



Para-architecture against gentrification

Simon Top_ 4791355
Studio_ Architectural Design Crossovers
Supervisors_ Agnes van der Meij & Alper Alkan



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FOREWORD

Para-architecture against Gentrification

A documentation of the Architectural Design Crossovers graduation studio. Part of the Master's program Architecture, Urbanism, and Building Sciences at the TU Delft. The graduation is to take place on the 25th of June 2026. I'd like to extend special thanks to building technology expert Florian Eckardt, research mentor and second supervisor Alper Alkan, and design mentor and first supervisor Agnes van der Meij.

The Architectural Design Crossovers studio focuses itself around Madrid and has a more philosophical approach rather than staying within the demarcated boundaries of architecture. For the duration of three quarters, the student will take on a fascination or problem within the urban context of Madrid, form a deeper insight and educated opinion about their topic, and explore possible solutions through academic research and architectural design.



FOREWORD

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The documentation process presented within this graduation report is divided into the following structure:

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Starting from a personal fascination with street art and the rebellious spirit of para-architecture, this part introduces Lavapiés as a neighbourhood where gentrification is slowly tipping the balance against the community. From this tension emerges the central objective: to explore how para-architecture can add weight to the community side of that balance.

PART 2 – APPROACH _____ **PAGE 12**

Drawing on Michel Serres' theory of the parasite, a framework is developed that traces how squatting practices move from parasitic to symbiotic, and eventually risk becoming fossilised by the very gentrification they set out to resist. This framework then becomes the analytical lens through which Lavapiés and its okupas are understood.

PART 3 – PRECEDENTS _____ **PAGE 20**

A series of reference projects from self-managed community gardens to parasitic blister structures are examined for what they reveal about temporality, self-management, and unconventional spatial activation. Together they form an incomplete but instructive catalogue that will directly inform the design agenda.

PART 4 – DESIGN AGENDA**PAGE 46**

A week of fieldwork in Madrid reveals the striking contrast between touristified main streets and quieter, more intimate side streets, ultimately pointing towards a specific cluster of vacant plots as the project site. Six design positions crystallise from this research, outlining the spatial, programmatic and social principles for the cultural space.

PART 5 – DESIGN PROGRESS**PAGE 46**

Through a chronological series of sketches, models and diagrams, the design evolves from a bridge weaving through rooftops to three distinct architectural acts, each with a clearer identity and purpose. This iterative process of research by design is what ultimately produces and justifies the final design agenda.

PART 6 – FINAL PRODUCT**PAGE 68**

The cultural space is realised in three acts: a parasitic guerrilla gardening shed, a symbiotic collective space for community associations, and a flexible performance patio that leaves a fossilic imprint on the neighbourhood. Together they form a temporary, self-managed, and community-driven counter to gentrification in Lavapiés.

PART 7 – IN RETROSPECT**PAGE 106**

Looking back, the three acts are evaluated against the design agenda, with the gardening shed and performance patio standing out as the most convincingly unconventional. The part closes by addressing the uncomfortable question of whether any intervention at all risks accelerating gentrification, and why doing nothing is ultimately not the answer either.



PART 1

Introduction

6

INTRODUCTION





1780s

1780s – 1975

Working-Class Era

- Factories
- Social cohesion

1850

1950

1975

1975 – 1995

Decay Era

- Cheap rents
- Artists & Immigrants
- Social problems & Activism

1995

1995 – 2018

"Coolest" Barrio

- Multiculturalism
- Young people

2000

2018

2018 – Now

Gentrification Risk

- Rents rise by 60%
- Residents move out

Now

2025



PART 1

Introduction

*"The rat is the only free animal in the city. It's an animal that people fear and has a strong history of bringing disease. When rats invade a town, it is bad."*¹

— Blek le Rat

I've always had a fascination with street art; the rats drawn by Parisian street artist Blek le Rat serve as an excellent example for why. Street Art is controversial; some see it plainly as vandalising the surfaces of a city, yet others praise it for being inventive and groundbreaking. There is friction between art and the law, and this is what makes street art even more exciting. The rats from Blek le Rat are the manifestation of controversy itself; separately rats and graffiti are seen as unwelcome, yet together, they form the desirable object of art. The fuzzy border of legality is inhabited by many more 'unusual guests'. People occupying vacant buildings, *squatters*, often share the same fear of eviction as rats. And also Pet architecture, small awkward buildings squeezed into left-over spaces, can certainly be described as an unusual guest in the urban habitat.² Together, these acts of unconventionality, rebelliousness and creative street culture within the urban landscape I consider to be *para-architecture*. *Para* meaning (be)side, so *side-architecture*: unexpected and creative use of architecture that isn't part of the original plan. It is about street culture, street art, freerunning and parkour, urbexing, PET architecture, parasitic architecture, megastructures, and so on.

Lavapiés and Gentrification

Pursuing para-architecture within Madrid, one might quickly end up in the historical neighbourhood of Lavapiés, located in the south side of the city centre.³ During the 19th century Lavapiés was the edge of the city, and a place for the working-class. Many factories were located here, rents were cheap, and only forty percent of the inhabitants were born within Madrid.⁴ During the 70s, 80s and 90s of the last century, the area was in decline; artists, immigrants and anarchists settled in the abundance of low-income housing. Yet at the same time there was great social cohesion and the area had the most neighbourhood associations in Madrid.⁵ At the turn of the century Lavapiés slowly evolved into one of the 'coolest' places to live, with young people attracted to the multicultural identity, the presence of major museums like the Reina Sofia, Prado and CaixaForum, and the proximity to the main train station.⁶ But more recently this popularity has shown its shadow side; between 2017 and 2018 rents have risen by 60% percent, making the place too expensive for the locals to live here. Due to this process of *gentrification*, whereby the character of an area is changed by tourists or wealthier people moving in, social cohesion built by the working-class is slowly falling apart.⁷

But it's not too late yet, despite gentrification, community initiatives are still thriving. Still every year on the 12th of October there is the very colourful Indigenous People's parade, where citizens celebrate their Latin American roots by parading through the streets of Lavapiés and Madrid in their traditional clothing.⁸ And Lavapiés often is the scene for political initiatives like protests and demonstrations against discrimination.⁹ In fact, community engagement

¹ A quote from Blek Le Rat (Xavier Prou), recorded by Reiss (2007)

² Atelier Bow Wow (2002)

³ Historic Lavapiés mostly overlaps with the present-day administrative neighbourhood of Embajadores

⁴ Pole (2020)

⁵ Rodríguez (2012)

⁶ *The Best of the Barrios: Lavapiés* (2014)

⁷ Trula (2018), Ratto (2020) and Gervacio (2023)

⁸ *As 12 October Approaches, Hay Algo Que Celebrar: This.* (2025)

⁹ *The Death of Mame Mbaye and the Lavapiés Riots – One Year On* (2021)



[1] Street art by Blek le Rat (1982)



[2] CSO La Rosa occupies Calle del Bastero 1 (2024)

has a strong tradition in Spain. Neighbourhood associations, '*asociaciones de vecinos*', already began in 1968, under dictator Francisco Franco. *"While they gather in the currents of different social movements, their autonomy, their strong local organization, and their capacity to negotiate with civic powers have made them key elements in the urban transformations of every Spanish city, especially Madrid."*¹⁰ This tradition with neighbourhood associations, together with the activist artists and immigrants that have experienced the social problems of the area in decay, and the once plentiful availability of vacant buildings, has led to Lavapiés having the highest density of squatters and occupied buildings

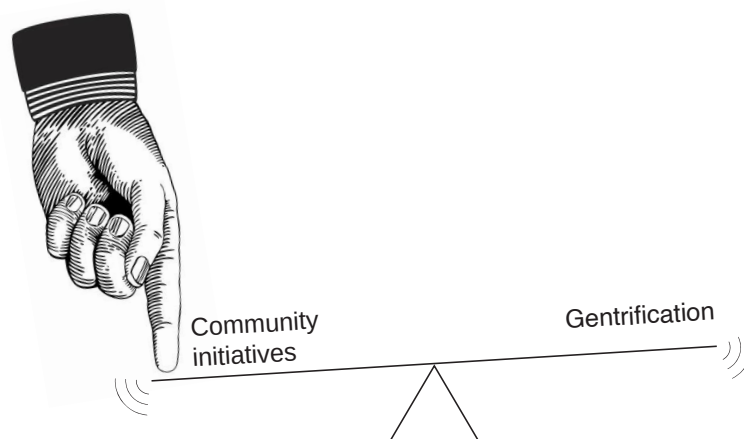
¹⁰ Durán and Moore (2015) p.52

in Spain during the seventies.¹¹ And in the modern day, after many years of transformation and gentrification, this *Movimiento okupa* is still surviving today. For example CSO La Rosa, who in 2024 occupied a pink building that had been abandoned for 15 years. Founded shortly after a musical protest against the eviction of 50 families from a building that is supposed to become tourist accommodation, La Rosa's main focus is to fight gentrification, touristification and speculation itself.^{12 13}

Problem Statement & Objective

La Rosa's programming spans a diverse spectrum: board game nights, yoga classes, reading groups on Marx's *Capital*, language exchange and so on.¹⁴ And it is the squatters' conviction that these community engagements and initiatives help to fight gentrification. Imagine this fight as a balance; on one side are community initiatives, and on the other gentrification. A careful equilibrium that must be kept stable. But the balance is slowly tipping; less and less vacant buildings in Lavapiés are available for occupation, and evicting and prosecuting squatters is becoming easier with newly proposed laws.¹⁵ And furthermore the process of touristification and speculation is not helping. Without intervention, gentrification in Lavapiés might just win.

The objective of this research is to find out how para-architecture can play a role in counterbalancing gentrification in Lavapiés. Of course the notion that gentrification can be entirely fixed by a single architectural intervention is naive, and perhaps gentrification is intrinsic to every popular neighbourhood and therefore unavoidable. Also as an outsider I realise I hardly have the agency to come in and quickly fix a problem for this community. Yet Lavapiés traditionally always has been open to outsiders and different cultures, and has proven to be a breeding ground for activism and new ideas. So therefore this research hopefully proposes one of maybe many good ideas, that simply aims to add some weight to the community side of the balance. Even just creating more awareness can already convince more citizens and politicians to recognise gentrification as a problem and motivate them to take action.



[3] The tipping the balance between community initiatives and getrification

¹¹ Rodríguez (2012)

¹² Demony and Latona (2024)

¹³ *New "okupa" CSO La Rosa Is Born Today in a Fight Against the Gentrification of Madrid* (2024)

¹⁴ *Calendario Del CSO La Rosa* (2026)

¹⁵ *Spain's New Anti-Squatter Law* (2025) and *BOE-A-2025-76* (2025)

With this objective in mind, this study aims to answer the main research question; *in what way could the para-architectural counterbalance gentrification within Lavapiés?* From this research question arises the main design question; *how to create spontaneous, unconventional and flexible cultural space within Lavapiés?* The research seeks to answer these questions using the following structure. First of all Part 2 - Approach goes into detail about para-architecture and architectural theory, based on squatting practices within the area. What would a para-architectural framework look like? And how can it better explain the specific process of gentrification in Lavapiés? After a break from theoretical research, with Part 3 - Precedents, Part 4 - Design Agenda presents the result of applying this framework to the fieldwork in Madrid. Can the para-architecture framework be used to better identify gentrification, and place it within a nuanced context? The fieldwork also serves as an analysis into relevant areas. Furthermore this part presents the best project site; where in Lavapiés would be the best location for an architectural intervention to counterbalance gentrification? And what should the architectural positions be; what is the design agenda? That will be followed up with the design of the cultural space itself, presented in Part 5 - Design Progress and Part 6 - Final Design. Should the architectural intervention be para-architectural? What would it look like, and should it be community initiated? And finally Part 7 - In Retrospect reflects back on the research and design process. Are the research and design questions adequately answered, what could have gone differently?



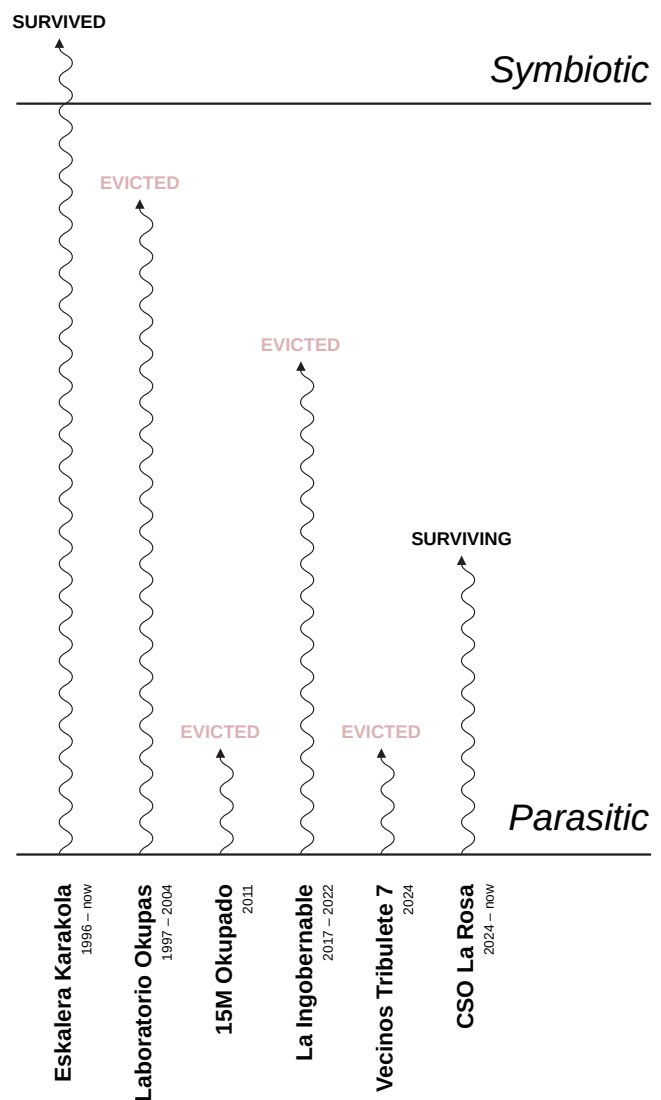
PART 2

Approach

12

APPROACH







Approach

*"The city rat invites the country rat onto the Persian rug. They gnaw and chew leftover bits of ortolan. Scraps, bits and pieces, leftovers: their royal feast is only a meal after a meal among the dirty dishes of a table that has not been cleared. The city rat has produced nothing and his dinner invitation costs him almost nothing."*¹

— Jean de La Fontaine

This is how French philosopher Michel Serres started his book about parasites from 1980. Parasites in the classical sense are pathological, like for example the honey fungus, that infects, feeds on and eventually kills trees.² But Serres transcends this notion, and instead identifies parasites in a philosophical and social sense; like the city rat parasiting on the leftover dinner, and the country rat parasiting on the city rat's invitation. Furthermore in Serres's story it becomes clear that even the tax-collector, who feasted on the dinner in the first place, is also a parasite, as he didn't produce the dinner himself, but obtained it by the power of law. Serres considers mammals and even humans able to be parasitic, so why not squatters as well?

Para-architecture Framework

Spanish law is certainly clear about squatting, it is illegal. And for good reason, it protects property owners against unwelcome guests; *"If all property is common property, then there is no property at all."*³ Without squatting laws, there is just anarchy. So the people behind *Labaratorio*, artists who lived in 4 different buildings around Lavapiés between 1997 and 2004, or *La Ingobernable*, activists who occupied two municipal buildings and a hotel between 2017 and 2022, are from the viewpoint of property owners just parasites.^{4 5} They are unwelcome guests who live within the host building for free. The relation between the guest and the host Serres describes with a single arrow, flowing from guest to host, and not the other way around. In a parasitic relationship the guest benefits, and never the host.

For some *okupas* this might be the case, if only in the beginning. Shortly after *Laboratorio* occupied Calle Embajadores 68, the group of artists broke with the usual methods of squatting. Instead of secretly performing their activities at night, and barricading their building against the police, they opened their door to the public in broad daylight. Many hundred citizens participated in concerts, alternative theater, idea workshops, body expression, cinema, debates and even cooking classes, elevating *Laboratorio* into *"a symbol in the neighborhood."*⁶ Two decades later many citizens participated in activities organised by squatters again, this time in protest from *La Ingobernable* to create awareness for social problems like sexism, racism, homophobia and transphobia.⁷ Or for example *Eskalera Karakola*, who focuses on social problems surrounding feminism since 1996, and got a permanent building in 2005 which is still around today.⁸ To say that these three *okupas* are parasites, and that merely the squatters benefit from this system, and not the host, is perhaps too simplistic. Because who is really the host here? While individual property owners may not benefit from occupation, when property is understood as part of the urban fabric, inhabited by a community, it becomes clear that the neighbourhood

¹ Serres (1982) pp. 3–14

² Armillaria Mellea (2026)

³ A quote from Jacques Derrida, recorded by Smith (2021) pp. 189–201

⁴ Durán and Moore (2015) p.52 and «El Laboratorio», *Último Cuartel De Los «Okupas»*, (2001)

⁵ Escobedo (2024) and *Madrid: La Ingobernable Evicted, but an Ungovernable Madrid Can't Be Evicted*, (2019)

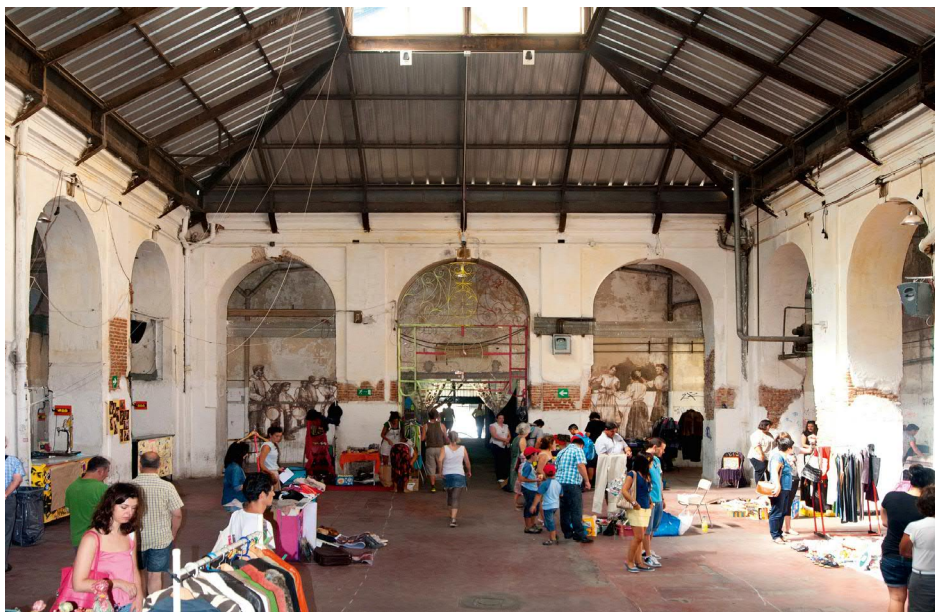
⁶ Durán and Moore (2015) p.52 and «El Laboratorio», *Último Cuartel De Los «Okupas»*, (2001)

⁷ Escobedo (2024) and *Madrid: La Ingobernable Evicted, but an Ungovernable Madrid Can't Be Evicted*, (2019)

⁸ *Las Integrantes Del Centro Eskalera Karakola Serán Desalojadas Mañana* (2005) and *Eskalera Karakola*. (n.d.)

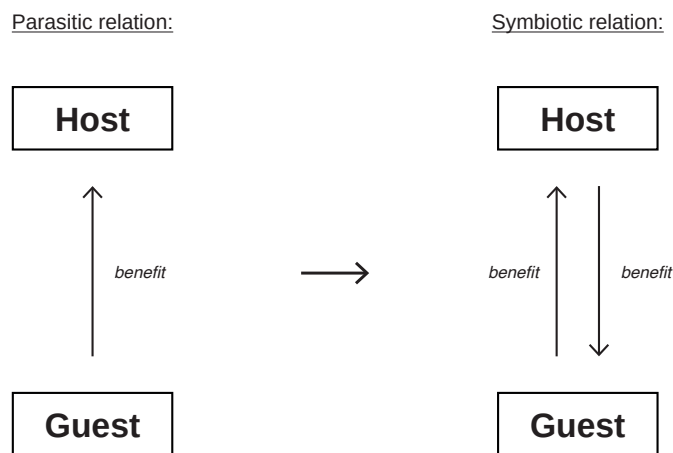


[5] Various images from Laboratorio 3 (2002 – 2003)



[6] A flea market in CSA La Tabacalera (2012)

itself is the host, and that both host and guest benefit from this arrangement. Following Serres' line of thinking within biological metaphors, this system where both entities benefit can be called symbiotic. But why still make the distinction between guest and host in symbiosis? One could argue that they are now both part of the same system, that the city has accepted these okupas, and that therefore they have become part of the city itself, that the guest and the host have become a single entity. While that may be true, there is still value in making the distinction between architecture and para-architecture, where the host is architectural with planning and rules, and the guest para-architectural, accepted, but never part of the original plan.



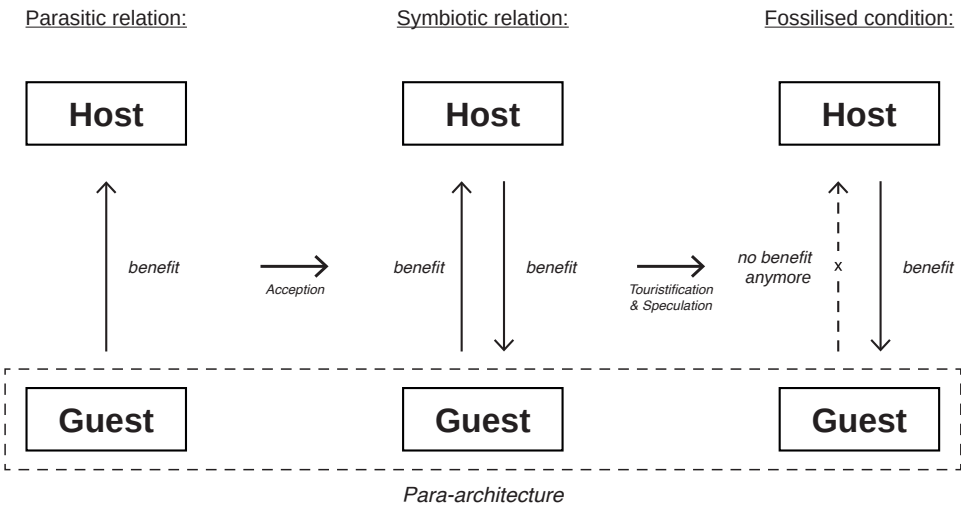
[7] Parasitic and symbiotic relation:

Okupas can be imagined moving from the parasitic towards the symbiotic stage. Surviving the longest, as all living things are programmed to do, is a lot more successful within a symbiotic relation. Therefore the long survival of *CSA La Tabacalera*, a very effective social centre responsible for a plethora of community activities during its twelve year existence, can perhaps be attributed to their symbiotic origin. It was the Ministry itself that in 2011 reached out to a group of Lavapiés citizens to allow them to occupy a vacant building. It was a former tobacco factory that had been abandoned since 2000, but due to its monumental status became property of the Ministry of Culture. There were plans to transform it into a museum, but the 2007 financial crisis had prevented it. And ever since the multiple evictions of Laboratorio, squatters and citizens were openly looking for a new place, to which the Ministry responded. *CSA La Tabacalera* was established as an official association, and signed a temporary user agreement that had to be renewed every two years.⁹ Besides this the CSA was allowed to do anything, and many community initiatives took place, like festivals, theatrical premieres, exhibitions, cinema, poetry, concerts, music and dance workshops, debates, Spanish literacy classes, and a lot more.¹⁰ In 2023 this came to an end as the building was closed for renovations temporarily, but later it was decided that the old factory would still be turned into a museum anyway. The winning design of the 2025 architectural competition shows that there is no place for the CSA and its community initiatives anymore,

⁹ Durán and Moore (2015)

¹⁰ *Dossier CSA La Tabacalera* (2010-2011) pp. 69–90, part of *Dossier CSA La Tabacalera* (2010-2023)

yet some of the successes are allowed to stay, like all of the artwork that has been produced over the years within the basement, or the theatre space *Molino Rojo* in an auxiliary building.¹¹ CSA La Tabacalera has moved from a symbiotic relation to parasitic again, only the roles have reversed. From their perspective their art and successes are being exhibited by the museum, while they themselves have been evicted from the building, not able to serve the community as they did before. This last part of the process can be called fossilization, where the association is dismantled, while their successes are frozen in time and exhibited in a museum.



[8] The para-architectural framework

The fossilisation process in this case can be attributed to *speculation* and *touristification*, both well established categories within the realm of gentrification.¹² Speculation is the process where external investors invest in property with the primary goal to make money, often leading to the actual needs of a neighbourhood as a second priority, and results in a shift in demographics as the increased rents slowly push them out. Touristification is similar, but instead of the rich coming in, it's the temporary visitor, resulting in public services that now primarily cater to tourists, and in turn causes the community life of actual residents to crumble. In the case of La Tabacalera it is speculation that has led to the realisation that the building can make more profit as a museum, and touristification to the prioritisation of the one time visitor over the local community.

In summary the parasitic relation describes the para-architectural guest exclusively benefiting at the expense of the urban host. In some cases, due to civic engagement, like activism or awareness for social problems, they become accepted by the host city. They enter the symbiotic relation where both guest and host benefit; the para-architectural is being acknowledged as an association, permitted and funded to stay. Yet after a while, fueled by the process of

¹¹ Renovation of the Tabacalera Building in Madrid by Arturo Blanco (2025) and CSA La Tabacalera (2025)
¹² Smith (1996) and Mazorra, Nofre & García-Ruiz (2025)

gentrification, there is the risk for associations to not be able to sustain their core values anymore, and they become fossilised. The para-architectural guest does not benefit anymore, but is artificially kept in place for the sole benefit of the urban host.

Method

With the para-architectural framework established, a one week fieldwork trip to Madrid is planned. During this week I intend to gain an insight into gentrification, speculation and touristification, specifically in Lavapiés. I will also identify if the level of gentrification is equal everywhere, or differs between various parts of the neighbourhood, combined with mapping abandoned buildings and vacant plots. Furthermore I want to gain insight into the character of Lavapiés and the Spanish way of living, by visiting the area often and thoroughly, staying overnight, and making notes and observations. The fieldwork will be fundamental to further establish the basic principles that will inform the final design of the cultural space. Therefore a site for the architectural intervention must be decided. Based on the application of the framework, a few contenders for a site will be explored during the fieldwork. There should be at least one suitable site within an area that is most gentrified, as the positive effect can be the biggest here, an area that is least gentrified, as the chances of success are the biggest here, and in an area with vacancy, for practical considerations. Of course the site might be chosen holistically and can fit multiple criteria. Or it will fit none at all, and will be chosen for another, yet to be defined, good reason. Lastly the program will be decided. It can take inspiration from various references, described in the next part, but ultimately the cultural space does not have a fixed program, and will still be flexible until the completion of the final design. So additionally to the references and fieldwork, the design itself will also continuously inform the program, by process of research by design.



Precedents

Researching para-architecture, self management and temporality, various reference projects turn up. This chapter serves as an overview for the most relevant precedents.

Self-Management

- Passage 56
- 20th arrondissement, Paris
- aaa (Studio for Self-managed Architecture)
- 2001 – 2006

Passage 56 was an urban infill project in Paris. On a vacant lot aaa designed a community garden with a small structure and mobile furniture for workshop stations, storage, cooking and media that could be flexibly moved around and out of the garden. *"aaa's projects are experiments in the temporary reuse of leftover urban space through the setting up of an enabling infrastructure that is slowly taken over by local residents and transformed into self-managed spaces."* Over time it became a venue for cultural, social and economic activities, like a monthly market, a small food business and youth training programmes in eco construction. It is aaa's believe that they act as curators and enablers while leaving enough room for others to take over complete responsibility during its five year existence, to the point that residents campaigned for another site when the garden was finally evicted from its original location. By means of a continuous participation process, the project was drawn up and constructed with minimal costs, and reinforces the idea that public space is continuously developed as a social, cultural and political production.¹

¹ Awan, Schneider & Till (2013) pp. 105–106



[9] aaa's Ecobox garden with mobile units (2005)



21



[10] The Passage 56 community Garden on a previously abandoned plot in Paris (2005)

An Association Platform

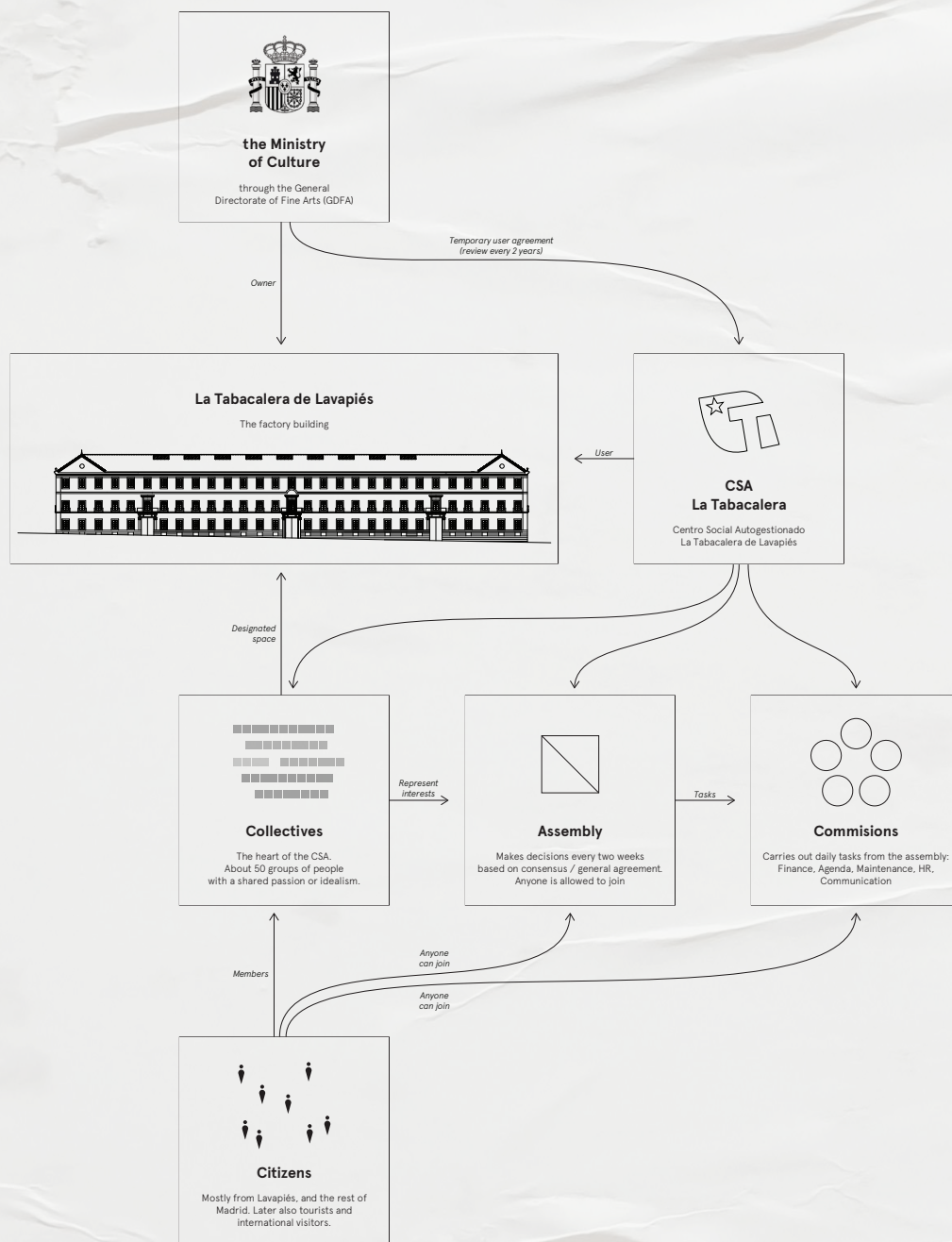
- CSA La Tabacalera
- Lavapiés, Madrid
- 2011 – 2023

CSA La Tabacalera was a very effective self-managed social centre, housed in a former tobacco factory, owned by the Spanish Ministry of Culture. Due to its official relation with the Ministry a strong organisational structure was needed, resulting in the CSA itself not organising any of the community initiatives themselves. Instead any group of citizens with a common occupation or idealism, e.g. music, art or a specific culture, was free to join the CSA as a '*colectivo*'.² It were the collectives who were responsible for all the activities and community engagement, which there have been 49 of during its 12 year existence. There was for example *Cigarra Eléctrica*, a place for any musician to jam, fix broken guitars, learn from each other and perform at venues. Or Molino Rojo, a performing arts group interested in teaching and exhibiting theatre, dance and circus. And *Tabahack*, a hacker activist group that also fixed their own computers. All these collectives weren't active for the complete 12 year period; some disbanded early while others were only assembled in the final period; it was a fluid process where only the CSA remained static. All of these collectives were assigned their own space within La Tabacalera, without fear of eviction. Tabahack for example only needed an office space of fifteen square meters. The key takeaway here is that CSA La Tabacalera therefore could be considered a platform for these collectives, an association giving rise to new associations.

² Durán and Moore (2015) and *Dossier CSA La Tabacalera* (2017-2019) pp. 27–29, part of *Dossier CSA La Tabacalera* (2010-2023)



[11] The entrance into CSA La Tabacalera (2023)



Ingeniería Sin Fronteras

Engineering putting technology in service of under-served and least-considered

Engineers for Humana Vida was born alongside the new social ideal called *Humana Vida* in 2002, during its creation. The organization and its members, the collective human part of a foundation of social development for people, now functioning locally, that are economically, geographically and least-considered. These defining characteristics are using technology for social development.

Due to their engineering background and the current social ideal called *Humana Vida*, the organization has been able to develop projects in areas such as: health, education, housing, agriculture, and social development. The organization has been able to make a social impact on the community, and has been able to develop projects in areas such as: health, education, housing, agriculture, and social development. The organization has been able to make a social impact on the community, and has been able to develop projects in areas such as: health, education, housing, agriculture, and social development.

Location: San Francisco
Target audience: Engineers, architects, designers and social capital

[illegible]

selecting, characterizing, and material—robotics programming and transformation to separate materials provide computer literacy for first steps dependence: identity through email, interaction with other people through the

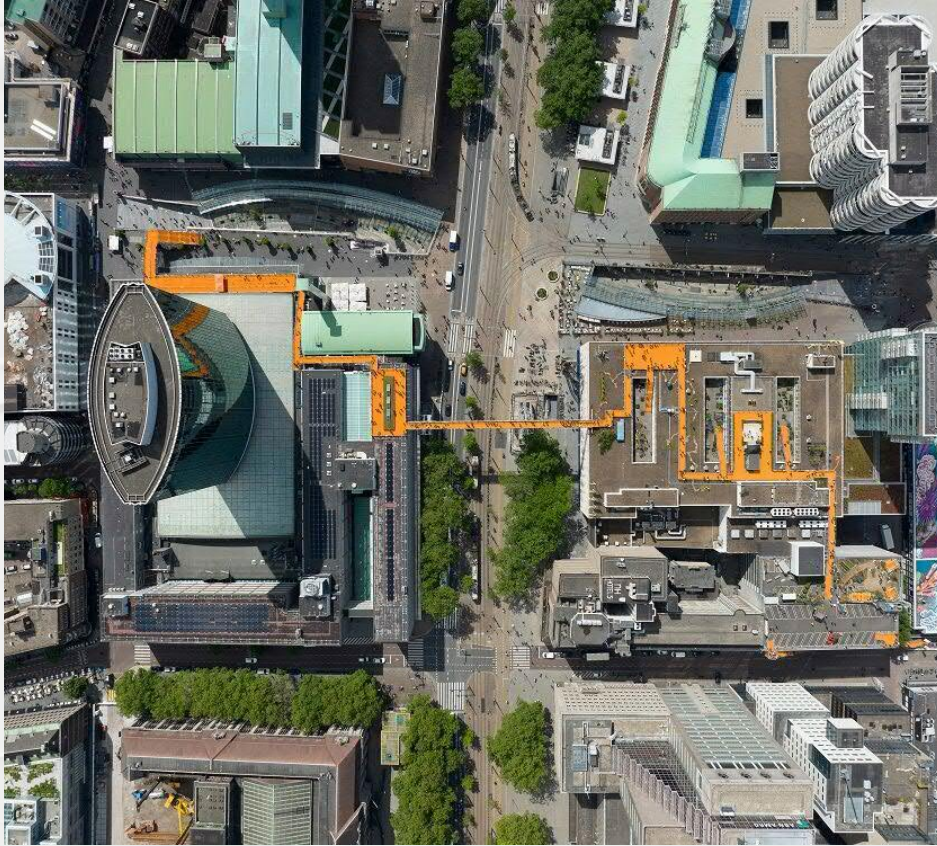
Lib Lab space where all public can enter their screen documentaries relevant to ecology and hold talks on "healthy" use of computers to teach how to build a recreational so they can develop skills in their

and Fridays 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM)
taining computer literacy, repair skills, or

[illegible][illegible]

Nave Trepacio Since 1999, Nave Trepacio is a space for artistic creation and dissemination of contemporary art. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. The space is located in the basement of the Tabacalera and is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Dibujos Madrid Dibujos Madrid is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Dub Central Dub Central is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Dockarene Dockarene is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Eje Metabólico Eje Metabólico is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public
Metropolis Metropolis is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Magnum Gym Magnum Gym is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	PERFORMING ARTS & MOVEMENT (2011-2023) Molino Rojo Named after a legendary red lantern where tobacco workers twisted their smoke. Molino Rojo was a Spanish imitation of the famous Moulin Rouge, located at Tribunal 16—a nightclub typical of Lavapiés in the 1950s that inspired this collective in choosing its name. The space honours the neighbourhood's nocturnal and secret life, taking up the red lantern as a torch promising new scenarios. It's the group of people at La Tabacalera interested in performing arts—the space where theater, dance, and circus are made or exhibited. Location: Tribunal 16 Target audience: Artists and the public	Malla Malla is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	
Taller Contacto Taller Contacto is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Madriguera Madriguera is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	SAMA SAMA is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Templo Afro A sociopolitical space demanding visibility and equality for the Afro community. Templo Afro is a cultural and educational space especially dedicated to the Afro Community, though open to all audiences. The collective functions as a sociopolitical space with clear objectives across multiple dimensions: cultural workshops, political training and history, social projects and assemblies addressing problems with documentation and drug addiction, training in languages and associationism, and spiritual practices rooted exclusively in African and Afro traditions. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	
Tabacalera Tabacalera is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Reciclos Reciclos is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Roots & Culture Roots & Culture is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Vulture Vulture is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	
Foto Free Foto Free is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Huerto Huerto is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Escaparat de Poesia Escaparat de Poesia is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Red Focus Red Focus is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	
Psicología Solidaria Free therapy where payment means giving hours back to the center. The Solidarity Psychology Attention project was born as a consequence of the serious social situation gripping Madrid. Its objective was to find an alternative exchange different from what money proposes as the only way to meet people's needs. Different professionals from the psychological, social, and educational fields, along with other collaborators both formal and informal, launched a psychological and social care service aimed at people without resources and in crisis situations who didn't have access to private or public intervention. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: People in crisis (those without resources, health cards, or access to public/private facilities)	Taller Radio Taller Radio is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Cine Forum Cine Forum is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Red Focus Red Focus is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	
CulturaSkate CulturaSkate is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Red Focus Red Focus is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Red Focus Red Focus is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	Red Focus Red Focus is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. It is a space for artists to show their work and for the public to see it. Location: Basement of the Tabacalera Target audience: Artists and the public	

[13] The 49 collectives active during the years of CSA La Tabacalera summarised with AI, given *Dossier CSA La Tabacalera* (2010-2023) as input



[14] Rotterdam Rooftop Days at the Coolsingel (2022) & [15] Teatro Oficina (2019)

The Language of Temporality

- Rotterdam Rooftop Days
- Various locations throughout Rotterdam
- Returns yearly since 2015

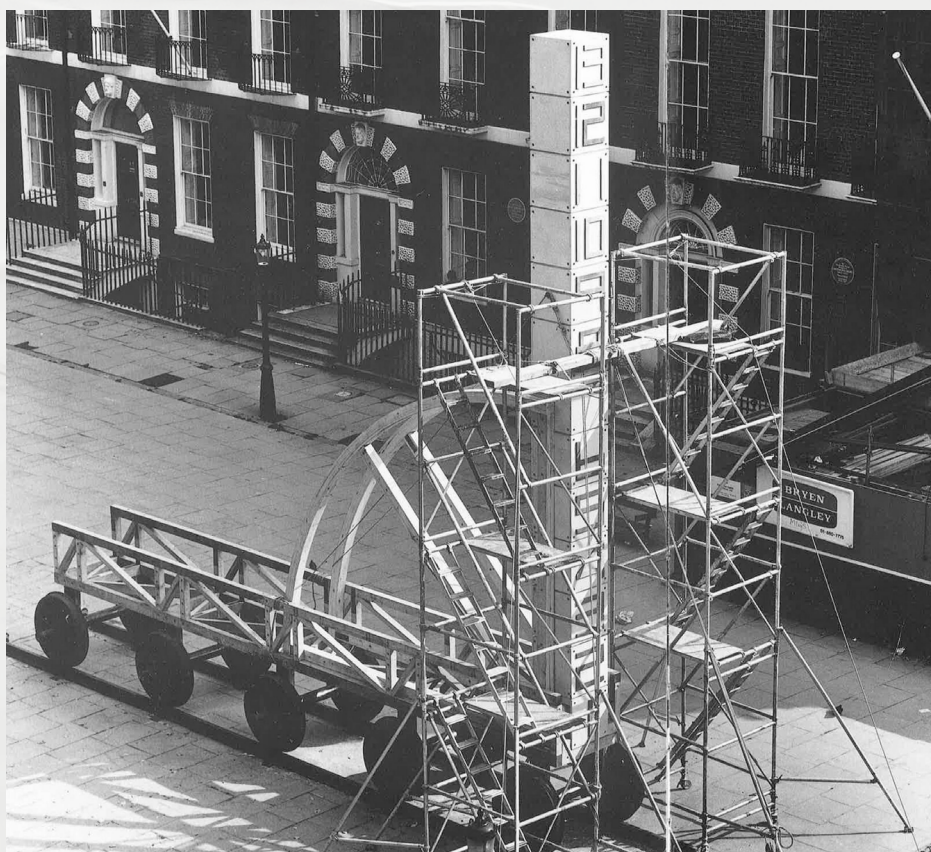
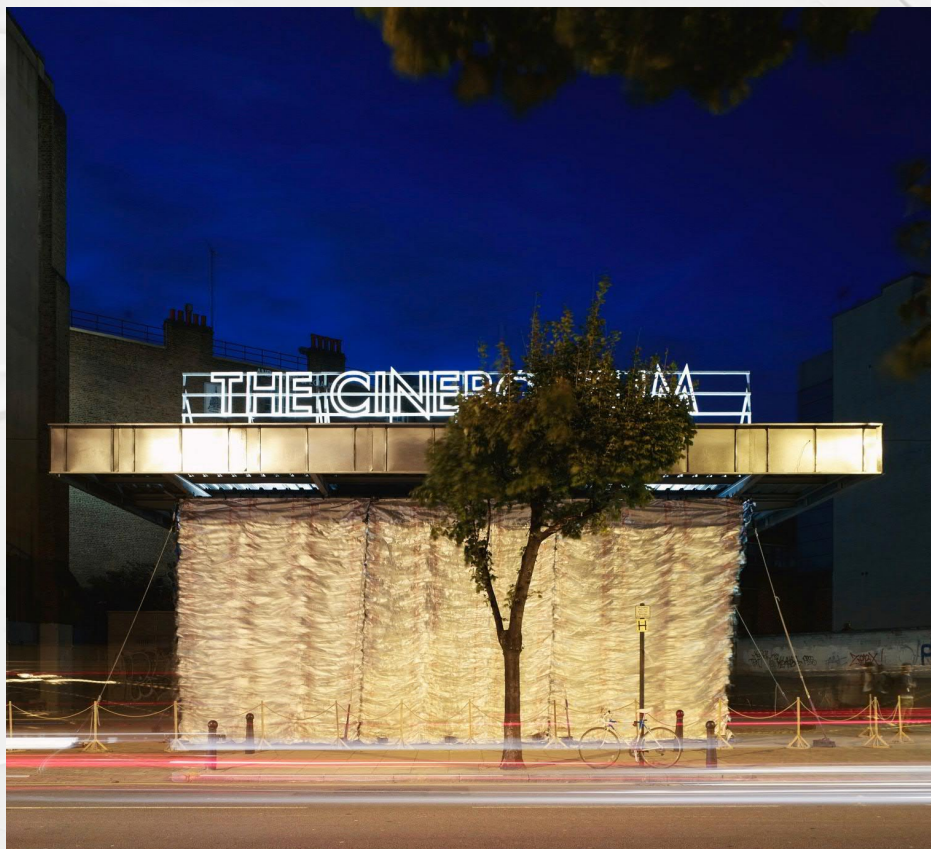
Every year multiple rooftops within Rotterdam are made publicly accessible, often with temporary interventions like staircases, catwalks and bridges made from scaffolding elements, exploring current urban architectural themes like heat stress, sustainability and biodiversity, often combined with local art or awareness for social problems. The shift in perspective the visitor experiences when entering the roofscape challenges them to reinterpret the urban context as a whole.³

3 Rotterdamse Dakendagen (2026)

- Teatro Oficina
- São Paulo, Brasil
- Lina Bo Bardi
- 1994 (theatre was originally founded in 1958)

Teatro oficina is a theatre that went through multiple altercations, including a fire, until Lina Bo Bardi proposed the current design in 1994. Instead of two blocks of audience seating facing each other, with the stage in between, Bo Bardi proposes a lateral layout, where 4 rows of seating are located within stacked scaffold structures. In doing so the boundary between frontstage and audience becomes blurred, a metaphor for the overlap between theatre and real life. The presence of the original brick building behind the contrasting steel structure facing the big windows showing real life São Paulo blurs these lines even more so.⁴

4 Pereira (2023)



[16] The Cineroleum (2010) & [17] The Clock Structure (1986)

- The Cineroleum
- Clerkenwell Road, London
- Assemble Studio
- 2010

The Cineroleum was a self-initiated project that transformed a decommissioned petrol station into a temporary cinema. It was built on-site by over a hundred volunteers, learning and experiencing together, using cheap industrial, reclaimed or donated materials. Separated by a curtain it allowed for collective escapism, which would rise at the end of the show, pushing the audience from the imaginative world of film to the everyday theatre of the street.⁵

⁵ *The Cineroleum* (2024)

- The Clock Structure
- Bedford Square, London
- John Hejduk
- 1986

John Hejduk's Clock Structure, often referred to as The Collapse of Time, was a temporary architectural installation, of which its symbology, interpretation and deeper meaning go beyond this description. Crudely put, it is a vertical stacking of wooden numbered boxes, representing time, that after a first week was lowered into a 45° angle, and the next week completely laid flat into, representing the collapse. To witness the complete collapse, the viewer had to return over multiple occasions.⁶

⁶ *The Clock-Structure* (2023)



[18] Oase No. 7 (1972) & [19] Kunsthhaus Graz

The Parasites

- Oase No. 7
- Fridericianum, Kassel
- Haus-Rucker-Co
- 1972

Oase No. 7 may be the most straightforward example of para-architecture. A transparent PVC sphere, eight meters in diameter, is attached to the neoclassical facade of the Fridericianum Museum in Kassel like a blister. From the inside, the viewer can observe the city from two lounge chairs accompanied by a palm tree, while from the outside, it makes the observer question their most basic assumptions about architecture itself. ⁷

⁷ Awan, Schneider & Till (2013) pp. 155–156

- Kunsthaus Graz
- Peter Cook & Colin Fournier
- 2003

This museum has no desire to blend in with the surrounding townscape and goes out of its way to achieve the opposite. Its biomorphic body with nozzle-like windows can be entered by escalator through the belly, giving many people uncanny associations with its infamous nickname: The Alien. ⁸

⁸ Kunsthaus Graz (2016)



[20] ARGOS & [21] Amos Rex

- ARGOS
- Graz
- Zaha Hadid Architects
- 2018

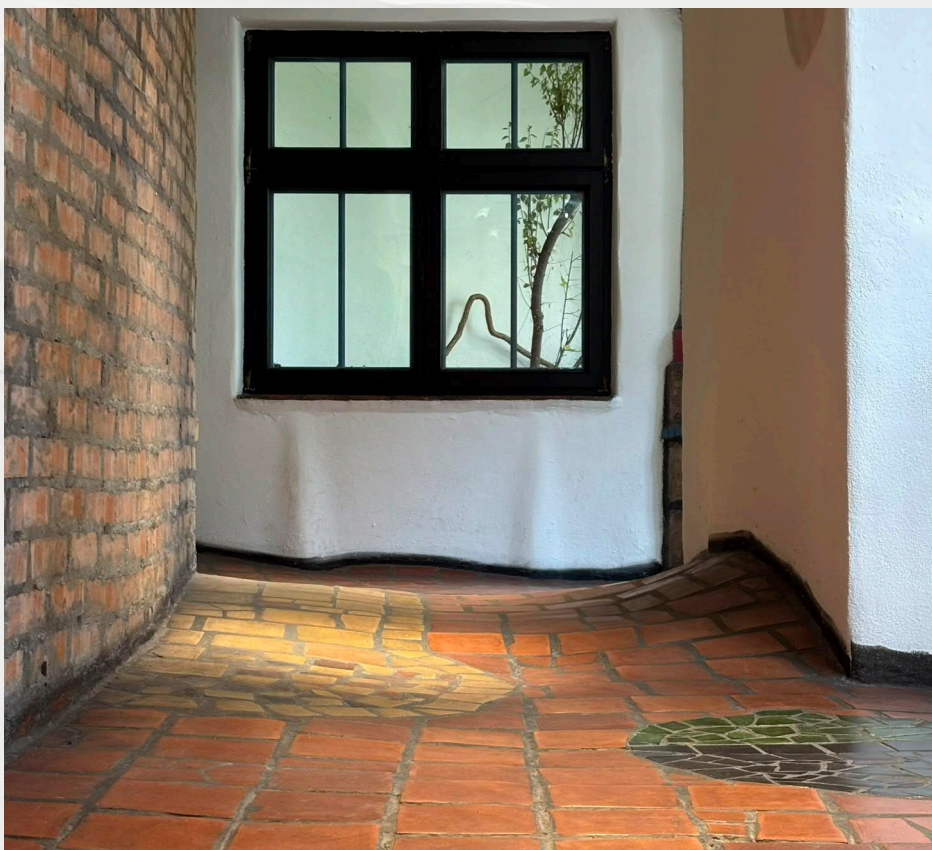
Unarguably inspired by the Kunsthaus, this hotel's facade has a creature-like resemblance too, albeit a bit more abstract. This time around, the protruding oval windows are bigger and have smaller pupil-like tilt windows within them. The boundary between aperture and ornament collapses while the building watches.⁹

⁹ *Argos Residences* (n.d.)

- Amos Rex
- Helsinki
- JKMM Architects
- 2018

Amos Rex is a former bus station turned into a museum. The protruding nozzle-like windows now extend from the ground level plaza upward to the sky, providing daylight to the exhibition space below ground, while the domes give skaters, children, and sunbathers a surface to interact with.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Amos Rex* (2019)



[22] Studio under a Bridge (2017) & [23] KunstHausWien (2026)

The Radical Individual

- Studio under a bridge
- Valencia
- Fernando Abellanas
- 2017

A self-taught furniture designer and former plumber installs a small timber and steel studio underneath a concrete road bridge, using the bridge's own structural beams as rails on which the unit slides via hand crank. The illegal intervention, with its desk, shelving, and sleeping space, proves a fascinating point that the city's unloved spaces have a spatial quality worth inhabiting, only if you are willing to look. ¹¹

¹¹ Bausells (2017)

- KunstHausWien
- Friedensreich Hundertwasser
- 1991

A conversion of a 19th-century furniture factory into a permanent museum for Hundertwasser's own work, the floors bulge unevenly, columns are clad in mismatched tiles, and the windows never repeat. It is a perfect manifestation of Friedensreich Hundertwasser's fight against "the straight line." ¹²

¹² KunstHausWien (n.d.)



[24] Teatro La Lira & [25] Greenacre Park

The Single Move

- Teatro La Lira
- Ripoll, Spain
- RCR Arquitectes
- 2012

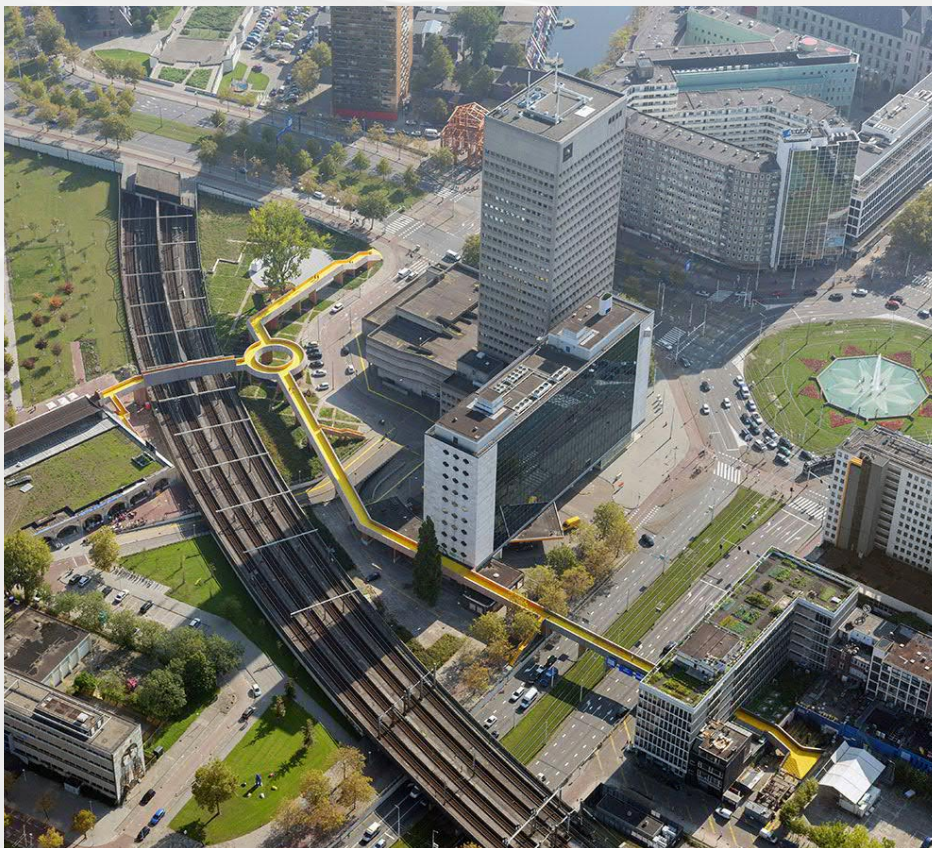
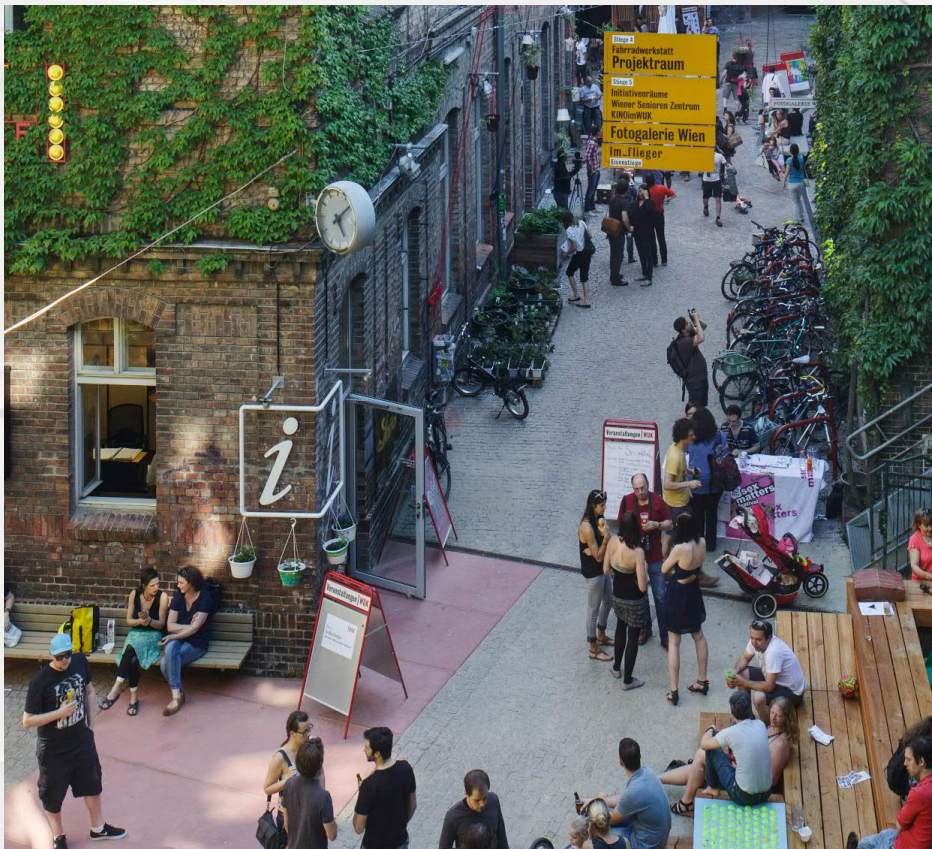
In the gap between party walls in the urban fabric of Ripoll, RCR did something close to nothing. Rather than filling the void, they stripped the existing structure back to its perimeter, inserted a transparent basement below, and suspended a lightweight roof structure above. The theatre's main performance space is essentially the void itself, visualizing the architect's restraint as a programmatic act.¹³

13 *La Lira Theatre* (2017)

- Greenacre Park
- East 51st Street, New York City
- Hideo Sasaki
- 1971

A pocket park located in a gap between Manhattan's high rises achieves its success by contrast to its surroundings. The noise of the city is answered by the noise of a waterfall, and the canopy of trees provides protection from the harsh urban heat. This park is an escape from the city, sheltered by sound and shade.¹⁴

14 *Greenacre Park* (n.d.)



[26] WUK & [27] Luchtsingel (2015)

- WUK
- Vienna
- 1981

A former 19th-century locomotive factory turned into a self-managed cultural centre, WUK houses over sixty individual groups ranging from theatre companies and music studios to a kindergarten and a bicycle repair shop. Especially interesting is the public-private ambiguity: wandering through seemingly unauthorised office hallways, you suddenly stumble upon an audiovisual art experience. By keeping this public-private threshold unclear, it keeps the uninvited out while retaining an open character. ¹⁵

¹⁵ WUK (n.d.)

- Luchtsingel
- Rotterdam
- ZUS
- 2015

Following the financial crisis of 2007, the Weena office district in Rotterdam faced mass vacancy, observed by architecture office ZUS. They proposed a 400-metre long temporary yellow bridge financed with public money and crowdfunding, stitching three disconnected neighbourhoods back together. Buildings along the route, like Annabel, the Biergarten, and the Schieblock, became well known hotspots activated by a singular intervention. ¹⁶

¹⁶ Van Boxel and Koreman (2019, pp. 22–49)



PART 4

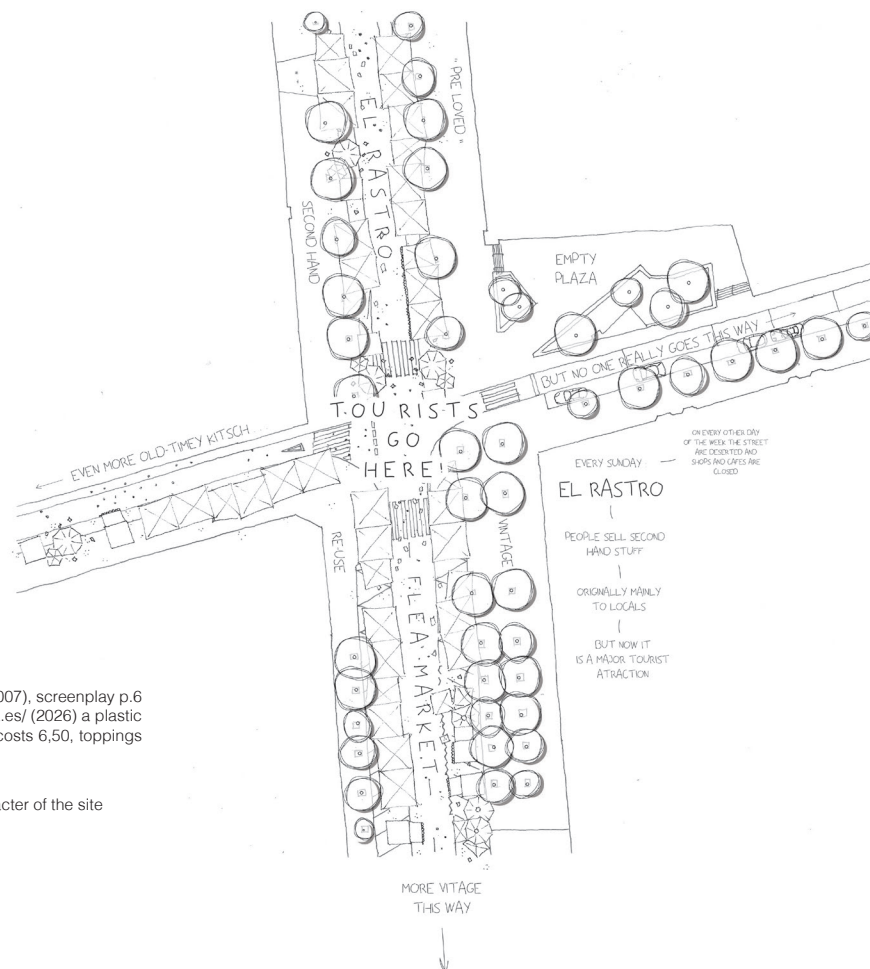
Design Agenda

*"I know I'm supposed to hate humans. But there's something about them... they don't just survive, they discover, they create."*¹

— Remy, in *Ratatouille*

Just like how Remy was an outsider to the human world, so am I an outsider to Lavapiés during the week of fieldwork in Madrid. And yet the character of the neighbourhood will heavily inform the design of the cultural space, so therefore I must observe; perhaps even take on the rat's perspective as I move through the city. During the fieldwork I lived Lavapiés, visited bars, restaurants, museums and spent the nights there. During the day I walked every single road, observing, taking notes and pictures of matters of interest and banality. What I saw was the striking diversity of people that roamed the street, the type of buildings they lived in, the lively places and the places that were abandoned, and I saw how the city changed its nature during the course of the day.

The 24/7 exposure to Lavapiés gave a comprehensive mental model of how the neighbourhood worked, and made a few patterns appear. The North-South streets were the main arteries, that all ran uphill Northwards so the city centre, and were the most touristified, with expensive cafés and instagrammable strawberry bars.² The East-West streets were secondary streets, where regular Spanish life was still taking place. Their quietness was in stark contrast to the perpendicular main streets. Also the diverse demography within the area became apparent, like well represented Senegalese and African communities, but also Indians, Bangladeshis, Islamic communities and Asians alongside the Madrileños, and furthermore also school children, students, the elderly, queer communities, artists and musicians.



¹ Remy, in *Ratatouille*, dir. Brad Bird (Pixar, 2007), screenplay p.6

² According to their website <https://lafreseria.es/> (2026) a plastic cup filled with 12 very ordinary strawberries costs 6,50, toppings costing extra ...

[28] Cutout of the soft map showing the character of the site



A VINTAGE STORE IS SELLING 300 EUROS + SECOND HAND VERSACE DESIGNER PANTS

THE SHOP OWNERS SEEMS ANNOYED THAT WE WALK IN WITH OUR WET SHIRT SLEEVES

€2.40 EXPENSIVE COFFEE

LAVAPIES IS SITUATED ON A SLOPE. UNHAPPILY THE COFFEE IS MORE EXPENSIVE

400M² LAY ABANDONED ALONG ONE OF THE MAIN ROADS OF LAVAPIES

AS HAS BEEN THE CASE SINCE 2009, WHICH HAPPENS TO BE SOMETIME AFTER THE FINANCIAL CRISIS OF 2008

SOMETIMES SIMPLY REFERRED JUST AS "LA CRISIS", AS ITS PROLONGED AFTERMATH HIT SPAIN PARTICULARLY HARD

THE TREES SEEM TO LIKE ABANDONMENT

THEY GROW BETTER WITH THE VACANT PLOTS THAN ALONG THE STREET

THAT SEEMS TO IMPLY THAT PEOPLE HERE DON'T EVEN CONSIDER THAT I COULD BE A TOURIST

SOMEONE IS ASKING ME DIRECTIONS

"SI EL MO GENTRIFICA"

YES, I GENTRIFY TOO

THIS IS WRITTEN OVER A PIECE OF STREET ART, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE ARTIST WHO MADE THE STREET ART IS ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR GENTRIFICATION ITSELF

THERE ARE SHOPS HANGING OVER THE CROSSED POWER LINES, AND THERE ARE MANY THEORIES FOR A SIMILAR MEANING

PARKING CRUS DEALING TERRITORY, BUT THIS IS LARGELY AN URBAN MYTH

CONTEMPORATING A MILITARY, LEAVING ONE'S NEIGHBOURHOOD, LEAVING A NEIGHBOURHOOD ON PENDING MILITARY SERVICE

A MEMORIAL MARKING THE SPOT WHERE SOMEONE DIED, ESPECIALLY THROUGH VIOLENCE OR SOMEONE'S SHOTS WERE TRUCK AND THROUING AS A FORM OF HUMILIATION, WHICH IS WHAT I LIKE TO THINK HAS HAPPENED

THE PARKING EXIT DOES A POOR JOB OF INVITING PEOPLE INTO THESE STREETS

NO-ONE GOES HERE

A GUY IS FIXING HIS MOTORCYCLE ON THE STREET WHILE TOGETHER WITH HIS SON

I SUSPECT THE GUY IS TRYING TO TEACH HIS SON HOW TO FIX IT, BUT THE SON SEEMS PREOCCUPIED WITH PLAYING DOLL

MYSTERIOUS SOUNDS COME FROM BEHIND AN OLD WOODEN DOOR. I WONDER WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE? SOMEONE RENOVATING THEIR HOUSE OR AN EXCHANGE

GRANDMAS ARE HAVING A DISCUSSION ON THE STREET

BUT IT IS INACCESSIBLE AND PAVED WITH CONCRETE

IT WOULD BE A PERFECT PLACE FOR SOME GREENERY

HIDDEN WITHIN THE BUILDING BLOCK IS THIS VACANT PLOT

SQUATTERS KEEP OUT

THE WINDOWS ON THE FIRST TWO FLOORS ARE CRICKED OFF

IN SPAIN IT IS ILLEGAL TO EVICT SQUATTERS IF THEY OCCUPY A BUILDING FOR LONGER THAN 24 HOURS

SO ABANDONED BUILDINGS ARE SECURED

ABANDONED BUILDING

IS THE 1.1 METER HIGH BRICK WALL TO KEEP THE CHILDREN IN OR TO KEEP UNWELCOME OUT?

1.1 METER HIGH BRICK WALL TO KEEP THE CHILDREN IN OR TO KEEP UNWELCOME OUT?

THEY MUST BE HERE

VERY COOL GRAFFITI & STENCILS

THE TERRACE IS USED FOR PARTYING OF THE BAR

FOR AN EXPENSIVE COFFEE OR LATE AFTERNOON

VERY CHEAP COFFEE! ONLY €1.60

PREPARED FOR THE NOTICES TO THE ALL-ARMY STORE DOWN THE STREET

LIKE A WALK IN THE PARK!

The Site

With these observations in mind, a few contenders for a suitable project site started to emerge, but one of them stood out as the right location for the cultural space. On this specific site the contrast between touristification along the main roads and abandonment along the perpendicular street was most striking. Within these seven blocks are at least five vacant plots that in combination have a lot of potential. And finally in the close vicinity of this site is the famous El Rastro Market tourist attraction, alongside the former La Tabacalera, Laboratorio and Eskalera Karakola occupations, connecting it nicely to prior research.

Taking inspiration from Jan Rothuizen's artwork, all observations done on the site will be combined into a singular map. Rothuizen, who quotes Jonathan Raban's concept of the *soft city*, talks of qualities of a city that can't simply be located on a regular map.³ In response he too observes the city carefully and comprises his findings into a *soft map*. But instead of showing the topography, his soft maps show the character of a place instead, which was also the goal of my take on the soft map of Lavapiés.

Design Agenda

The six design positions form the culmination and synthesis of previously established research, like the para-architectural framework, reference projects, soft mapping and preliminary research by design like sketches, drawings and models. These foundational principles will inform the spatial aspects of the spontaneous, unconventional and flexible cultural space.

As the reference projects like Passage 56, the occupations and Cineroleum have shown, self-managed cultural life is a good para-architectural contender, as their non-profit character counterbalances speculation, and their primary goal isn't to make money. Additionally, with the involvement of the very diverse community, touristification can be counterbalanced, as the cultural commons should primarily serve those who actually live here. Cultural life will include community gardens and pocket parks for families and the elderly, workshops and ateliers for makers and artists, rehearsal spaces for musicians, a central performance place for cinema, exhibitions, theatre, concerts and festivals. Alongside it there will be, similar to how it worked in La Tabacalera, spaces for collectives to come together, to focus on for example: digital activism, the queer community, afro communities, legal advice, or helping the homeless.

The various parasitic squatting practices have shown that occupation is a very quick and effective way to activate an abandoned building, and use it for cultural practices. The same can be done with the vacant plots in the project area. As the empty space is part of Lavapiés, it should serve Lavapiés, so occupation will be the initial process to activate these vacant plots as well. It also has the benefit of physically blocking investors from speculation and building here, preventing further gentrification. To achieve this initial occupation, the design will include a sea container that can be placed swiftly from the back of a truck onto the site, perhaps even overnight.

The biggest takeaway from the para-architectural framework is the strength and potential of the symbiotic relation. Eventually all para-architecture is exposed to the risk of being fossilised if they don't keep reinventing themselves; therefore the resistance lies in temporality. To stay vital, architectural interventions shouldn't

³ Jan Rothuizen referenced Raban's *Soft City* (1974) during a lunch lecture at the TU Delft Architecture faculty (2026, February 17)



Cultural Commons

self-managed cultural life,
produced by and for those
who actually live here



Occupation of Space

claiming abandoned plots
before speculation does,
and putting them to use



Temporality

vitality lives in change;
permanence invites
exploitation



Hospitality without Surrender

welcoming visitors without
handing the neighborhood
over to touristification



Gentrification Awareness

demonstrate what's possible,
to demand better conditions
politically



Experimental Ground

a testing site for ideas that can
travel, fail, be revised and taken
over by those who stay

last forever, but should change, adapt, disappear, and reappear over time, to prevent them from becoming the source of gentrification. Therefore the cultural space will be designed with a timeline in mind, start out as parasitic, to become symbiotic, fossilise, and eventually disappear again, and then to inspire something new.

The soft map shows yet another group of people not featured so far in the design agenda: the tourist. A primary cause for the emergence of a cultural space is to counterbalance touristification, yet that does not mean that tourists shouldn't be considered. They are undeniably part of Lavapiés, and will therefore also have a space within the design, as long as they aren't the primary target audience. Design interventions should non-verbally communicate that they are primarily focused to residents, reminding the visitors that they are guests. Yet the interaction between tourists and the various other communities aims to create a mutual respect between each other, and hopefully take some of the controversy and friction around touristification away.

The strength of aaa's Passage 56 lies in the involvement of the community. At first they simply just liked a place for gardening and greenery, but over time they started to realise that the community itself had power. When they were evicted, the people cared so much for their neighbourhood that they started seeing potential in other vacant lots and campaigned for the return of the community garden. This will be an inspiration for the cultural space within Lavapiés; to make the people realise that they themselves can take responsibility in creating self-managed cultural space to counterbalance gentrification. The individuals as part of the whole have the power to undertake something themselves, attend association meetings or even influence political opinion. Within the design this can be achieved implicitly; just get people involved, or explicitly; with space for lectures and debates about gentrification, or even artwork, infomarkets, exhibitions, movies and theatre performance.

And finally, most and foremost, the design for the cultural space should be seen as an experiment that is allowed to lead to unexpected, surprising or maybe also disappointing results. Just like John Hejduk's experimental Clock Structure or Lina Bo Bardi's theatre, this cultural space should inspire to repeat this experiment elsewhere, perhaps even literally with the same structures after they've fulfilled their temporary purpose. Or from it should emerge new experiments, initiated by the community, where the people of Lavapiés slowly take ownership over the project themselves.



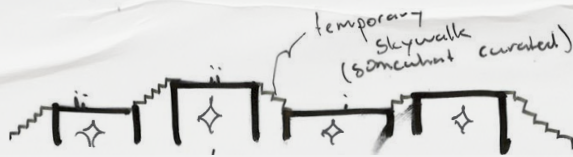
PART 5

Design Progress

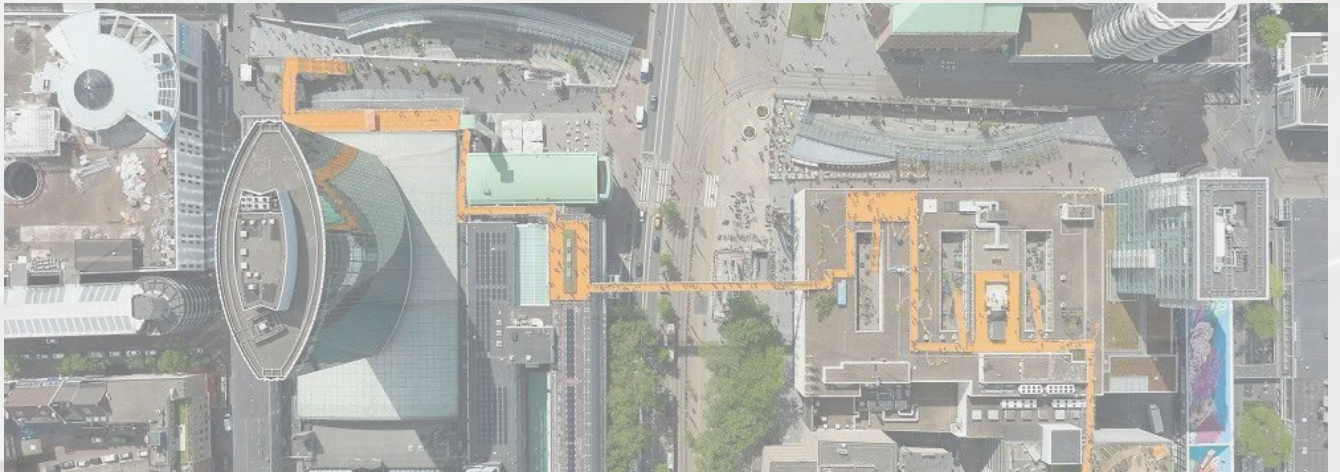
Further exploration into the main design question: how to create spontaneous, unconventional, and flexible cultural space in Lavapiés, is done through the process of research by design. This part presents a series of sketches, diagrams, and drawings in chronological order, inspired by preliminary design positions but also used to develop and finalize the presented design agenda in Part four.

Lavapies Bridge

Observing the abandoned plots within the project area makes apparent that some are very close together and even form a route through the urban fabric. Inspired by the heightened interaction with the roofscape of Rotterdam during the Rooftop Days, I wanted to see what such intervention weaving through and above Lavapies would look like. Ultimately this idea served as an exploration into the spatial layout of the area and the possible program. Although not in their final location, the community garden, collective space and performance patio persisted throughout the evolution of the design.

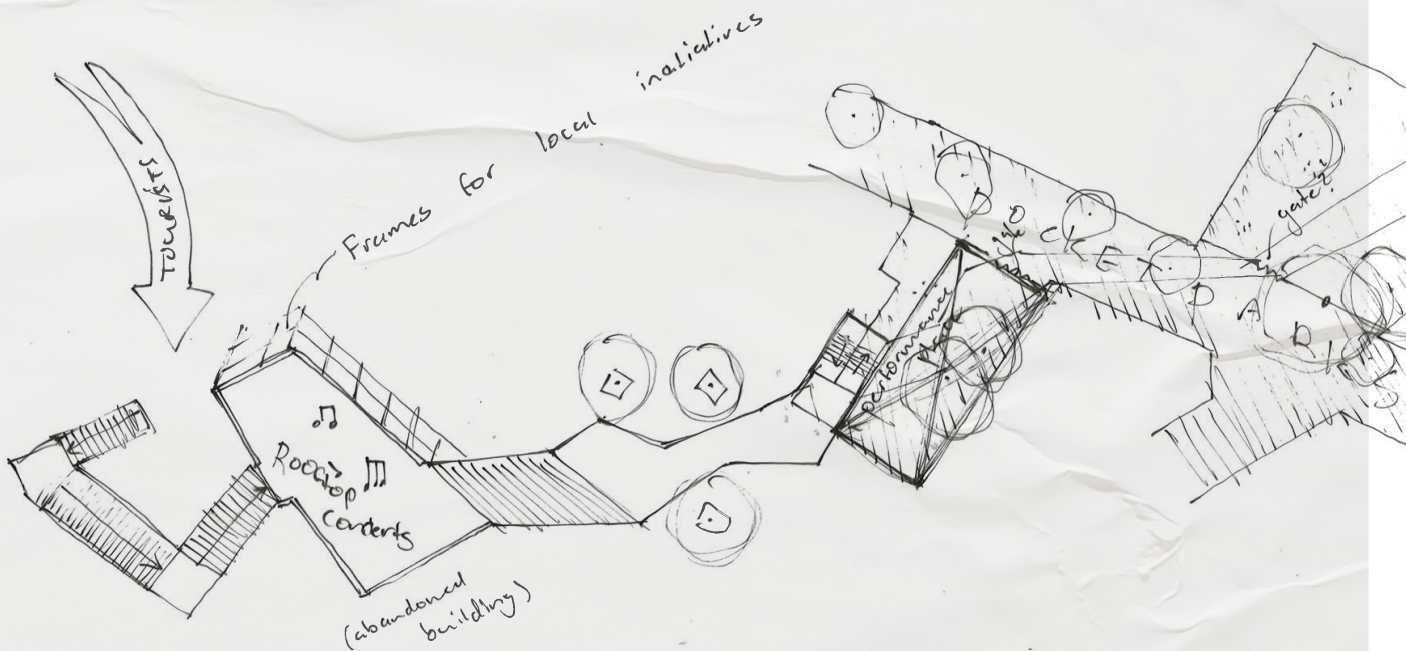


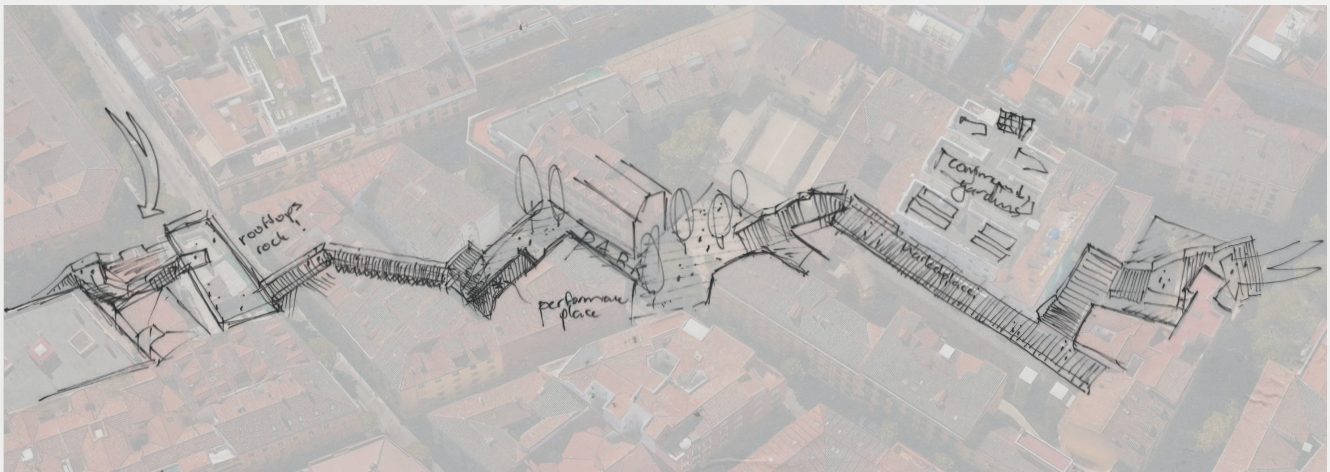
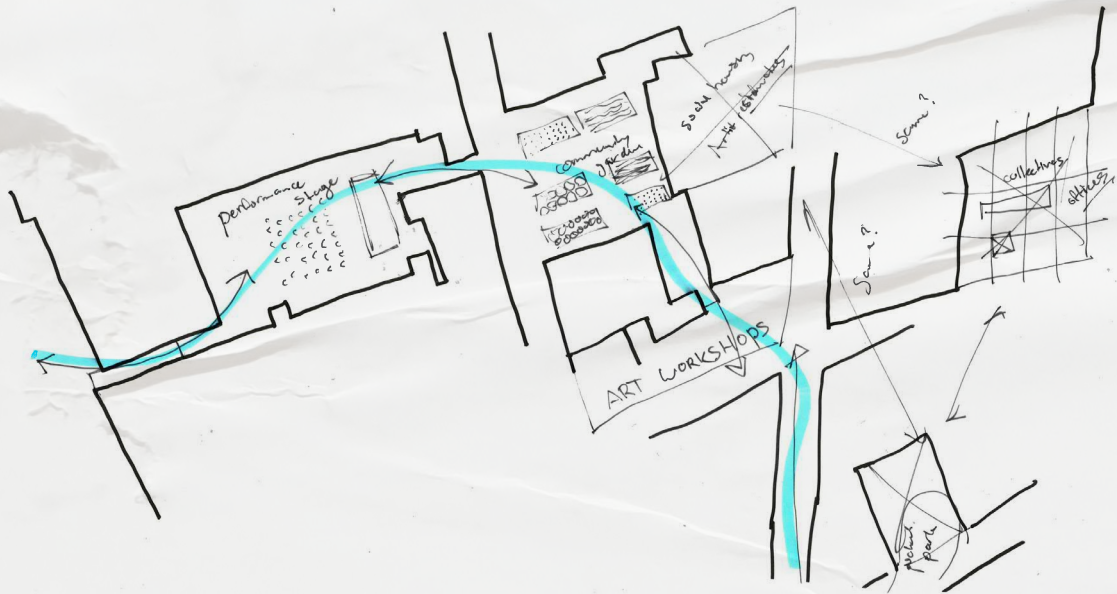
permanent improvements
(slowly being taken over
by locals)



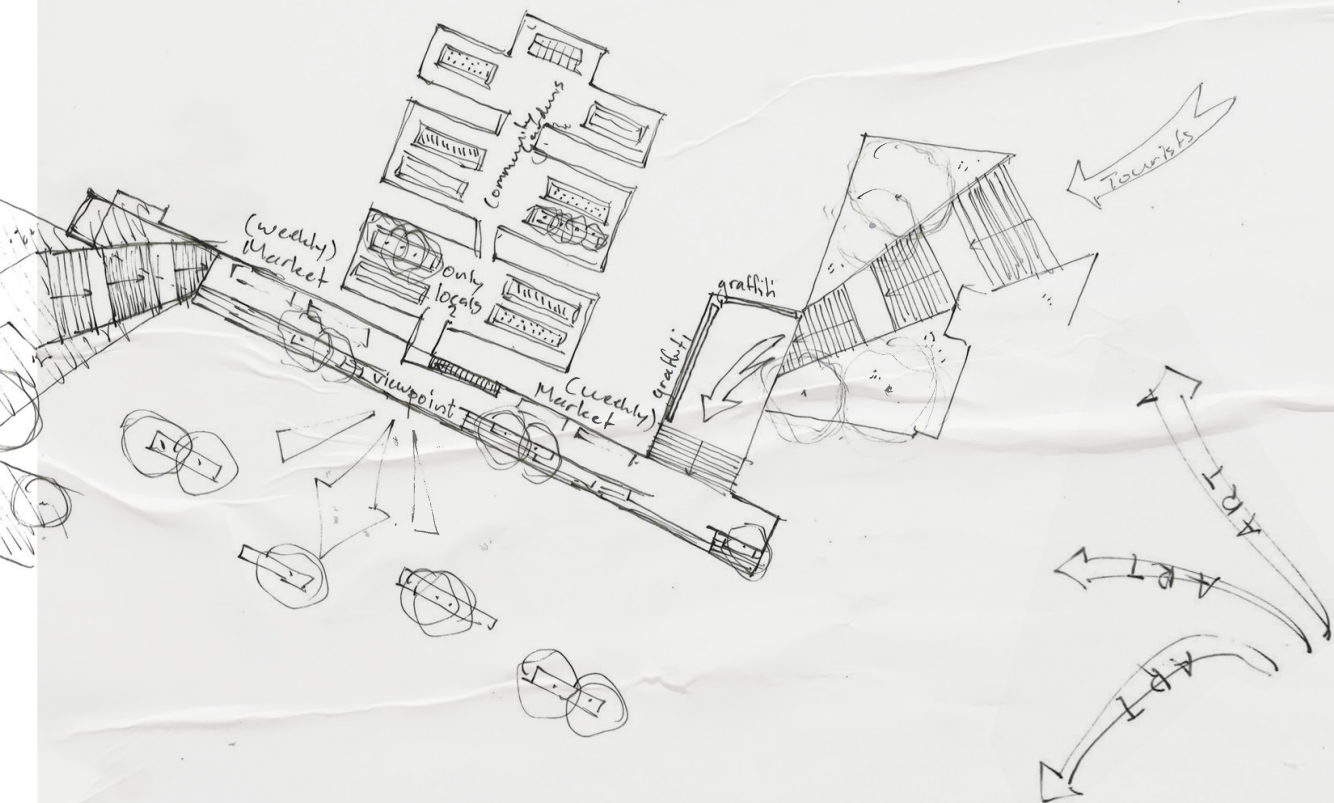
48

DESIGN PROGRESS





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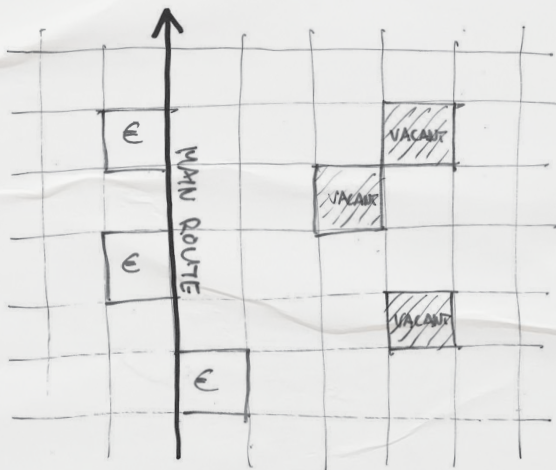


Abstracting the Lavapies Bridge concept into diagram reveals the mechanics and motivations behind the intervention. As with the Luchtsingel in Rotterdam, the bridge can be seen as an activator giving the vacant plots purpose with locally initiated ideas. It also raises the concern about the impact of the intervention on gentrification, which it is trying to counterbalance, as this route might become a popular tourist hotspot. The interplay between tourists and the people is diagrammatically visualised, showing the local urban fabric remaining intimate while there is also a place for visiting tourists in the public realm. The collectives act as an interface between the two, where people can participate and visitors can experience, creating mutual respect for both parties. Eventually the literal connecting element disappears later on, but still the separate acts of architecture will be experienced in sequence, and the mechanics behind them still stand.

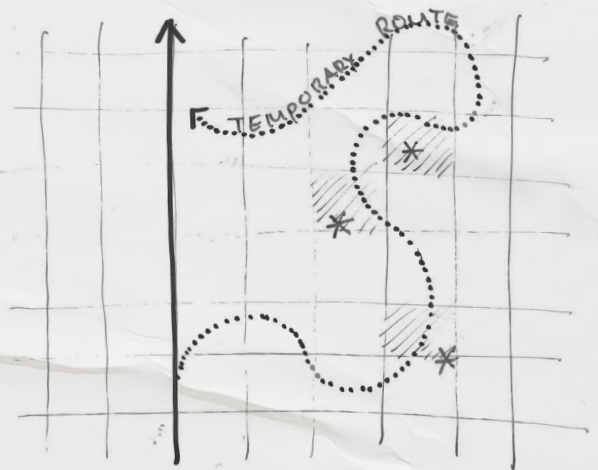
Collective Goal

- * dedicated spaces which are primarily touristic and local
- * Space for spontaneous collectives at the interface between public and local
- * tourists can experience and buy things here
- * locals can participate and benefit from represented interests
- * tourist and locals can learn to respect each other and benefit.

50

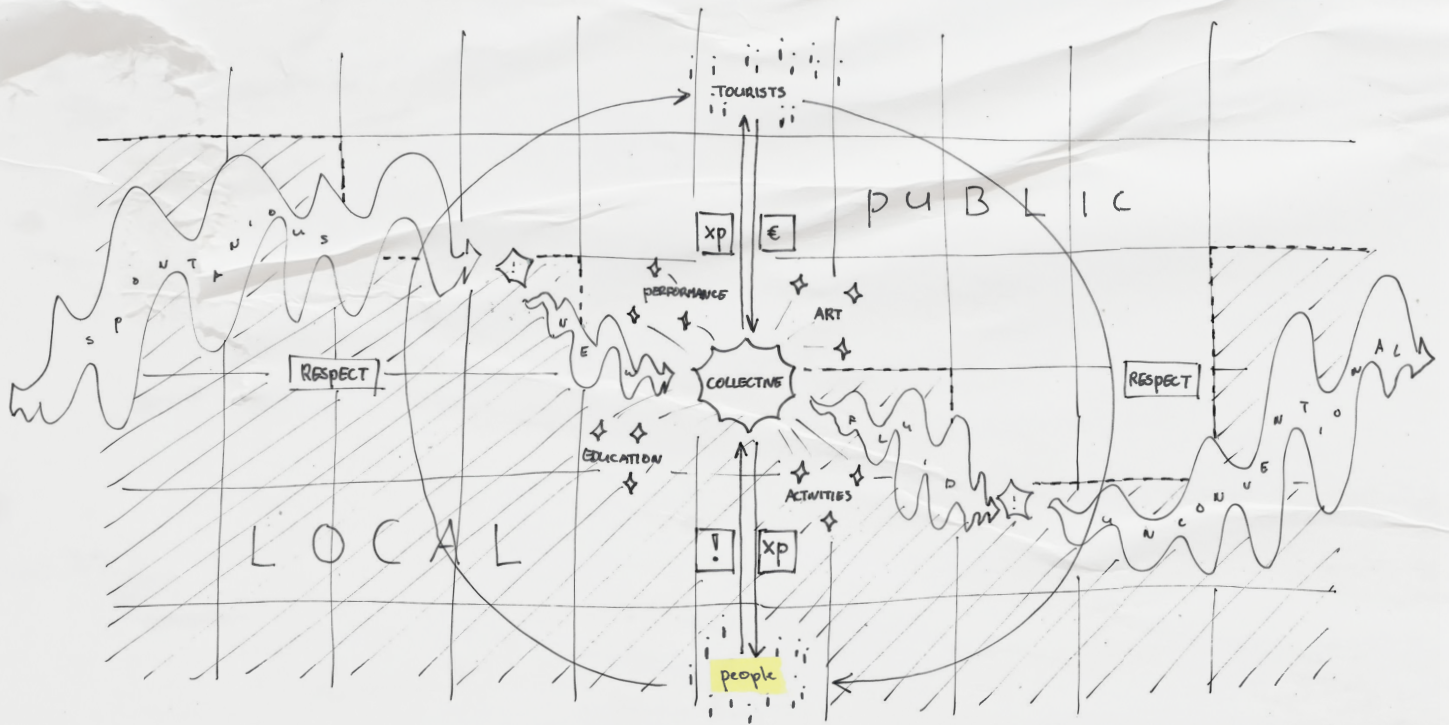


social stress between overtouristification and vacancy.

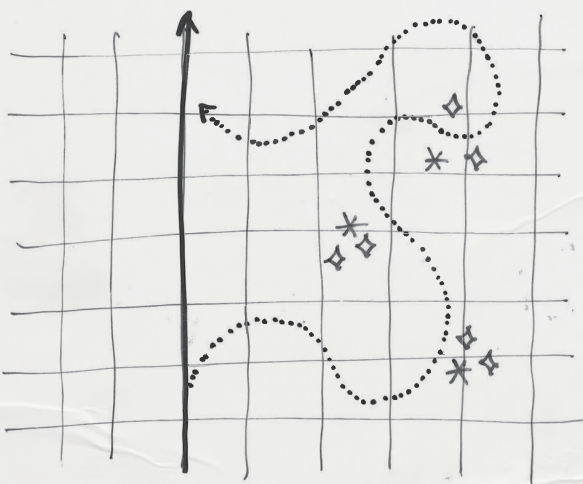


create a temporary route with curated amenities.

* Curated amenity

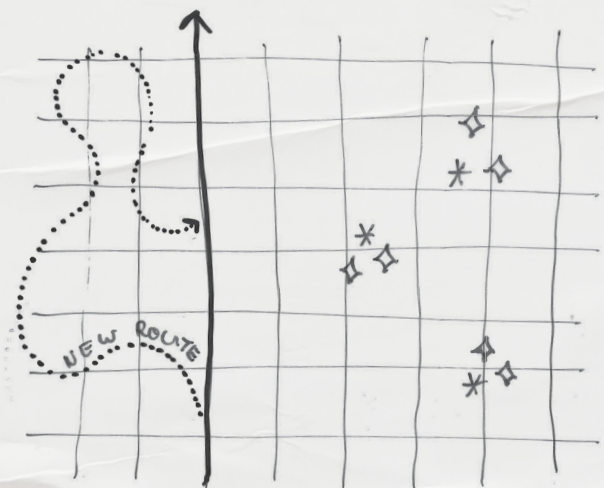


51



local initiatives can form along the route.

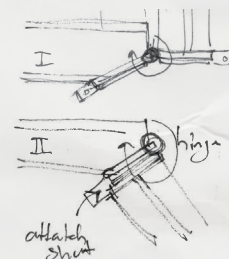
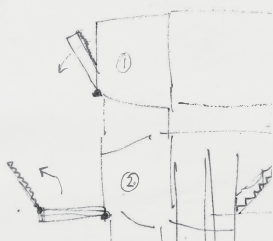
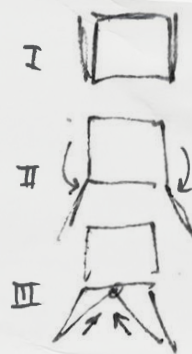
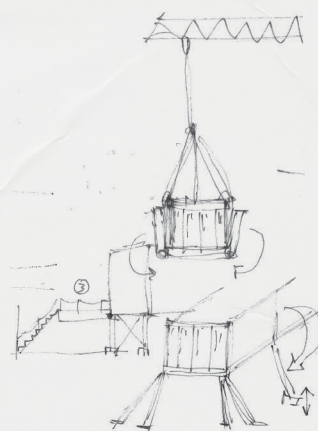
✧ local initiative

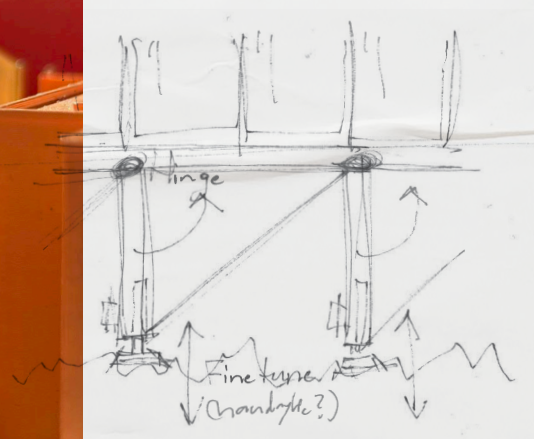
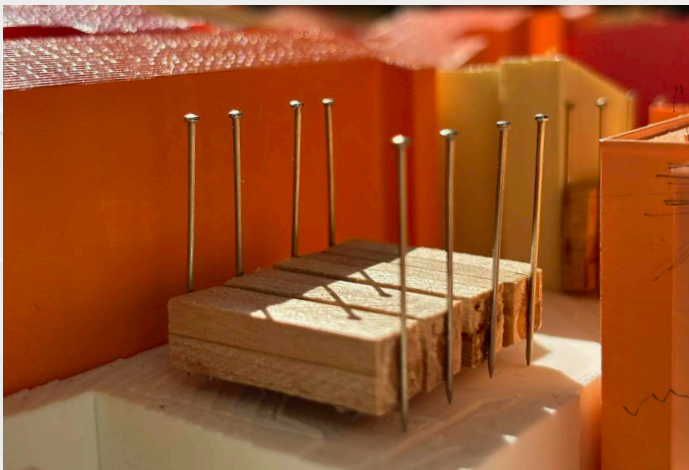
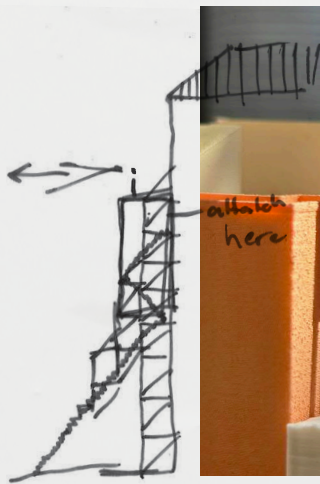
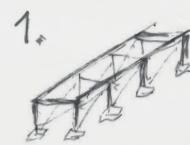
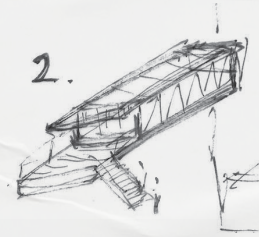


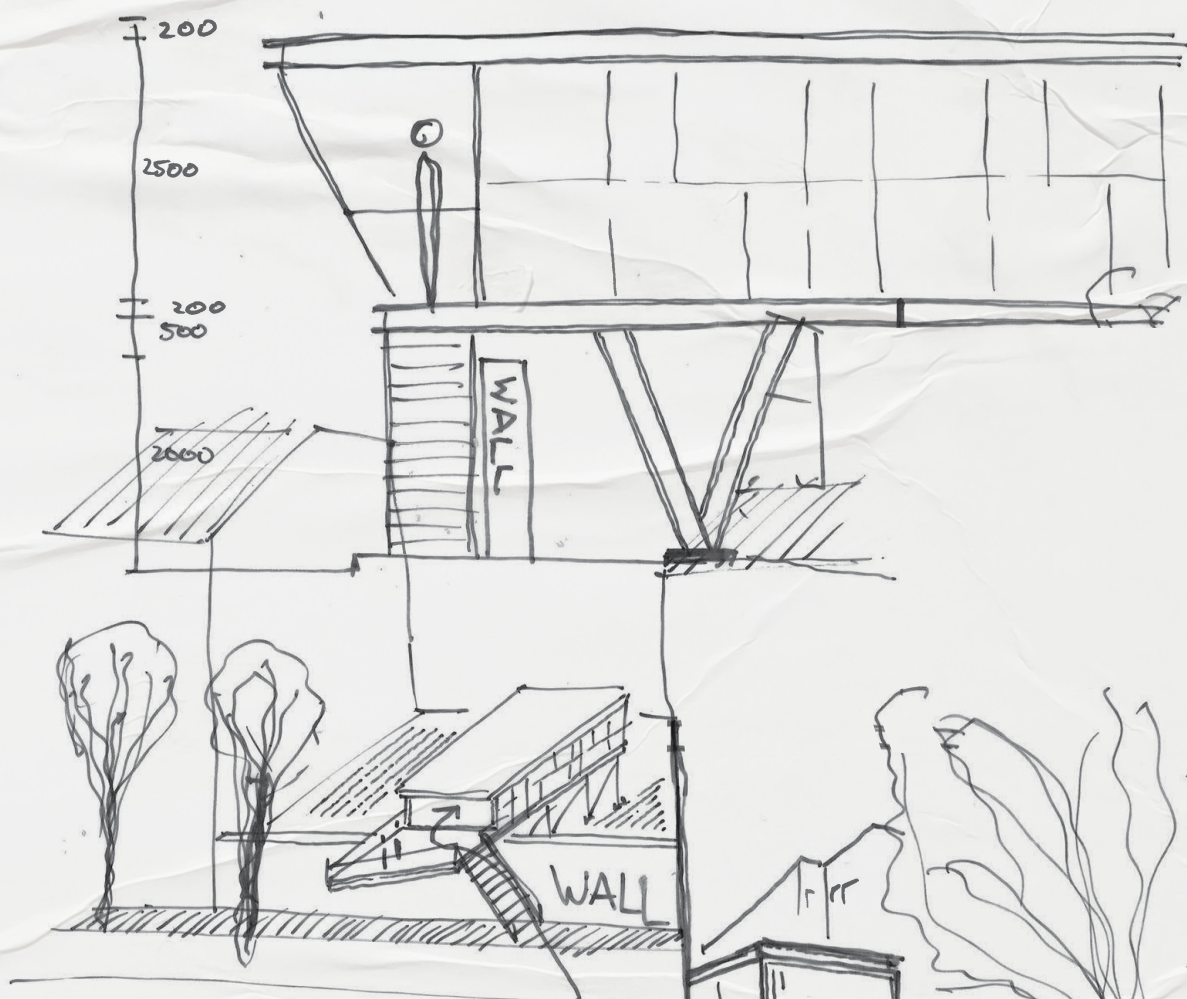
Care for the initiatives is given to the locals when the route goes away.

The Intruders

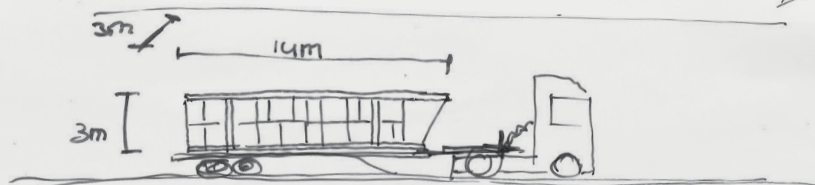
Physical modeling allowed me to experiment with different size pavilions and towers. The parasitic intruders are intentionally creature-like and attach themselves quite literally to their urban host. The arachnoid pavilion peaks eerily over the wall and grant access from the street to the lot, and the phage-like observation tower grants the human visitor an overview of their surroundings. The small pavilion eventually evolves into a Guerilla Gardening Shed that can be illegally placed overnight from the back of a truck and invites the Madrilenos to transform this barren lot into a thriving, socially active community garden.

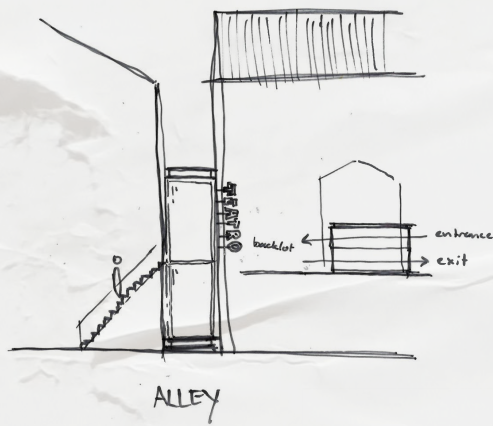




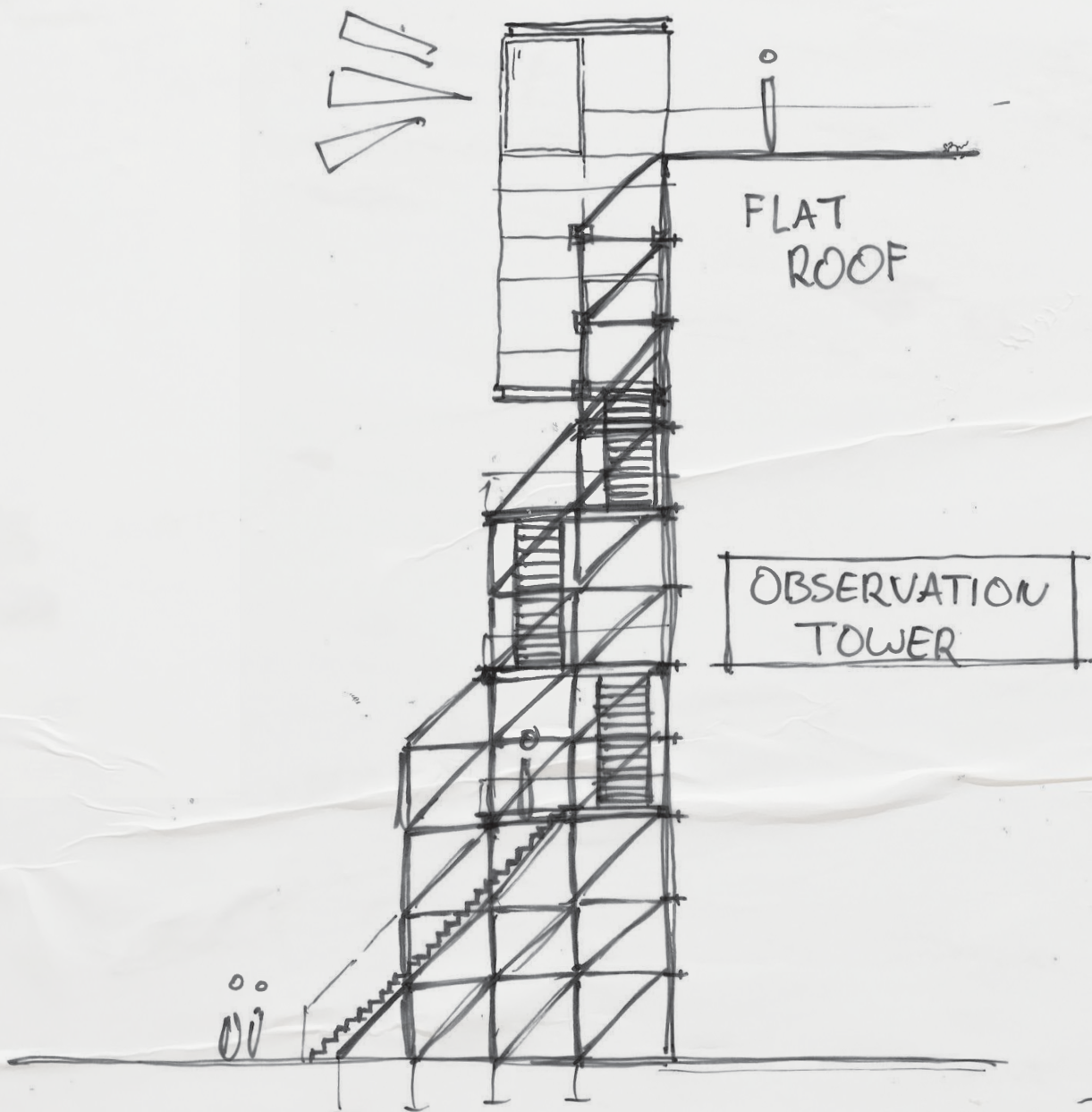


GUERRILLA GARDENING
SHED





PERFORMANCE
PATIO
ENTRANCE



At this point, the three locations of the intervention remain stable. The gardening shed can become the illegal instigator of further symbiotic intervention; the pavilion will manifest itself as a sea container, which is cheap to come by and can easily be transported. The collective space can exist on a plot marked as a "multi-purpose space for civic activities" and will activate the two adjacent abandoned buildings. The performance patio will become a flexible space ready to serve a wide variety of uses like cinema, theater, exhibitions, or festivals.

- gardening enthusiasts
- Squatters
- book readers
- older residents

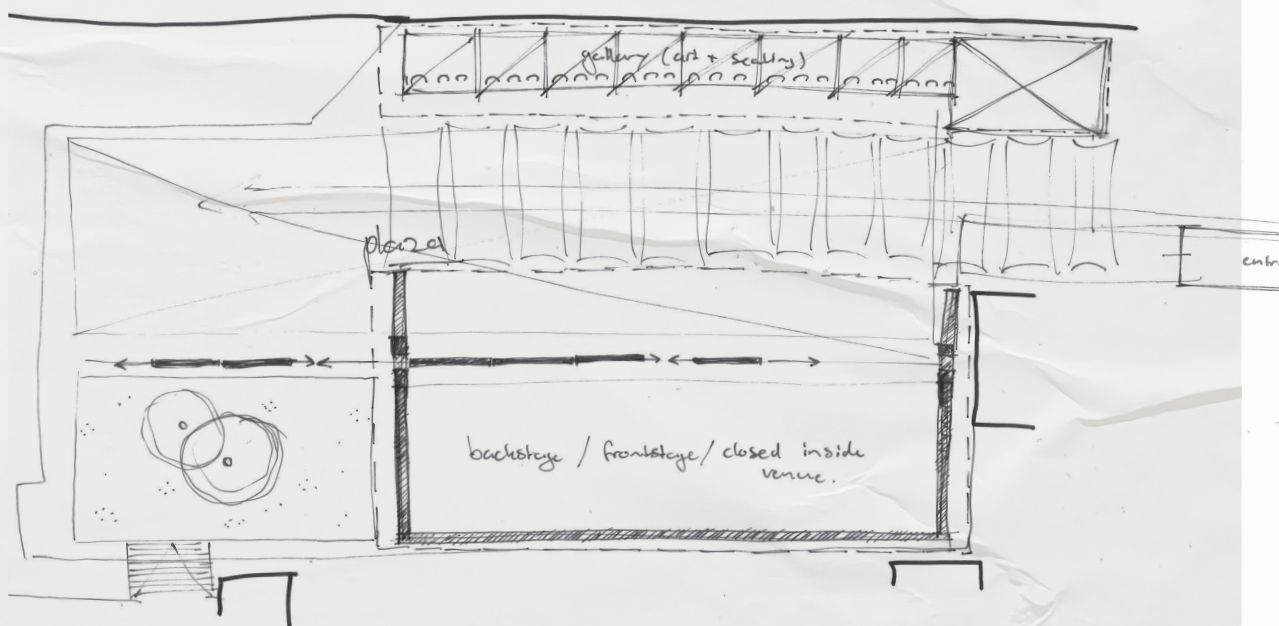
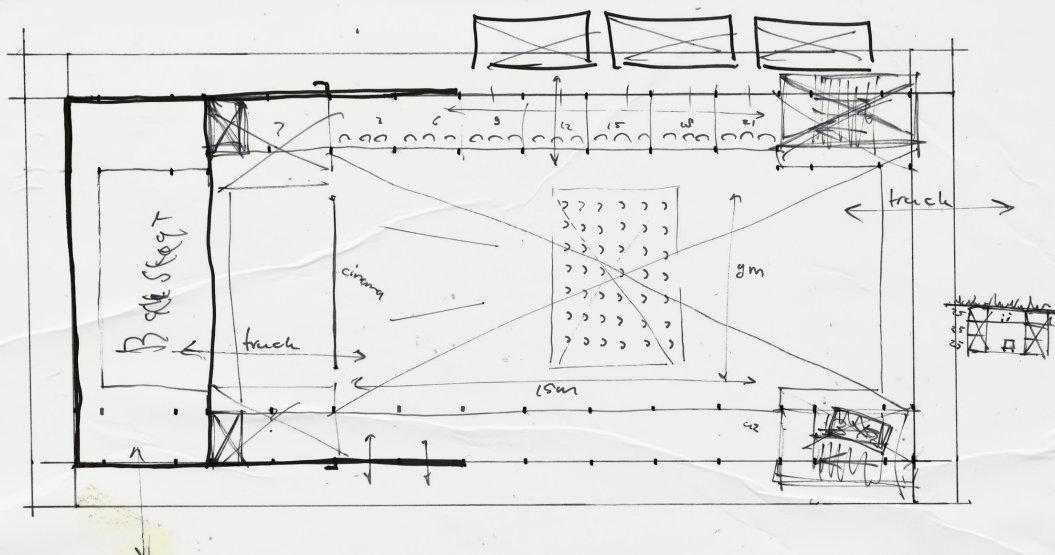
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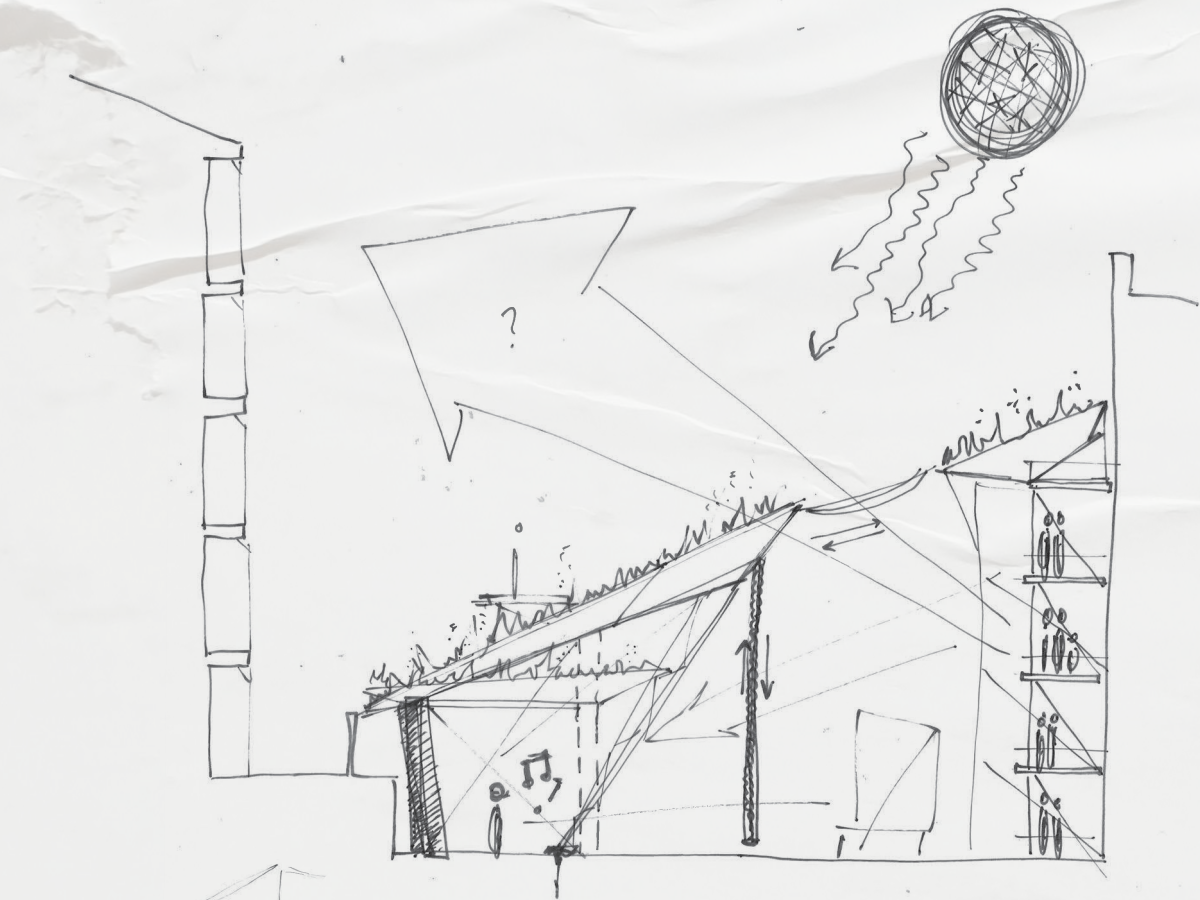
DESIGN PROGRESSES



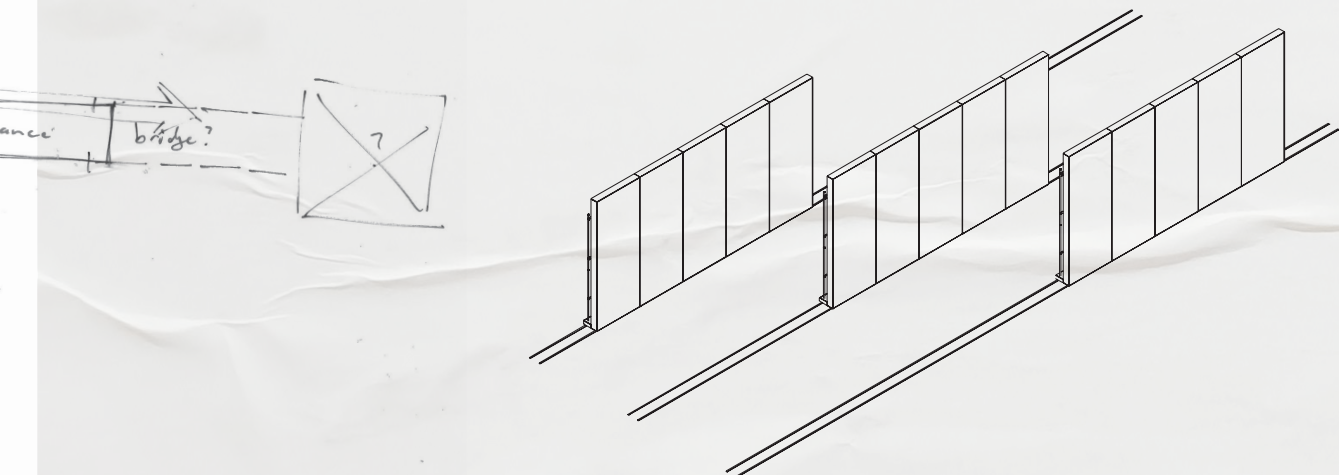
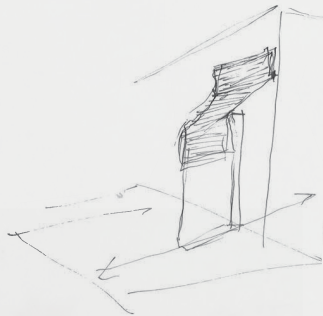
Restraint as an Architectural Act

To provide this wide variety of functions, our architectural instinct tells us to arrange this with a building. Various layouts spanning the entire courtyard have been tested, yet none really captured the potential of the courtyard. Lina Bo Bardi's take on Teatro Oficina, stating that the lines between theater and real life should be ambiguous, presents a solution. The day-to-day life of Lavapiés is the real dramatic theater here, showcased already on the adjacent 'Corrala' (gallery) and through the back windows the apartments. Therefore, the unobtrusive intervention materializes in fifteen single wall segments. Placing them on tracks provides flexibility to push them in any configuration, inspiring people to use them in any way they please.



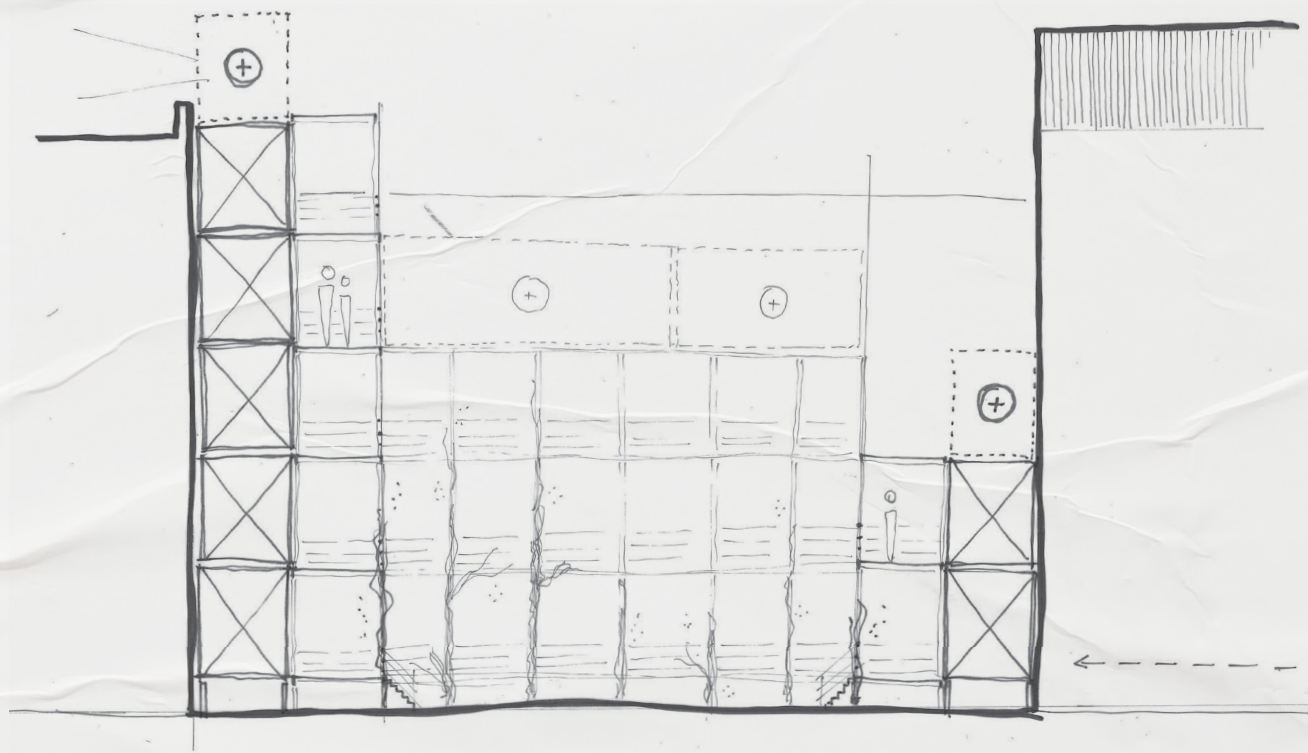


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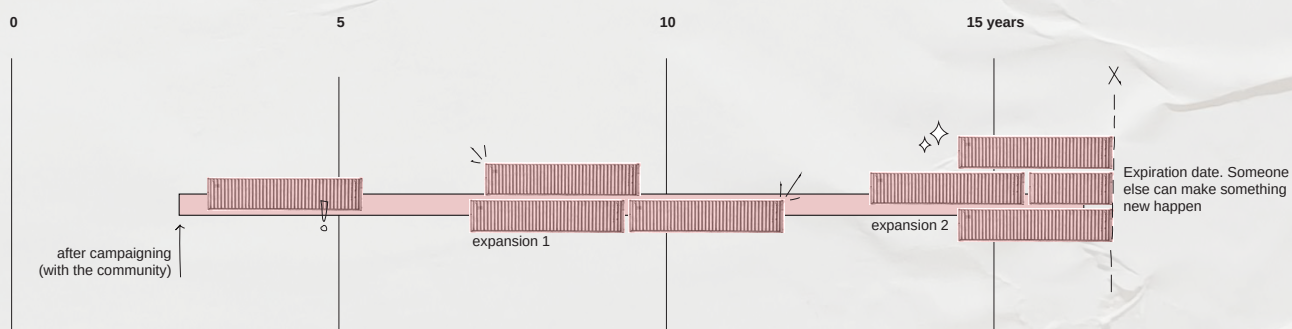


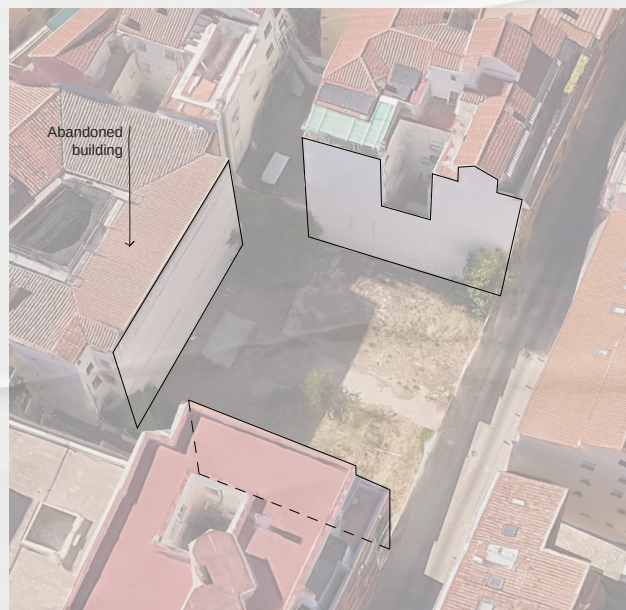
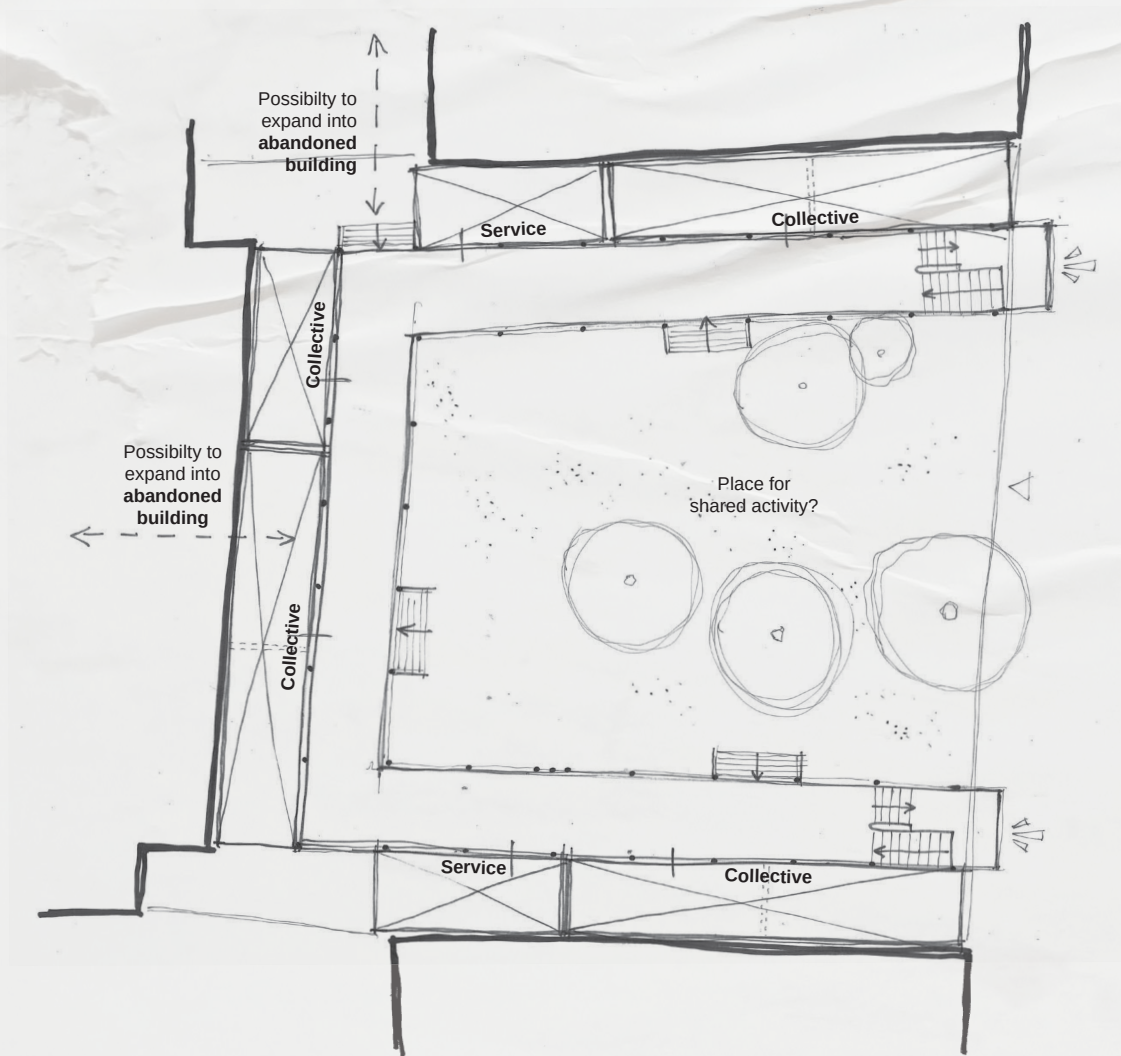
Symbiotic Design

The collective space will undergo the most iterations, each providing a better insight into this specific site. A layout is tested where the collectives each interact with one of the three blank walls, breaking the fourth wall to keep the lot mostly empty, ready for community engaged activities. The collectives are housed in single sea containers that can potentially grow, as they can easily be stacked up to six levels. As it becomes clear that this building, unlike the Guerilla Gardening Shed, will start out as a more formal symbiotic intervention, the use of sea containers becomes contested. A more architecturally justified design seems desirable.



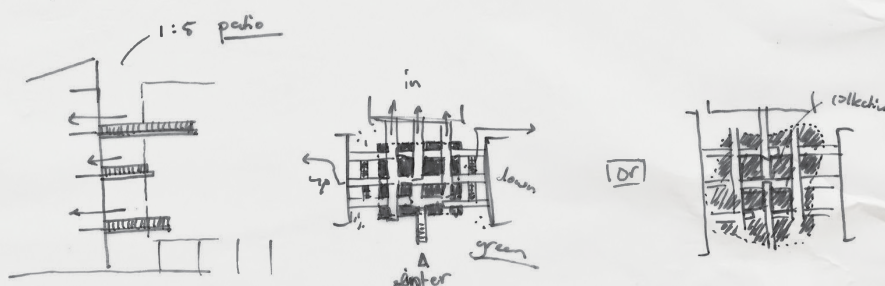
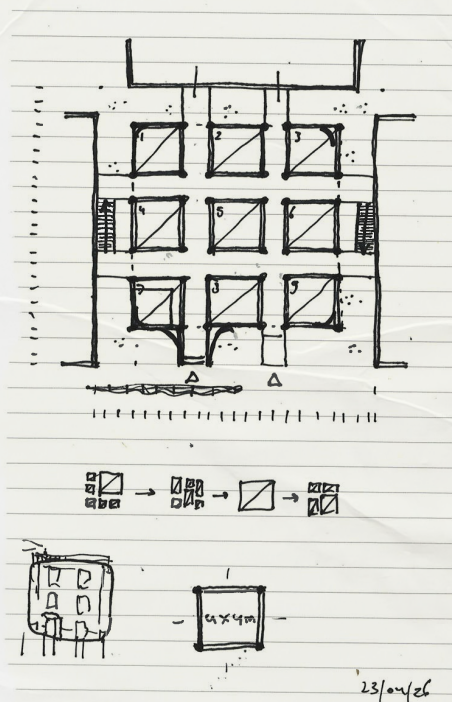
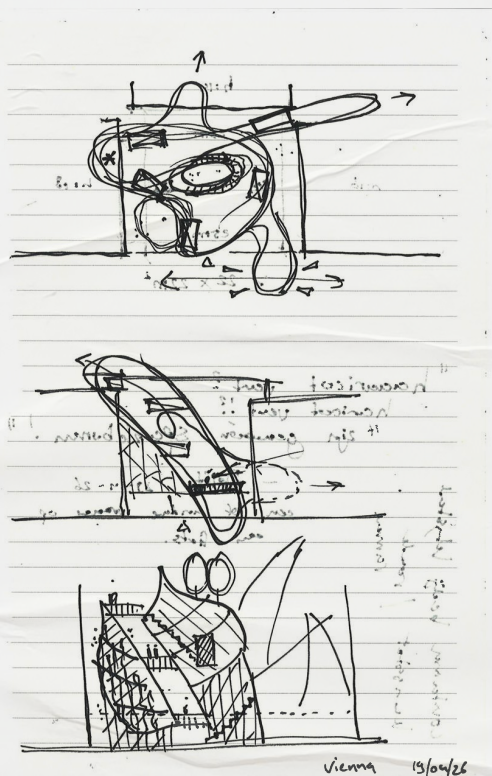
⊕ Ability to grow

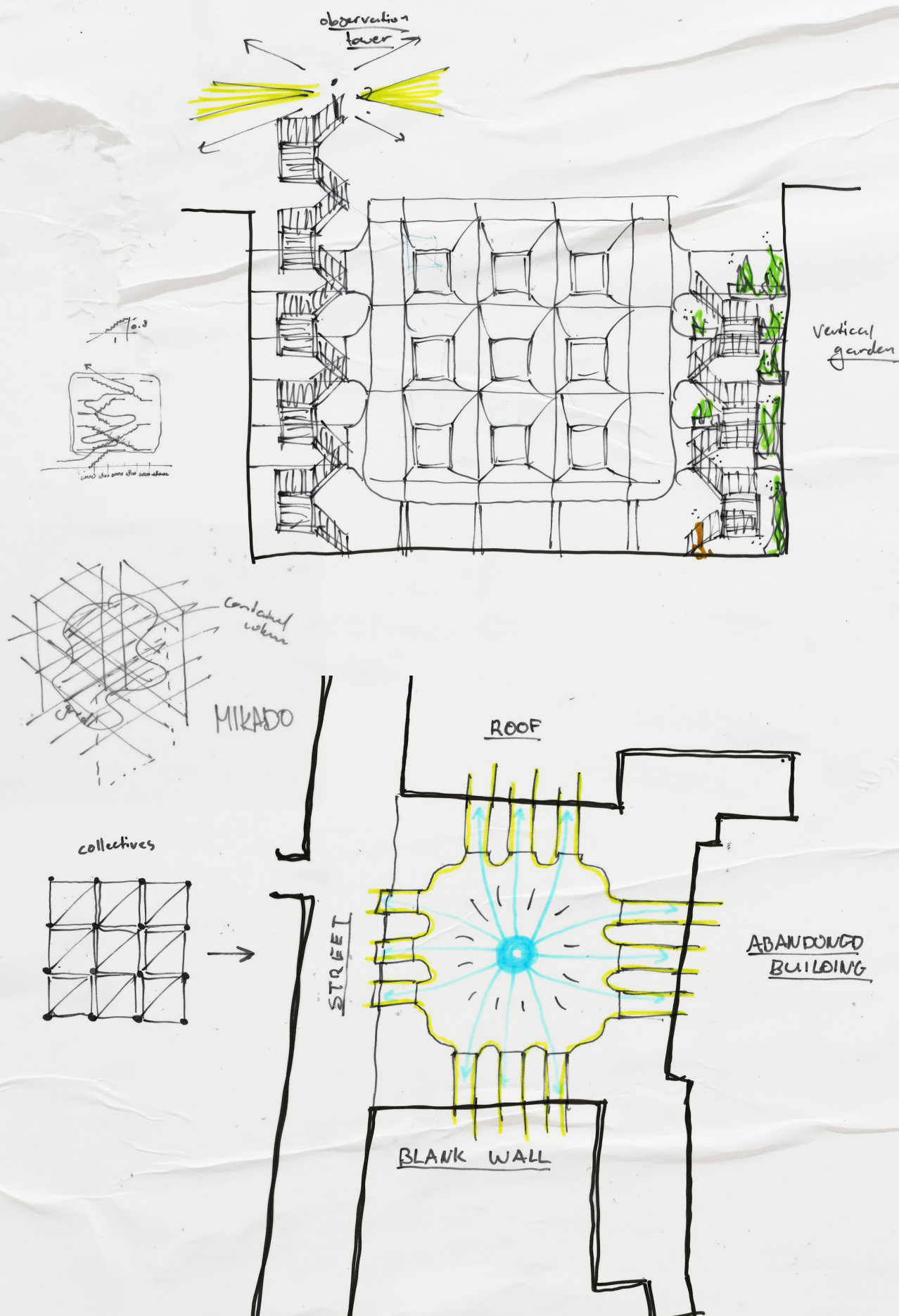




The Alien

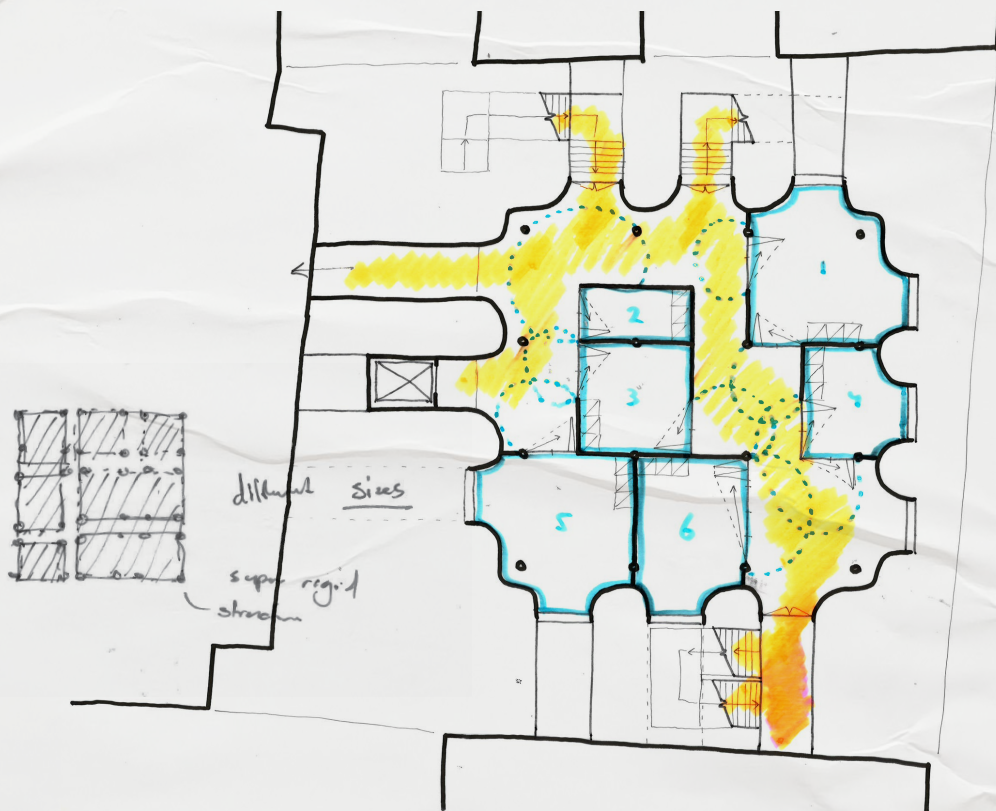
This point in the design process happened to align with an unrelated two week trip to Austria and Finland. Projects like Kunsthaus Wien by Hundertwasser, Kunsthaus Graz, Argos by Zaha Hadid, and Amos Rex in Helsinki inevitably inspired the collective space. A mix between a spaceship and an alien-like creature manifests itself on the plot, quite literally sucking itself shut onto the surfaces of the blank walls, ready to infest the surrounding urban fabric and grow between the cracks. As the windows are the eyes of the building, these eyes certainly observe the inevitable transformation of the city, while behind them lie the collectives that are fighting to prevent just that. This building highlights some of the potential within this spot, like the outside circulation space, observation tower, vertical garden, ground floor plaza, and connections to the abandoned buildings. Yet it eventually fails due to its rigid repetitiveness, shallow sculpturality, and poor floorplans.

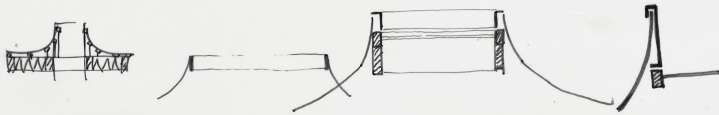
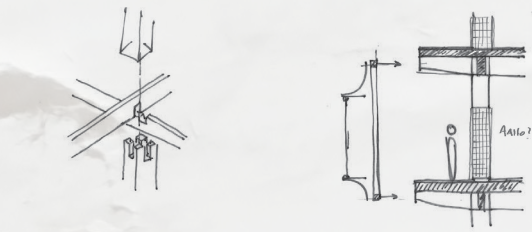




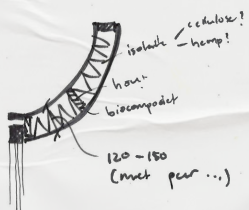
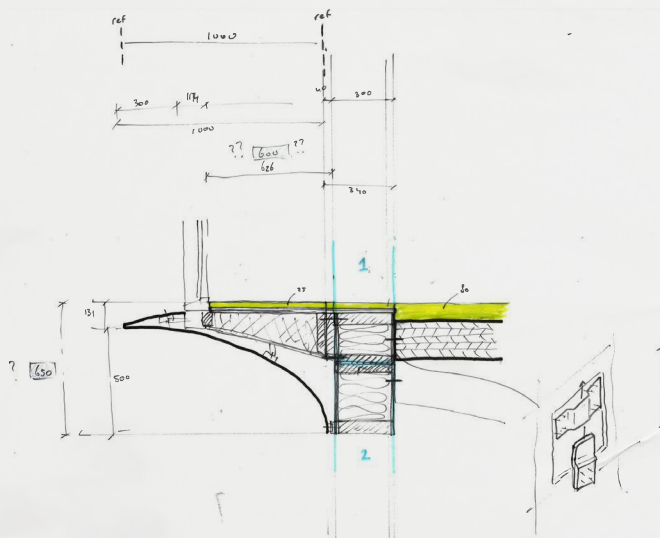


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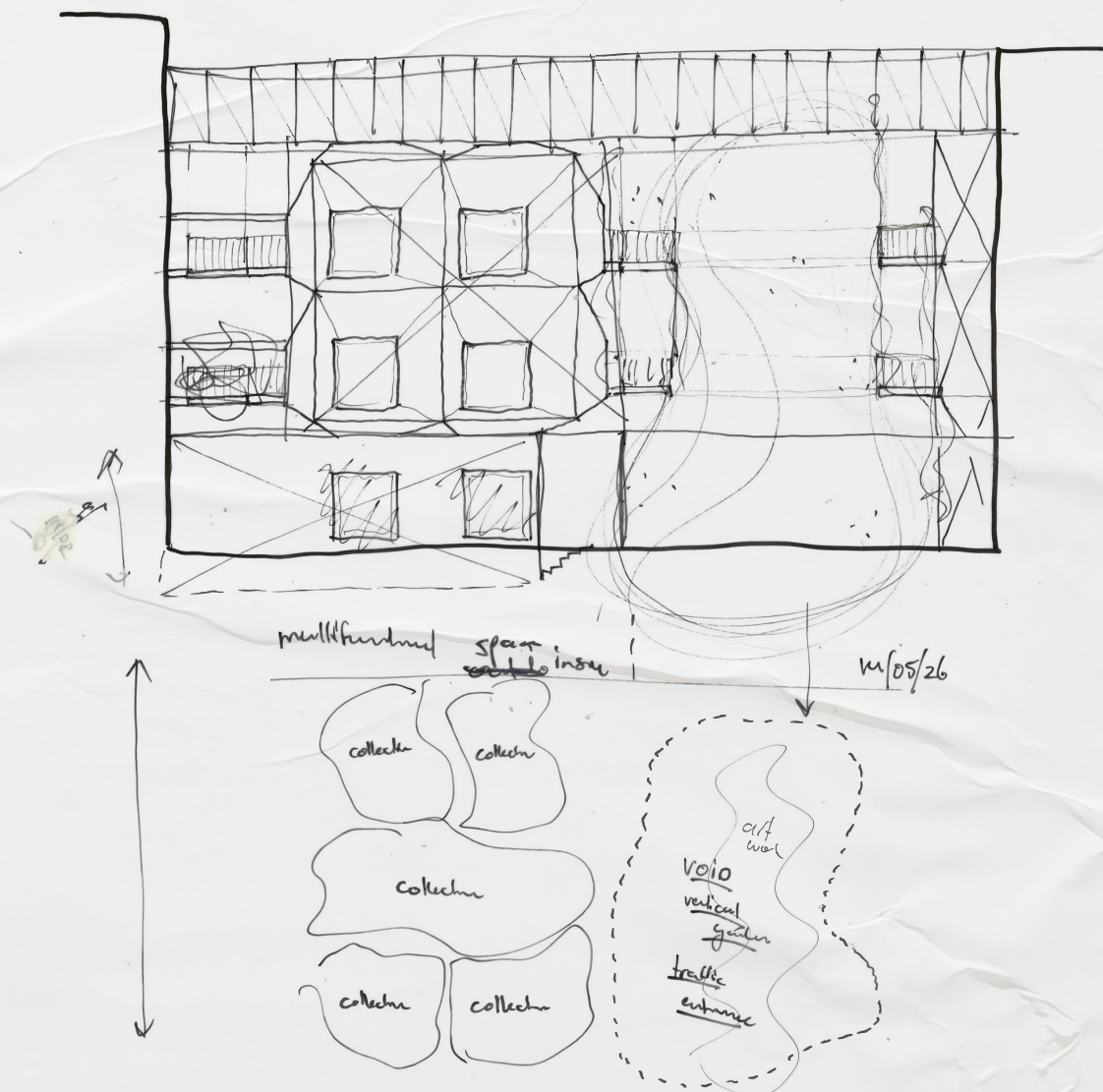


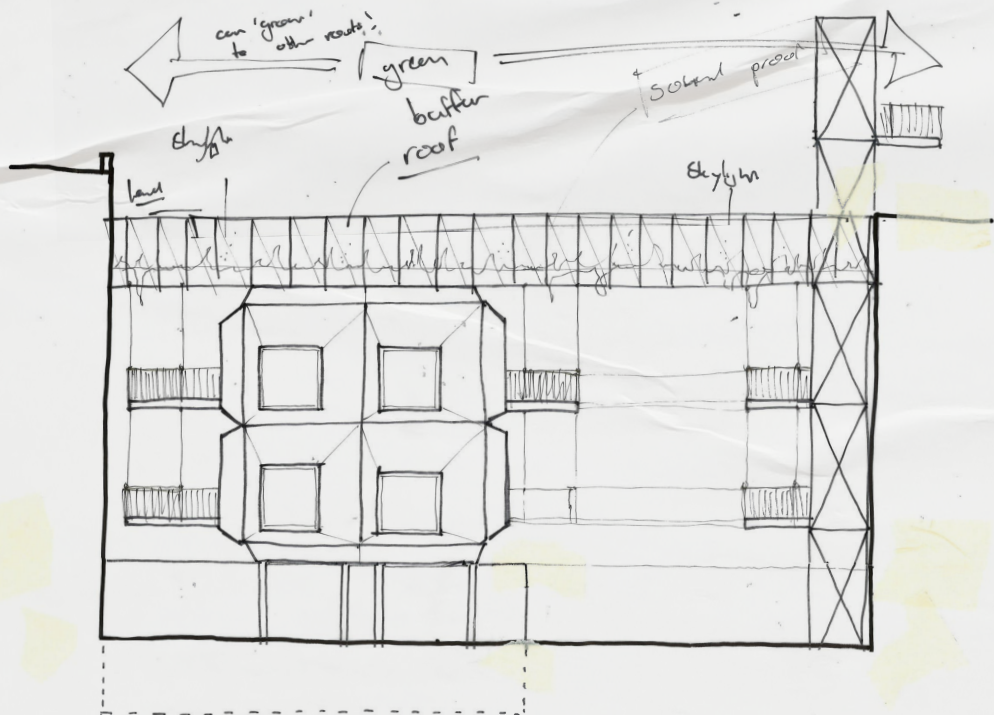
$9.250 \div 1 = 9.25$
 $800 \div 25 = 32$



An Eclectic Mix

Finally, the synthesis of all previous designs and the reverse strategy of starting with the floor plans results in an eclectic mix of layered functions. Most prominent are the eight spaces for the collectives. The roof activates the square, protecting it from rain and the summer heat. The courtyard is for meeting, reading, breaks, coffee, public announcements, poetry readings, acoustic music, and small info stands. The catwalks grant access to the abandoned building, which can house artist residencies, or even more collectives. The stairway leads into the alley towards another abandoned ground floor, with large north facing windows and are therefore perfect for ateliers or workshops. The observation tower provides access to the roof but also to other roofs, ultimately giving people knowledge about their surroundings. And finally the basement is for activities that produce lots of sound, like raves, salsa evenings or wrestling matches. The collective space becomes an intervention that inspires people to spontaneously use their urban surroundings in a new, better, and even unconventional way.





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PART 6

Final Product

No design is ever 'done', and certainly not an ever-evolving architectural design about self-management. So although the next part presents the cultural space in a conclusive way, the project is only really 'complete' after it has been built, used, altered, reused, and re-altered again. Nevertheless, this is the final part of the design progress and will thereby be referred to as the final product.

The strategy for this cultural space against gentrification will follow a three-act structure, taking inspiration from scenario writing. The para-architectural acts, the Parasites, the Symbiotes, and the Fossil, aim to achieve the goals of the earlier established design agenda and are the result of the research into the main design question: how to design spontaneous, unconventional, and flexible cultural space in Lavapiés.

Three Acts

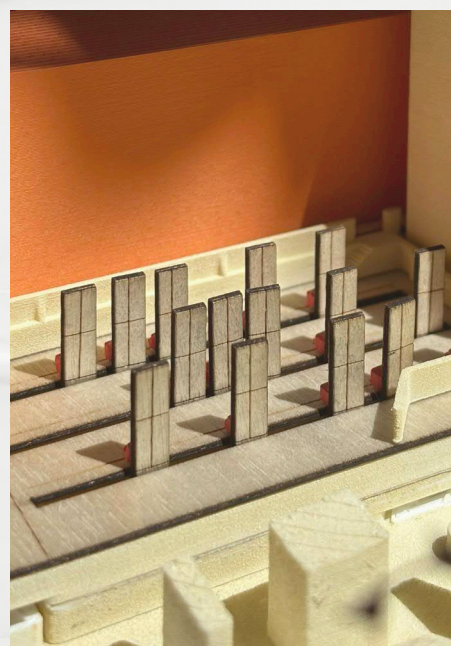
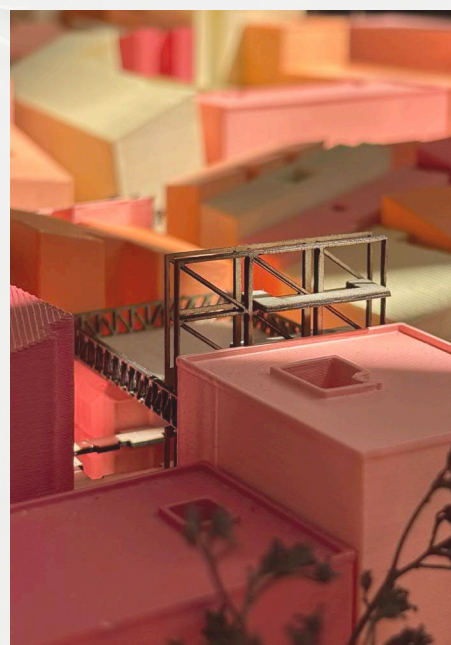
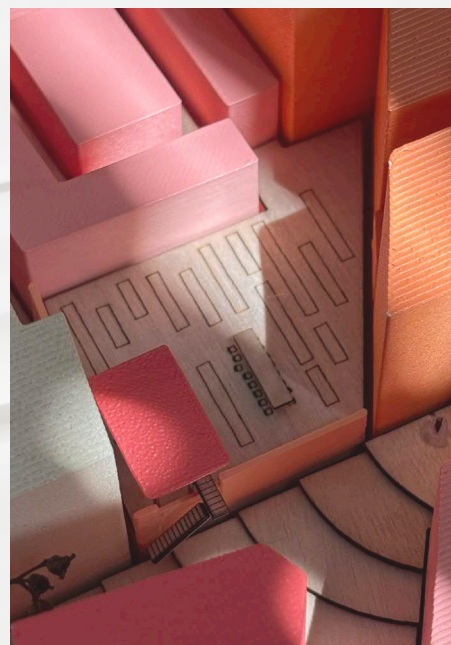
The 1:500 model shows the five vacant lots within the chosen project site in Lavapiés. On three of those, the three acts of the final design will take place, while the other two remain open to the people of Lavapiés, ready for them to experiment and slowly take ownership over themselves after they have perhaps been inspired by the realisation of the cultural space presented here.

ACT 1

ACT 2

ACT 3

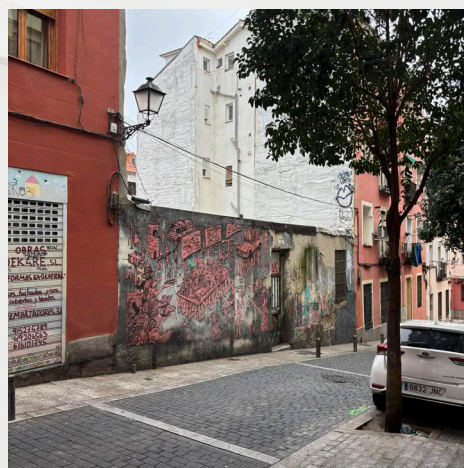
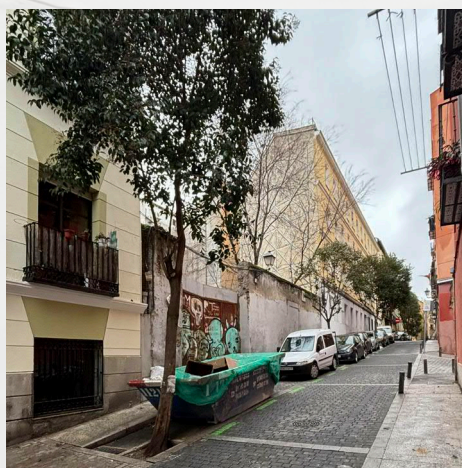
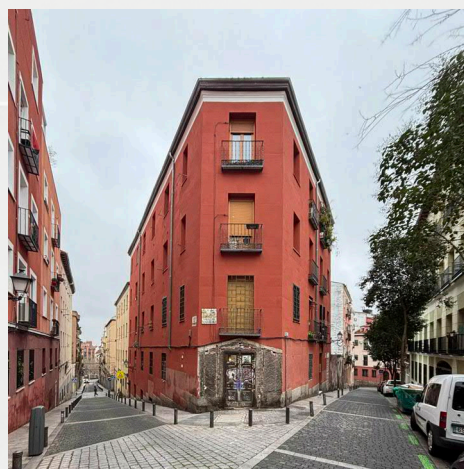
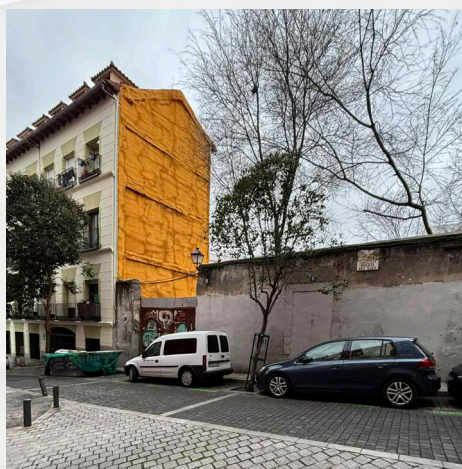




Act 1 – The Parasite

The first location for a Para-Architectural act is on this vacant lot. Over fifteen years ago there used to be a building here, but now only what remains are these four-metre-high walls that block access from the surrounding streets. This part of Lavapiés is still more quiet and not at all touristified; there was a guy in the streets fixing his motorbike while his son was playing ball, and someone else was asking me directions, implying that everyone who goes here must live here. But apart from these minor interactions, the streets were mostly quiet and mildly desolate. Inspired by the Greenacre Pocket Park in Manhattan and aaa's Passage 56, the plan is to create a community garden here, providing activity, social cohesion, and greenery for the people who actually live here.

The quickest and cheapest way to achieve this, and by taking inspiration from the squatting tradition in Lavapiés, is to build an illegal parasitic intervention here. It can be initiated by one of the few squatting occupations still in the area, like CSO La Rosa, who will have a lot of knowledge and experience to make such an illegal intervention happen. In this way, intrinsic Lavapiés street culture can be used to create a community space for the people themselves. And by giving the plot an actual use again, it prevents future speculators from inevitably building expensive tourist accommodation here.



[30] Various images taken during the fieldwork trip (2026)



The Takeover

While squatters usually occupy abandoned buildings, taking over a vacant lot takes a different strategy. Occupying the lot will be done overnight with a 20-foot sea container from the back of a truck. It can be swiftly placed on stilts on the lot and stay there rather inconspicuously for the first 48 hours, as that is the time squatters need to occupy a property before they can no longer be evicted by the police without a court order.

After that, when it has become de facto theirs, a staircase will be attached, giving the visitor a way to cross the four-metre-high wall and access the lot behind. And finally, a protective roof will be added to complete the composition, turning the sea container into a pavilion that eerily observes the urban surroundings, almost creature-like, from behind the wall.

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FINAL PRODUCT





The Guerrilla Gardening Shed

The goal for this lot is to become a community garden, so the function of the pavilion is to be a guerrilla gardening shed. The pavilion itself will house some basic amenities, like a kitchen and a toilet, while underneath there can be storage. There will be lots of space for gardening, to be realised by the people themselves, but also, most importantly, there has to be a place to get together. Just like aaa's Passage 56, this should become a place for social activity. So over time, the lot can be taken over by the people and will ultimately invite them to become a close community that cares for their neighbourhood and proposes similar community-engaging ideas on other lots, like, for example, the one opposite the street. Therefore, the design comes with a big shared table in the middle of the lot, perfect for garden parties and community dinners, but also for discussions and meetings on what else besides fruits and vegetables should grow here.

Considering the dry inland Mediterranean climate of Madrid, a sea container is almost the worst possible structure to be in. Without insulation, the metal shell starts conducting heat quickly from outside to inside, and when it becomes hot, starts radiating heat out itself. Placed within an urban canyon blocking what little wind there was, even the existing building walls can get up to 60°C in summer and start radiating heat out towards the container. So protection is required. An overhanging green roof will protect the container from sunlight, made with 40 centimetres of heavy sedum substrate. It acts as a twelve-hour thermal buffer, radiating its coolth down onto the container during the day, and its accumulated heat up to the sky during the night. The long-wave radiation coming from the urban canyon walls will be blocked by plants growing along trellises on the side of the container, and by all the greenery already within the community garden. Because the container sits on stilts, cooler air underneath is sucked in through small intakes on the bottom and large outtakes on the top, driven by the stack effect. All these measures make the container hospitable during most of the summer, and also serve as principles that will be applied to the building in act 2.



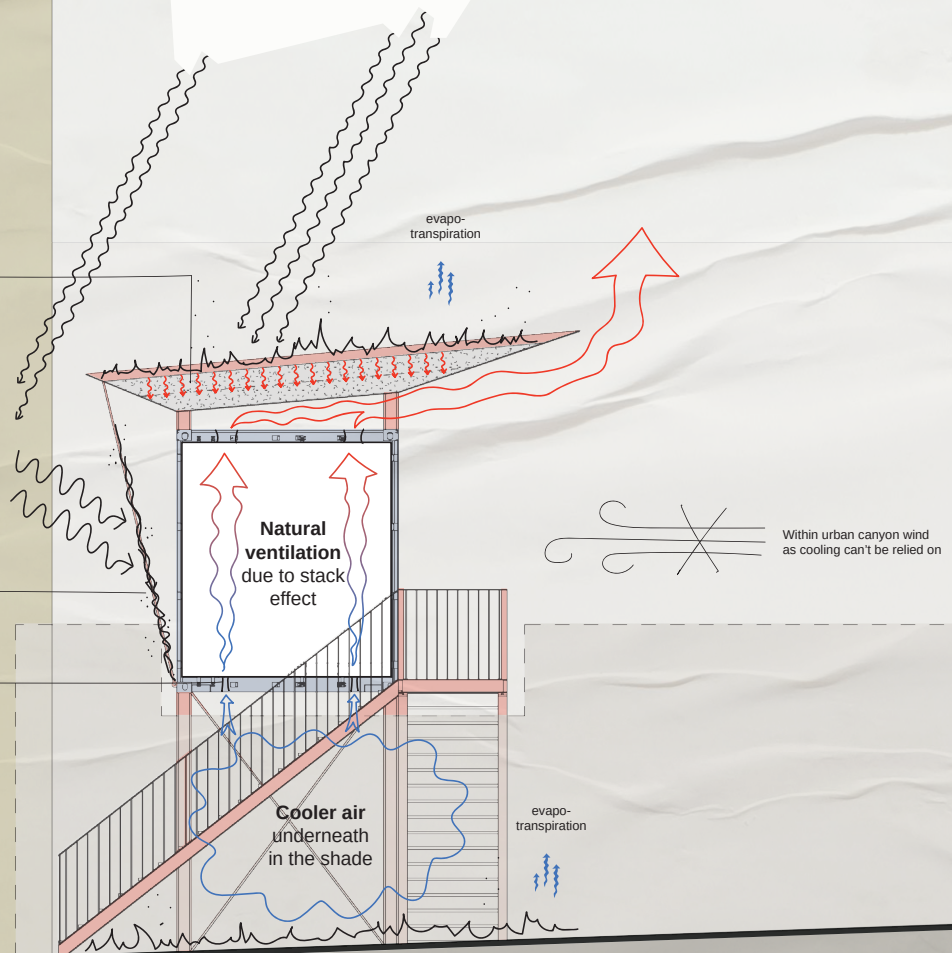
**Heavy sedum substrate
acts as thermal buffer**

Absorbing peak solar heat slowly
and shifting it toward night. 400mm
substrate creates a 12 hour time lag

**Surfaces can get
up to 60°C and
start radiating heat**

Trellis with climbing
plants blocks long
wave radiation

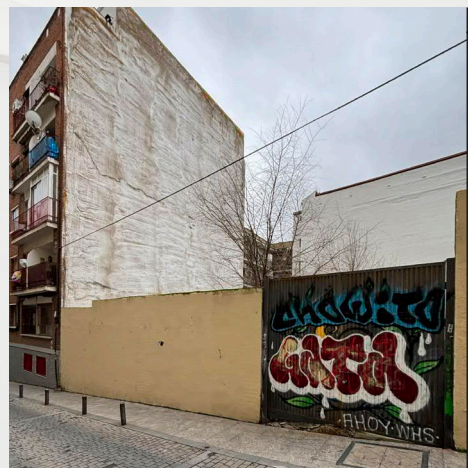
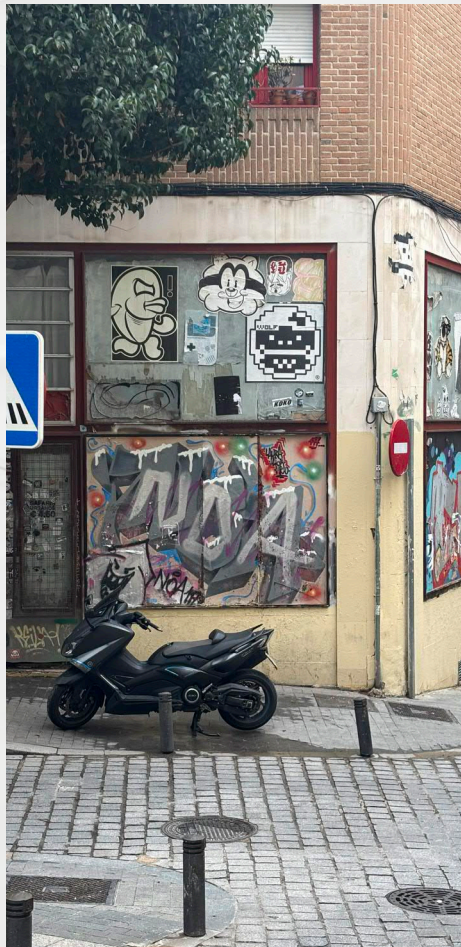
Small intakes cause
venturi effect; air moves
faster and feels cooler



Act 2 – The Symbiote

After a small engaged community has been established from act 1, they can start campaigning for something more ambitious. This lot, for example, is marked as "multi-purpose space for civic activities" by the municipality of Madrid, so therefore illegal occupation is not necessary and the building process can be more formalised. The lot is almost directly adjacent to two abandoned buildings, and on the opposite side of the street sits an alley that leads into yet another vacant lot.

The multi-purpose space will mostly keep its function, but a space for collectives will be added, modelled after the symbiotic self-management structure of CSA La Tabacalera. Any group of people with a shared concern or interest can form a non-profit '*colectivo*' and apply for a free space within the structure. Collectives could focus on art, performance, music, digital activism, the queer community, Afro communities, legal advice, helping out the homeless, etc. Next to the collectives, there will also be commissions carrying out maintenance and administrative tasks, and assembly meetings where matters concerning everyone are democratically discussed.



[31] Various images taken during the fieldwork trip (2026)

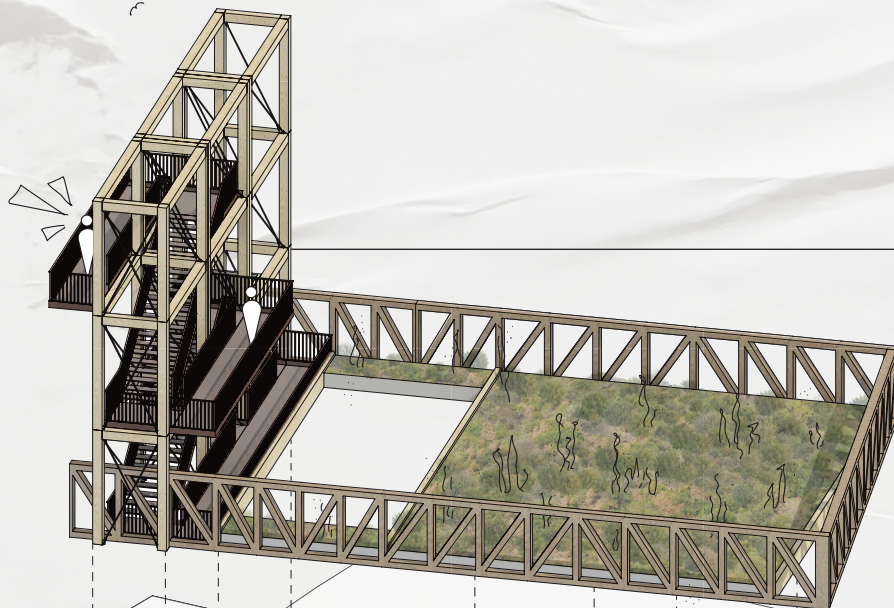
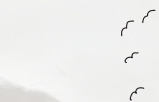


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Apart from the purpose, the spatial qualities of the site also influence the program. The lot is surrounded by three blank separating walls, while the fourth wall is left open to the street. These surfaces are seen as interfaces to the surrounding urban fabric through which the architectural intervention can interact with, and grow beyond the boundaries of the plot. One wall can serve as a backbone for an observation tower that grants access to nearby roofs and gives an overview of the surroundings, while another wall is punctured so the collective space can literally grow inside the other building. And finally, the last wall is intentionally left blank so the white surface can reflect as much daylight as possible. Collectives and residents, just like architectural intervention and existing residential buildings, are living in balanced symbiosis within the same urban block.

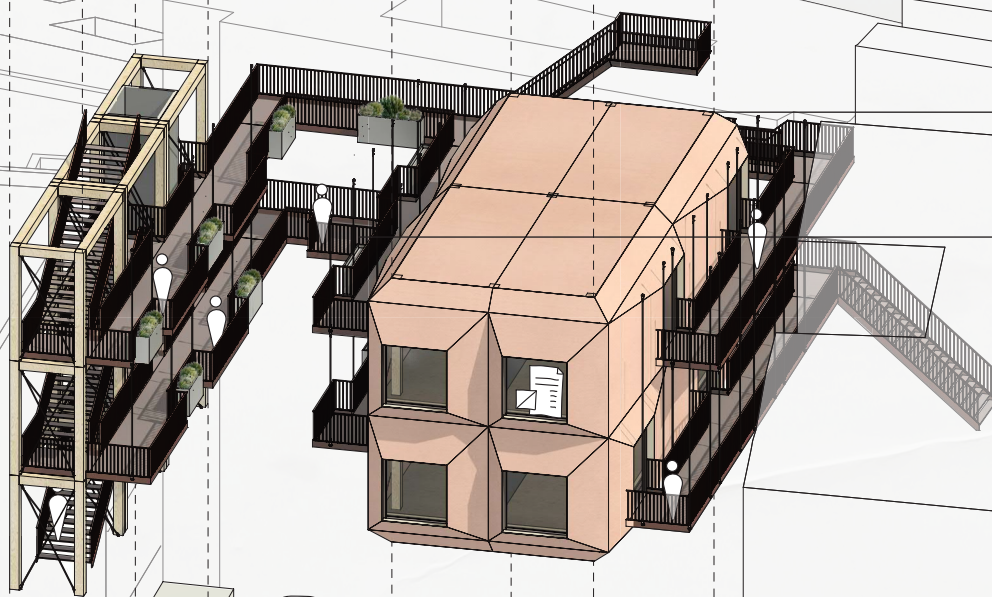
The result is an eclectic mix of layered functions. Most prominent are the eight spaces for the collectives. The roof above activates the square, protecting it from rain and summer heat. The assembly courtyard is for meetings and for meeting new people. The vertical circulation core acts as an observation tower, and the basement is for activities that produce too much sound. The collective space becomes an intervention that inspires people to spontaneously use their urban surroundings in a new, better, and even unconventional way.





OBSERVATION TOWER

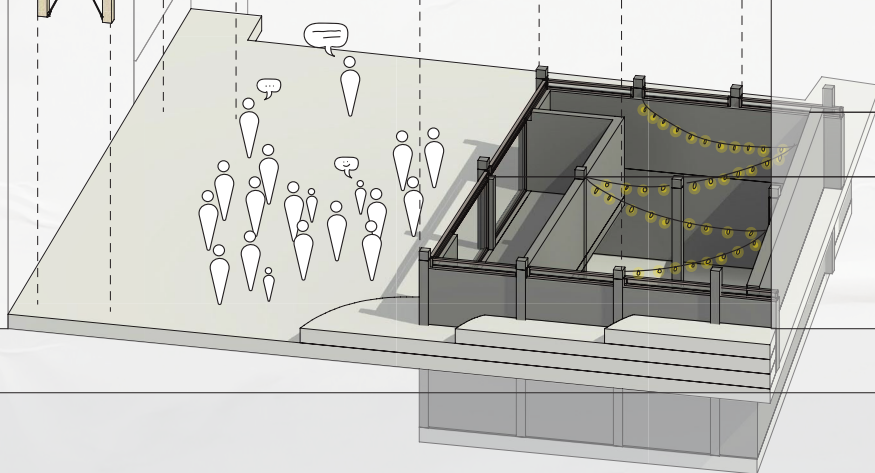
GREEN ROOF



COLECTIVOS

ASSEMBLY

81



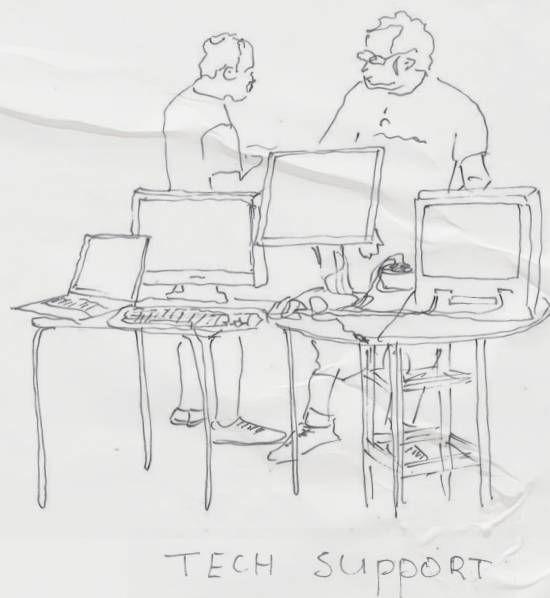
SÓTANO

CAFÉ

Colectivos

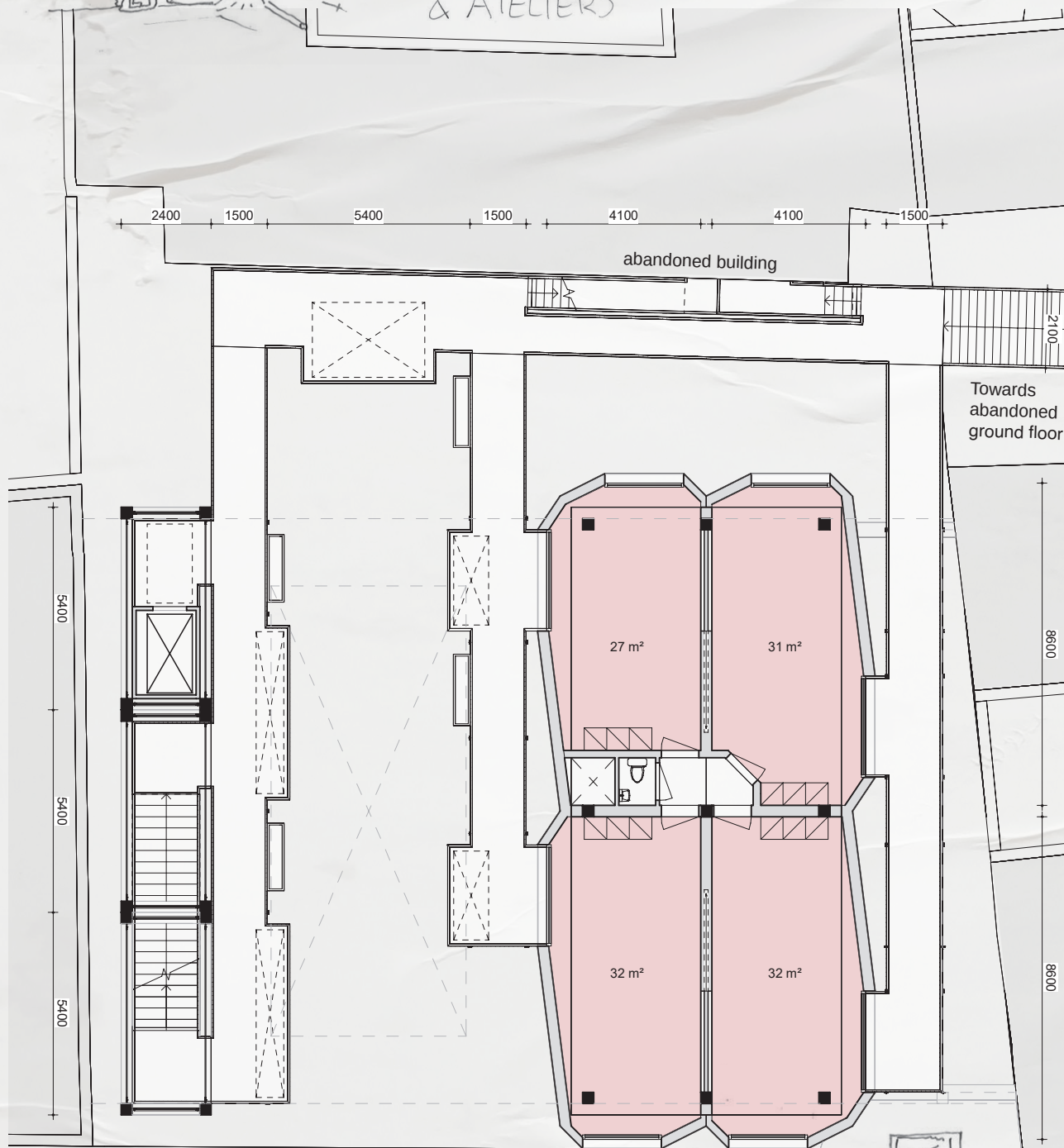
On the first and second floor are the eight collective spaces of each 30m², which can all be accessed from the suspended catwalks outside. Each of them gets a little kitchen unit with storage, while the rest of the space can be filled in and decorated as desired by the collective. The space can be shared by multiple collectives at different times of the week, or combined into a bigger 60m² space by opening the separating walls. The program has the ability to expand into the abandoned building on the west side via the catwalk, where there can be more collectives or artist housing. And it can also expand into the abandoned ground floor of the building on the north side, accessed by the staircase. This space, with high north-facing windows, will be perfect for ateliers or workshops.

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WORKSHOP
& ATELIERS



83

Street



The Assembly

Next to the collectives is the assembly space, consisting of the ground floor kept completely free of columns, and the two levels of suspended catwalks above, acting both as circulation and as a means to interact with the created courtyard. The multilevel space will be perfect for assembly meetings and live music performances, but also for relaxing, taking a coffee break, reading, meeting other people, or poetry performances. Alongside the catwalks are little balconies that will activate the space: interactive displays from adjacent collectives, a place to add some seating, planters for greenery, and a bigger balcony at the short edge of the courtyard, large enough for a small acoustic band to play.

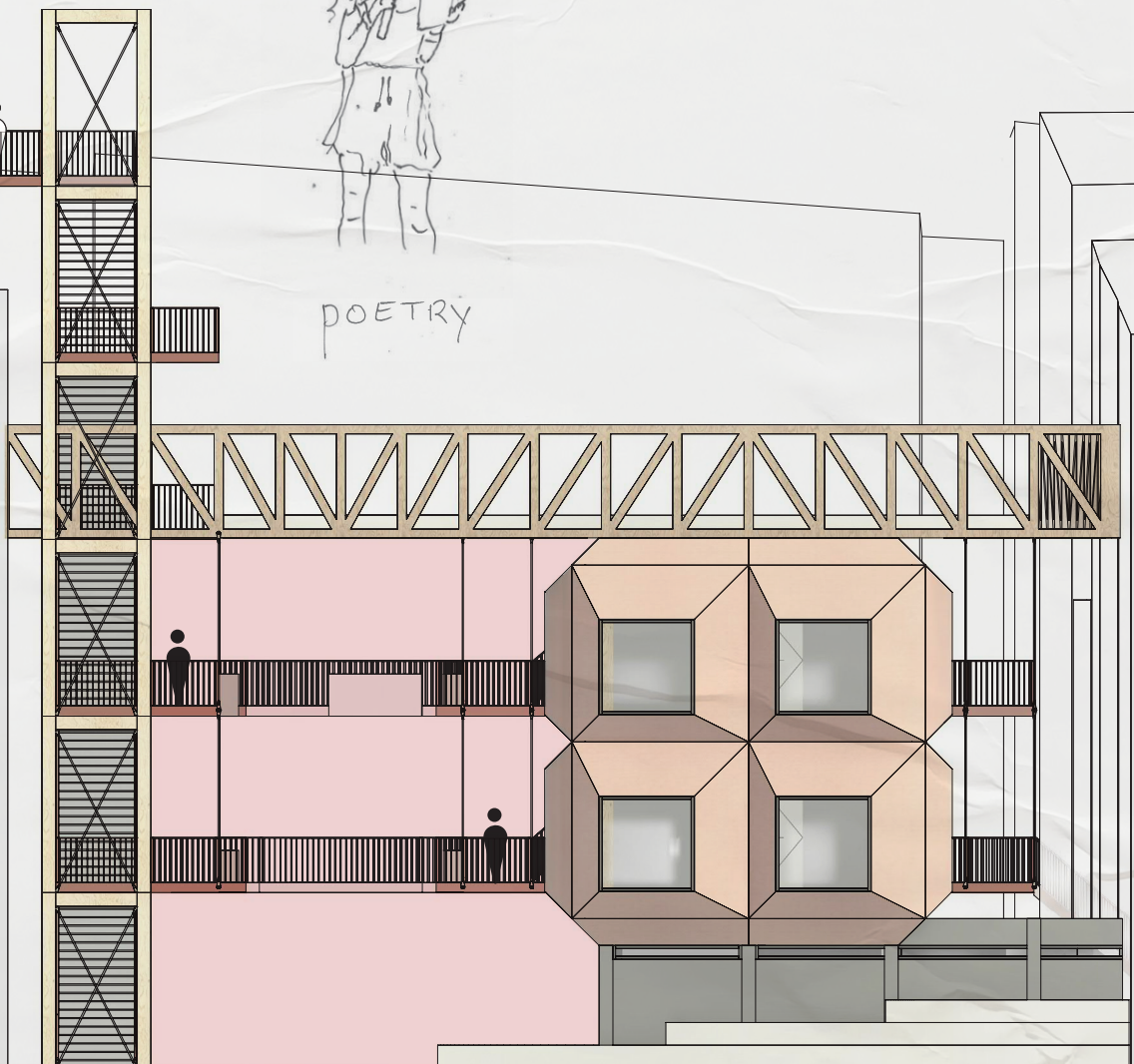
84

Flat roof

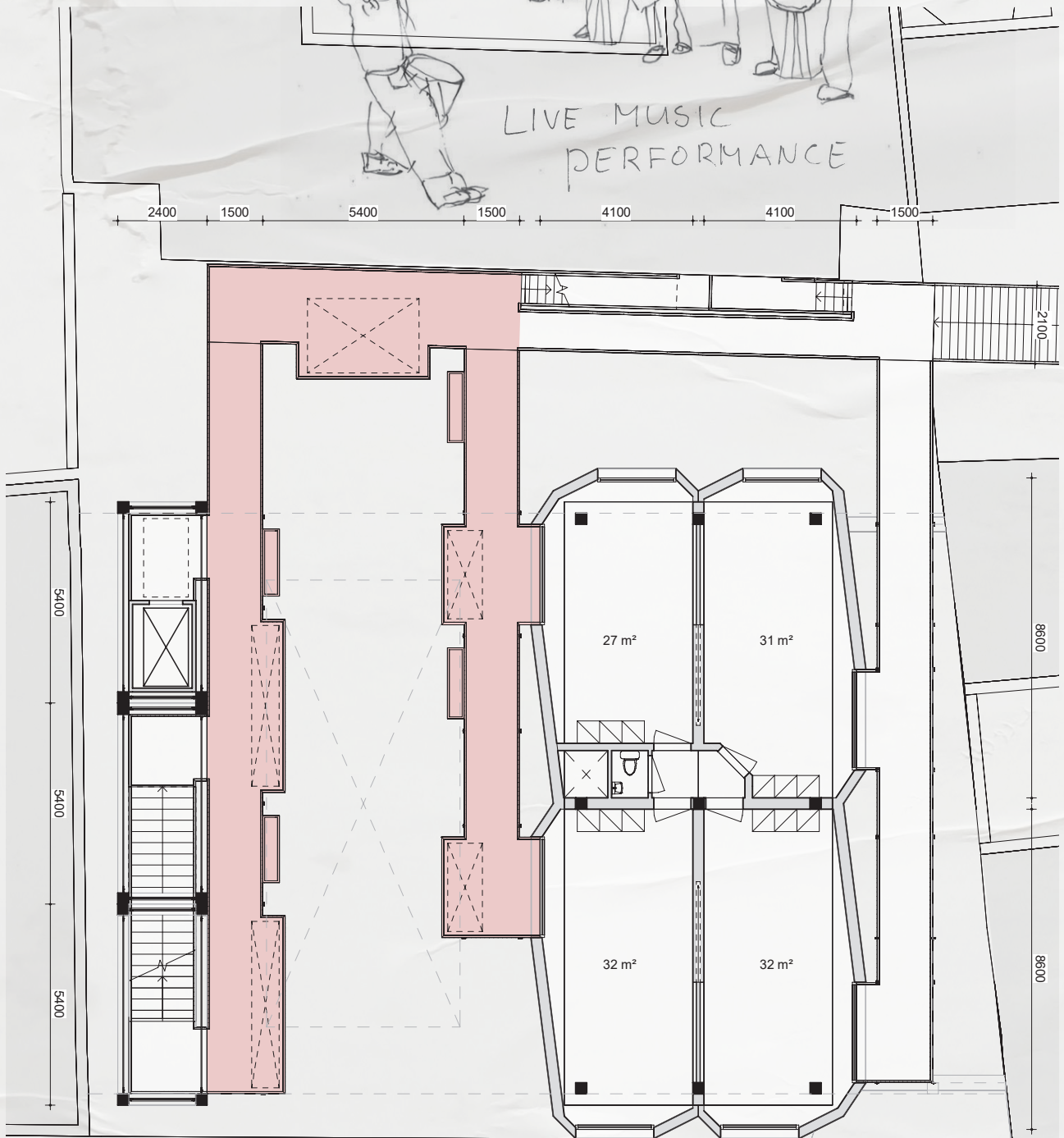


POETRY

FINAL PRODUCT



1:100 elevation view from the street



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Street

Inevitably this collective space will attract tourists and visitors, and rather than trying to keep them away they should have a clear dedicated destination they will want to go to. Therefore, the vertical circulation space turns into an observation tower at the top level, mixing the tourist and the user only at the assembly space while keeping the collective spaces in relative privacy. This approach hopefully creates a mutual respect between the two and takes some of the controversy and friction around touristification away.





ASSEMBLY MEETING

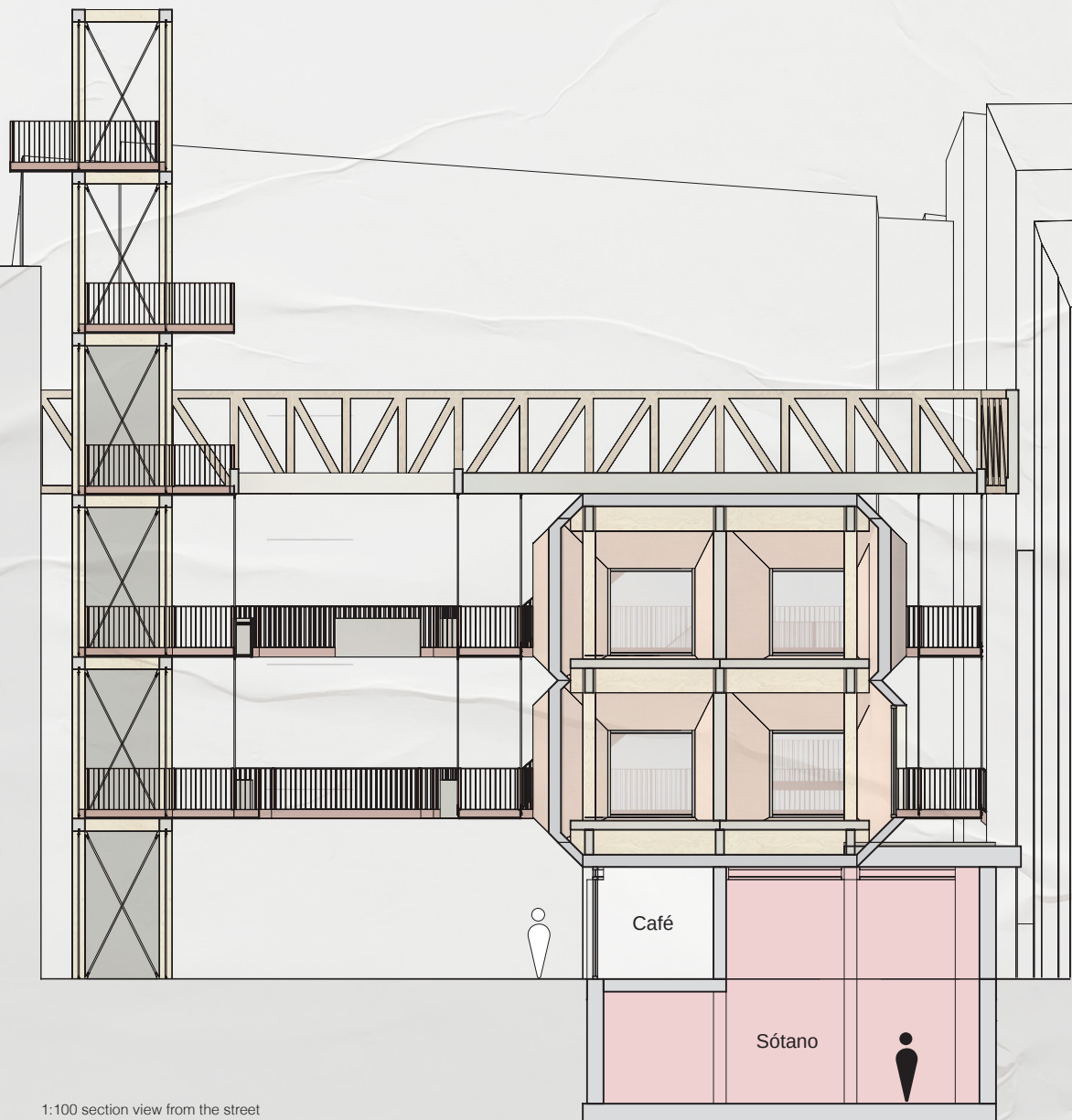


Sótano

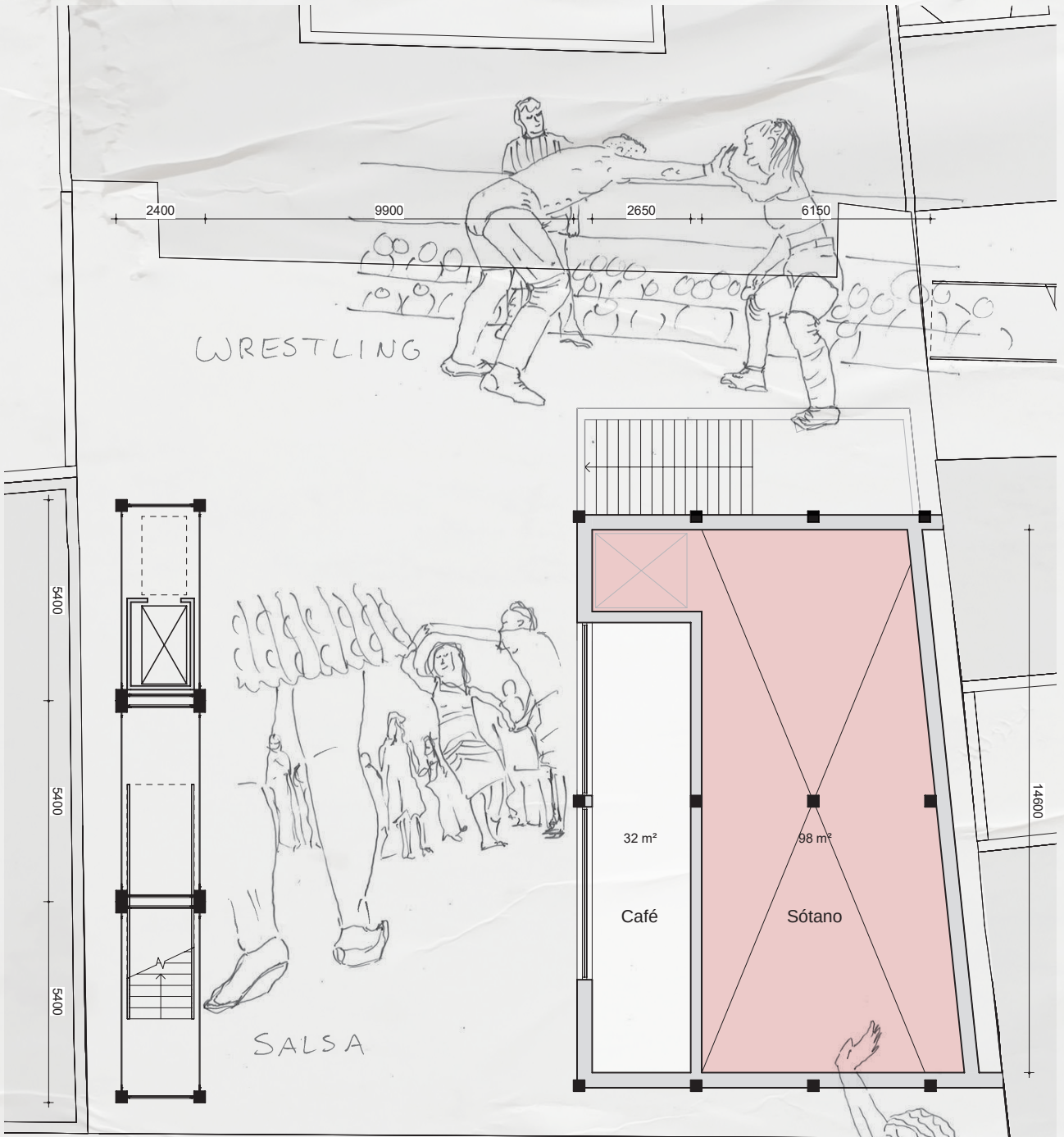
Below the collectives, halfway submerged into the ground, is the Sótano, the basement. This double-height space with little daylight and proper sound-proofing will provide for the bolder and louder activities of the collectives, like raves, music, salsa evenings, wrestling matches, audiovisual exhibitions, but also assembly meetings during the hot summer days.

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FINAL PRODUCT



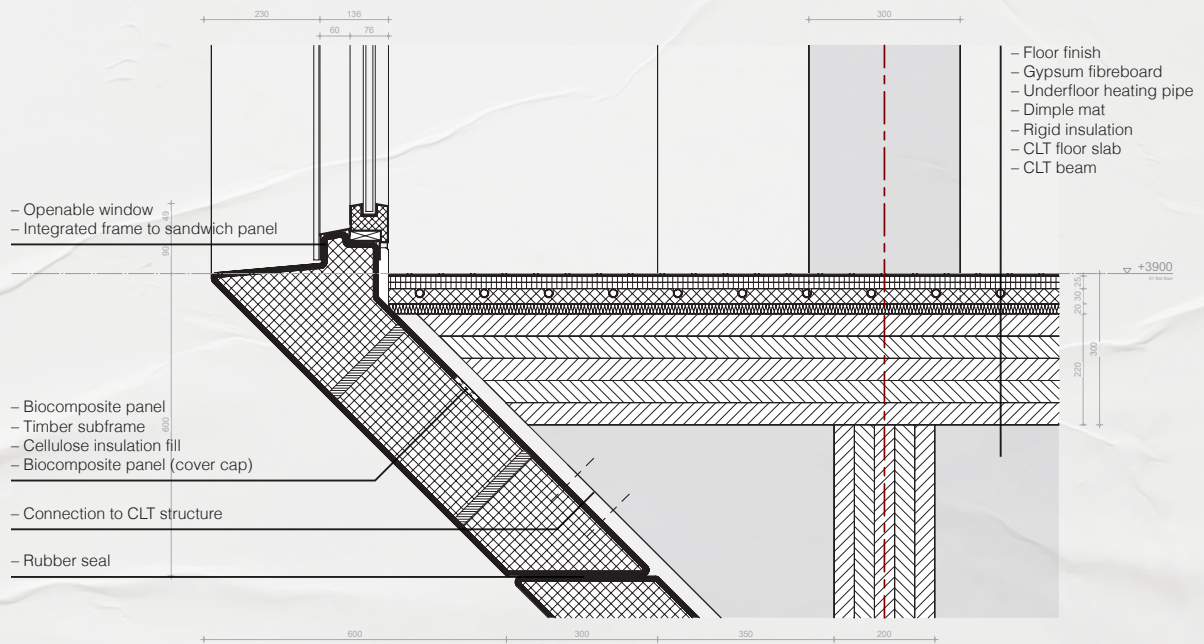
1:100 section view from the street



Facade Fragment

The structure is made out of CLT columns, beams, and floors designed for disassembly. The roof acts again as a thermal buffer, made out of 40 centimetres of heavy sedum substrate. It can keep the collectives and the assembly cooler for up to twelve hours. The facade is made out of bio-composite sandwich panels that can easily be moulded in any shape that is required. The bio-composite panels, made out of 33% reed, 33% chalk, and 33% bio-based resin, are attached to each other with a wooden substructure and then filled with cellulose for insulation. The 3900 x 3900mm facade elements with integrated windows are made off-site and transported via truck to be easily attached to the CLT structure.

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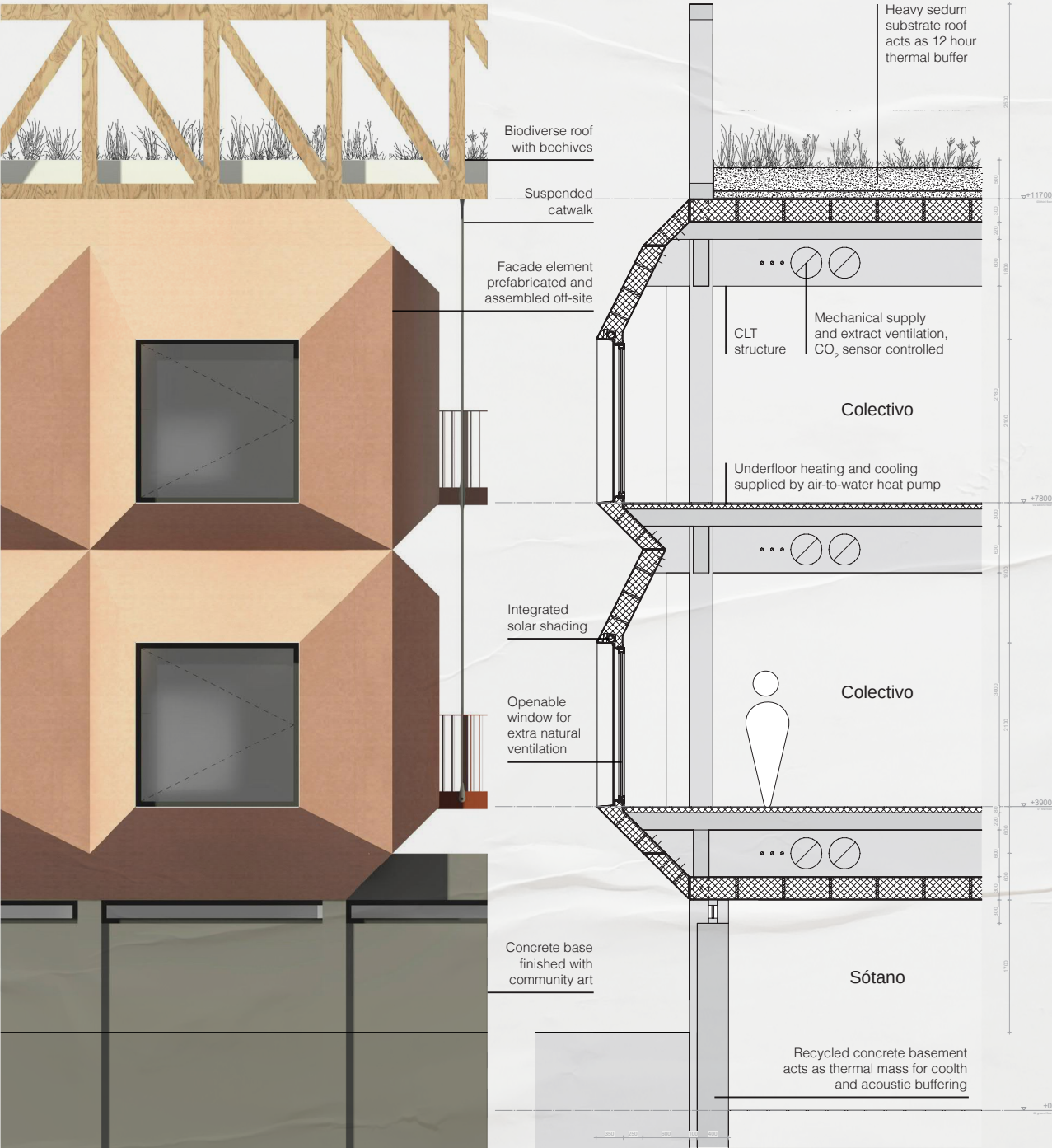
1:5 detail (scaled to 1:15) showing the connection of the facade element to the CLT structure

FINAL PRODUCT



Bio-composite panels, made out of 33% reed, 33% chalk, and 33% bio-based resin

On-site and off-site, the building team can be assisted by the local community through the process of participatory building. Skilled people can volunteer to help out, creating a closer bond between them and the building. For example, Lavapiés traditionally has a large undocumented population who by law are not allowed to work; allowing them to volunteer helps their integration within the neighbourhood. By using sustainable materials and participatory building, the collective space becomes a durable part of Lavapiés.



1:20 (scaled to 1:80) front facade view

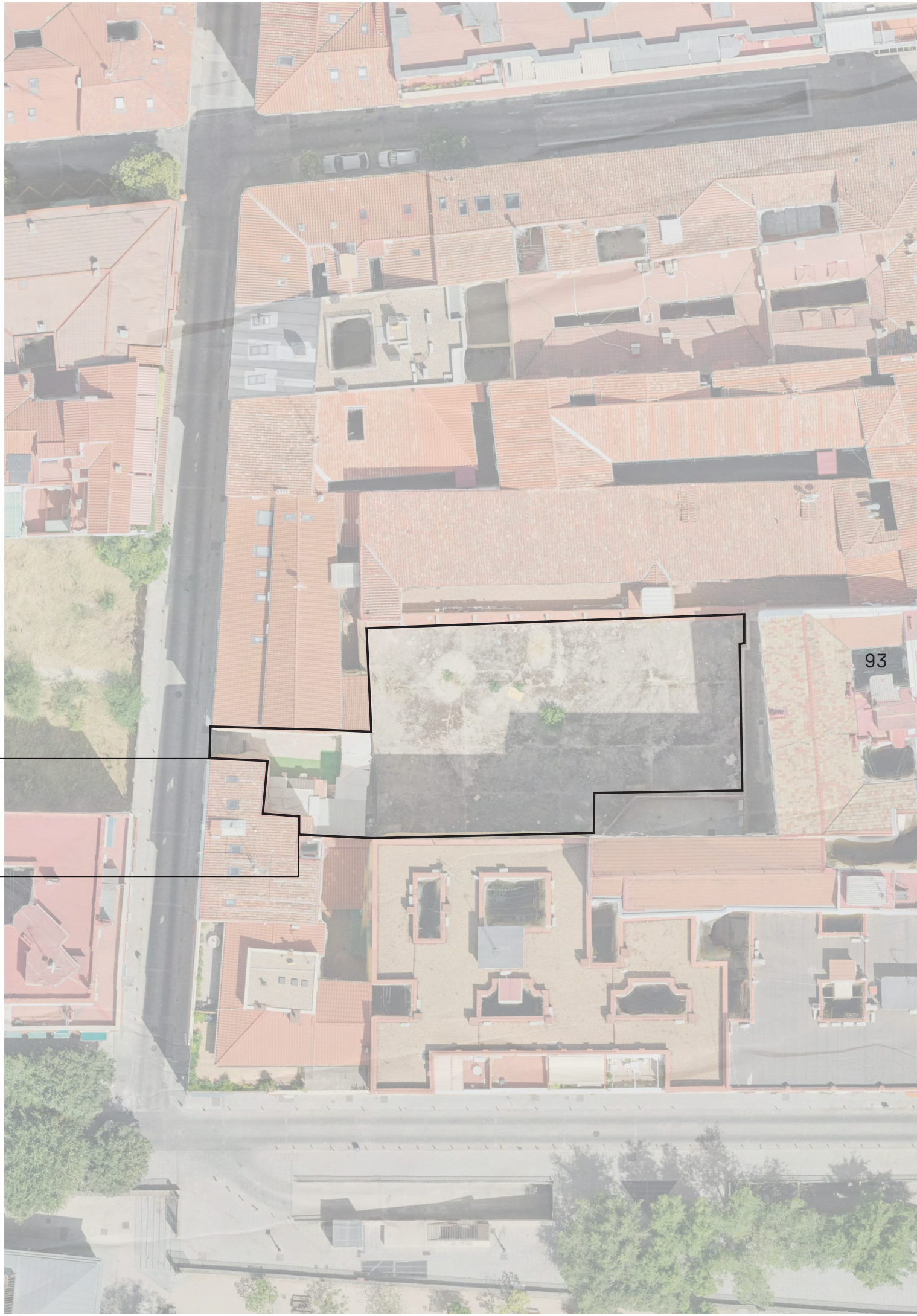
1:20 (scaled to 1:80) facade section

Act 3 – The Fossil

The gardening shed is a parasitic intruder. The collective space, a thriving symbiote. But what happens after, when an organism fossilises? When we look at fossils, we see the past, romanticising things that have already happened. And in a way, any cultural activity is a fossil: an event that happened on a fixed time and location, a fossilic imprint a thriving community leaves on its surroundings. The people from the collectives will also want to express themselves, for which they can use the performance patio, accessible through an alley opposite the assembly space. Culture, cinema, exhibition, theatre created by the collectives can be displayed here to the city and become a space for them to leave their imprint on history.



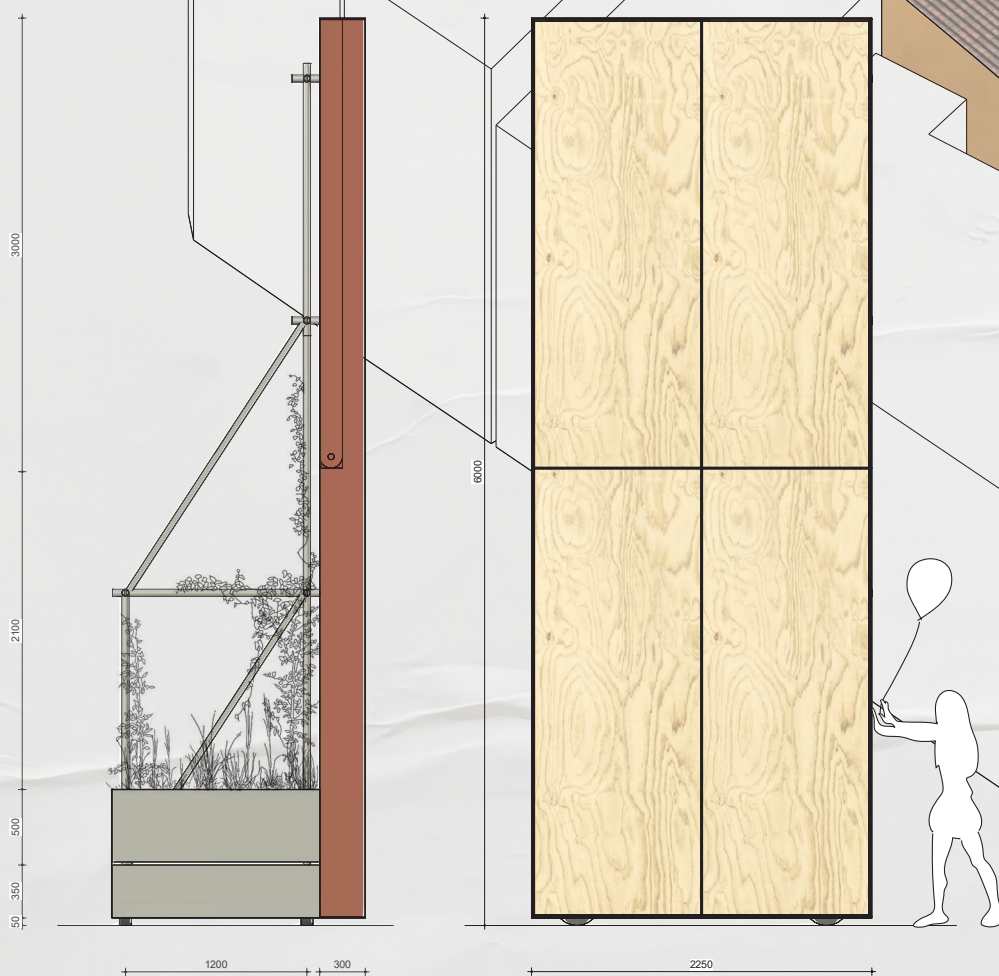
[32] Various images taken during the fieldwork trip (2026)



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15 Wall Segments

Adjacent to this plot sits a traditional Lavapiés typology, the '*corrala*', a multi-storey dwelling where apartments on each floor open up to a gallery facing a shared patio where much of the community life took place. Lina Bo Bardi pointed out that the lines between the real life theatre, happening on these galleries, and the scripted theatre on stage can be blurred to create an even more immersive experience. Therefore the intervention will be kept as unobtrusive as possible to retain the communal patio feeling and to create an unobstructed connection to the surroundings. The result is a collection of fifteen monumental wall segments that can be moved by the community over tracks into different and unique configurations.



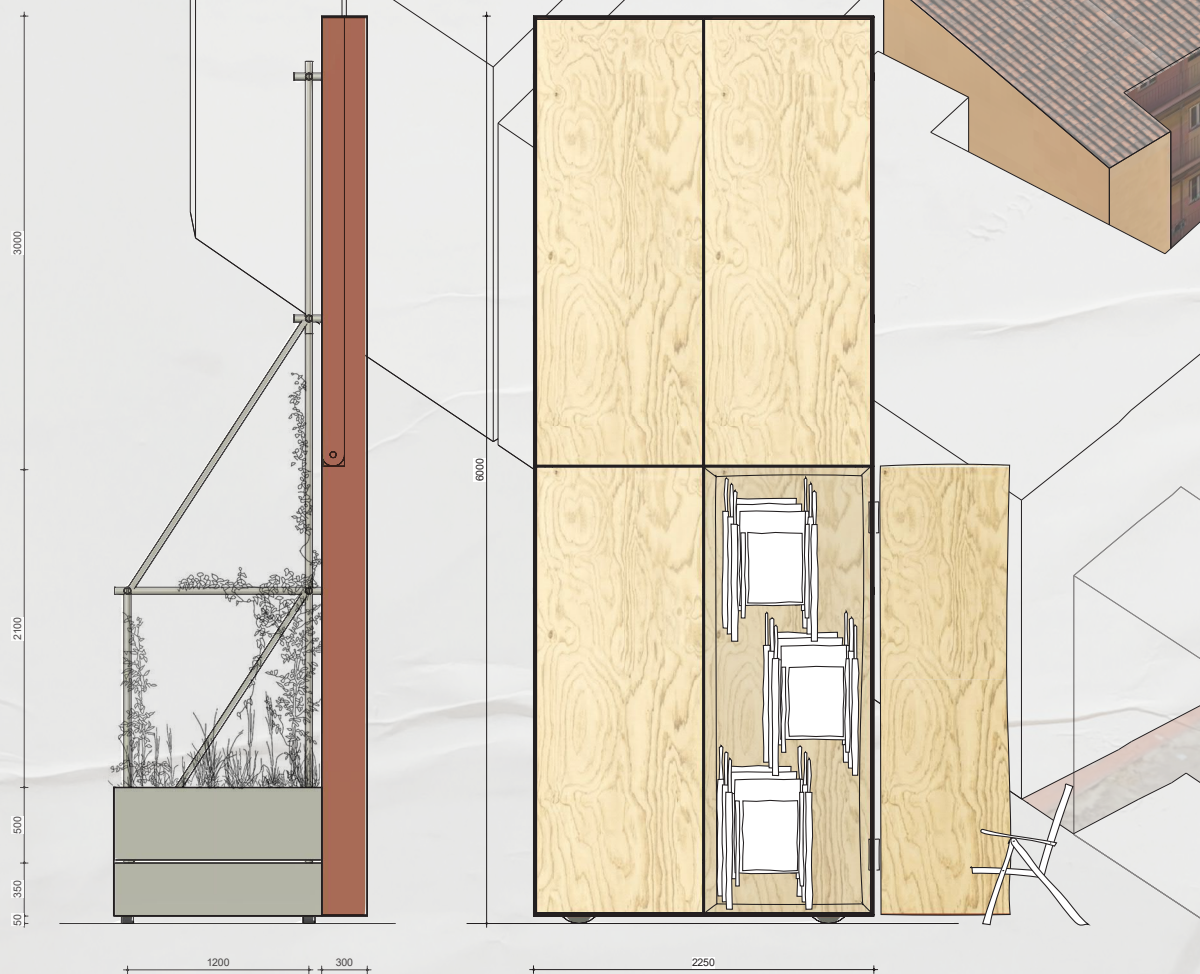
1:20 elevations (scaled to 1:50) showing a moveable wall segment



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Silent Cinema

One configuration can be the cinema, where multiple segments add up to a projection screen. Openable panels reveal storage within the walls, ready for chairs and headphones to be put away when the screening is done.



1:20 elevations (scaled to 1:50) showing the openable storage panels



Theatre

Another one of these configurations will of course be the theatre. The wall segments can become a stage with the corrala as a backdrop, by moving the walls even during the performance, the theatre becomes an immersive experience where surroundings and set pieces can be dynamically shown and hidden as desired. And by breaking the line of sight from the sound source, the walls additionally act as noise barriers. Additionally during the day fabric canopies protect from the sun.



1:20 elevations (scaled to 1:50) showing the retractable canopy



Exhibition

For an exhibition, the wall segments can act as canvases themselves, ready for the art collectives to show their work. On the backside, the artwork can be comfortably observed from benches integrated in planters, also doubling as a counterweight preventing the walls from toppling over. The planters and benches also activate the patio when it is not in use by the collectives, which will probably be most of the weekdays. Then the residents from the adjacent buildings can use this place to read a book in the shade, let their children play in the protected courtyard, or meet up with their neighbours.

100

FINAL PRODUCT

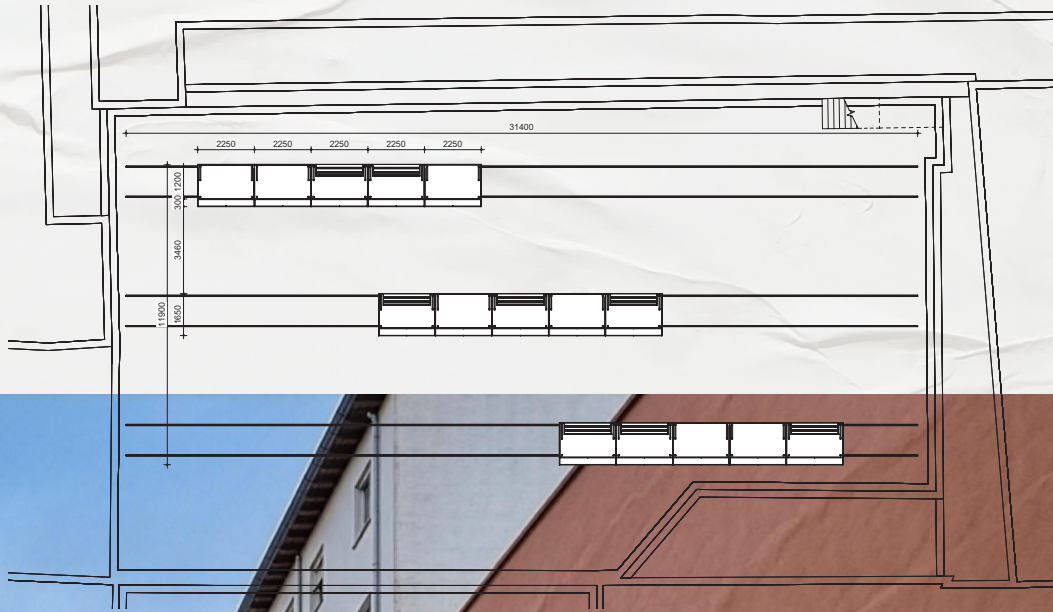


1:20 elevations (scaled to 1:50) showing a moveable wall segment



Ultimately, the fifteen segments are intentionally not fixed, making any configuration and intended use just temporary. Apart from theatre, cinema, or exhibitions, there can be festivals, silent discos, public debates, and much more. Above all, the space should inspire the people to use this patio, and any part of their neighbourhood for that matter, in any way they want. Because in the end, Lavapiés belongs to no one but the community itself.





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1:100 floorplan (scaled to 1:300) of performance patio in cinema configuration

Timeline

The parasitic, symbiotic, and fossilic interventions should be seen as experiments that are free to lead to unexpected results. The timeline offers an overview of how these experiments begin, how they set up the requirements for the next act, how long they last, and what happens after they expire. But it is not a rulebook. If the people see an opportunity to alter or improve upon it, they are encouraged to do so. Better still is when they feel inspired to devise experiments of their own, and in doing so, the people of Lavapiés take ownership of their own neighbourhood.

Act 1

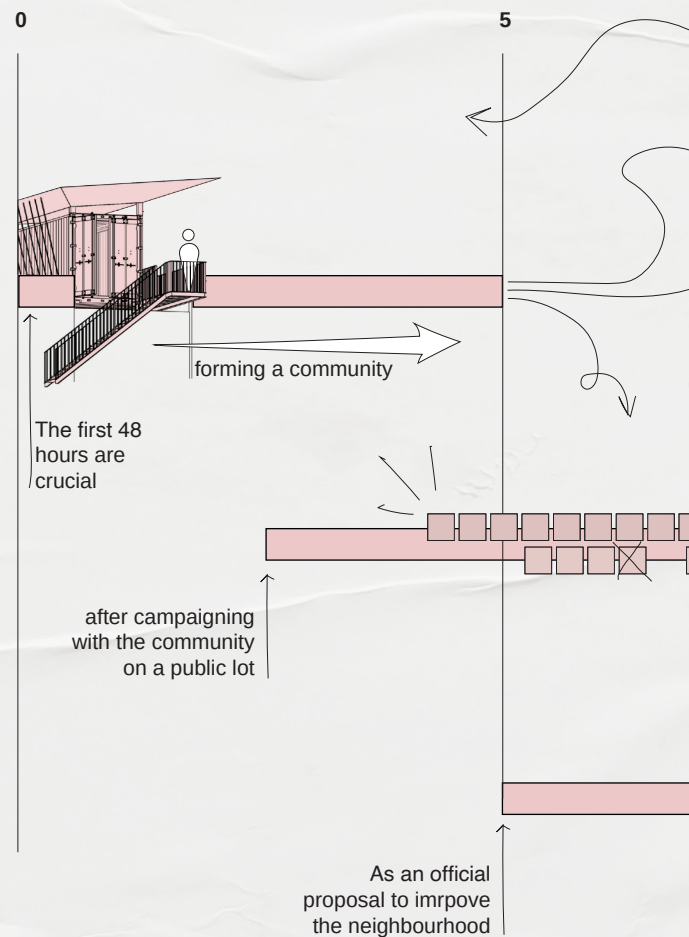
the parasite

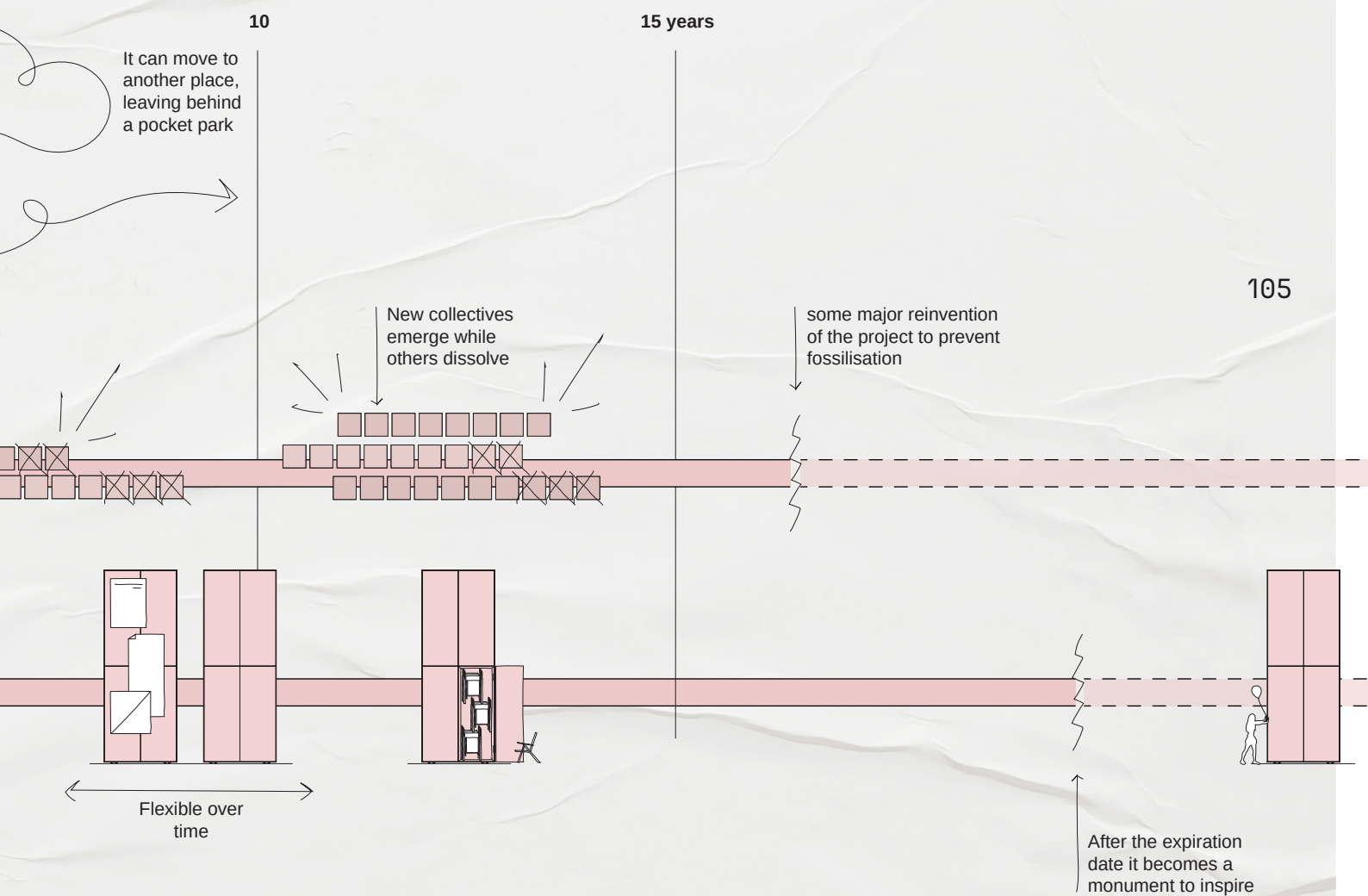
Act 2

the symbiote

Act 3

the fossil







In Retrospect

The objective this study sets out is to find out in what way para-architecture could counterbalance gentrification in Lavapiés. The most explicit example of that is squatting, where people believe that by occupying buildings they can physically block speculators from investing, while more importantly, they create awareness for gentrification and preserve the sense of community by hosting free cultural activities. While this parasitic approach is very effective short term, symbiotic self-management examples like CSA La Tabacalera, Passage 56, and WUK have proven that a more formalised version of para-architecture also has a lasting effect on counterbalancing gentrification. But it has also become clear that para-architectural relations change over time: parasites become symbiotes and symbiotes become fossils. And ironically, this almost inevitable process of fossilisation sometimes even accelerates gentrification itself.

Shifting from research to design, it became clear that the architectural interventions against gentrification needed to be para-architectural: a spontaneous, unconventional, and flexible cultural space in Lavapiés. A cultural space divided into three acts was designed. Looking back at the final product, I am genuinely convinced that this collection of interventions can counterbalance gentrification, even in a little way. And by splitting the design into three, the project got more experimental in nature and more enjoyable to work on, as the risk of a failing design was also divided by three. Especially the gardening shed and the performance patio achieved their envisioned unconventional approach towards architecture, and became almost art-like installations. When comparing the final product to the design agenda, each set out position made its way into the project. Only the position of temporality clashes with the permanence of the collective space, which ended up maybe too conventional. Although it very effectively fulfils its desired program, there is still potential here for improvements, either to do more with it, or to do less.

Doing less resonates very much with a question that has come up at every part of the process: is doing nothing not better at all? Does creating a green park, popular collective venue, and performance stage not accelerate gentrification itself? And should I, within my very formal role as architectural designer, even interfere with spontaneous self-management practices?

First of all, such a change affecting the community should be influenced by the community. Therefore, the final design should in no way be seen as final, but as a possible way to do it. It can help in showing the people the potential of their neighbourhood and how this can be achieved. But in the end, it is the people who will make this project happen, so the next step would be to rewrite this design and strategy towards a Spanish audience and present it to a group of Lavapiés activists. It can start the conversation about the new cultural space, discuss changes that better counterbalances gentrification, and use their input to improve the design. My role as designer then becomes enabling the community to envision a shared ideal.

And secondly, to address the concern about accelerating gentrification, the introduction already states that gentrification is perhaps even intrinsic to every popular neighbourhood and can't be avoided. Seeing it as plainly bad is too black and white, since changes in the character and use of a neighbourhood have been part of almost every place in the world. Fighting gentrification can even be considered conservative, a desire to keep everything how it once was. But on the other hand, if change results in a homogenous place for tourists and rich people, then there is nothing wrong with dreaming of how diverse

and alive it once was. When intervening, we can make choices on what to improve and what to keep, but doing nothing in Lavapiés is not a solution. We as designers and people shape our surroundings with care and respect for the city, but everything doesn't have to stay the same always; we don't have to live in the museum our ancestors created for us. Change is inevitable, but instead of standing by, we can direct this change into improvement.

And at last, we return to the antagonist of this story, the rat. When rats invade town, it is bad, and when they appear throughout the graduation report, it is seen as unprofessional and alienating towards the reader. But this notion itself signifies the friction that has led me down the path of para-architecture. Things that some consider unwanted, like illegal squatting, windowless blank walls, tight alleyways, and barren concrete patches, are truly fascinating only because people feel the need to fix them. But celebrating this intriguing dissonance can be so much more inspiring and creatively rewarding than simply following the rules. The embodiment of this belief are the rats; they stand for shifting focus every once in a while, to love the unloved, and to not always do what is expected. The rat is there to remind us that there is beauty in imperfection.





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