



A Spatial Dialogue in the Emerging City of Addis Ababa

Bridging the Gaps between Informality and Formality

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Graduation Studio | Explore Lab
2022 – 2023
TU Delft

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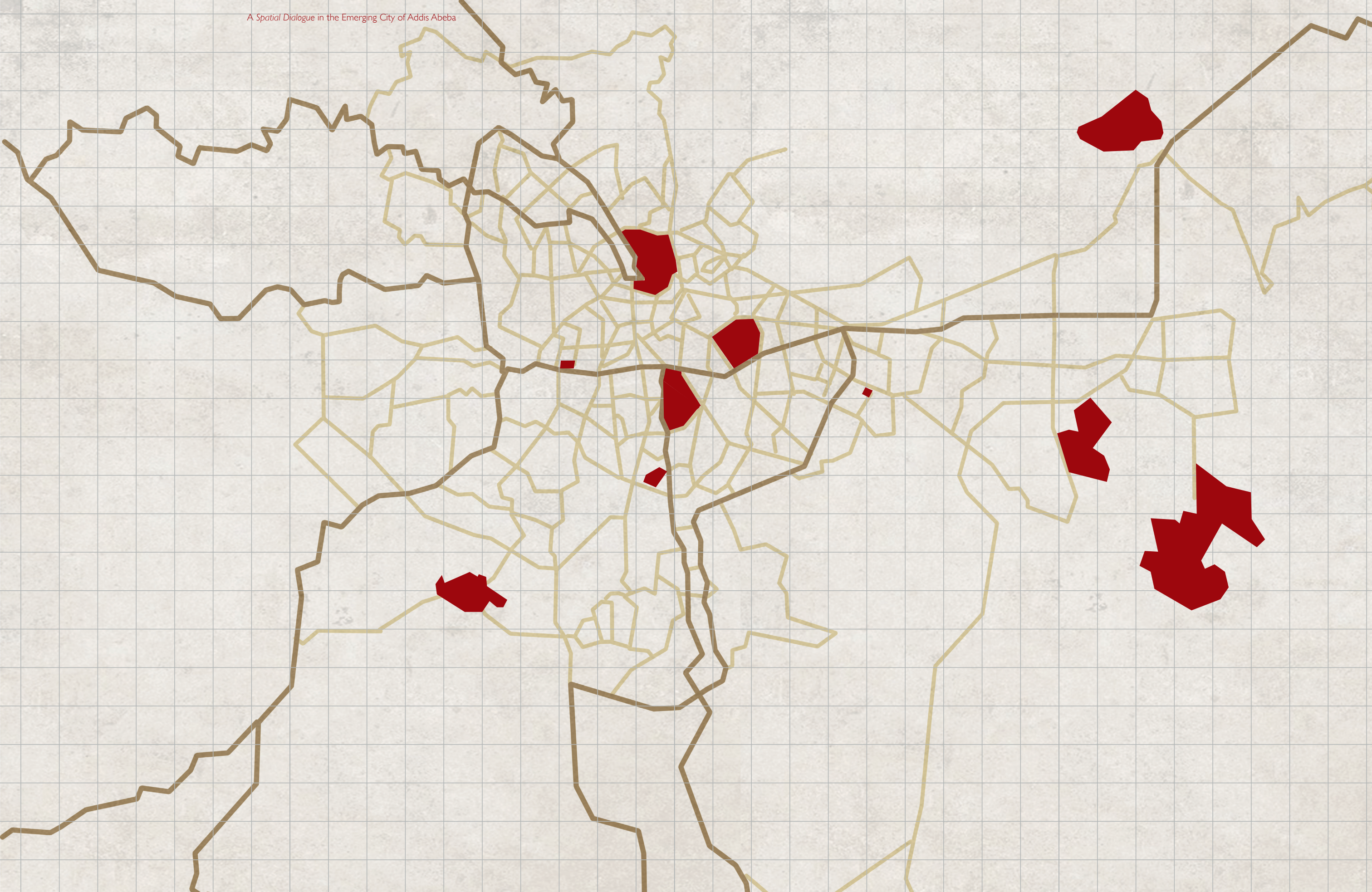
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“Thinking in dichotomies such as “formal” and “informal” is strongly related to a dialectical mode of analysis, which has not only been a long-standing, intrinsic part of Western culture and discourse but has also always been an important historical frame of reference to position the West against other geographical entities.”¹

¹ Sascha Delz,
“Spatial Dialogic: An integrative
approach for urban develop-
ment in rapidly transforming
cities,” in Lessons of Informality
Architecture and Urban
Planning for Emerging Territories
- Concepts from Ethiopia, eds.
Felix Heisel and Birat Kifle
Woldeyessus Basel, Switzerland:
Birkhäuser, 2016), 191.

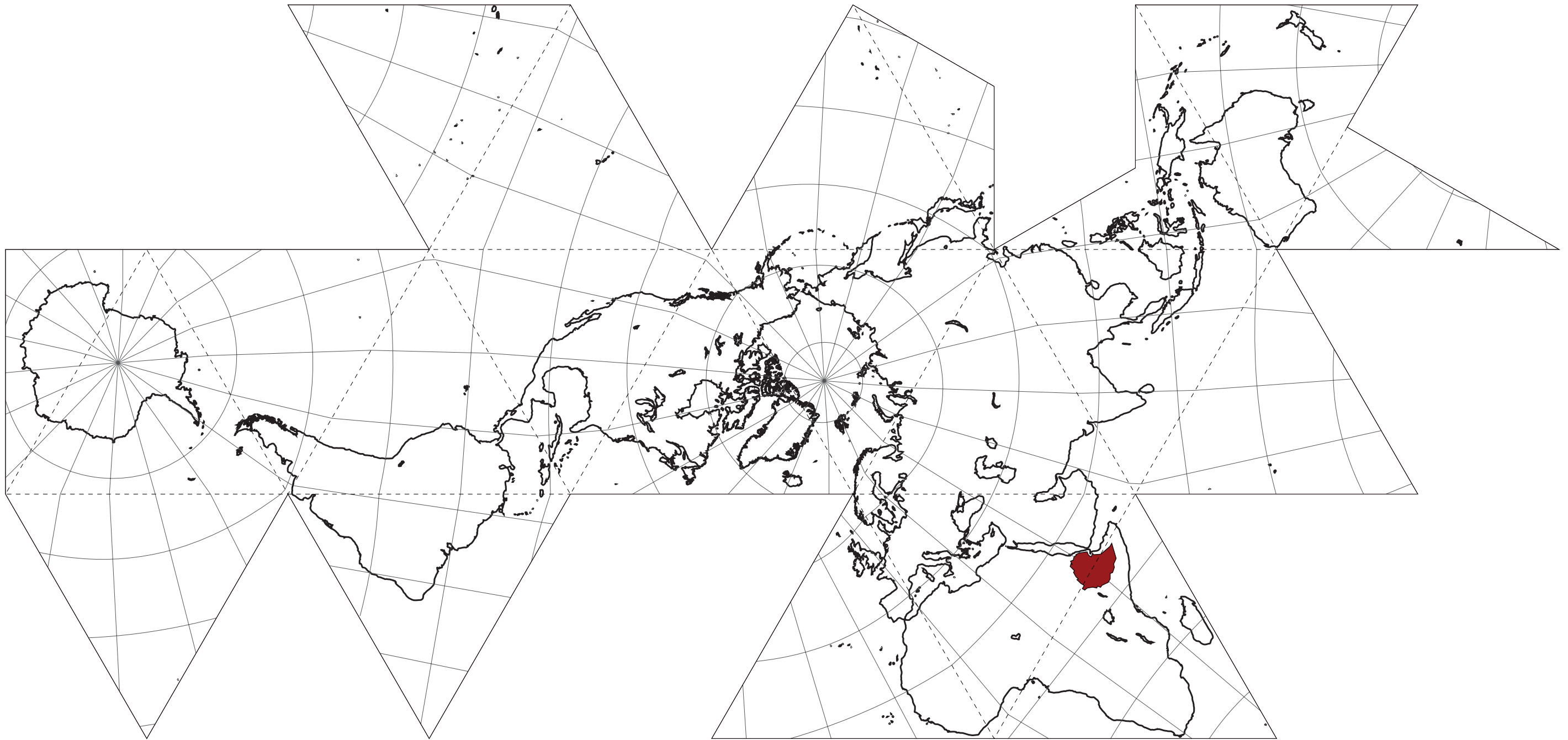
Modern vs Traditional

As architects, designers, and professionals from diverse disciplines—we all share a well-defined perception of modern design. It encapsulates something contemporary, mirroring the essence of the present day.

With ‘modern’, we quickly associate the ‘formal,’ or more expansively, the concept of the ‘developed.’ At the same time, traditional, informal, and undeveloped entails everything that is not ‘modern.’ This dichotomous distinction becomes especially highlighted within the discourse of international urbanisation processes, specifically those in the Southern Hemisphere.

The juxtaposition of these polarising concepts leads to a certain oversimplification of reality, a tendency inherent in human nature, where we often find it more convenient to simplify certain aspects rather than grapple with the nuanced realities that often just lie within the middle ground. However, what unfolds when both dichotomies materialise within a single space? How do we, as architects, navigate between such polarised concepts?

What if we encounter environments where both formality and informality intertwine ?





Plastic Sheets and Glazed Towers: Addis Ababa

One of many places in the “Global South” that encompasses both contrasting realities, the formal and the informal, is Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. It is a city full of contradictions, where high-rise glazed office buildings emerge into self-constructed market stalls made of corrugated steel and plastic sheets.

The problematic nature of the polarising categorisation is particularly evident concerning the housing situation in Addis Ababa. Most of the population resides in what is commonly referred to as „sefer,“ a term that, when interpreted through the lens of Western vocabulary describing underdeveloped areas, corresponds to what we would typically label a traditional slum. However, these traditional

settlements have a long history and are an intrinsic part of the city’s urban morphology and therefore act as important carriers of the city’s heritage. The sefer are characterised by the fact that families and people until today live in close social, economic, as well as spatial proximity. The built structure in the settlements not only facilitates social interaction and a sense of community but also allows for interaction with the environment, which is an integral part of the daily routine of the Ethiopian dwellers. The permeability of the living space connects the interior with the exterior, creating spaces that can be used for daily activities like the preparation of food, social interactions and the generation of income. As a result of the permeability and flexibility of the dwelling, spaces within the home can be utilized





not just for living, but also for working, making the incrementally grown settlements a place where living is not separated, but correlating with working.

The modest height makes it easier for residents to use their homes for income-generating activities, fostering a seamless connection to the street. Additionally, the low-rise nature empowers residents to be auto constructors, by constructing, repairing and maintaining their homes according to their needs and preferences.

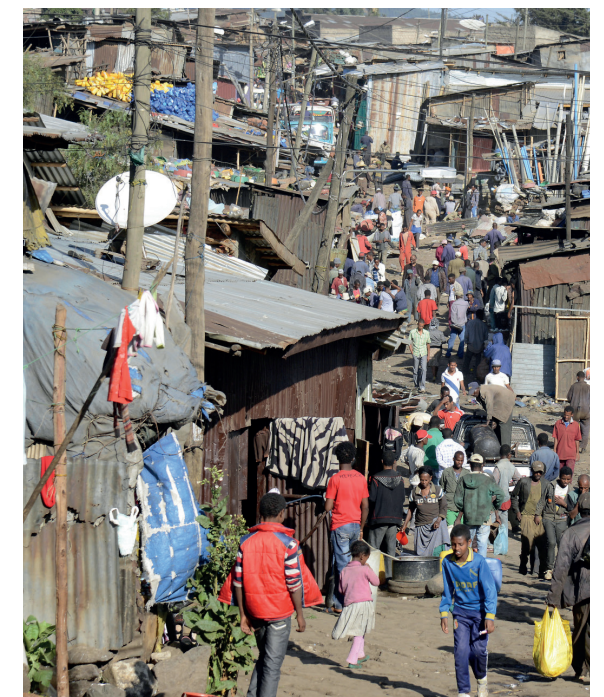
However, the increase in population and the fast migration from rural to urban areas have made these spaces unsustainable. The government attempt-

ed to tackle this problem by formalising housing through the implementation of the Grand Housing Program (GHP), a project which, in collaboration with the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), gave birth to the so-called Condominiums. A mass-produced large-scale housing scheme that not only created a vast amount of housing in a short time but also provided multiple employment possibilities aimed to replace the sefer. Accordingly, the GHP represents a significant leap forward in addressing housing needs. Still, a closer examination of its exterior and interior structures reveals a departure from traditional living patterns. The design concept seems more aligned

with a global, modern approach to housing rather than drawing from the rich tapestry of former inner-city habitation. In stark contrast to traditional settlements, the Condominium buildings are towering blocks with standardised apartment sizes and lack organic spatial and programmatic connections. Even though each compound has an assigned community building for communal activities, its detached location from the apartment blocks makes its integration into daily life quite difficult. Overall, it seems like the needs of the people are oversimplified to the extent that the architecture of the Condominium could belong to any community across the globe.

Although it is important to note that traditional settlements are no longer sustainable for Addis and that condominium blocks are a generally positive contribution, this example clearly shows how a dichotomous mindset is detrimental to the built environment. Despite the challenges often associated with informal settlements and the stigmatisation of being labelled as „slums,“ they indeed offer profound insights into their residents' daily lives, experiences, and perspectives. These insights are a rich resource that should greatly inform and enrich contemporary housing projects. However, to truly integrate these valuable insights into housing projects, we must first address

and dispel the degrading stigma associated with the term „slum.“ This pejorative label implies an imperative to eradicate, further exacerbating the existing dichotomies. Rather than perpetuating a narrative of demonization versus glorification, we must adopt a more pragmatic view of these realities and focus on “the real city, the real economy and the real social practices and identities of the majority of urbanities who are building our cities if we want to make sense of them”. The consequence of such an aspect-oriented approach is no longer a clear picture with contrasts but a picture full of shades of gradations that are no longer so easy to categorise.



Positionality

As a German-Ethiopian architectural designer, I see myself at the intersection of both contrasting realities and struggle to define my attitude towards this development clearly.

On the one hand, it must be acknowledged that the need for housing is pressing, and such large-scale projects provide the tangible need for housing. However, on the other hand, this project falls short in addressing the intangible living culture of the people. Intrigued by this conflict within me I wanted to address this issue in a project. Rather than relying on abstract concepts and artificial boundaries, I entered into a spatial dialogue where I aimed to unravel some of the dichotomies by immersing myself in the stories and experiences found on site. My aim was to gain a genuine understanding of the specific spatial needs of Ethiopian dwellers, that housing in Ethiopia must fulfil to ensure the expression of their culture of everyday life.

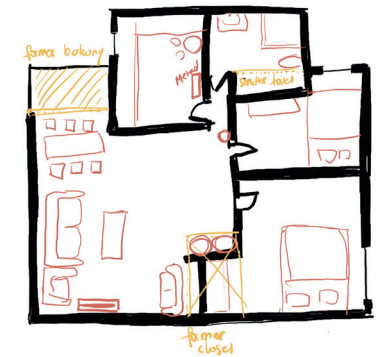
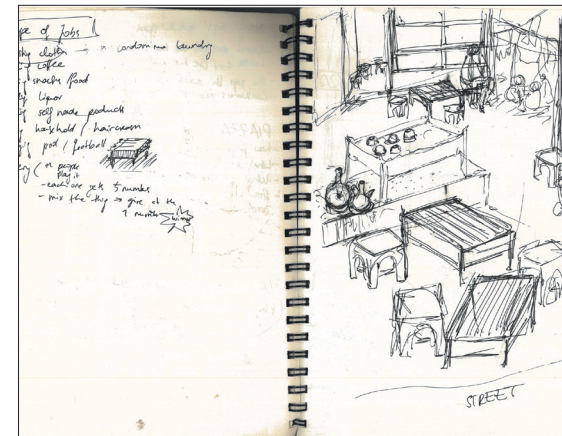
Research Questions

What are the architectural requirements for a home in Ethiopia that enables Ethiopian Dwellers to express their living culture ?

How are daily practices influenced by space ?

How is it possible to map/trace/document culture ?

Where could architecture be a potential barrier and carrier for culture?



The Method

So I equipped myself with ethnographic research methods and activated my family. With their help, I was able to visit a multitude of inner-city settlements and Condominium sites. I met various warm-hearted, welcoming people, entered a multitude of homes and was able to become part of the daily life of the residents.

Analysing these lived spaces through observations, photography, and sketches accompanied by informal conversations with residents provided me with valuable insights into the local living culture and the multiple ways in which residents navigate their daily lives in their domestic spaces.

These insights challenged and expanded my initial assumptions, revealing nuanced and complex relationships between dwellers and their living spaces.





I was welcomed into the homes of many people within the condominiums and the sefers...



..and I was often offered food, which shows how eating together is part of the culture and a way to break down boundaries



A woman showing me her garden within a Condominium compound.



One of my uncles who is living in a Condominium showed me a similar garden.



More food ... and coffee...



Me and my tour guide Adaye, who introduced me to her friend who lives in the Kirkos sefer.



Piazza

Kazanchis

Kirkos

Sefers visited in Addis Ababa

“The close-knit relationship between these single housing units creates one big social community ‘building’ where each unit cannot survive without the other.”

The Sefer

The inner city settlements have a high significance socially, economically and historically for the urban fabric of Addis Ababa. The establishment of these settlements dates back to the foundation of the city in 1886 and was developed by the emperor at the time to facilitate administration and planning. However, due to the increasing population growth, there was no longer a clear overview anymore. The influx of population and the demand for service and housing led to the uncontrolled growth of the settlements, as the residents continued to adapt and extend their housing according to their own needs and demands. Thus, once established by the emperor to control the city, today the sefer function

as micro cities within a larger urban network, “not correspond[ing] to the City Administration plans of density, sanitation, safety or public accessibility.

The most common housing typology in these settlements is the ‘small houses and sheds’, which are the most affordable possibilities for shelter. Both types appear mostly together, as 70 % of the small houses are characterised by an extension. However, sheds are not the only way of extending the living space, the houses are also directly adjusted by the residents in order to gain more living space. It becomes visible quite clearly that the residents are auto constructors of their own homes, who do not regard their housing

as a static product but rather as an organically individually growing space. This way of letting the house grow incrementally, meaning the gradual step-by-step construction process, is deeply rooted into the Ethiopian building tradition.

The dwelling is not merely produced as a finished product, but rather evolved over time depending on the owner’s needs and income. Most of the inner city settlements are made of state-owned housing, referred to as Kebele housing, and are rented out at a very low price, enabling the poor population to stay in the centre of the city. These Kebele houses are a result of earlier interventions of the public sector in the communist

period in the 70s. The government of the time took over the private property to generate housing for the poor society. This development has led to the fact that 40 % of the housing still belongs to the state. Therefore “the old inner-city residential neighbourhoods of Addis Ababa [do] not only provide housing at rents that can be afforded by the low-income residents but also provide, within the settlement areas, a wide variety of employment opportunities, formal and informal.” This level of informality is especially inviting for the poorest and less privileged population of the city.





Income Generation

The street is especially a very important place for formal and informal income generation. A large number of households and families run smaller businesses at home and use the street space to position “small kiosks, home-made drinks bars, snack bars as well as small-scale repairing shops”. Due to the constant flow of passers-by, the residents are likely to attract a large number of customers. However, people who are not able to open their living space to the street space can also generate income through street vending activities.

Thus, one also encounters women with small stalls or covers, which they use to sell vegetables or male youths selling bananas in self-made cargo bicycles. In addition “personal services such as shoe shining, car washing, carrying goods, etc. provide employment opportunities for large numbers of people in the centre of the city.”

These activities are specifically important considering that Ethiopia is not fully industrialised yet, the majority of the poor are dependent on these types of activities to generate income.

However, it is important to note that the city centre is characterised by a mixed land tenure and like in most capital cities, operates as the economic centre. Precisely this point leads to a clash of interest, as the inner-city areas are the places with the highest market price and at the same time the place where the largest part of the urban poor lives and generates their income.



Shops leaning against buildings or their interstices.



Expansion of the shop area through extensions like awnings/ corrugated steel sheets, the space can be shared by several sellers, like coffee/tea sellers.



Standalone shops along the street that are made of simple constructions like wood, plastic sheets and corrugated steel





Piazza

The Case Studies

The three selected settlements in Addis Ababa are situated in the city centre and have developed over the years, becoming integral parts of the urban landscape.

As a result, they represent a source of traditional urban life. The first inner-city settlement chosen for this study is **Piazza**, a traditional settlement with a strong commercial influence from the Italian occupation. The second settlement is **Kirkos**, locally considered the home of the poorest settlers. Lastly, the study focused on **Kazanchis**, an area located in the midst of business and diplomatic buildings.

Despite their different positions in the city, there is a certain similarity in the street pattern. The main streets mark the formal, public part. Behind or adjacent to these main streets, is a network of smaller, narrower, and more organic pathways located.

These pathways create a more intricate and informal network, allowing for pedestrian movement and creating space for smaller, more intimate housing compounds referred to as **gebbi**. As a collective these smaller gebbis make up the **sefer**.



Kazanchis



Kirkos



Within these Gebbis the spaces inbetween the domestic spaces are used for activities like washing clothes, drying herbs or cooking.

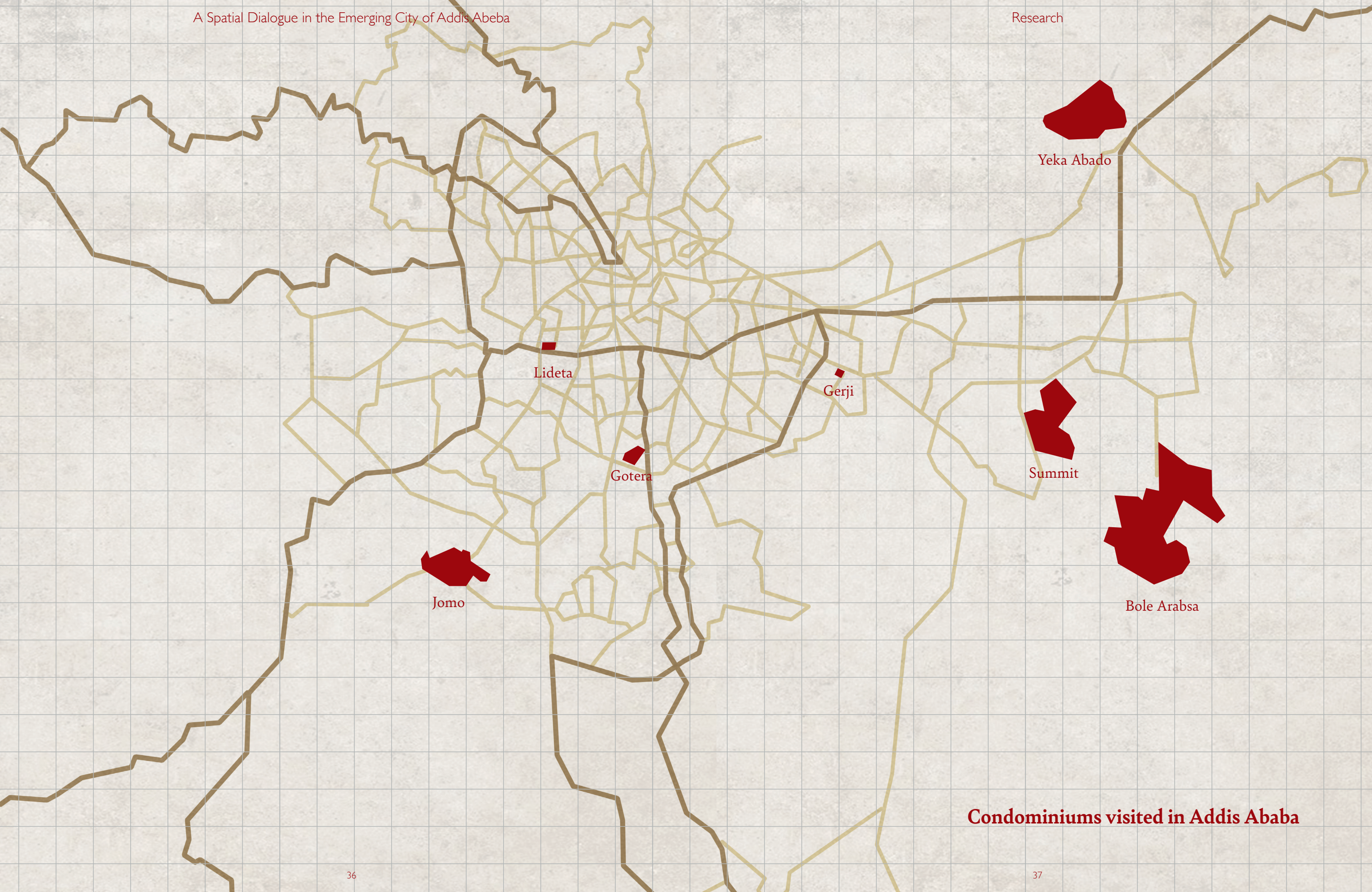
These **intermediate spaces** are therefore not only for everyday activities but also function as communal spaces.



While activities such as cooking and washing take place in these intermediate spaces, the interior spaces are dedicated for spending time with family and guests. **The living room plays a very important role** here as this is the room where most of the time is spent indoors.







When we see the way of life in condominiums, the social interaction of the inhabitants is getting weaker than the conventional settlements (...) because in such arrangements, open spaces are missed for social interaction. In order to gain a higher density, activities are raised above the ground, segregating the habitual interaction between common ground and social activities.

The Condominium

The concept of condominium housing was first introduced as part of the Integrated Housing Development Programme (IHDP) in 2005. This program was implemented to effectively address the challenges of low-income housing, as a continuation of the Grand Housing Programme (GHP).

The primary aim of the IHDP was to increase the supply of affordable housing for the low-income population while also recognizing and preventing the expansion of urban slum areas. In addition to this, the program sought to create employment opportunities for micro and small enterprises as well as unskilled labourers,

thus providing a means of income for families to afford their own housing. Furthermore, the IHDP aimed to promote wealth creation and distribution across the nation, which would significantly contribute to the overall development of the country.

Despite the positive intention, there are several aspects that led to negative effects, one of them being the promotion of home ownership, which represents a significant shift from the previous government-owned rental kebele housing models.

Furthermore the urban development strategies result in “tabula rasa planning”

for older parts of the city. While one could argue that this approach causes more diverse layouts of the city, which could be regarded as positive, this process has had negative effects on the social fabric of the affected neighbourhoods.

For the majority of low-income residents in these areas, their economic livelihoods are intricately tied to the interdependence and close proximity they share with their neighbours. Once these neighbourhoods are cleared and residents are relocated to other parts of the city, they may enjoy better living conditions, but their socio-economic foundations are severely disrupted.

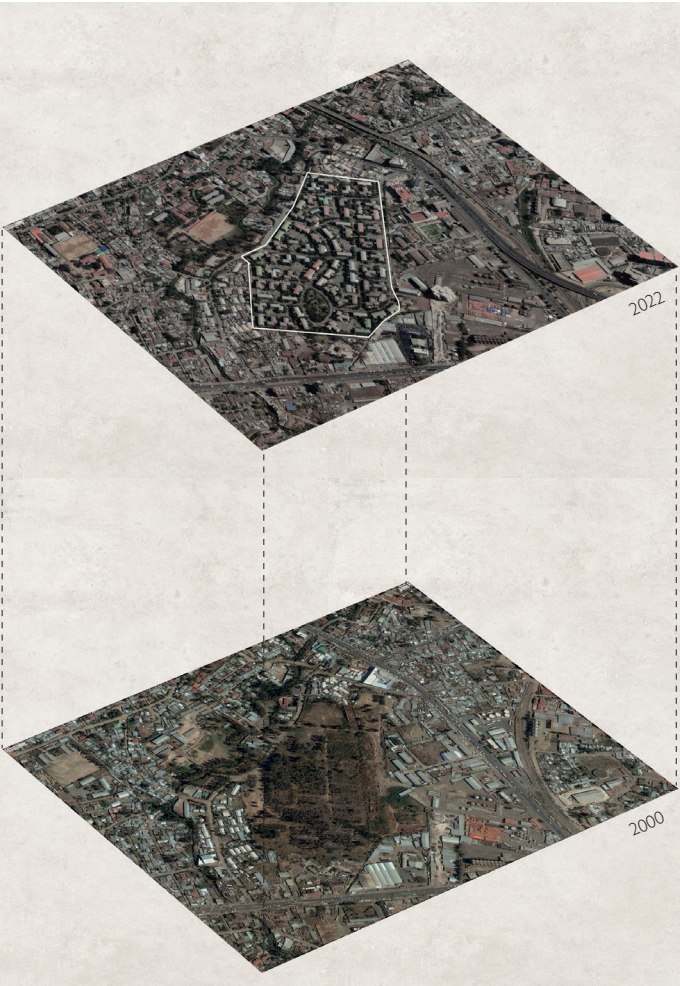
It is precisely here that it must be taken into account that Addis Ababa

is unique in that it has a long-standing tradition of social mixing between the poor and the rich. This integration of different socio-economic classes in the city centre has led to benefits such as street vendors profiting from wealthier passers-by. The displacement of lower income people from the city center towards places like the periphery poses a risk for the development of ‘satellite towns’ with a homogenous concentration of lower-incomeers.

Such development could lead to limited opportunities for social mobility and a lack of access to the resources that are essential for community development.



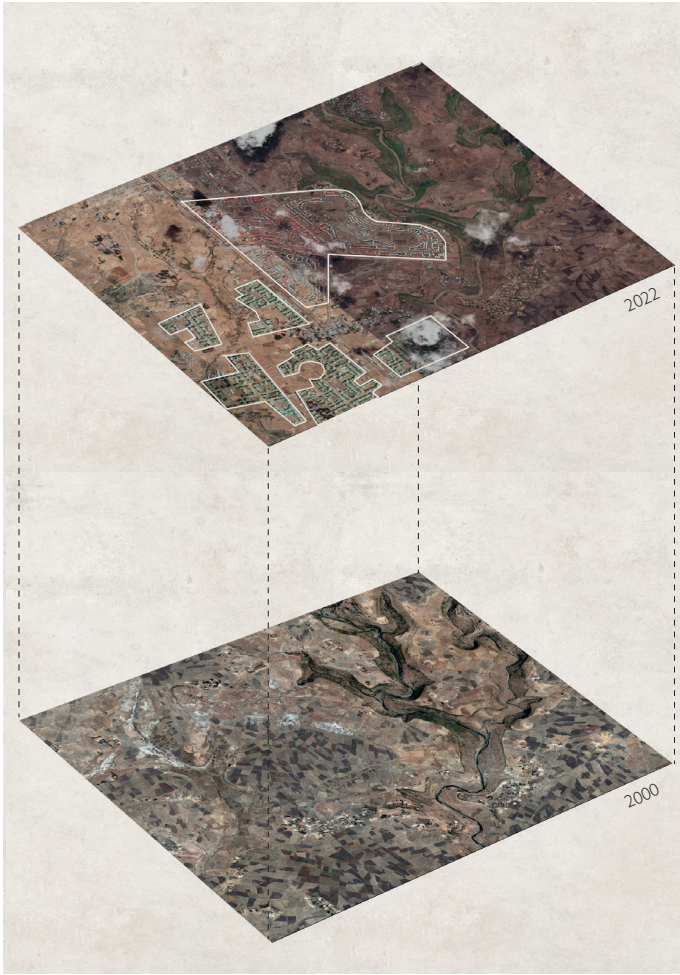
Condominium Urbanization Processes



brownfield urbanization



urban renewal



greenfield urbanization



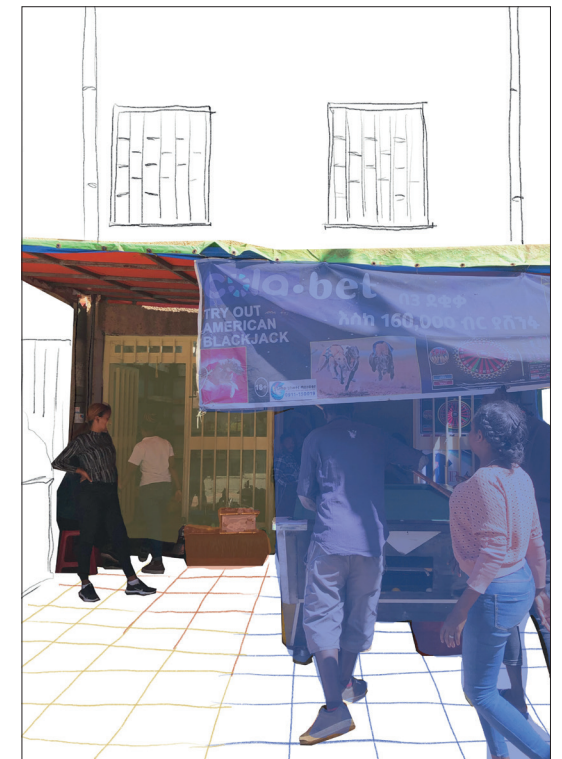
Shops on the ground floor of the condominium building.



Standalone shops along the street are made of simple constructions like wood, plastic sheets and corrugated steel sheets.



In areas where there was a scarcity of shops, vending stalls located on the roadside with a linkage to the living space were sighted.

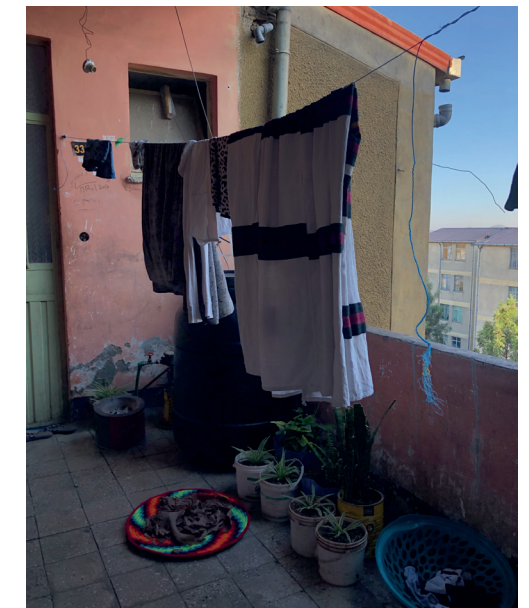


Expansion of the shop area through extensions like awnings/ corrugated steel sheets, the space can be shared by several sellers, like in this case coffee/tea sellers (red) a flour shop (yellow and a bar (blue).





The corridors of the Condominium are used in a similar way as the inbetween spaces within the gebbis. Even though these spaces were not specifically designed for this purpose the **residents appropriate** them anyways either for activities like washing and drying clothes





The interiors of the condominiums also bear a certain resemblance to the interiors of the domestic spaces visited in the sefers. Here, too, **great importance is given to a fully equipped living room.**





Condominium in Bole Arabsa

Modelmaking as a *Tool*

Following my research trip, I elaborated and abstracted my findings and tried to develop answers to my research questions by compiling my findings in the form of **collages and abstracted models**.

Initially, I started to do that as a way of documenting; however, **the modelmaking process became a method** to dismantle my observations. Since I had no documentation of the actual floorplans, I reconstructed the homes through photographs and used the position of prominent furniture pieces as a guide to understand the spaces around them. **Through the combination of photographs and comments, I aimed to create a holistic understanding of the domestic space.**

Through this method, **I was able to juxtapose two completely opposite places and ways of living:** a small house in Kirkos, one of the poorest settlements in Addis Ababa, and two flats in a condominium in Yeka Ababa, one of the newer condominium projects in the periphery.

A significant finding from my research was the **unexpected similarity** in the relationships between the residents and their completely different interior and exterior living spaces.

Inside, one is immediately struck by the very similarly furnished living rooms. **Large sofas, a marble sofa table and a large television can be seen as the main component of any Ethiopian home.** Rooms like the bedrooms, on the other hand, are not given much attention, as most of the daily activities revolve around the living area.

Especially in Kirkos, I witnessed how **a big part of the day happens within the threshold of the home like the porches, private smaller patios and communal outdoor corners.** In these spaces hidden from the public realm daily activities within the community take place, like washing the clothes, the preparation of food, or just daily conversations with the neighbors.



In many settlements there are communal kitchens, but in this case the resident has her own kitchen. However, it can be said that a kitchen away from the living area is very common. Ethiopian cuisine is very much based on the Ethiopian bread, injera. For this reason, in every home there is a special pan for it, called metad.



Kirkos



The most prominent room is the living room. Especially the large sofa catches the eye as well as a large TV.



The public street space is used for drying herbs.

Connected to the private outdoor space of the resident, one can enter into the semi public area. This intermediate area is a shared space with other neighbors and used for daily activities like washing clothes and producing food. One can notice a collection of objects that are used collectively.

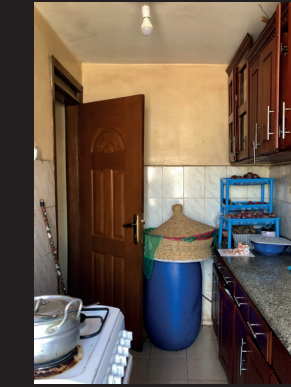
The private veranda is connected to a patio, these areas are optimal for the activities of daily living to be carried out in private.



The intertwining of cultural activities with specific spatial conditions became quite evident to me and emphasised the significance of thresholds that offer multiple gradients from private to public spaces. Furthermore, I witnessed how **the balcony which is often highly desired in German homes, was often completely closed and transformed** either into another room or utilized to expand the living room or kitchen.

In addition to this type of transformation, in many homes, **new partitions were added** to create additional living space. **These interventions highlighted the residents' determination to shape their living spaces according to their needs, overcoming the limitations imposed by the architecture**, which made me understand that architecture may set spatial boundaries but cannot dictate how spaces are actually used.

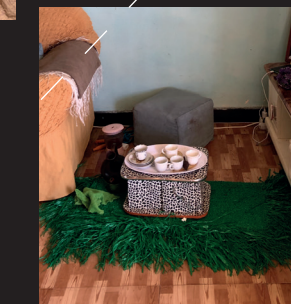
Yeka Abado



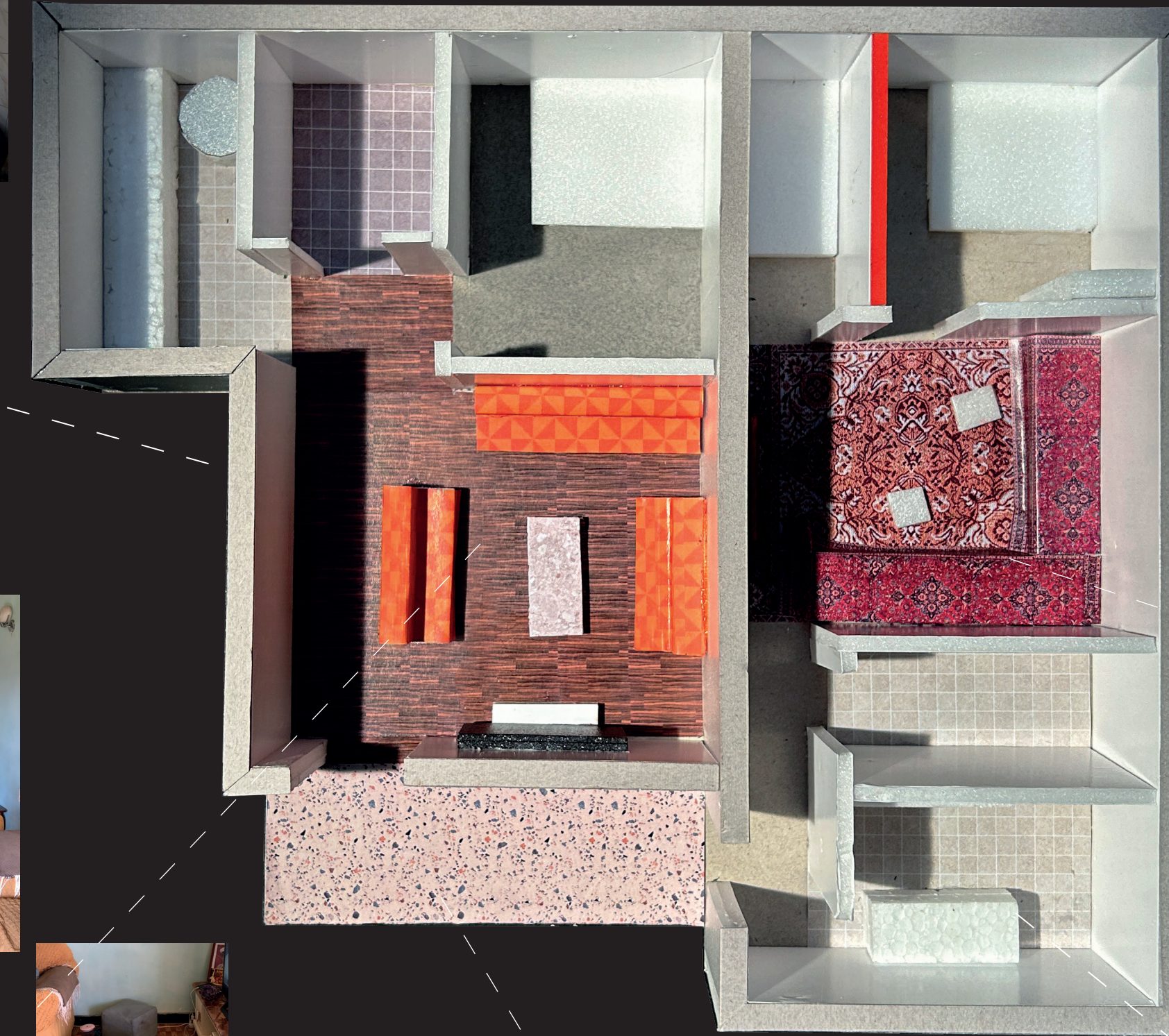
Just as important as the large living room is the kitchen. However, it is visible that the objects that are specifically important for Ethiopian cuisine are positioned somewhat out of place.



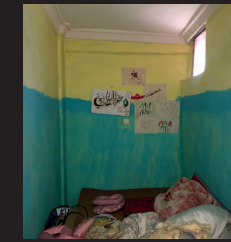
The living room is the center place in the apartment. Characteristic for an Ethiopian living room are large sofas and a big TV. The large sofas offer space for family, friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, sofas and the television represent wealth.



The Ethiopian coffee ceremony plays an important role in everyday life.



The hallway functions as an entrance area for both families, and accordingly can only be partially used as a social area and food production space. For those purposes residents have to go downstairs



The occupant of this apartment has pulled in another wall to allow her daughter to have her own room. This type of adaptation is widespread. Residents adapt their apartments to their own needs.



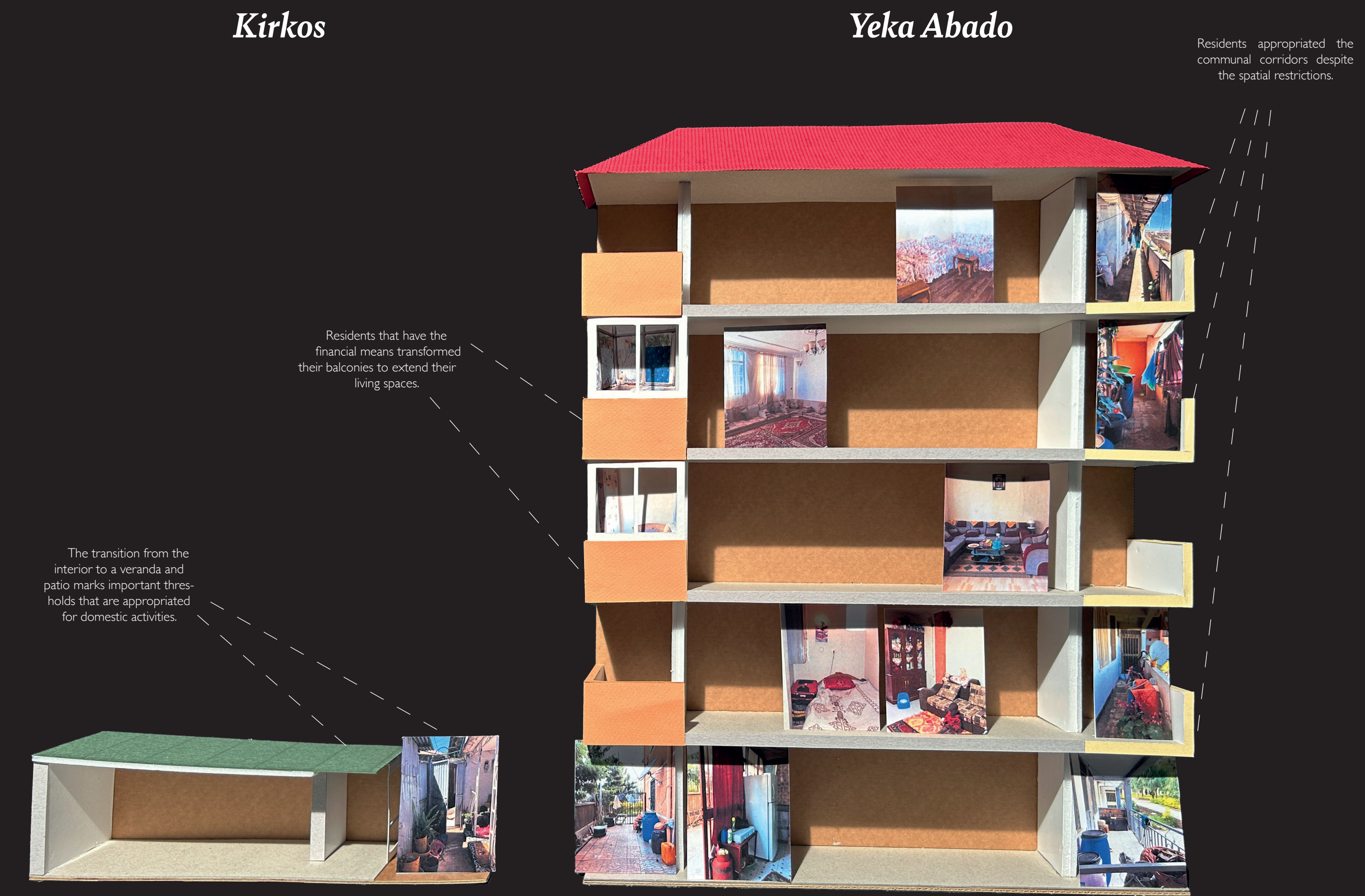
The living room in this apartment is also very noticeable. There is a large TV and instead of sofas large seat cushions.



I observed that certain cultural practices were affected by the restrictions on cultural expansion within condominiums, leading residents to abandon or modify certain activities of their everyday life, like the production of homemade products, which started to decline with the construction of the Condominiums.

The general sentiment among the people appears to be marked by conflicting opinions. Residents in the sefer express contentment with their current living situation while recognizing the condominiums as a viable means to generate income, as many condominium owners opt to rent them out rather than reside in them

On the other hand, those residing in the condominiums express overall satisfaction with owning a unit but voice concerns about the dearth of community bonding and social cohesion within the condominium environment.



Bridging the Gaps

During my time in Addis and as I analyzed my findings, a significant realization dawned on me: *the striking closeness between formal and informal housing.*

Despite the apparent contrast in architectural form and context, the people exhibit strikingly similar behaviours in appropriating their living spaces.

The comparison between informal dwelling houses and formal condominiums highlighted a crucial insight, particularly within the Ethiopian context:

the necessity to design transitional spaces that create gradients from private to public realms, mirroring to a certain ex-

tent the setup in the informal settlements.

These thresholds have immense potential to serve as areas for residents to personalize and engage in their daily routines. Moreover, observing the way residents interact with their built surroundings underscores their inclination to challenge spatial constraints by adapting balconies and modifying walls.

These actions highlight the need for flexible floorplan configurations, that allow residents to easily appropriate and adapt their living spaces to align with their needs and preferences.

The presence of traditional practices within formal housing emphasises the blurred boundaries between these conventional categories.

In reality, the way people interact with their living spaces is a unique blend of both concepts, rendering the strict division between formal and informal somewhat arbitrary.

It is precisely these informal practices that hold tremendous value, complemented by the daily routines of the residents and incorporating these aspects into the design should be a priority.

As designers, we must shift away from rigid, universally applicable abstract con-

cepts and embrace the diverse realities on the ground. Letting go of the need to categorize and instead embracing an open-minded approach allows us to discover the nuanced middle ground.

This nuanced understanding becomes the key to appreciating informal settlements and their ways of living. They embody inherent strengths and unique communal dynamics that have evolved organically over time, deeply intertwined with the local culture.

By recognizing and integrating these strengths into contemporary housing design, we can bridge the gap between modern concepts and traditional practices.

Ingredients of the Design

From my research findings, which are based on observations, interviews and photography, I have formulated important ingredients for the design. Firstly, that **cultural activities** are integrated as an important part of the planning. Secondly, that spaces must be provided for the **production of food**.

Ethiopia is not yet fully industrialised, which means that residents largely produce their own food for sale or consumption. For this very reason, it is important that the planning of housing also includes **planning for places of income generation**.

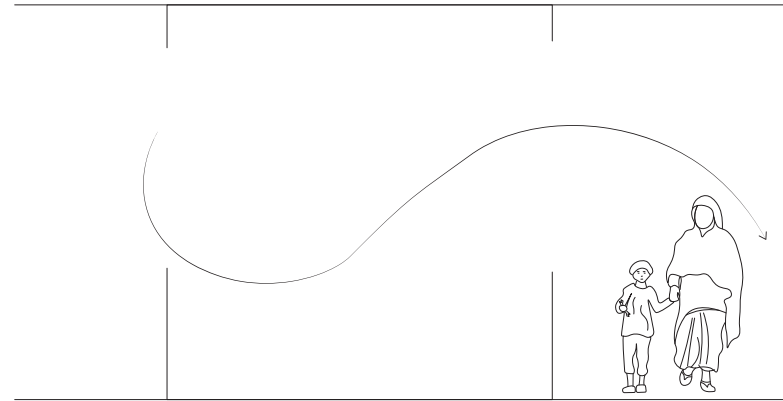
The analysis of the settlements also revealed how important **thresholds in the domestic space** are for carrying out everyday activities. In addition to these thresholds, the integration of **communal corners** is important in order to promote everyday encounters between neighbours.



Cultural Activities



Food Production

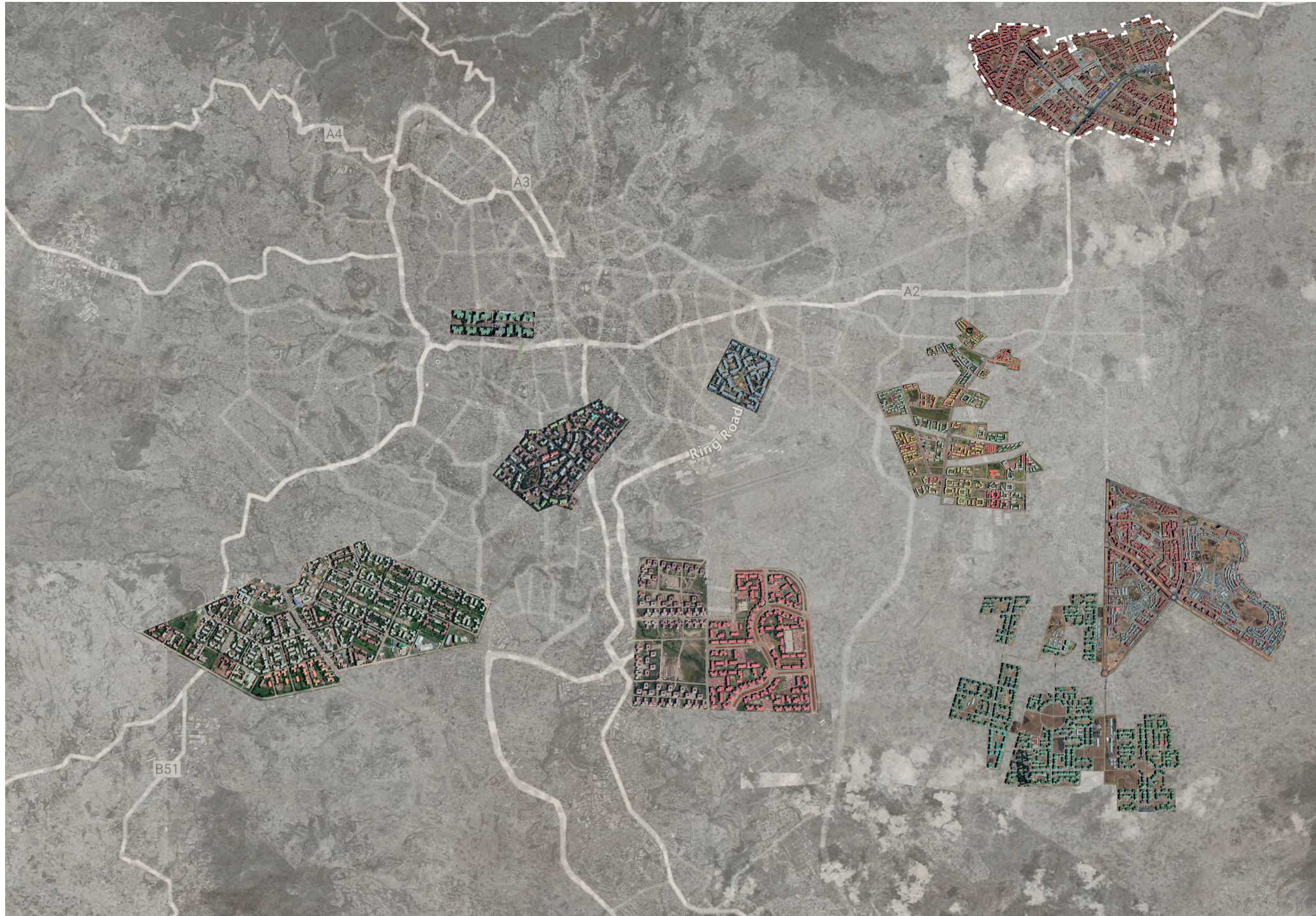


Gradients from
Private to Public



Communal Corners





Project Location

The location for the design is the Condominium site Yeka Abado. Yeka Abado, is located in the sub-city Yeka in the northeastern part of Addis Ababa and was previously undeveloped land used for agriculture and farmers' housing, making it a greenfield construction site.

This type of urbanization stands apart from the naturally evolved urban landscapes, as it was developed without referring to existing urban references and infrastructures. This constructed environment was basically constructed from scratch leading to the creation of extensive open spaces.

Consequently, these vast, uncharted areas present an exciting opportunity for in-depth exploration and architectural interventions.

Johannesburg The University of the Witwatersrand, "Addis Ababa," University of the Witwatersrand, accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.wits.ac.za/urbanperiphery/addis-ababa/>.



Google Maps Image of the Condominium site Yeka Abado

With the development of the Integrated Housing Development Program (IHDP), over 18,000 residential units were constructed in 2012, primarily in the form of condominiums. In addition to the newly developed condominiums, Yeka Abado also features a mix of informal settlements, farmer resettlements, and older properties.

Besides, there are also some private real estate developments in the area. Even though an attempt has been made to offer a mixture of different types of functions, it is immediately noticeable that Yeka is largely made up of housing, with minor exceptions like public facilities.

Despite the focus on housing, the ground floors of the condominiums do provide opportunities for smaller businesses to operate. In addition, Yeka Abado is home to several industrial manufacturing companies in the area's centre.



The condominiums are surrounded by large green areas which are used for drying spices and cultural activities. However, the open nature of the spaces makes appropriation difficult.



Self-built rows of shops are located along the main street, which suggests that the planning of spaces for income-generating activities has not been fully integrated.





Landuse Plan

Very noticeable in Yeka Abado are the large empty plots of land along the main streets. By analysing the government's land use plan, it is clear that these areas are reserved for commercial use by future developers, which means that it would not be advantageous to plan a development on these areas.

However, it is also clear that the open green spaces within the plots have not been allocated to any other use than car parking, meaning that these areas are not of high interest and could therefore accommodate alternative interventions.



Furthermore, some of the ground floors of the condominiums along the streets have been planned with rows of shops (red), which shows us that the planning of retail space in combination with living space has been integrated but can still be expanded. There are also small community spaces within the compounds (green). When comparing the original planning documents, it becomes clear that more of these communal buildings were initially planned. The original plan would have divided the compounds into smaller courtyards.

In this project, the focus lies on the intermediate spaces—not those destined for intense commercial development in the future or purely residential zones, but rather the areas where the formal and informal facets converge. Through a detailed site analysis, utilizing the government's plans, a location for the design was identified. This site specifically hadn't been earmarked for formal purposes, offering a unique opportunity to explore the intersection between these two realities.



Project Site

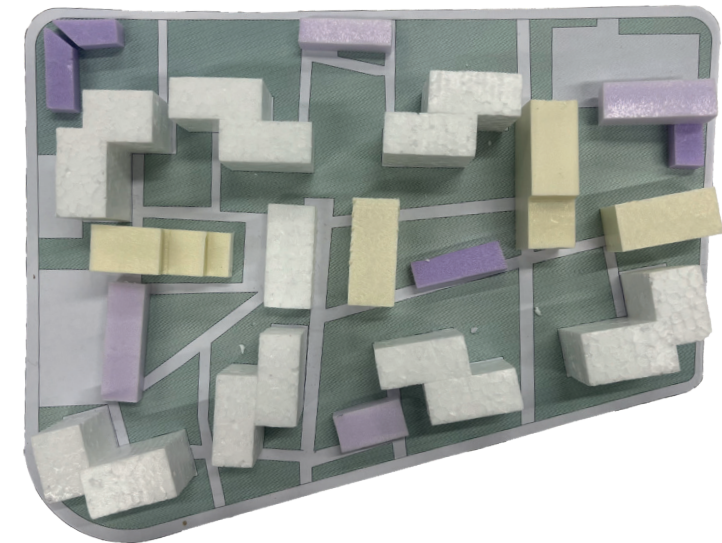
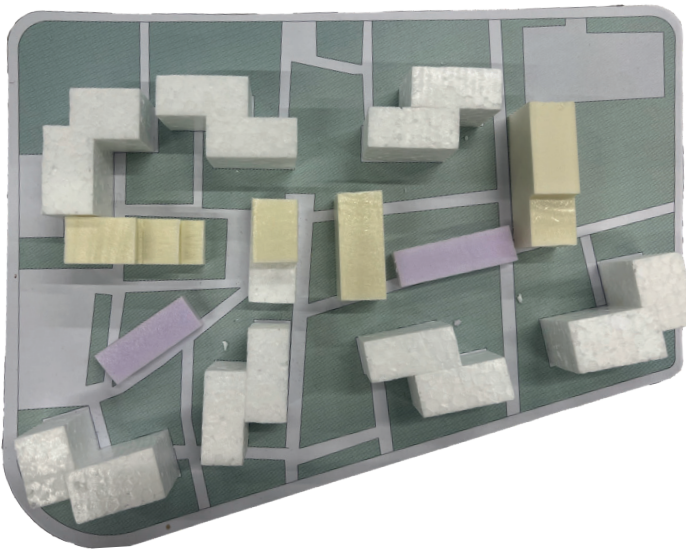
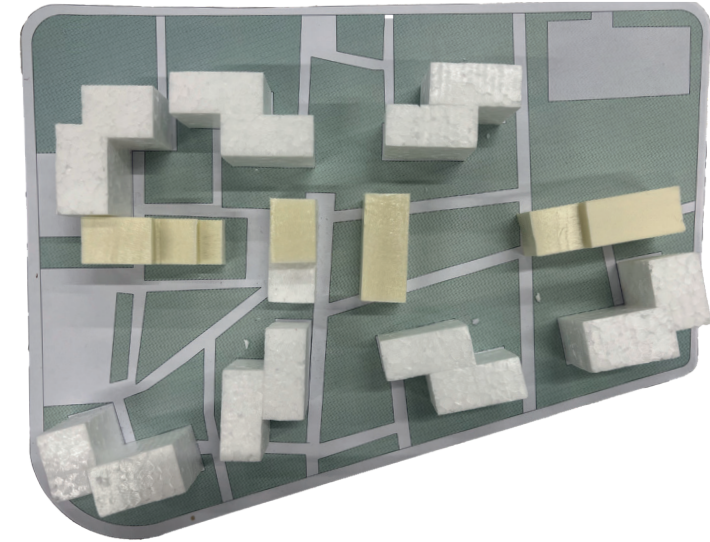
Urban Strategy

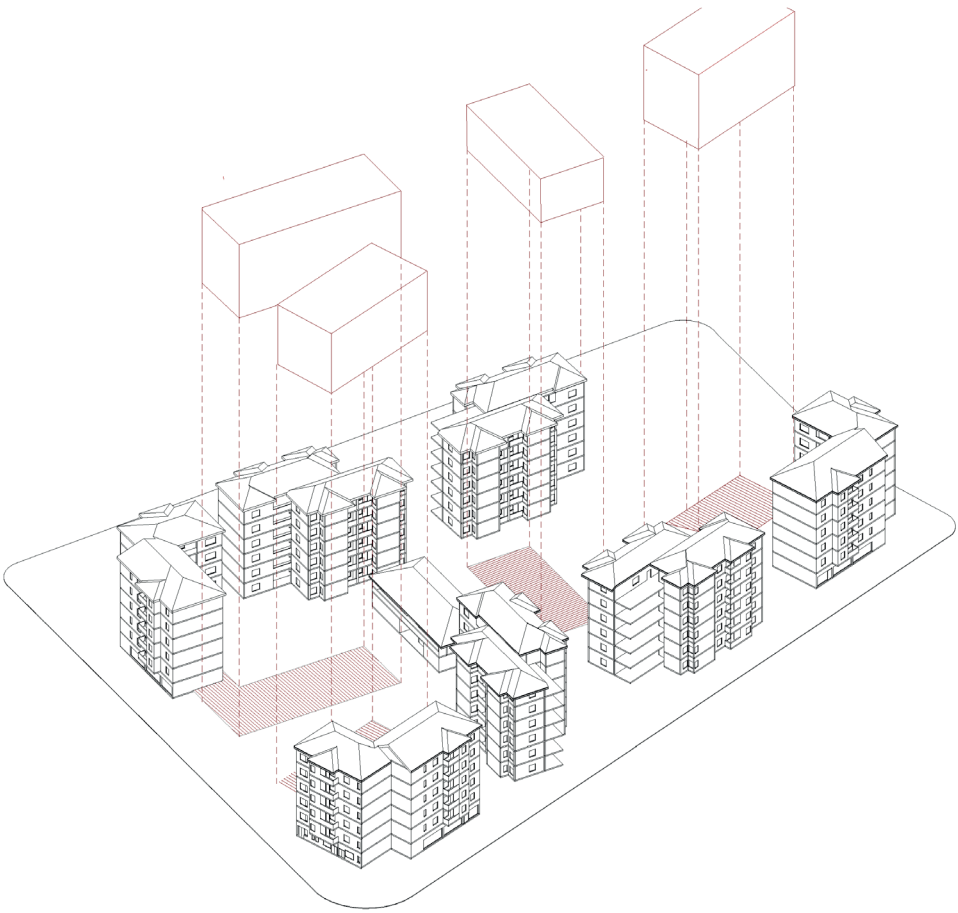
The urban strategy encompasses three key elements. Firstly, it involves reducing the scale of the large compound by implementing redensification. This aims to cultivate more intimate and private spaces for residents while simultaneously generating new living areas within the neighborhood.

Secondly, the strategy emphasizes a distinct separation between private and public zones to encourage the utilization and personalization of private spaces. To achieve this, the western section, connected to the commercial area, is designated as the neighborhood's entrance, featuring small shops. From this rather public square one

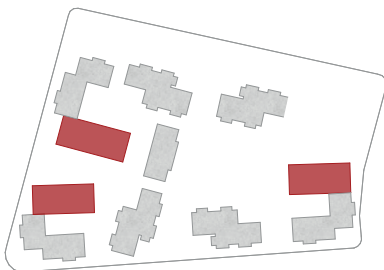
is guided through the neighbourhood to a small market square, catering more to the communal residential needs. This space is designed not only for markets but also for cultural events such as festivals and ceremonies.

Furthermore, the design includes small shop stalls strategically positioned between the condominiums along the street. This placement encourages and supports additional income-generating activities within the community, further enhancing the economic landscape.





Current



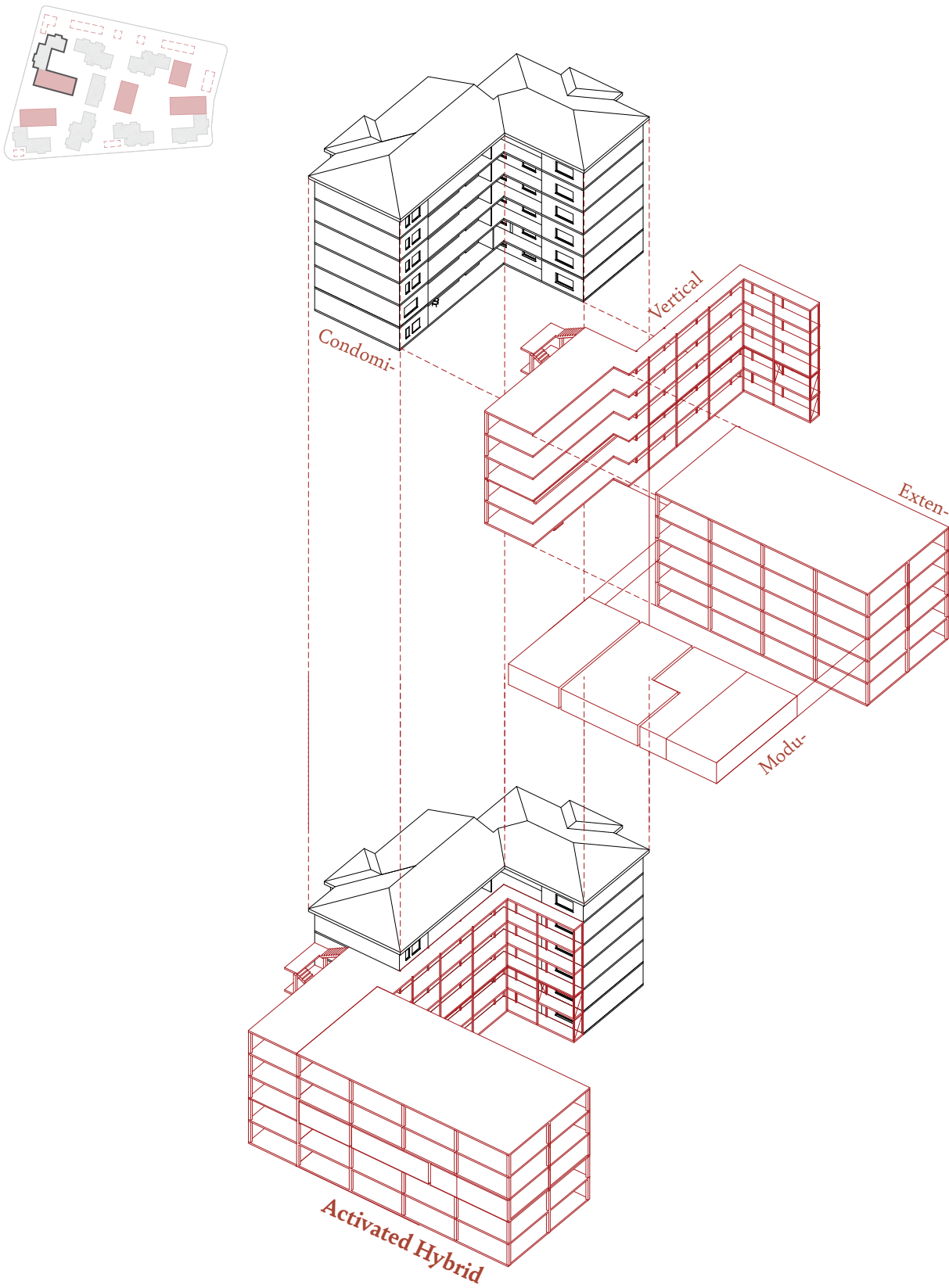
Housing extension on the edges of the plot

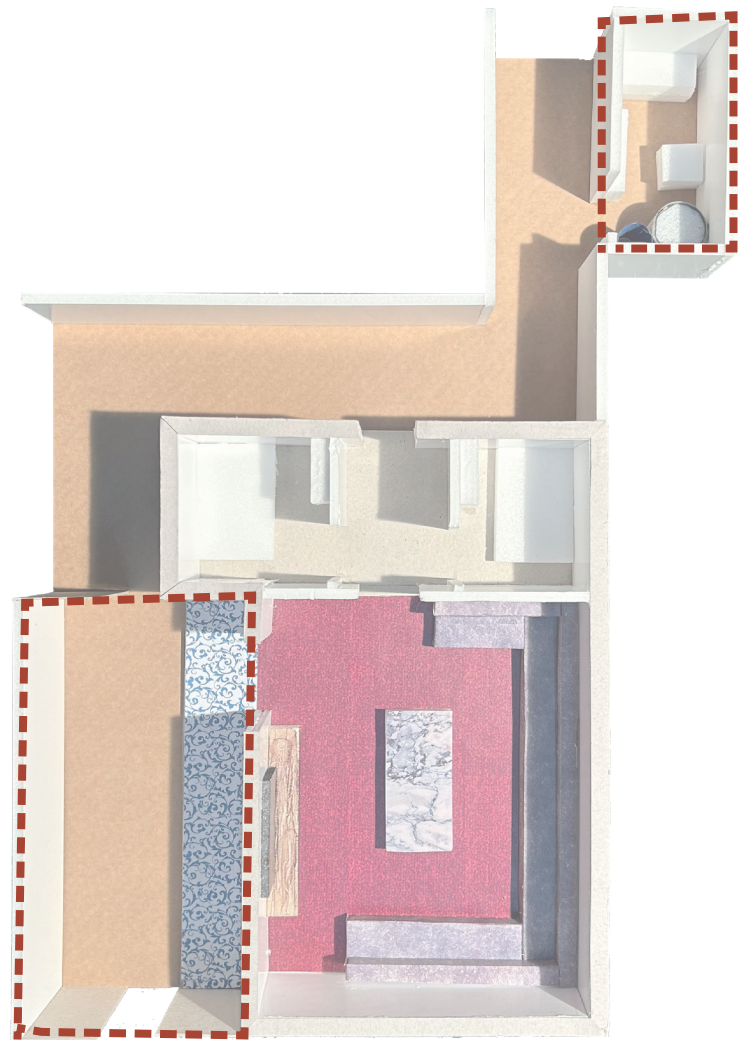


freestanding Volume enhances the passage though the plot, creating more intimate courtyards.

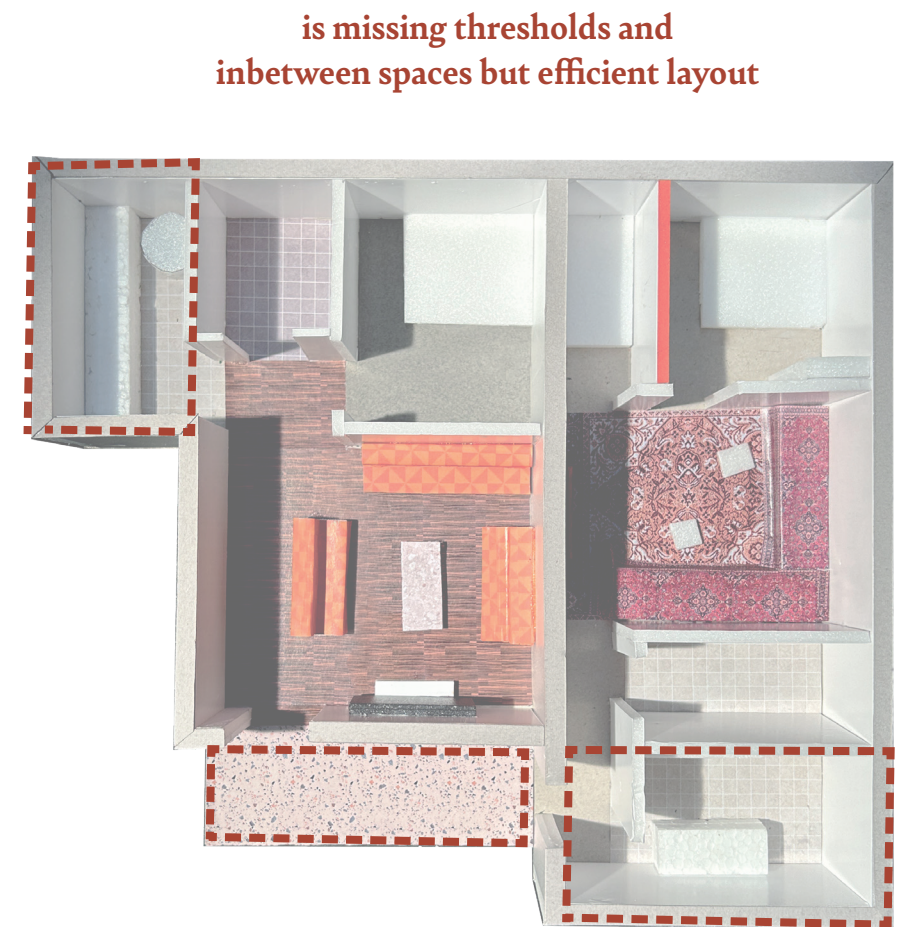
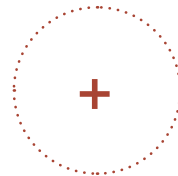


Inbetween spaces are used for communal market stalls, addressing the need for spaces for income generation

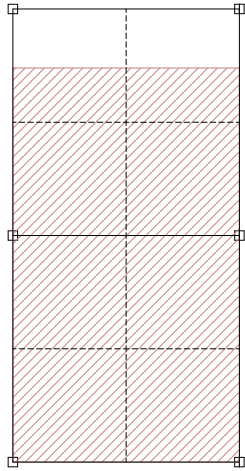
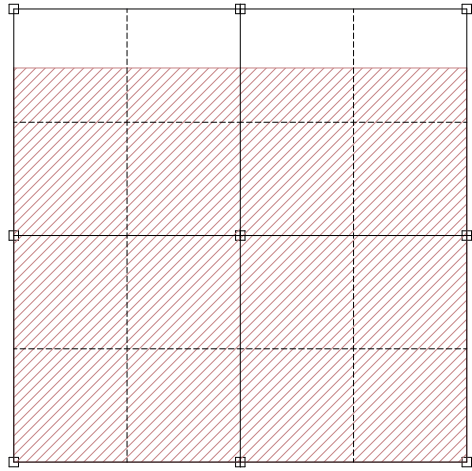
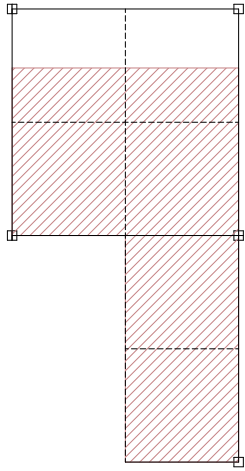
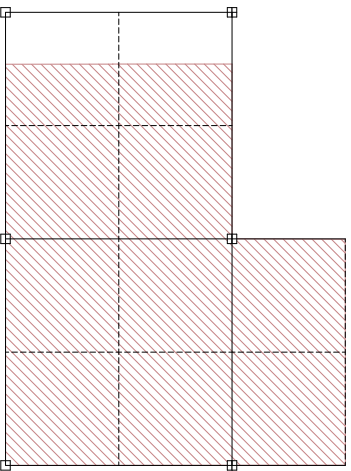
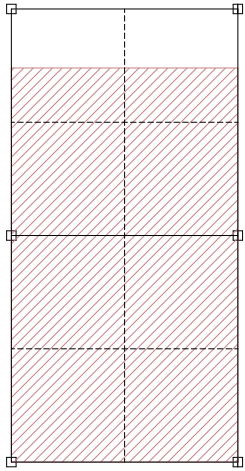
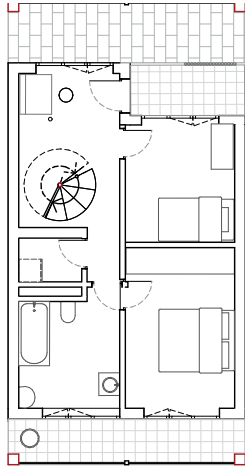
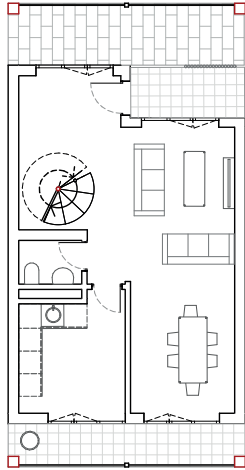
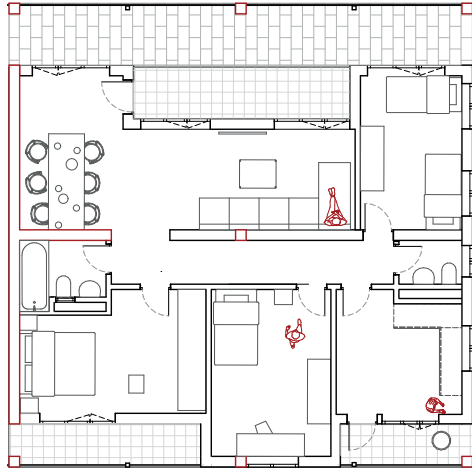
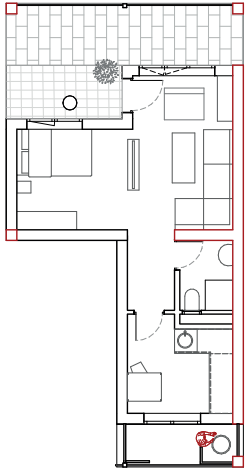
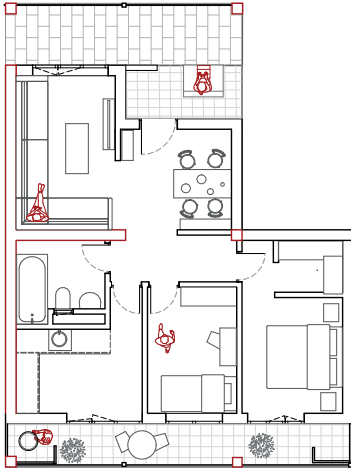
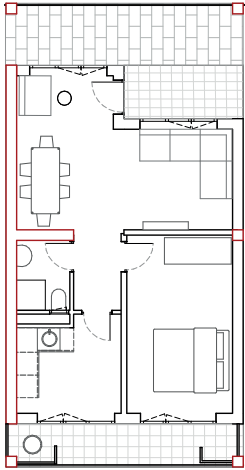




gradients from closed to open



is missing thresholds and
inbetween spaces but efficient layout



1/2 Bedrooms

2/3 Bedrooms

Studio

3/4 Bedrooms

Maisonette with
2 Bedrooms



Site Plan 1:500



First Floor 1:500



Ground Floor 1:200



First Floor 1:200



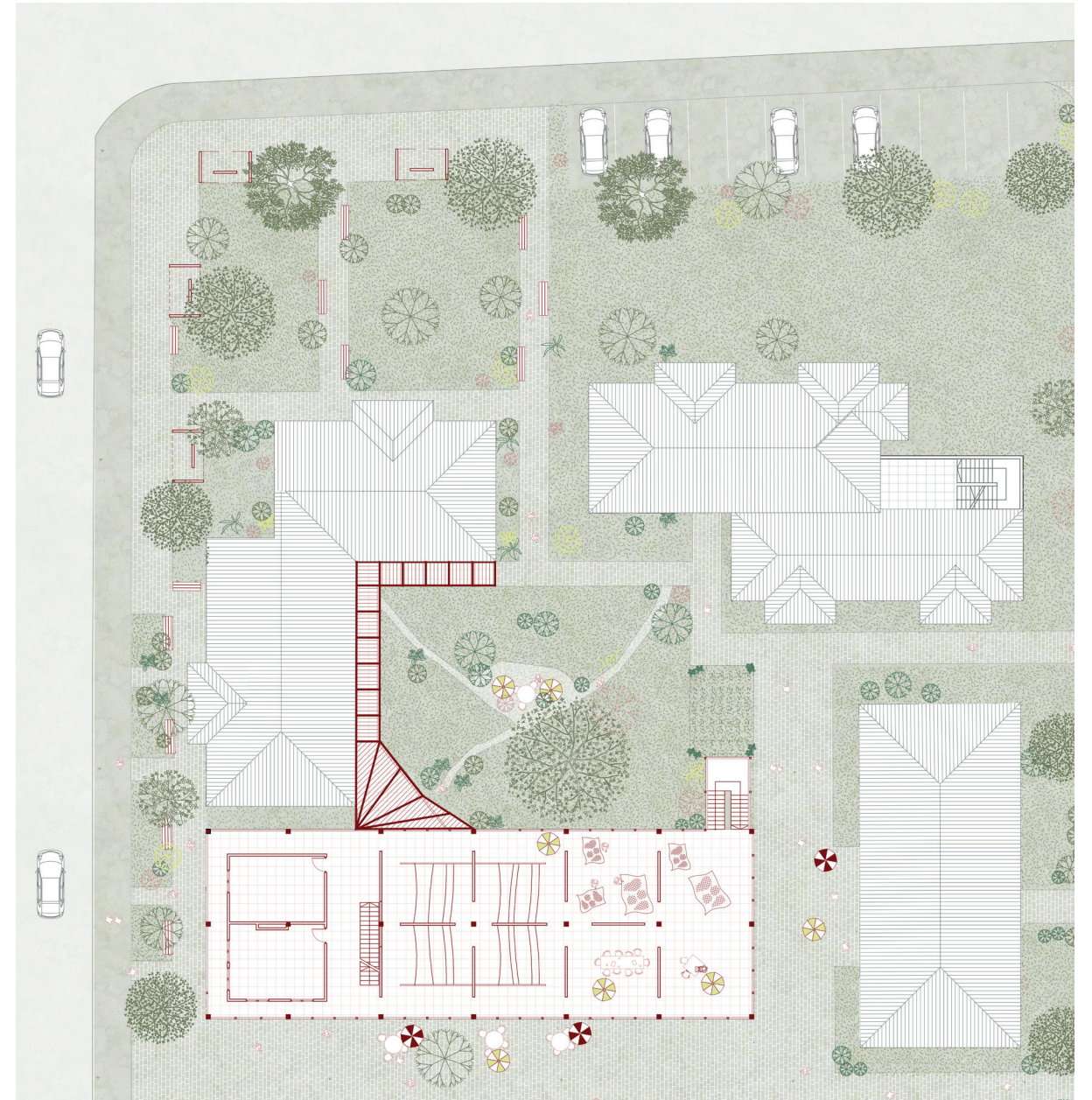
Second Floor 1:200



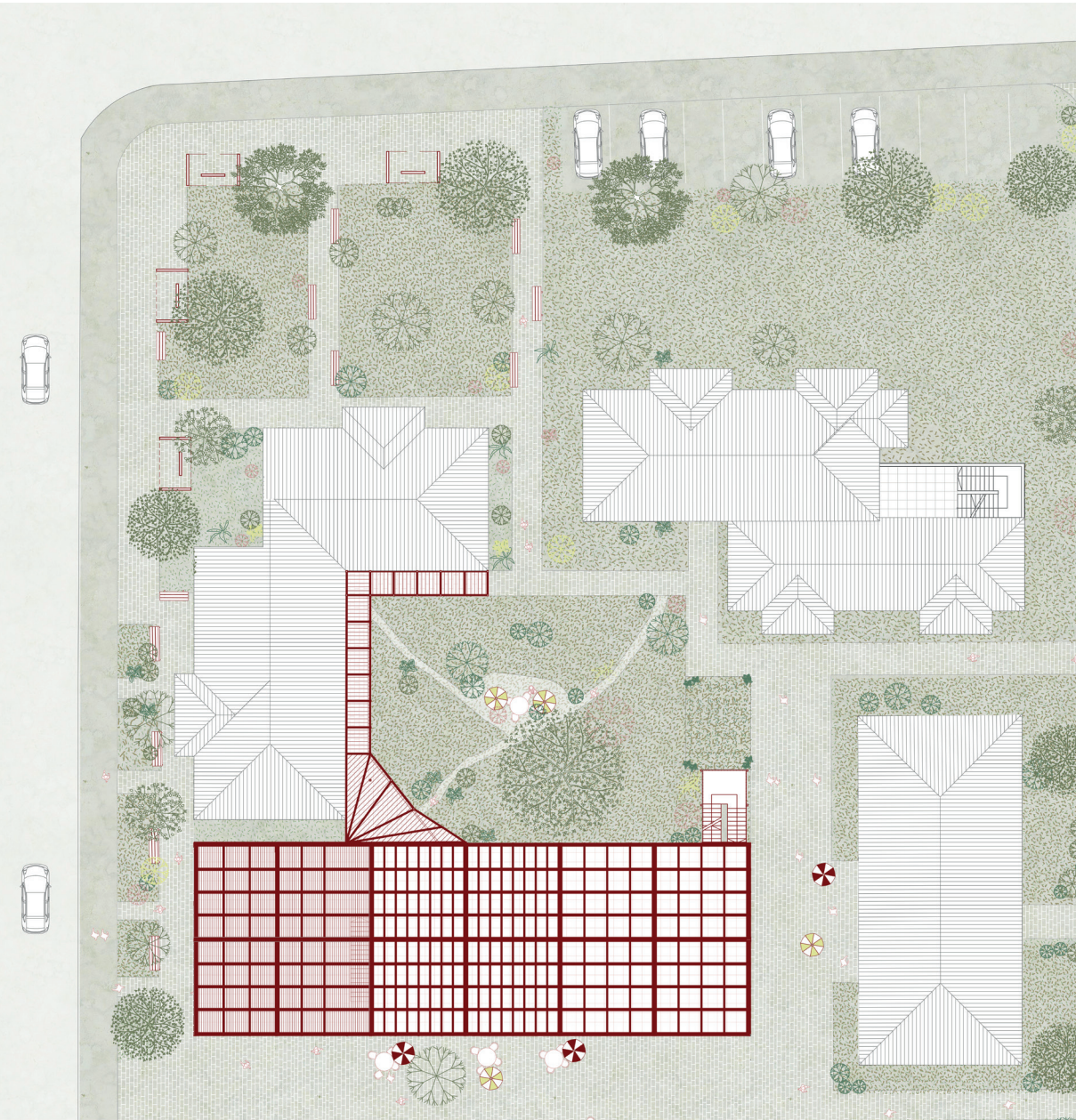
Third Floor 1:200



Fourth Floor 1:200



Roof Terrace 1:200



Roof Top 1:200

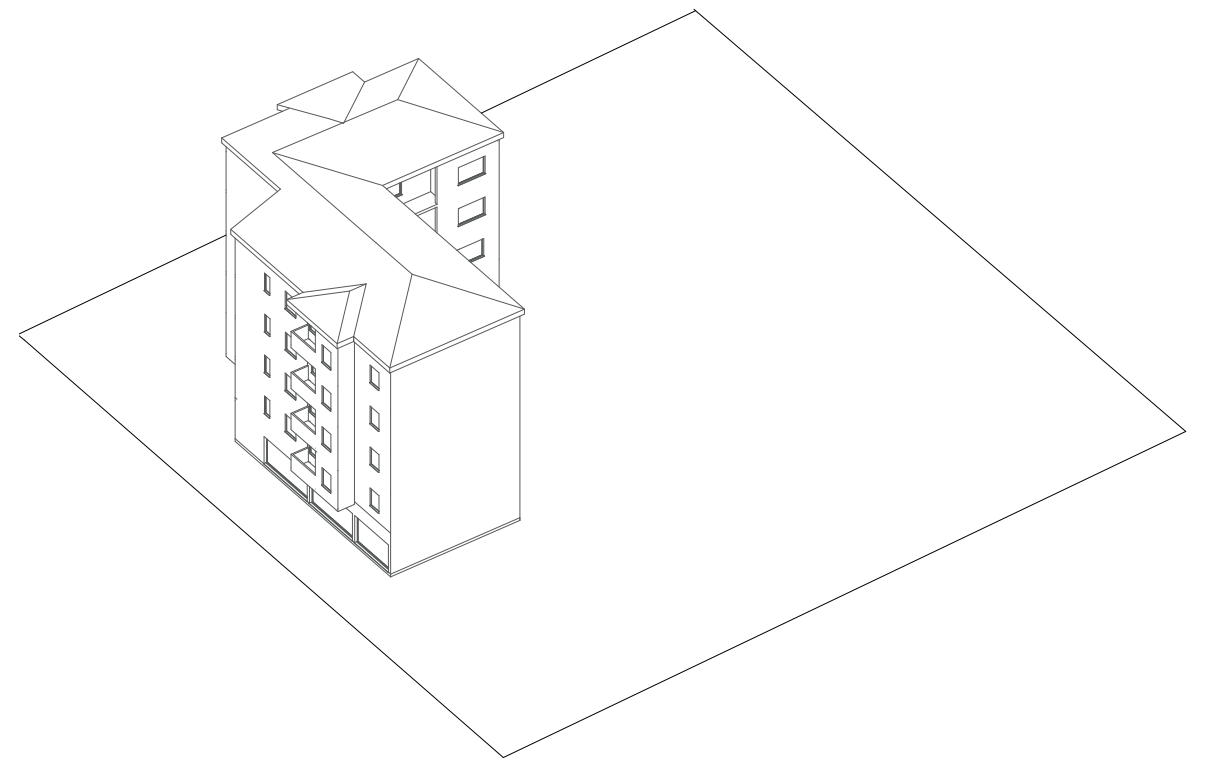


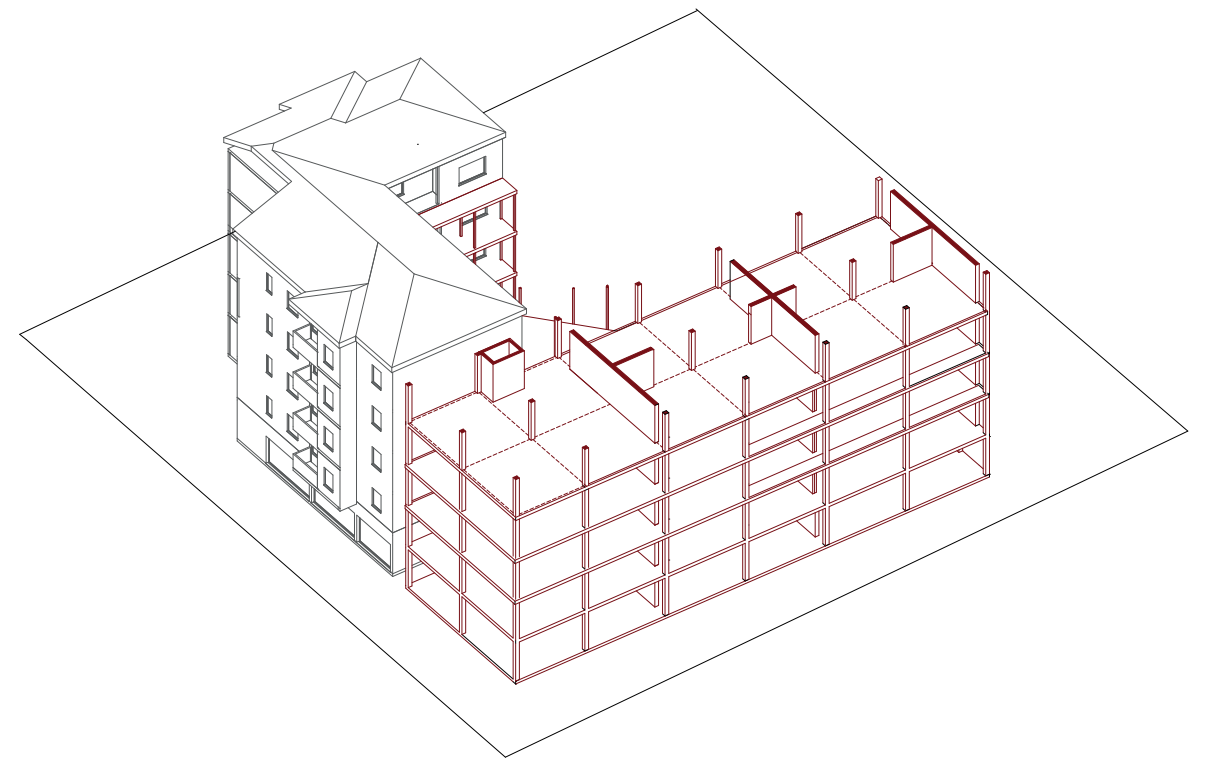


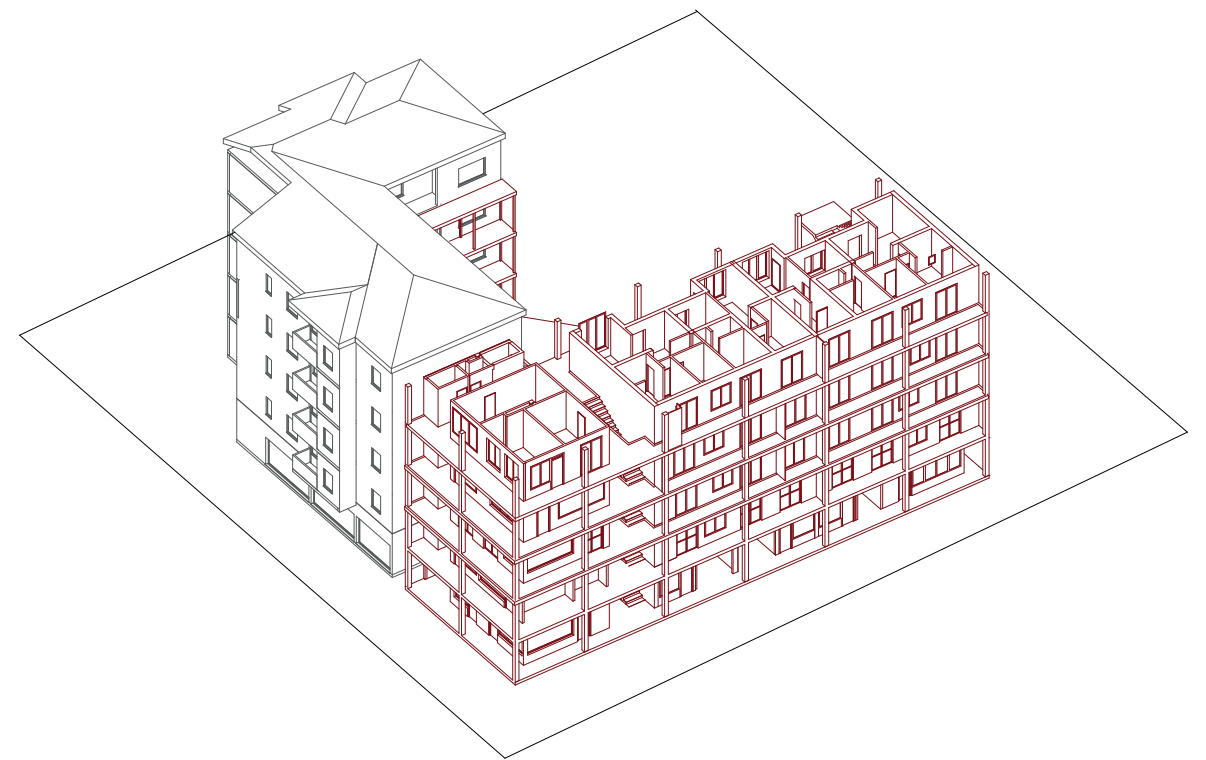
Section 1:50

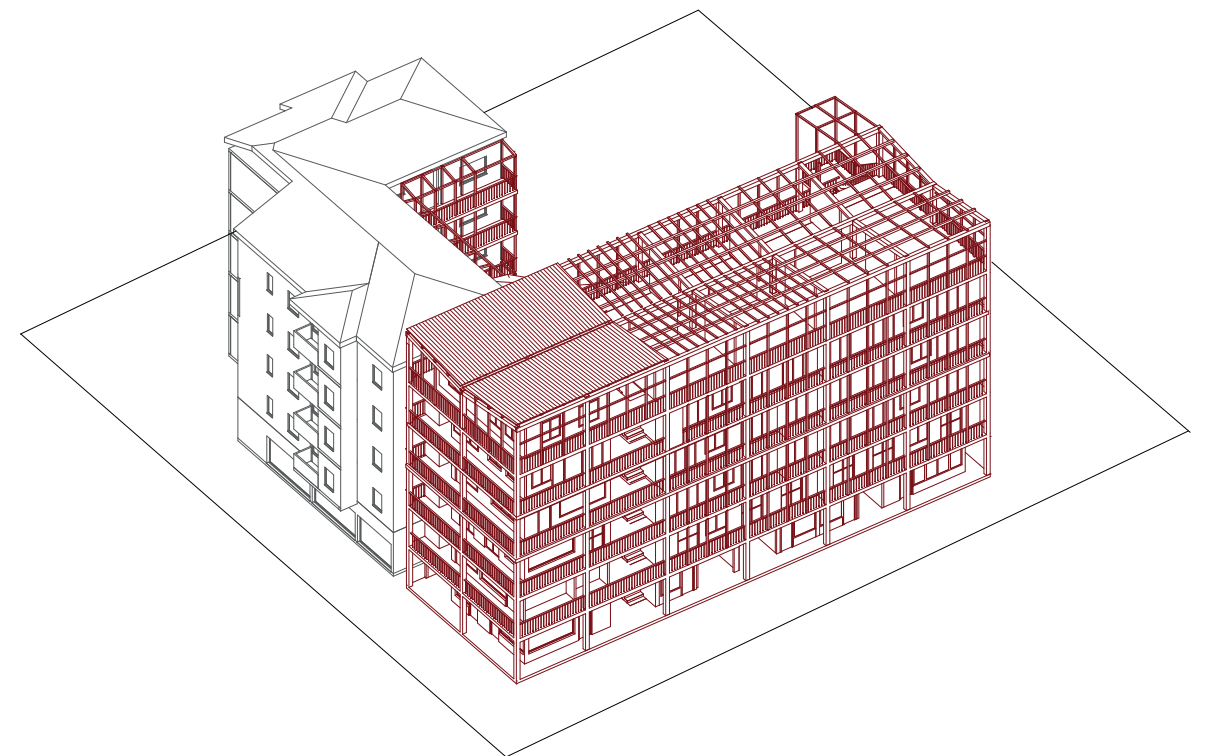


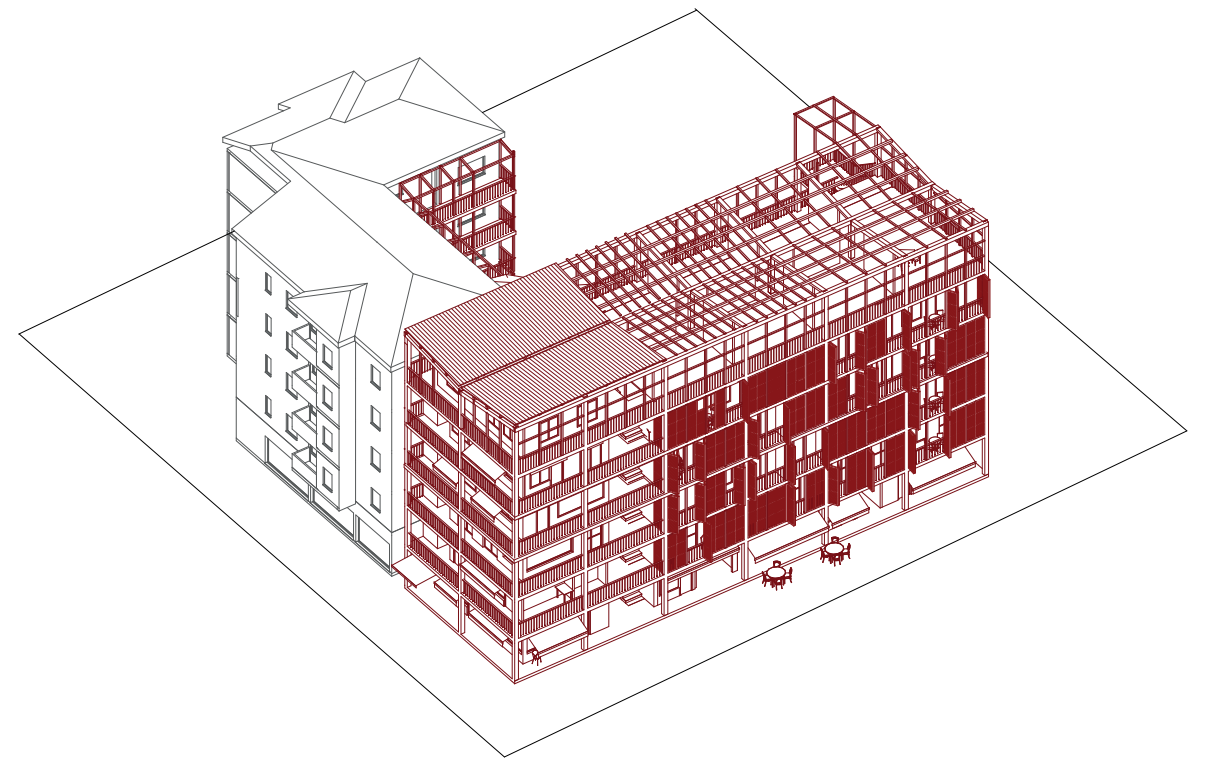
Facade and Section through the Site 1:200

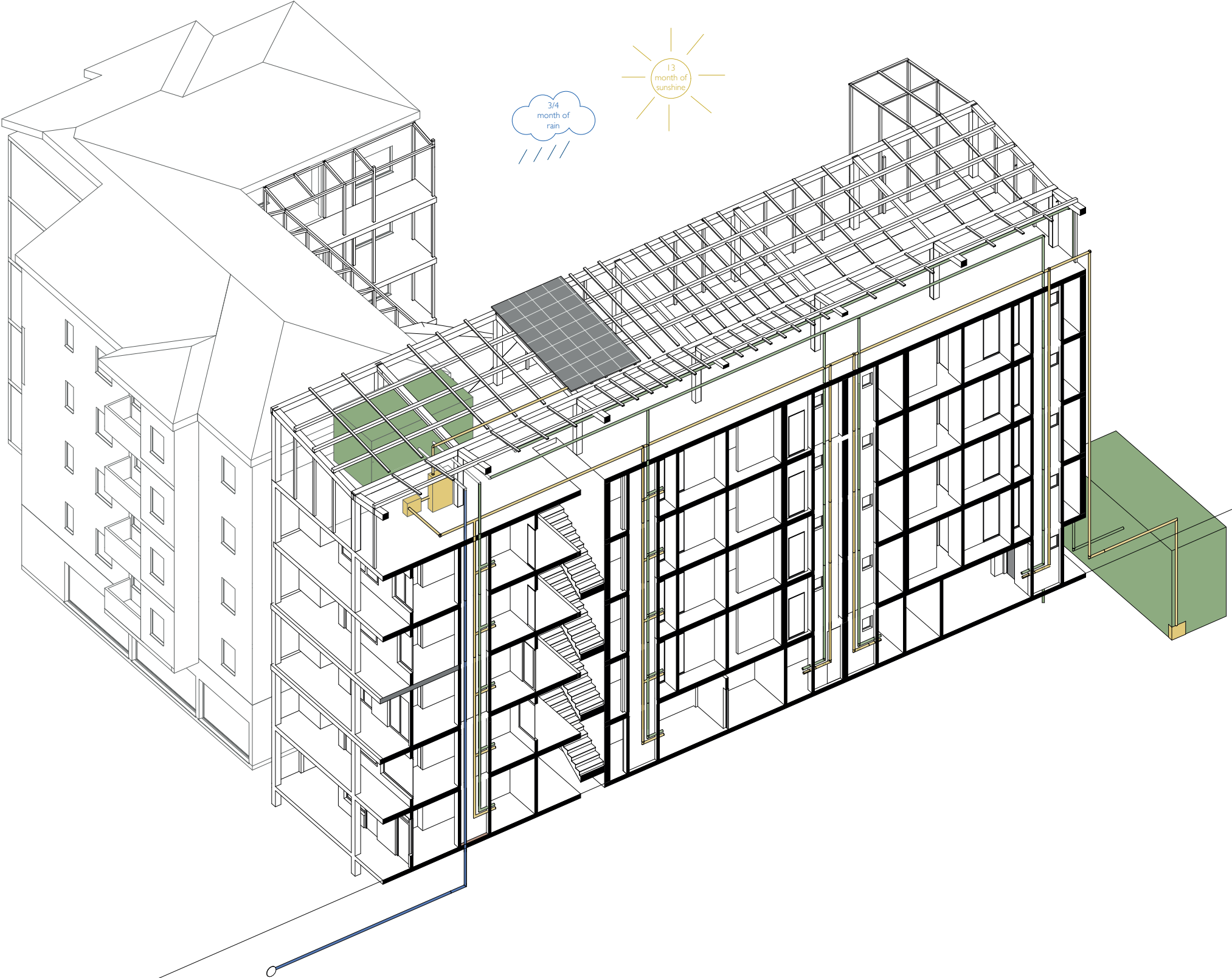


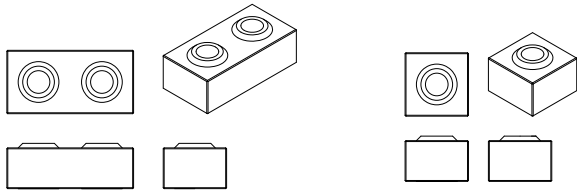
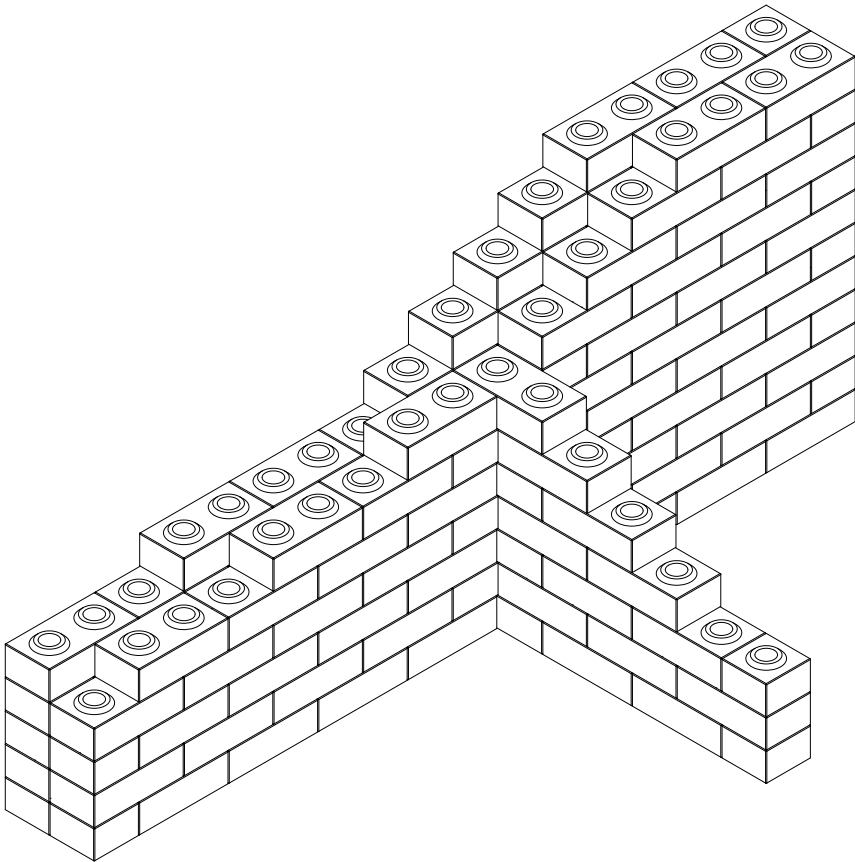




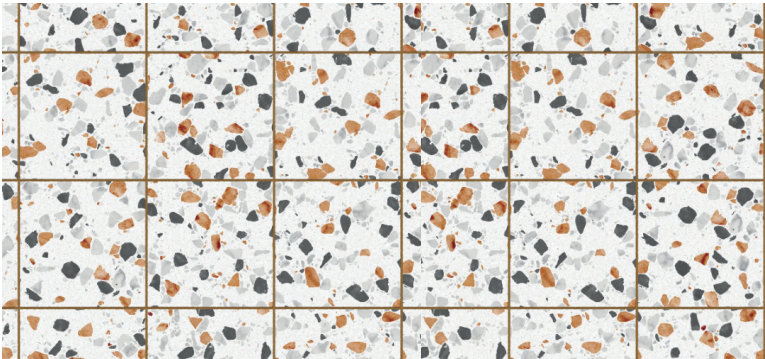






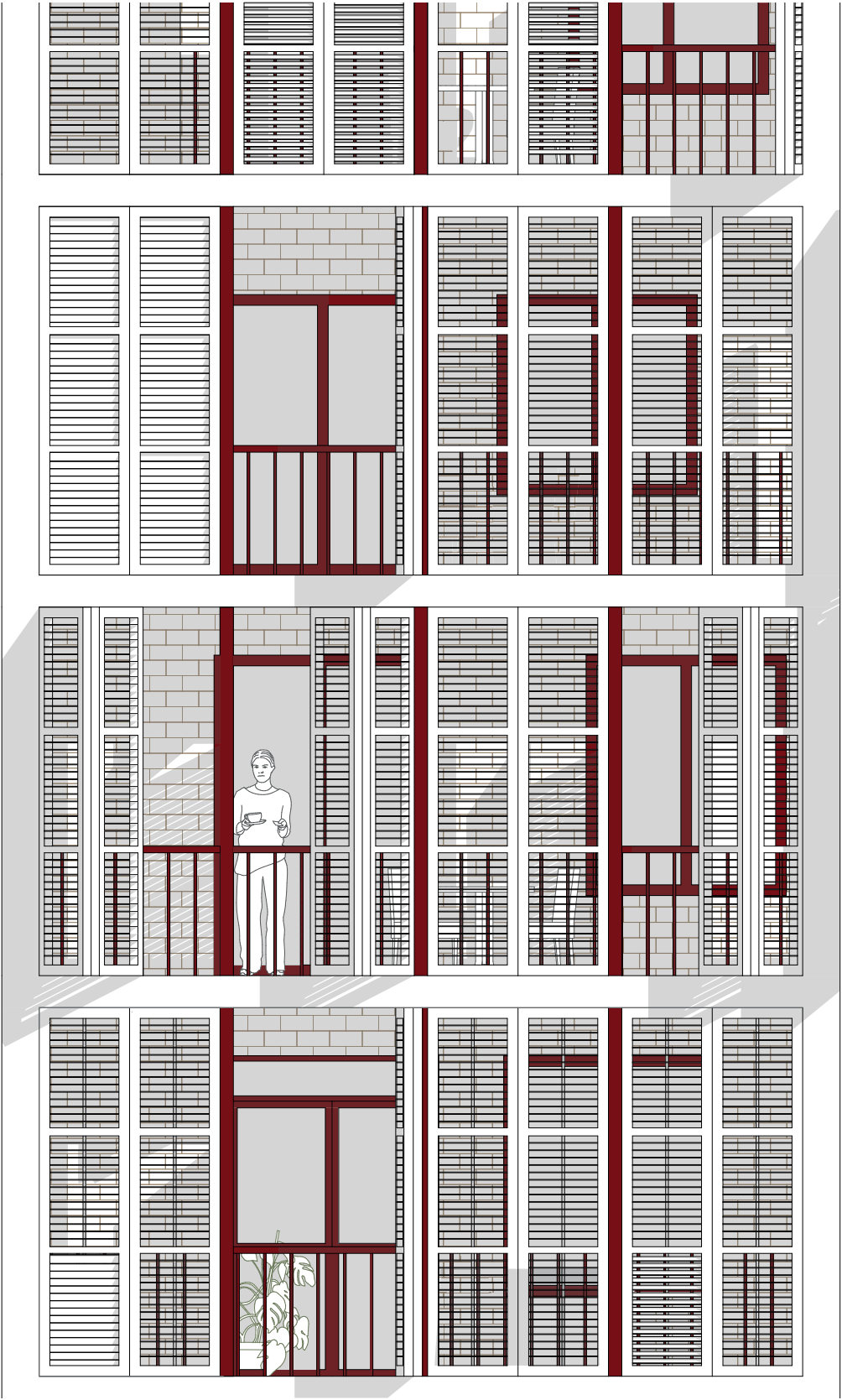


Interlocking Compressed Earth Blocks

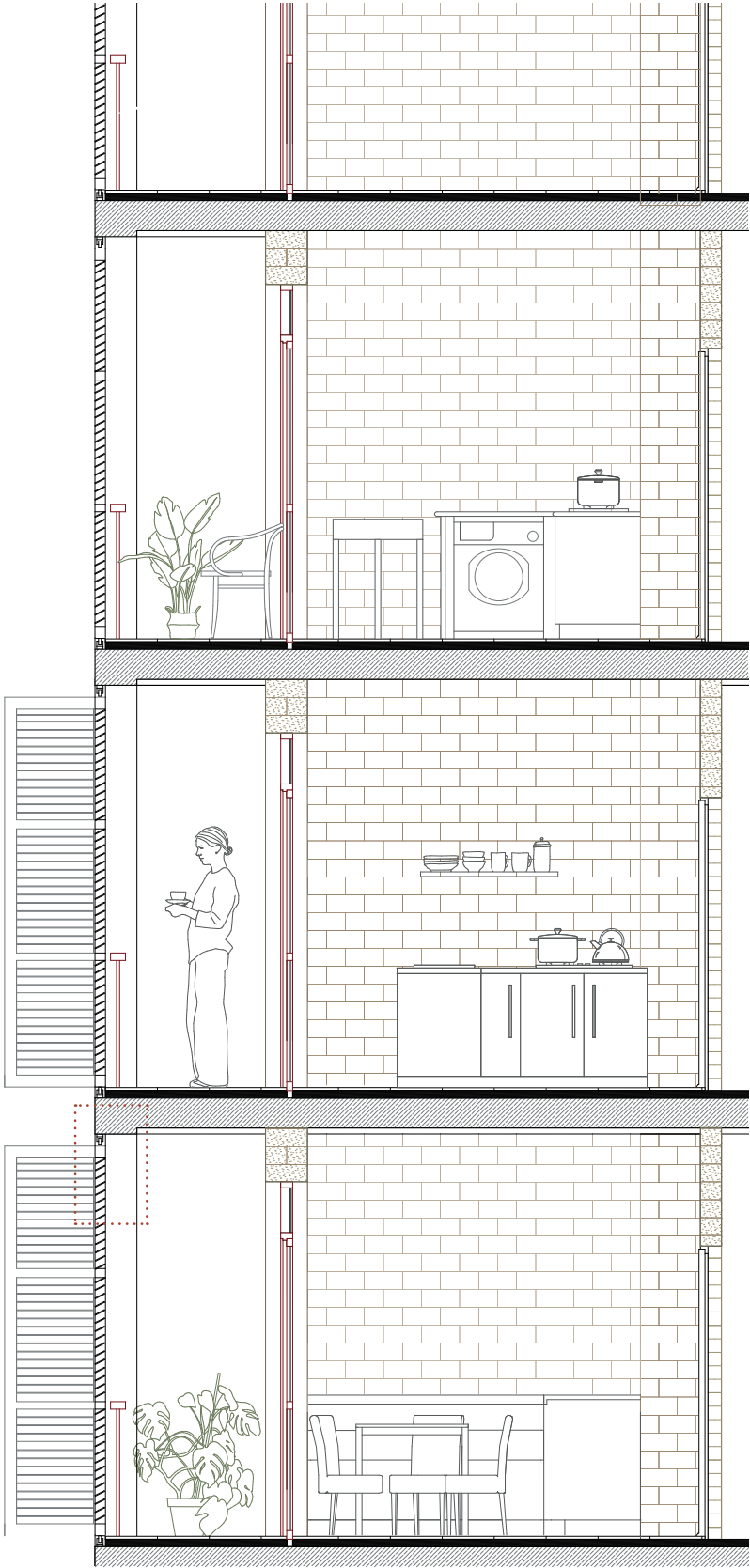


Textures for the Design:
Compressed Earth Blocks, Terrazzo, Concrete and Steel

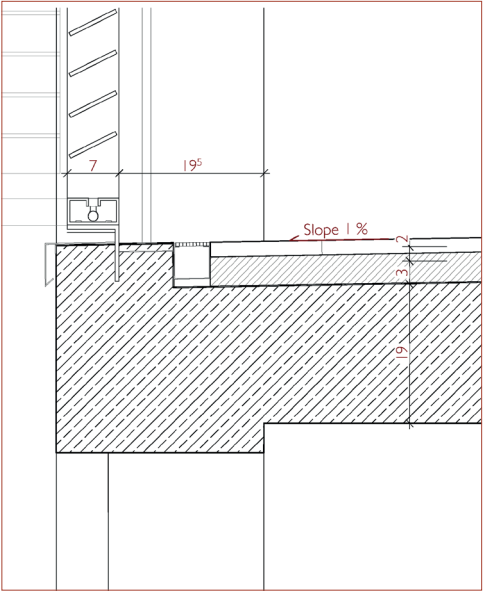




1:20 Facade



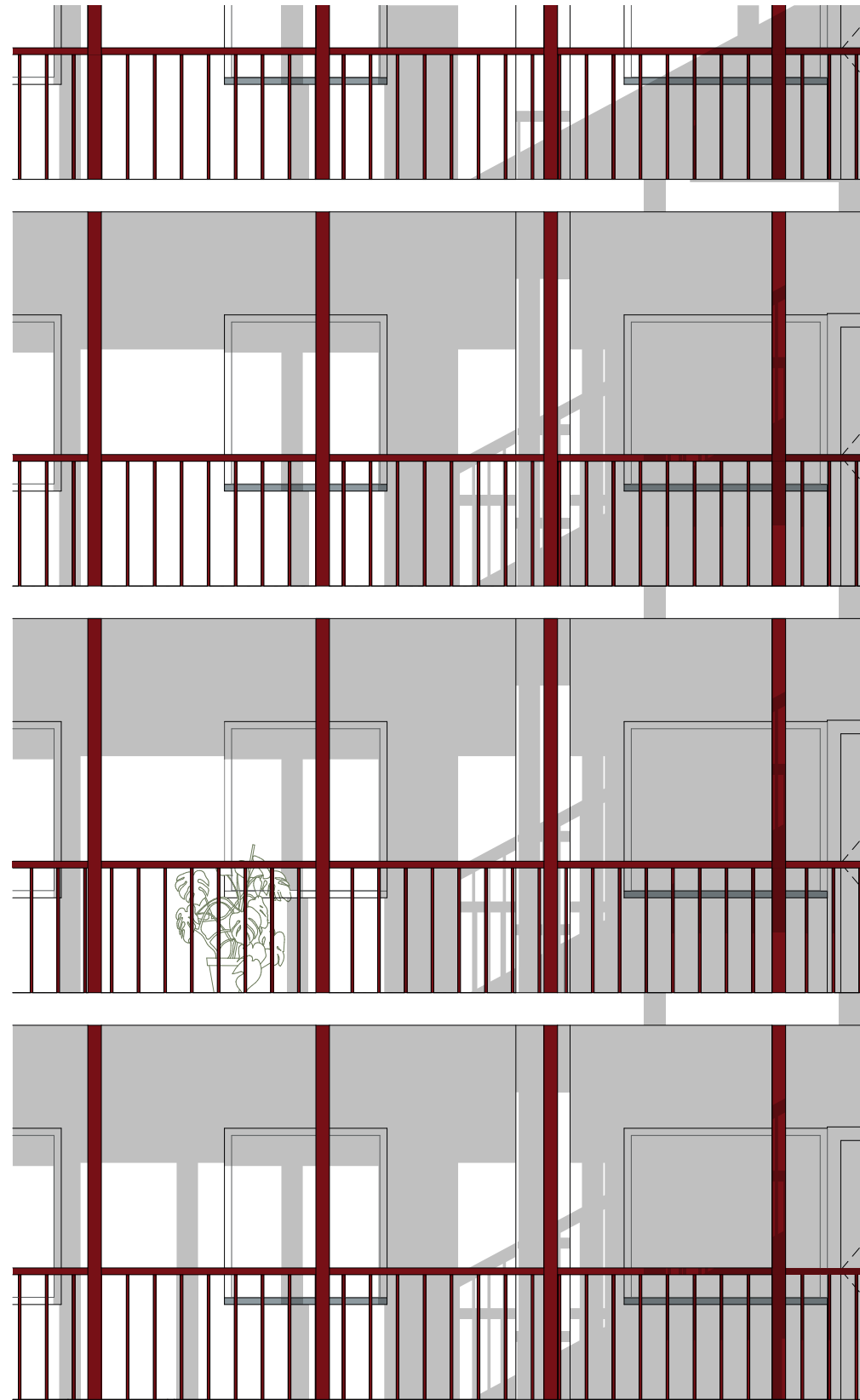
1:20 Section



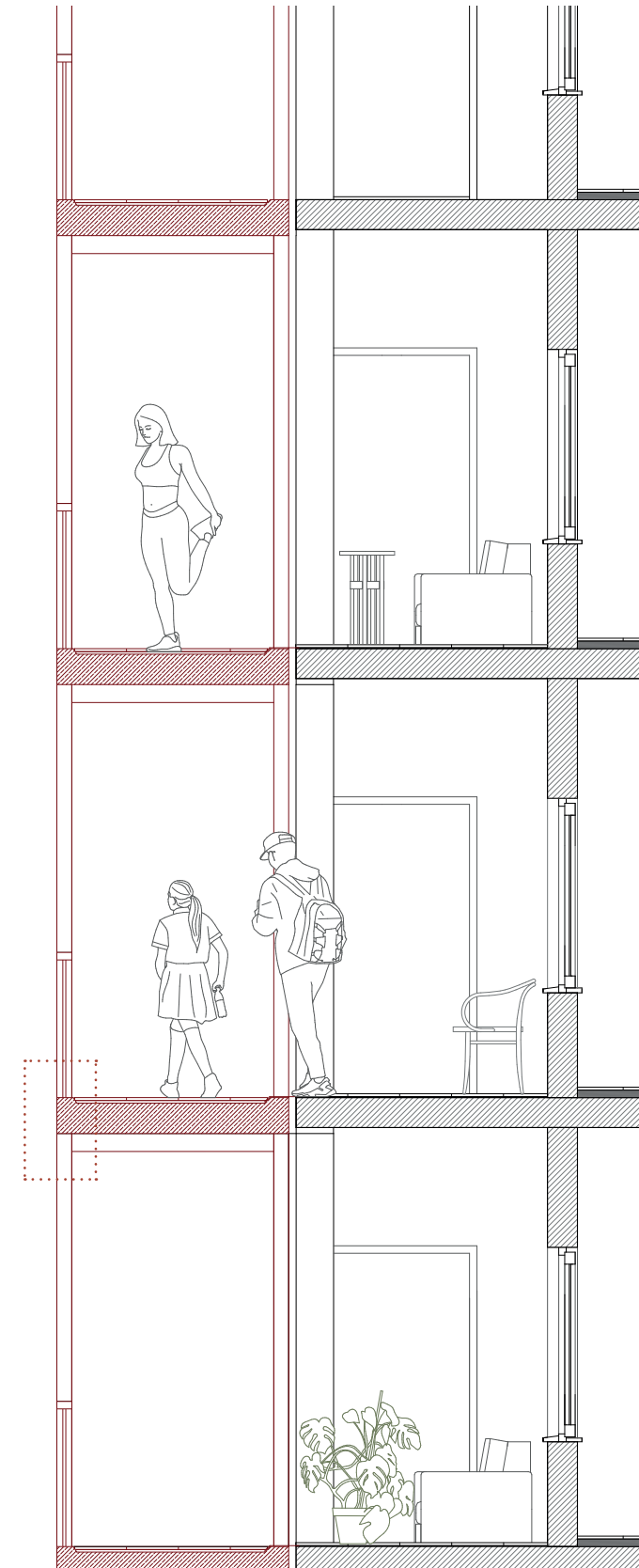
1:5 Detail



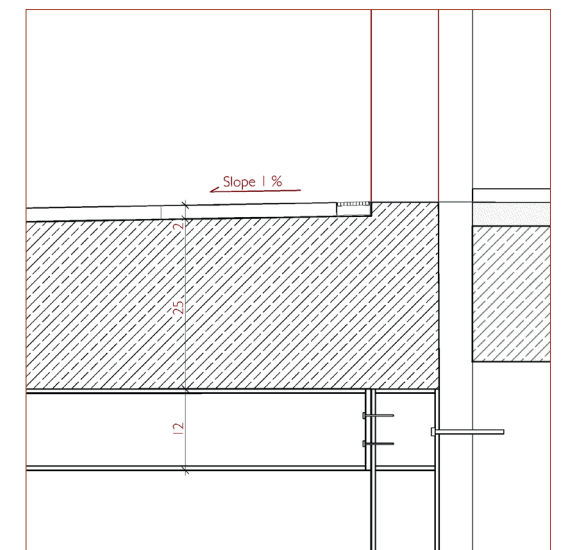




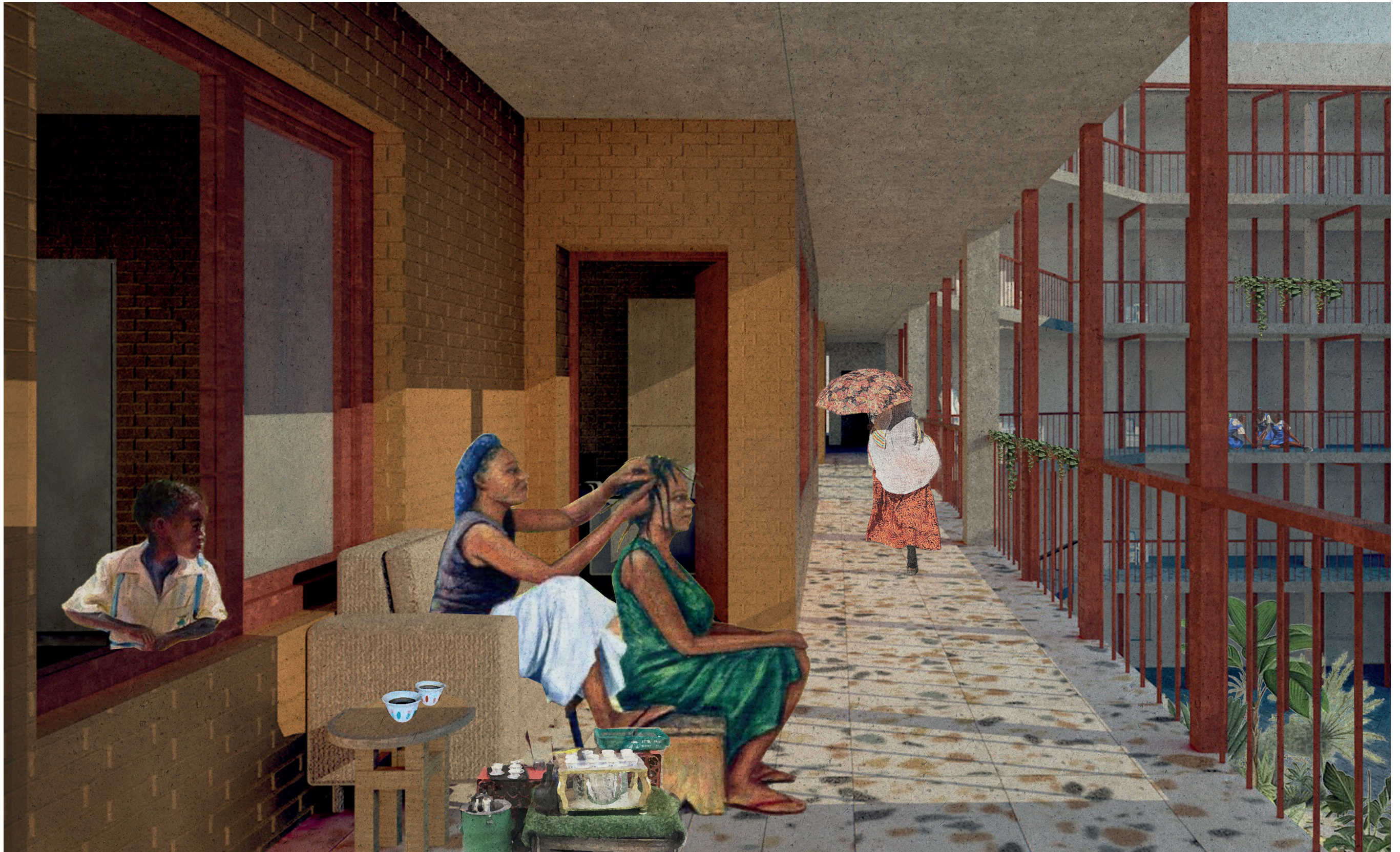
1:20 Facade



1:20 Section



1:5 Detail





Reflection

As a German-Ethiopian, my background and experiences have profoundly influenced my understanding of this issue. Growing up with both cultures, I was confronted with this issue at an early age, and my interactions with scholars and family members have shown me the ambiguity of this issue. It is clear that Ethiopia is in desperate need of housing, and the condominium mass housing project is a successful project that provided a vast amount of housing and continues to do so. The condominium addresses the tangible need for housing; however, it is lacking in addressing the culture of the Ethiopian people. Recognising myself at the intersection of these cultural contexts, I became aware of the potential limitations architecture can impose on people's ability to express their

culture. The current architectural concepts often imply that the Western way of life is the ideal to strive for, leading to the loss of valuable cultural heritage. This realisation encouraged me to address this issue as part of my Master's thesis focusing on the possibilities of integrating the nuanced aspects of culture, lifestyles and environment into a housing project.

In the research part of the Master's thesis, I deliberately focused on the residents' perspectives and worked out the following research questions:

What spatial needs do Ethiopian dwellers have that housing in Ethiopia must fulfill in order to ensure the expression of their culture of everyday life?

How do Ethiopian dwellers relate to space? How does space influence their practices?

To delve deeper into Ethiopian dwellers' spatial needs and cultural expressions, I employed ethnographic research methods by travelling to Addis Ababa and visiting Condominium Sites.

By actively immersing myself in their daily lives and establishing rapport with the community, I aimed to minimise my outsider status and gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and perspectives. I recognised that home-making encompasses both spatial and social dimensions, so I aimed to move beyond biased and polarised concepts of formal and informal categories. Instead, I focused on listening to the multifaceted realities observed on the ground, understanding that architecture may set spatial boundaries but cannot dictate how spaces are actually used. Analysing these lived spaces through observations, photography, and sketches accompanied by informal conversations with residents provided me with valuable insights into the local living culture and multiple ways in which residents navigate their daily life in their domestic spaces.

These insights challenged and expanded my initial assumptions, revealing nuanced

and complex relationships between dwellers and their living spaces. Following my research trip, I elaborated and abstracted my findings and tried to develop answers to my research questions by compiling my findings in the form of collages and abstracted models

A significant finding from my research was the unexpected similarity in the relationships between residents and their interiors, despite the architectural differences between condominiums and inner-city settlements. Even within the more rigid structures of condominiums, residents found creative ways to appropriate their living spaces, making them their own. Balconies were transformed into extensions of kitchens, new partitions were added to create additional living space, and communal corridors were personalised with household items. These observations highlighted the residents' determination to shape their living spaces according to their needs, overcoming the limitations imposed by the architecture.

Additionally, I observed that certain cultural practices were affected by the restrictions on cultural expansion within condominiums, leading residents to abandon or modify certain activities of every day, like producing homemade products. The intertwining of cultural activities with

specific spatial conditions became evident, emphasising the significance of thresholds that offer multiple gradients from private to public spaces.

The research process made it clear to me that housing in an Ethiopian context needs to focus on the various needs of the everyday, like the generation of income, communal activities and the possibility of appropriation. These aspects became a main part of my design proposal, where I focused on the peripheral condominium site in Yeka Abado. The unfinished appearance of the site revealed several untapped potentials, which I recognised as opportunities to create a proposal that actively engages its inhabitants and aimed to create a proposal that would not oppose the condominium but would include it.

Initially, I approached the project from a small-scale perspective, seeking to address the immediate needs of the residents. However, as the design process progressed, my first tutor emphasised the importance of integrating managerial aspects into the project to ensure its long-term affordability. While a small-scale approach may address immediate needs, it could clash with the existing context. Therefore, I expanded my project towards a larger housing project to

create a proposal that harmoniously incorporates and requalifies the condominium structure.

In response to this challenge, I developed a modular housing system in combination with a new walkway, that connects the former condominium with the new housing module. This design approach not only requalifies the existing condominium structure but also integrates seamlessly with it. The new corridor serves as a unifying element, connecting different units and facilitating communal interactions as well as enabling the Condominium residents to expand their living space. By incorporating these elements into the design, I aimed to activate the inhabitants' engagement and enhance the overall livability of the housing complex.

As I reflect upon the complexities of executing and detailing my architectural intervention, I find myself grappling with a profound dichotomy. On the one hand, there is an inherent responsibility to meet the requirements and needs of the residents, ensuring their well-being and satisfaction. On the other hand, there is a pressing need to prioritise affordability and the sustainable impact of these interventions. This struggle is particularly evident within the African context, where mate-

rials like earth, although sustainable, often carry a stigma of poverty. In contrast, materials such as steel and concrete are seen as modern and aesthetically pleasing.

Given that the demand for housing units within the condominium framework has led to increased availability of these formal construction materials and knowledge regarding their usage, it presented a challenge for me actually to materialise this gap between the formal and the informal. However, I wanted to create a proposal that takes up this challenge and stimulates a discourse by combining both realities.

With this aspiration in mind, I embarked on the design of a self-supporting framework that allows for a flexible floorplan configuration. With this concept, I reference Le Corbusier post World War I “Dom-ino” solution, a standardised, two-storey house made up of concrete slabs supported on columns and a staircase.

I extend this concept with housing modules that can be flexibly configured. By designing these housing modules non-load-bearing, I have unlocked the freedom for the residents to explore a wide array of materials, offering flexible and even informal solutions like the usage of earth blocks.

However, during the further design process I realised that flexibility can be seen

as a blessing as well as a potential curse and I asked myself - how can I ensure that spaces are not overly appropriated at the expense of others?

This quandary compelled me to research possible design configurations that address the delicate balance between flexibility and responsible use. For me, the key lies in creating adaptable and accommodating spaces, yet with a conscious awareness of the impact on the community as a whole. In my project, I address this question by giving residents space for private spatial expansion and appropriation alongside communal spaces.

Although this perspective is based on observations and assumptions, I believe that if people are given enough space for their own private appropriation, communal spaces can be better shared in harmony with the community.

However, in order to truly guarantee the success of these interventions, it would be essential to involve residents in the design process and consider their opinions. Throughout this Master’s thesis, I have often questioned to what extent I am imposing my views on a group of people to whom I do not fully belong. Unfortunately, it is not possible for me to test these approaches and genuinely expose myself to

the residents’ opinions.

Therefore, I consider this thesis as a conceptual exploration of this topic, that is based on the extensive insights that is gained through two research trips to Addis Ababa. By creating narratives based on the residents I have interviewed, I attempt to represent possible forms of inhabiting the building on their behalf. In the remaining time of the graduation, I intend to elaborate further the detailing of my project in the form of models and visualisations.

Through this project, I have learned that architecture should go beyond building for people; it should actively include them, their realities, and their stories in the design process. This realization has broadened my perspective on being an architect, emphasising the importance of a holistic and inclusive approach.

The project’s intimate connection to my own cultural background has allowed me to bring my personal experiences, perspectives, and heritage into the design process, forming a profound connection between myself, the community, and the architectural interventions I propose.







