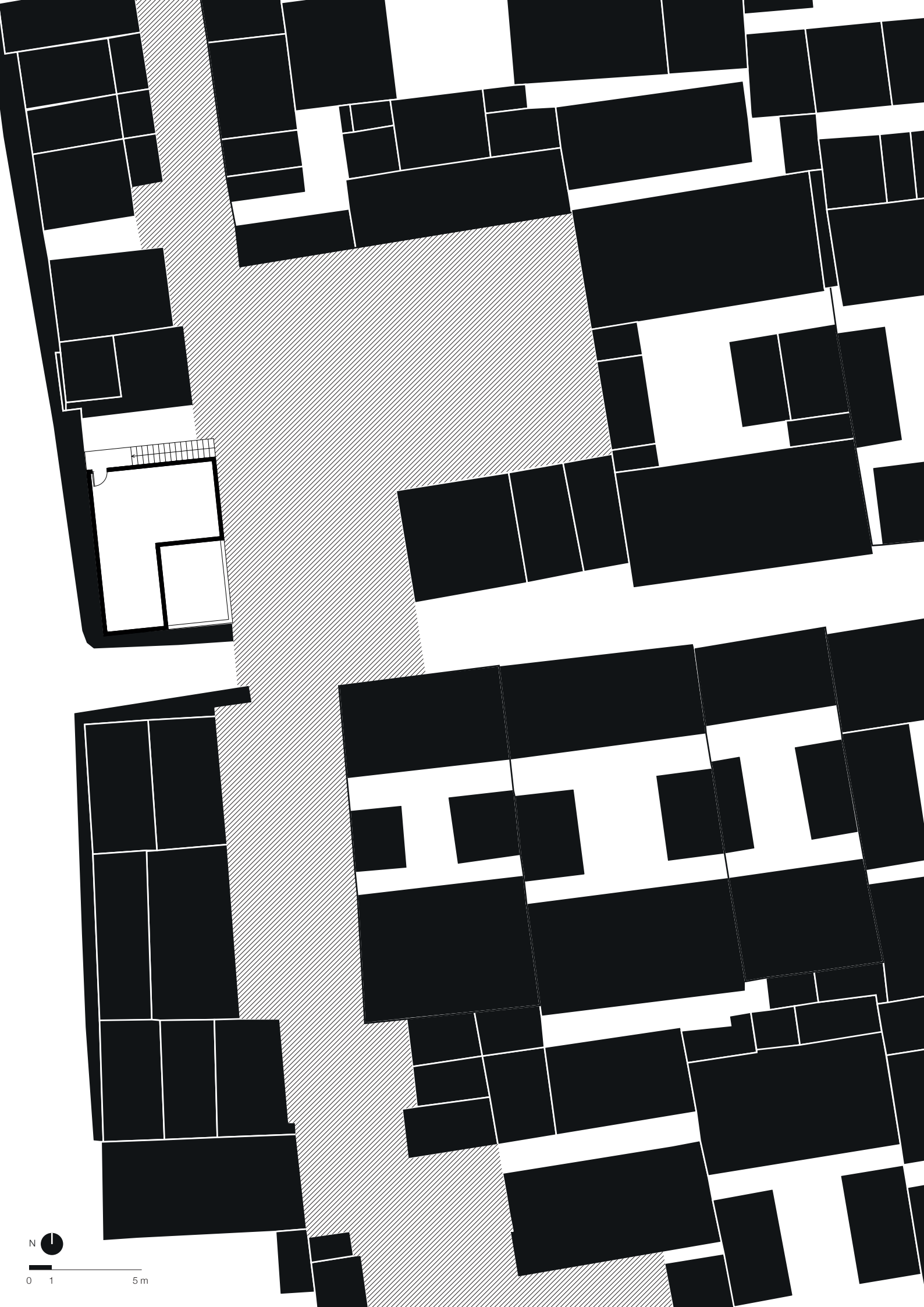
- total area_ 9 mq
- ◻ day_ 7 mq
- ◻ night_ 2 m
- / open space_ none
- user_ family of 3



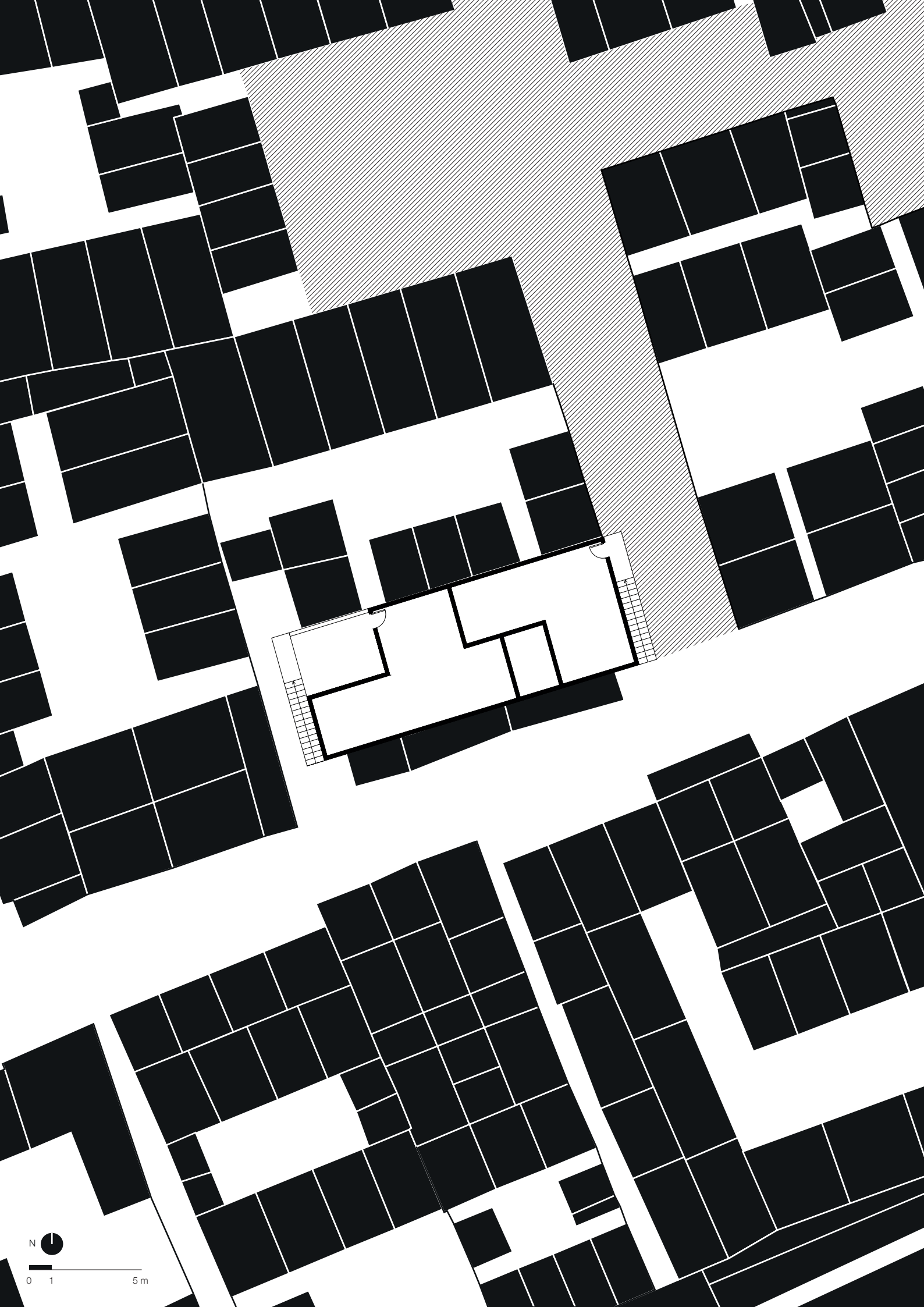
housing prototype_ size M

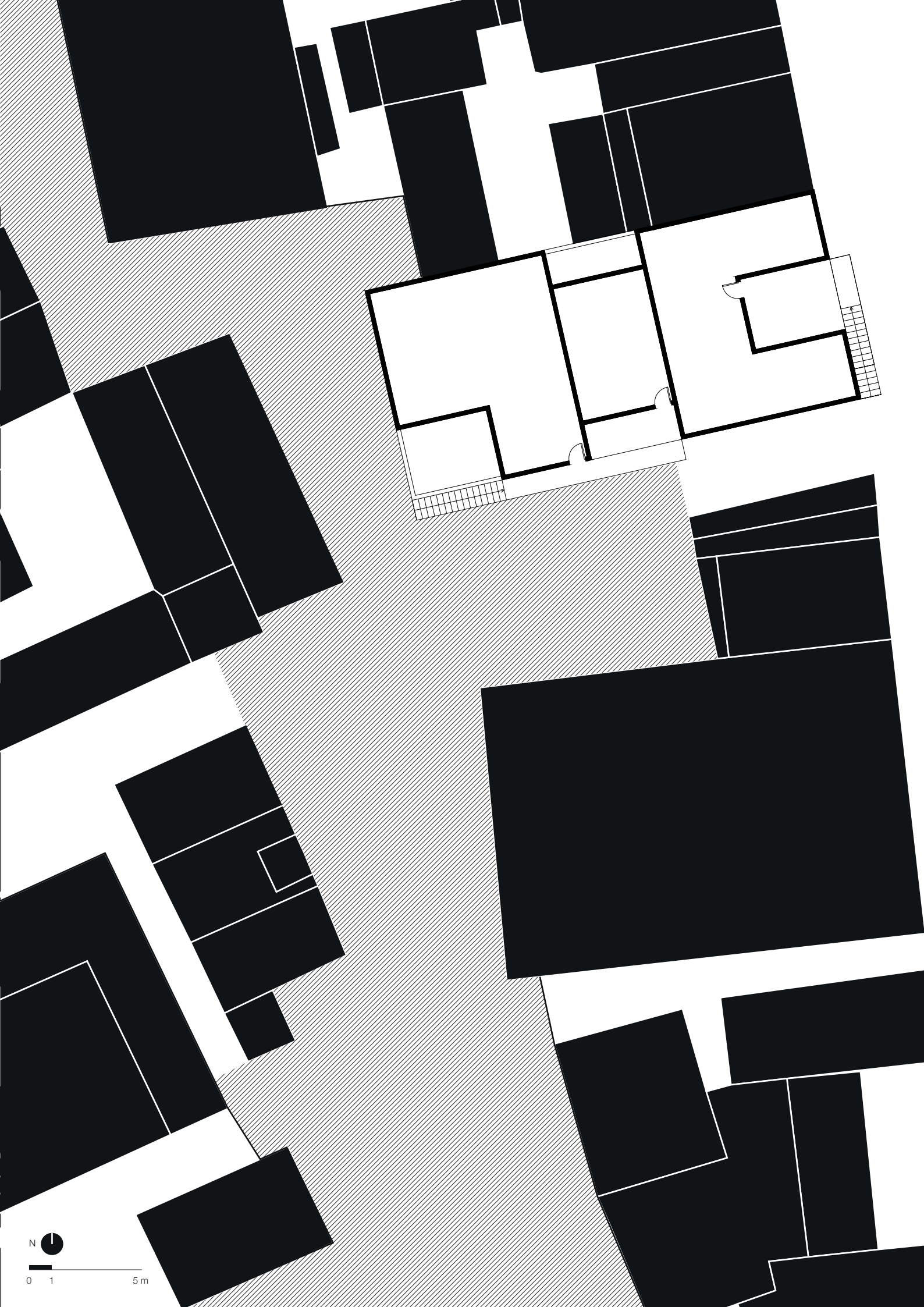
- total area_ 62 mq
- ◻ day_ 30 mq
- ◻ night_ 16 mq
- open space_ 16 mq
- intended user_ family of 3





0 1 5m



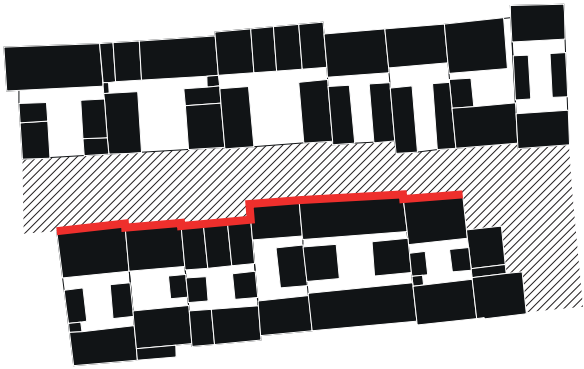


0 1 5m



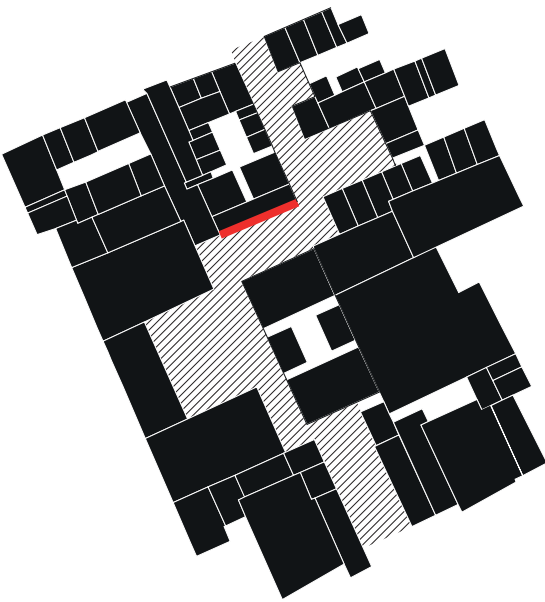


sample #1



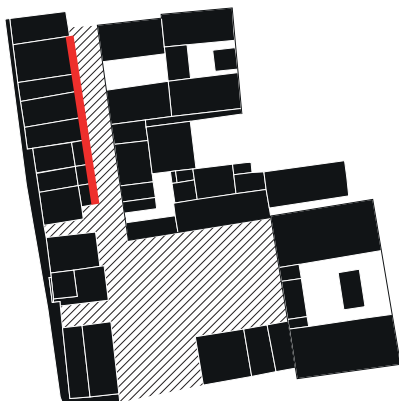
//lenght_ 54 m
//height_ 3 m
//orientation_ North
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ p.1, sp.2, p.2
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #2



//lenght_ 11 m
//height_ 3 m
//orientation_ South
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ pr.1, p.2
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #3



//lenght_ 22.5 m
//height_ 3 m
//orientation_ East
//adjacency to street_ yes
//adjacent catalogue elements_ pr.1, f.1, sp.2
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

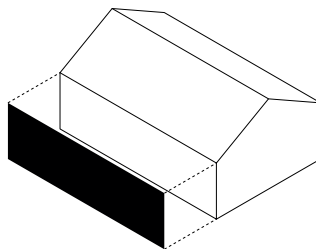
//objectives

- _ providing a shared space for the community
- _ promoting tourism in the area
- _ cheap and easy to build

//sphere of influence



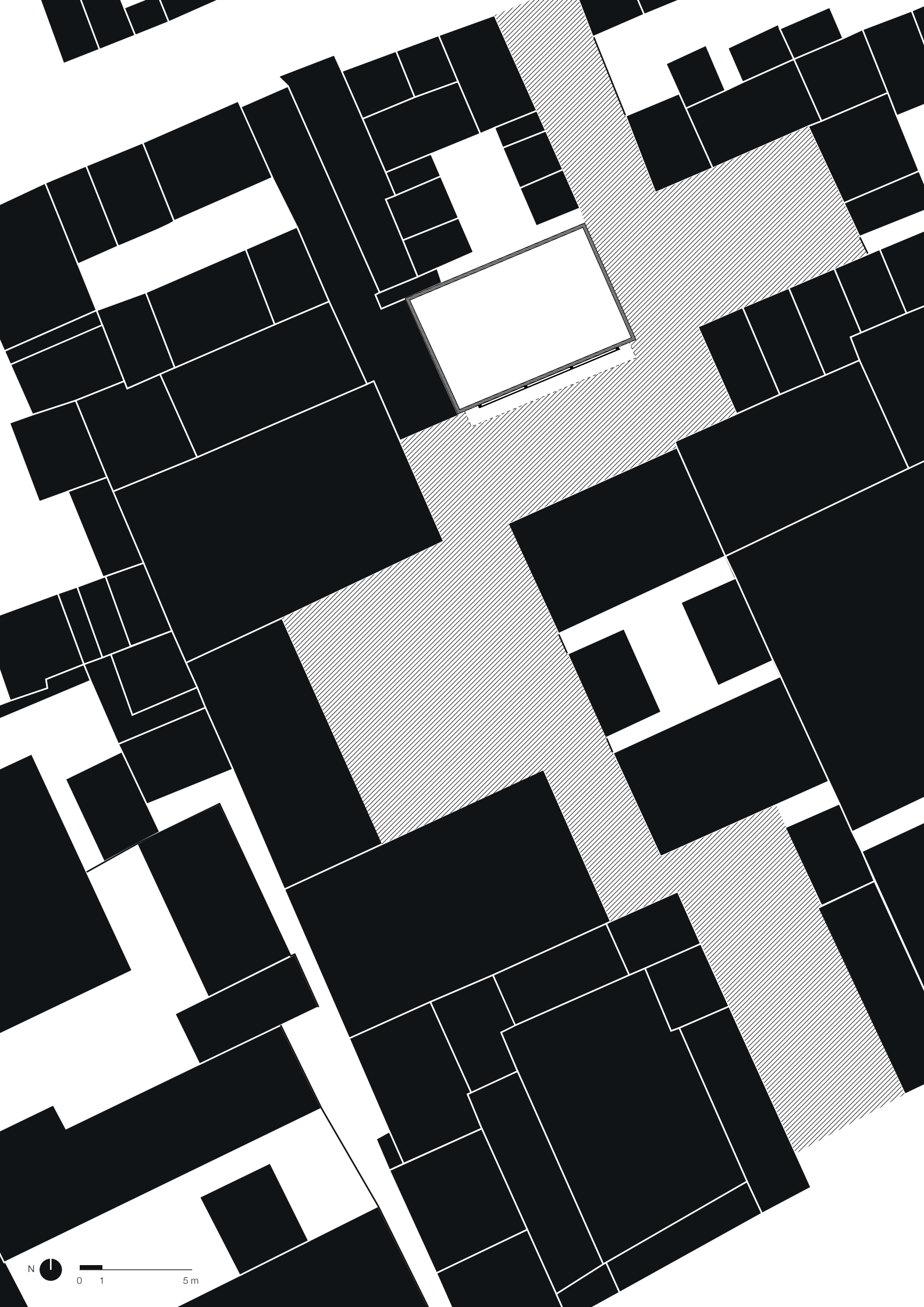
//strategy



a simple wooden frame is applied onto the blind facade to provide a screen to display local art or touristic infos about the district

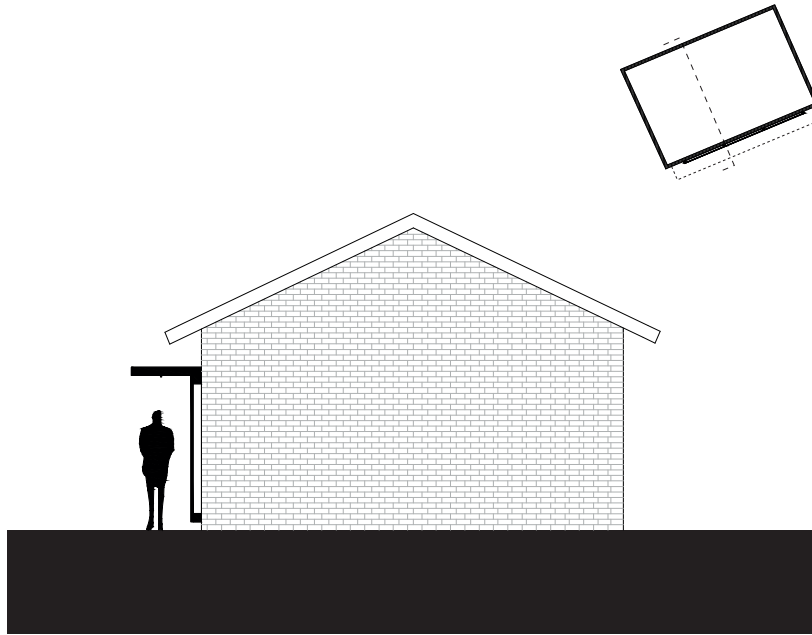
//intervention



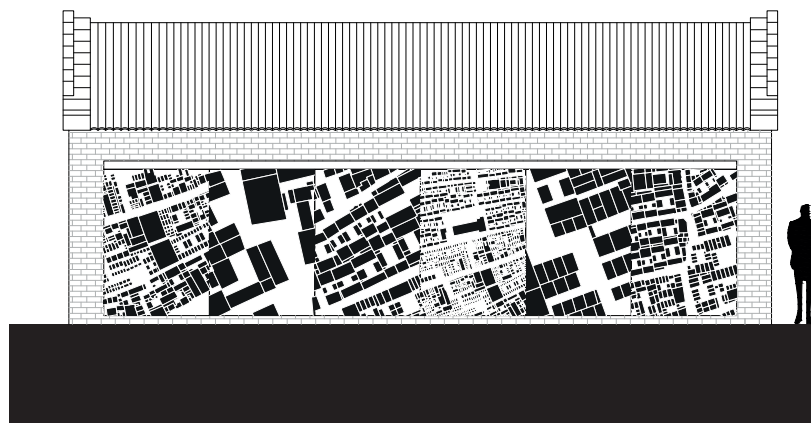


N

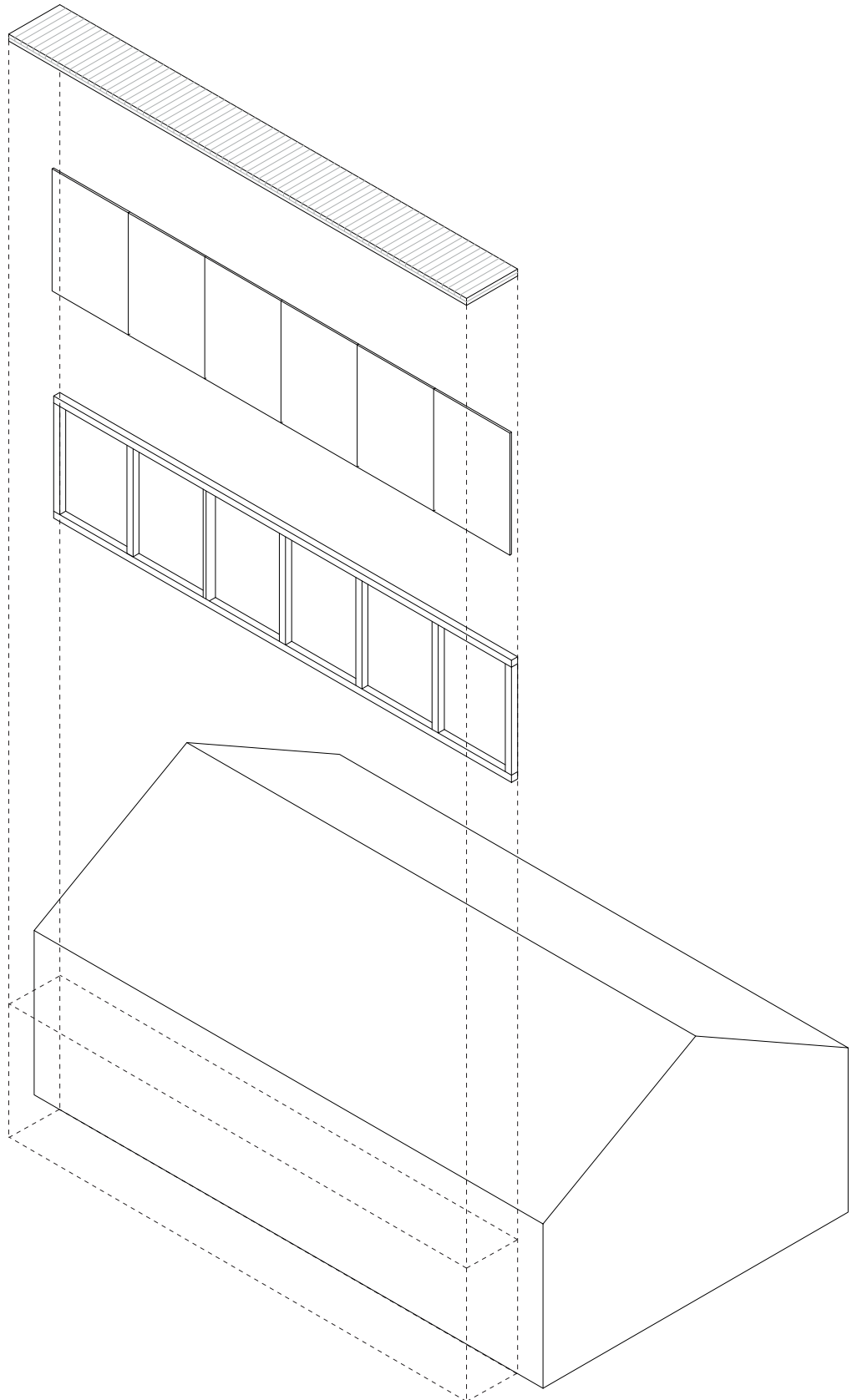
0 1 5m



section



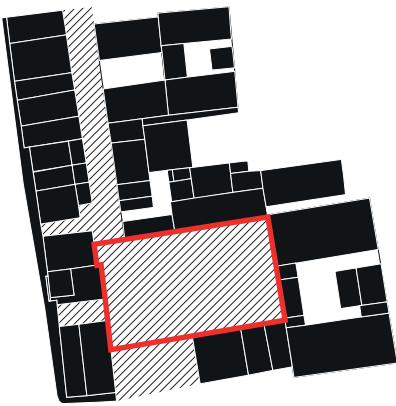
elevation





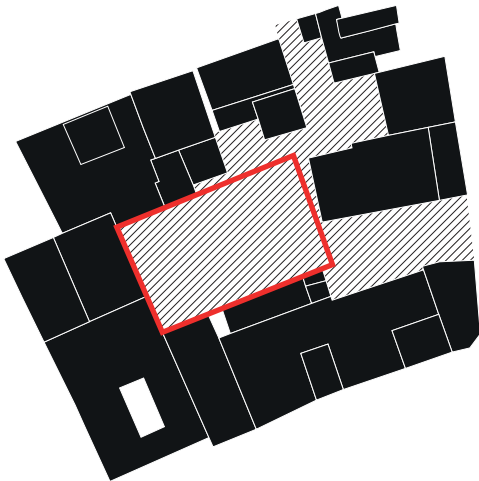


sample #1



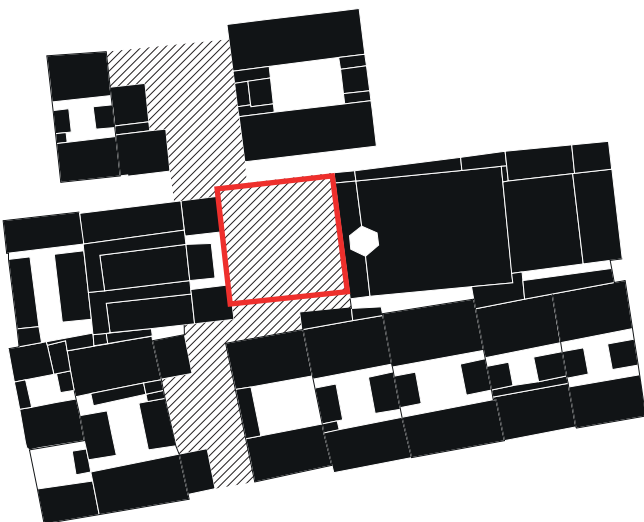
//area_ 320 mq
//width_ 22,5 m
//lenght_ 14 m
//adjacency to street_ yes
//adjacent catalogue elements_ pr.1, sp.2, f.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #2



//area_ 250 mq
//width_ 16,5 m
//lenght_ 16 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ r.5, sp.1, sp.2, c.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 6 m

sample #3

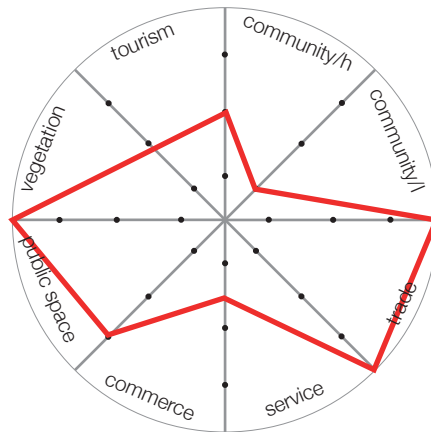


//area_ 280 mq
//width_ 15 m
//lenght_ 16 m
//adjacency to street_ yes
//adjacent catalogue elements_ r.2, f.1, sp.2
//average surrounding buildings height_ 4 m

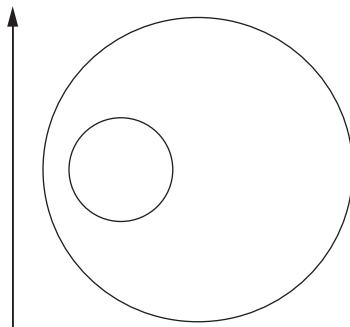
//objectives

- _ maintaining pedestrian flow
- _ clarifying the public character of the square
- _ densification of activities

//sphere of influence



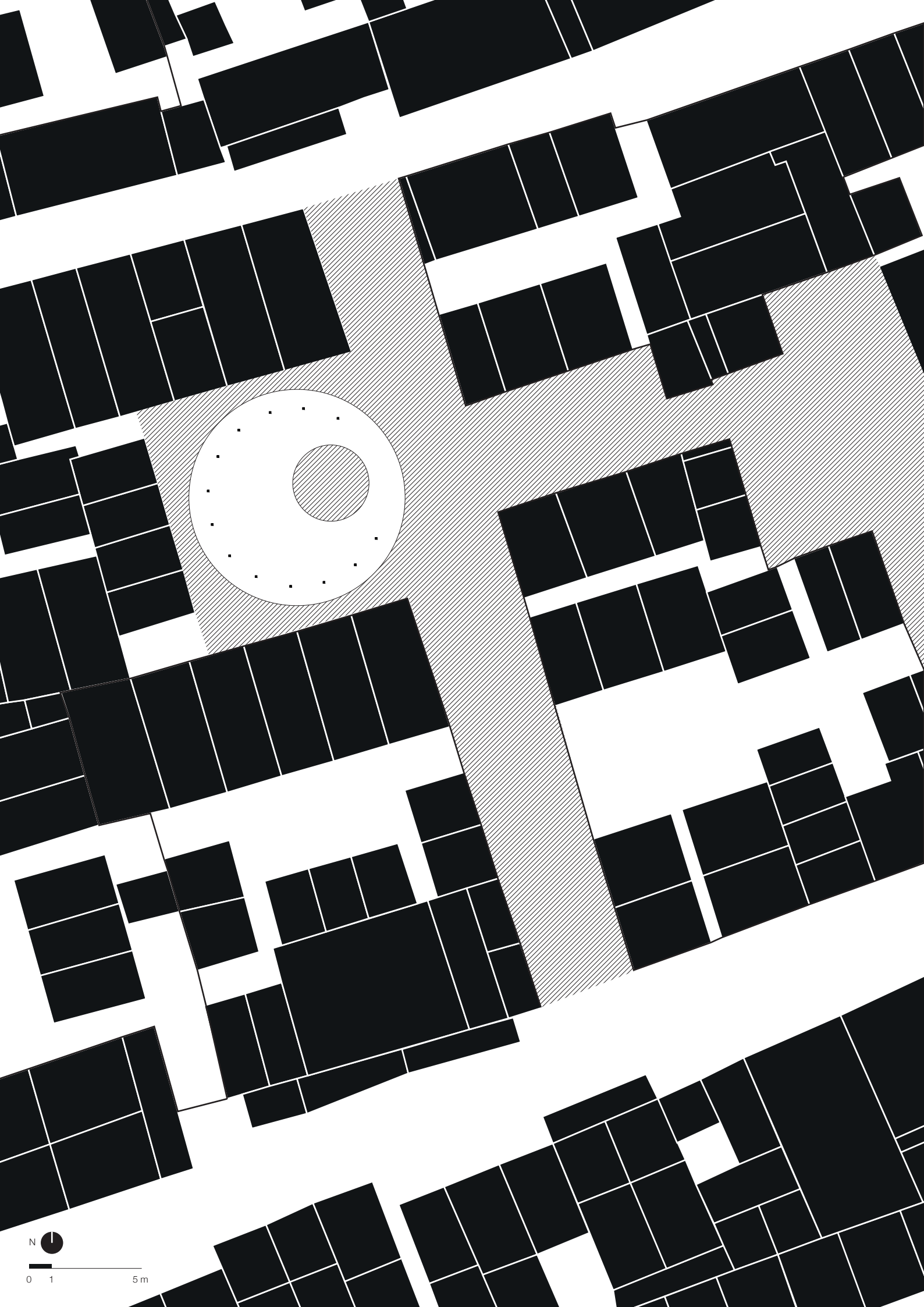
//strategy



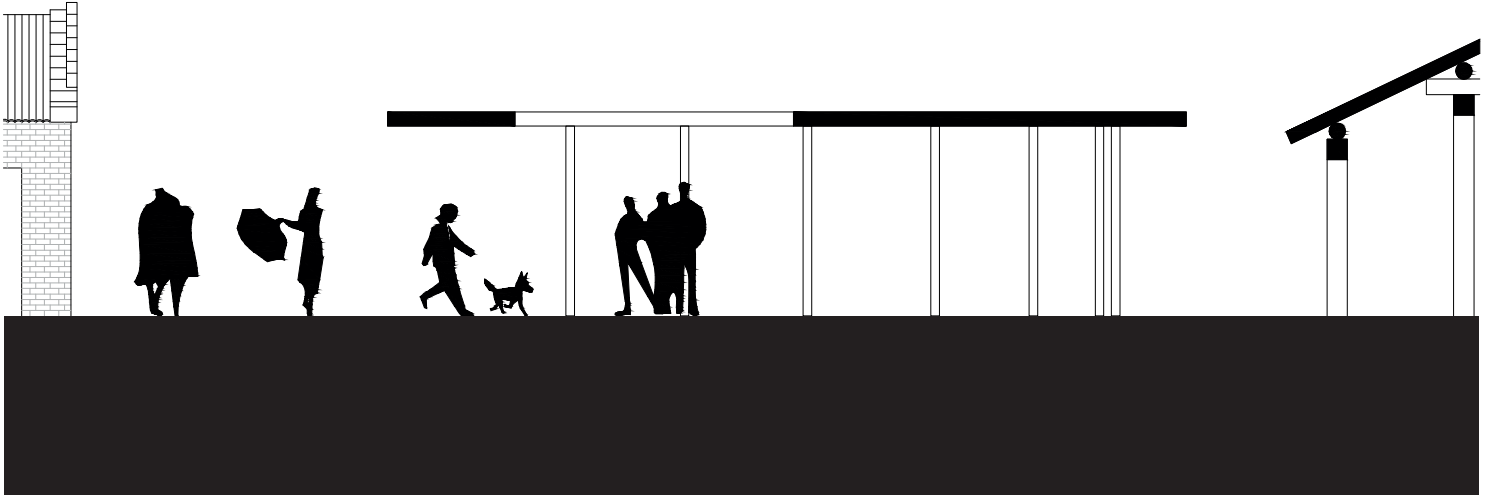
a large canopy provides a protected place to host spontaneous activities: its shape invites pedestrians to enter the square and spend time there

//intervention

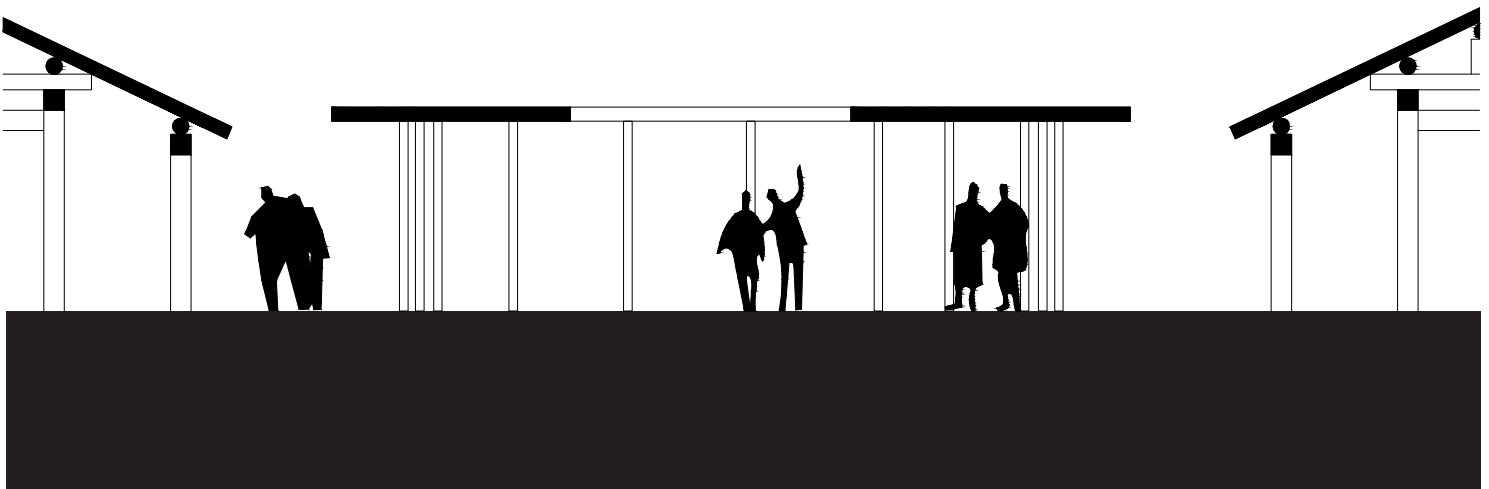




0 1 5m



section AA'

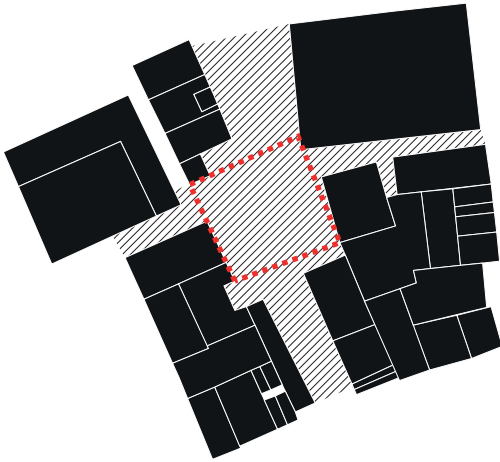


section BB'



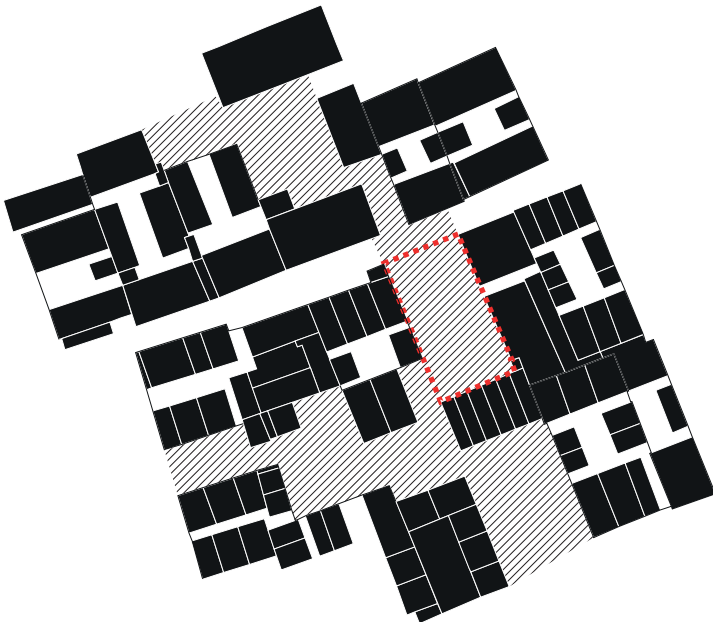


sample #1



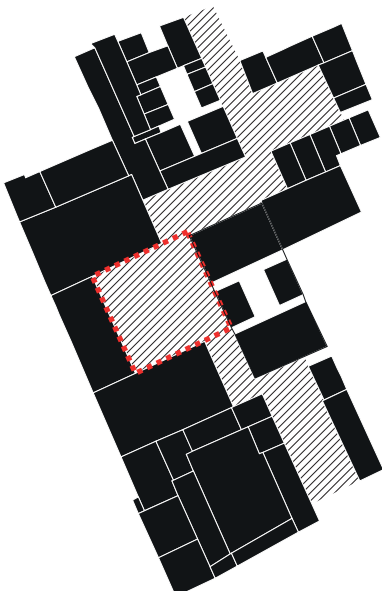
//area_ 190 mq
//width_ 14 m
//length_ 14 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ c.1, pr.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 4 m

sample #2



//area_ 140 mq
//width_ 10 m
//length_ 13.5 m
//adjacency to street_ yes
//adjacent catalogue elements_ f.1, c.2, pr.1, sp.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #3

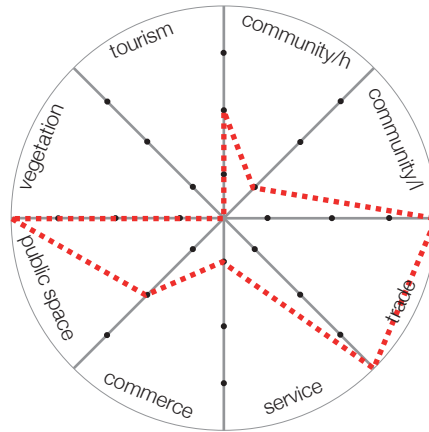


//area_ 190 mq
//width_ 14 m
//length_ 14 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ c.2, pr.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 4 m

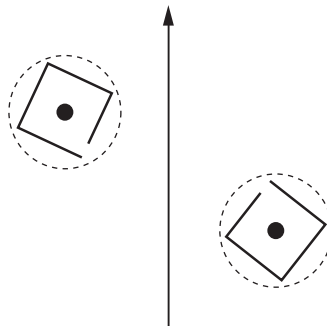
//objectives

- _ pedestrian flow
- _ enclosed public spaces
- _ sitting areas

//sphere of influence

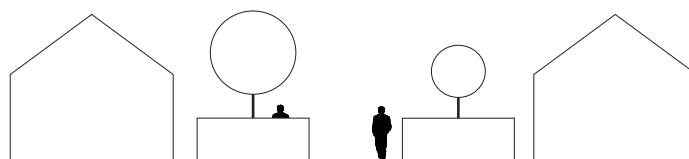


//strategy



small enclosed gardens are created around existing trees to provide quiet sitting areas

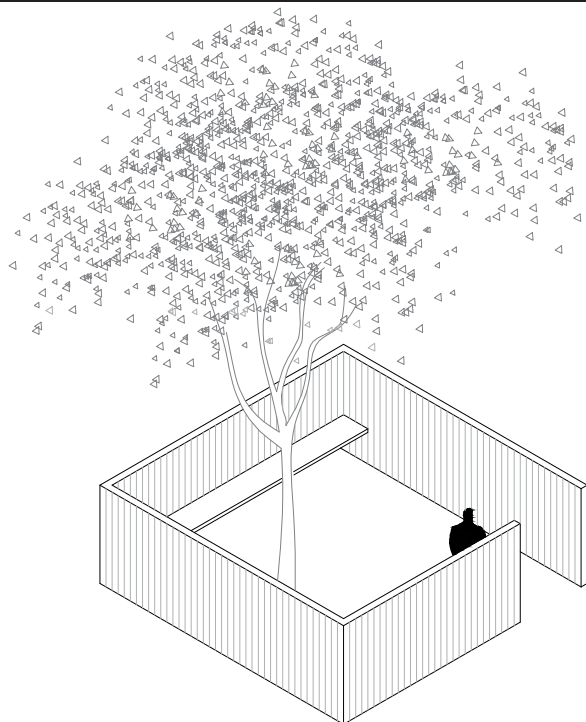
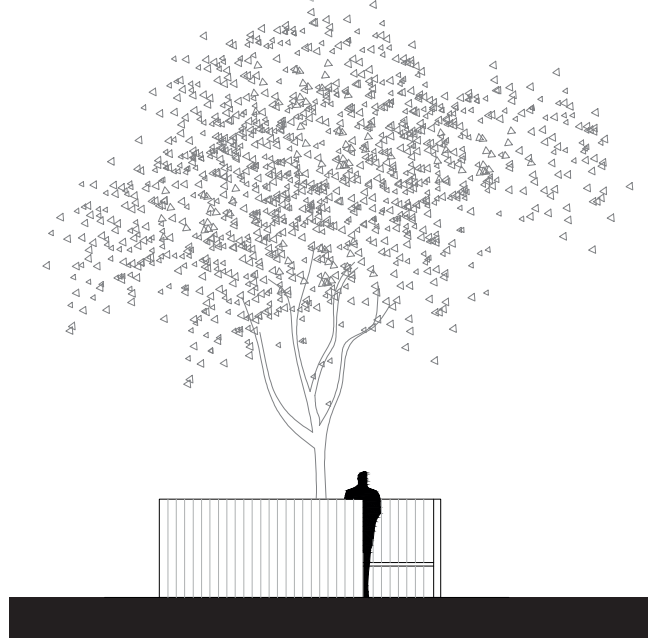
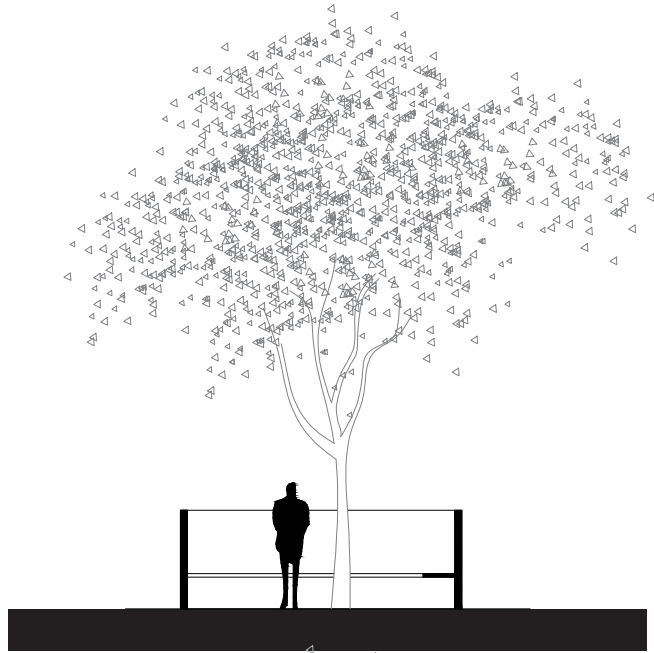
//intervention





0 1 5m

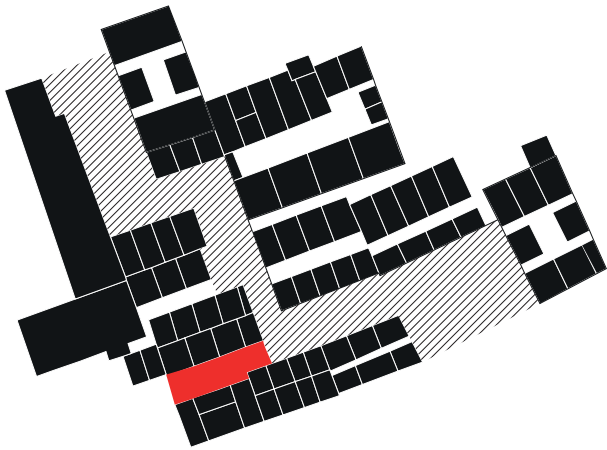
p.2_little public square





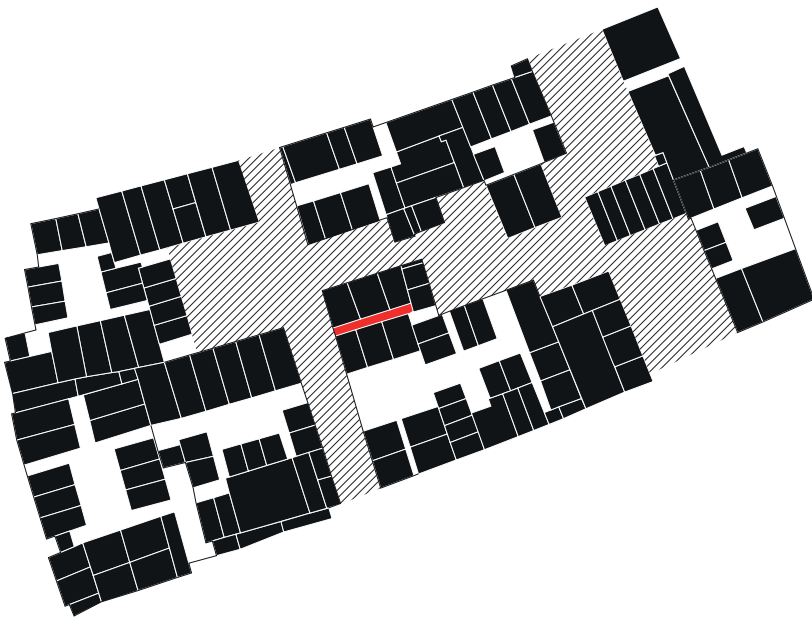


sample #1



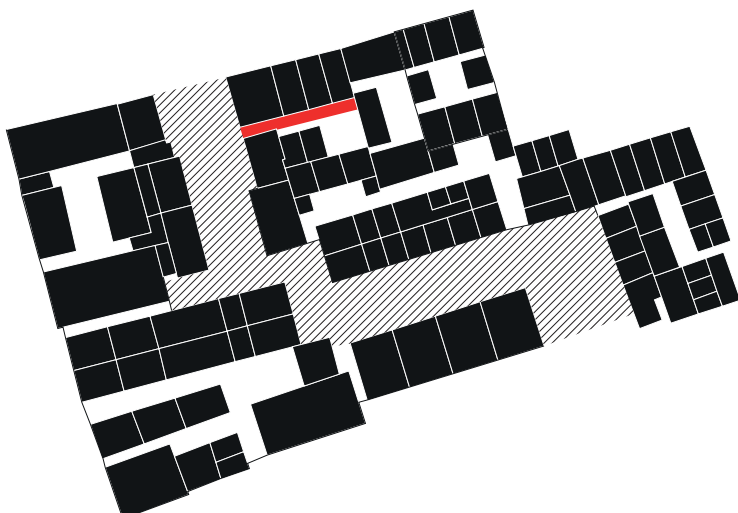
//area_ 50 mq
//width_ 3,2 m
//lenght_ 13,6 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ p.1, f.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #2



//area_ 20 mq
//width_ 1.5 m
//lenght_ 15 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ p.2, pr.2
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #3



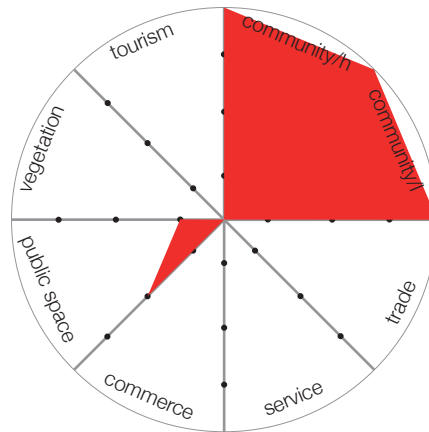
//area_ 25 mq
//width_ 1,5 m
//lenght_ 15 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ pr.1, f.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 4 m

sp.1_semi public access

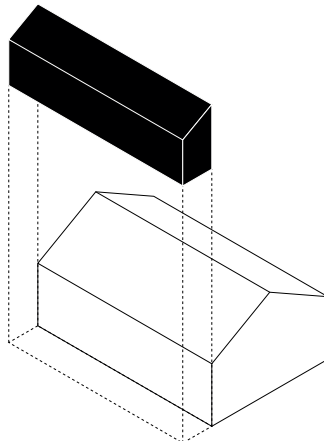
//objectives

- _ providing a buffer zone between public and private space
- _ extending each dwelling's space
- _ providing an open air area for each dwelling

//sphere of influence

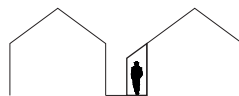


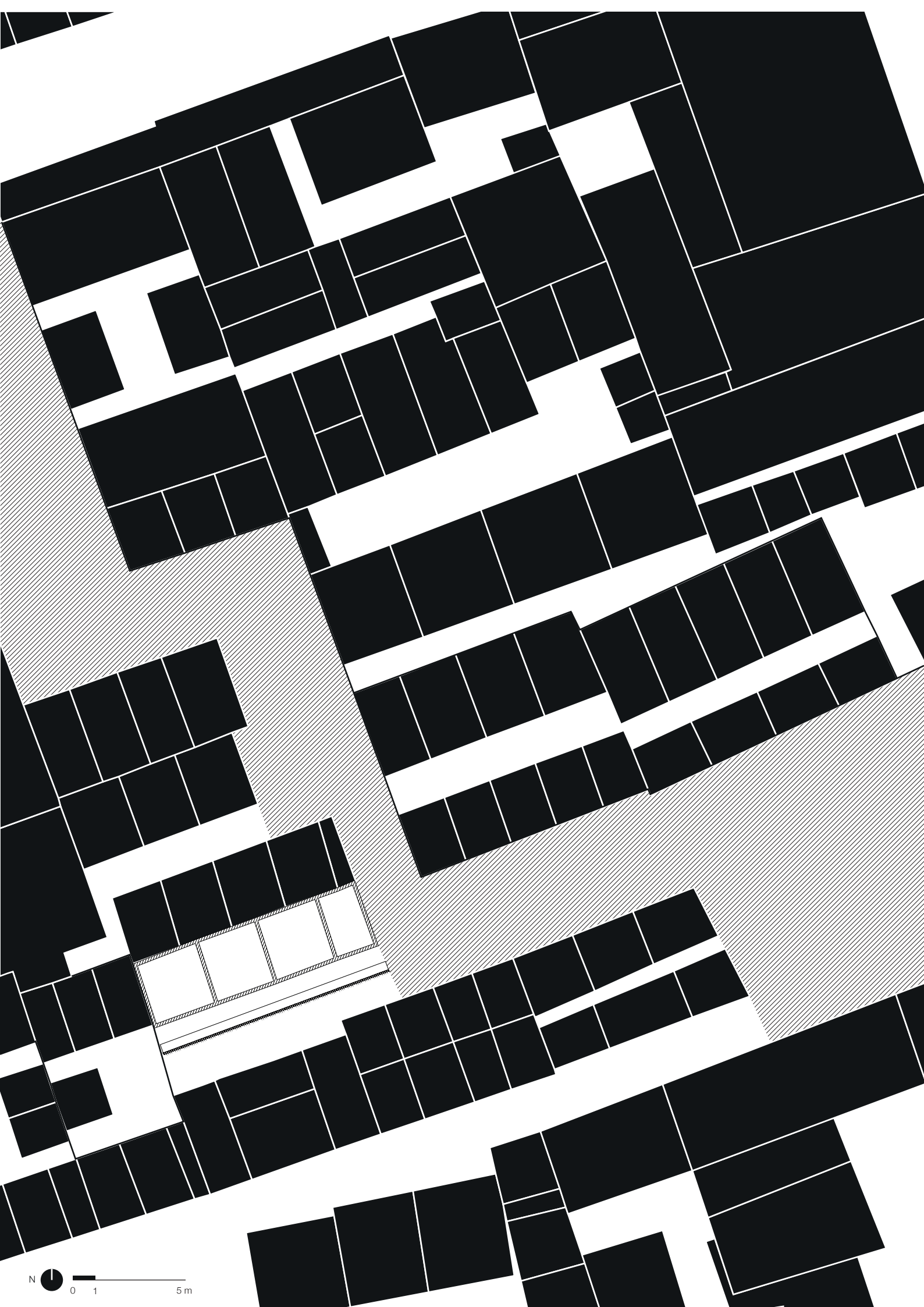
//strategy

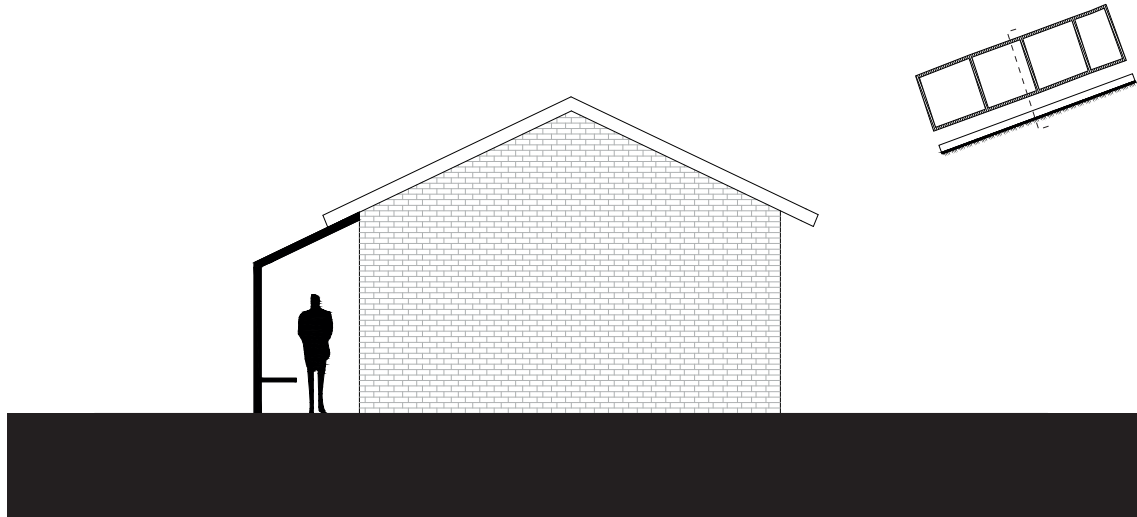


a wooden volume is superimposed to the facade of the dwelling, providing sheltered space for the residents to share

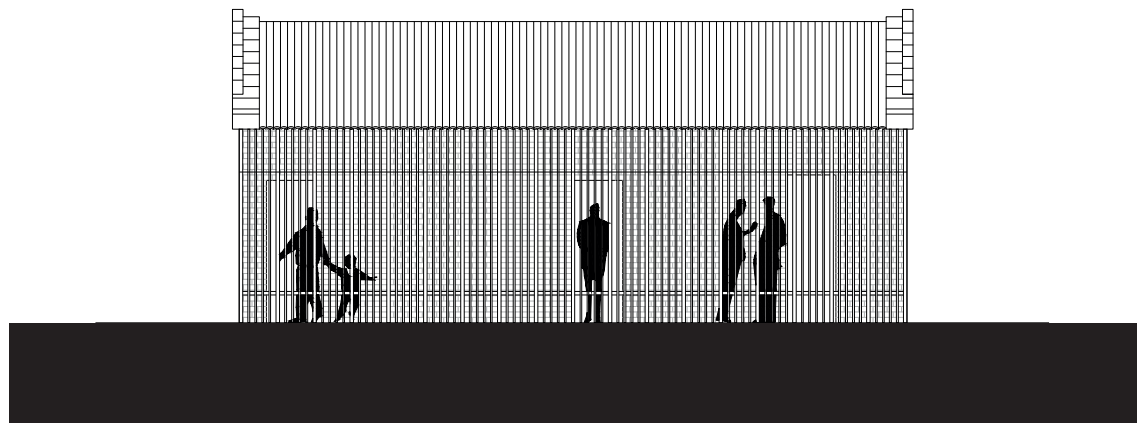
//intervention



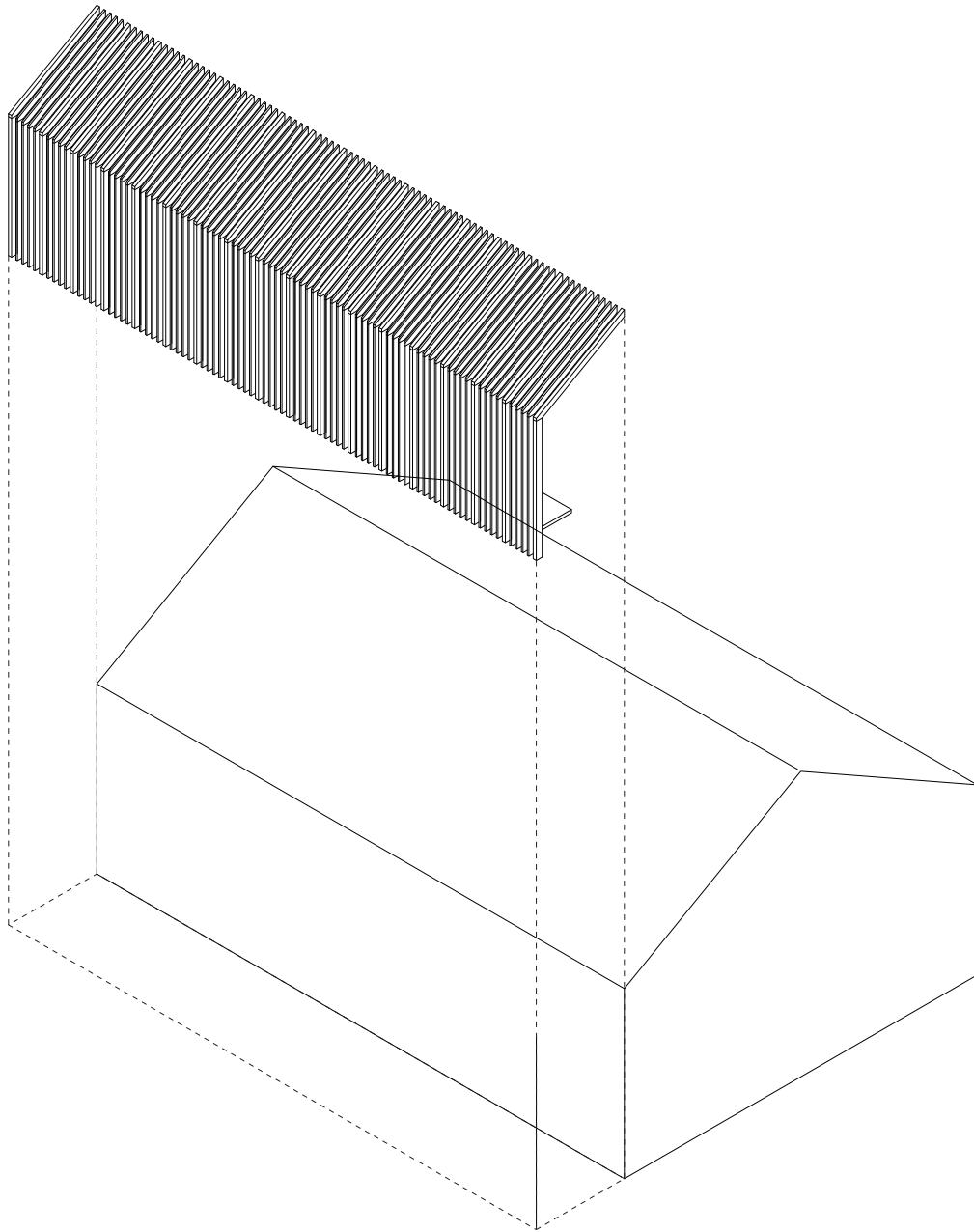




section



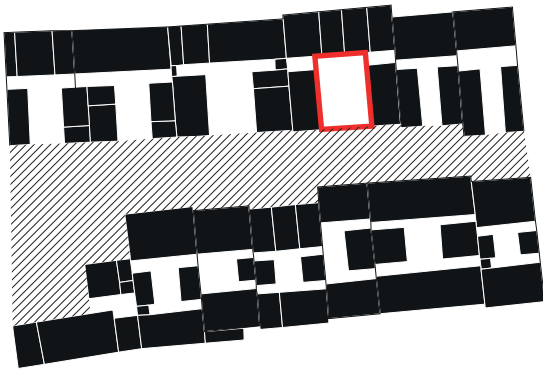
front elevation





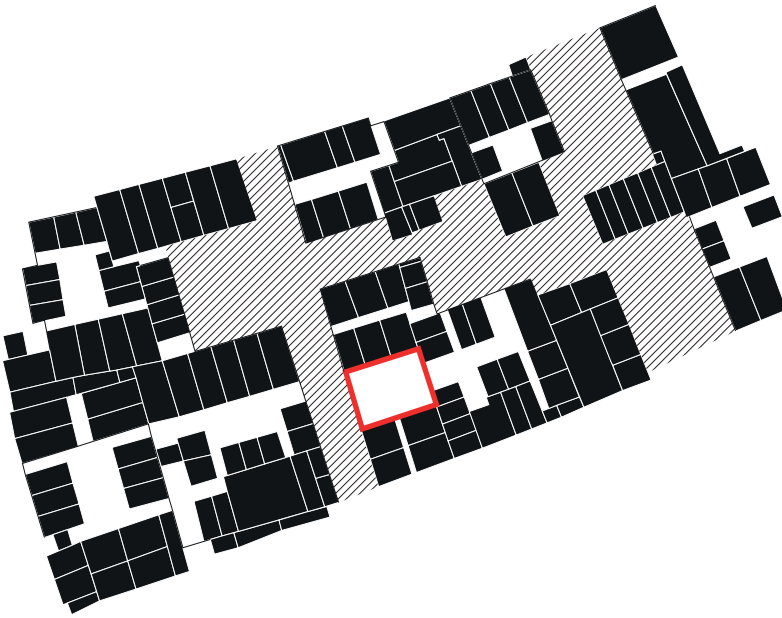


sample #1



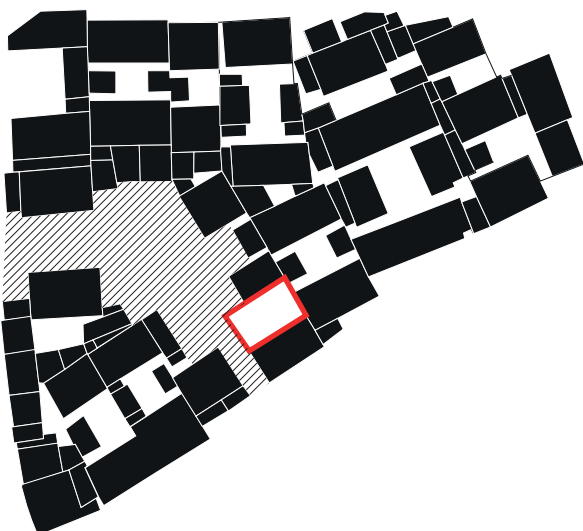
//area_ 65 mq
//width_ 6,5 m
//lenght_ 10 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//adjacent catalogue elements_ pr.1, pr.2, p.2
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #2



//area_ 80 mq
//width_ 10 m
//lenght_ 7.8 m
//adjacency to street_ yes
//adjacent catalogue elements_ pr.1, c.2, f.1
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #3



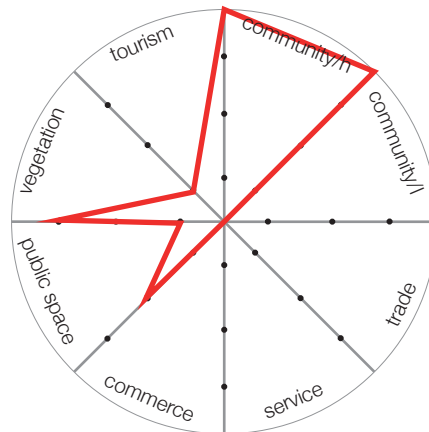
//area_ 50 mq
//width_ 8.8m
//lenght_ 6 m
//adjacency to street_ yes
//adjacent catalogue elements_ p.2, f.1, pr.2
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sp.2_semi public courtyard

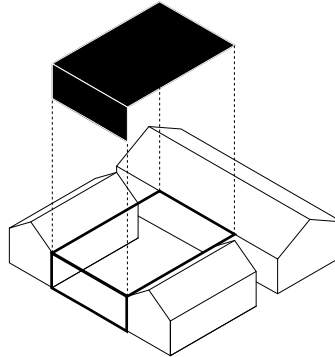
//objectives

- _ defining border between public and semi private
- _ ensure to residents a good degree of self management
- _ improving the multi functional space of the courtyard

//sphere of influence

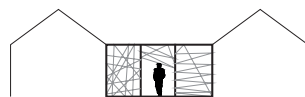


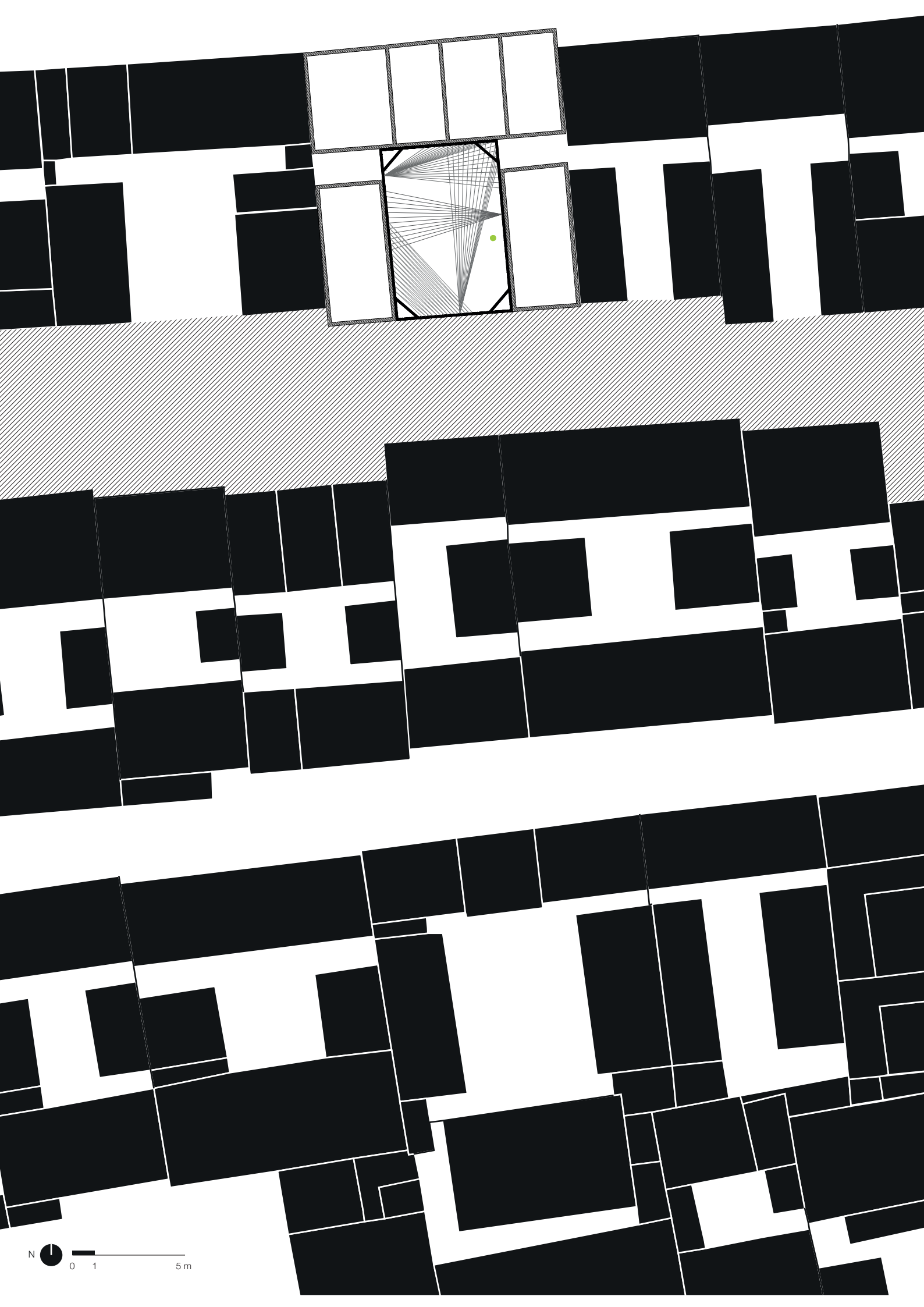
//strategy



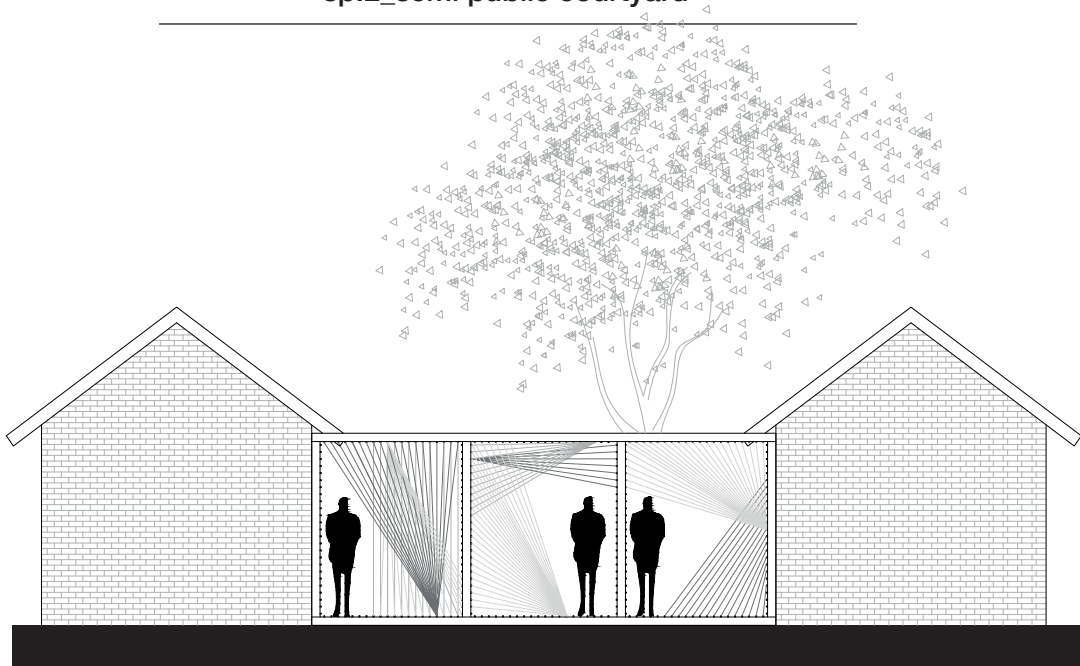
a simple wooden frame is place in the courtyard: residents can use strings to establish different degrees of privacy

//intervention

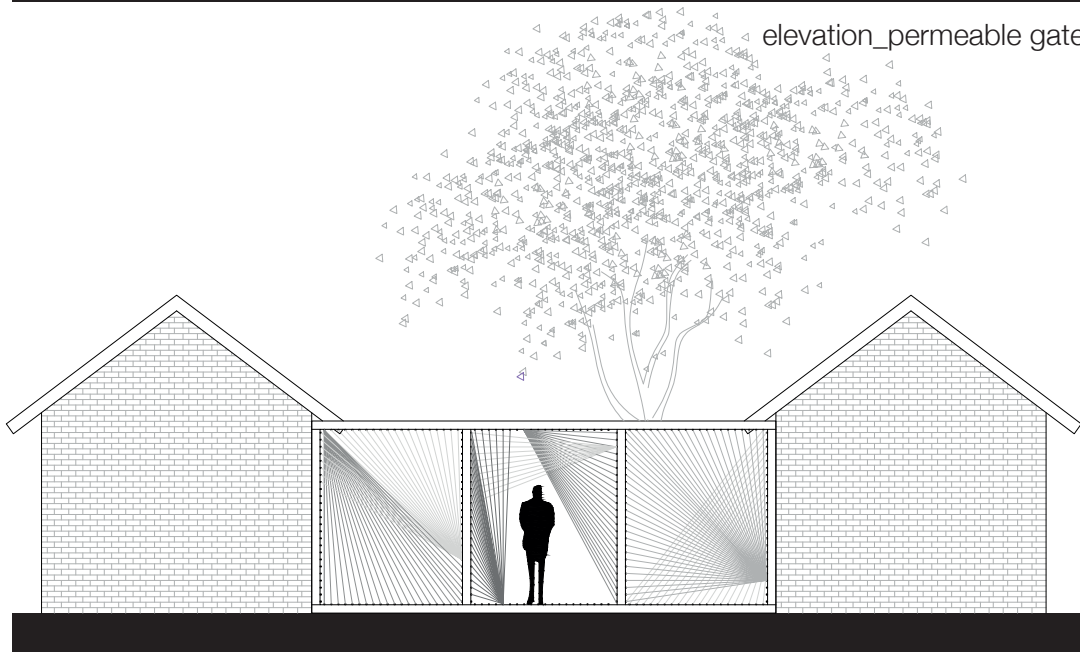




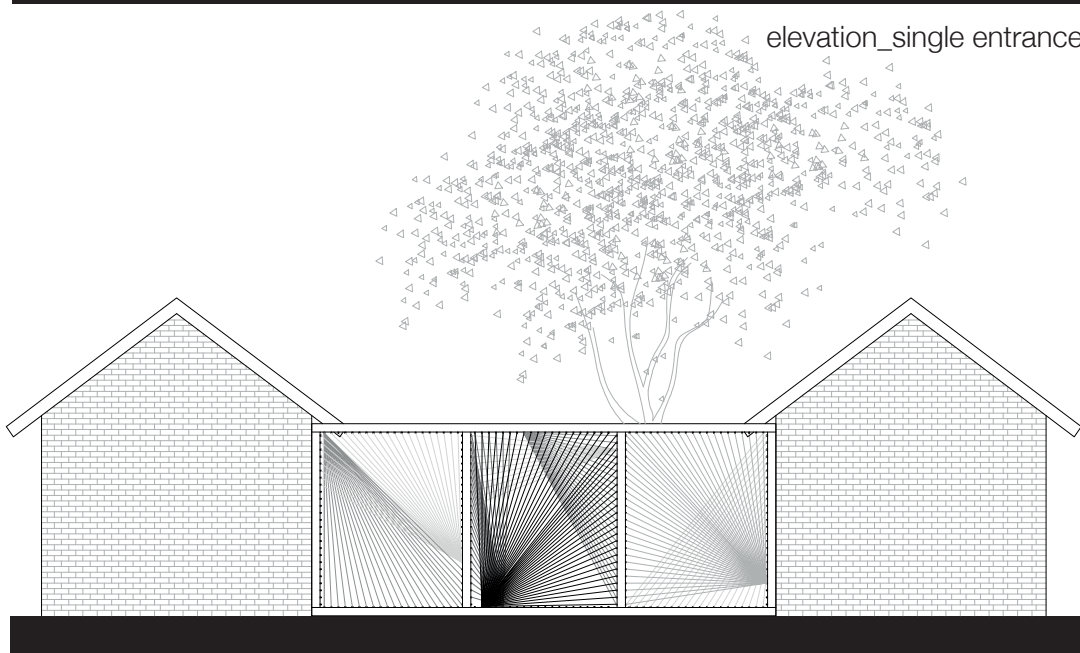
sp.2_semi public courtyard



elevation_permeable gate

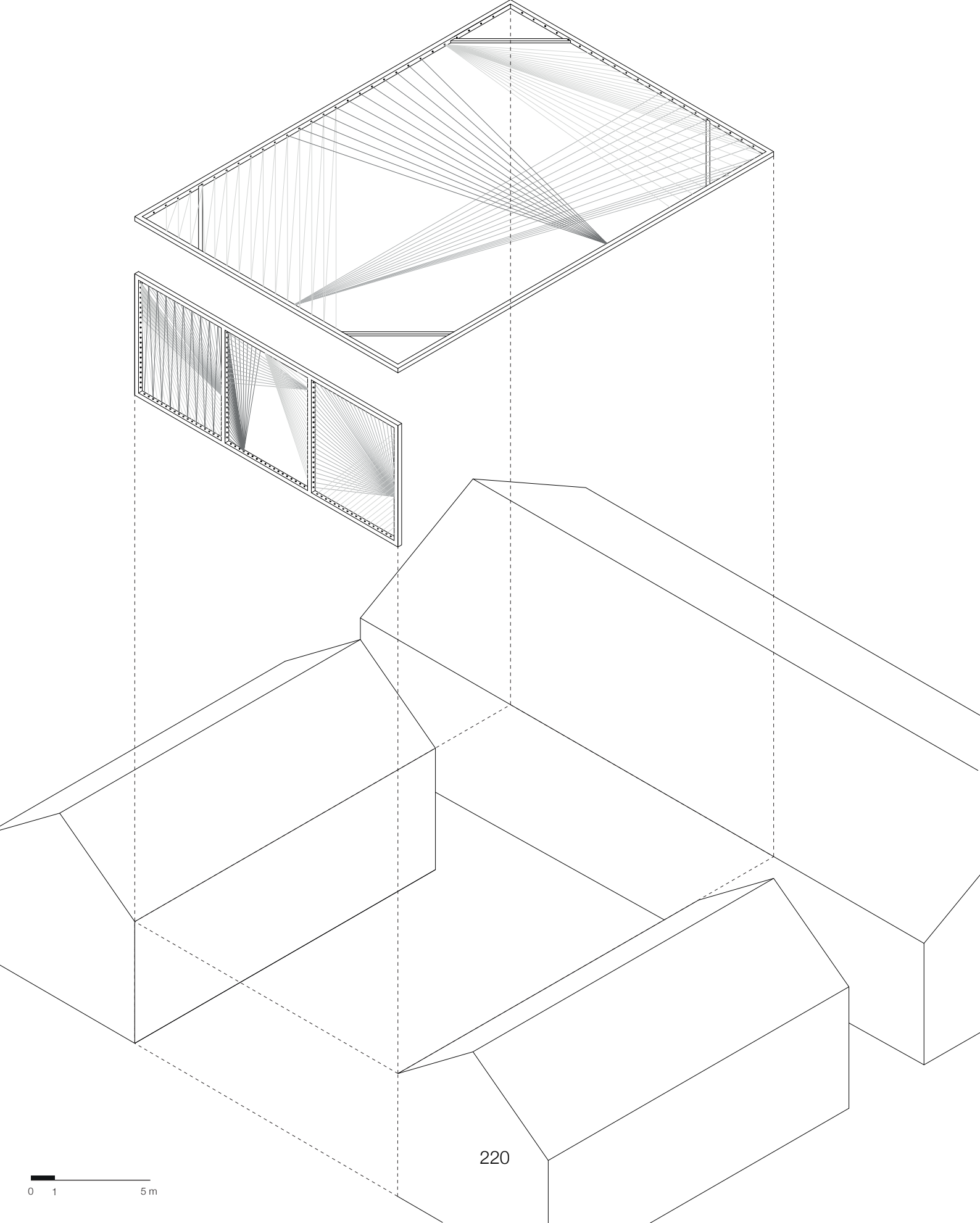


elevation_single entrance



elevation_fully closed

sp.2_semi public courtyard

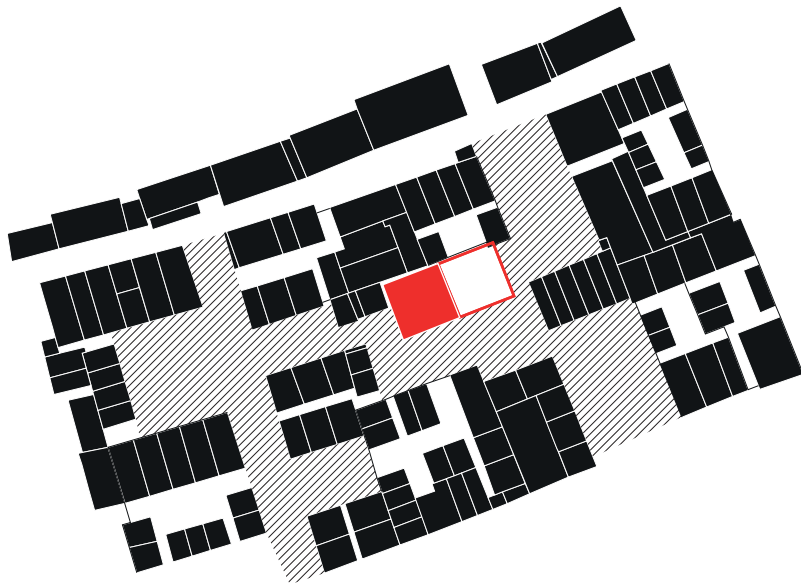


0 1 5m



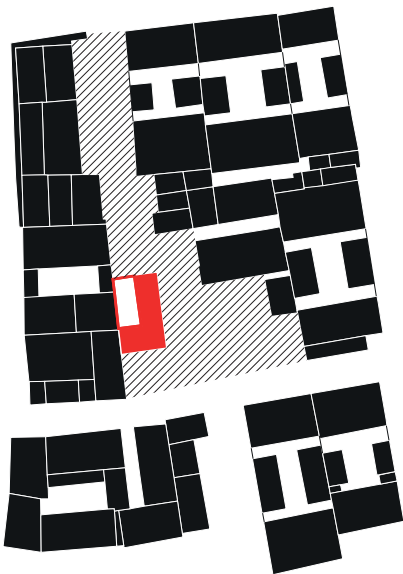


sample #1



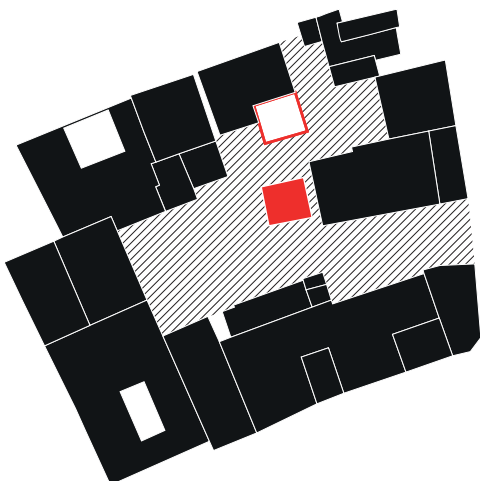
//area_ 60 mq
//width_ 7.6 m
//lenght_ 7.5 m
//additional area_ 45 mq
//available surrounding open space_ 280 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #2



//area_ 20 mq
//width_ 3.5 m
//lenght_ 7 m
//additional area_ 30 mq
//available surrounding open space_ 270 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 4 m

sample #3

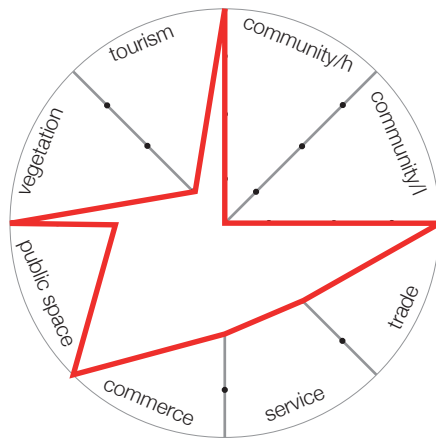


//area_ 35 mq
//width_ 6 m
//lenght_ 5,5 m
//additional area_ 35 mq
//available surrounding open space_ 440 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 4 m

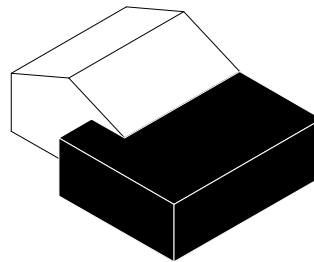
//objectives

- _ additional space for commercial activity
- _ panoramic terrace
- _ covered outdoor space

//sphere of influence

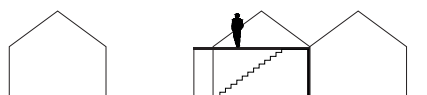


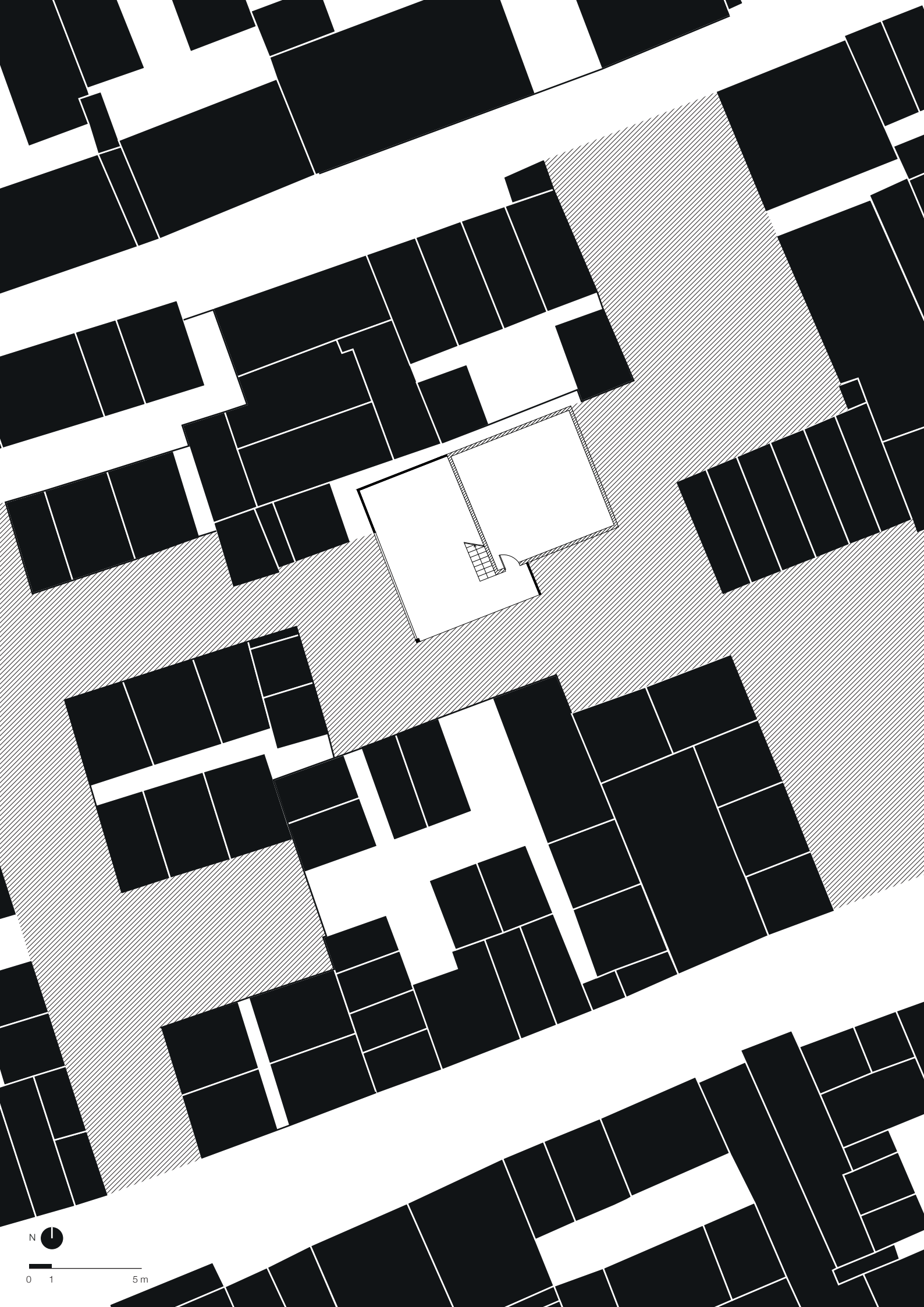
//strategy



a wooden addition is placed along the building, providing space for a future commercial development

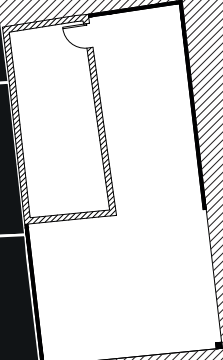
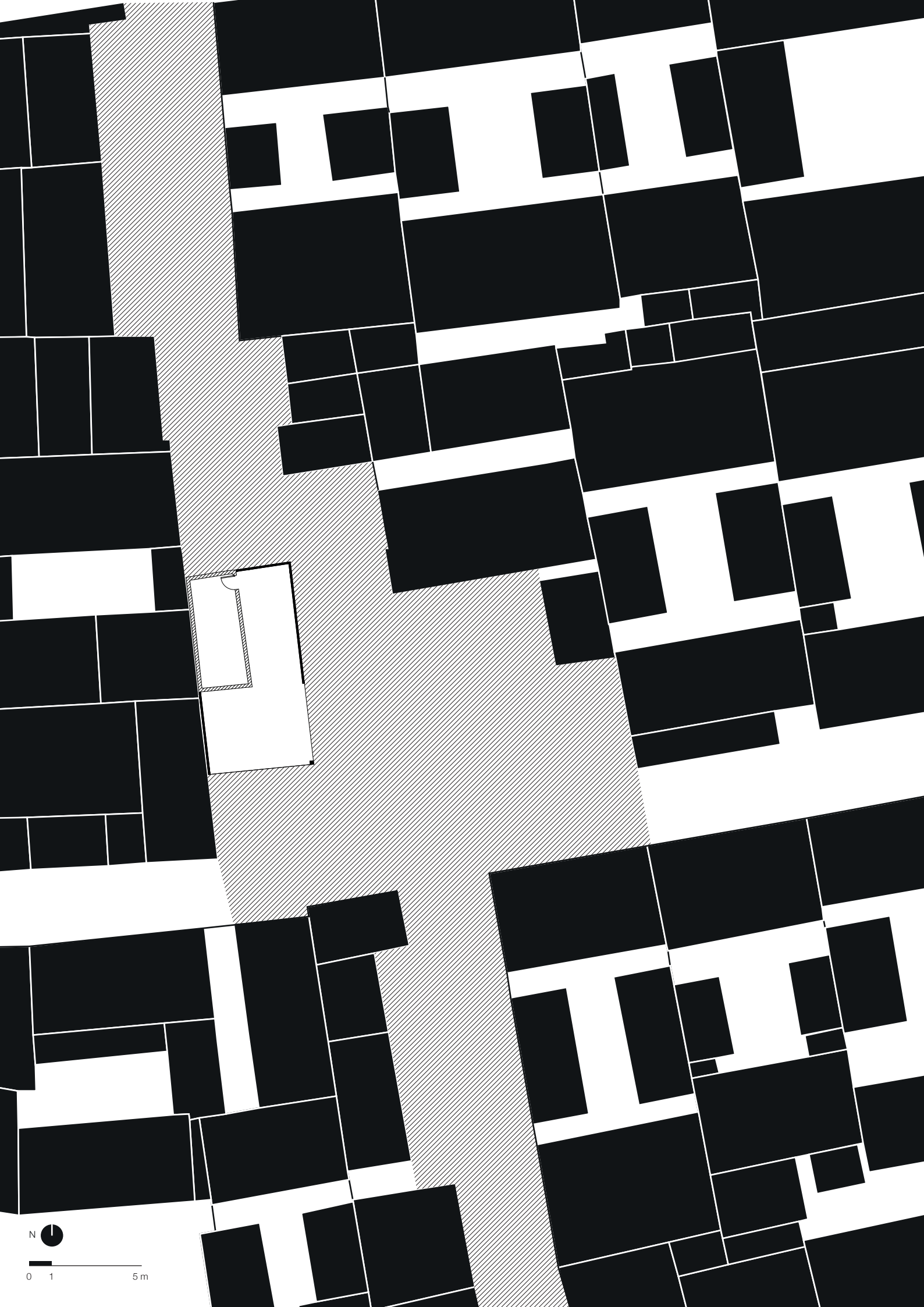
//intervention



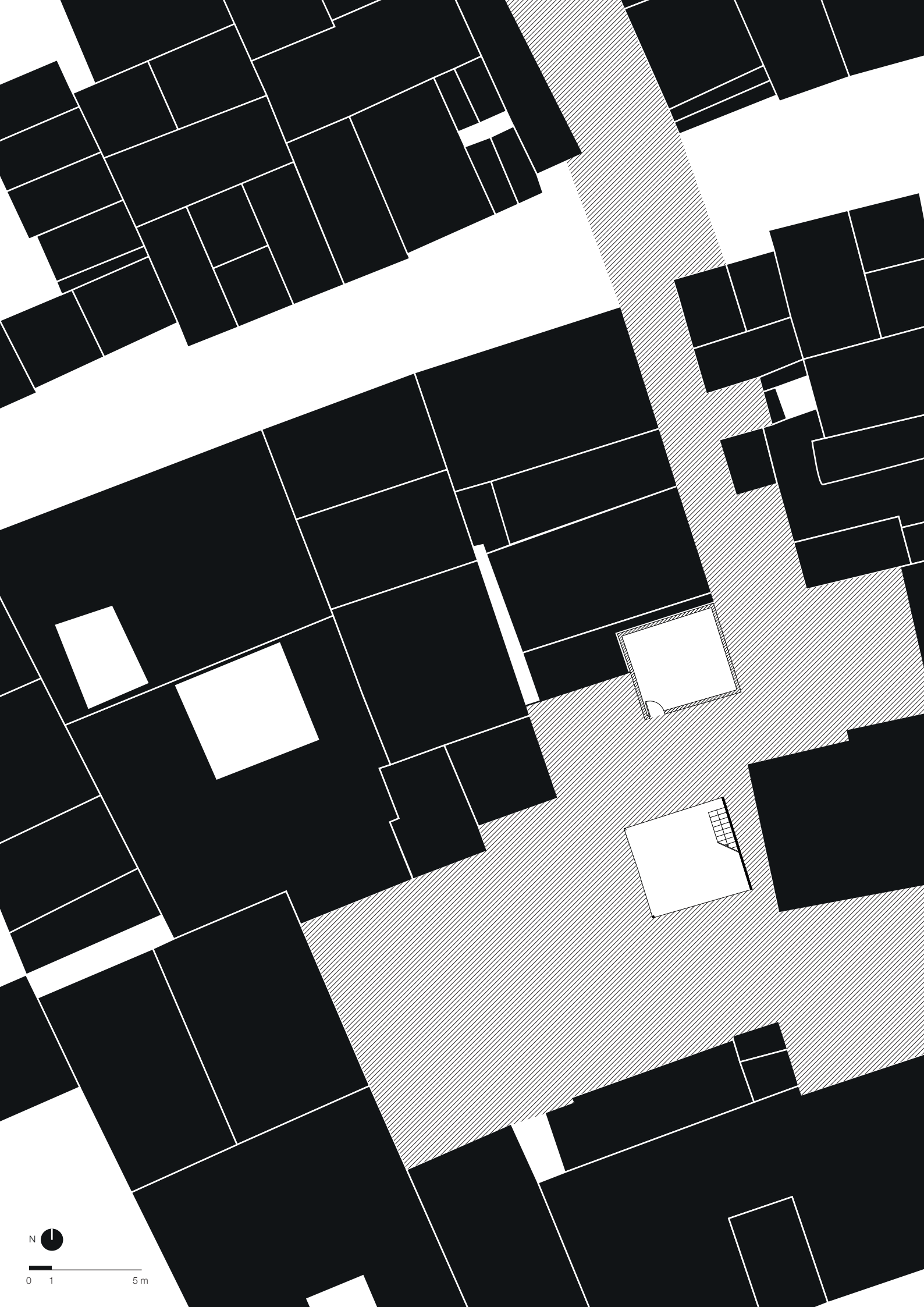


N

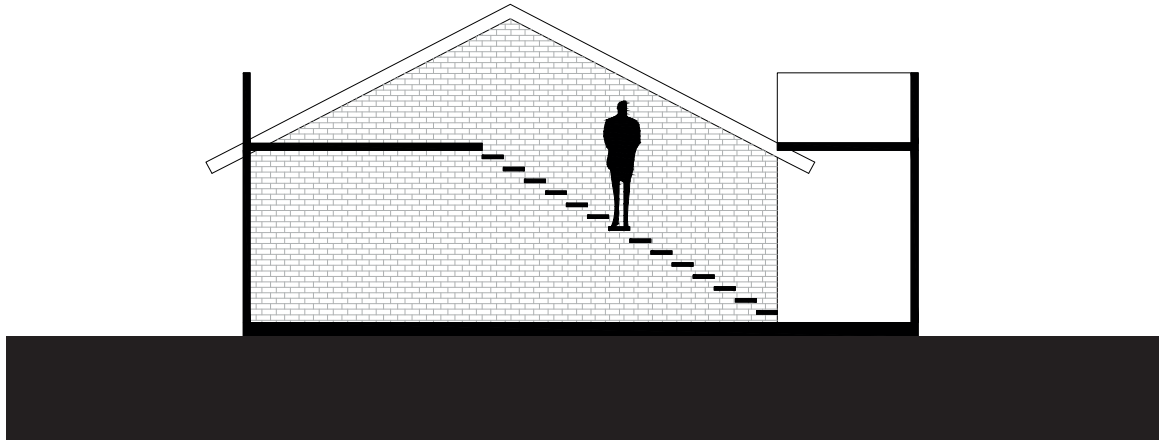
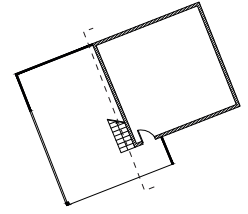
0 1 5m



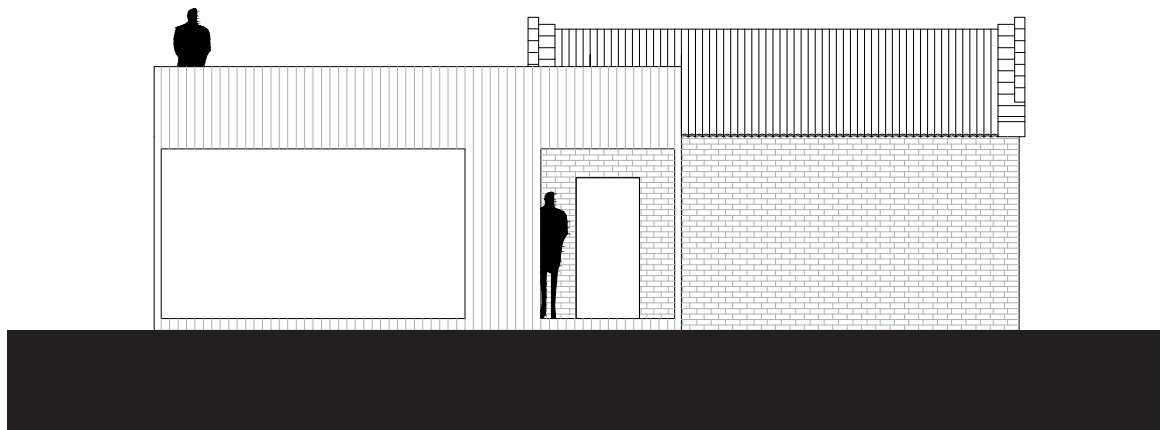
0 1 5m



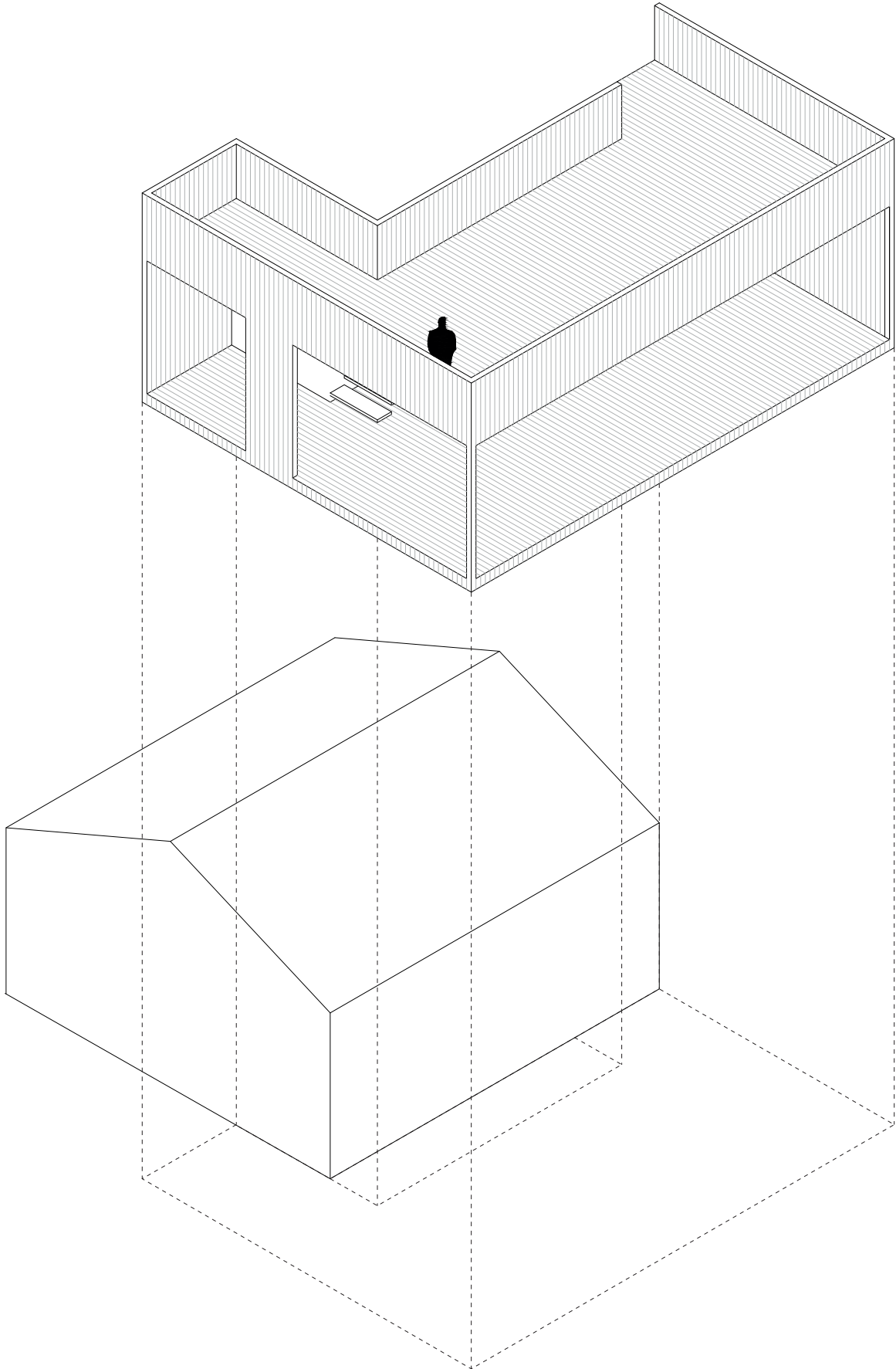
0 1 5m



section



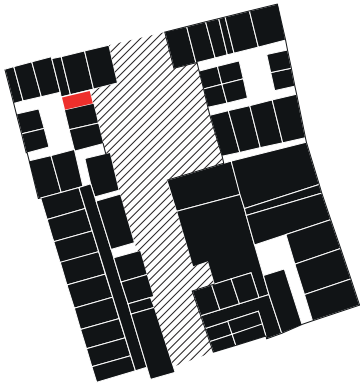
front elevation





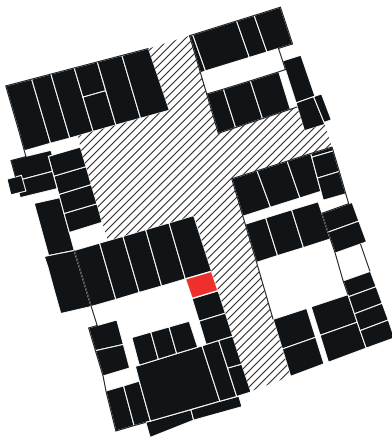


sample #1



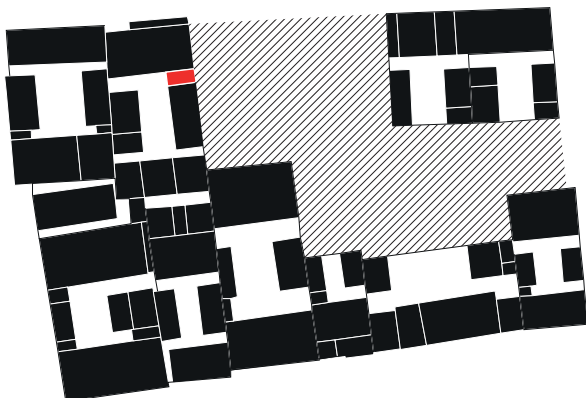
//area_ 10 mq
//width_ 2 m
//lenght_ 4 m
//adjacency to street_ yes
//available surrounding open space_ 200 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #2



//area_ 10 mq
//width_ 2.7 m
//lenght_ 4 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//available surrounding open space_ 150 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 3 m

sample #3

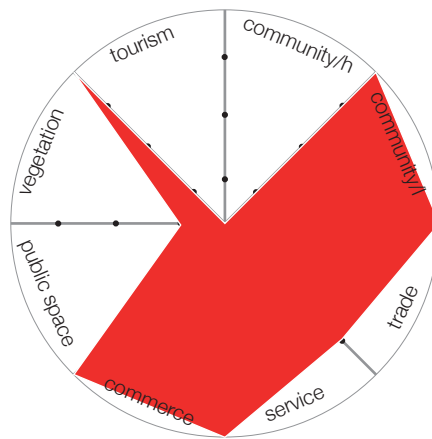


//area_ 8 mq
//width_ 1.8 m
//lenght_ 3.5 m
//adjacency to street_ no
//available surrounding open space_ 500 mq
//average surrounding buildings height_ 4 m

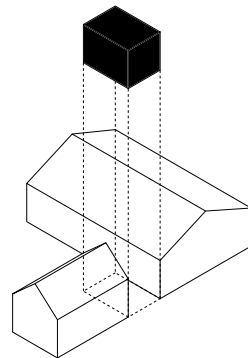
//objectives

- _ small space for minimum commerce
- _ tailored element that fits in between two buildings
- _ cheap and easy to build

//sphere of influence

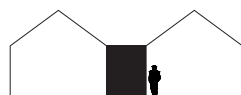


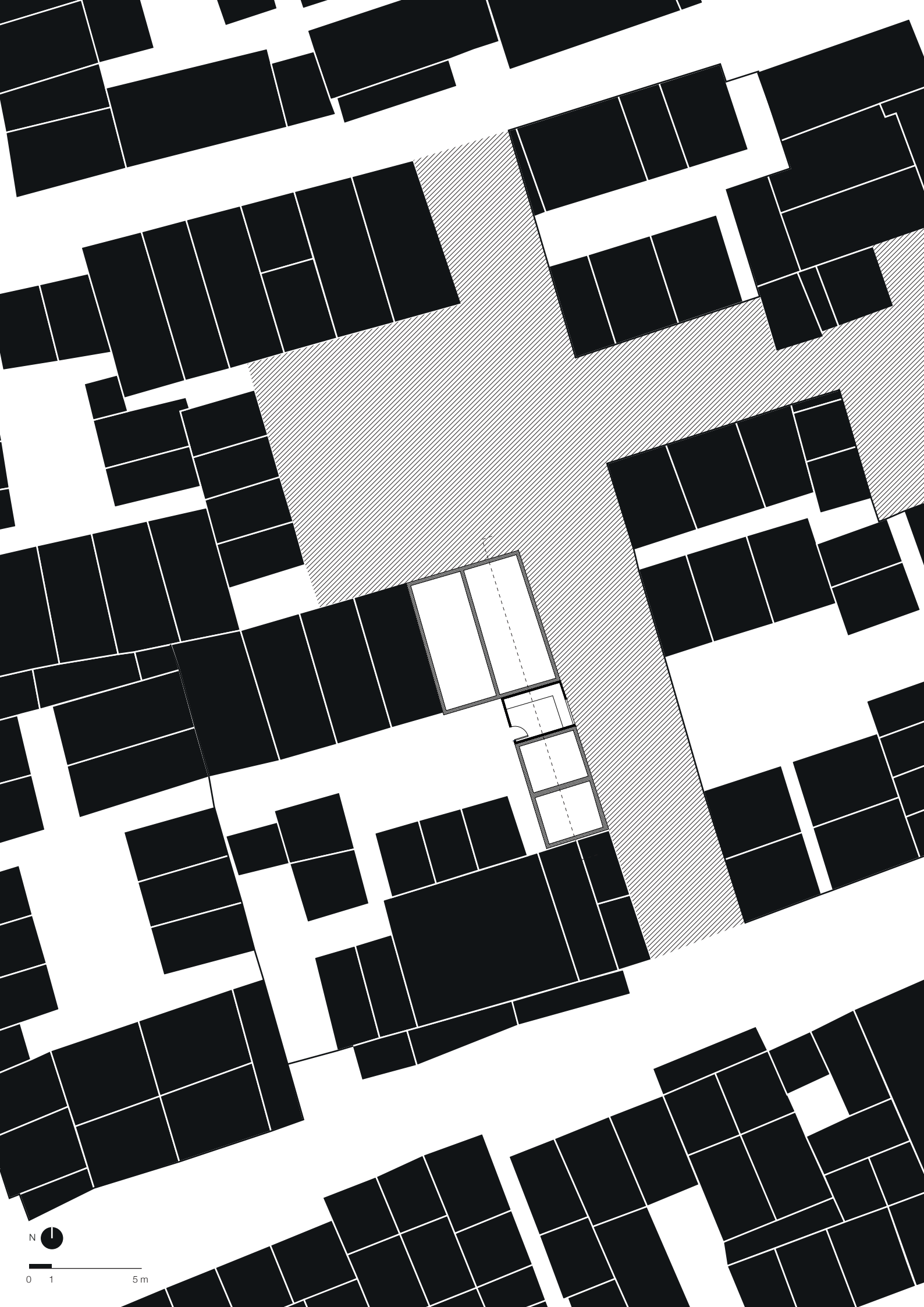
//strategy



a small wooden box fits in between two residential buildings in order to provide space for a small commercial activity such as tea or coffee shop

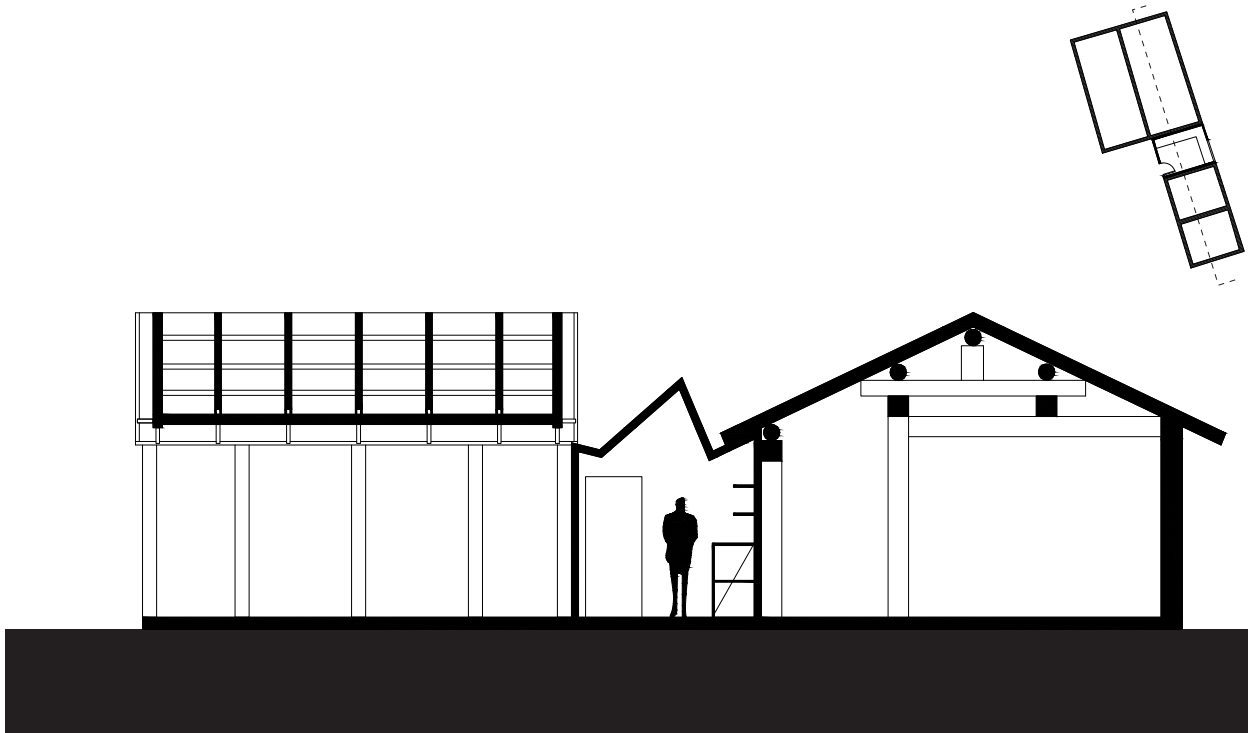
//intervention



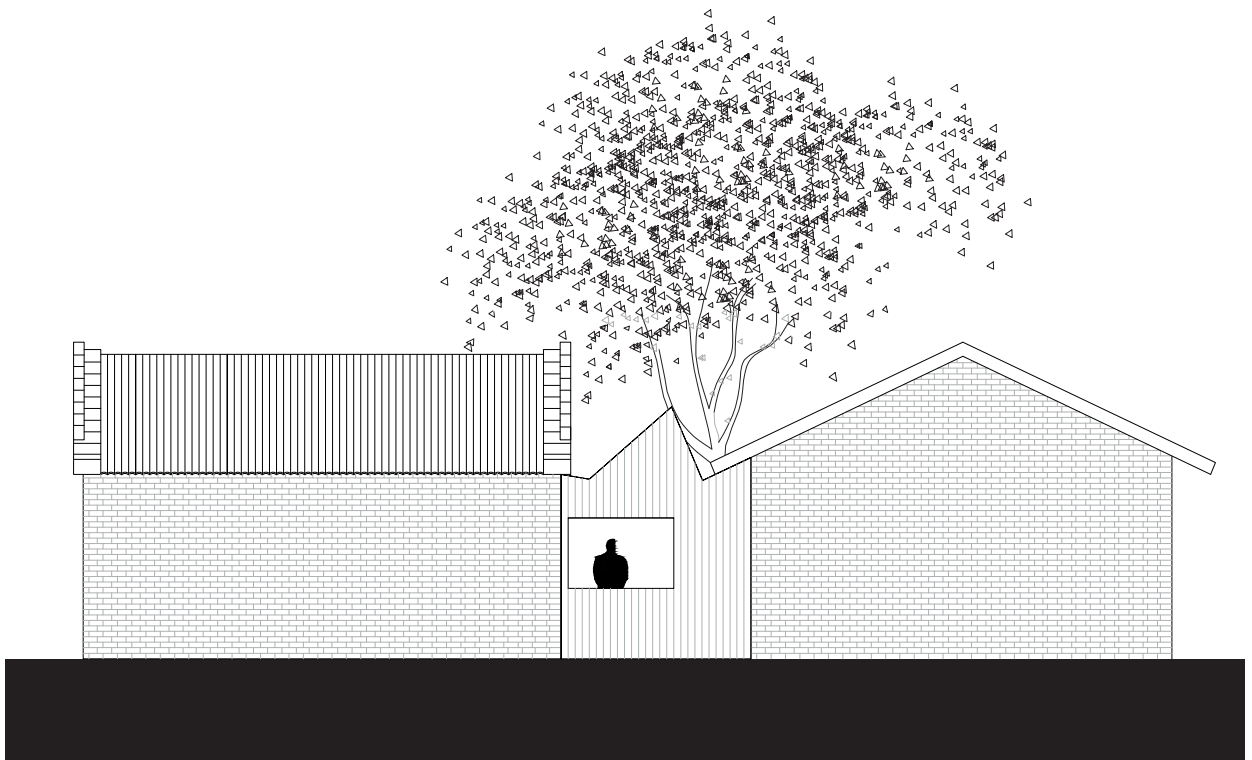


N

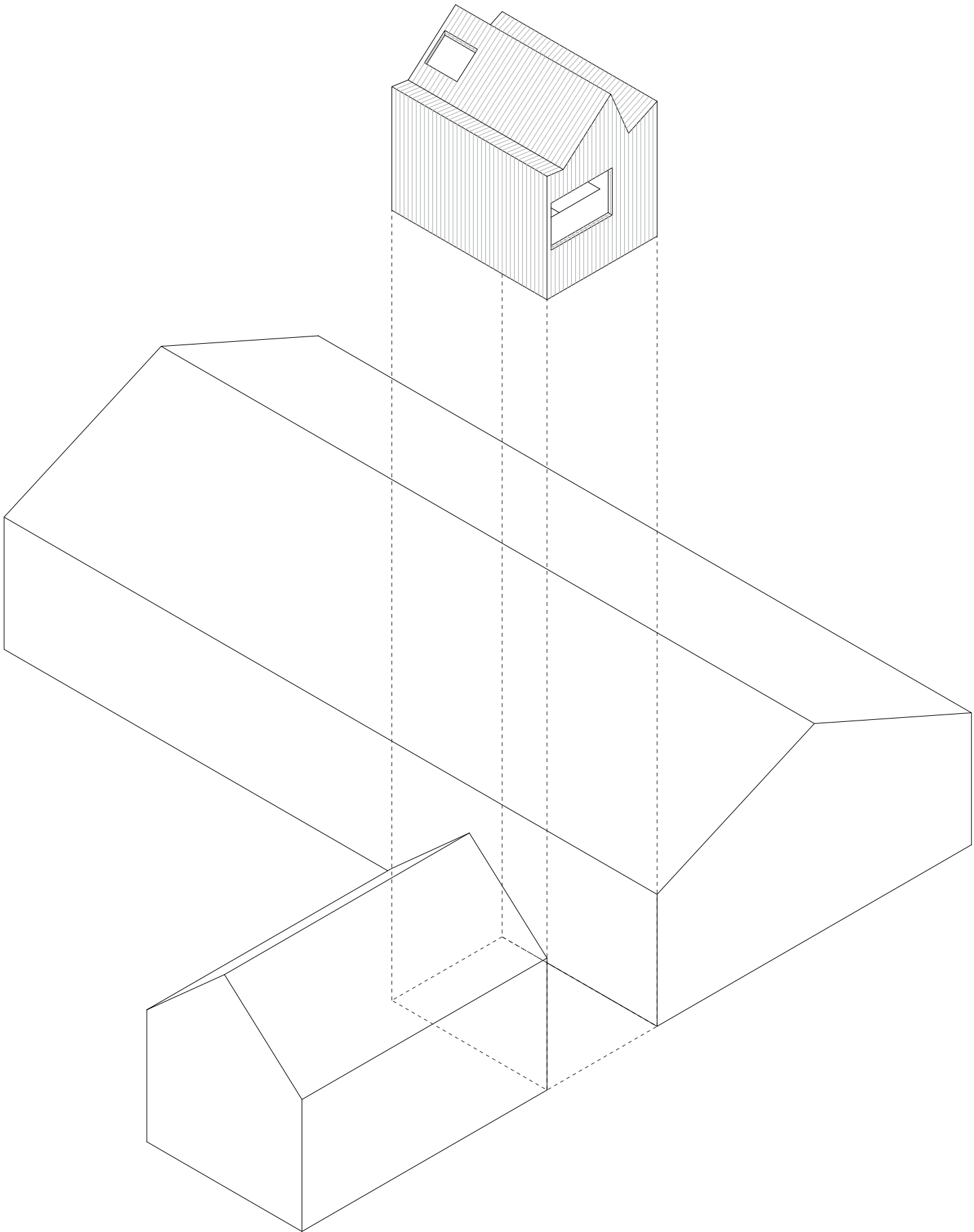
0 1 5m



section



elevation



Dealing with a hutong is not an easy task for an architect or urban planner. Many elements add to the complexity of the situation: the multi-layered urban fabric, the historical value of the dwellings, the overall slumified condition of the area, the sense of instability that most of the local community feels, the crazy residential density, the lack of infrastructure of any sort, the narrow spaces.

In order to find the right approach, the author believes it is important to avoid both the widespread perspectives that have been used by architects and urban planners when dealing with hutongs: on one side the top-down approach that wipes away the existing and just considers the area as a blank page, on the other side the punctual, fancy design that resembles more of an art installation than of an architectural project.

In fact, the goal of this research was to formulate a third approach, an all-inclusive strategy, working on the whole district instead of just one specific spot, but also a strategy based on minimum interventions that can regenerate the area in the same way the needles of acupuncture regenerate a sick body. In this sense, this thesis explores this sort of *archipuncture* perspective as a possible answer for the future management of Beijing's hutongs.

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