

The Dwellers of Väikese Rannavärava

Tallinn, Estonia, 2024-2025
Kushav Dharvish Aubeeluck

Research Plan
A Matter of Scale



METHODS OF ANALYSIS AND IMAGINATION

Overtourism in Historical Cities

In historical cities, the consequences of overtourism are particularly complex, as tourism development is often connected to the preservation of heritage. While tourism can provide the necessary funding for maintaining heritage sites, it can also compromise the social and functional diversity of these spaces, turning community neighbourhoods into tourism monocultures. This issue is quite known in many European cities, such as Venice and Barcelona, where rising tourist numbers have increased the cost of living and real estate prices, leading to depopulation and a decline in the quality of life for residents (Talk et al., 2023). Residential areas often become “touristified,” with short-term rentals displacing locals and altering the character of neighbourhoods. This process can marginalize the resident population and lead to hostility between locals and visitors, eroding cultural identity and social cohesion (Peeters et al., 2018, pp. 39, 40).

Overtourism can be understood as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors’ experiences in a negative way” (UNWTO, 2018, p. 4).

Problem Statement

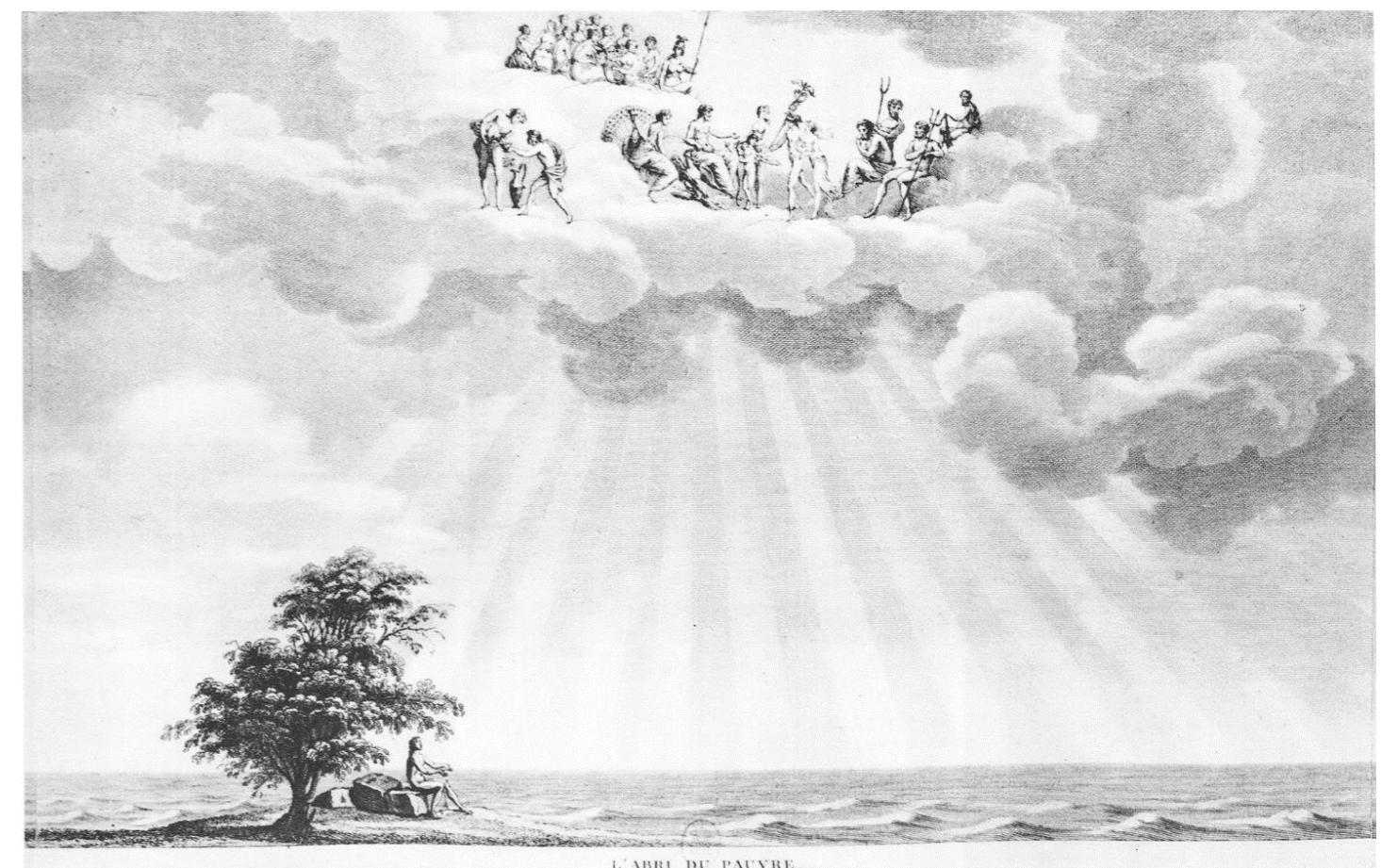


Figure 01| L'Abri du Pauvre by Ledoux, C., 1804

Problem Statement

Extinction of Tallinn Old Town

In Tallinn, tourism has grown rapidly, with foreign visitor numbers increasing from 160,000 in 1985 to 4.6 million in 2018. Simultaneously, the population of the Old Town has decreased from 6,000 to 2,300, raising concerns about the impact of tourism on urban diversity and local communities. This extreme disbalance can be better understood when we consider that Tallinn Old Town had more tourists per inhabitant than Venice before the pandemic (Talk et al., 2023).

The mass departure of the Old Town's permanent residents is largely due to the growing number of buildings used for short-term rentals or other tourism-oriented purposes, like hotels and Airbnb accommodations. According to the Tallinn City Council (2014, p. 44), these buildings contribute to seasonal fluctuations, leaving the area underutilized during off-peak times and failing to meet the needs of permanent residents.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily stopped mass tourism, starting discussions about the need for a more sustainable urban tourism model. As noted by Talk et al. (2023), the traditional tourism model that prioritized

quantity over quality and favoured economic growth over residents' well-being is now being questioned globally, with calls for a model that focuses on sustainable urban development, prioritizing local populations and entrepreneurs. This is becoming increasingly important in order to avoid tourism monocultures and ensure the long-term sustainability of historic city centres.

This paradoxical relationship between the development of tourism and the preservation of Tallinn Old Town, therefore leads me to my research question:

How can an architectural intervention serve as a precedent for the preservation and regeneration of Tallinn Old Town?



Reading the City

To understand this social challenge that Tallinn Old Town is facing, it is important to recognise that space is not merely a background for social activities, but is actually an active product. This spatial concept consists of a spatial triad which includes the conceived, perceived and lived dimensions. Conceived space refers to the planned and conceptualised spaces; Perceived space is how space is physically organised and utilised in everyday life; Lived space is the perceptions and lived experiences of people and the personal meanings they attach to this space (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38, 39).

To understand social space complexities and resulting spatial narratives, it is therefore crucial to also understand these three spaces since this implies that every society produces its own spatial layouts which is a reflection of its social relations and mode of production, therefore challenging simplistic perceptions of urban spaces as basic collections of people and buildings. Despite the diversity in spatial layouts and forms, societies implicitly accept certain spatial norms, creating shared spaces that support social interactions and communal life (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 8, 56). These shared spaces, therefore either discourage or encourage social life to unfold, shaping people's presence and experience within them.

However, overtourism in Tallinn Old Town has fragmented and commodified its spaces, creating what I would describe as 'unshared spaces'. This process is threatening the social and cultural fabric of the Old Town resulting in an unsustainable urban development as mentioned previously. Jacobs (1992, pp. 117-120) attributes this issue to a lack of deep social connections, attachment and permanence within such spaces. Therefore, to create a socially cohesive and resilient neighbourhood in Tallinn Old Town, I must go beyond its physicality and search into how it is perceived, conceived and lived in.

To achieve this, my research partner Clarisse and I identified symbolic conceived spaces (landmarks) in Tallinn's City Centre that reflect distinct stages in its historical, social and architectural evolution (Figure 03). These spaces will serve as markers for studying its thresholds, its various perceived spaces- its tangible architectural forms and urban layouts (Figure 04). The analysis of these complex layers, will require a set of specific methods which I will expand on in the following pages, so that I can hopefully understand the diverse urban experiences and interactions that define the lived spaces of Tallinn's City Centre. This layered analysis will inform responsive design principles that address the social and spatial needs of Tallinn Old Town.

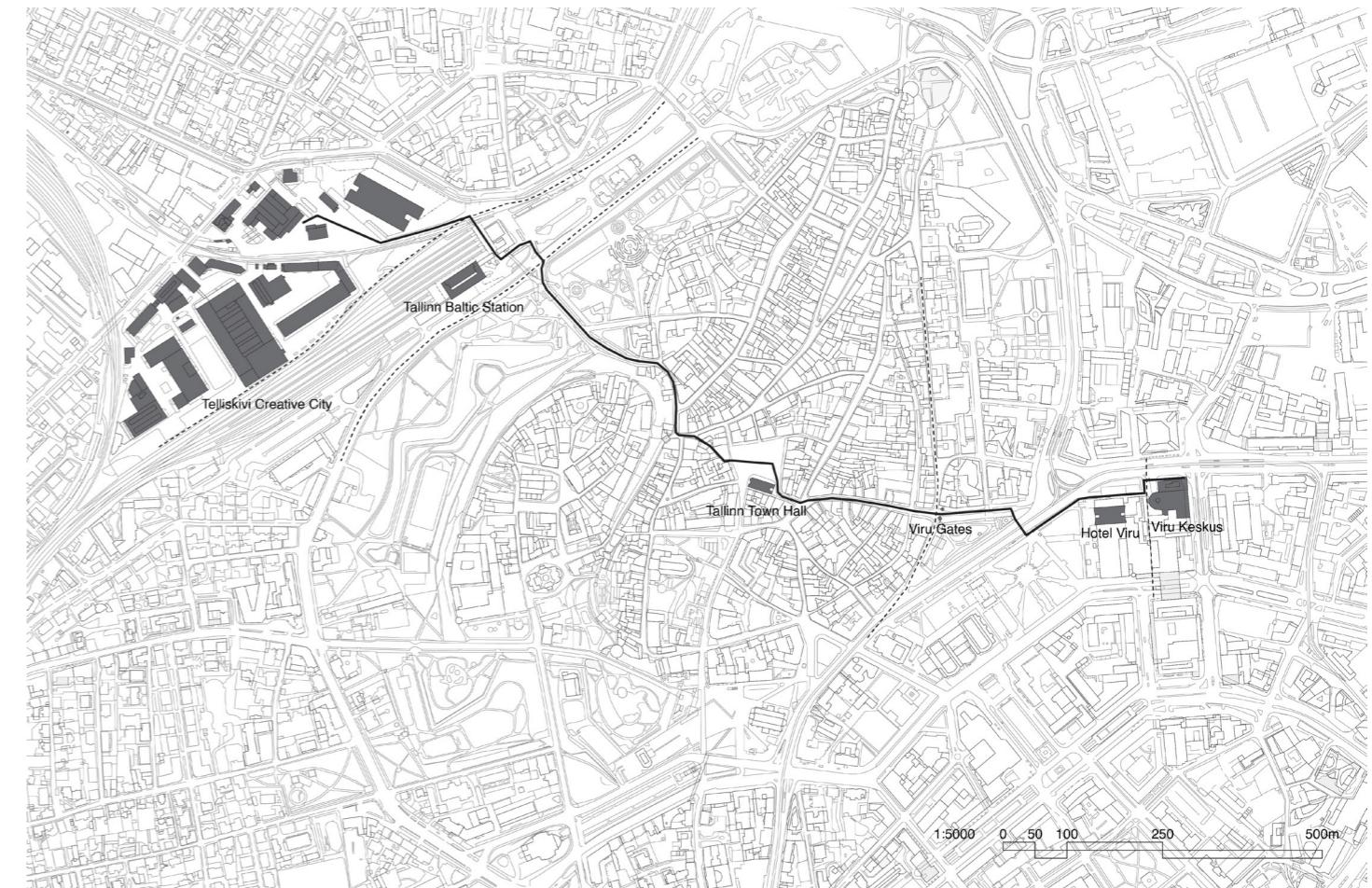


Figure 03| Tallinn City Centre: Landmarks as Symbolic Conceived Spaces

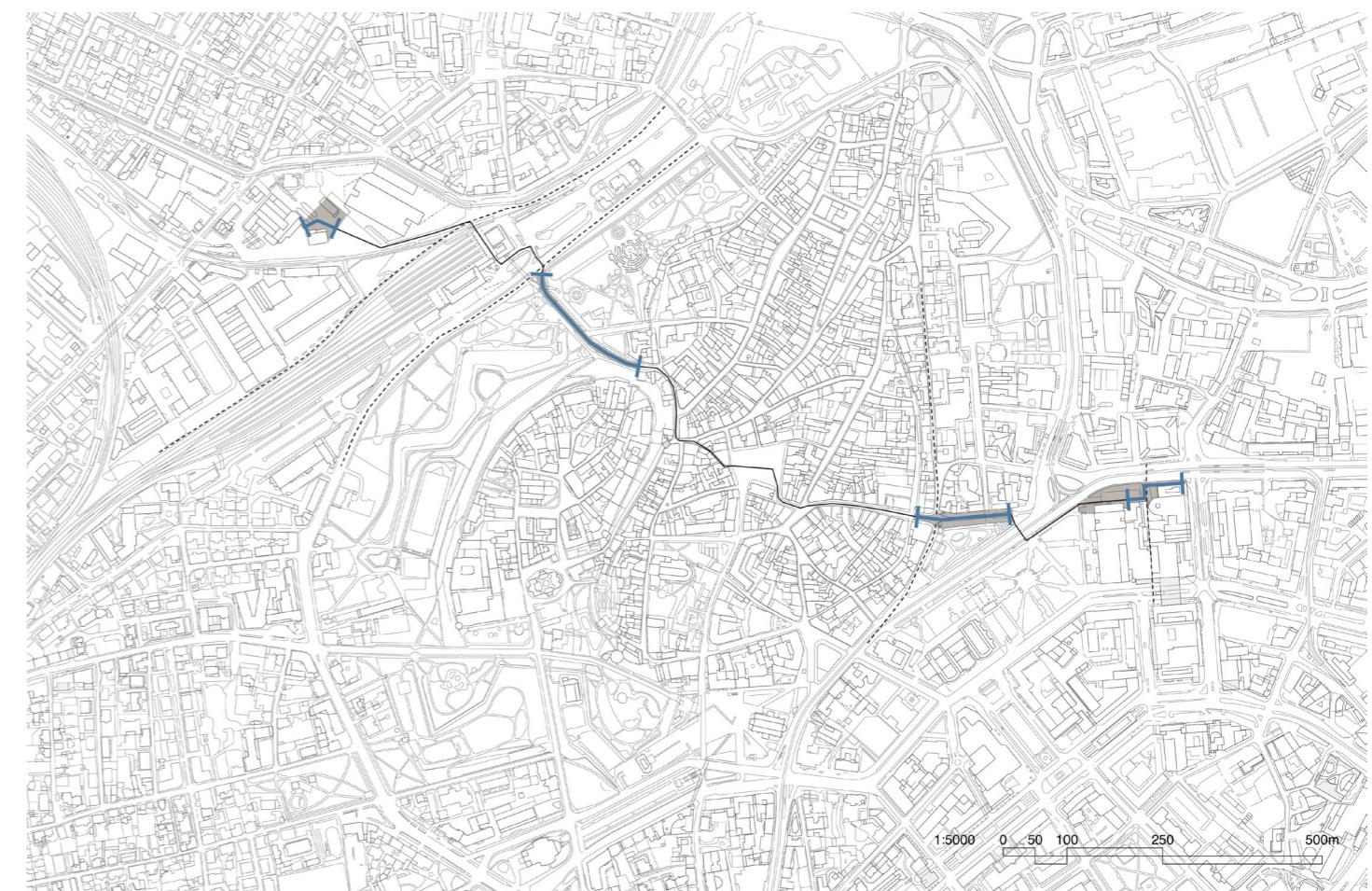


Figure 04| Tallinn City Centre: Thresholds as Perceived Spaces
Theoretical Framework

Juxtaposition of Scales

As mentioned previously, to analyse these complex social and spatial processes, we created a hybrid method, which we termed as **Juxtaposition of Scales**. It is a method of 3 steps and 3 scales to represent how the different scales of Tallinn influence or are a subtle indication of the purpose of each space.

The 3 Phases are:

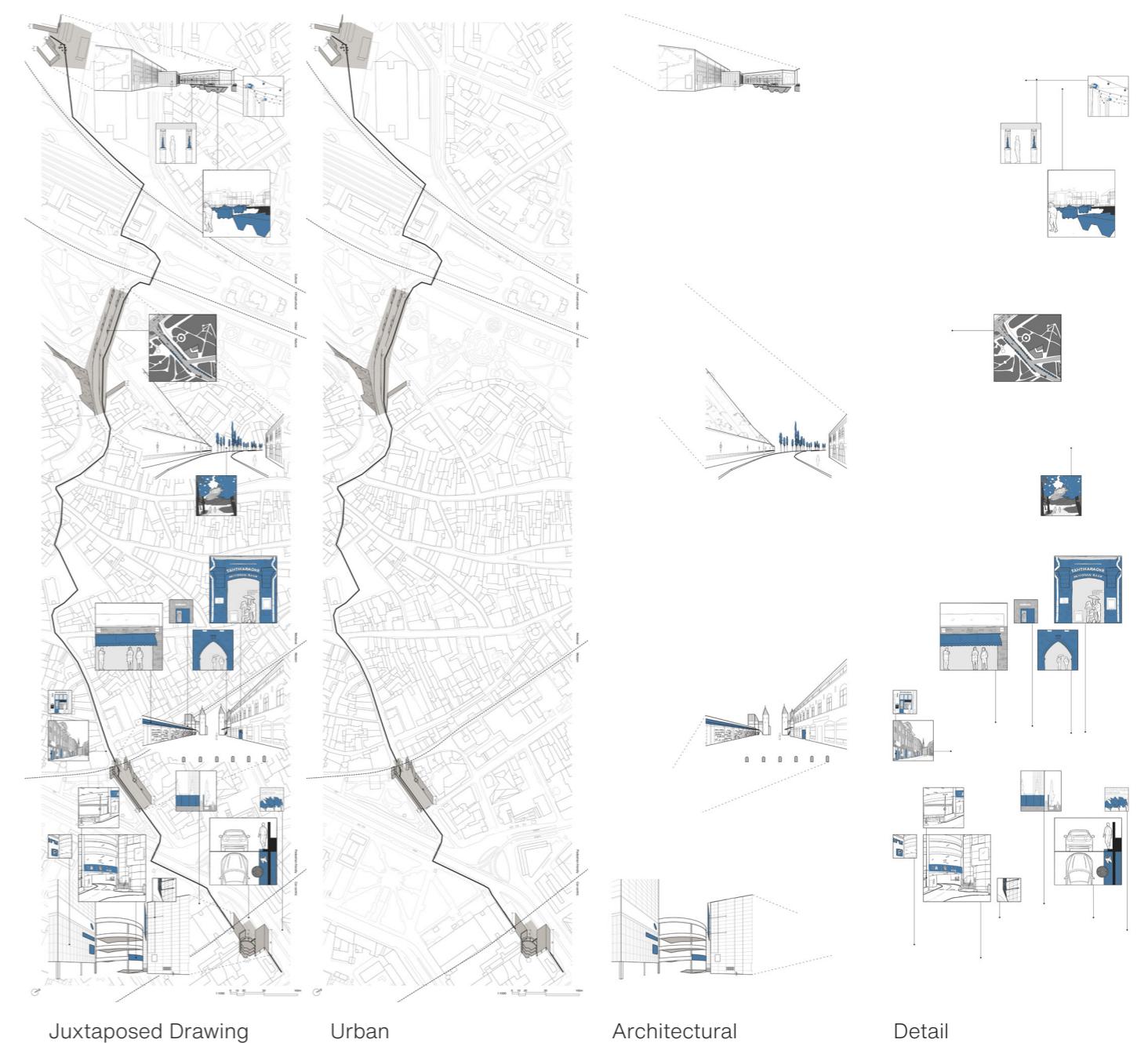
1. Planning and Walking a Thematic Route
2. Horizontal-Viewing
3. Drawing Collectively

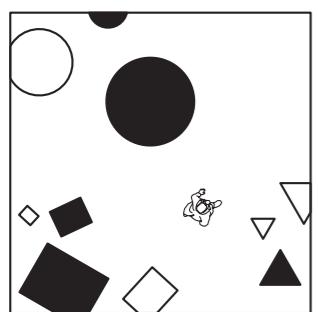
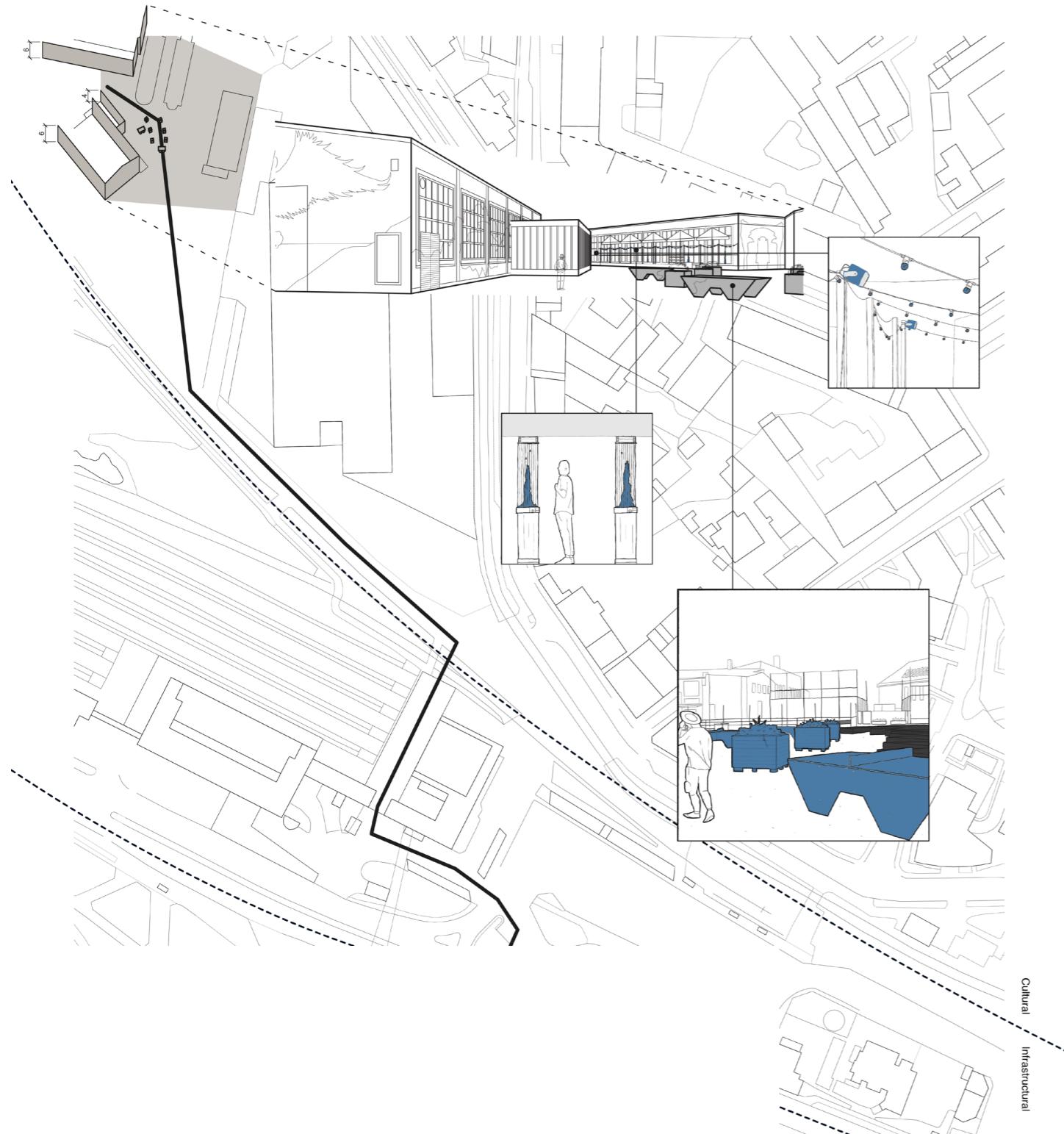
The 3 Scales are:

1. Urban
2. Architectural
3. Detail

This method, therefore allowed us to see and understand the everyday spatial realities (Lived Spaces). This became a juxtaposed drawing, which served as a tool to reveal the city's hard data (dimensions, orientation, qualities, and geometries) and soft data (activities, use, experience).

Therefore, Figure 05 became our container for the new knowledge gained, which I covered in more detail in the following pages and later used as my design principles.





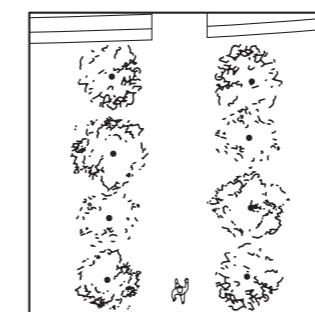
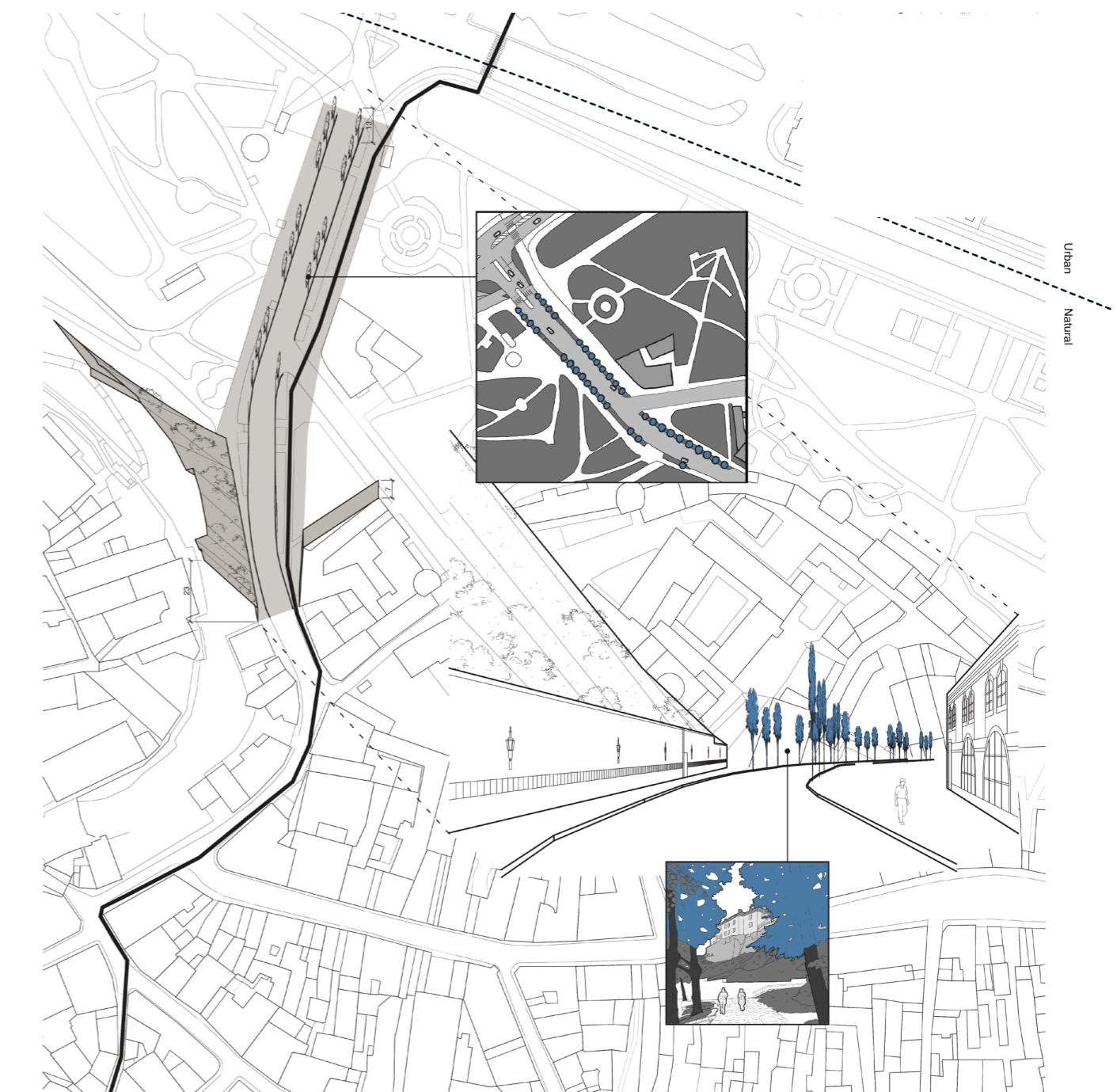
Principle 01: Stimuli

Lesson learnt:

The dissemination of activities with different sensorial abilities makes the space lively.

Figure 06| Threshold Between Cultural and Infrastuctural Zones

Research Method 01



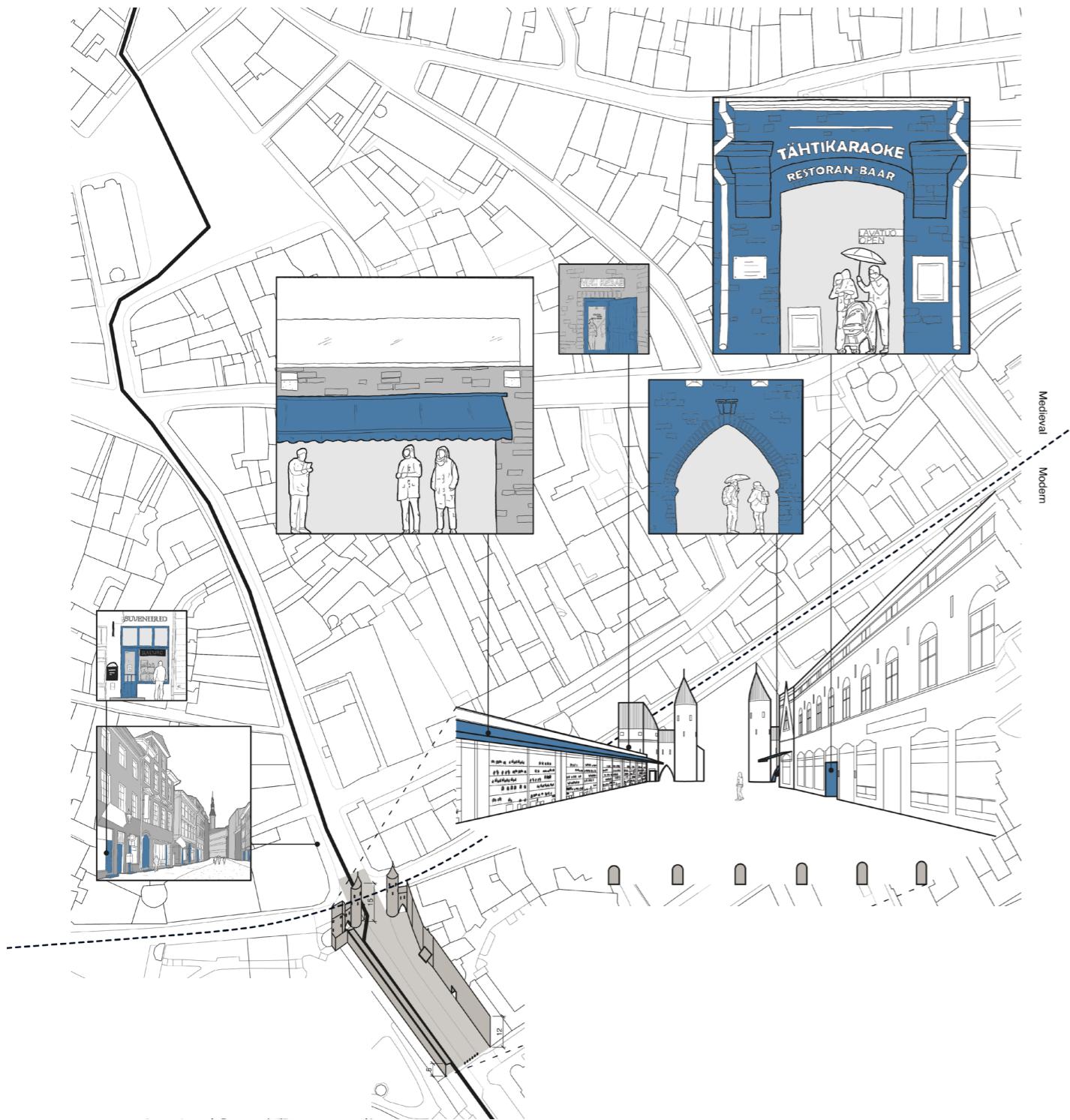
Principle 02: Procession

Lesson learnt:

Nature can be a soft transitional space while framing the destination and arrival.

Figure 07| Threshold Between Urban and Natural Zones

Research Method 01



Principle 03: Pocket Spaces

Lesson learnt:

Having multiple depths with human proportions allows for sheltering spaces.

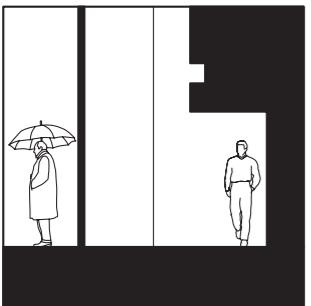
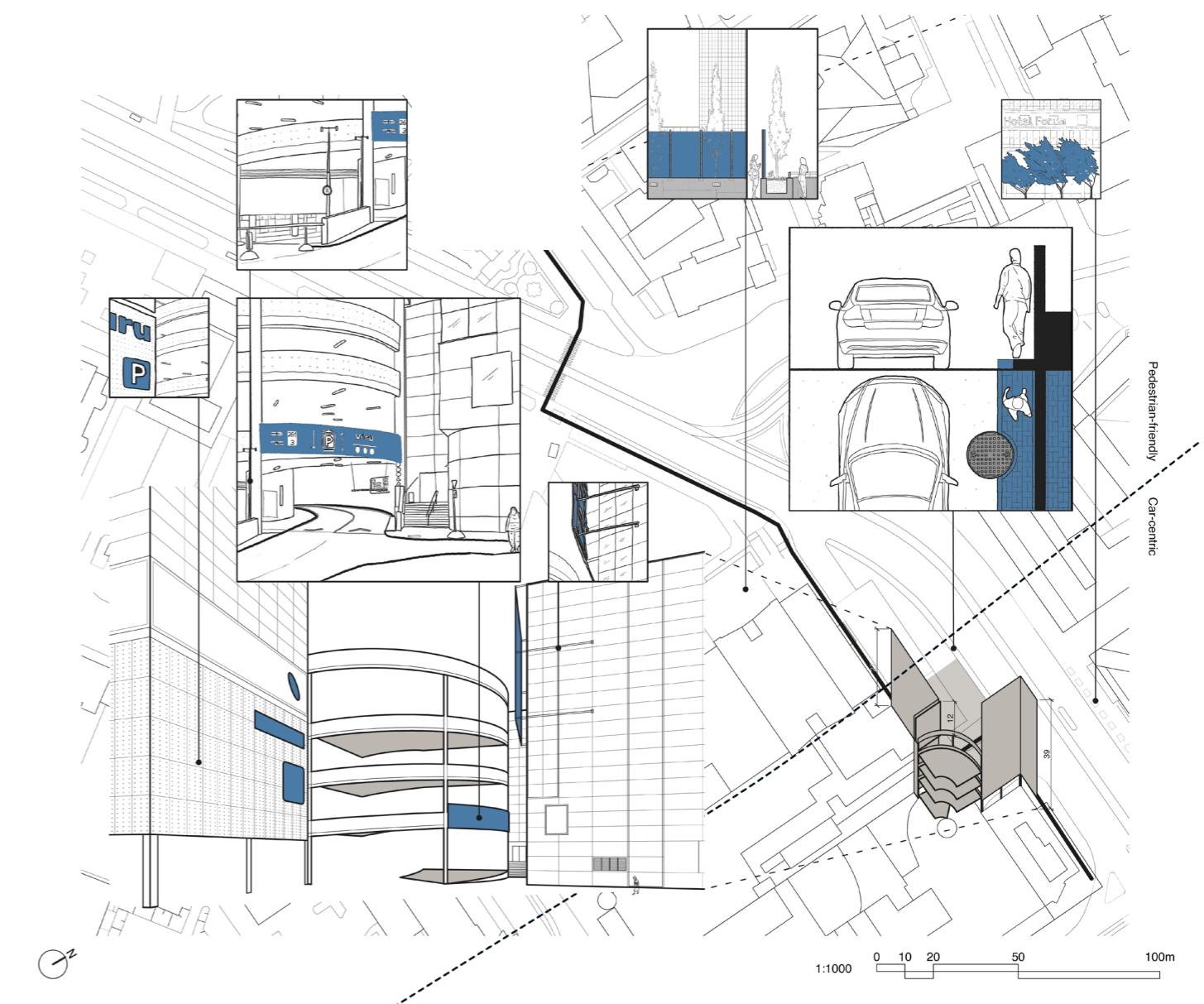


Figure 08| Threshold Between Medieval and Modern Zones

Research Method 01



Principle 03: Pocket Spaces

Lesson learnt:

Contrary to the medieval and modern zones, the lack of depths with human proportions rarely or simply does not attract people to stay and use the space.



Figure 09| Threshold Between Pedestrian-Friendly and Car-Centric Zones

Research Method 01

Hairy Drawings

We then followed our contextual analysis by sketching Tallinn in groups of 4 in which 1 member was a local student from EKA, Tallinn. This group methodology was organised as a mapping workshop in which we collectively drew the city centre from memory. This mapping technique became a drawing with no end or start but more so as expanding containers of knowledge which the workshop coordinator termed as *Hairy Drawings*.

This workshop was very reassuring in that our conclusions about how different thresholds and scales create different sets of experiences kept coming back.

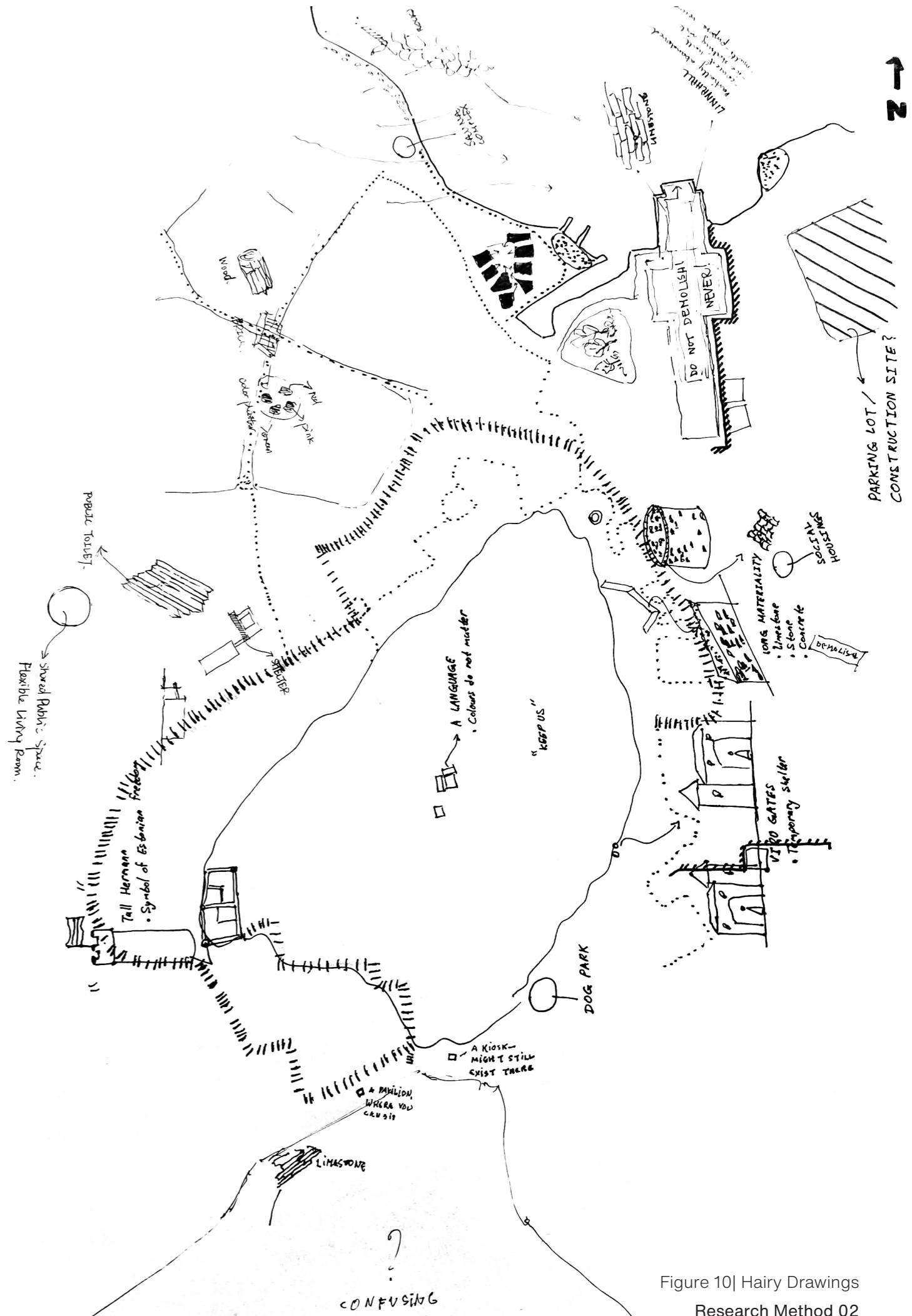


Figure 10| Hairy Drawings
Research Method 02

Tallinn's Defence Belt

After analysing the different thresholds of Tallinn's City Centre, I narrowed my focus to its symbolical and historical thresholds, namely its fortifications. According to Zobel (2014, pp. 9-11), Tallinn was what could be termed as a real fortified city throughout the medieval era (1030) until its loss in military importance in the modern era (1864). Historically, its defence belt evolved from medieval fortifications from the era of vertical defence (1200s-1400s) to a new layer of fortifications during the era of horizontal defence (1500s-1800s).

We can still see some of the remnants today, which were not destroyed after 1857 when Tallinn was removed from the registry of land fortifications (Zobel, 2008, p. 13). The once permanent defense belt (Figures 11 and 12) together with many buildings in the Old Town were part of a chaotic destruction that erased most of Tallinn's stone bastions.

However, during my archival research, I discovered that the Väikese Rannavärava Bastion, which supposedly stands today, was part of the fortifications destroyed in the late 1800s. (Figures 13-16 show its gradual disappearance).

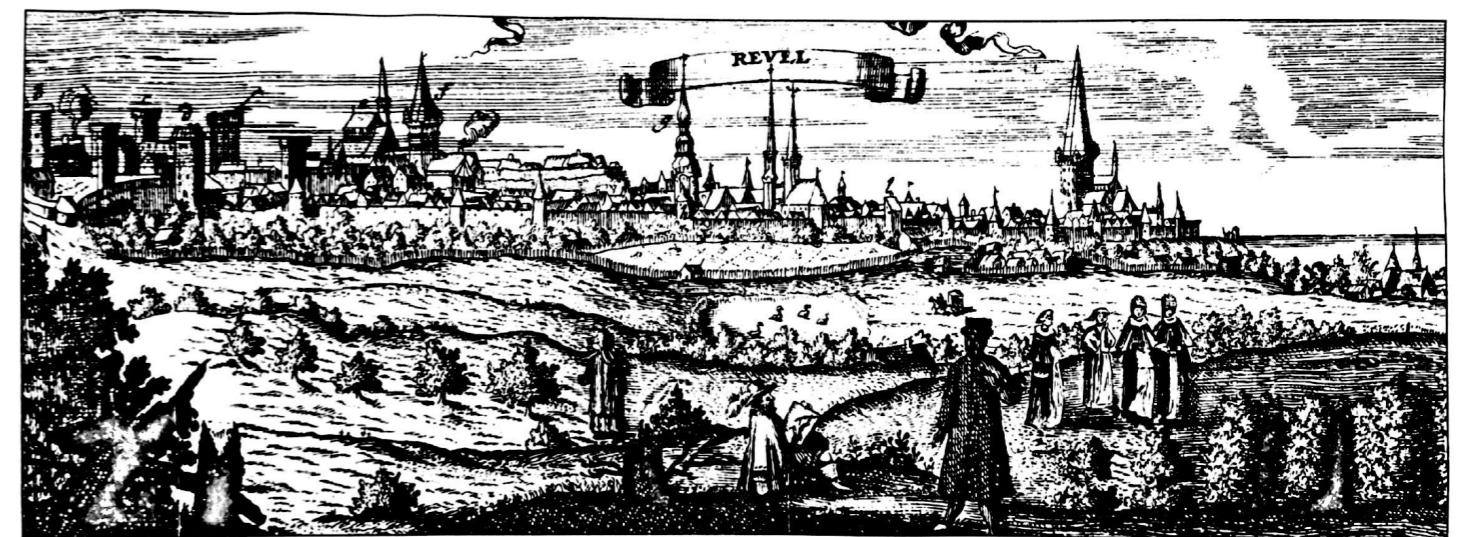


Figure 11| Tallinn From the South-East in 1590-1650 by Olearius, A.

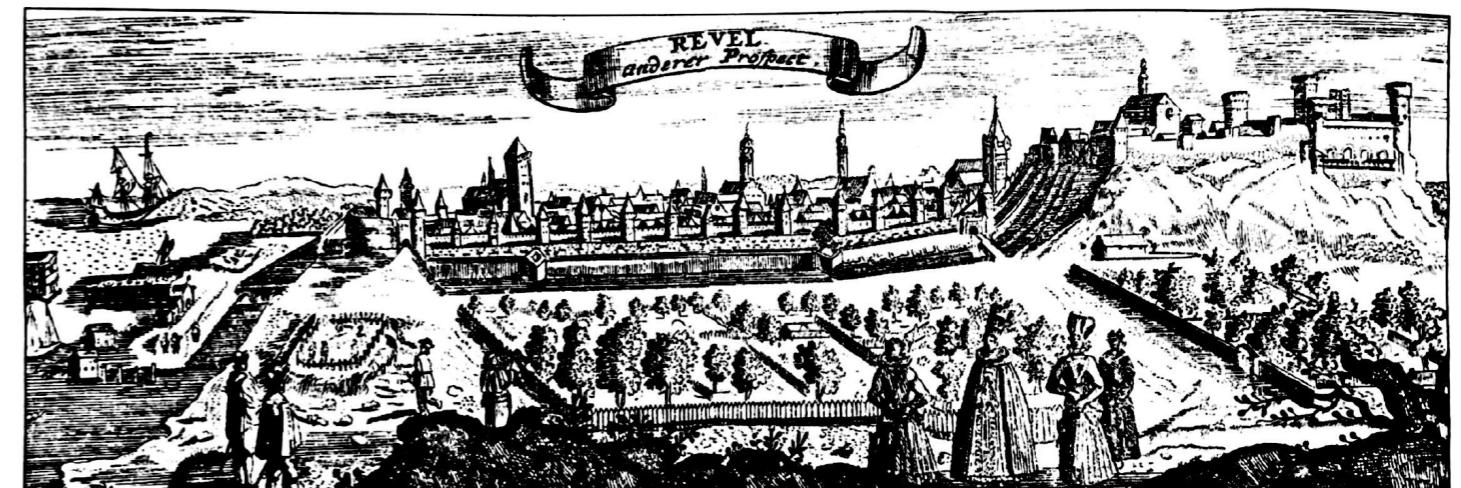


Figure 12| Tallinn in 1590-1625 From the North-West by Olearius, A.

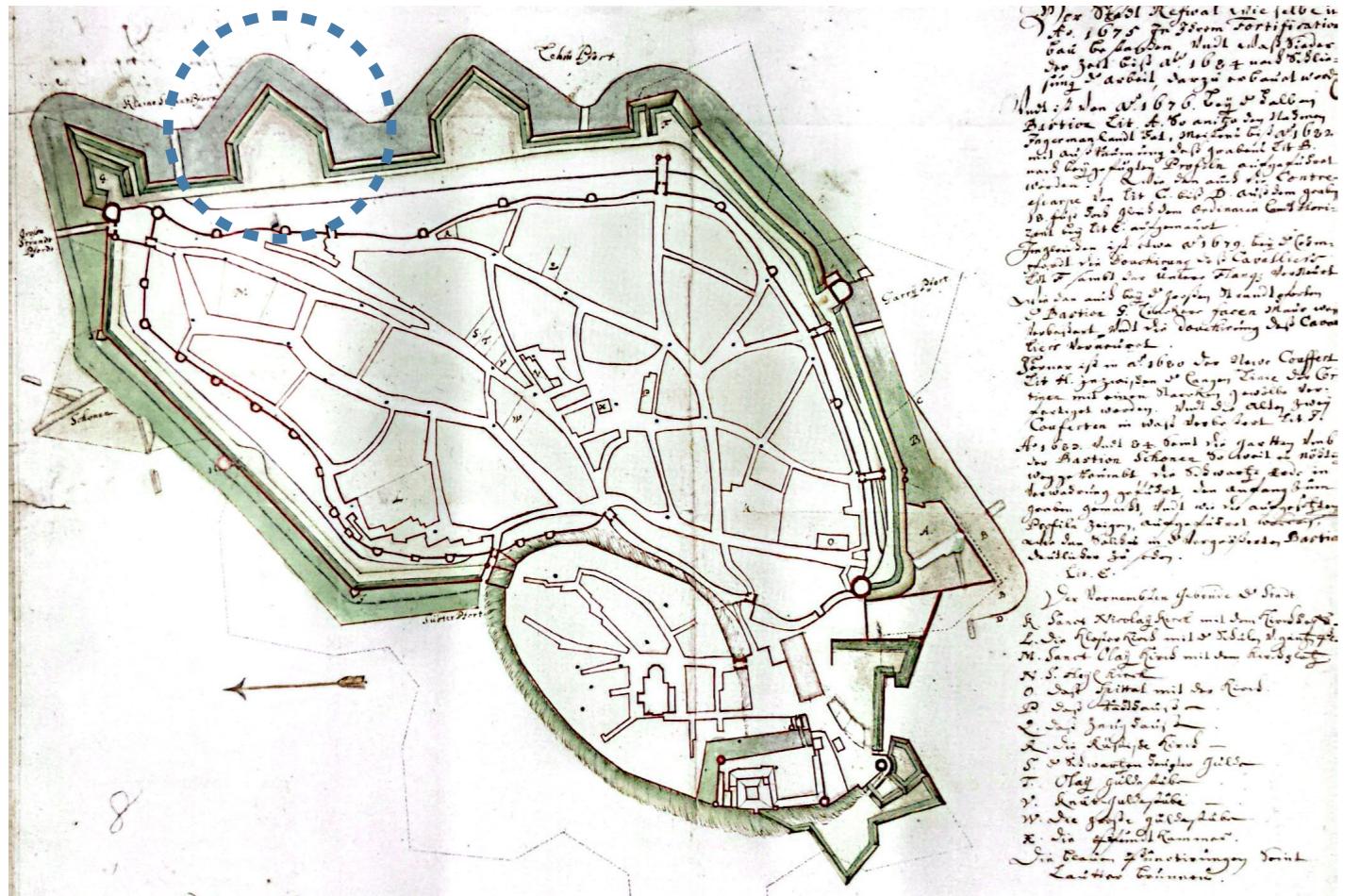


Figure 13| Tallinn Through the Ages, 1684

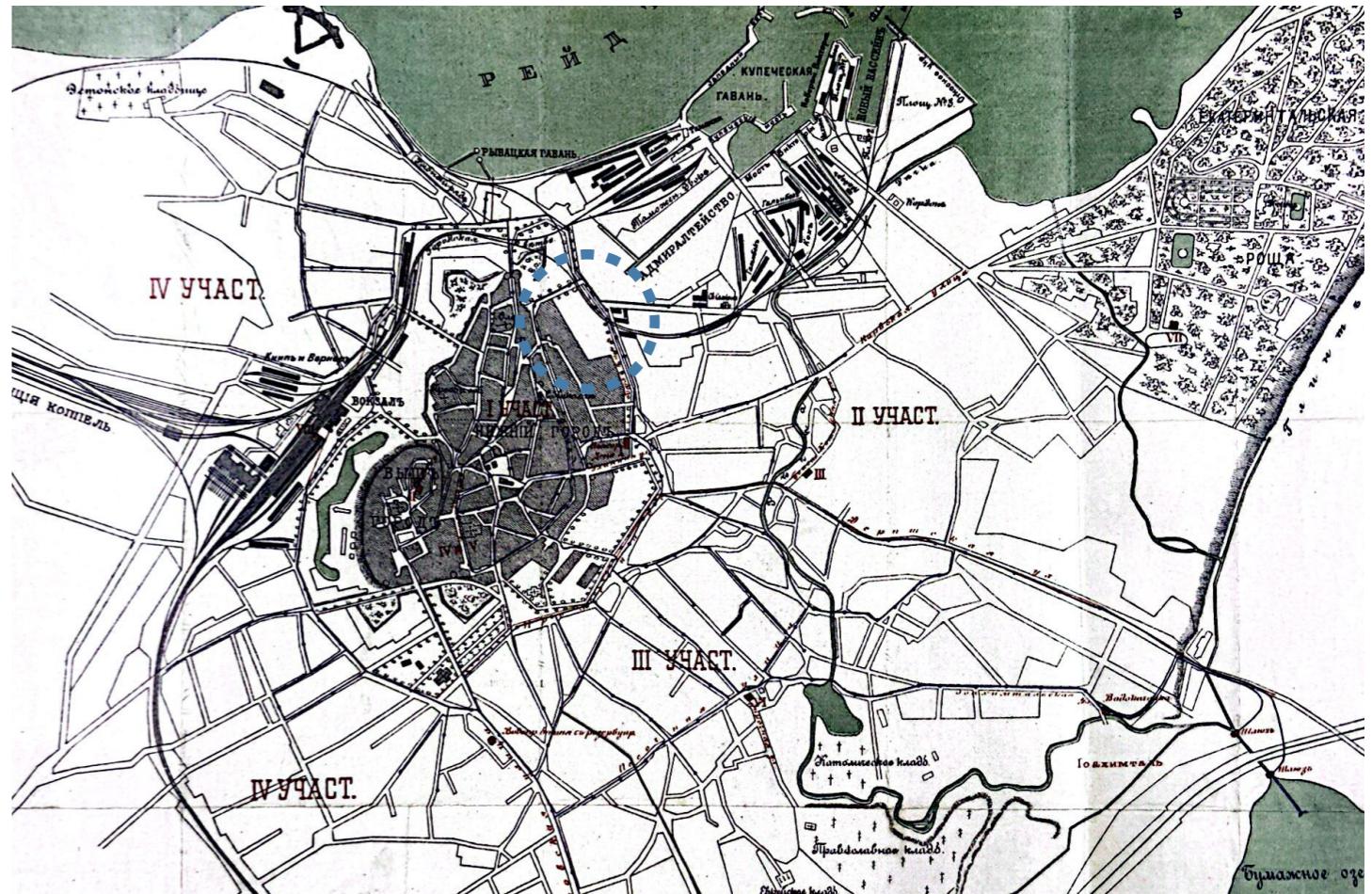


Figure 15| Tallinn Through the Ages, 1891

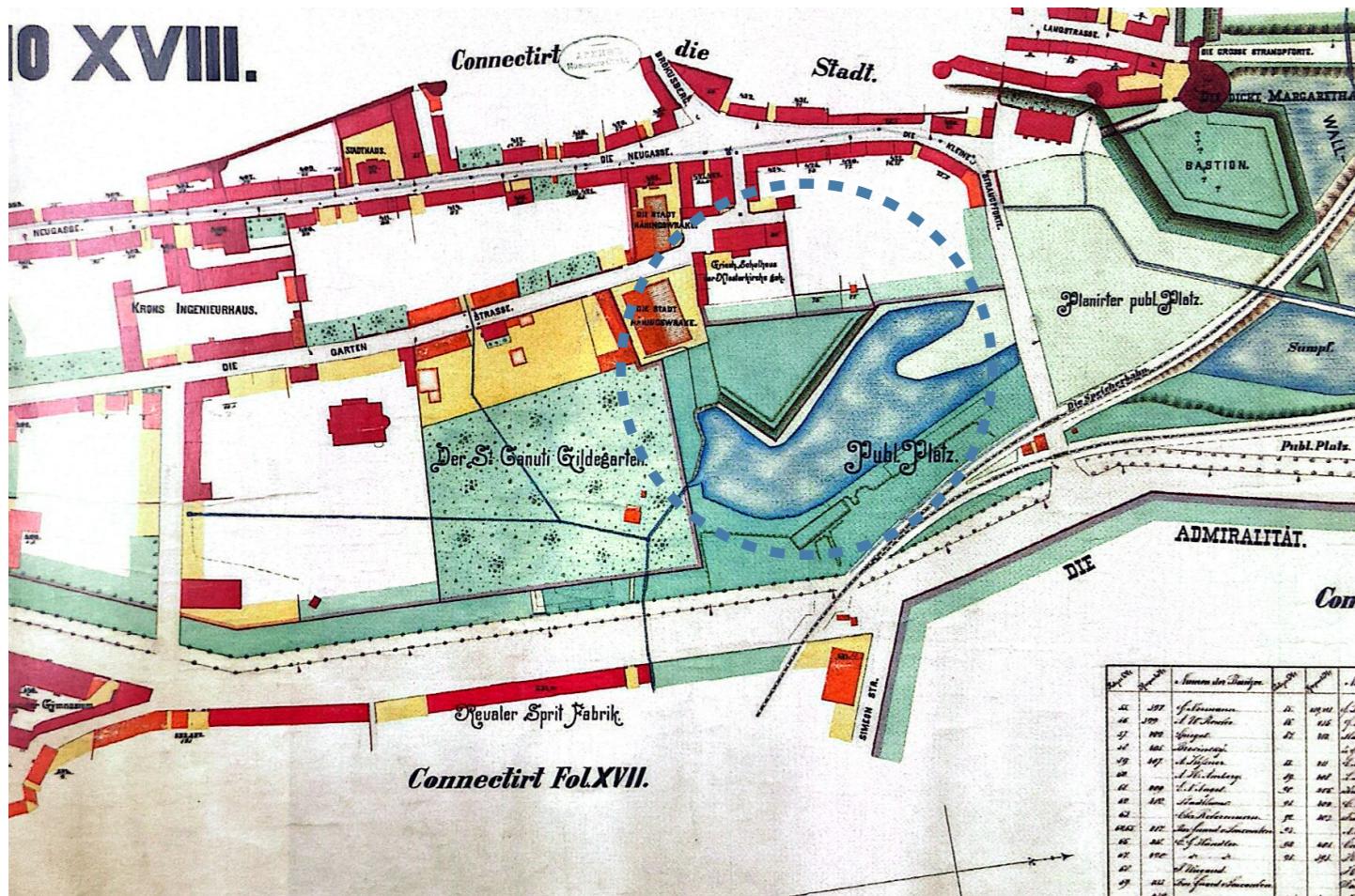


Figure 14| Tallinn Through the Ages, 1879

Research Method 03

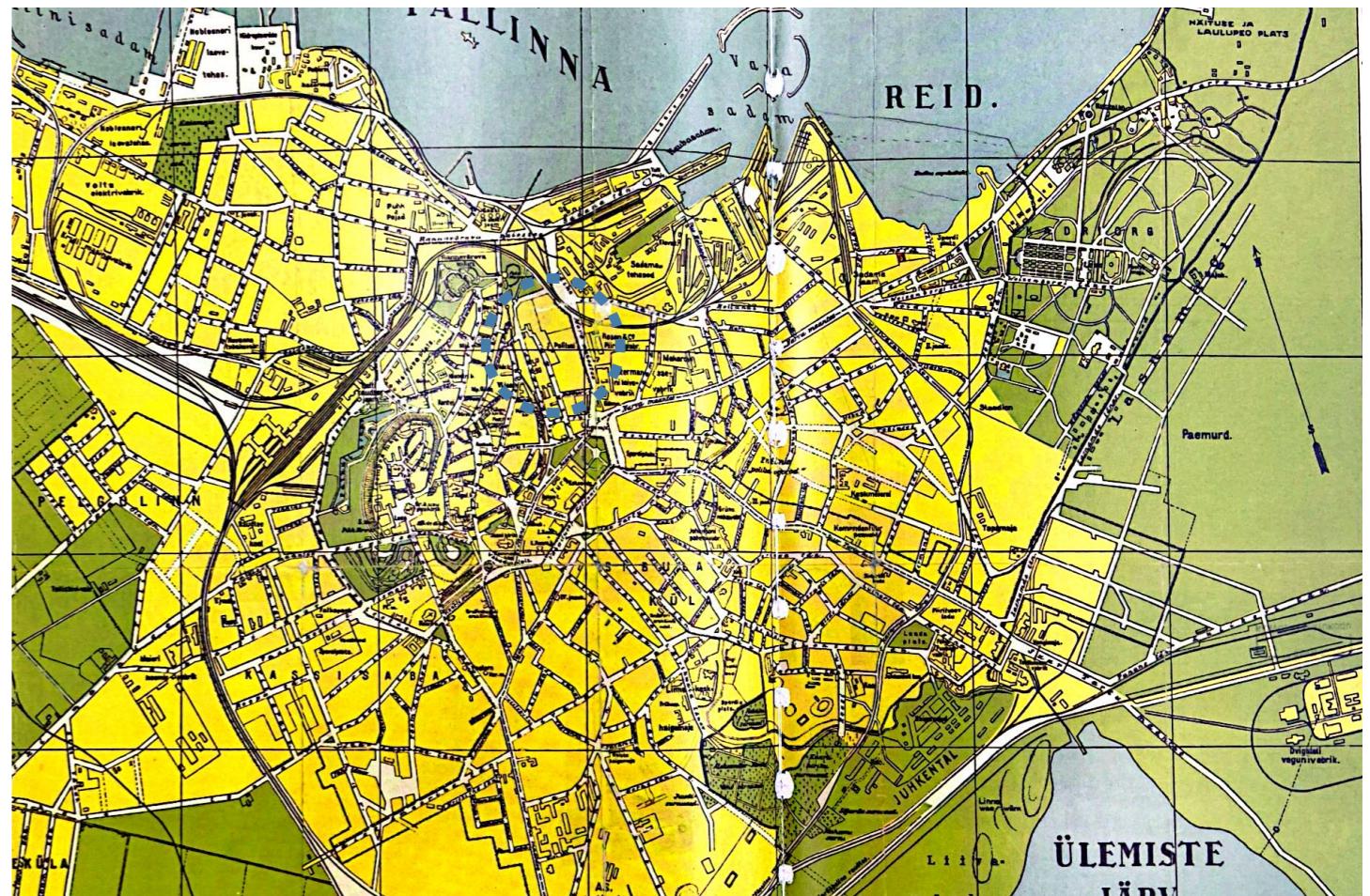


Figure 16| Tallinn Through the Ages, 1928

Research Method 03

Väikese Rannavärava Bastion

As seen in the archival pictures from 1983 (Figure 17), only its foundations were left. Undeniably, its rebuilding to host modern architecture must have created its own events, which I wanted to uncover.



1



2

Väikese Rannavärava Bastion

Build Year 1986

Use (Past) Housing and Utilities
Department of Old Town

Use (Now) Hotel, Sports and Water
Centre

Surface Area 7832 m²

Height (Max.) 11.9 m

The current Väikese Rannavärava Bastion was actually rebuilt in 1986 to host the Housing and Utilities Department of the Old Town. Its function changed in 2002 into the Tallinn Sports and Recreation Board, which led to the creation of a sports and water centre. It was renovated again in 2006 and 2008 by adding a hotel. Therefore, this new complex became the Braavo Spa Hotel and Reval Sport, comprising hotel rooms, a sports complex, and a water centre.



Emerging Questions

While investigating the Braavo Spa Hotel / Väikese Rannavärava Bastion and its surroundings, many questions emerged in my mind:

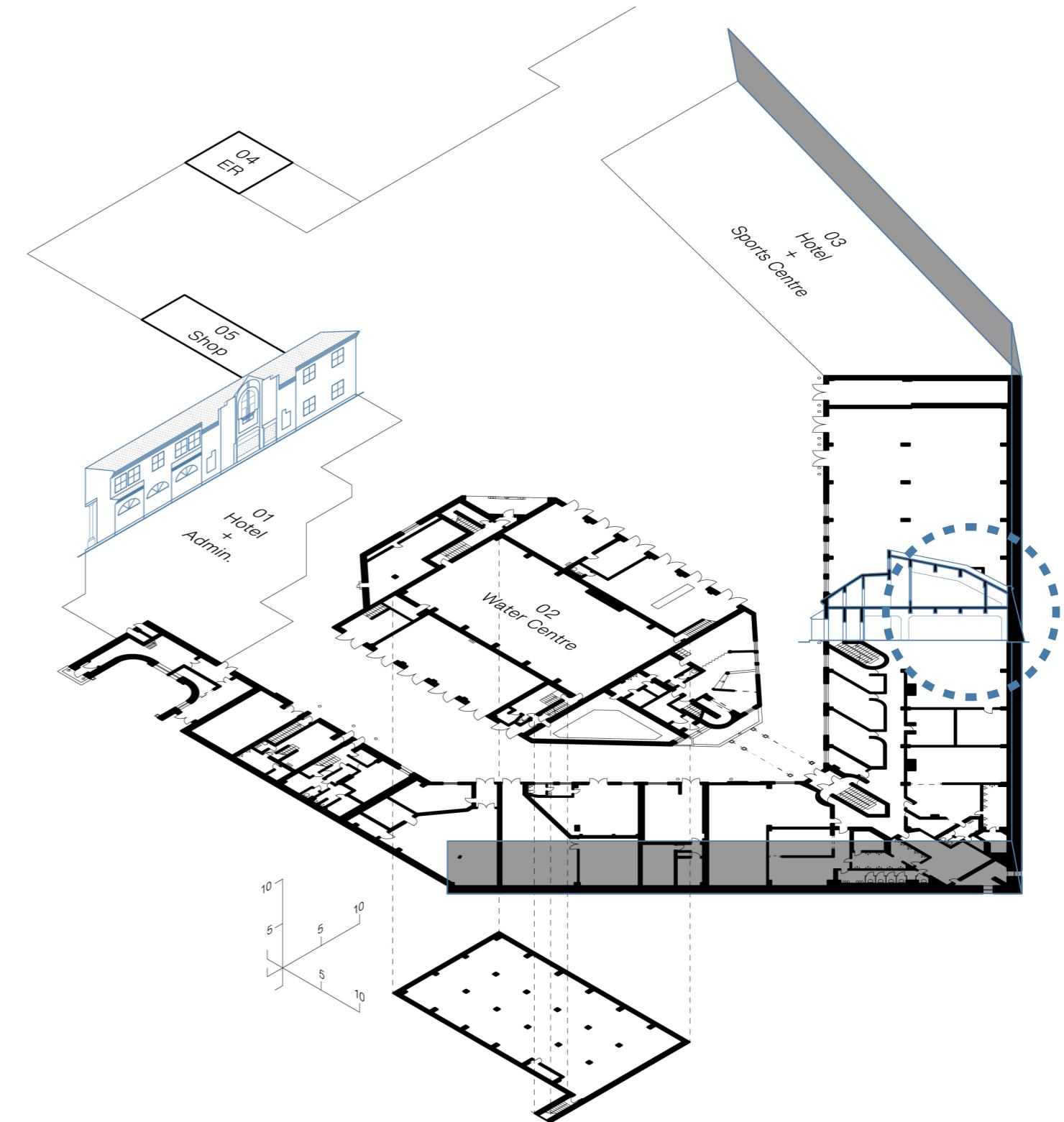
1. Why was it reconstructed as the real bastion that now creates: Blind Facades and an Unactivated Green Corridor?
2. Why is the Braavo Spa Hotel surrounded by so many parking lots? (Figure 19)
3. Why add another hotel when there are already so many nearby ones (Figure 19) and considering how pre-covid Tallinn's hotels average occupancy rate in 2017 was only 66% (Tallinn City Tourist Office & Convention Bureau, 2017, p. 24)? Moreover, Tallinn's hotels can still not achieve high occupancy rates (Leit-Teetlaus, 2023).



Architecture as a “Common Enterprise”

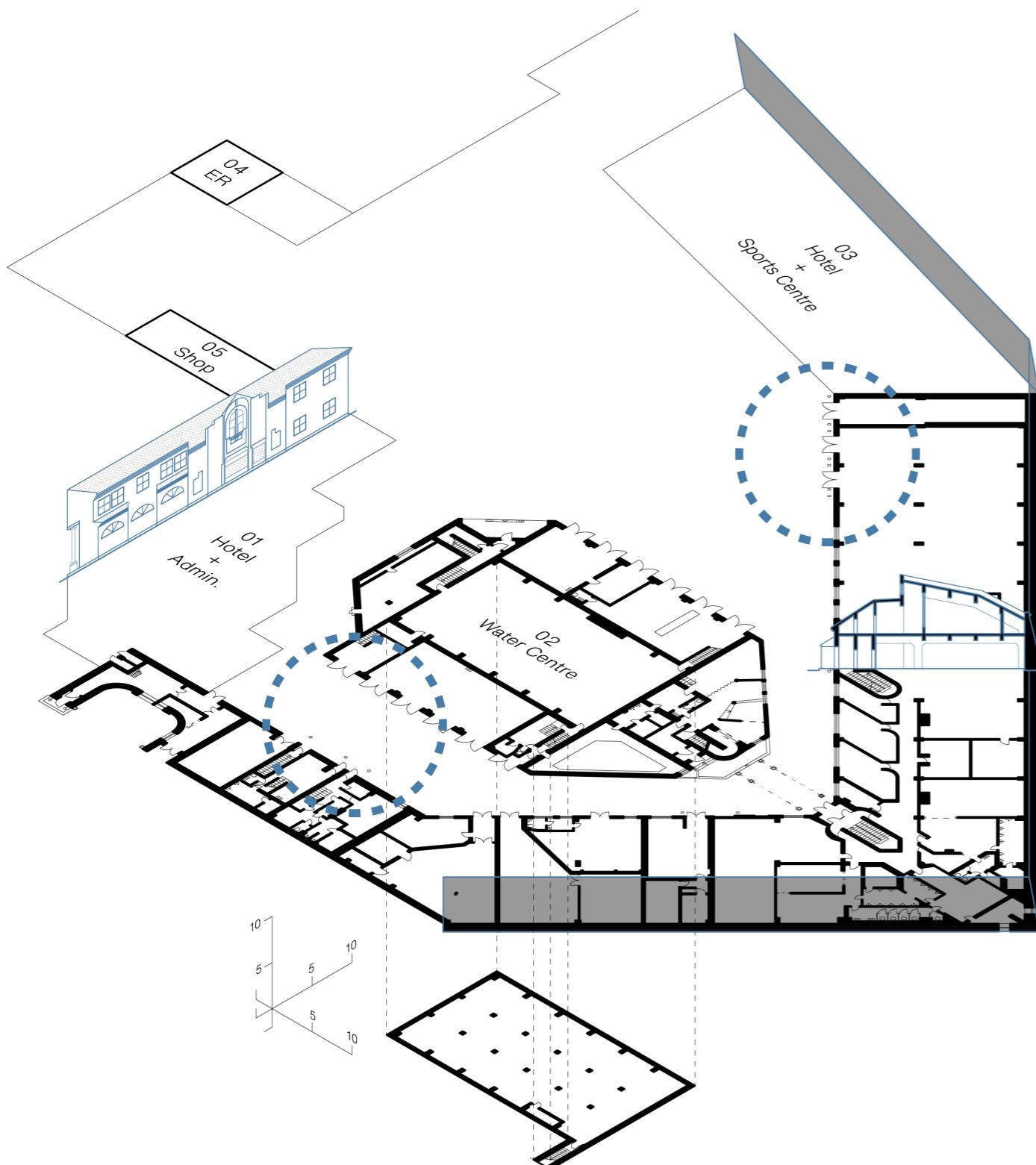
While being a physical threshold that divides the Old Town and the new developments, it is also a temporal threshold in which the hotel is for temporary dwellers while the sports and water centre is for both temporary and permanent dwellers of the Old Town.

This area can therefore become my architectural intervention which aims to achieve a balance between the privatized and everyday realities. The Väikese Rannavärava Bastion and its surroundings will therefore be transformed in the aim of creating an architecture as a “Common Enterprise” and regenerating the area with more pocket spaces and stimuli as found to be important during my Juxtaposition of Scales. To understand the Väikese Rannavärava Bastion better, I therefore deconstructed it.



Observation 01: Manifestation

The building's significance and character is expressed through its materiality and form.



Observation 02: Spatial Segregation

Spaces without visual and physical connections to the city become isolated.

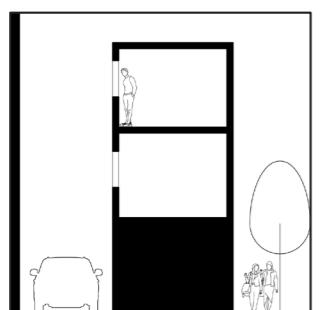
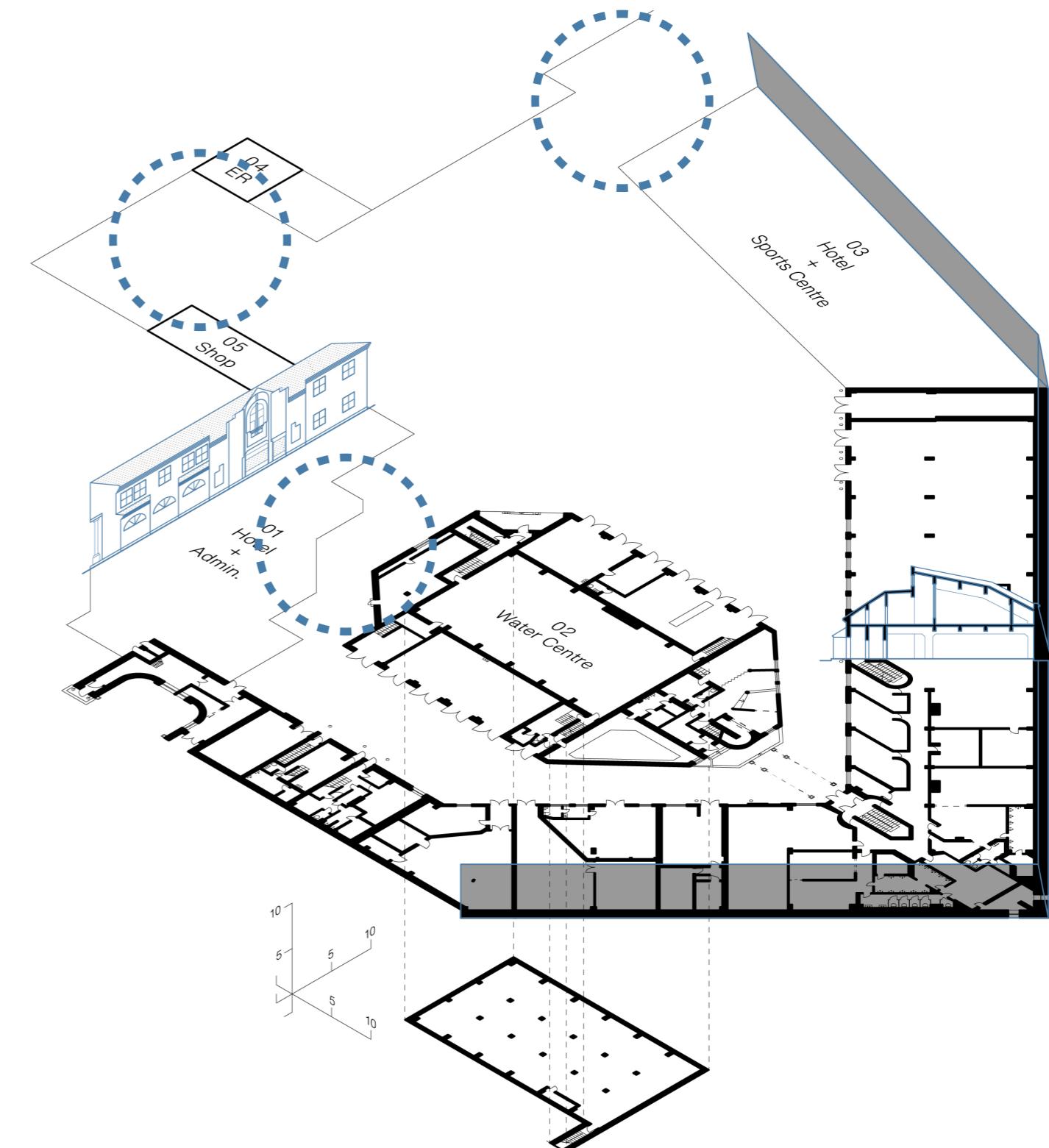


Figure 21| Deconstructing Väikese Rannavärava Bastion: Spatial Segregation

Research Method 03



Observation 03: Segmentation

Rigid segmentation creates purely functional spaces and leads to underused areas.

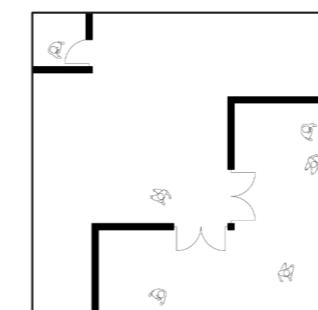


Figure 22| Deconstructing Väikese Rannavärava Bastion: Segmentation

Research Method 03

Diocletian's Palace

Original Building

Build Year 295-305

Use (Past) Diocletian's Palace: Soldiers' Quarters, Temples, Bath Complex, Mausoleum, Gardens and Orchards

Dwelling Size 3.2 ha
Building Layers 2
Dwelling Layers 1
Dwellings 1
Dwelling Types 1

Transformation

Build Year 7th Century - Present

Use (Now) Shops, Restaurants and Other Urban Amenities

Dwelling Sizes ca. 30-300 m²
Building Layers 1-6
Dwelling Layers 1-6
Dwellings ca. 144
Dwelling Types ca. 144

To improve the living conditions in the Tallinn Old Town, I also acknowledge the special conditions in which many will argue for maintaining its historical appearance and substance since this replica of the Väikese Rannavärava Bastion is now viewed as heritage. However, as Alatalu (2017, p.8) says, "today's creation is tomorrow's heritage". Therefore, I believe that if we want to improve the living conditions in Tallinn Old Town, we need to acknowledge that the creation of new events can actually benefit some monuments and to a wider context its surroundings. These events, therefore create their own conditions.

This is the case of my architectural precedent in how the house of an emperor became a city for 3000 people at Split (Figures 23 and 24)



Figure 23| Reconstitution of Diocletian's palace by Hébrard, E., 1912



Figure 24| Creation of a New Heritage, 2018

Architectural Precedent

"today's creation is tomorrow's heritage"

Architectural Precedent

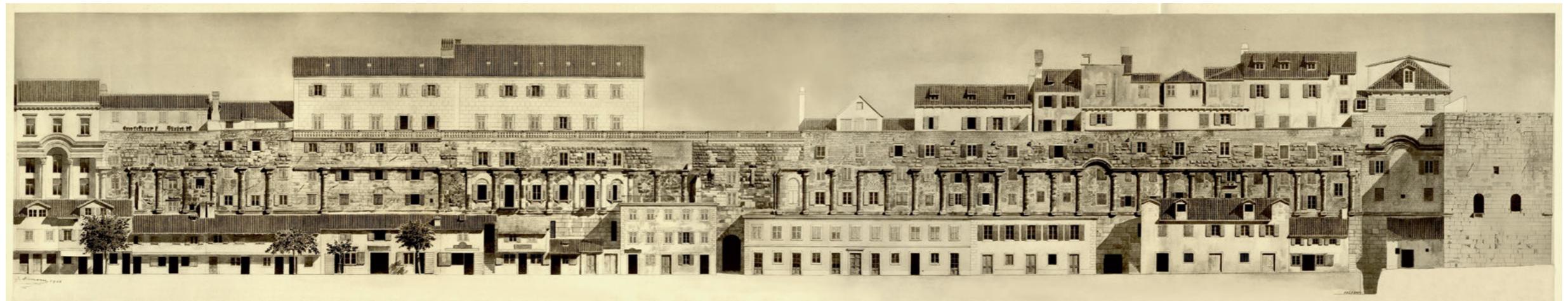


Figure 25| Current State of the South Wall, by Niemann, G., 1910

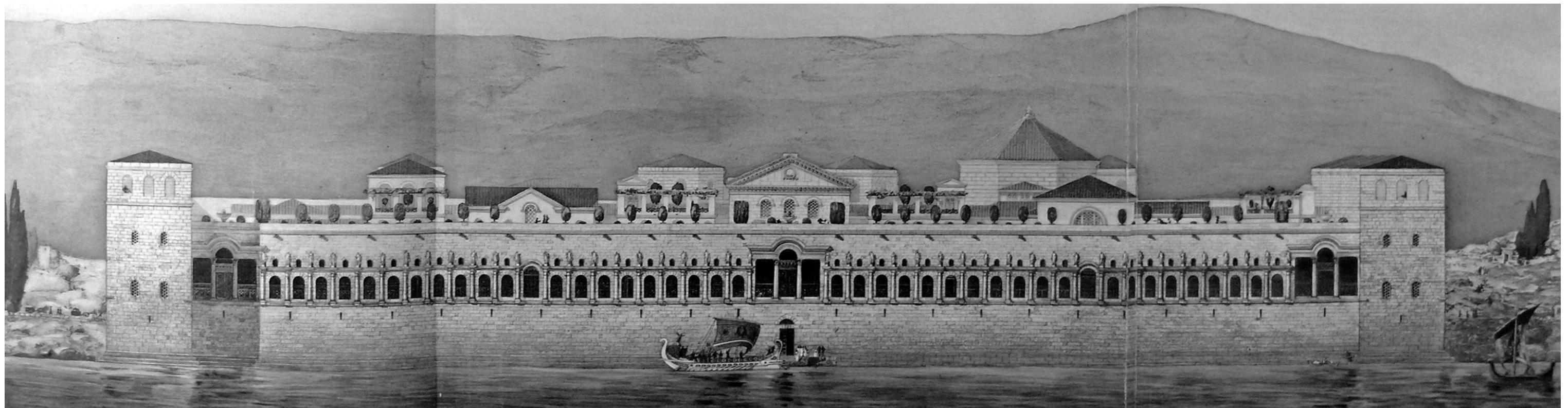


Figure 26| Reconstitution of the Original South Wall, by Hébrard, E., 1912

Creation of New Events Create Their Own Conditions

Architectural Precedent

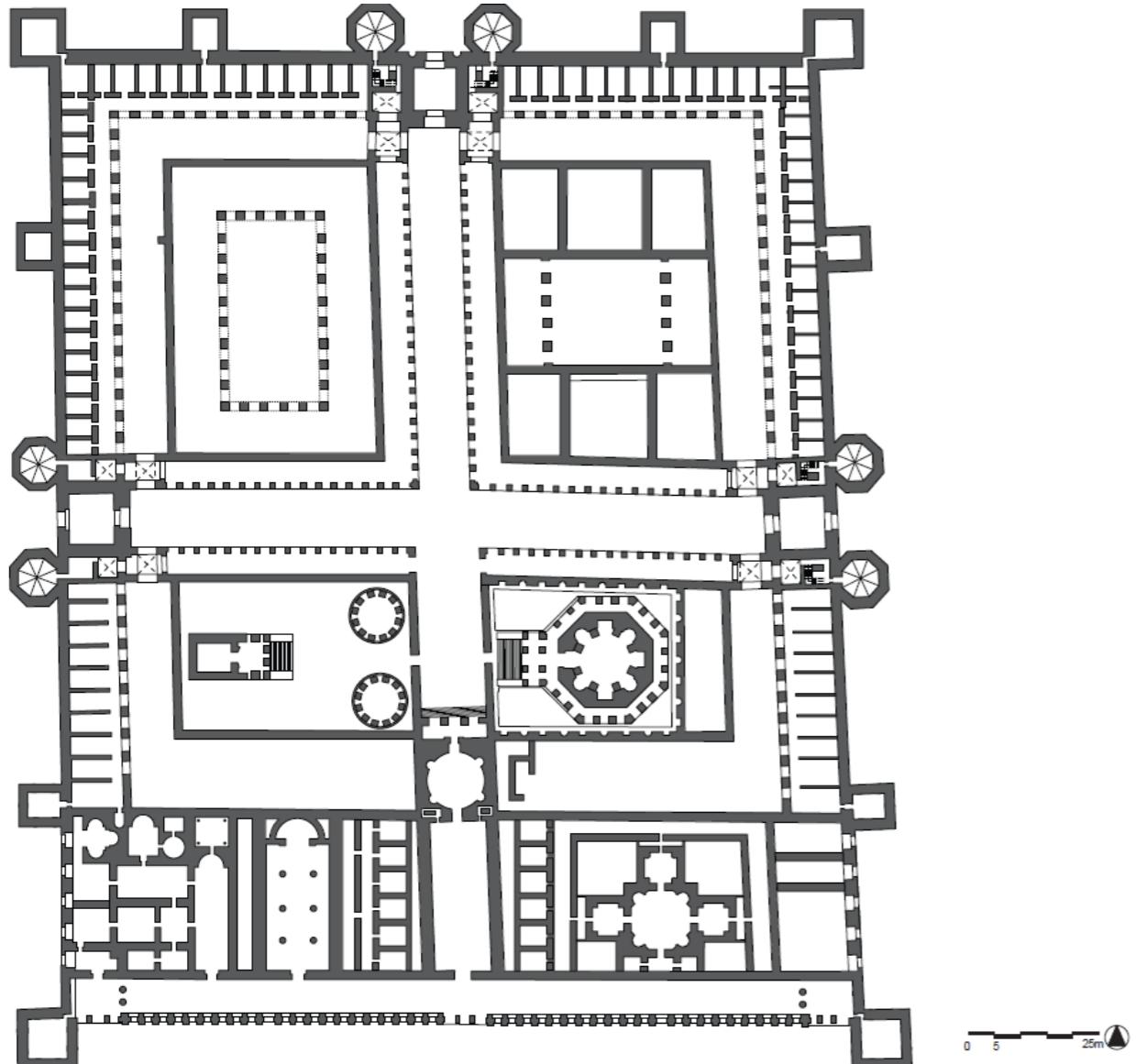


Figure 27| Possible Floor Plan of the Original Complex by Marasović, J., and Marasović, T., (1970)

Creation of New Events Create Their Own Conditions
Architectural Precedent



Figure 28| Non-Human Scale Structure Eventually Became Human Scale

Creation of New Events Create Their Own Conditions
Architectural Precedent

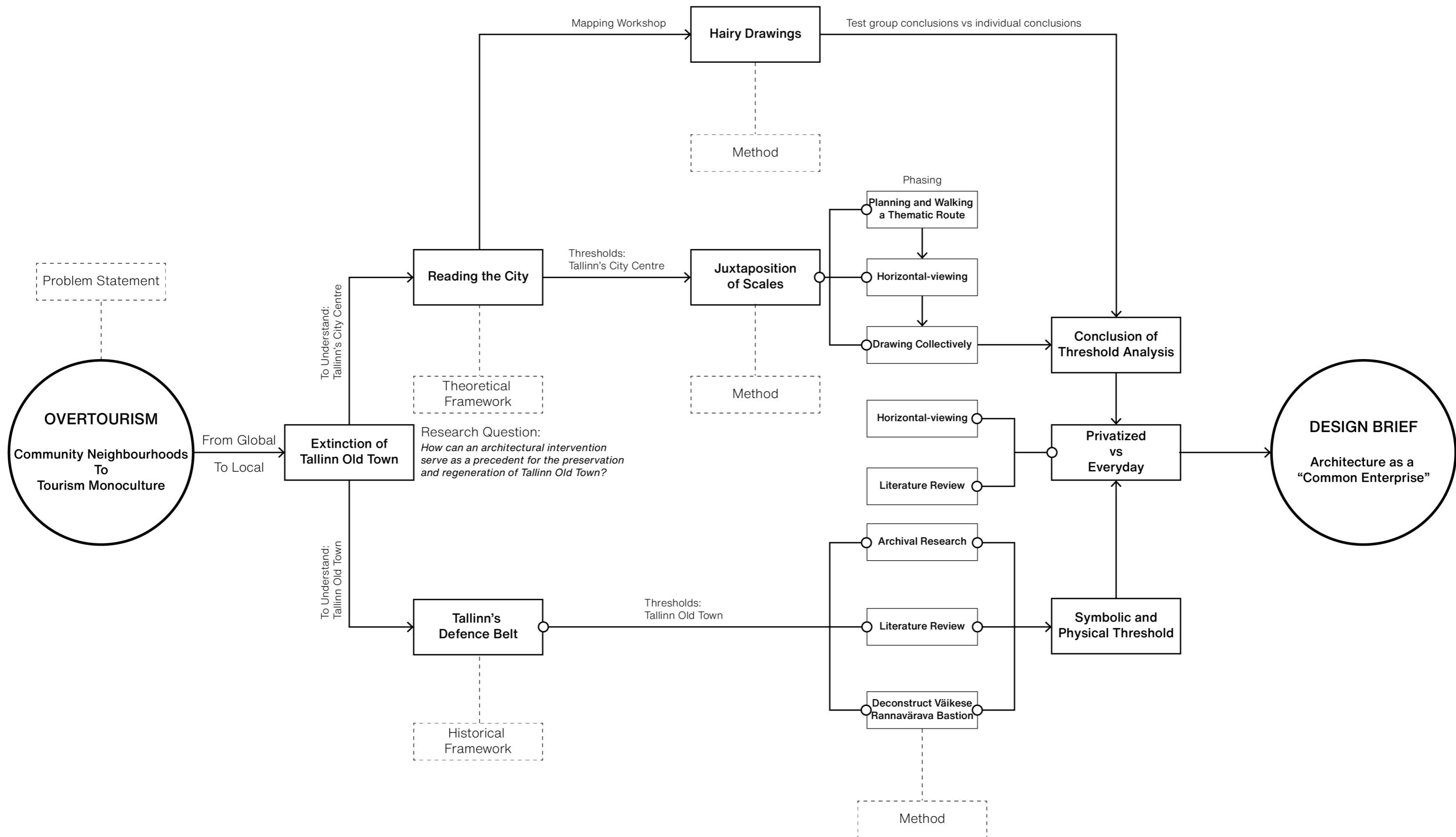
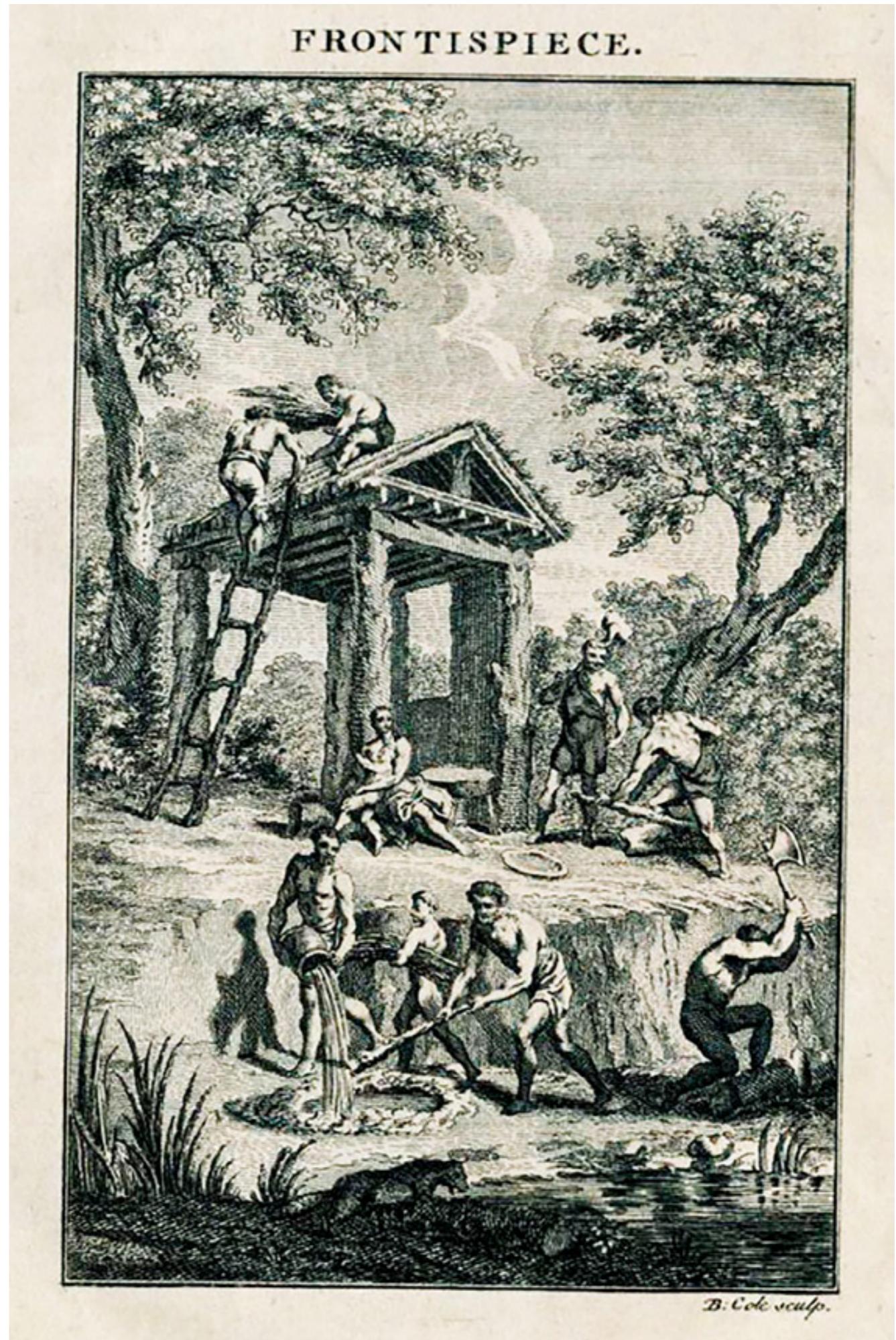


Figure 29| From Global To Local
Research Plan Diagram

Reflection

Coming from a country where I have personally experienced both the benefits and challenges of tourism, this research is, therefore, close to my heart. Choosing the *A Matter of Scale* studio has provided a valuable framework for this exploration, allowing me to spend two weeks in Tallinn, connecting with locals and working collaboratively. Although I was initially confused by this extended stay, I became very busy discovering and researching every day.

Moreover, access to the many literatures shared by Estonian professors and architects has deepened my understanding of how overtourism is a global phenomenon, how specific it can be to a local context, and how to understand it. Collaborating with Clarisse on our *Juxtaposition of Scale* methodology has also been fun and meaningful, as we have explored different dimensions of understanding Tallinn, even though we have different aims in mind. While it is now time to continue working individually, I feel that our studio culture is very strong. I hope we continue challenging and learning from each other as architecture is a “Common Enterprise”.



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Figures

Figure 01. Ledoux, C. (1804). *L'Abri du Pauvre, L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation*. <https://www.sophiajournal.net/sophia-5-the-modern-shelter>

Figure 11. Olearius, A. (1590-1650). View of Tallinn from the south-east.

Figure 12. Olearius, A. (1590-1625). View of Tallinn from the north-west.

Figure 13-16. Raid, T. (2011). Tallinn on historical city plans 1634-1989.

Figure 17. National Construction Committee of the UNSC Council of Ministers. (1983). Restoration and adaptation of the Väikese Rannavärava bastion into an engineering and maintenance centre.

Figure 19. Google Map. (2024). Screenshot showing abundance of hotels and hostels.

Figure 23. Hébrard, E. (1912). Reconstitution of Diocletian's palace.

Figure 24. Mooij, H. (2018). View from the bell tower to the south; in the foreground are excavations of the baths and the partially reconstructed imperial promenade.

Figure 25. Niemann, G. (1910). Current state of the south wall.

Figure 26. Hébrard, E. (1912). Reconstitution of the original south wall

Figure 27. Marasović, J., and Marasović, T., (1970). Possible floor plan of the original complex.

Figure 28. Mooij, H. (2018). Ancient city centre of Split with remnants of Diocletian's palace, floor plan, three aspects and a cross section

Figure 30. Wale, S. (1804). Engraving of the Cabane Rustique. <https://www.sophiajournal.net/sophia-5-the-modern-shelter>

Note: Figures not Referenced are by Author (Kushav Dharvish Aubeeluck)