



In conversation with the river

giving voice to the Vistula in Warsaw

Katarzyna Prokopiuk | P5 presentation

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Bar by the Pond



Bar by the Pond in 2015, source: Google Maps

Bar by the Pond



Bar by the Pond in 2021, source: Google Maps

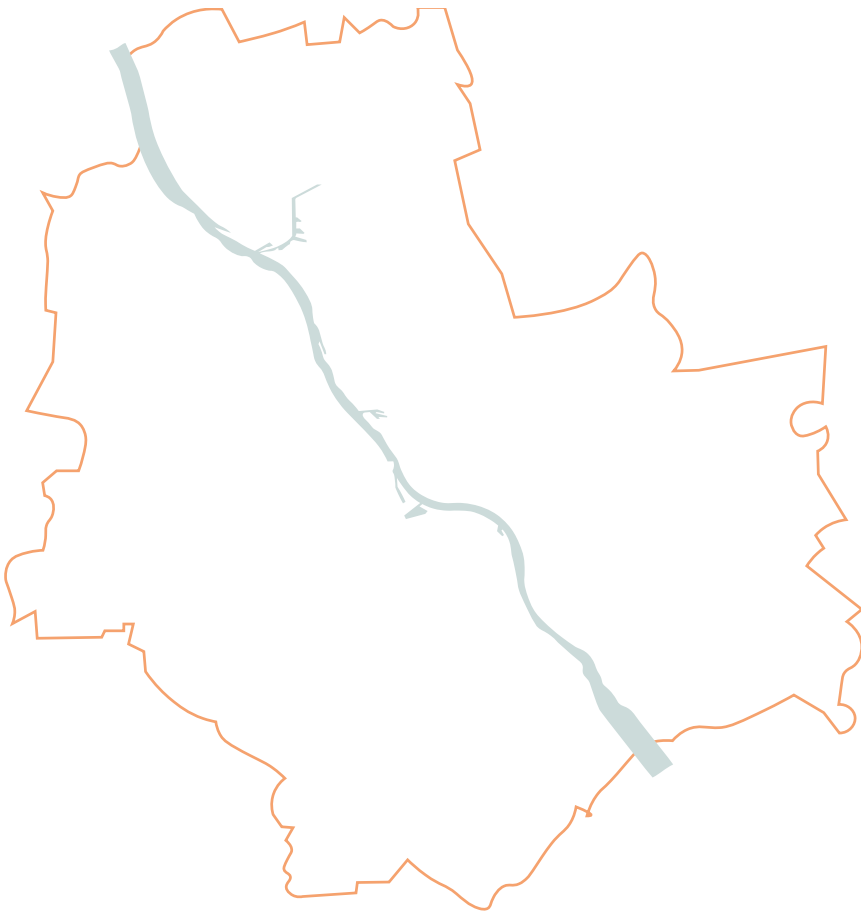
Warsaw by the Vistula



the Vistula River in Warsaw



the Vistula in Poland



the Vistula in Warsaw

the Vistula River in Warsaw

the central point of social life



“View of Warsaw from Praga” (fragment) by Bernardo Bellotto, 1770

the Vistula River in Warsaw

inter-war peak



Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe
Warsaw residents by Vistula before WW2, photo: National Digital Archive

the Vistula River in Warsaw

decline from the 70s onwards



New road along the Vistula, 1975, source: tubylotustalo.pl

the Vistula River in Warsaw

Warsaw facing the Vistula again



Boulevards and museums near the old town, source: zzw.waw.pl

extreme climate events

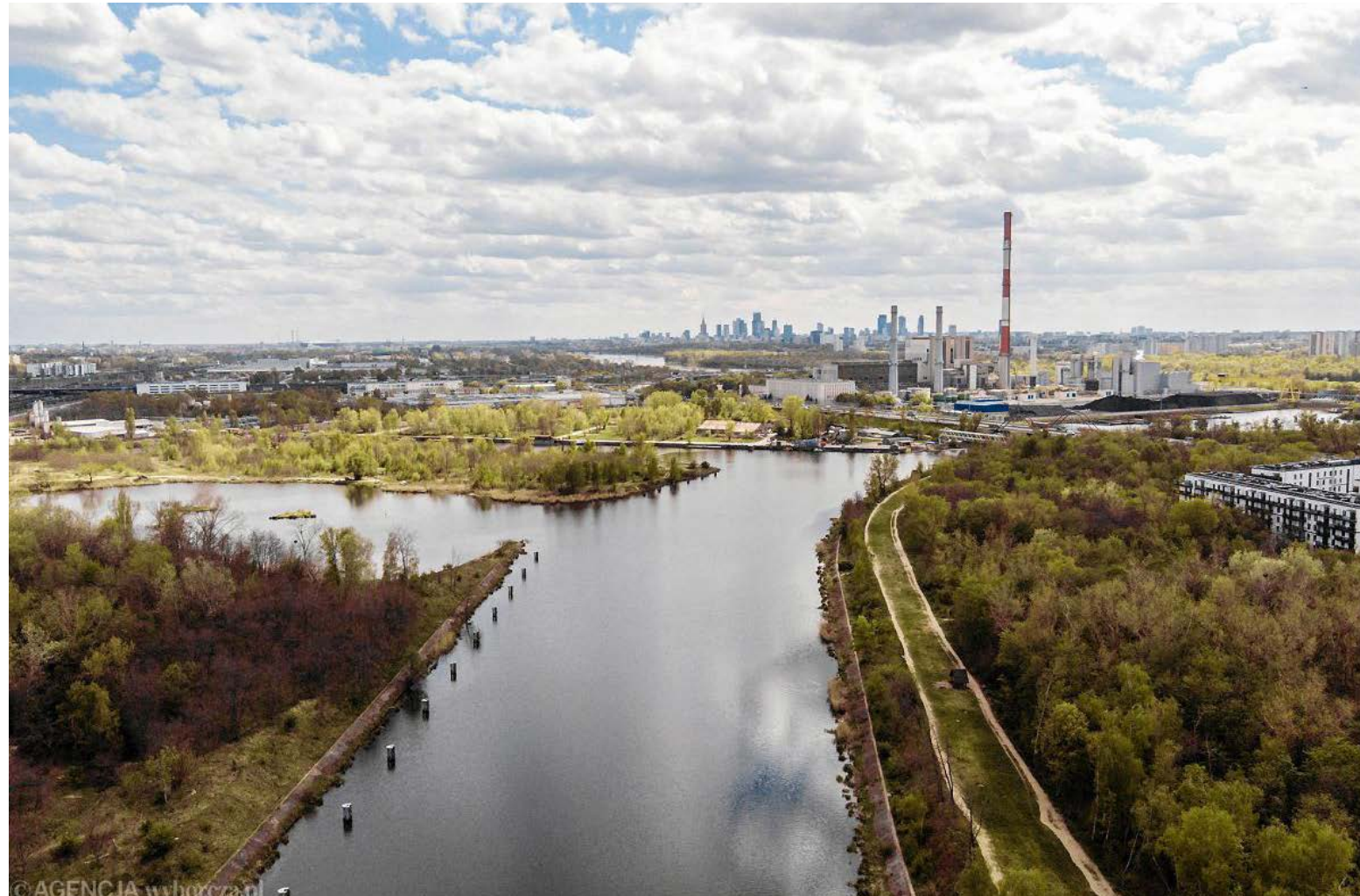


Flood in Poland in 2024, photo: Adam Hawałeł



Drought in Poland in 2024, photo: Maciej Jaźwiecki

what would the river say?



Port Żerański, photo: Adam Stępień/AgencjaWyborcza.pl



The future of Port Żerański - public consultation

giving voice to the river

research question

how can understanding the voice of the river help to better connect it with the urban landscape,
taking into account the river's needs?

What makes up the identity of the river?

How to represent the complexity of the river?

How to give voice to the water and hear it ourselves?

How to include the river's voice in the debate about its future?

how to find the river's voice?



experience the river



engage in activities



talk to people who know it better

constructing the narrative

individual narratives from interviews



biodiversity hotspot
coexistence of people and nature
direct contact with Vistula
constant flux

I have many faces and cannot be locked up
In one identity
It is impossible to step into the same river twice
And impossible to twice in the same manner hear
Its voice
And yet it's beautiful to listen
To the kaleidoscope of monologues

Sometimes I change drastically.
Sometimes you follow me along
my banks, and you meet a different
river.
(...)
We could work together towards the
same goal. To preserve the resources
and the joy that I want to give you.
And above all to protect nature to
whom I give life.

constructing the narrative

individual narratives from interviews

Mateusz Senko



Białoleka District council member, Port Żerański area resident, active in the local community. He made it his mission to protect the natural environment of the port and make it a socially active park. To this end he engages in discussions both with fellow residents and city authorities at a higher level.

*In the beginning there was Nature
My voice was not disturbed, because there was no reason to disturb it
Now I have become sensitive
I am more easily offended
But I know that Animals will find a place
The question is whether you want to keep them with you
Or forever emphasize the question:
US OR THEM?
You find it hard to believe, but I know
That we will endure anyway
Our collective perseverance will outlive your ideals*

"Certainly, the identity of this river is created by nature. In my opinion, the Vistula is also inscribed in the identity of Warsaw. In recent years, the accessibility of Vistula has increased, Warsaw has basically opened up to the Vistula."

"I have very good memories associated with the river. I think that the fact that I settled down in such a place, that is by Żerański Canal, but also in close proximity to the Vistula River, is basically, and I'm not saying it as a high-minded thing, that it changed my life."

"There's a lot of awareness in Warsaw, and kind of also a commitment to the Vistula, to its protection, that this [the granting of legal personhood] could really work. And I think it would be projected upon the perception of rivers throughout Poland."

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IN CONVERSATION WITH THE RIVER

Conversations with the river

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My name is Vistula, and I would like to welcome everyone with open arms. And with an open heart – so vast it might seem impossible to reach from one of its banks to the other. Yet spacious enough to hold a place for everyone. I wish for each person to feel that with me, they can find their own little corner – not always equal to the luxury of a velvet sofa, but honest and truly theirs. I especially want to offer shelter to those whose voices ask for their rights more quietly. They say sound carries well over water. I would like to carry especially their voice – that of all the creatures to whom I am home. And though water has always been drawn in blue, I somehow feel much more green. Up to the point when the green doesn't fit inside me anymore and overflows through every crack. Something in me breaks when I see trees levelled to the ground, and animals gripped by fear, forced to bend to human whims.

If I must, I am ready to fight for their rights and mine. Without hesitation, without unnecessary politeness, without warning signs – which you so often ignore anyway. You could say setting out on my waters and meeting their unwanted currents is a fight for life – your life. But it's also a fight for mine – flowing and nourishing, giving energy to everything I touch. I hope we don't have to fight each other for that life, but that we can face the future together. You can help me breathe by clearing my pores of ions of waste. I will help you breathe, taking with me the toxins – the side effects of progress. Together, we can set an example for other cities and other rivers, celebrating beauty and diversity. And in the end, sit down together, stretch out lazily in the summer sun, and soak in wonder.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH THE RIVER

Conversations with the river

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Maciej Kaufman



Architect from Warsaw, one of the designers of the park currently being constructed in Port Żerański. In his work he focuses on integrating the natural processes of the river into design.

*We know Vistula
Where we meet her
Because it is impossible to know her whole
Vistula is surprising and it is dangerous
Different every time
A bit like the Warsaw Mermaid
Vistula is created by people
They keep her in invisible checks*

"Amphibians are losing habitat in our developed world. [...] Coastal vegetation allows amphibians that need to breed on land to walk across that concrete and come out. [...] This connection is often missing because of the regulation of rivers."

"This is the Polish pride a bit - manufacturing. So this kind of manufacturing function could still take place there, because there are fewer and fewer of those areas in cities, and it's not a nuisance."

"People don't think about how much creation is involved. Basically, people think that infrastructure is something that creates itself. That no one invented or designed it, especially blue and green infrastructure"

"There is a connection, in my opinion, between the coat of arms of Warsaw, the mermaid, and the Vistula River. Maybe the danger of the mythological water is embodied in this."

"Vistula seems wild, but in reality it isn't. It's largely regulated, but it still gets her way. It absorbs this form of regulation and transforms it in its own wild flows."

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IN CONVERSATION WITH THE RIVER

Conversations with the river

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It always starts with a bang. Shoots spring up, buds bloom, insects buzz, amphibians awaken from hibernation, and the increasingly blue sky is every now and then crossed by the flutter of wings of returning birds.

Suddenly we are much closer - I stretch upward filled with energy, my edges fill with the quivering of the young, people emerge from their cramped apartments with unprecedented enthusiasm, as if this parade of colors and concert of new life were happening for the first time. And I know that next year it will be exactly the same. Then everything will slowly calm down, mature into a slow coexistence in the warm sunshine of early summer. My shores will be filled with beachgoers, walkers, weekend sportsmen and wildlife enthusiasts. And I will hover for a while again, waving to you as if to say goodbye and thank you for another summer together. The birds will fly away, the amphibians will disappear into their burrows, and the people into cramped apartment blocks. A handful of the more persistent will remain, who will sail through the winter lethargy with me and wait until things start again, as always, with a bang.

Seemingly as always, and yet you are surprised every time. Maybe it's a matter of our different perspectives and scales, or maybe it's how strenuously you sometimes refuse to understand and adjust to the natural rhythm. When you act against it, I am forced to show you your place. Sometimes I feel that you know so little yet. But you are getting used to the mystery, just as you got used to the mermaid in the Warsaw coat of arms. She is no longer so scary, yet still shows strength and inspires awe. I believe that this is how you see me too, after all, where else than in the Vistula to find a mermaid in Warsaw? I won't deny it, I can be mysterious, sometimes threatening, but not as wild as you may think. People think I've always been like this, because they've never met me any other way. But your predecessors cut my sides with spurs, covered me with rubble, patched me up with artificial islands. There's a lot of water under the bridge now, and I don't blame you. I was able to heal my own wounds, which became my ornaments, like tattoos of Warsaw memories and willow. What I do hold against you, like my other sister rivers, is the garbage that still flows in us. Is asking for clean water too much, with all that you get from me? Don't take my life, because I want to continue to give you yours. And every year, as always, start with a bang.

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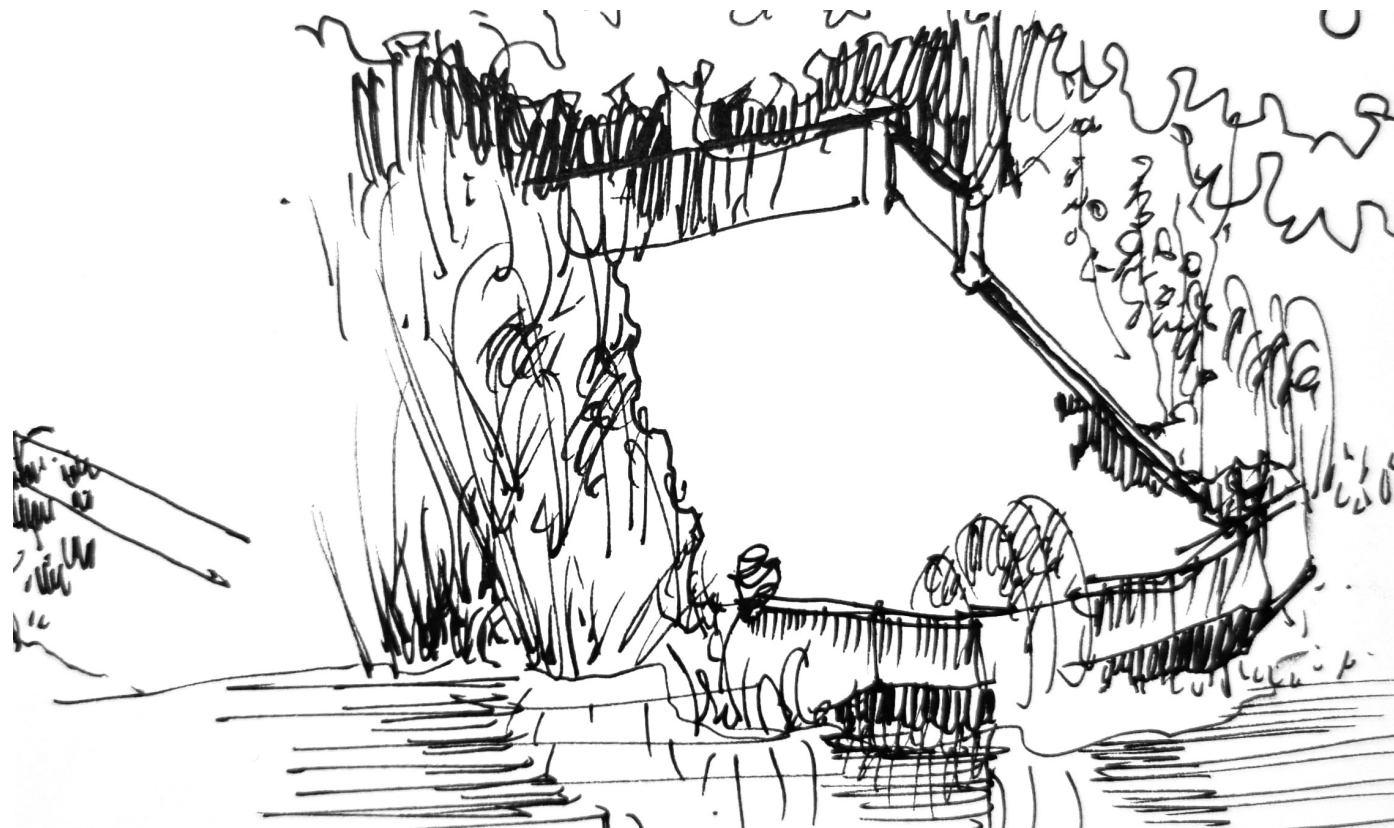
IN CONVERSATION WITH THE RIVER

Conversations with the river

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constructing the narrative

my own encounters with the river



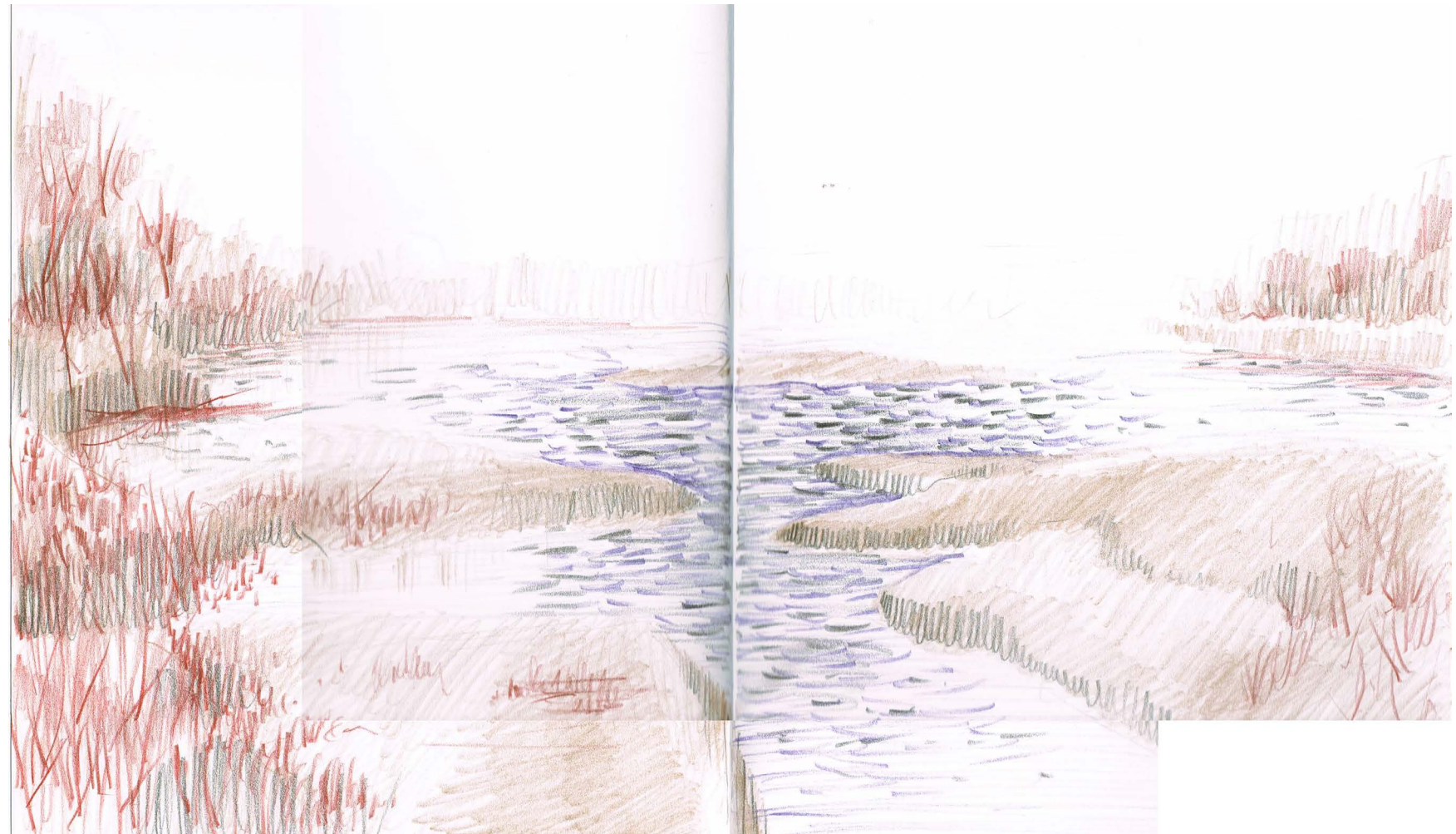
*There is almost always a medium
between me and the river.*

*a deck
the seat of a canoe
a step
reeds
inflatable mattress*

constructing the narrative

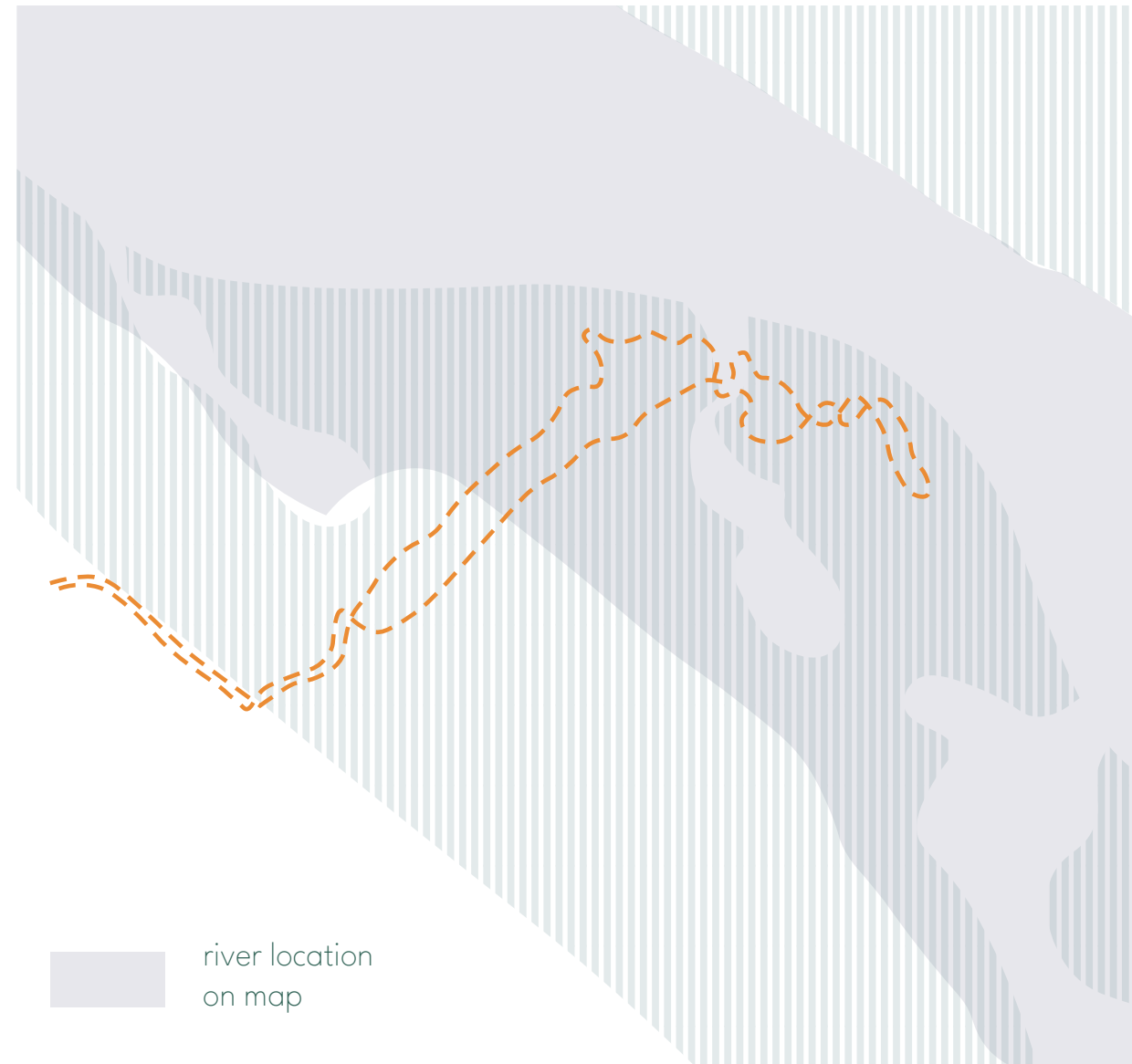
my own encounters with the river

We want to meet, but somehow we find it difficult. We build walls and footbridges, just to avoid touching each other. It's as if we deliberately keep our distance. Although if I'm honest, I think distance sometimes does us good.



constructing the narrative

my own encounters with the river



*I look at the map and see myself
walking on water on the screen. I dip
my foot deeper. But I plunge it into the
soft, loose sand. And again I ask myself
- where is the river? Is it possible to
draw its boundary?*

constructing the narrative

documenting the river through photography



users



infrastructures



landscapes



perseverance



patterns

constructing the narrative

[illegible]

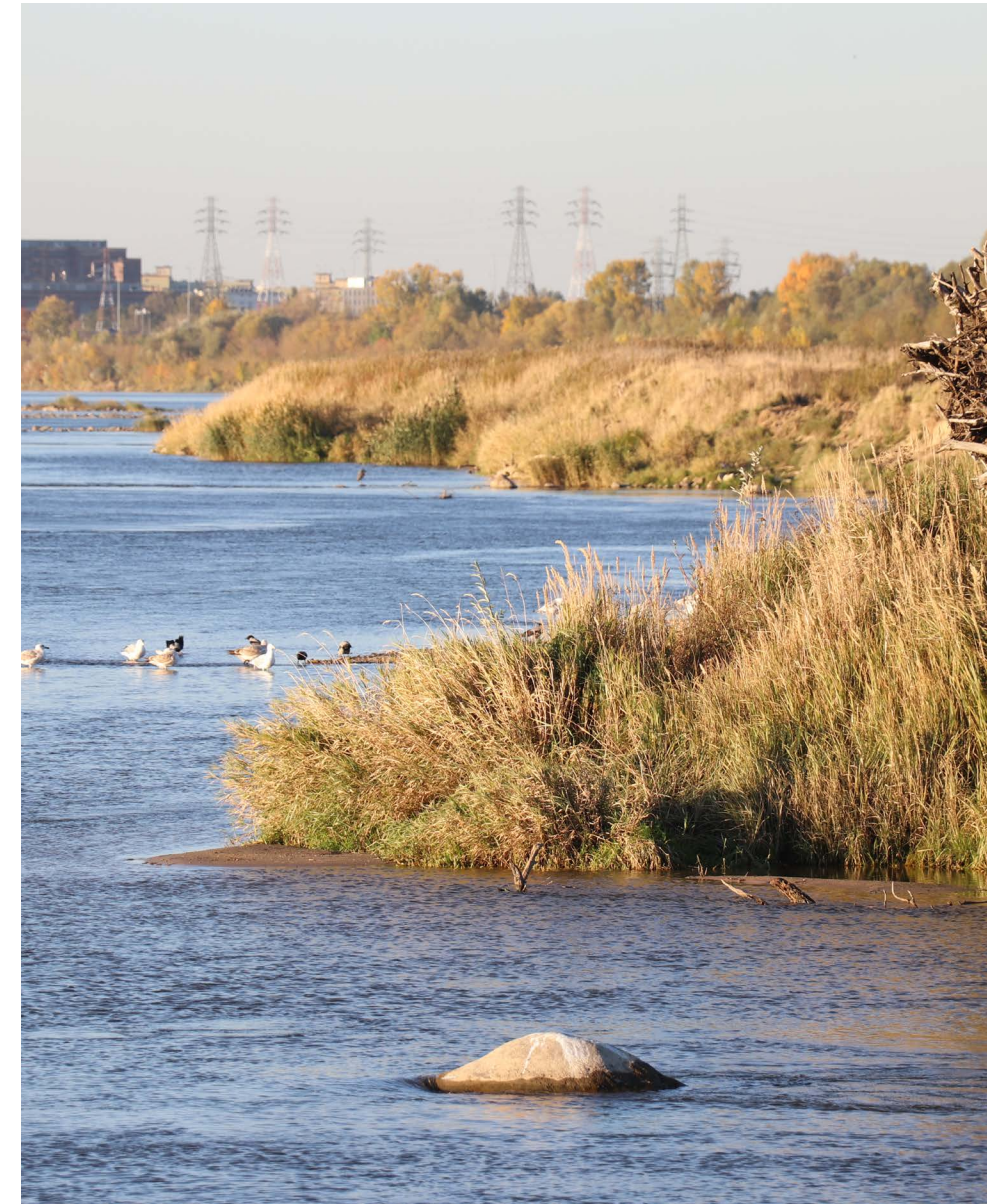
no man ever steps in the same river twice

narrative of the river



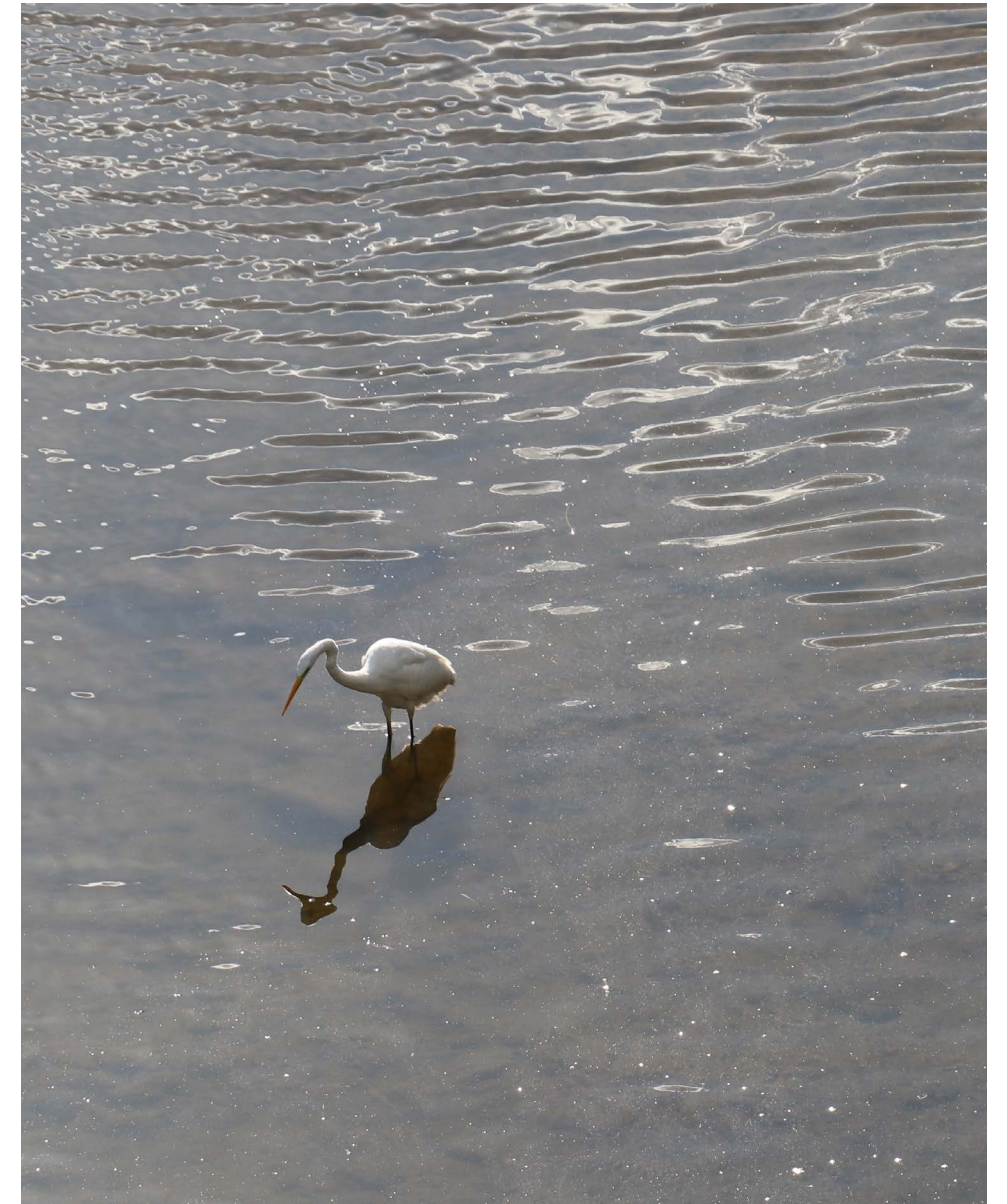
the voice of the Vistula

beauty, life and connection



the voice of the Vistula

animals as the main inhabitants



the voice of the Vistula

strengthening the relationship between people and the river



the voice of the Vistula

critique of activities driven solely by financial profit

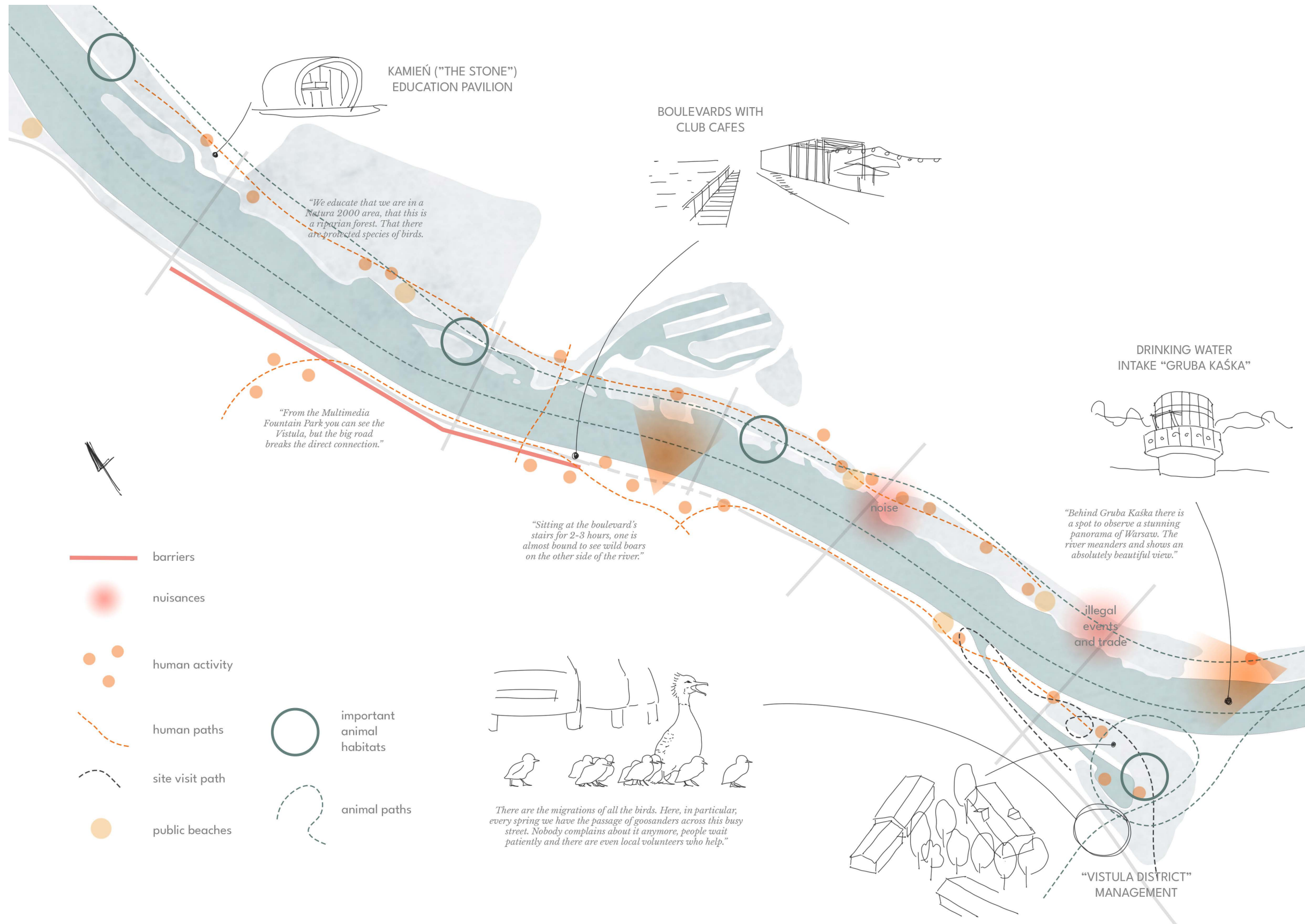


the voice of the Vistula

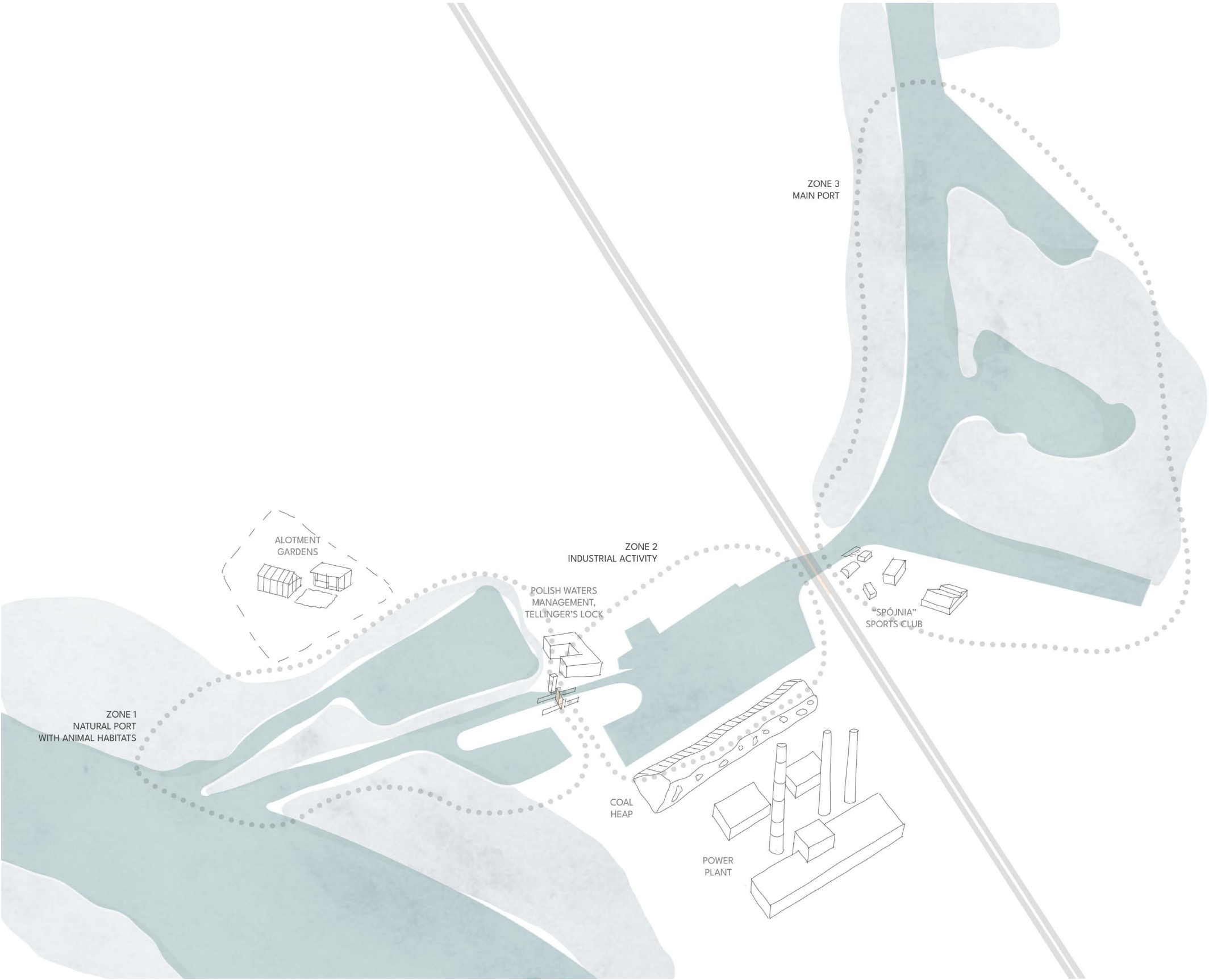
respectful coexistence



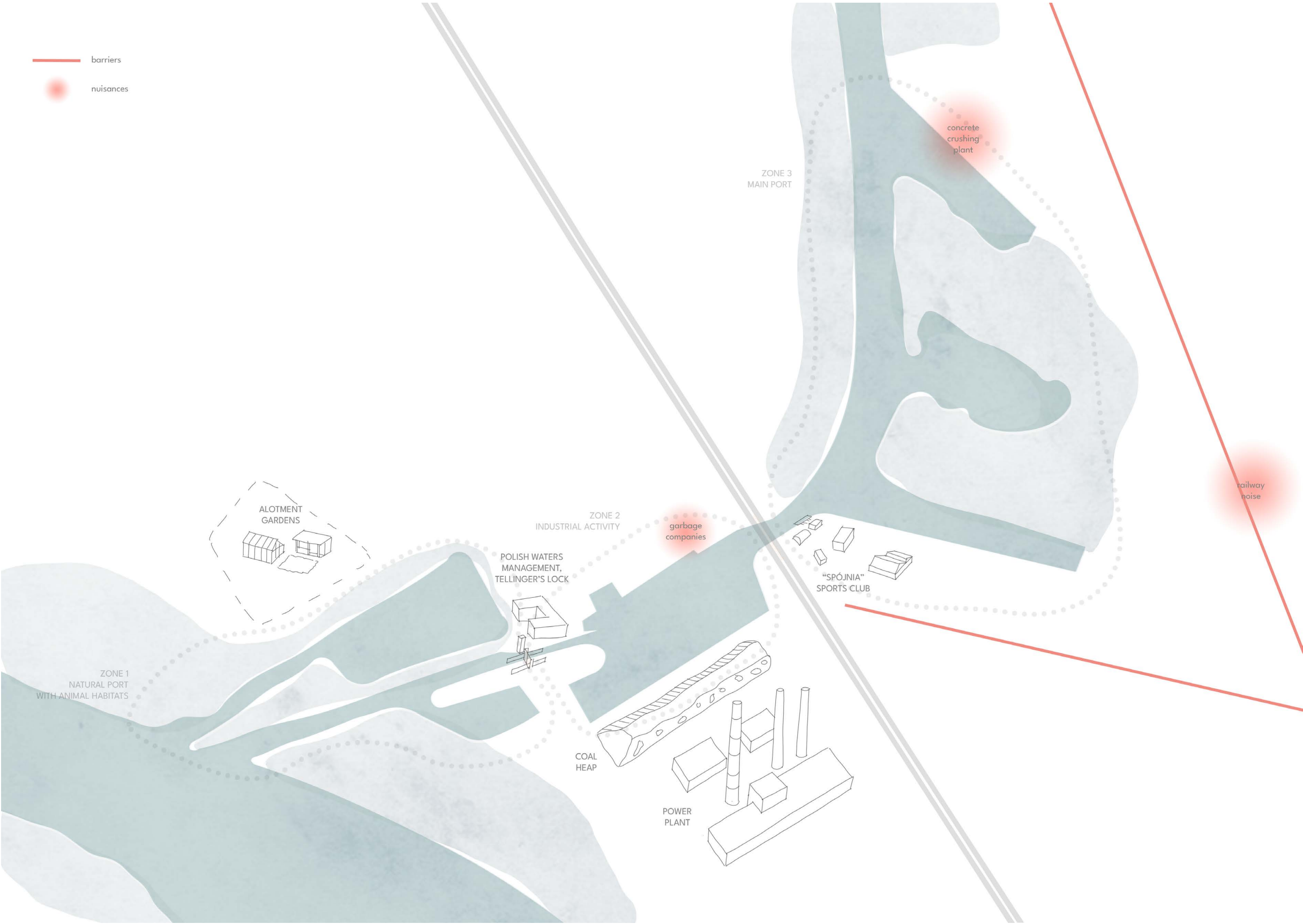
mapping the voice



mapping the voice



mapping the voice



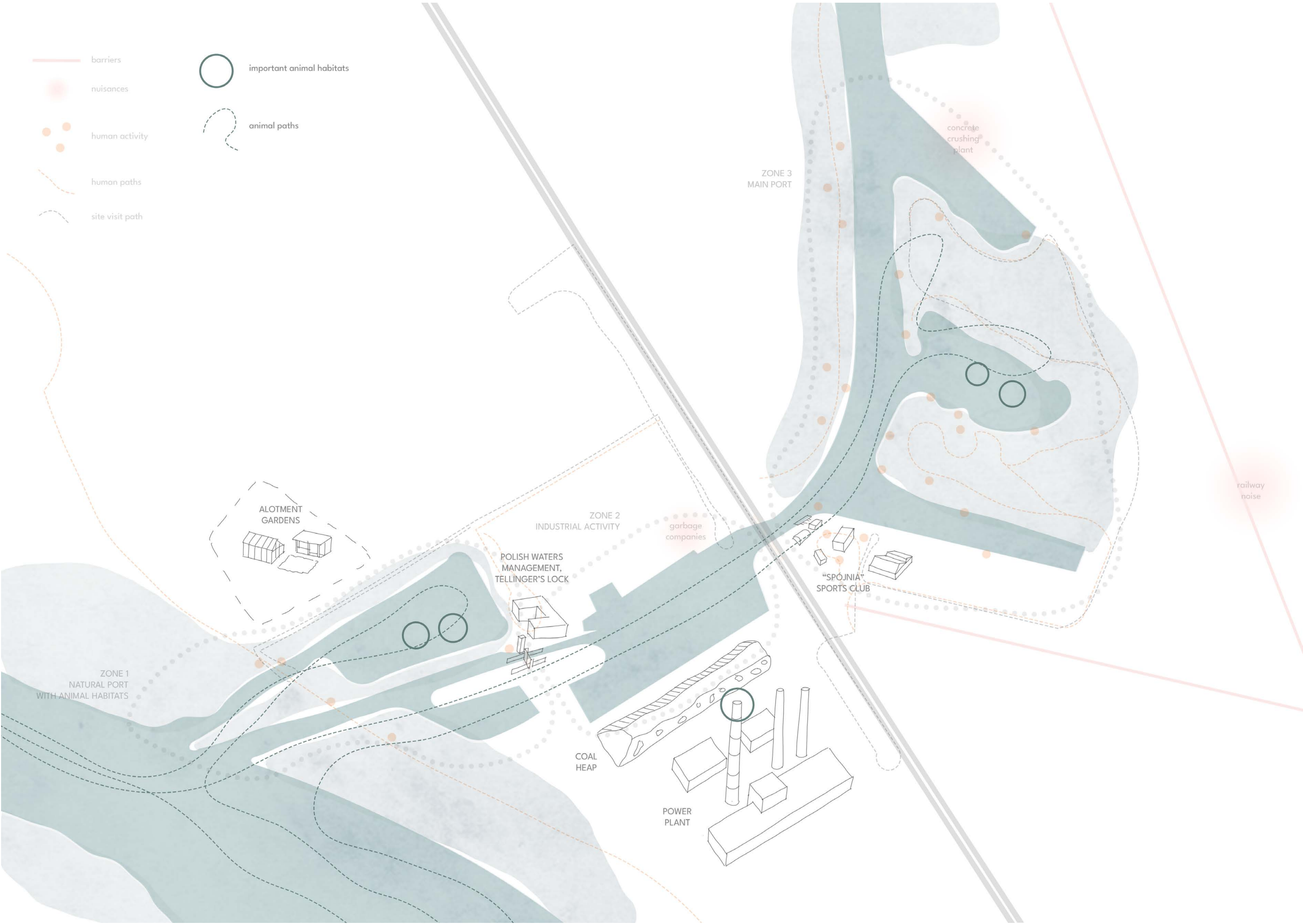
mapping the voice



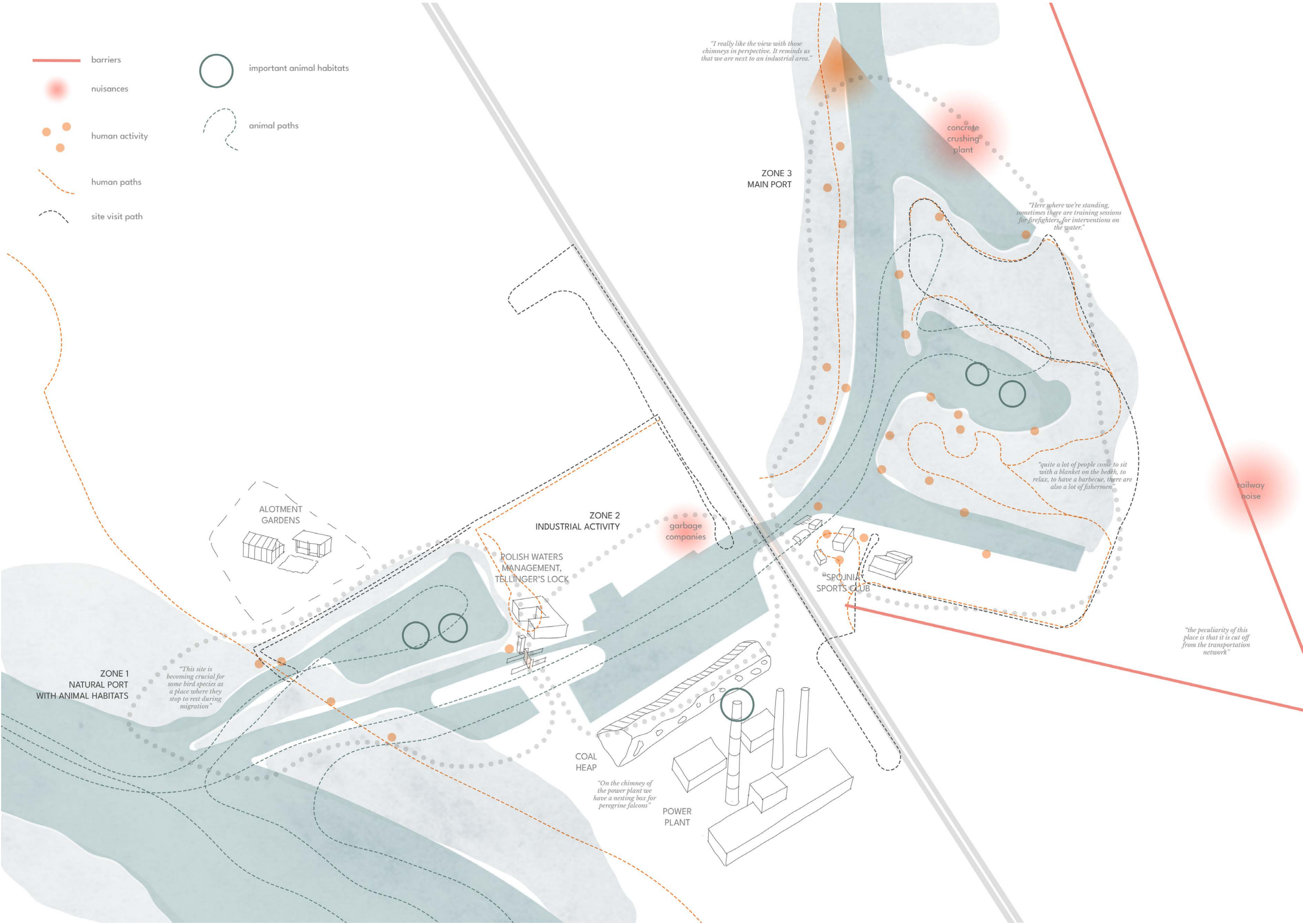
mapping the voice



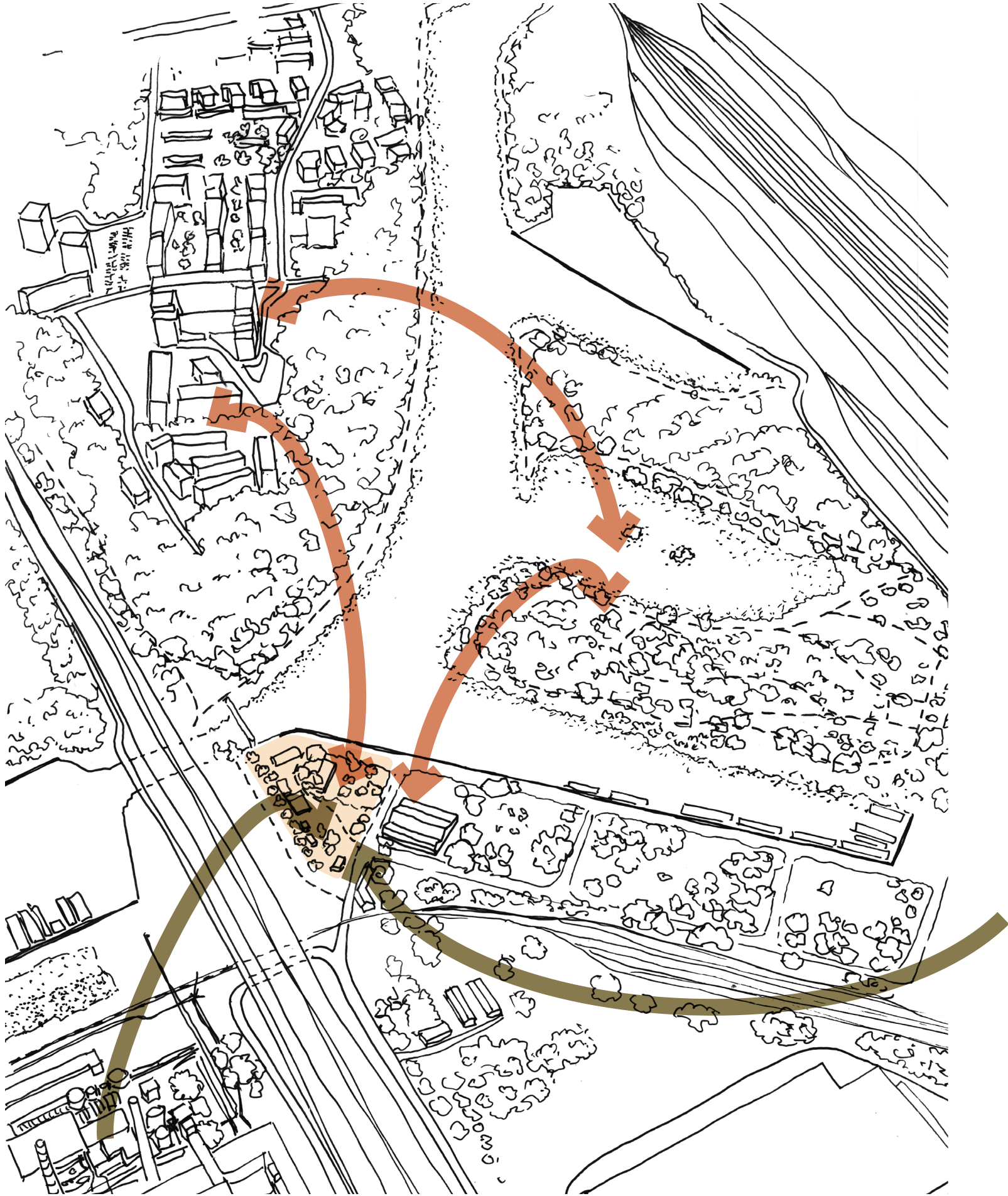
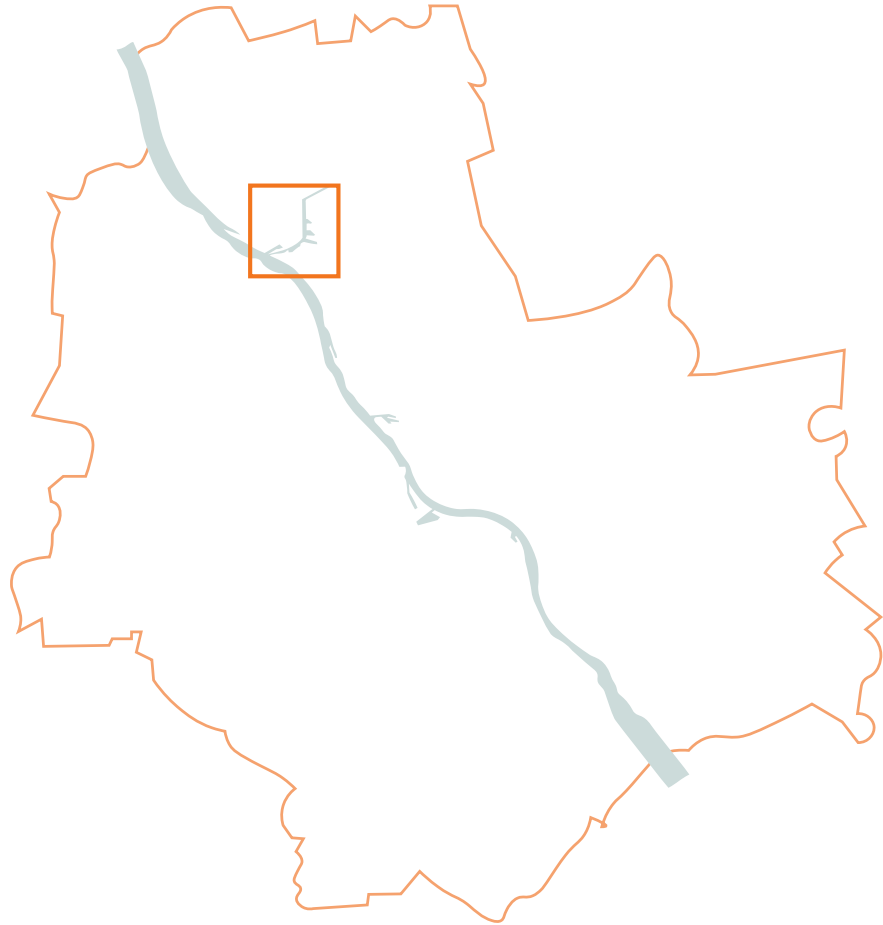
mapping the voice



mapping the voice



Port Żerański



water sports



source: Google Earth



water sports and nature



source: Google Earth



water sports and nature



water sports and nature



water sports and nature



what future for the port?



The future of Port Żerański - public consultation





biodiversity hub, natural park

“informal” functions and facilities in
natural landscape: camping, fishing,
natural swimming pool

Warsaw water sports center

organized social functions: restaurant,
crafts, events etc.

prioritize nature

Just imagine the little tippy taps of a beaver proudly carrying his log, the soft touch of an otter's paw and the barely noticeable pinching of a crayfish. Being woken up from daydreams by the singing of thousands of birds. I will never cease to be amazed.

primary users



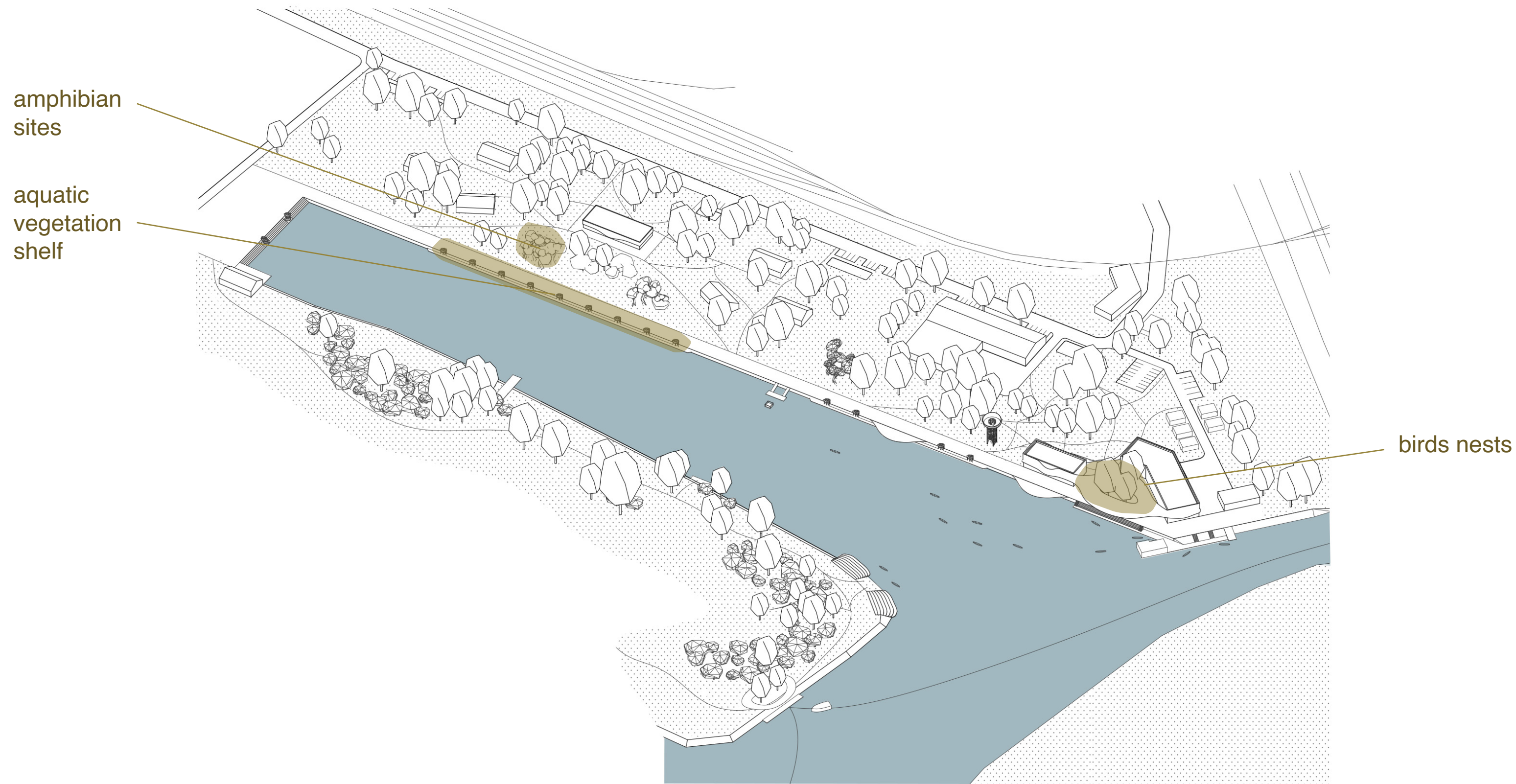
existing green spaces



separated from water

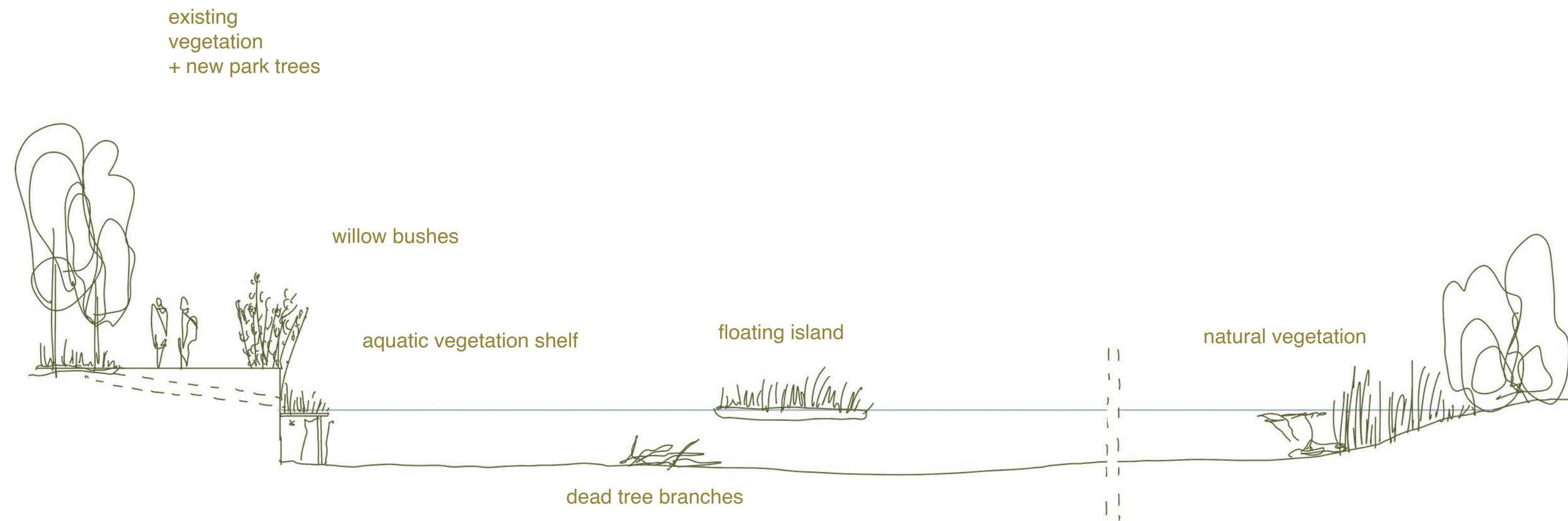


new animal habitats



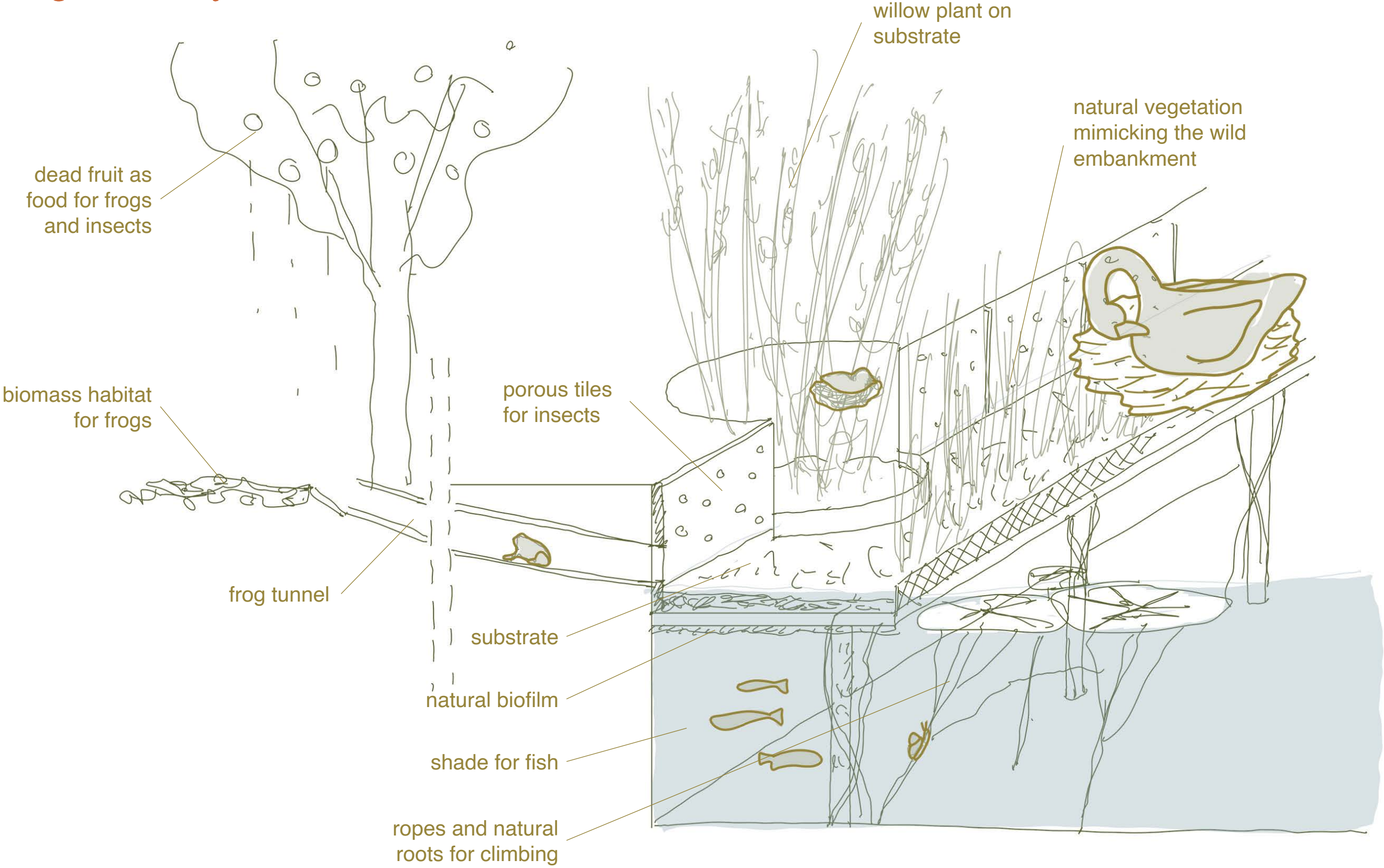
new animal habitats

reconnecting with the river



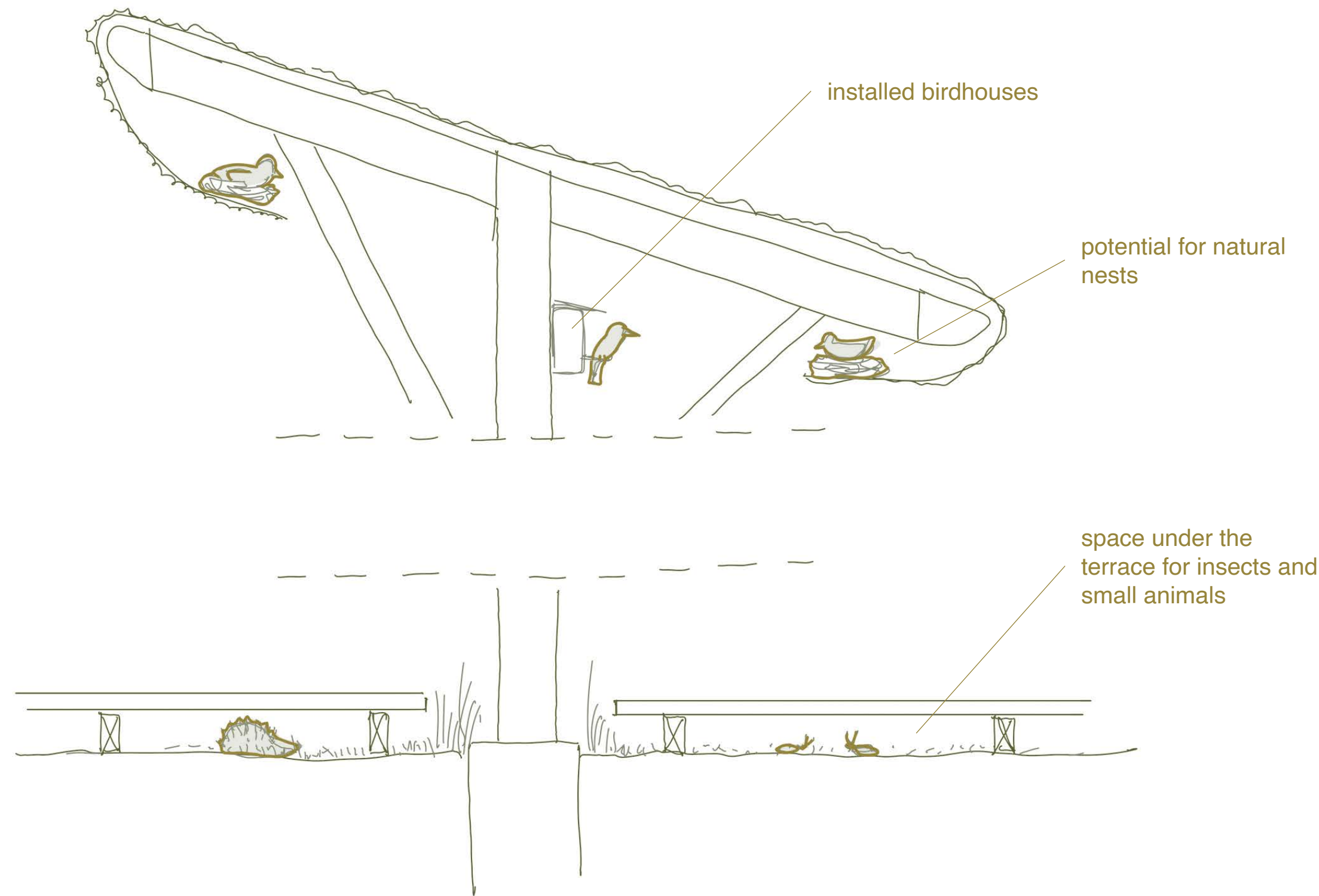
new animal habitats

aquatic vegetation shelf

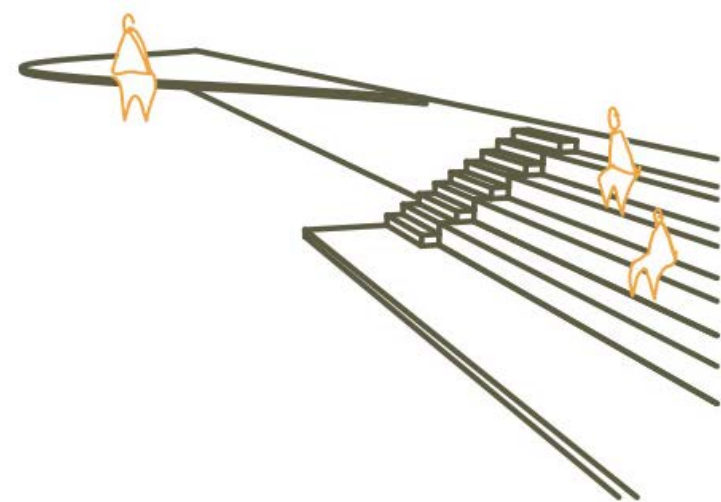


new animal habitats

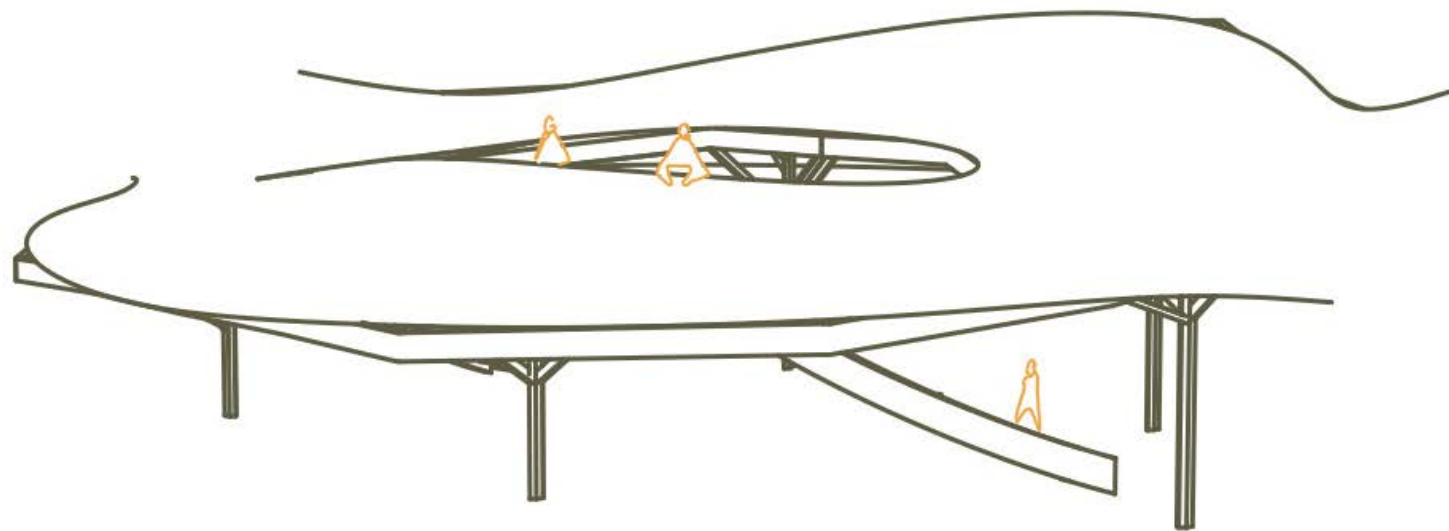
the canopy



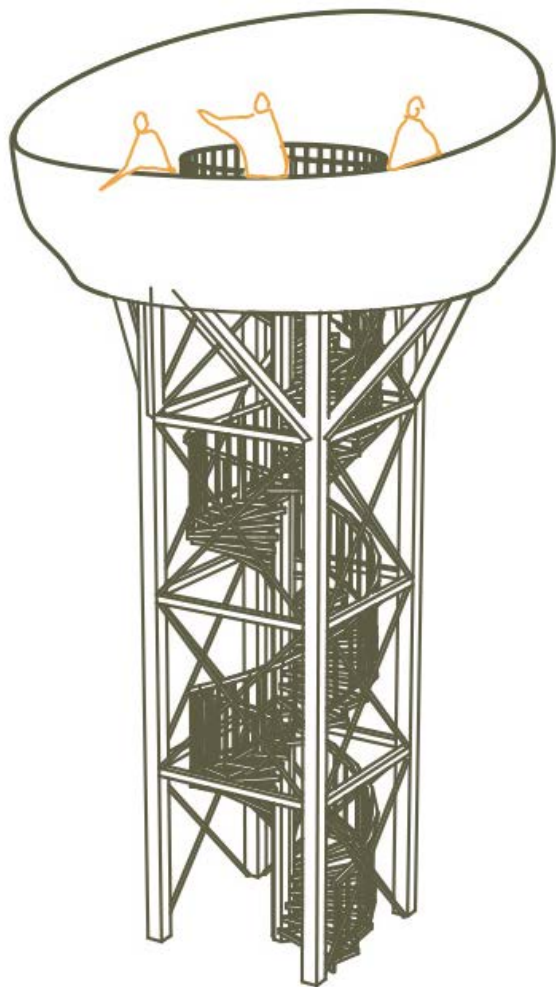
different levels of observation



0 - 1 m



3,5 m



10 m

build a relationship with the river

You bring me a sense of novelty with the activities you come up with. And a sense of nostalgia with the ones that have barely changed since centuries ago. I hope that being here with me helps you to understand me better.



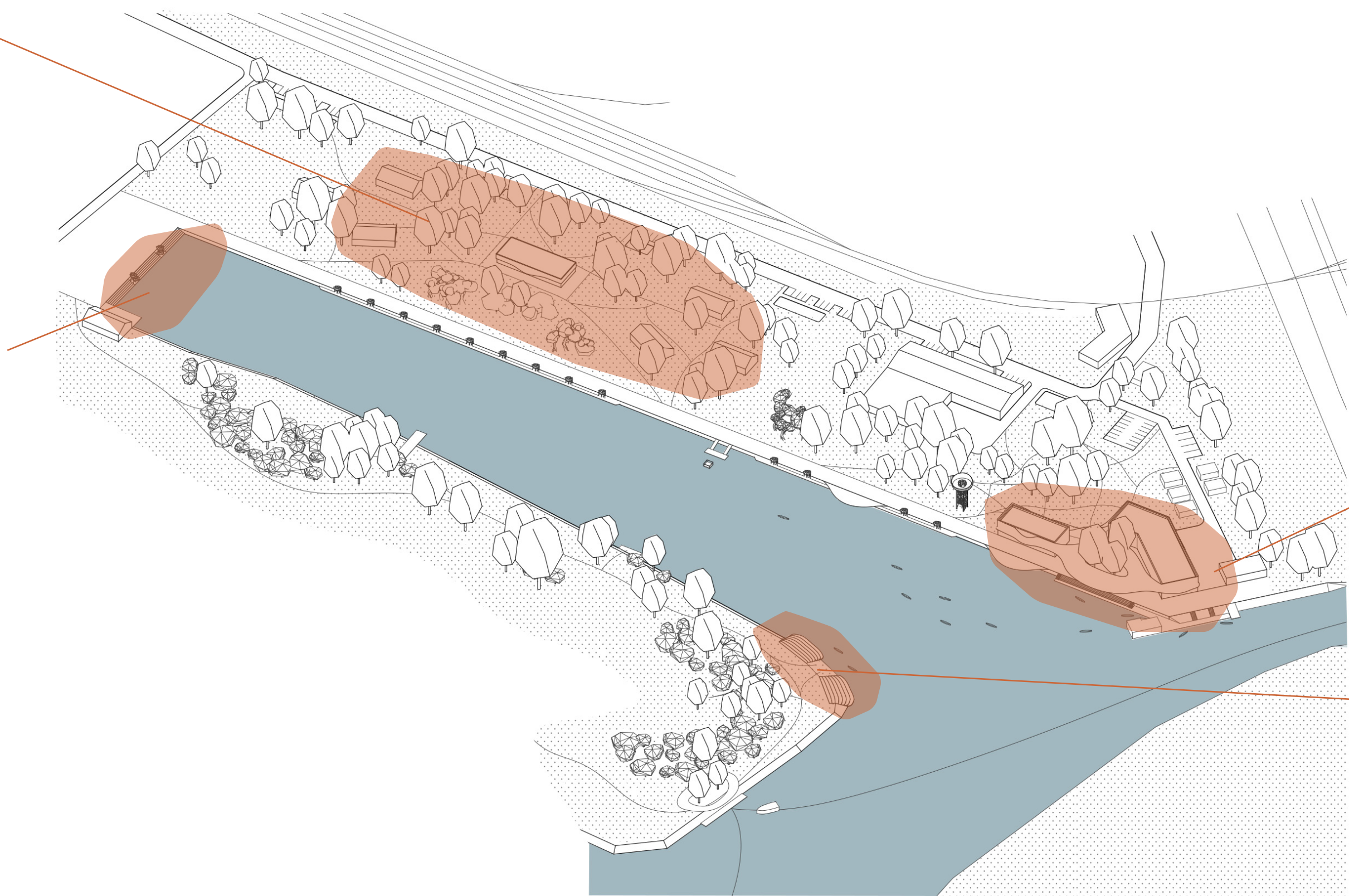
new human activities

workshops,
NGOs etc.

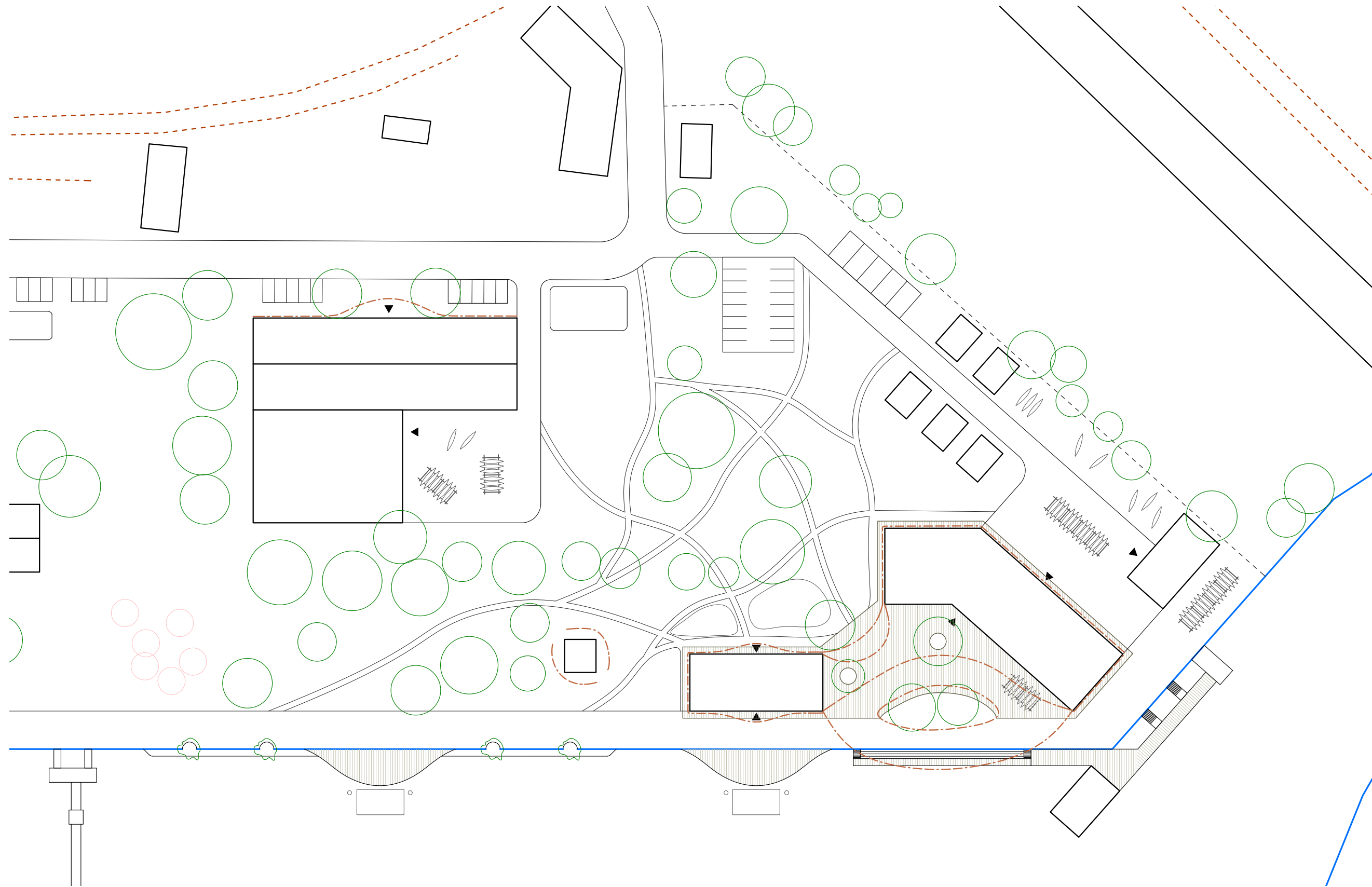
natural
swimming
pool

water sports
practice

water sports
observation



site plan



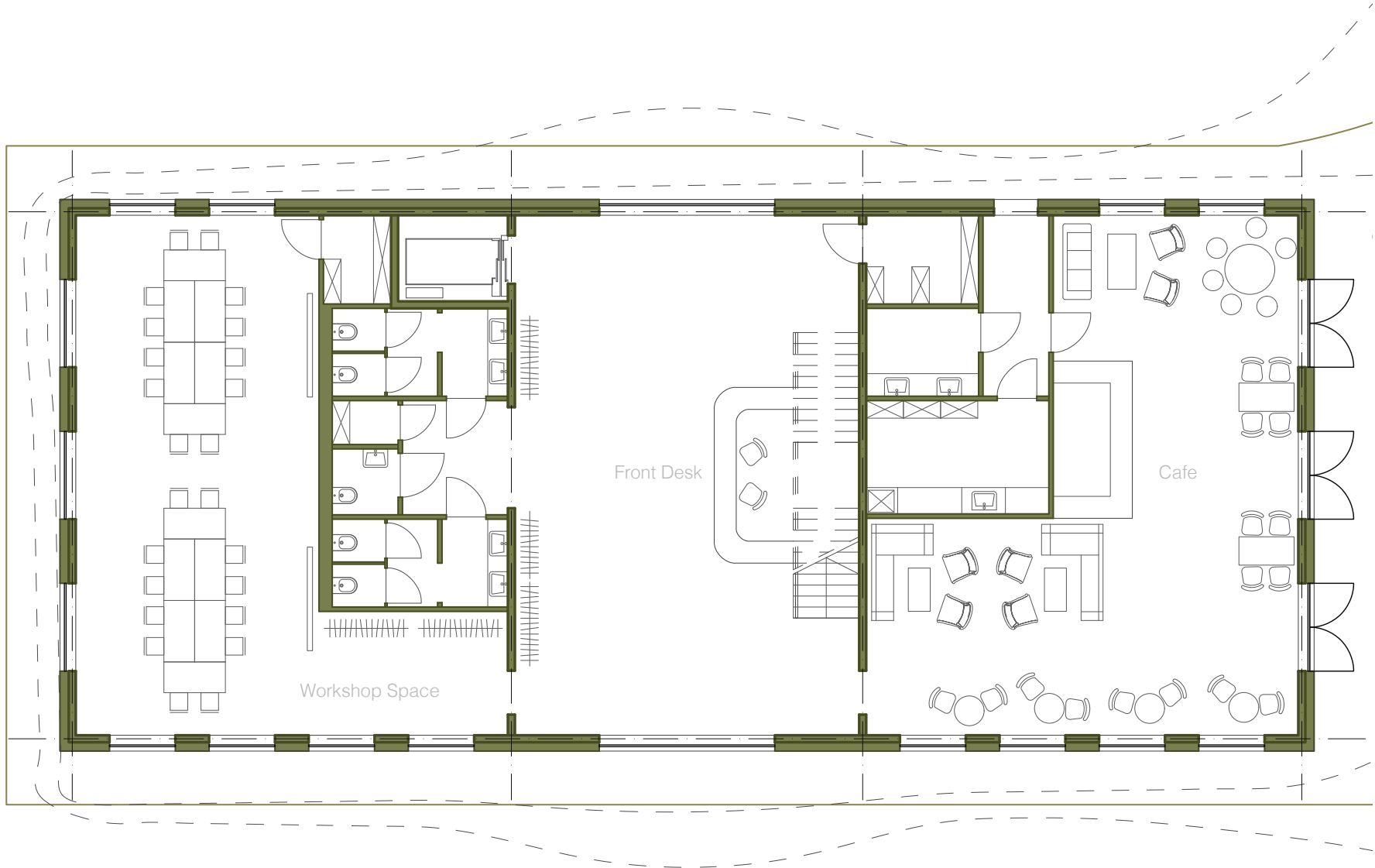
sports building - ground floor



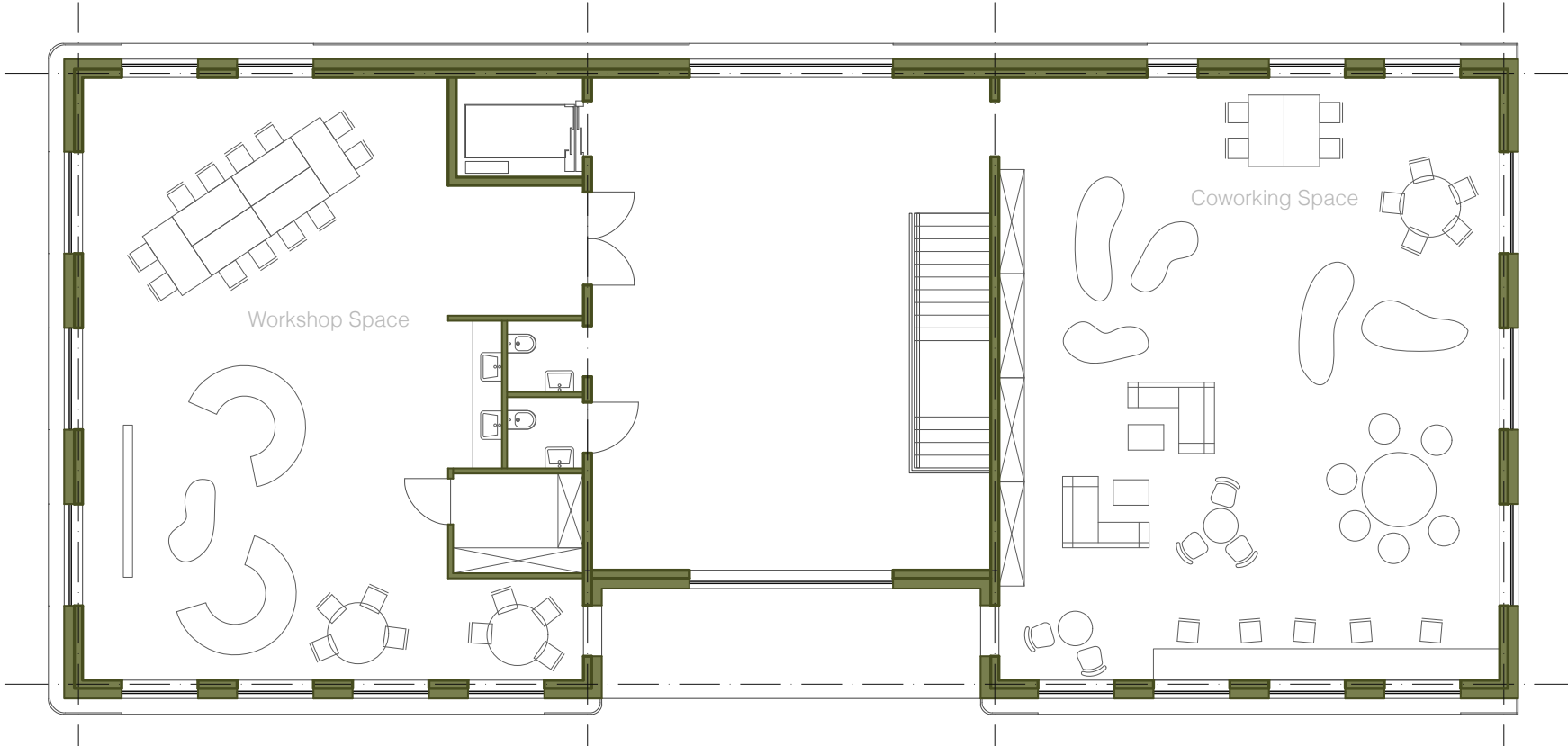
sports building - first floor



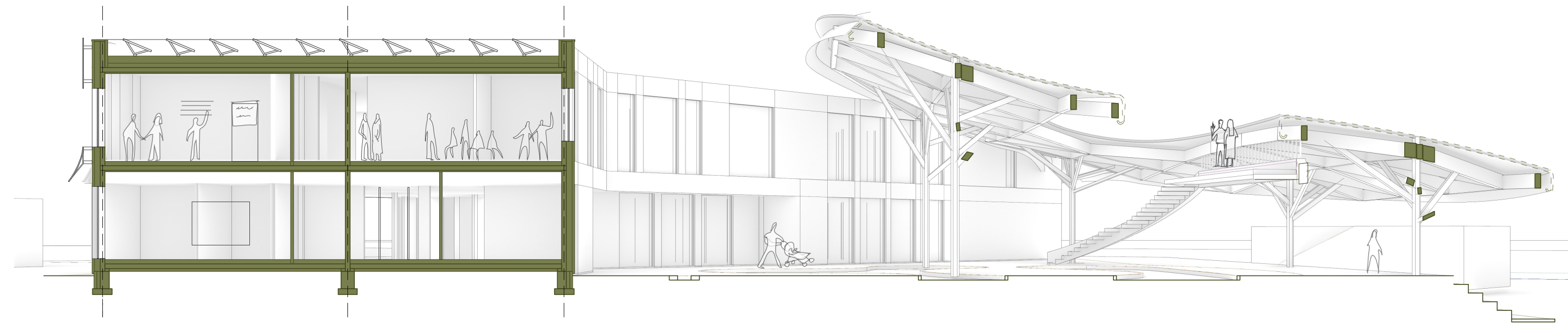
education building - ground floor



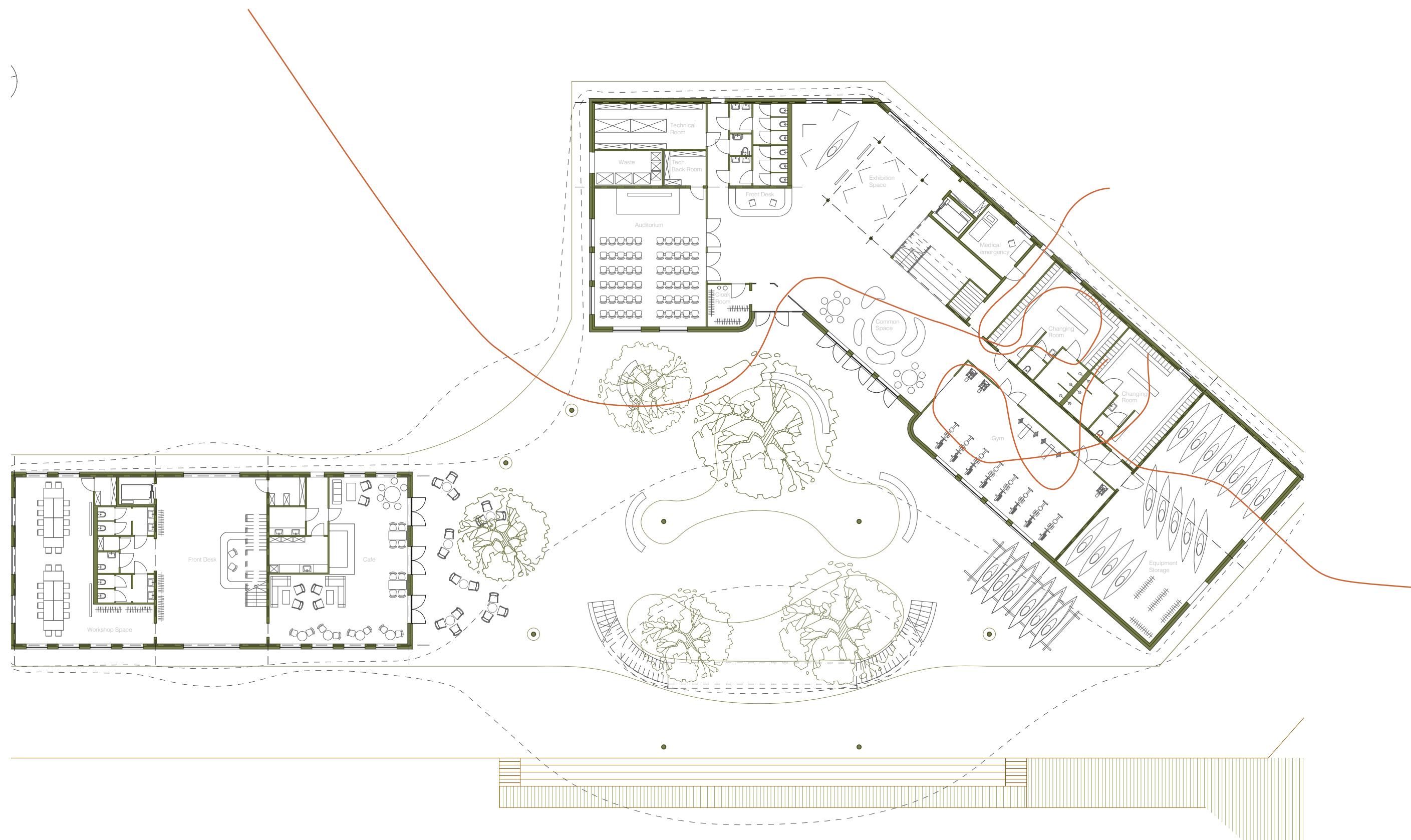
education building - first floor



section



user flow - sportspeople



user flow - other visitors





outdoor common space



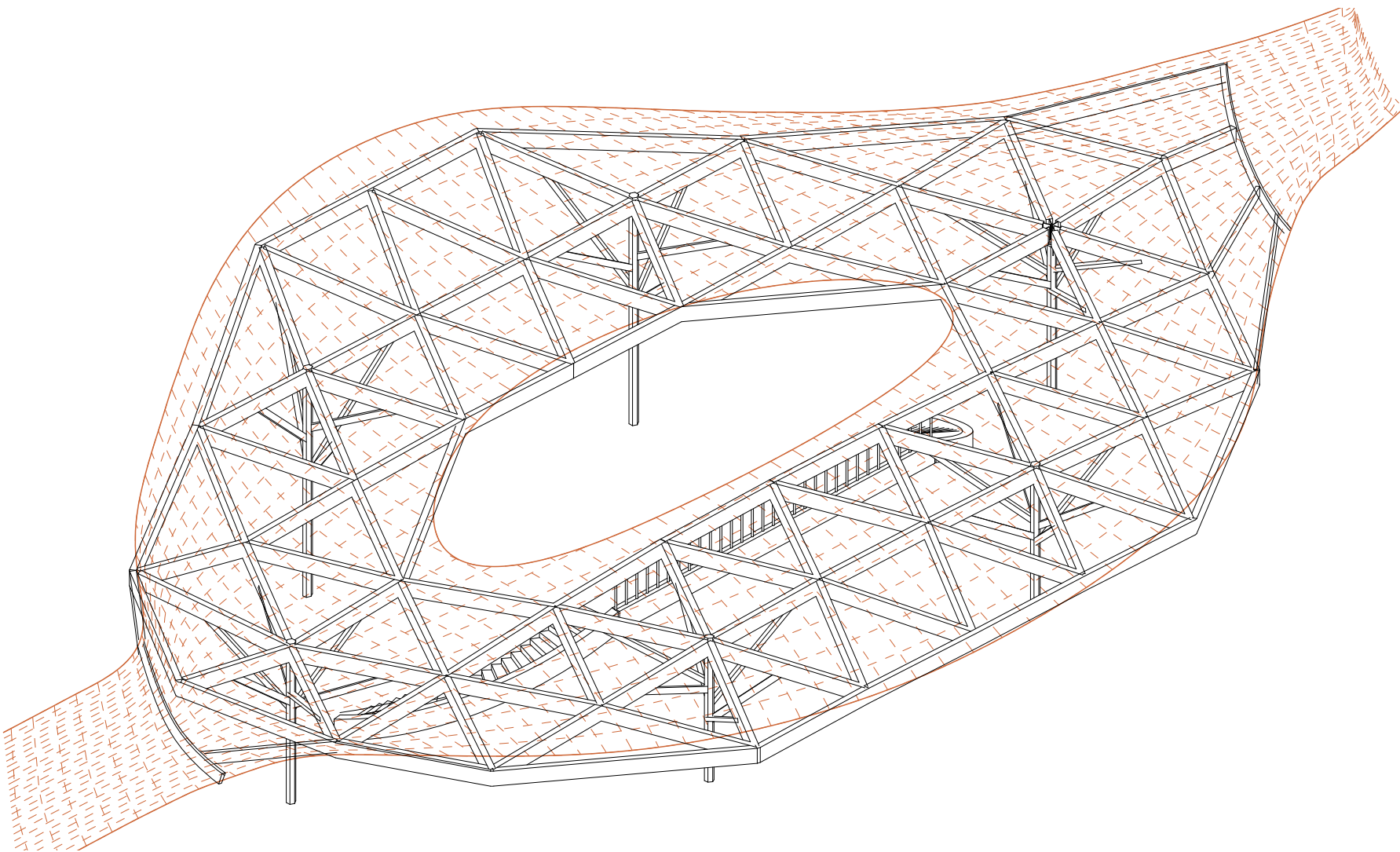
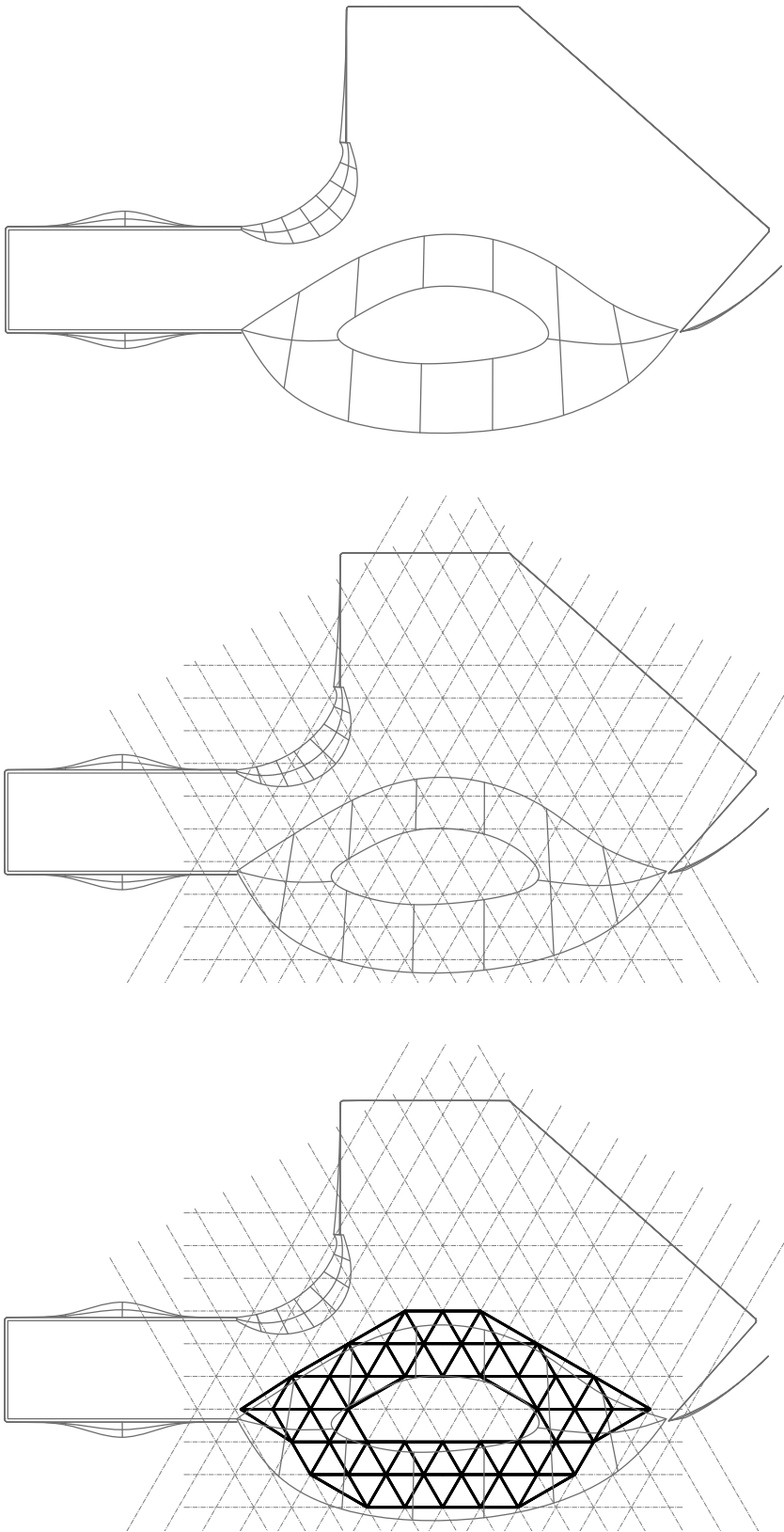
outdoor common space

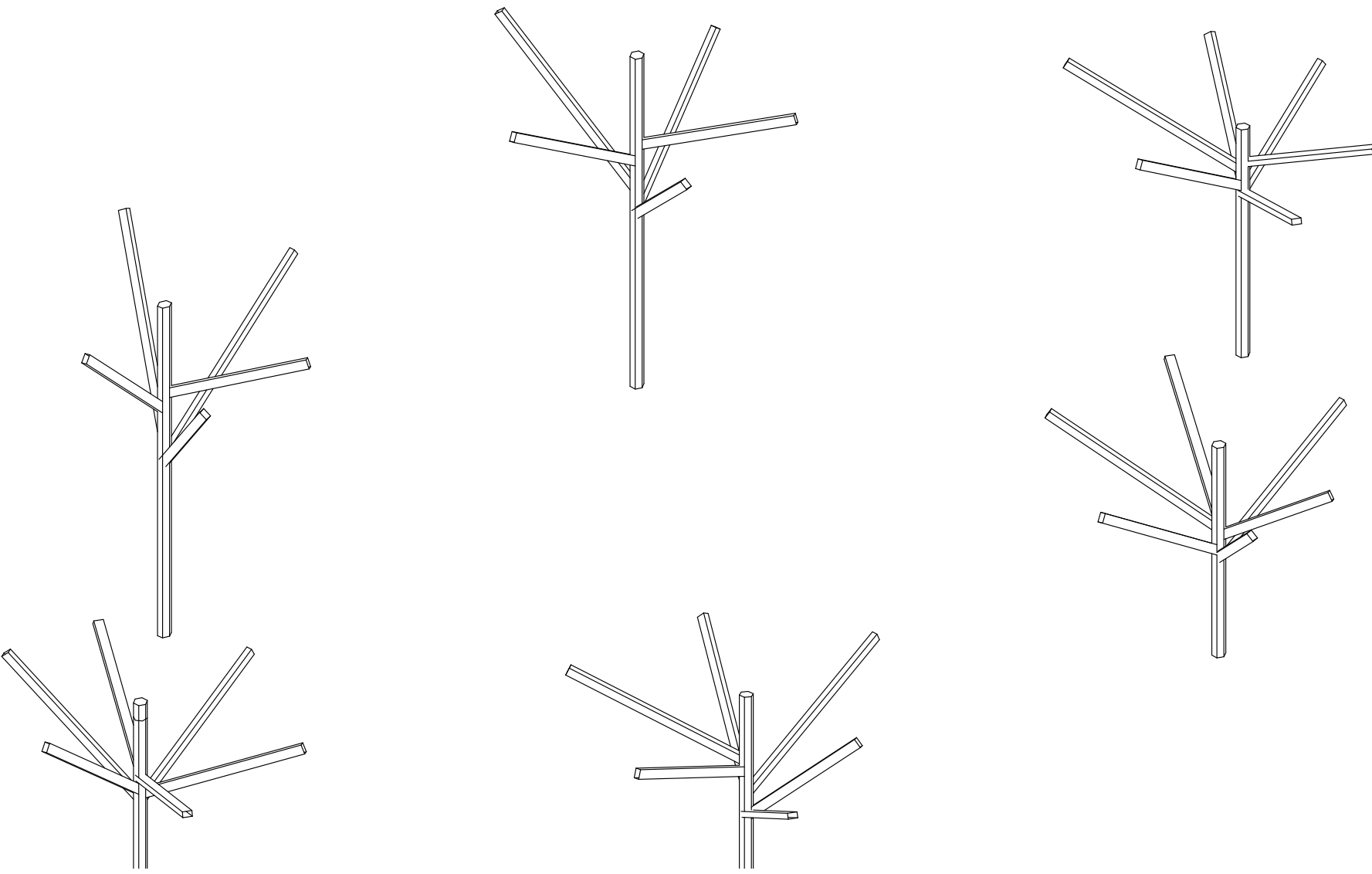


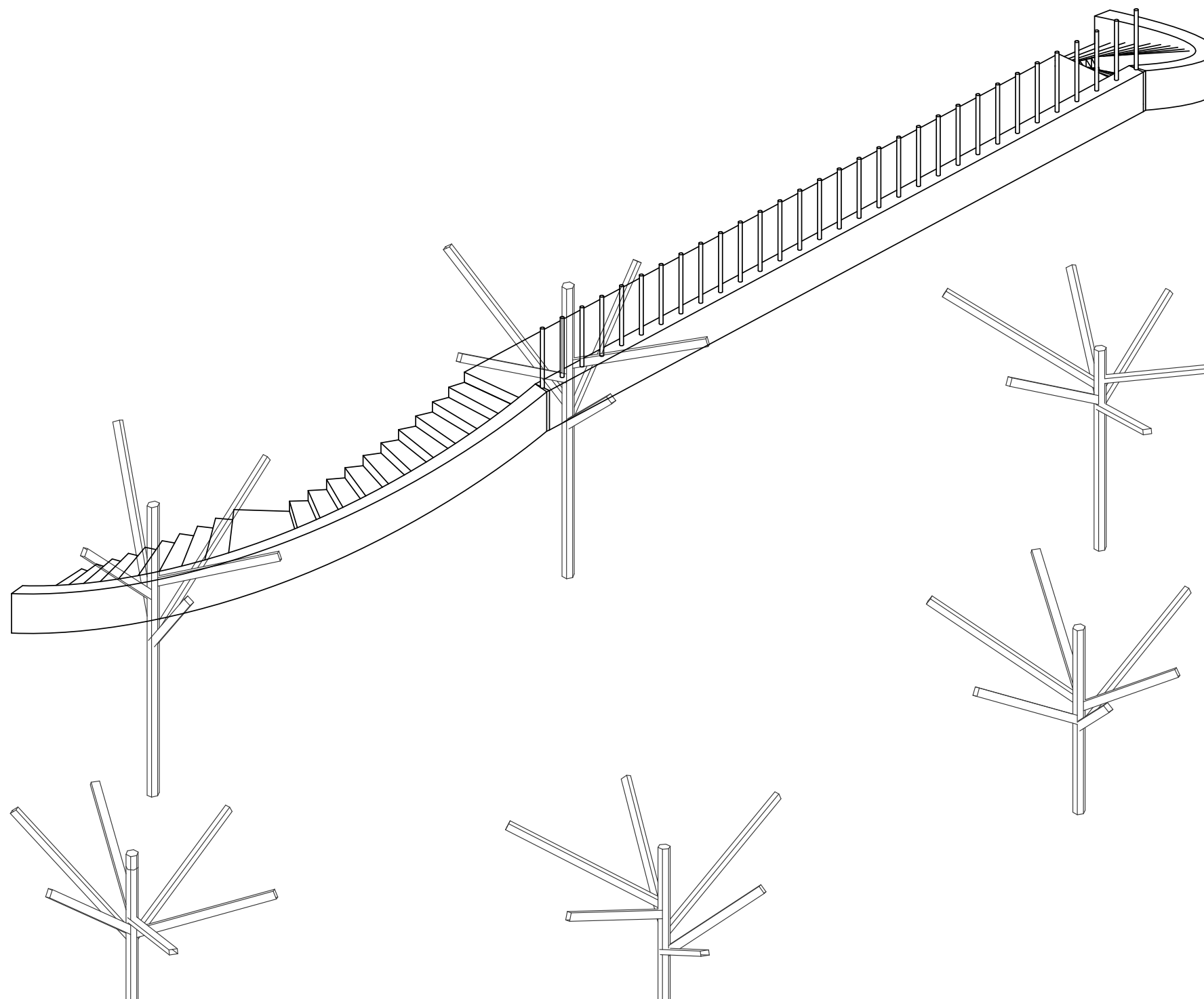
outdoor common space

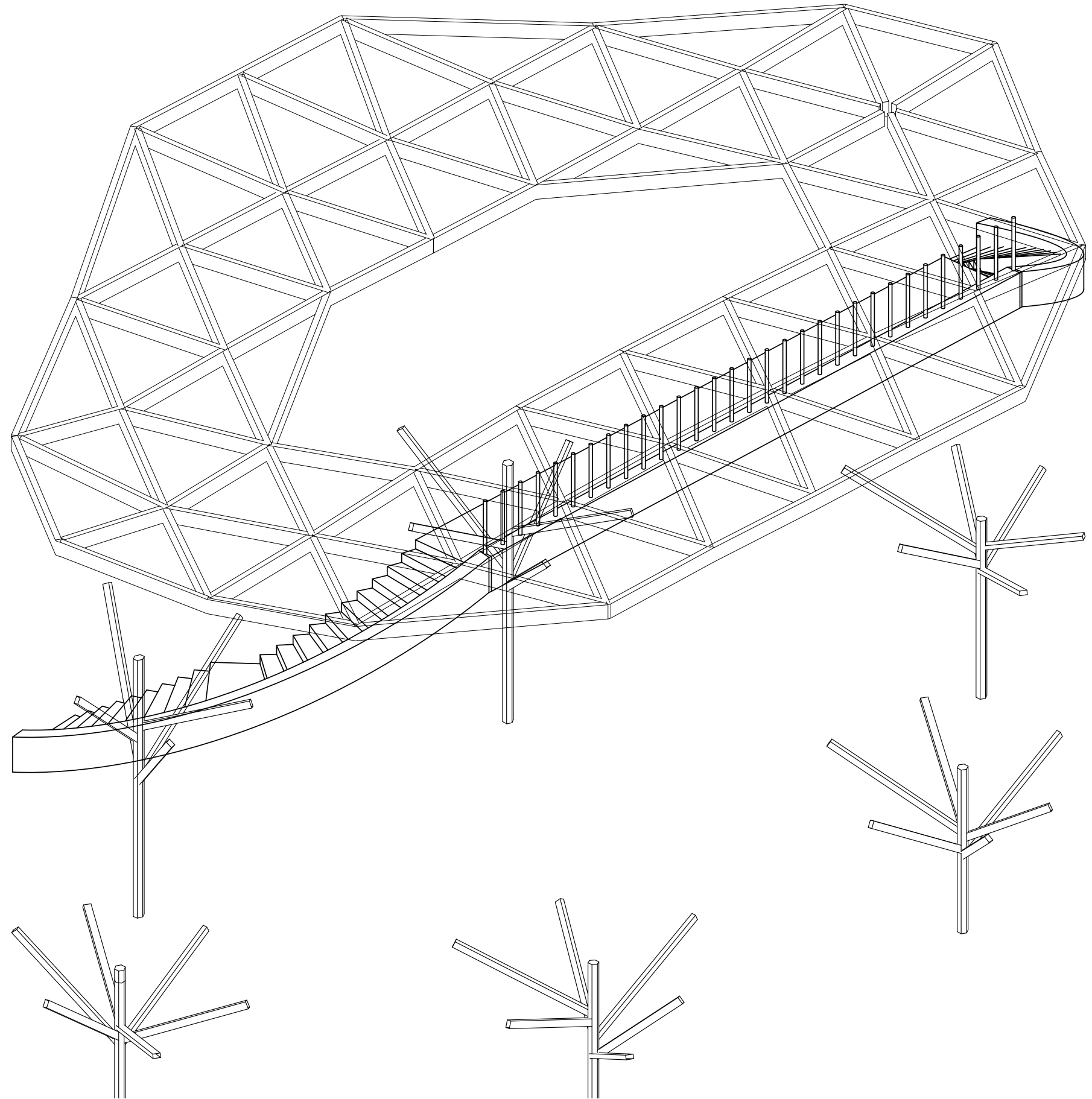


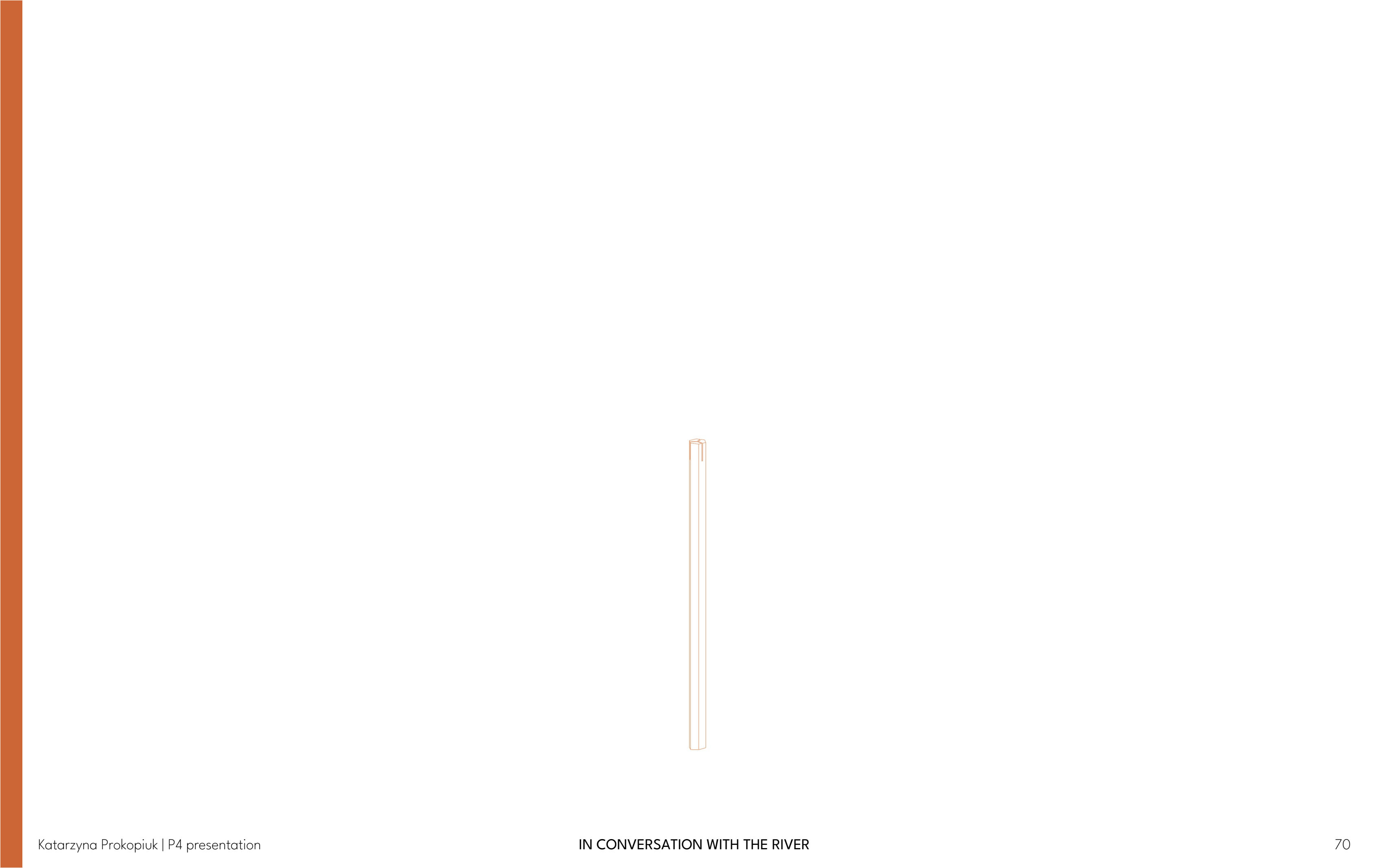
canopy structure

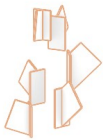


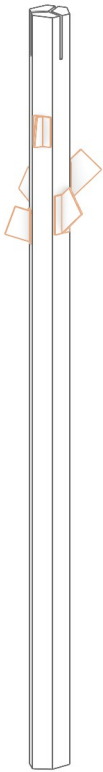


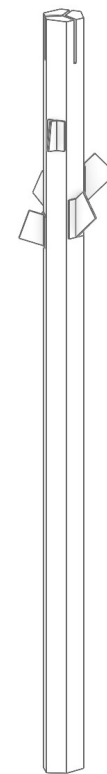
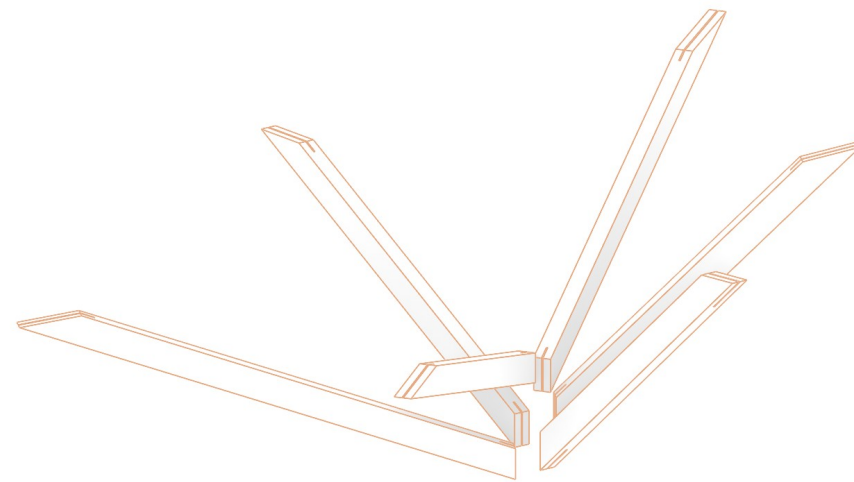


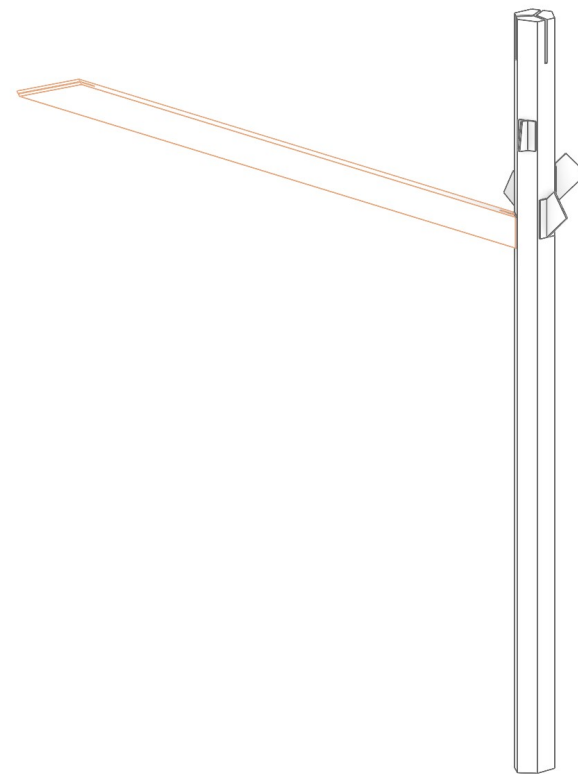
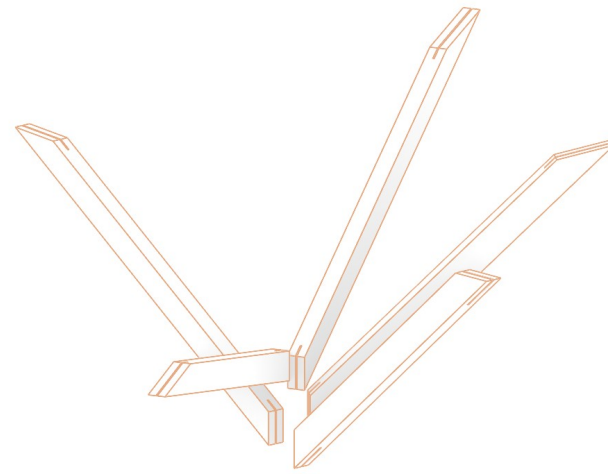


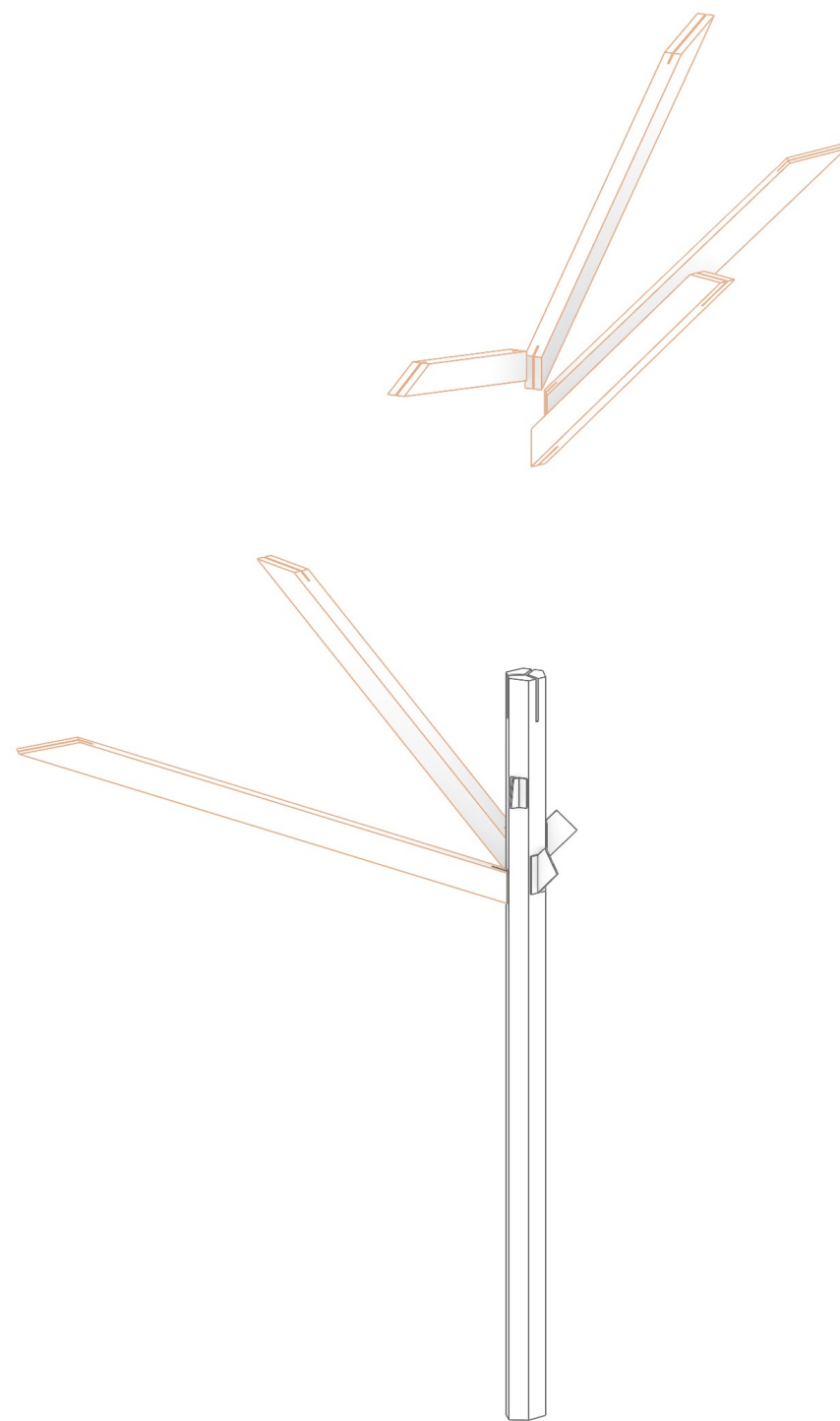


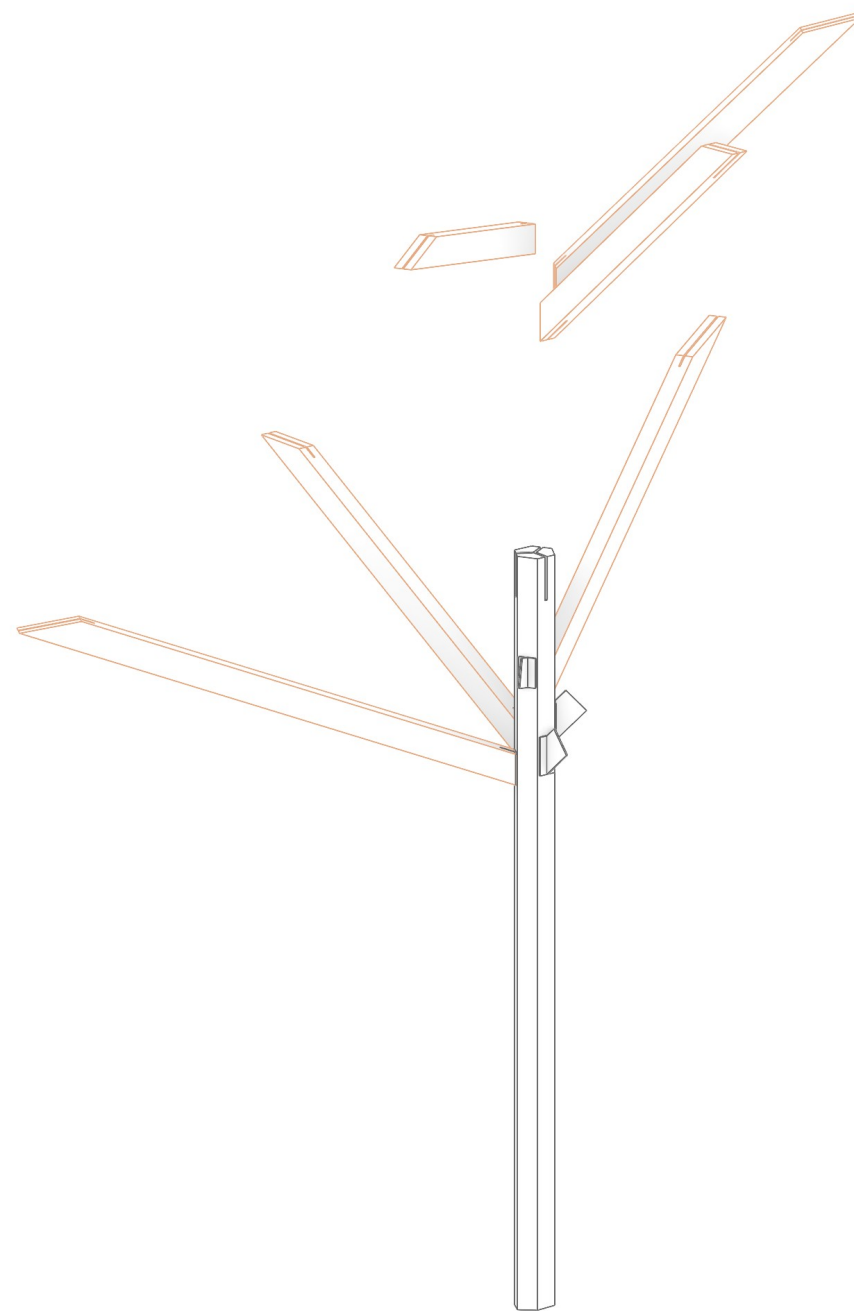


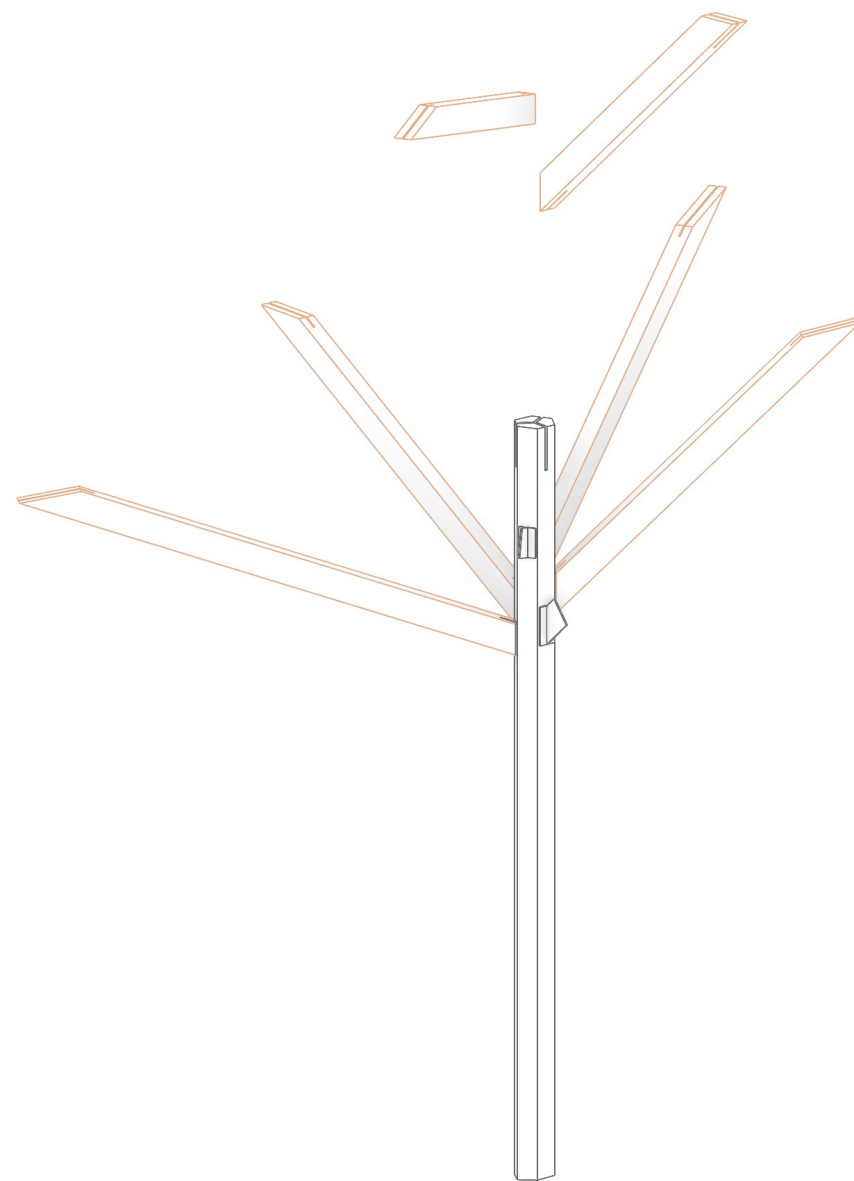


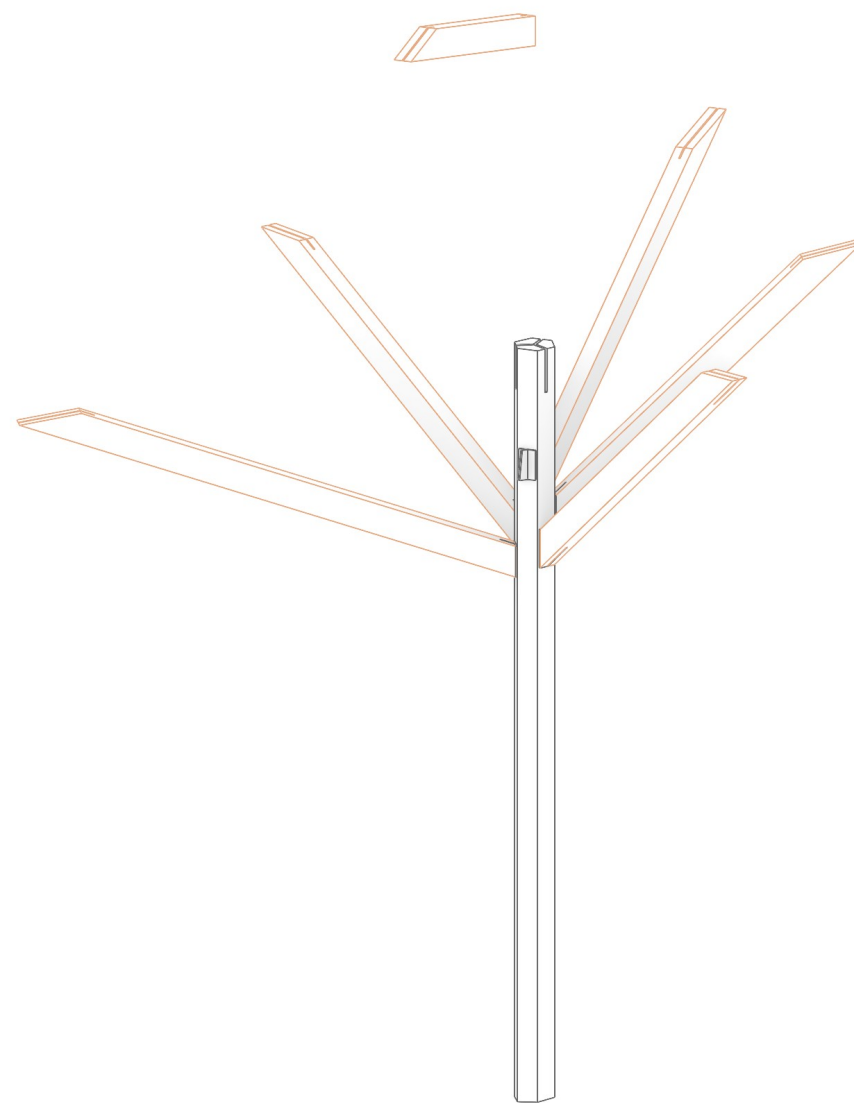


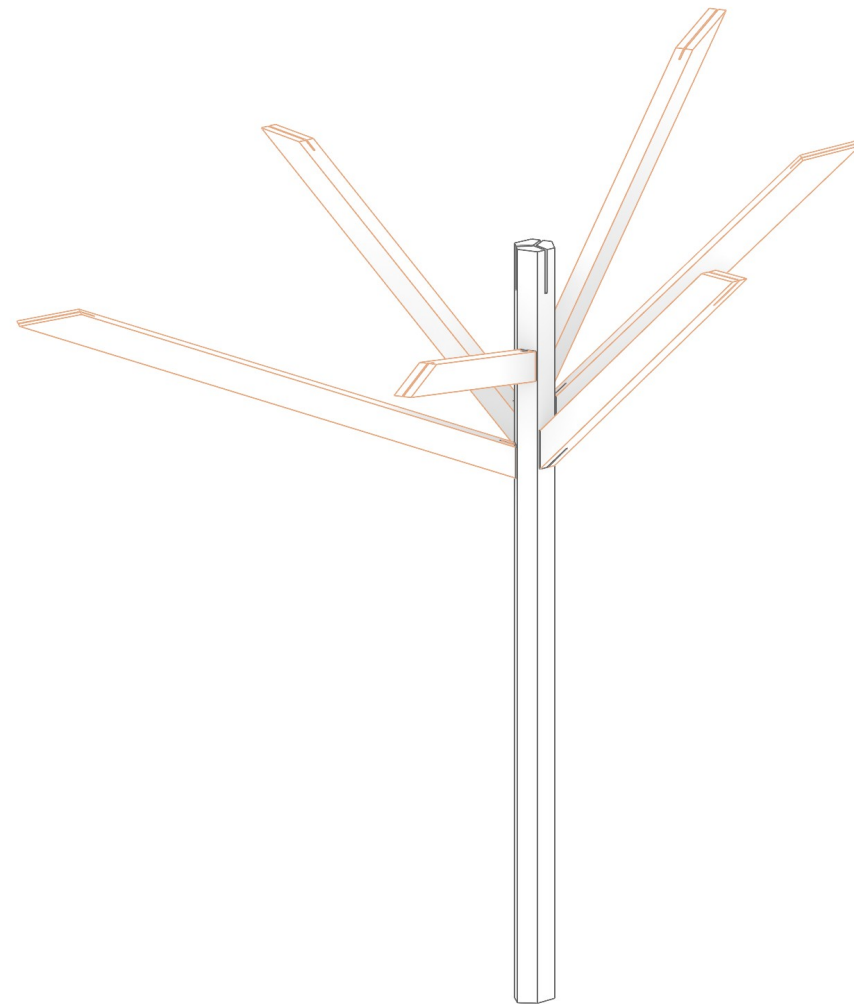


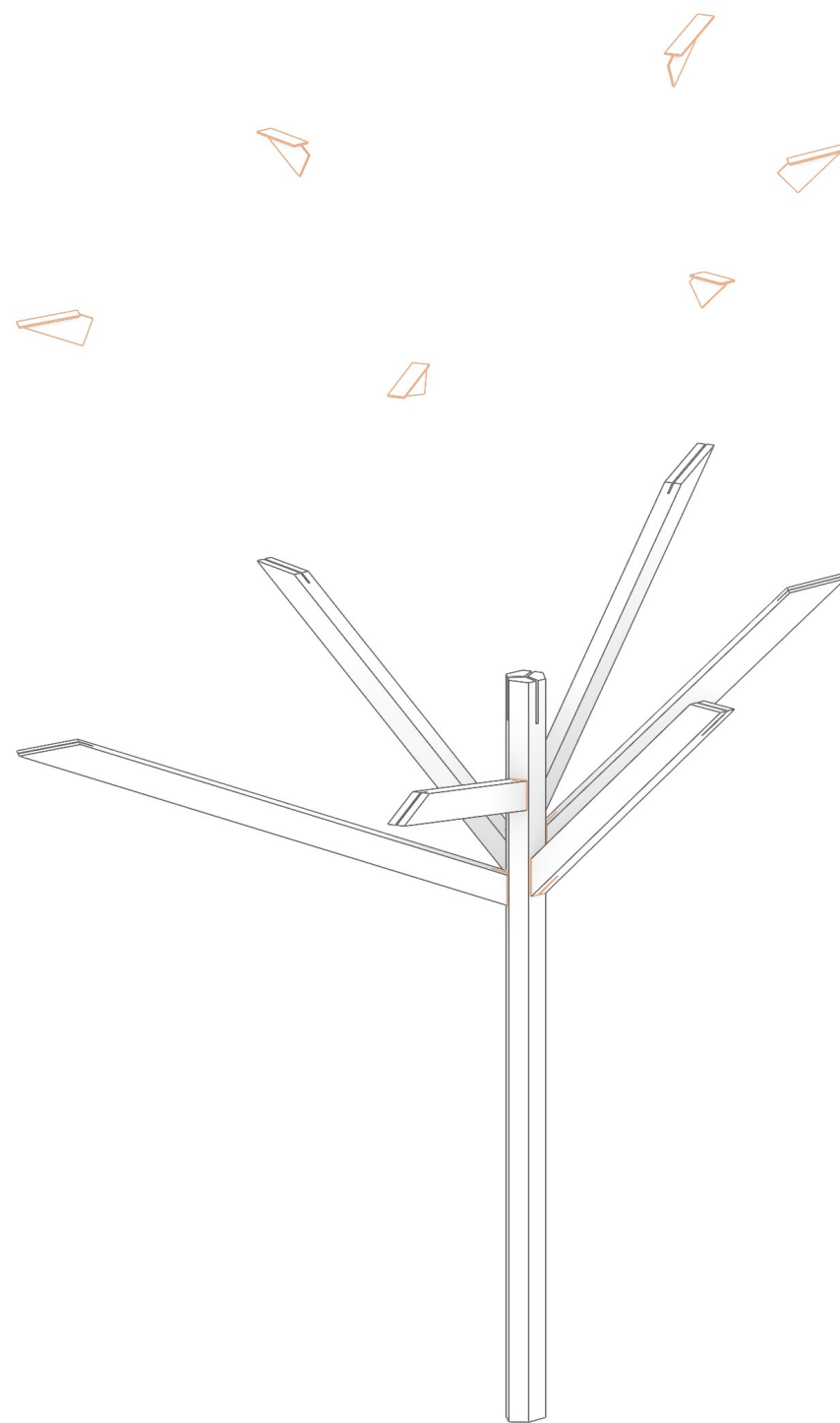


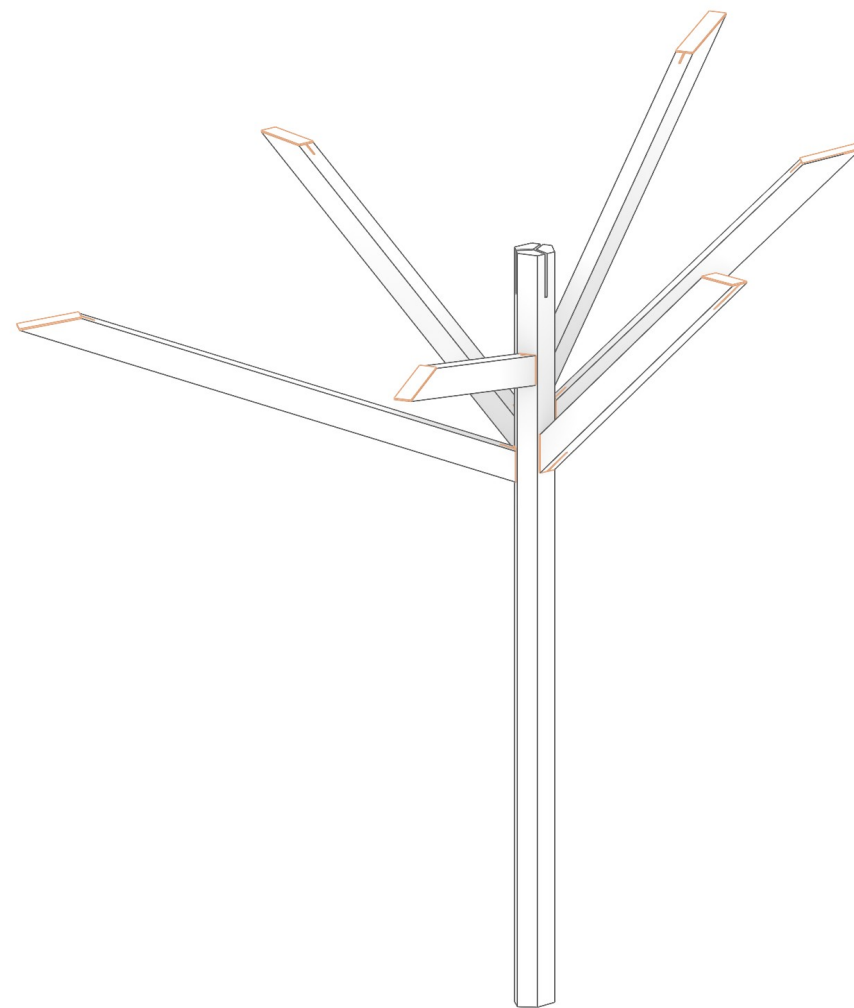


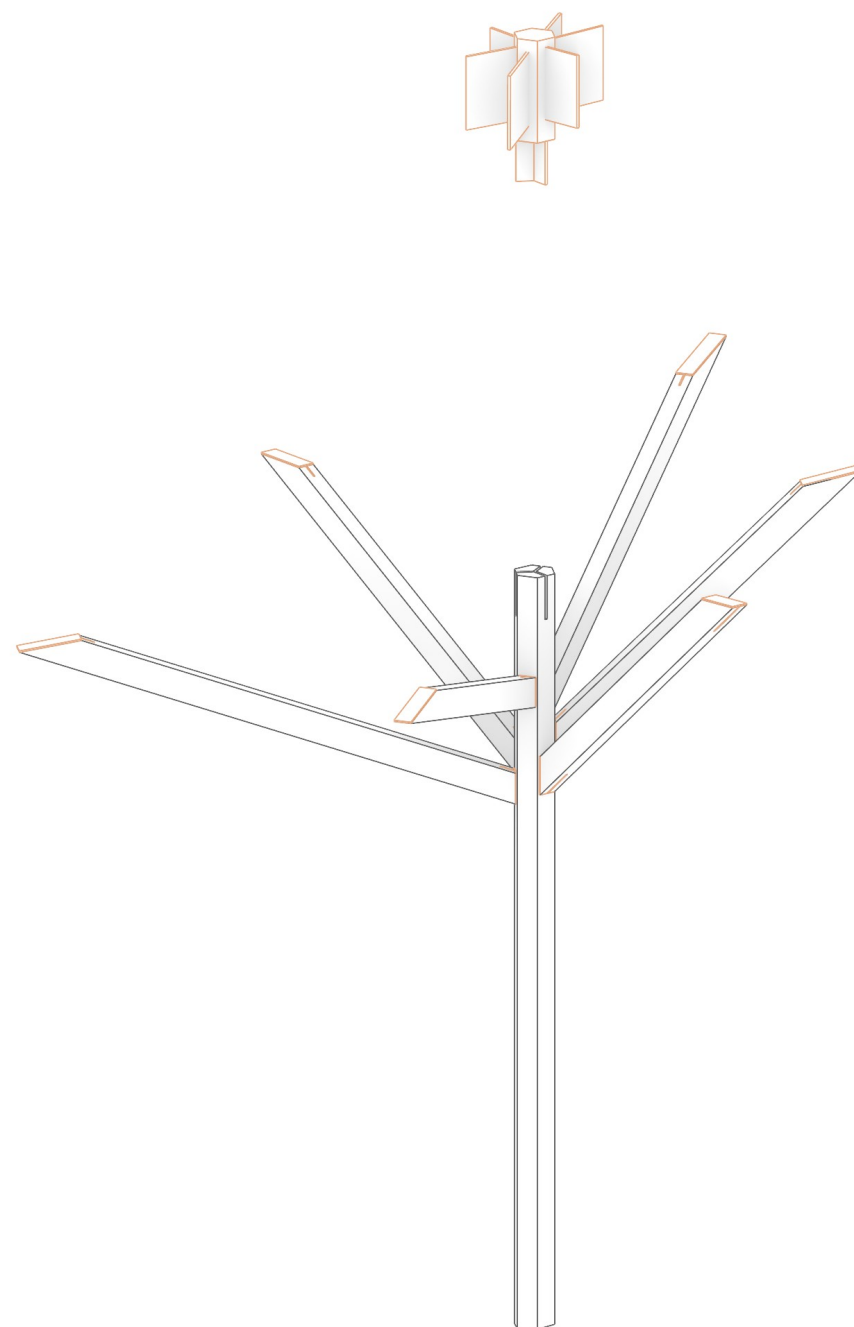


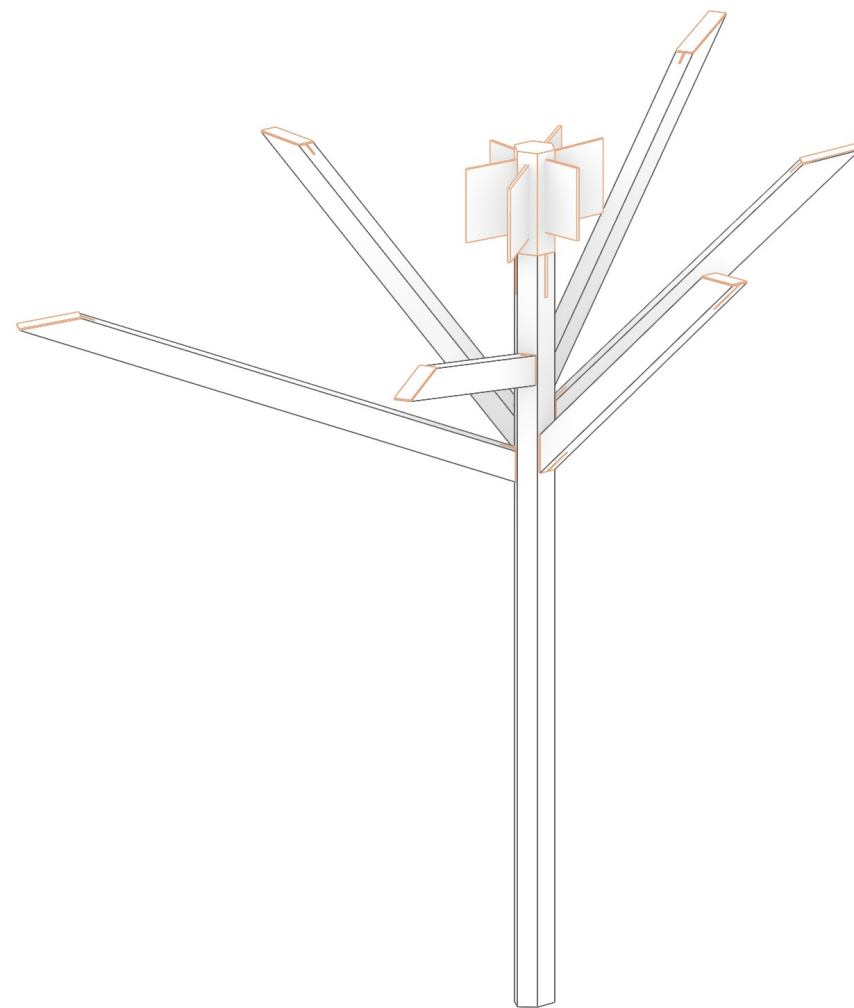


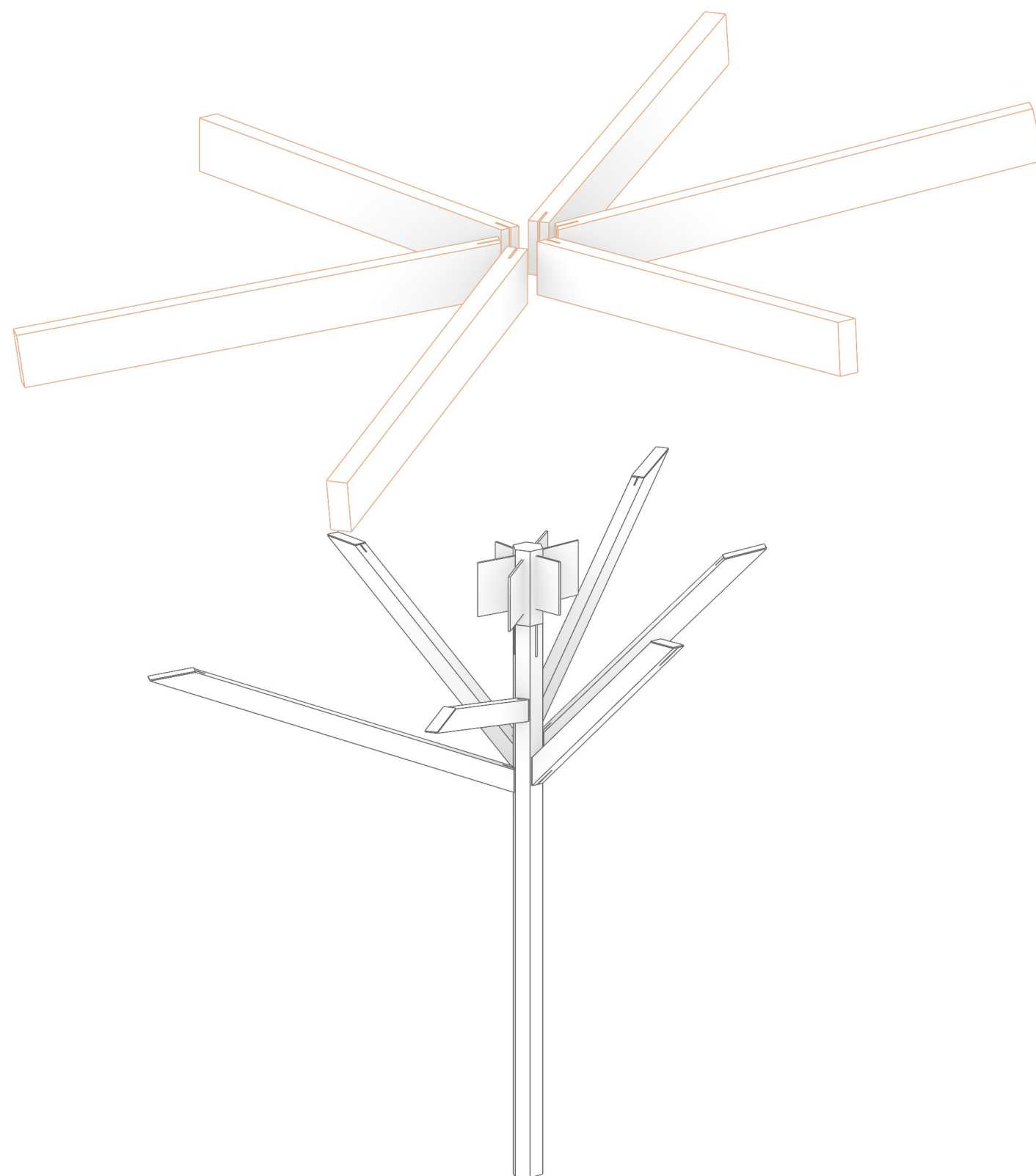


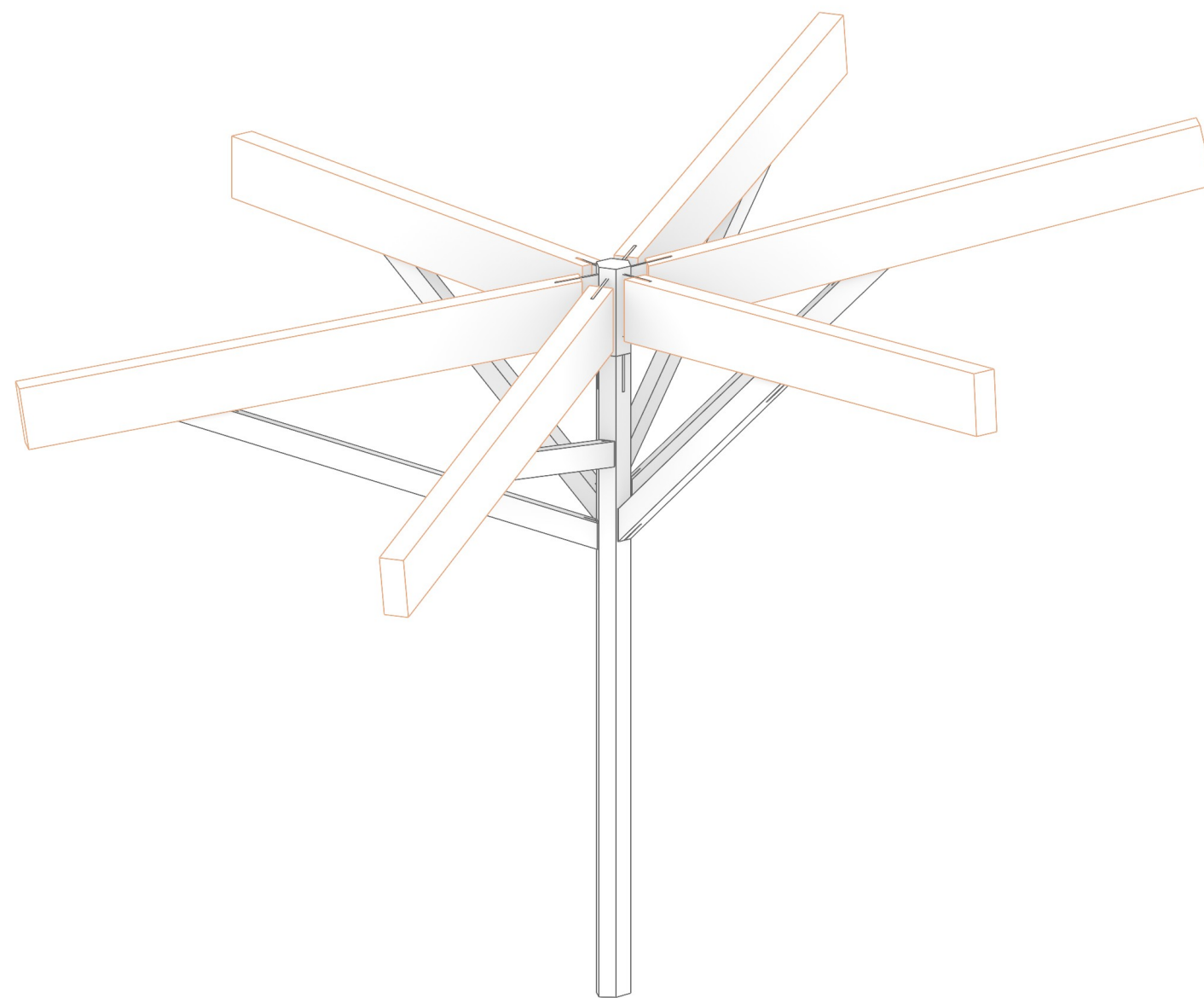






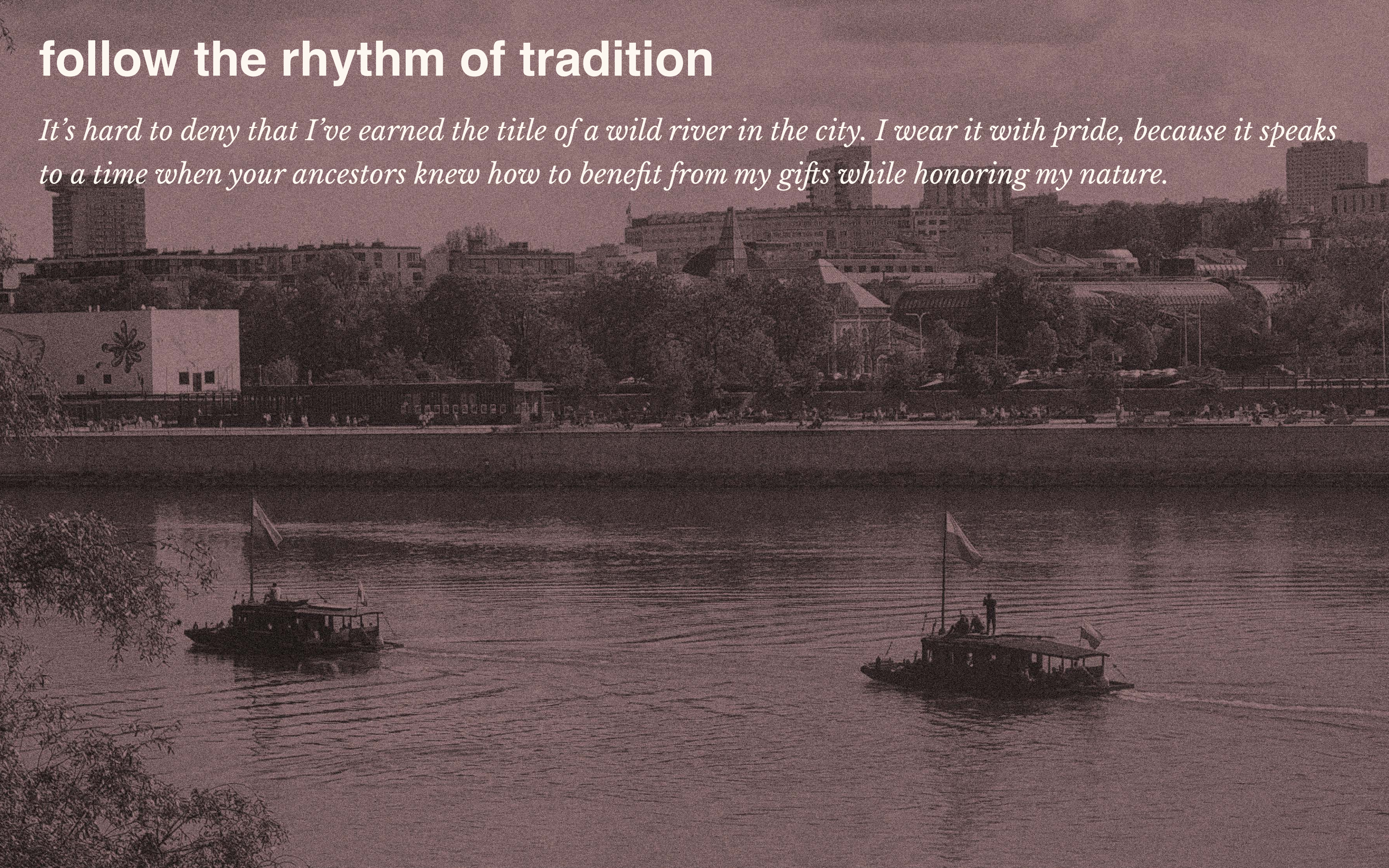






follow the rhythm of tradition

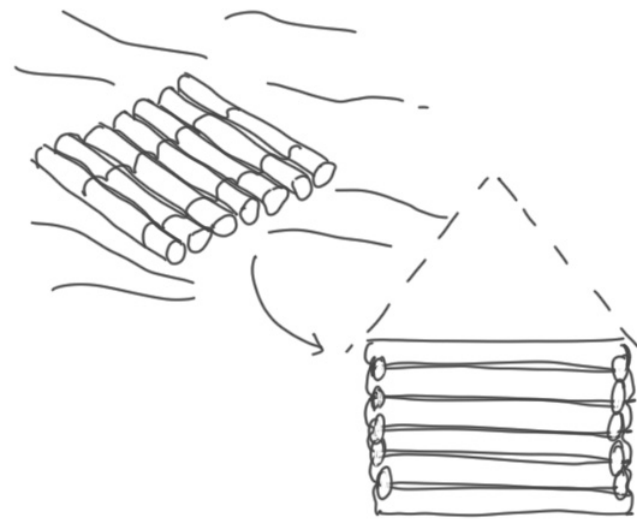
It's hard to deny that I've earned the title of a wild river in the city. I wear it with pride, because it speaks to a time when your ancestors knew how to benefit from my gifts while honoring my nature.



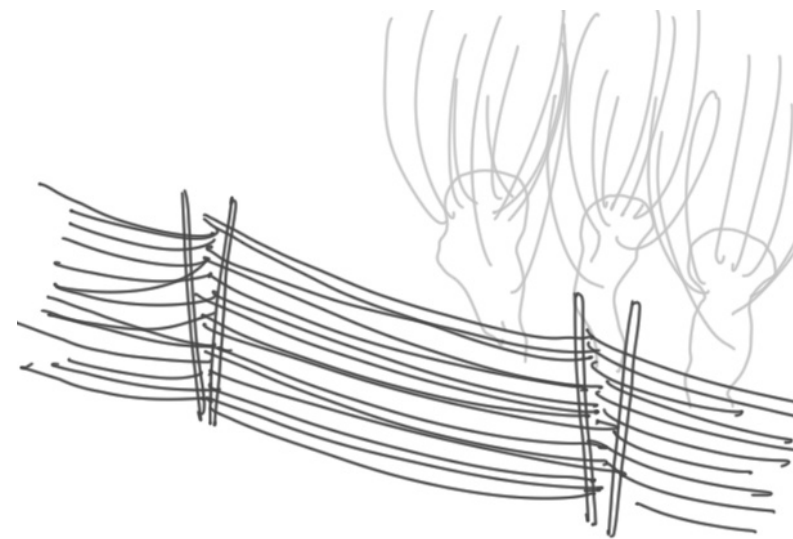
Olęder heritage in the midstream Vistula region



Vernacular building practices:



*floating construction wood as rafts
down Vistula river*



*willow branches - abundant natural
resource - used for building fences
and strengthening hills*



Olęder settlement in Saskia Kępa (currently a district of Warsaw)



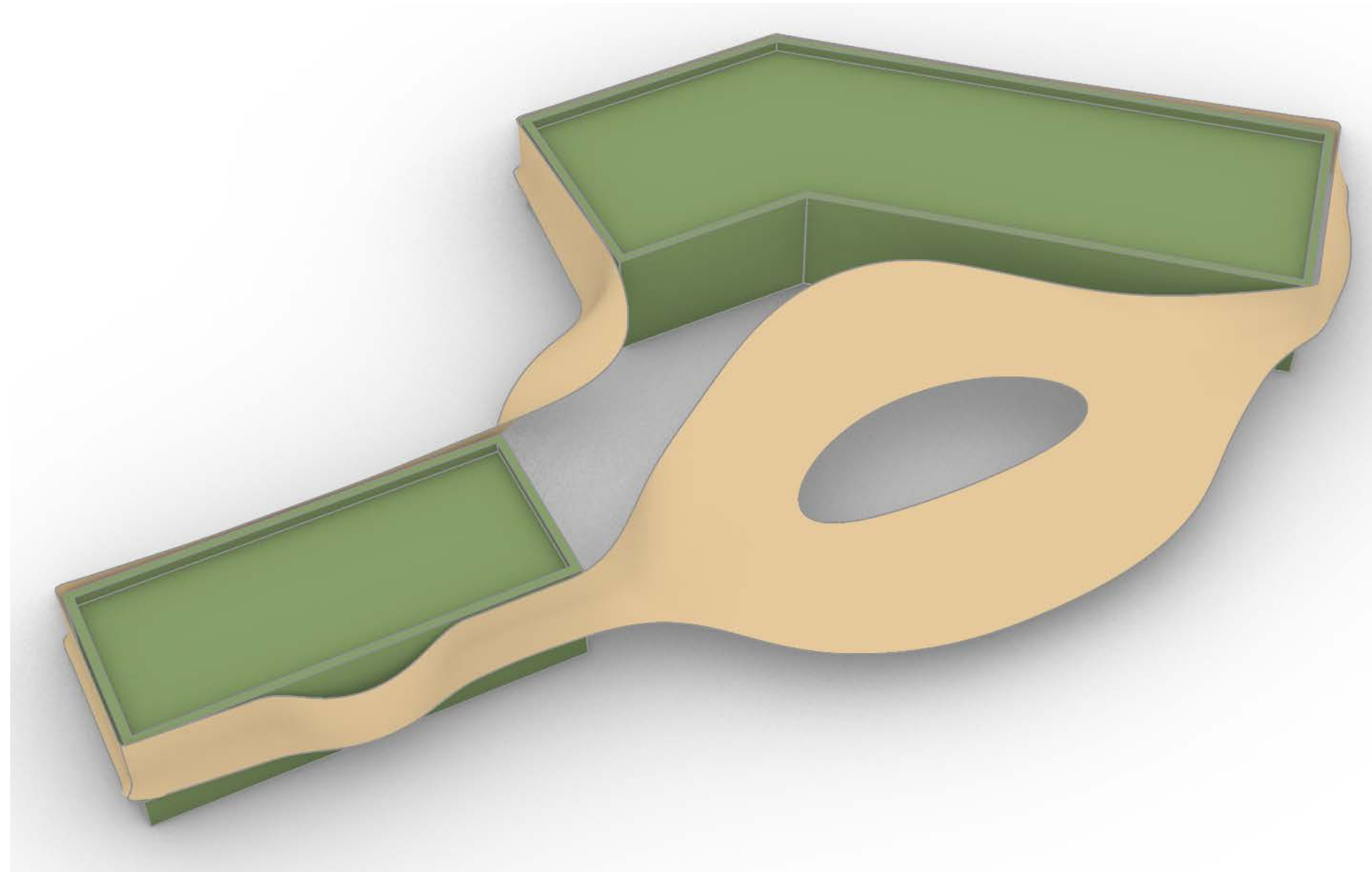
"Flood", photograph from National Digital Archive, visible traditional Olęder willow fence

willow's plasticity

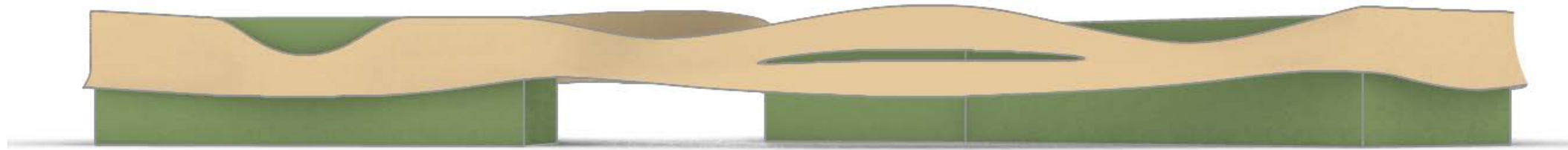


Poland's pavilion for EXPO 2005, Whitemad.pl

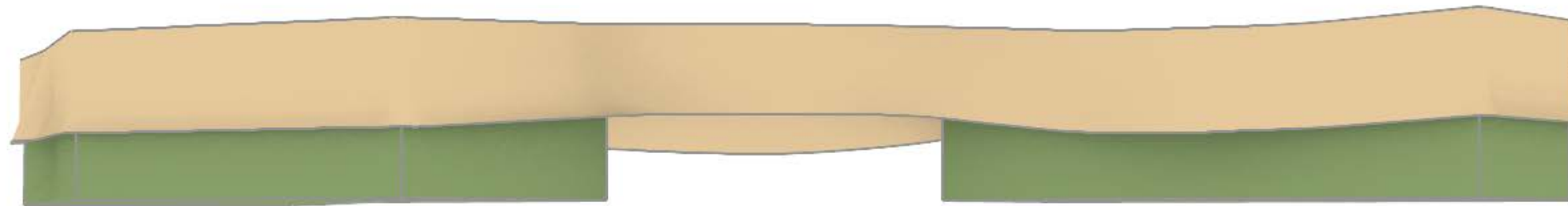
wrapping around the building



wrapping around the building



willow shape from the water

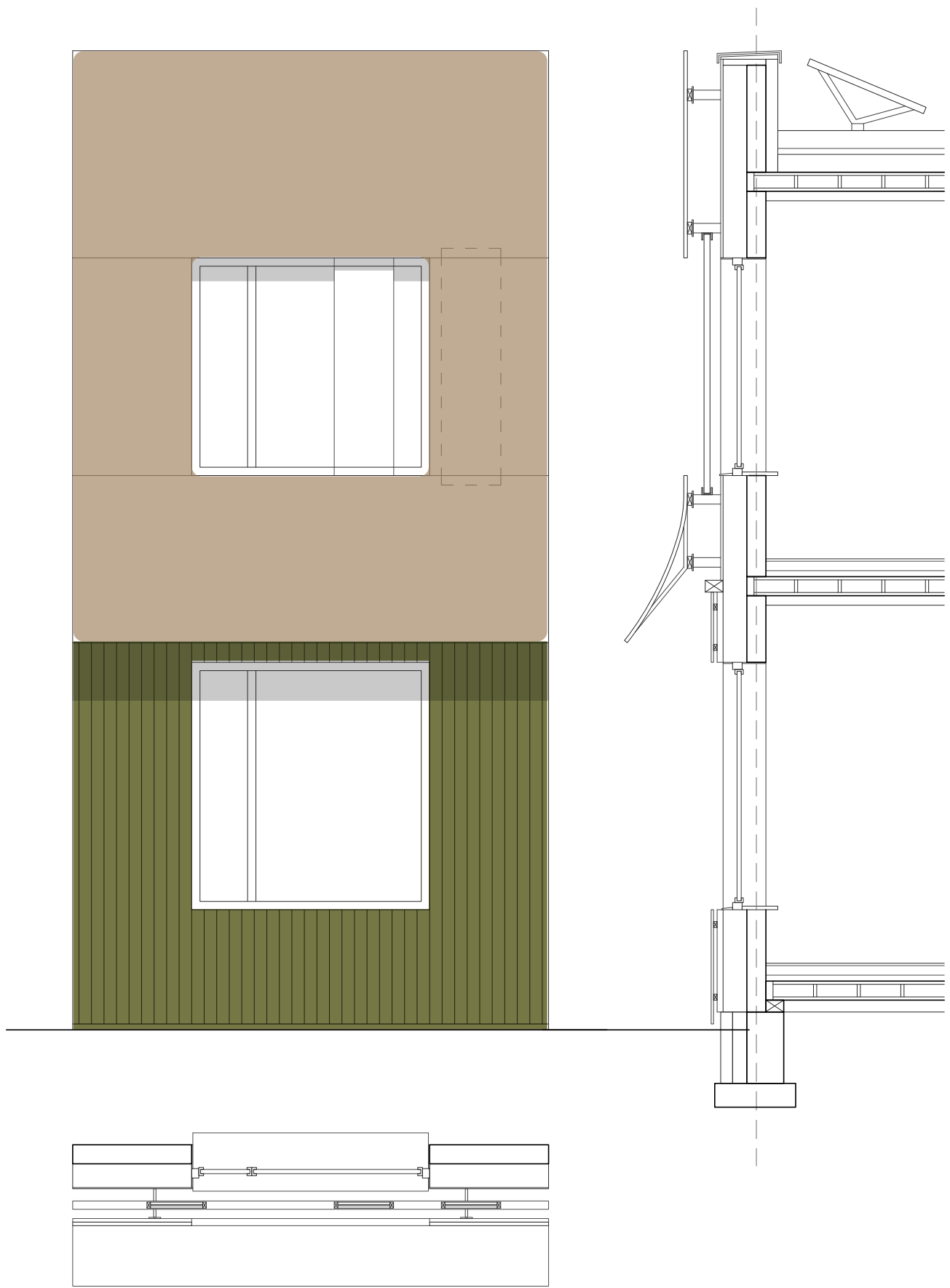


willow shape from the park

elevation - view from the water



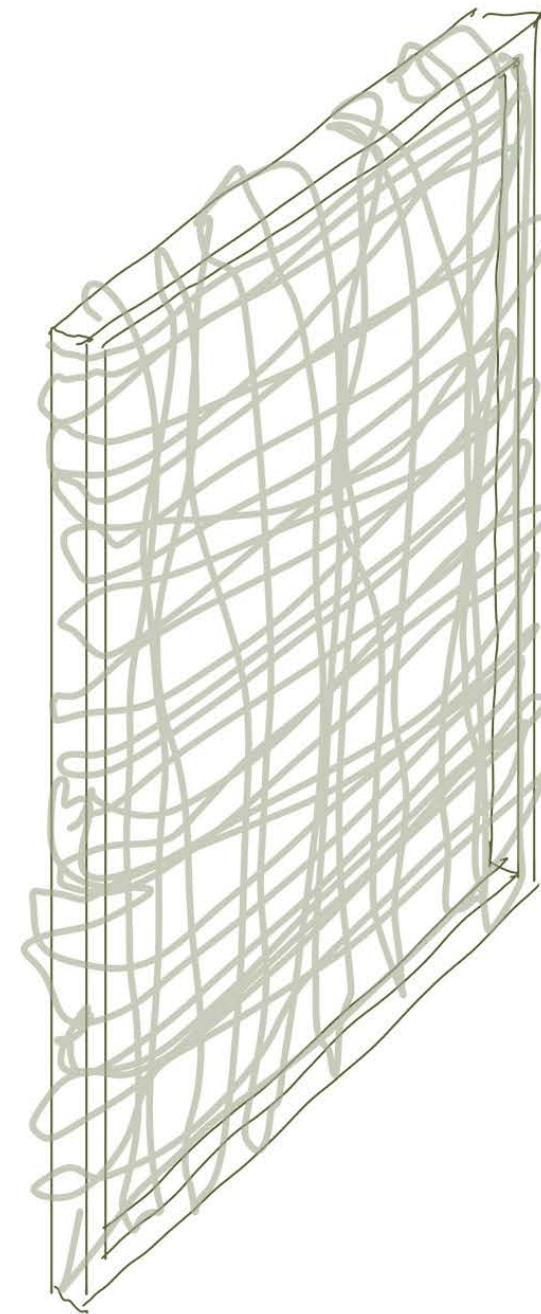
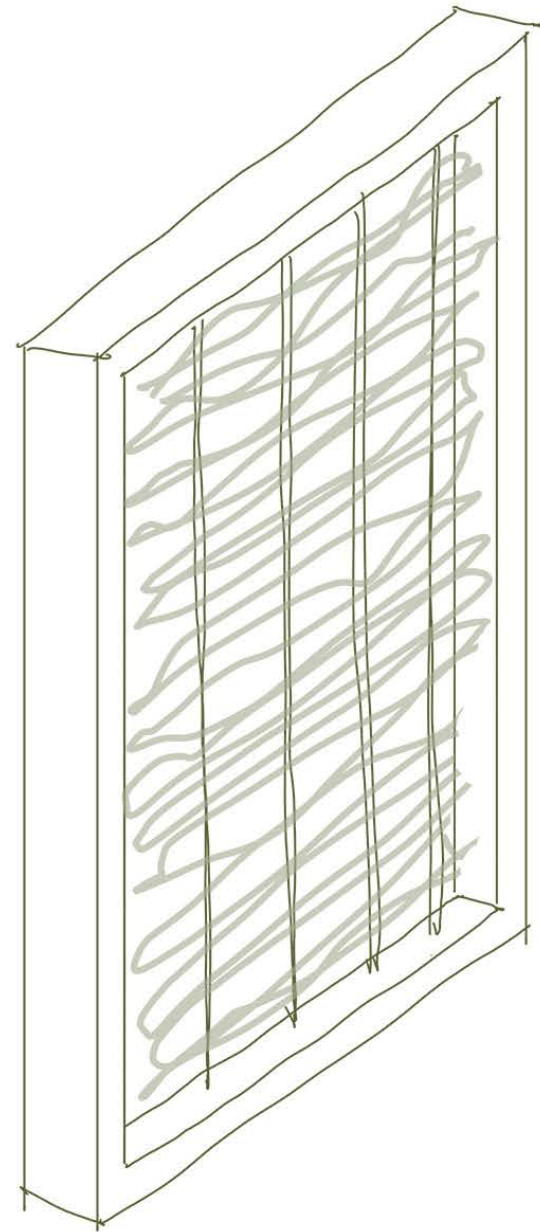
facade design



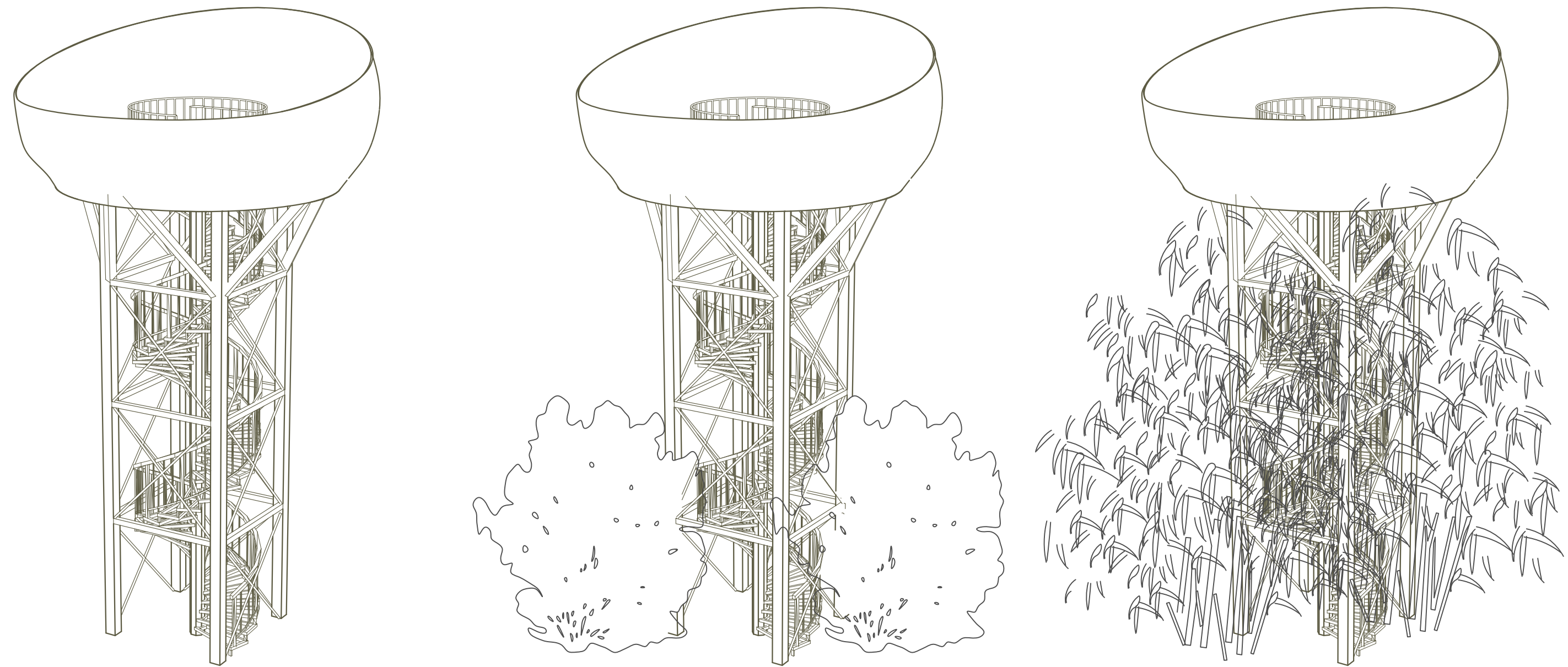
facade design



willow panels



living willow structures - viewing nest

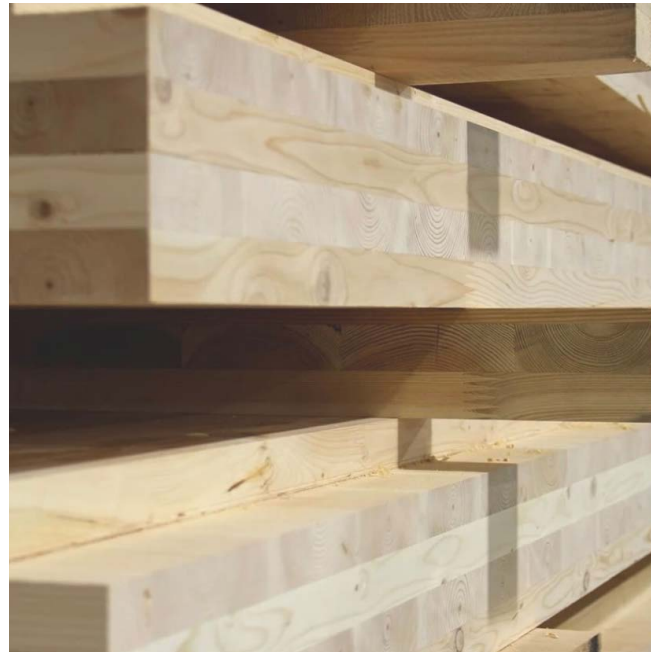


think about the future

We could work together towards the same goal. To preserve the resources and the joy that I want to give you. And above all to protect nature to whom I give life.



materials



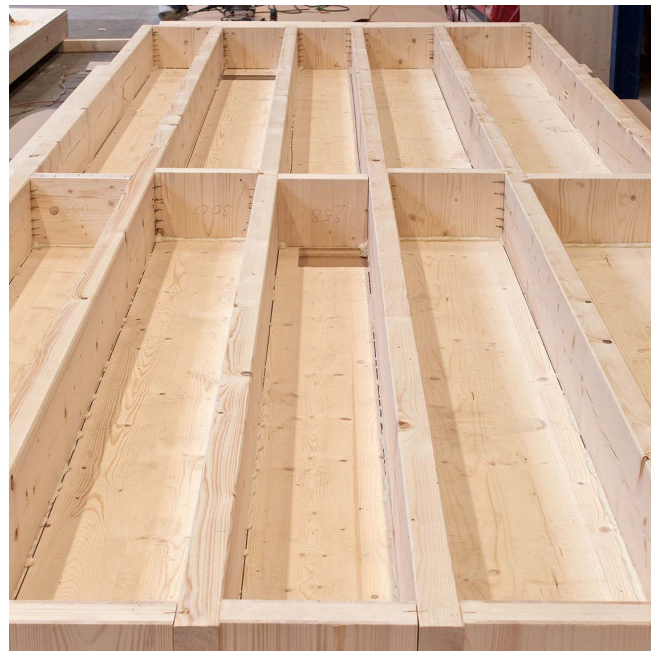
CLT



wood fiber insulation



timber cladding



NOVATOP

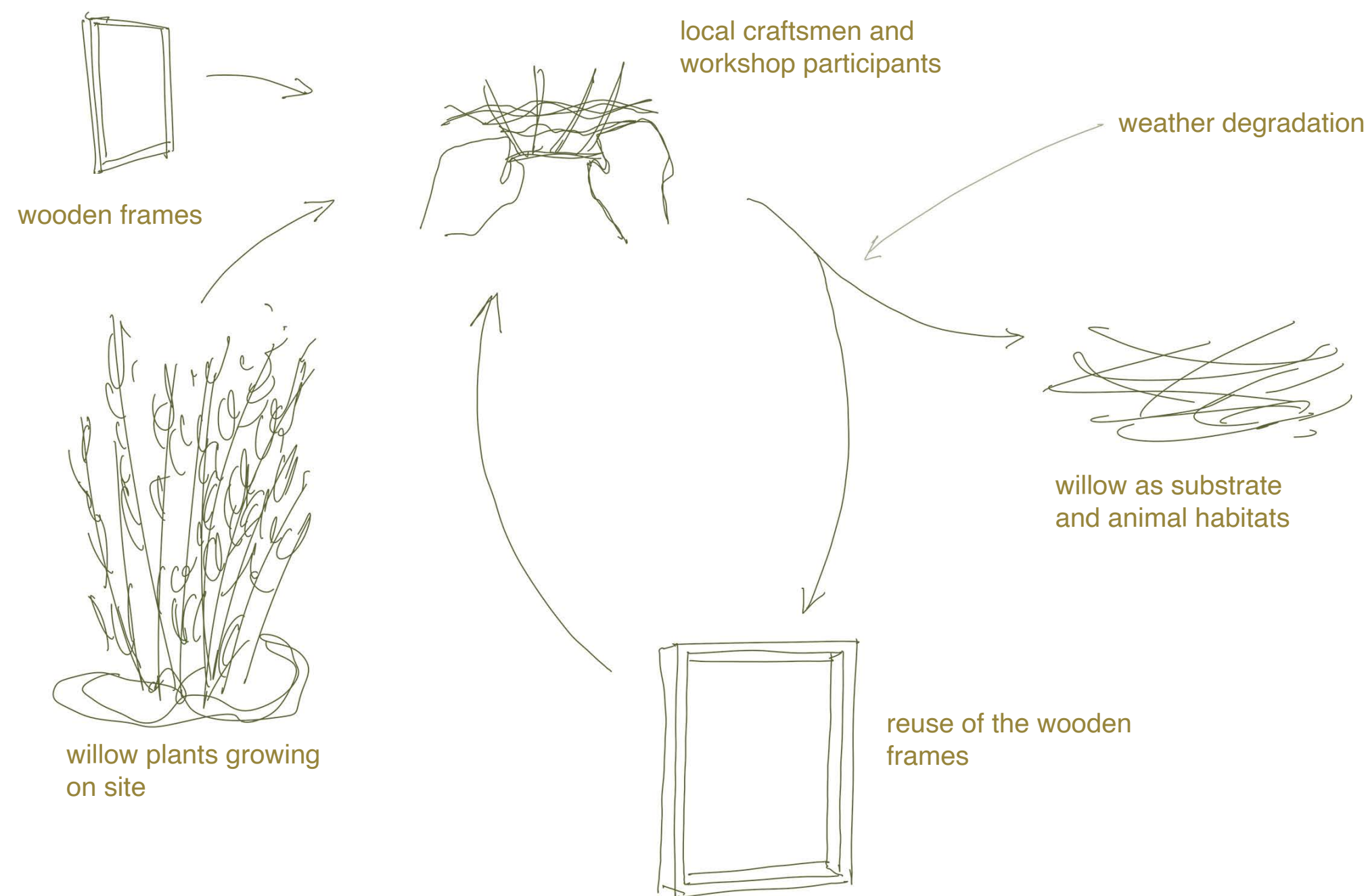


compressed wood fiber for
floor heating panels

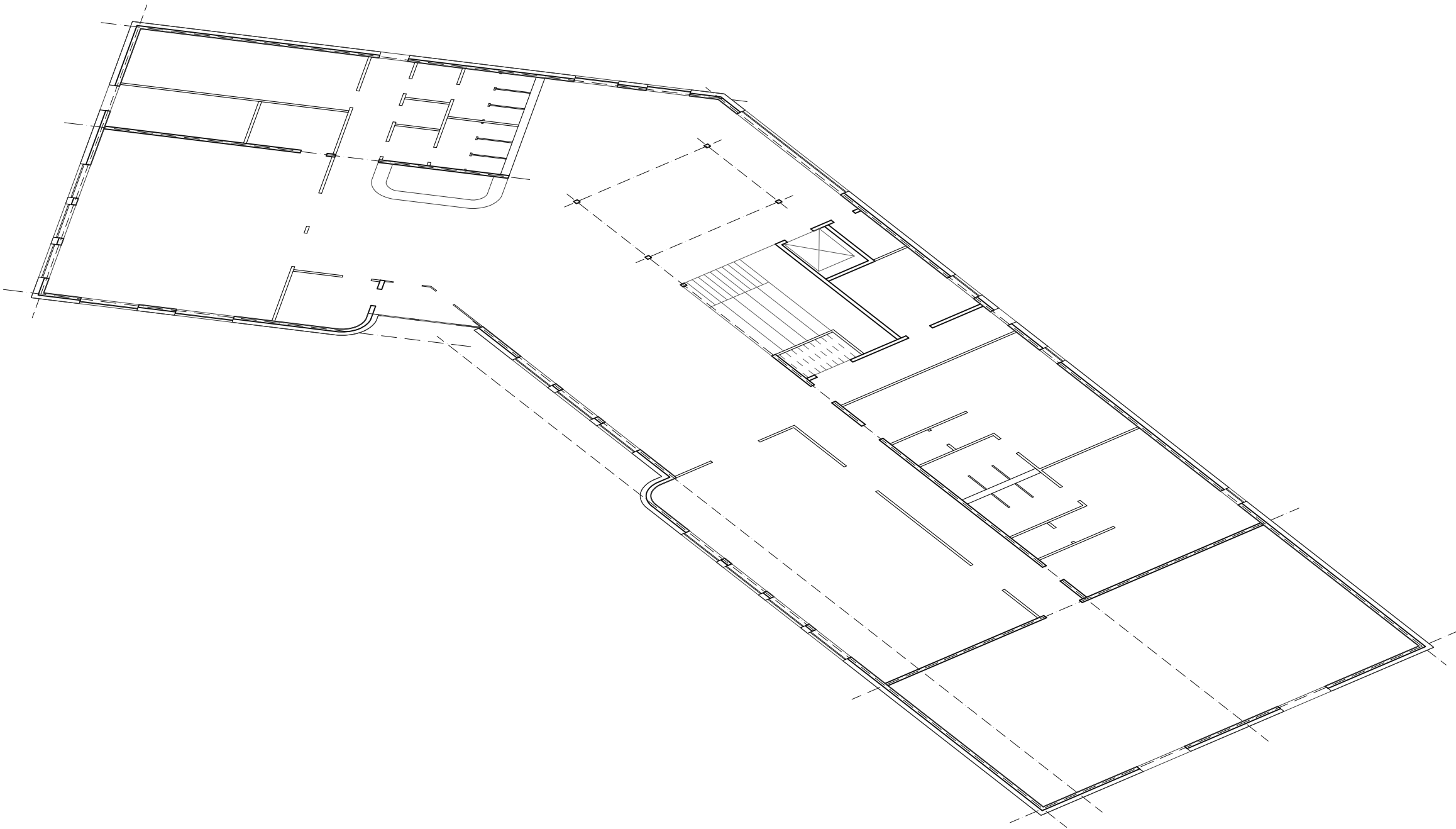


willow

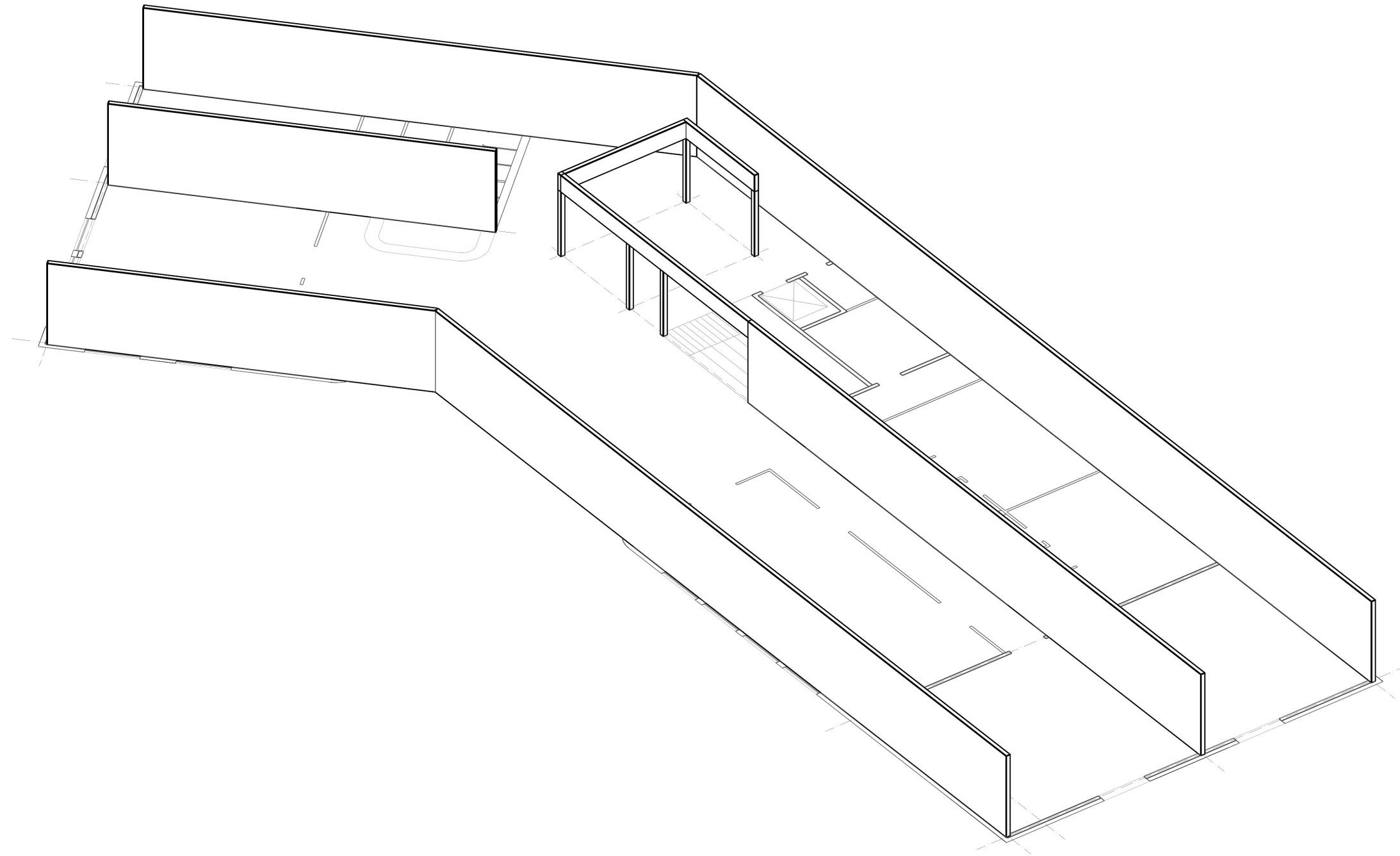
willow cycle



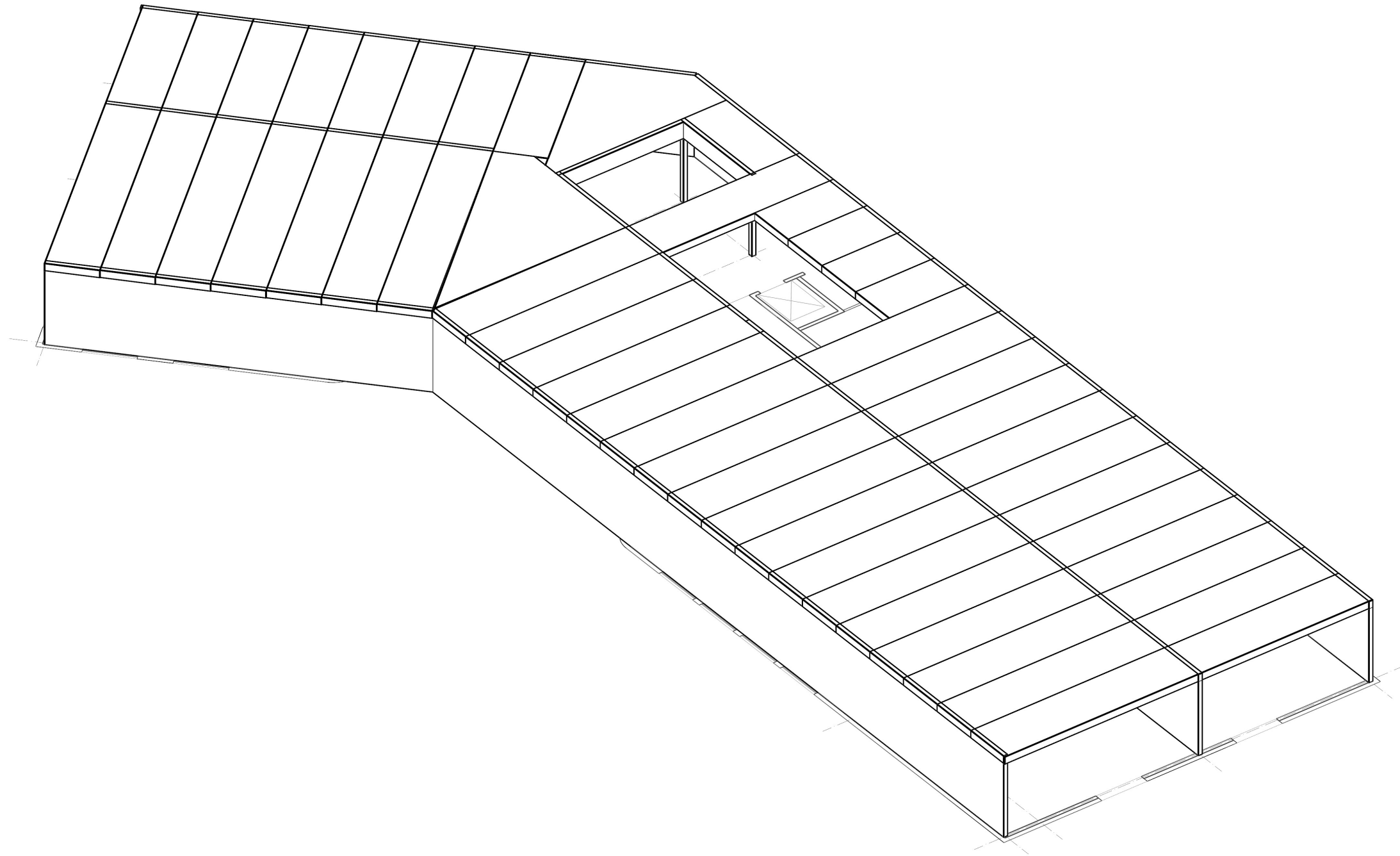
structural system



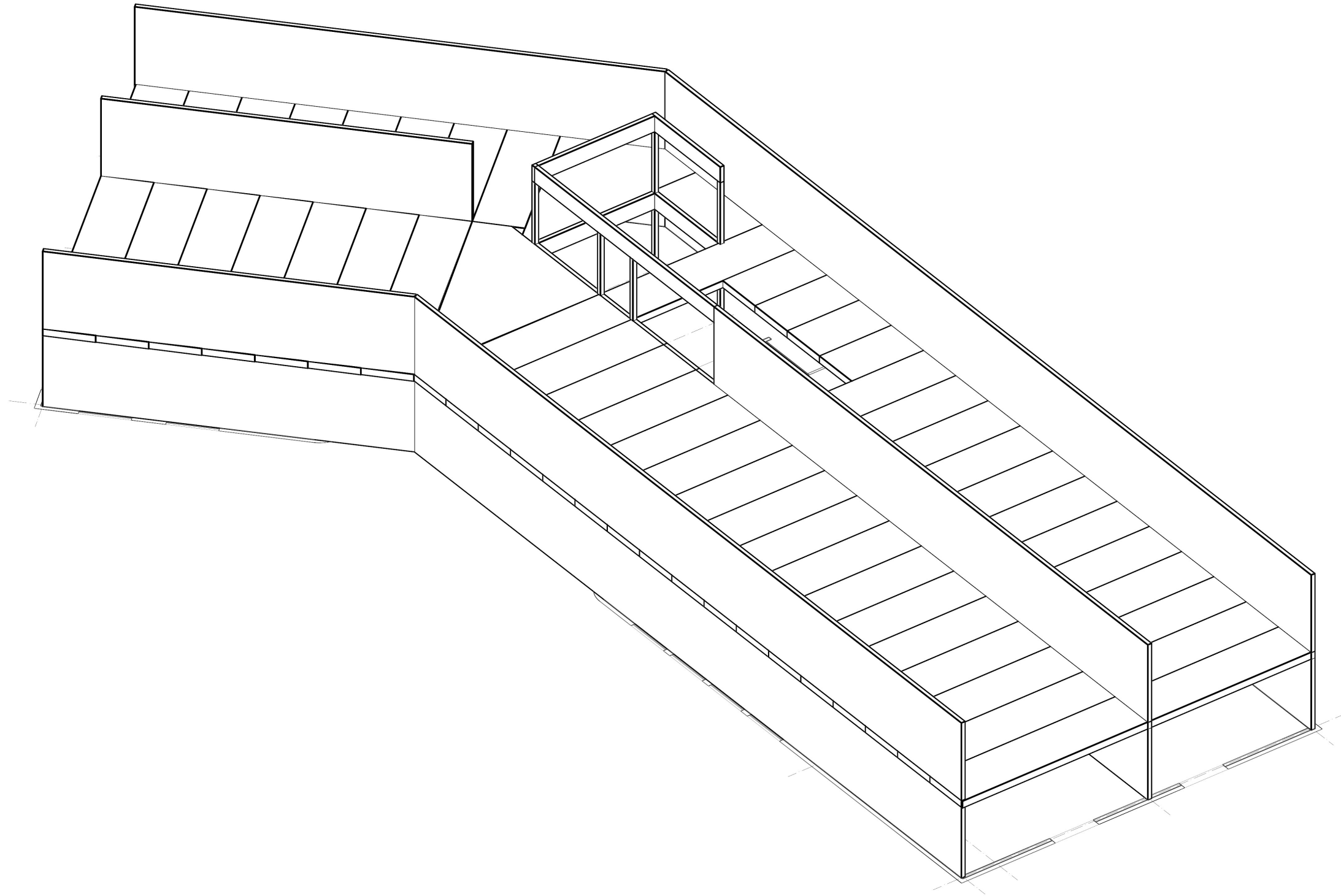
structural system



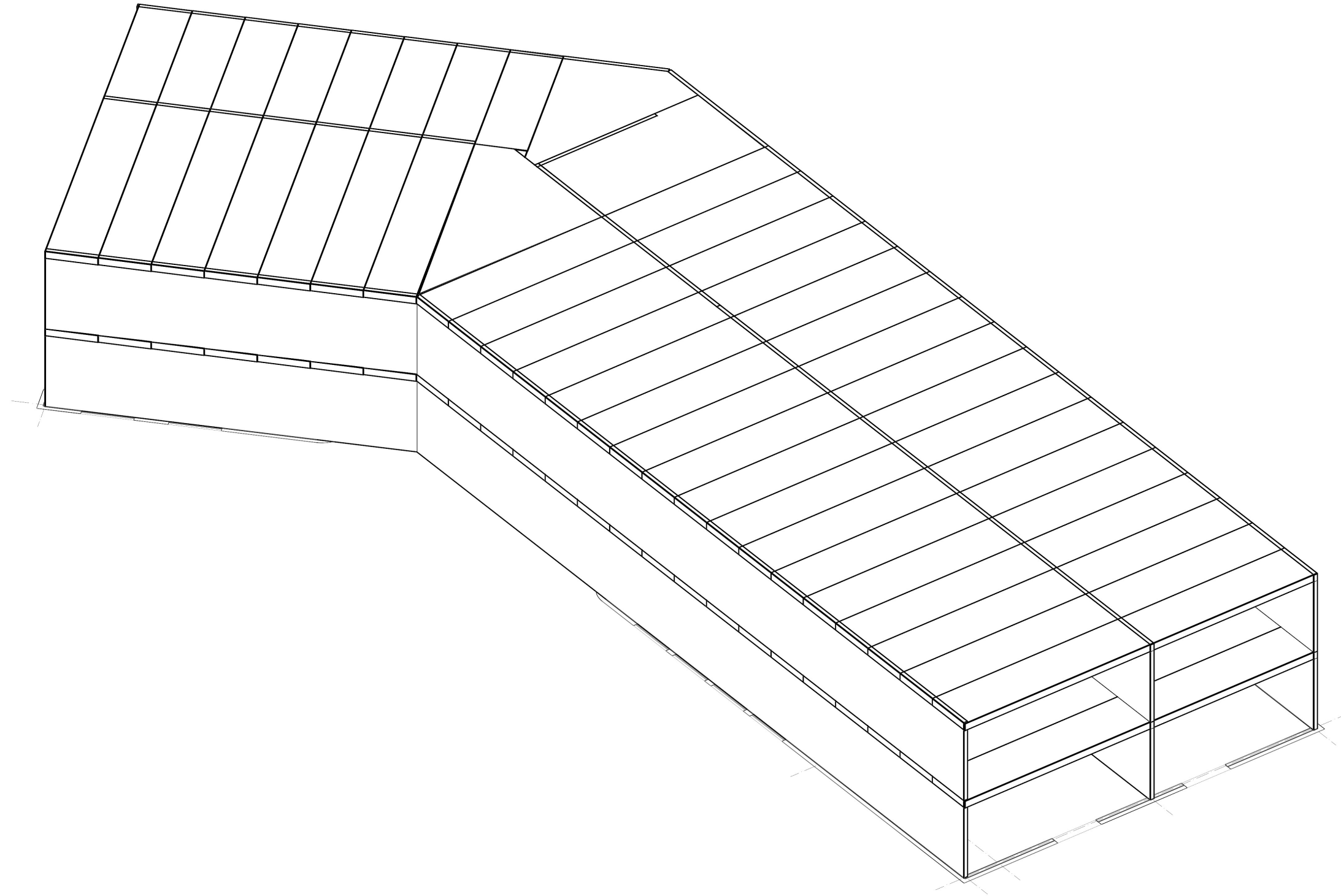
structural system



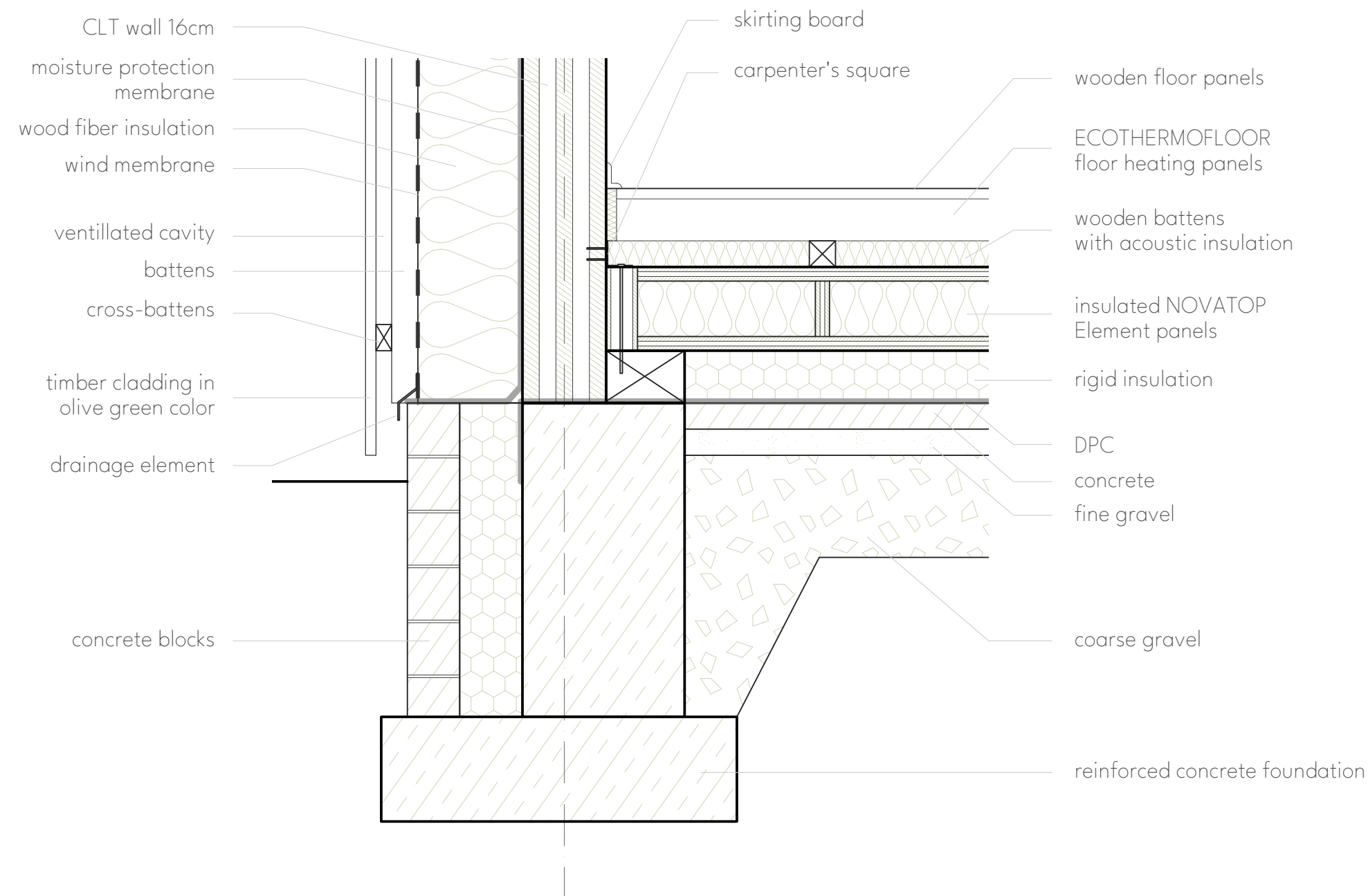
structural system



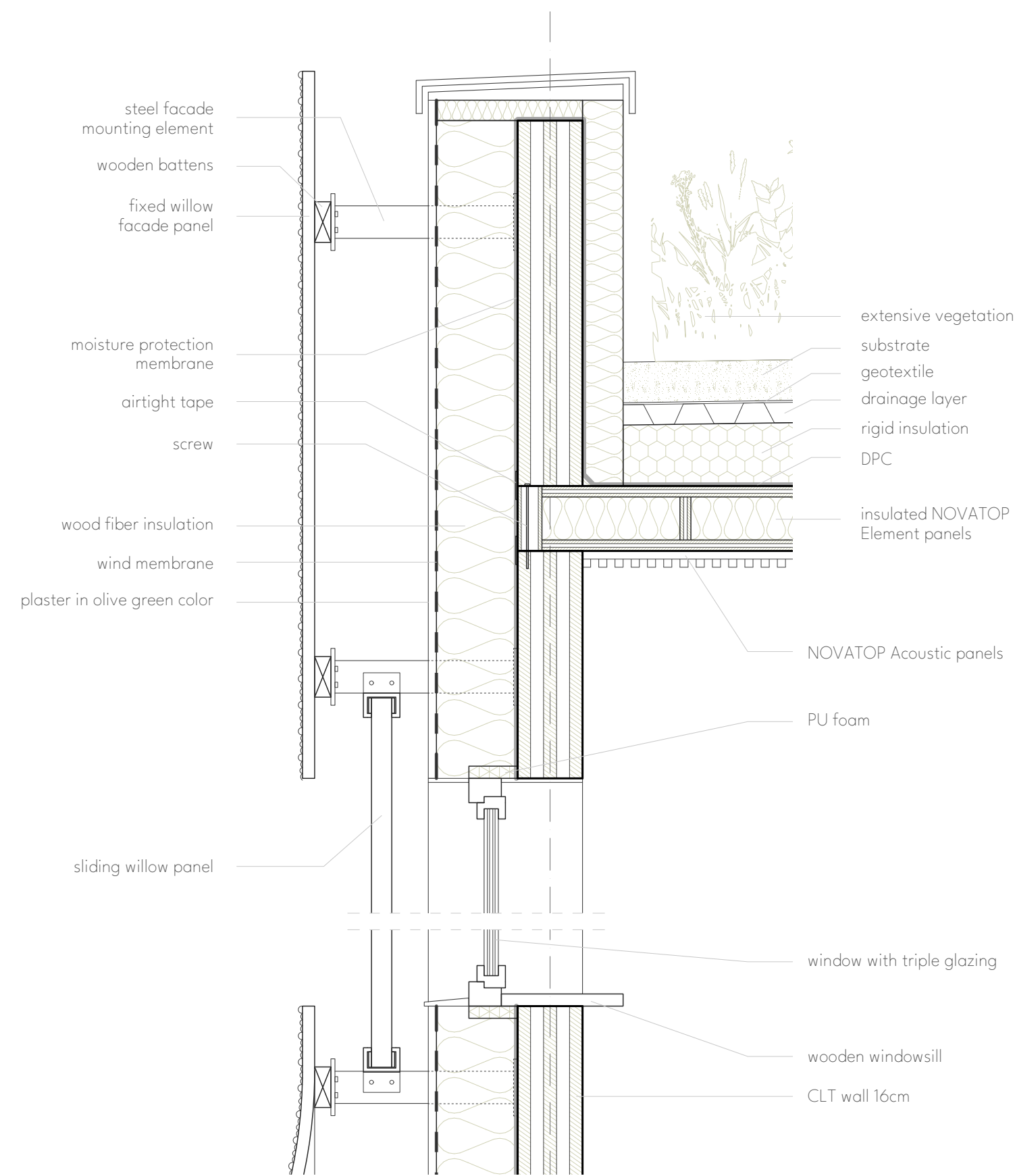
structural system



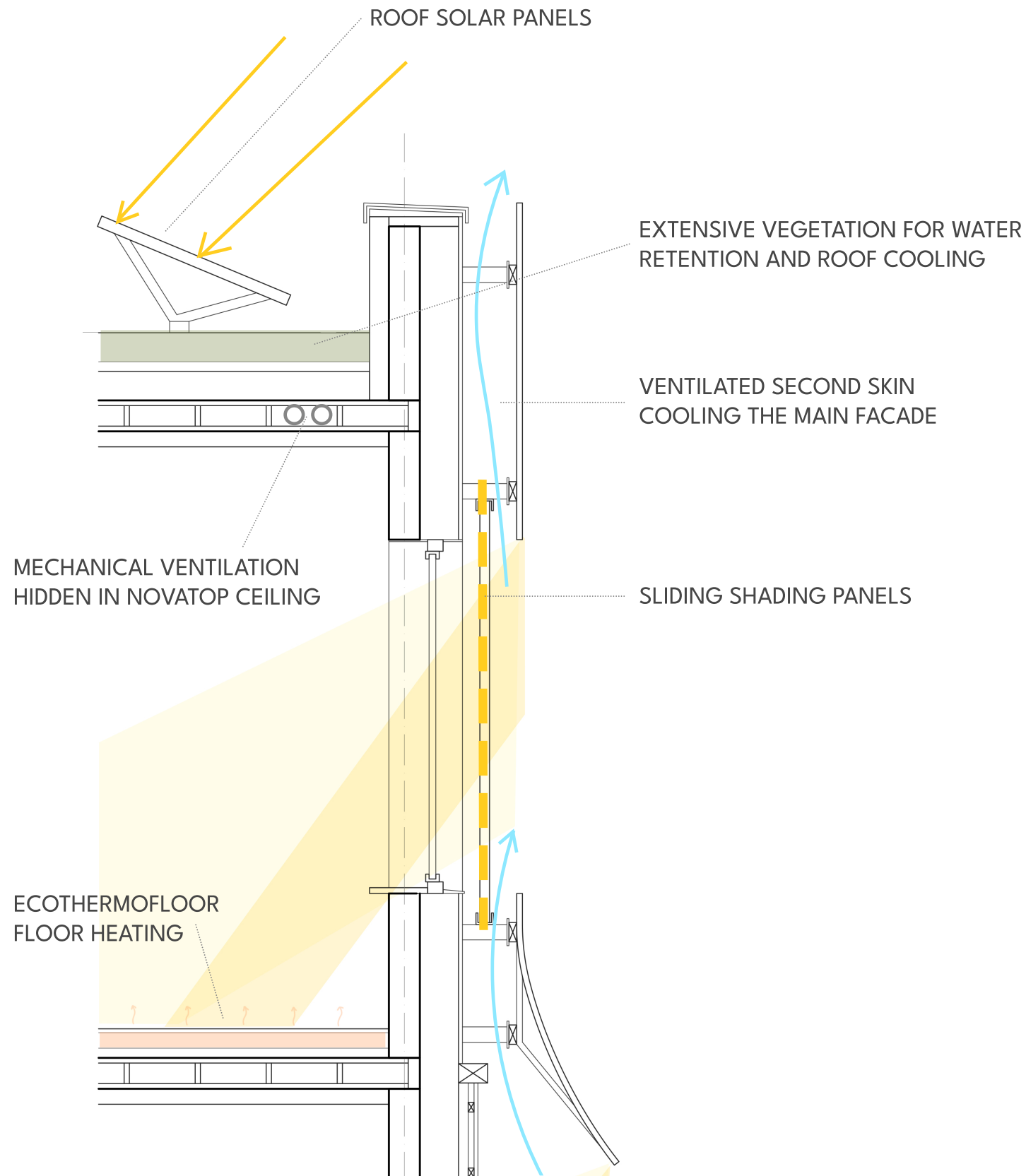
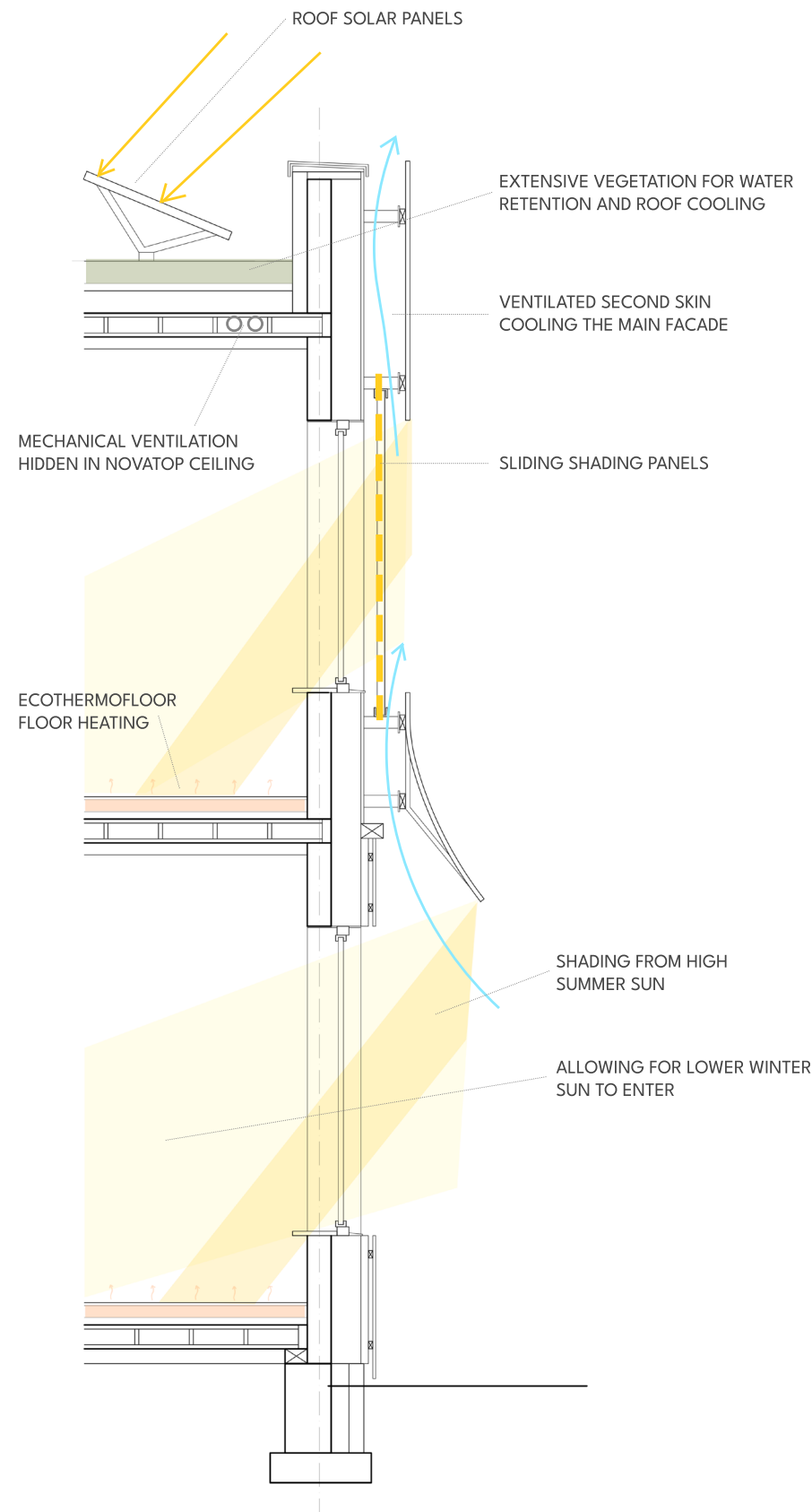
wall to ground detail



wall to roof and window detail



healthy interiors



learn to coexist

I never divide - I always connect. I connect parts of Warsaw, its residents, and people with nature. For me, it's never "us and them," but always just us - together.



workshops,
NGOs etc.

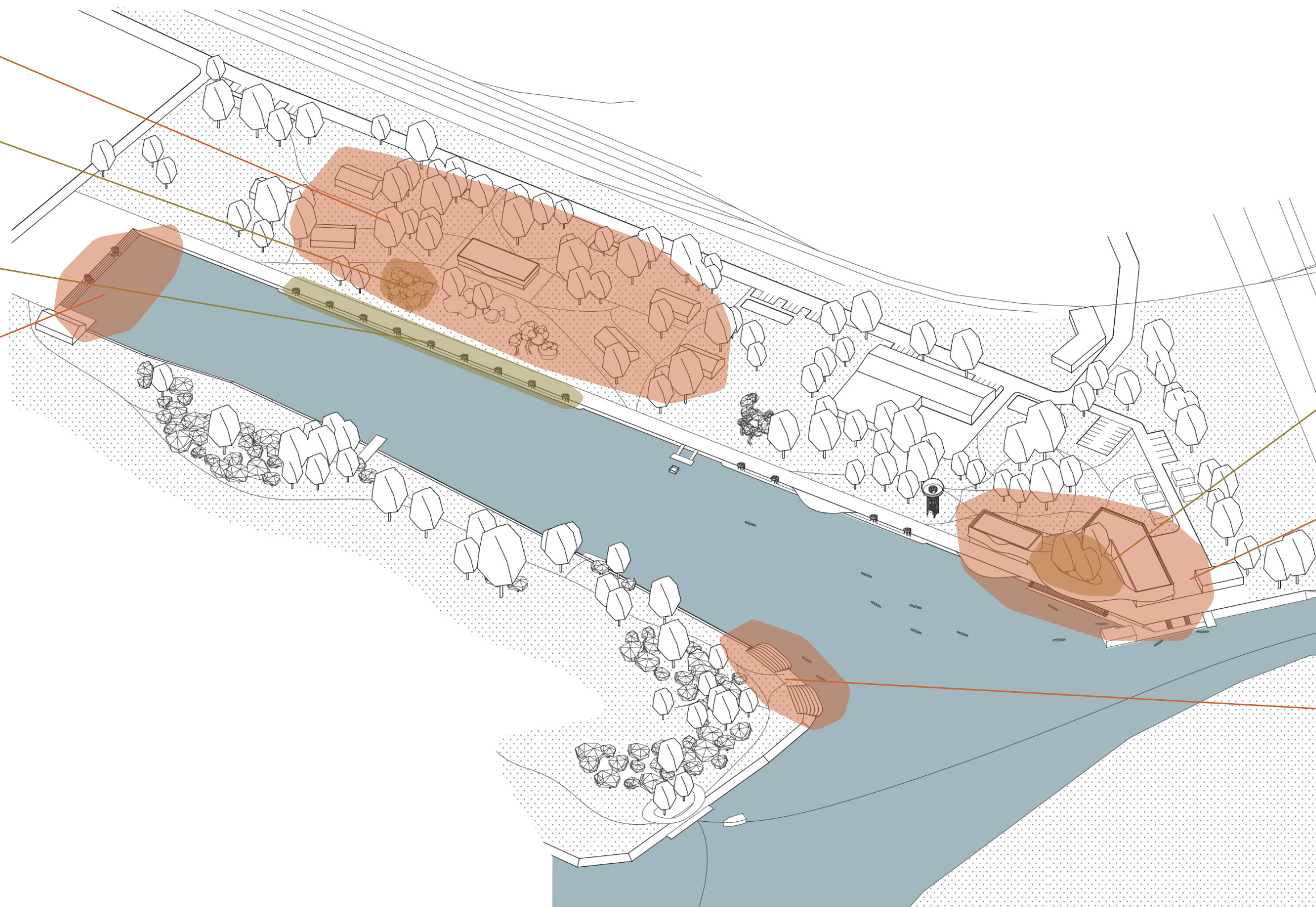
amphibian
sites

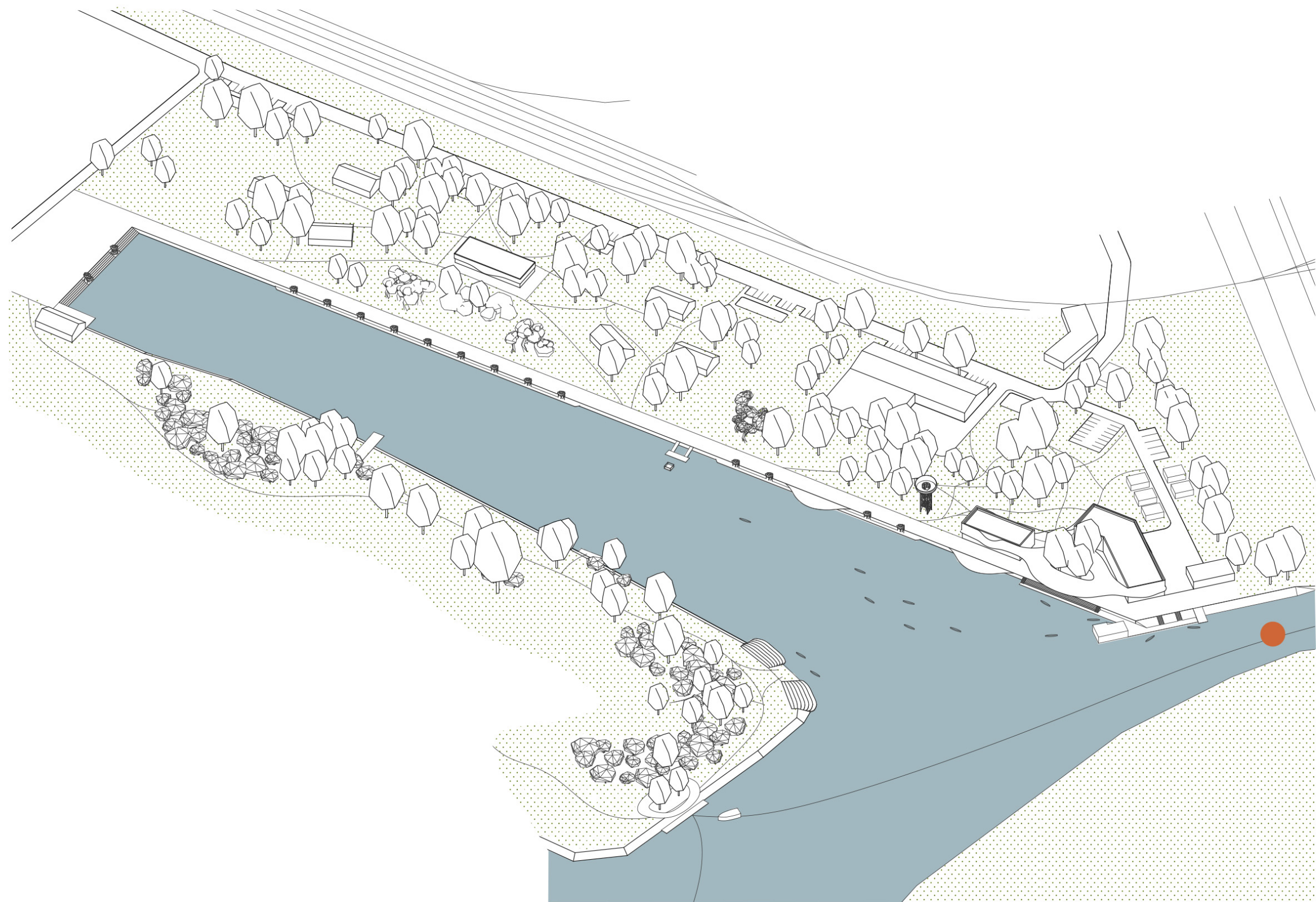
aquatic
vegetation
shelf
natural
swimming
pool

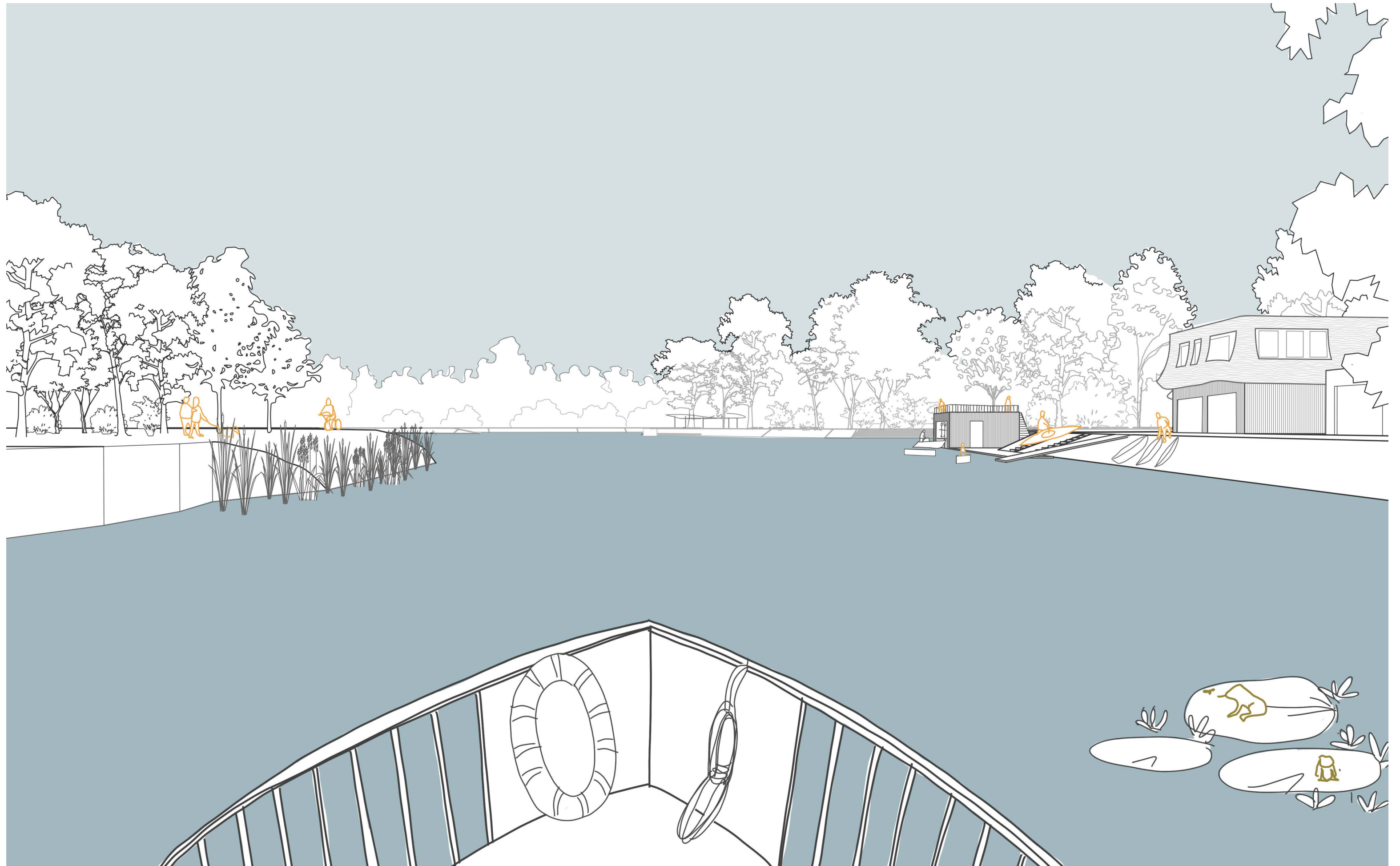
birds nests

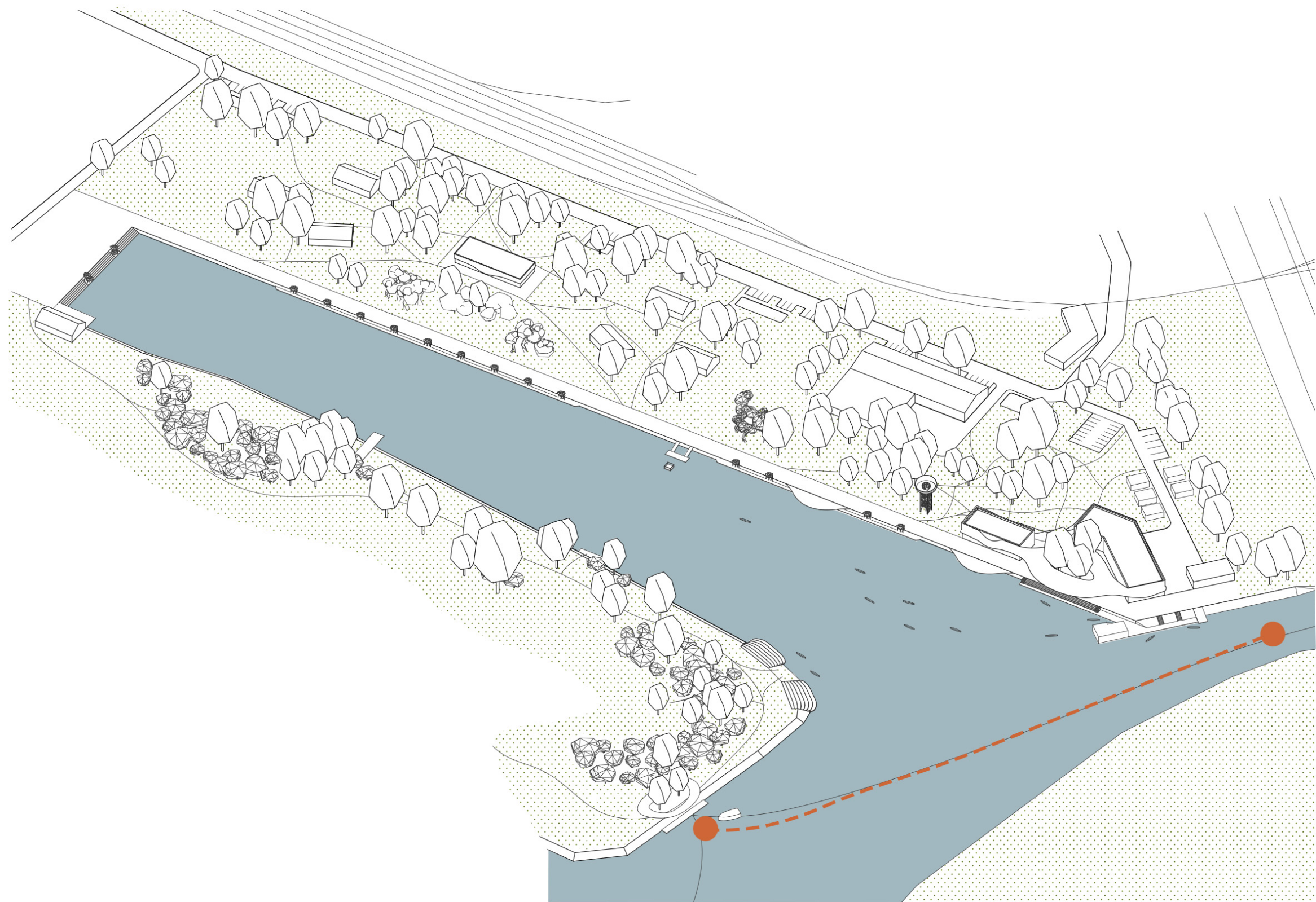
water sports
practice

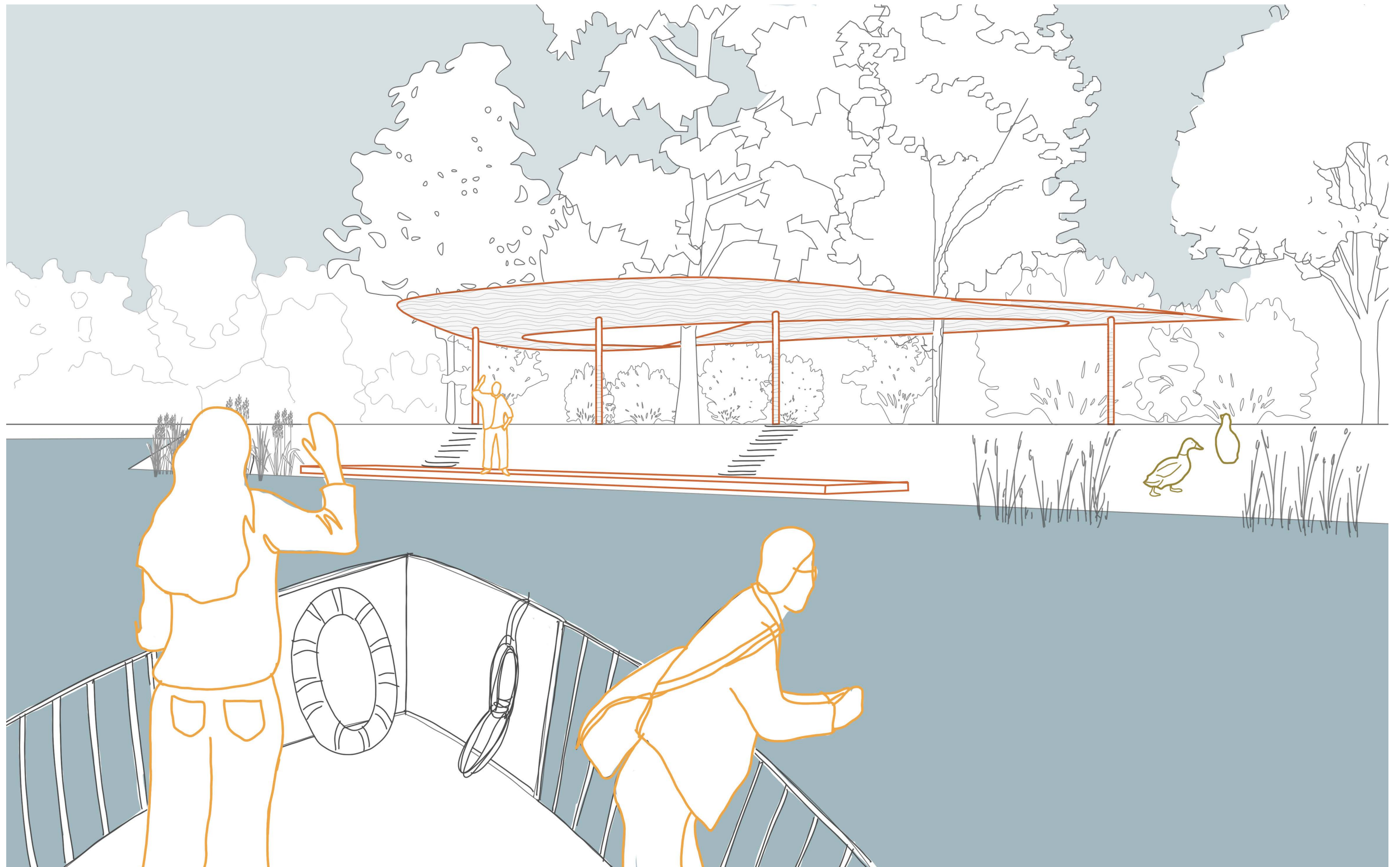
water sports
observation

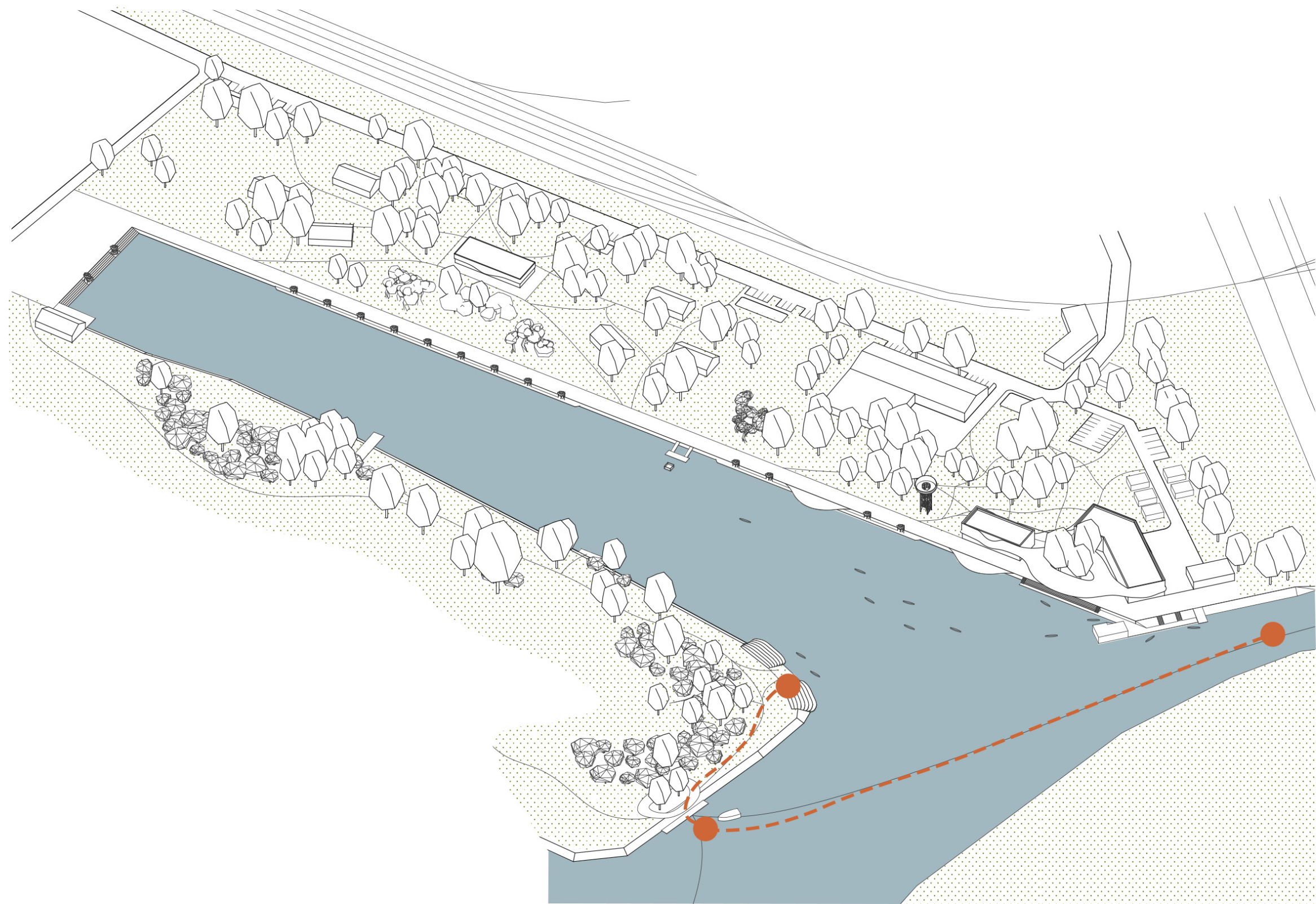


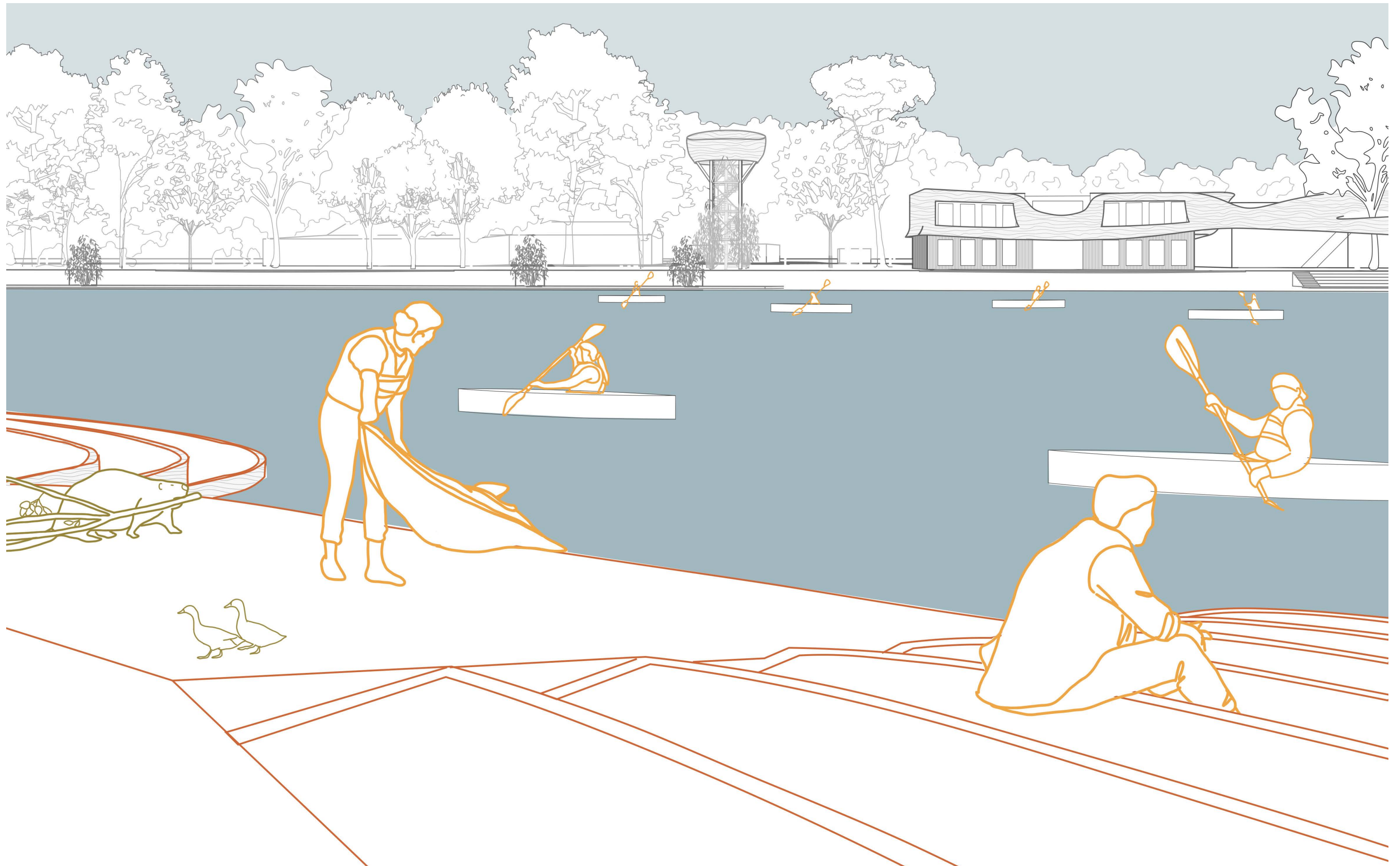


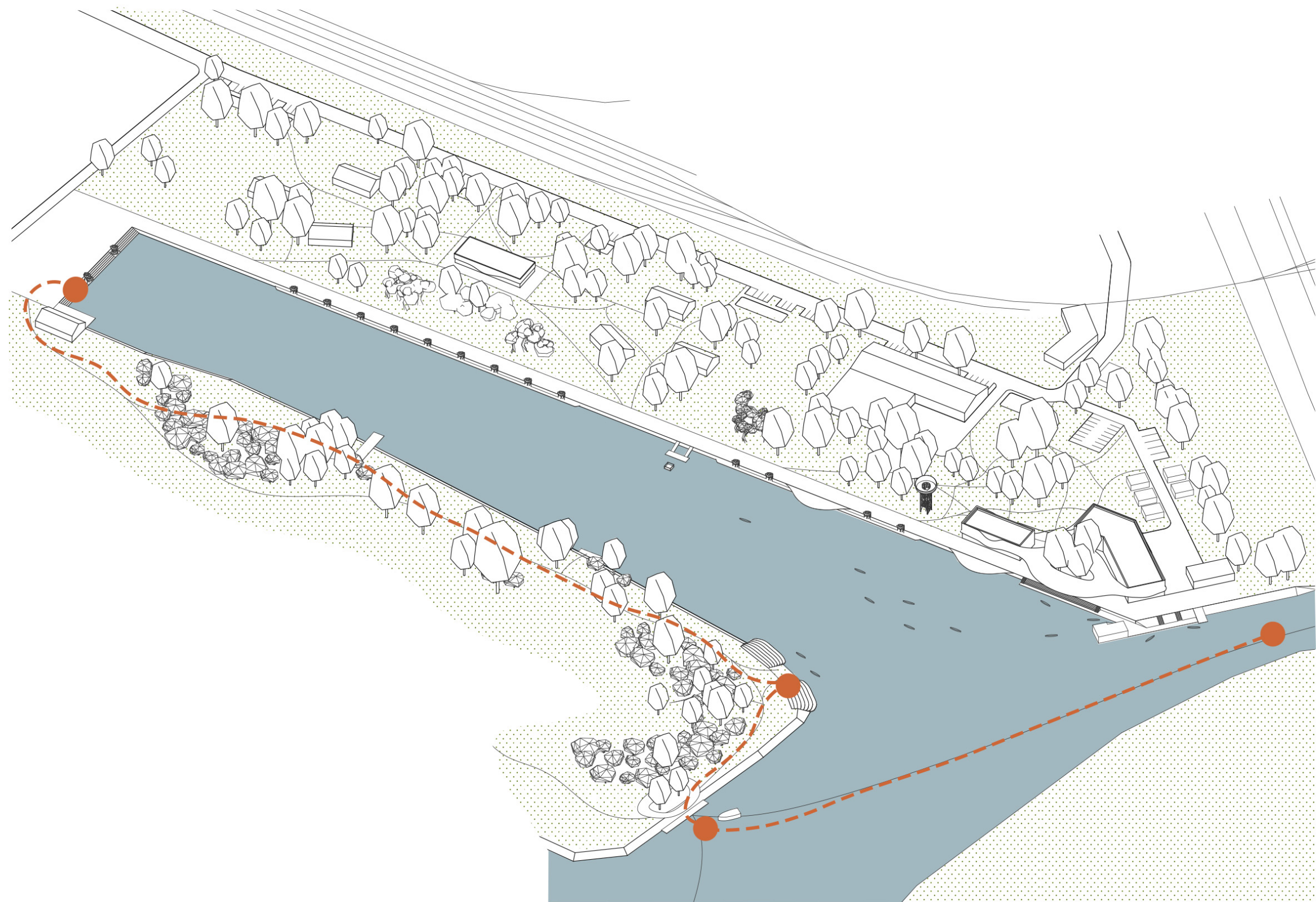


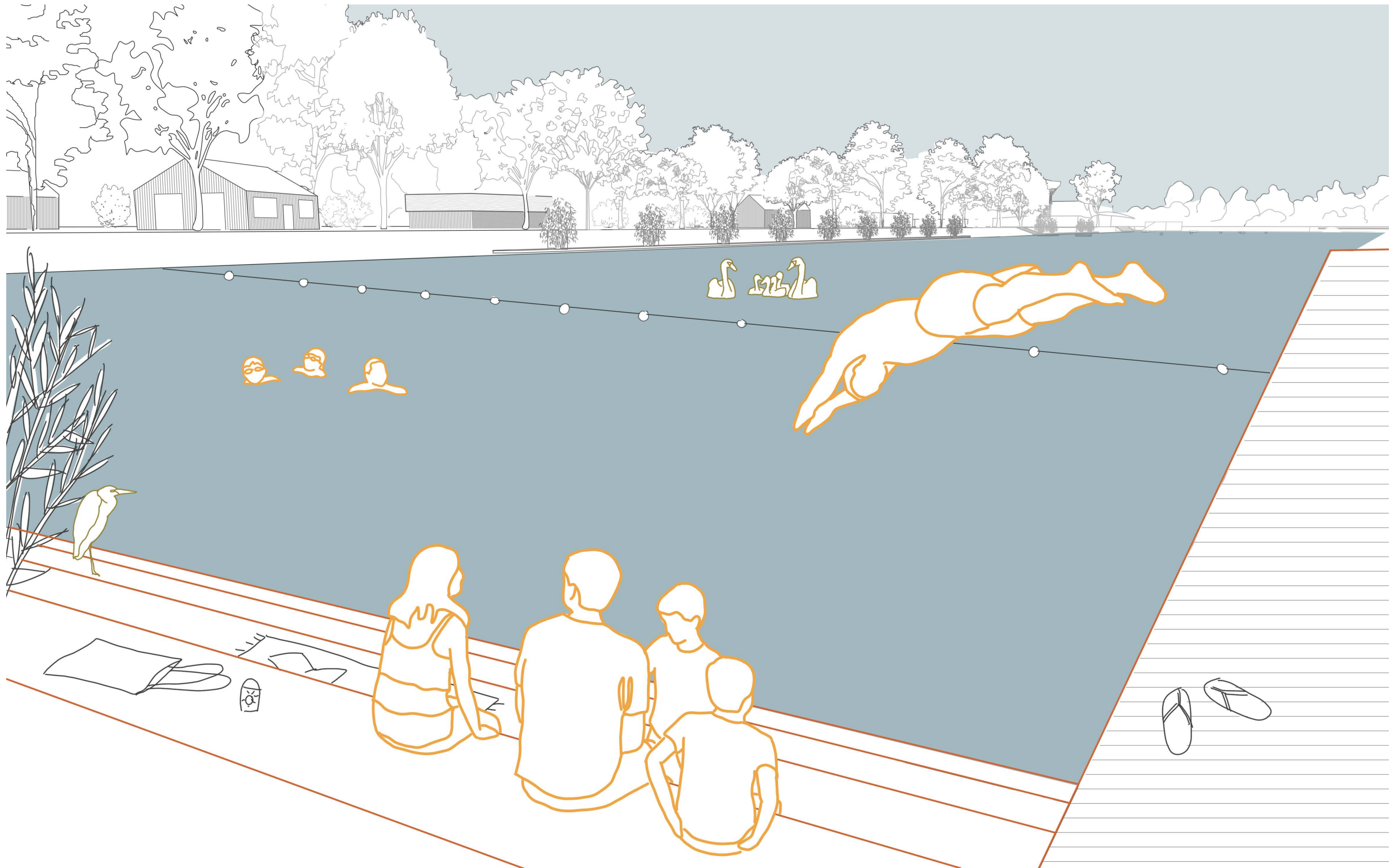


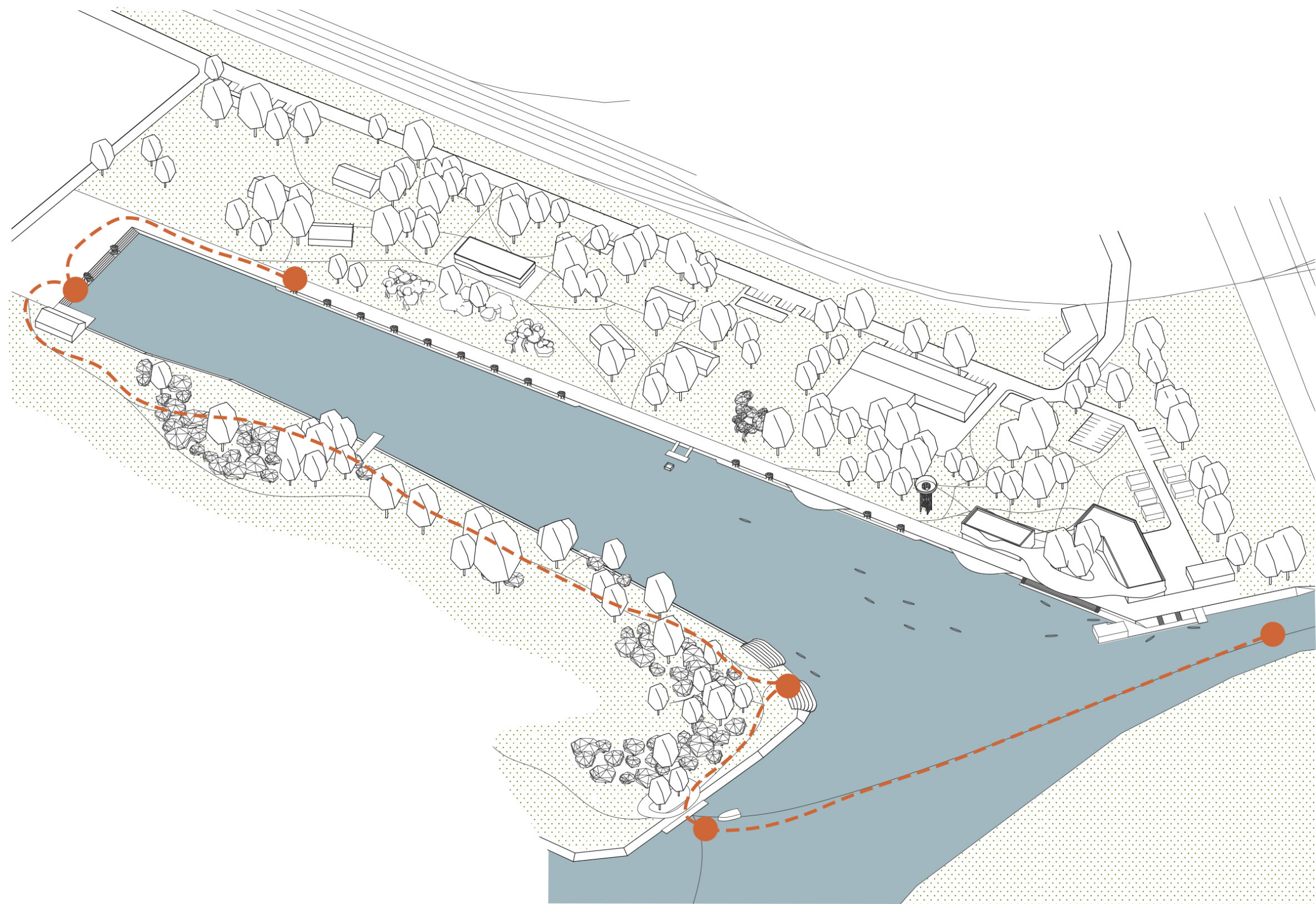




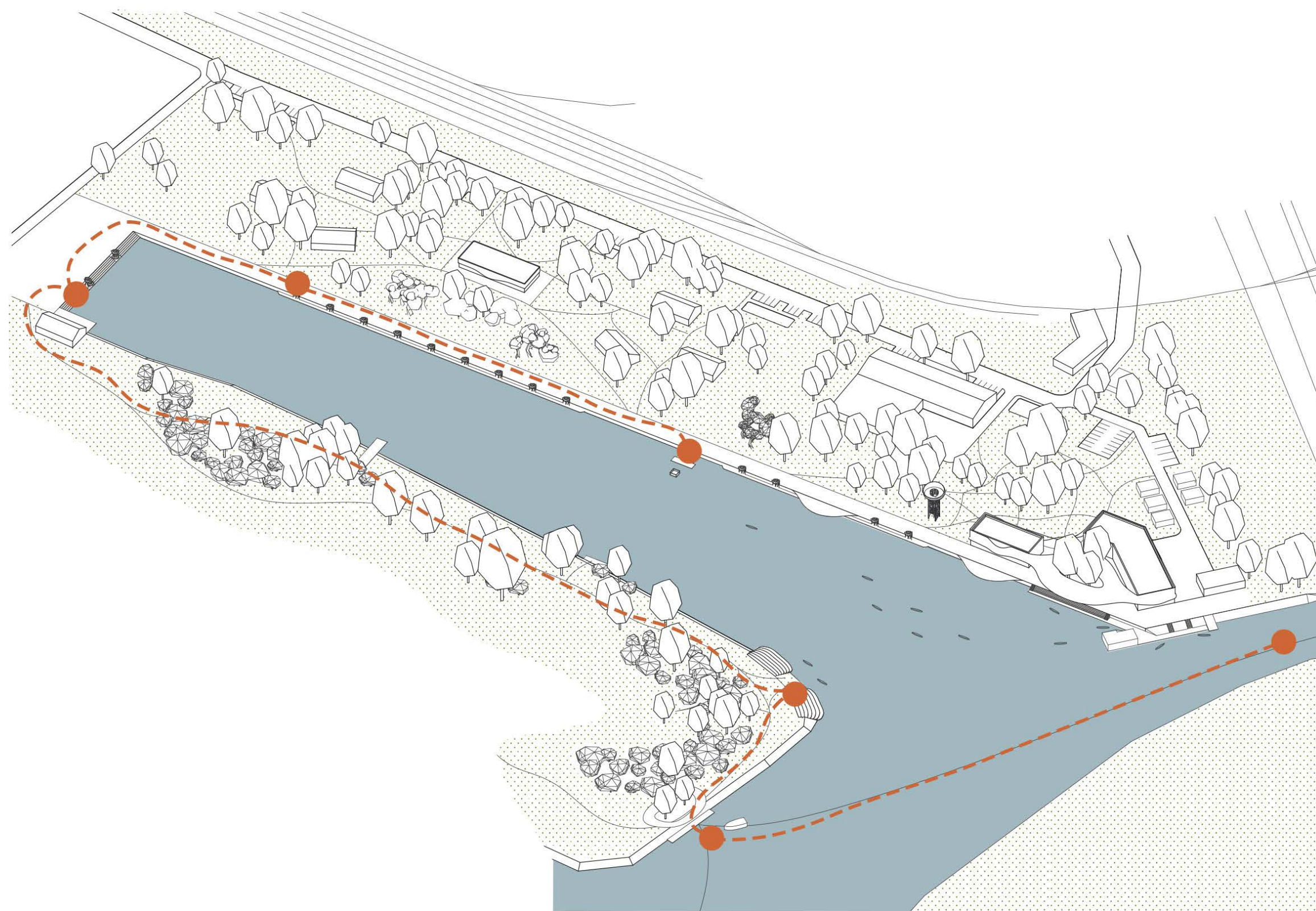


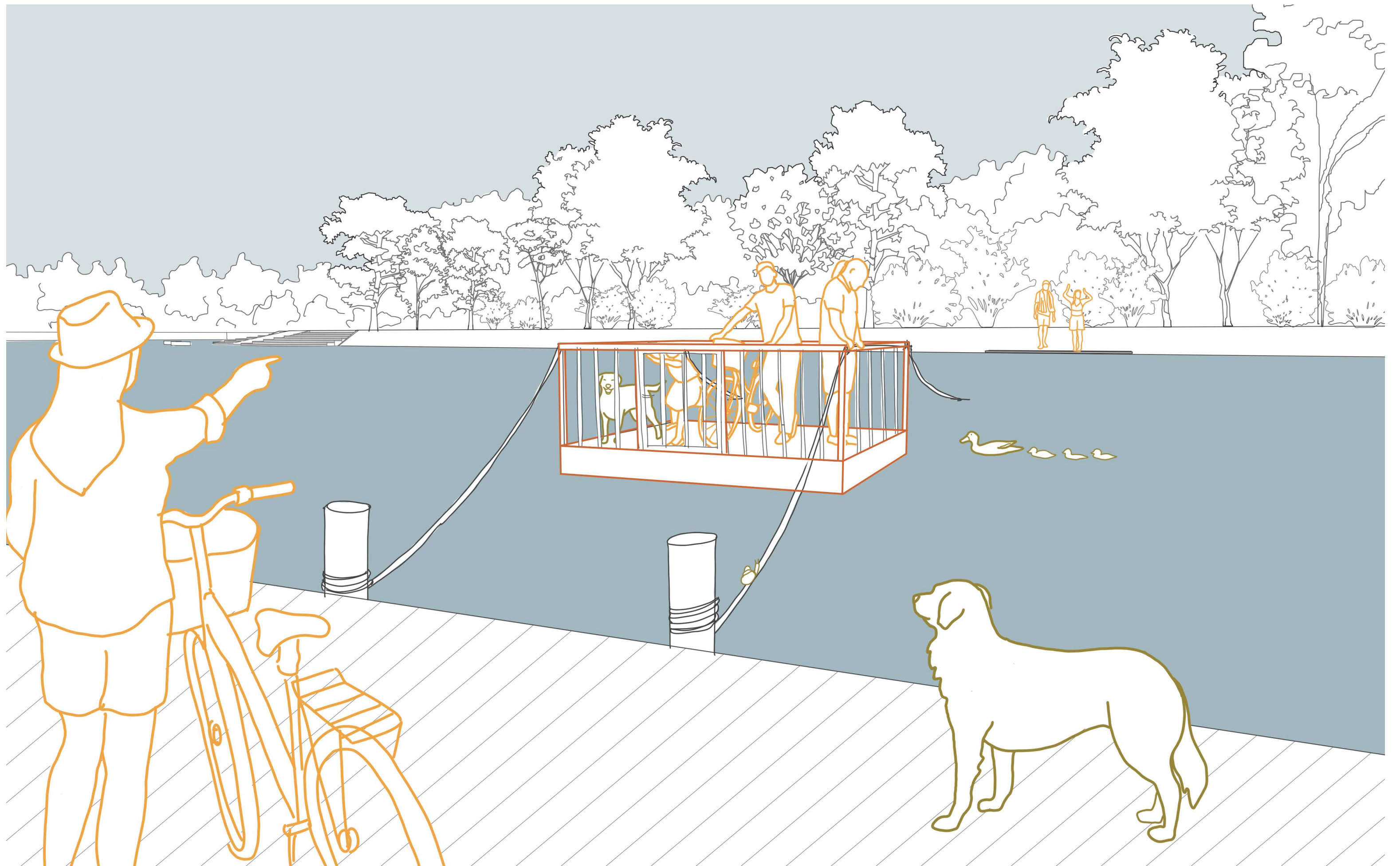


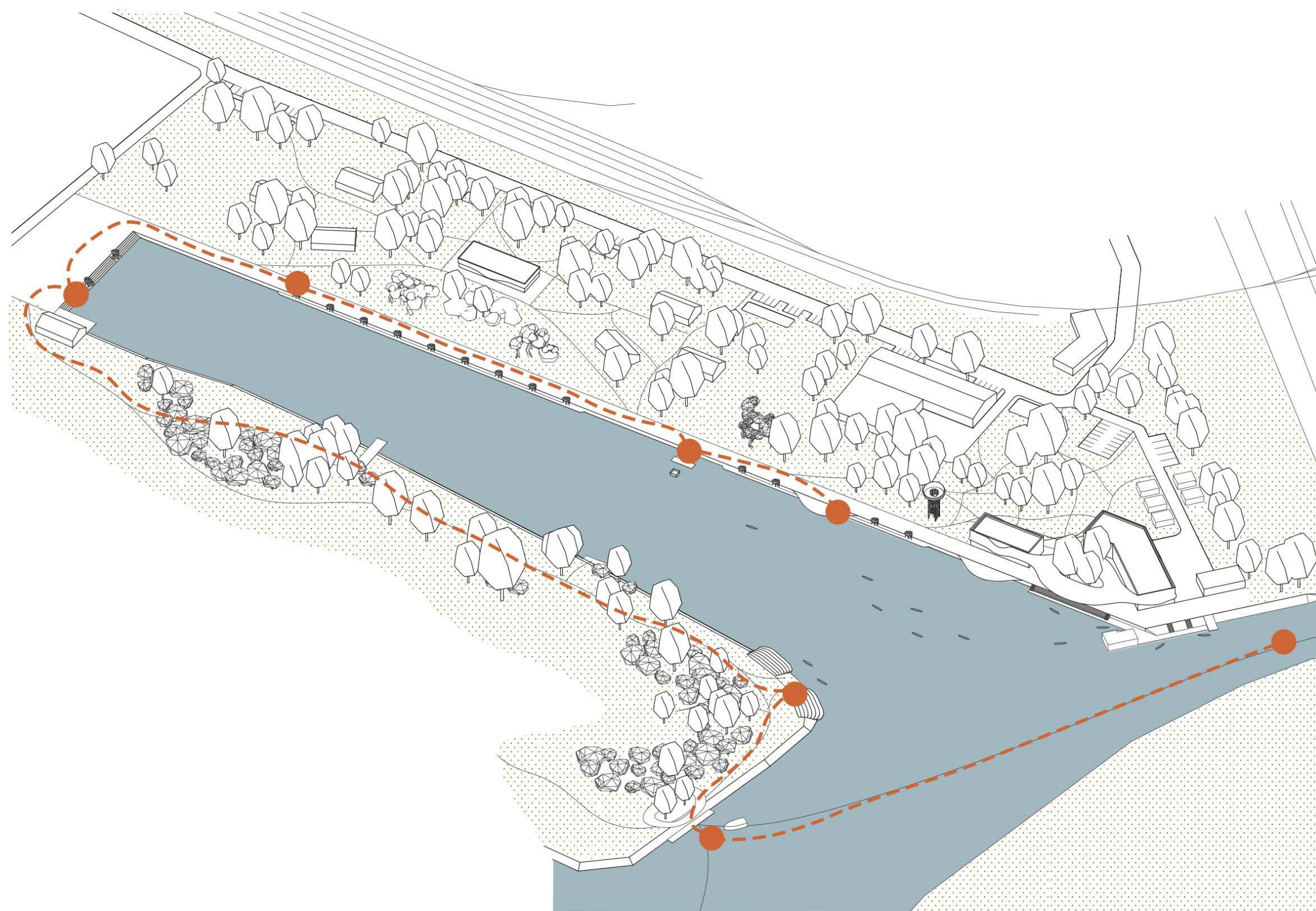


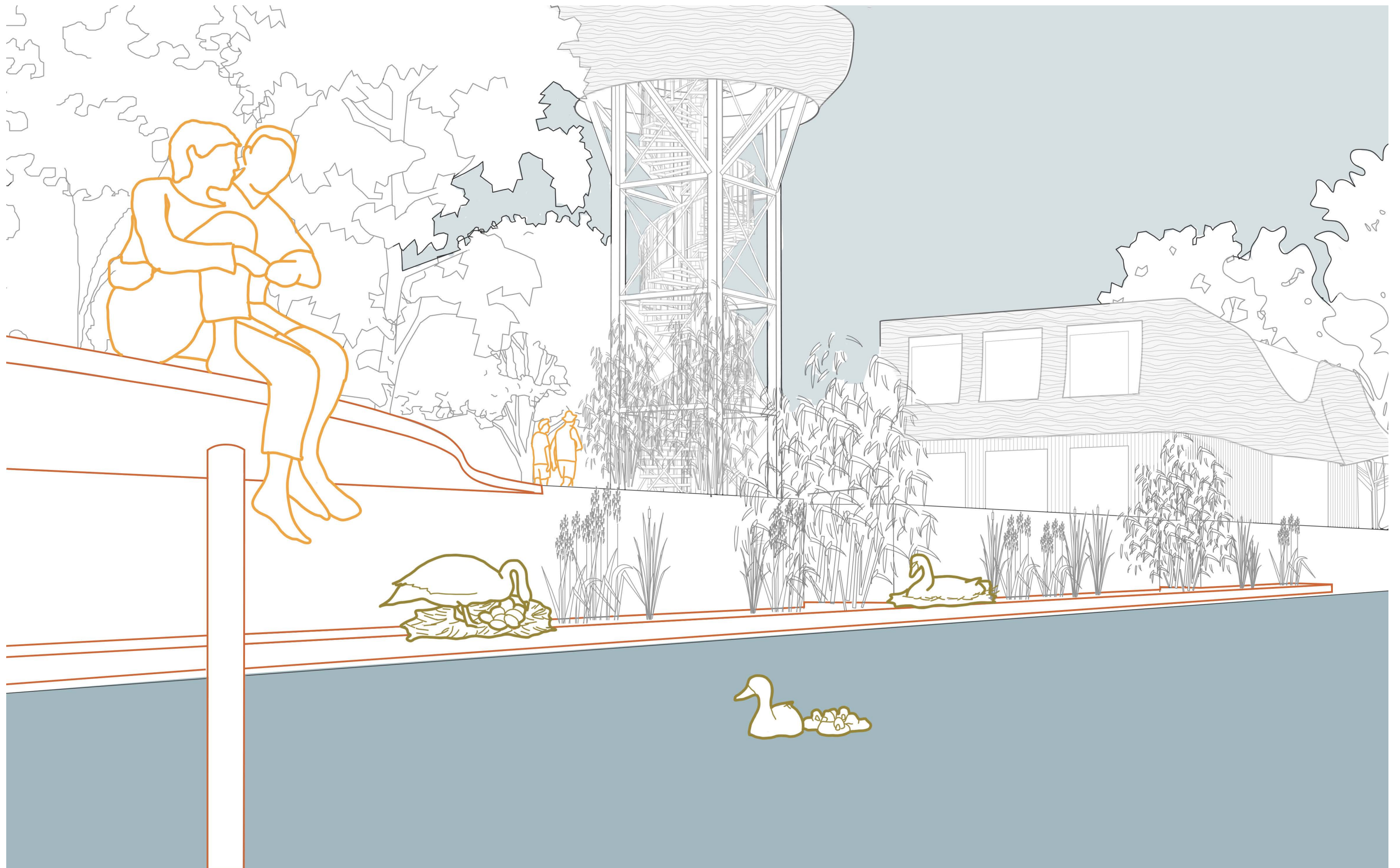


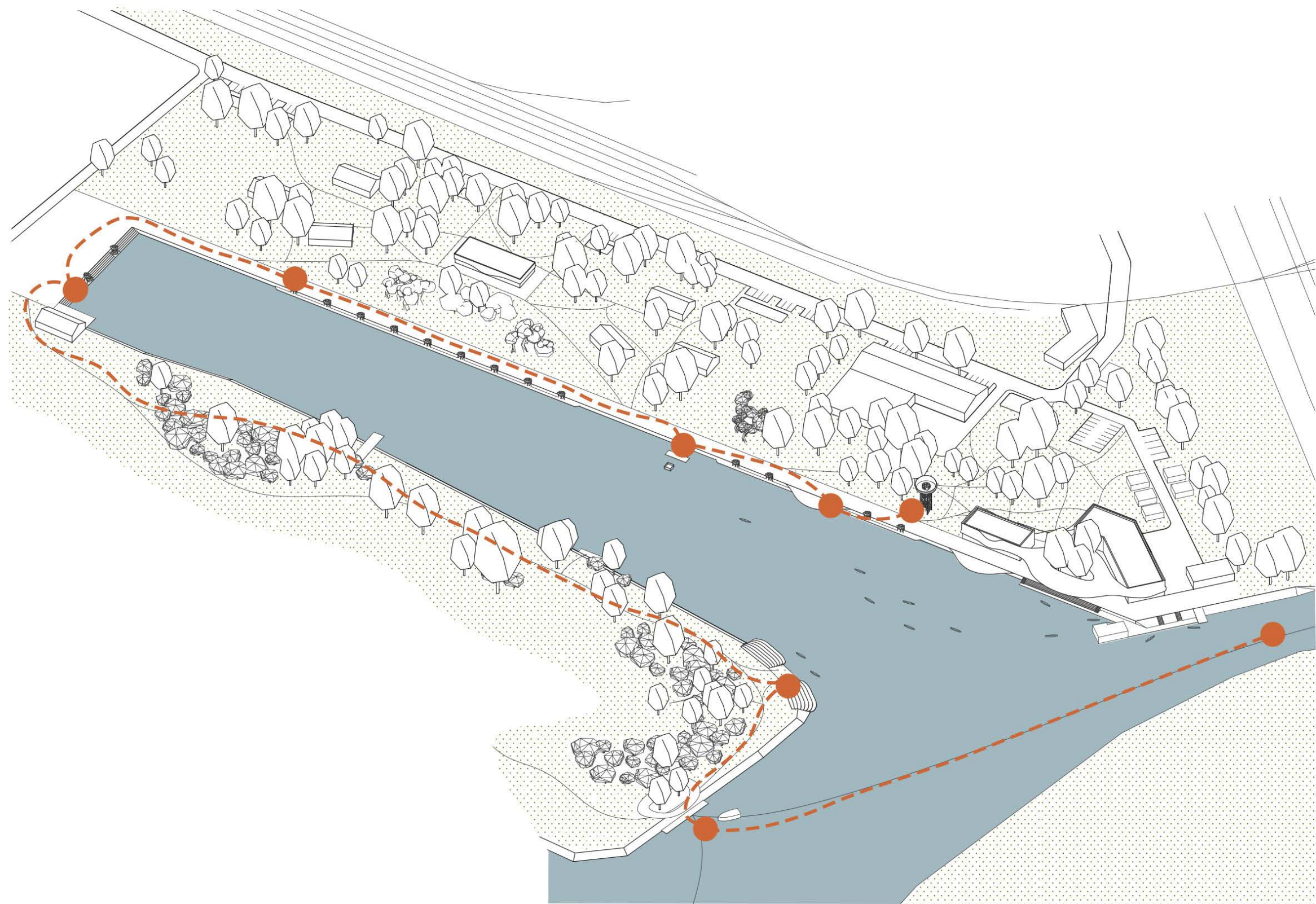


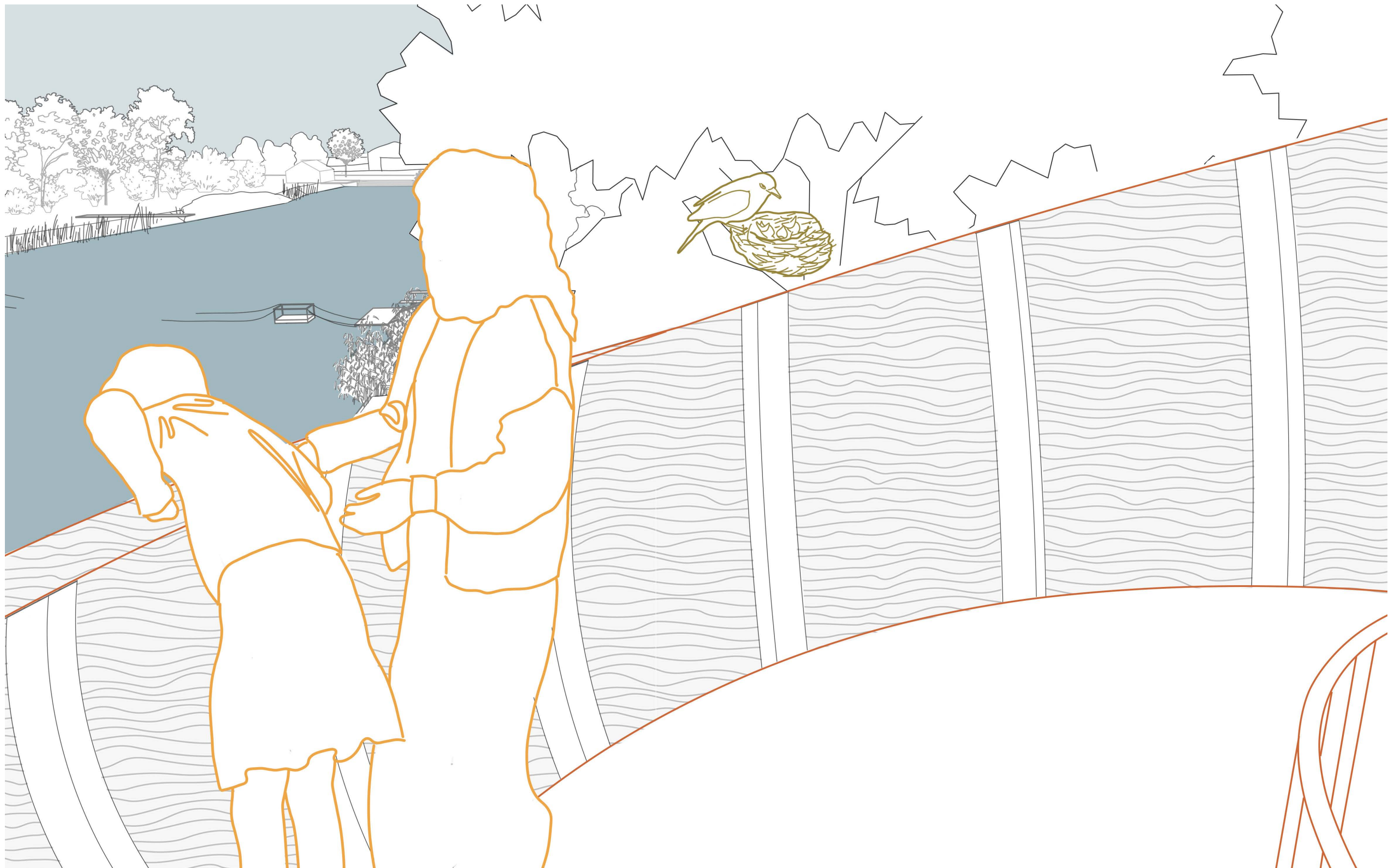


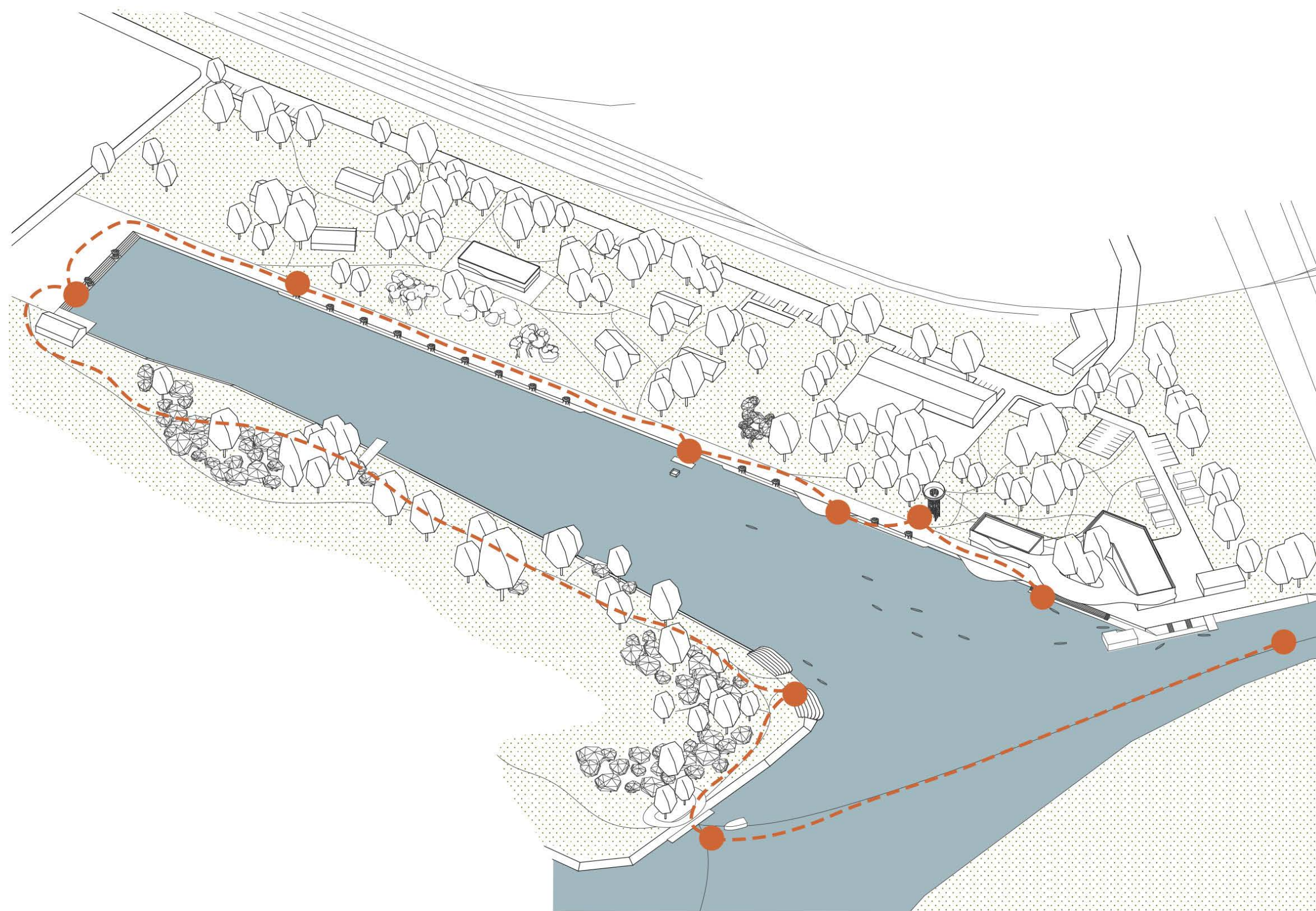


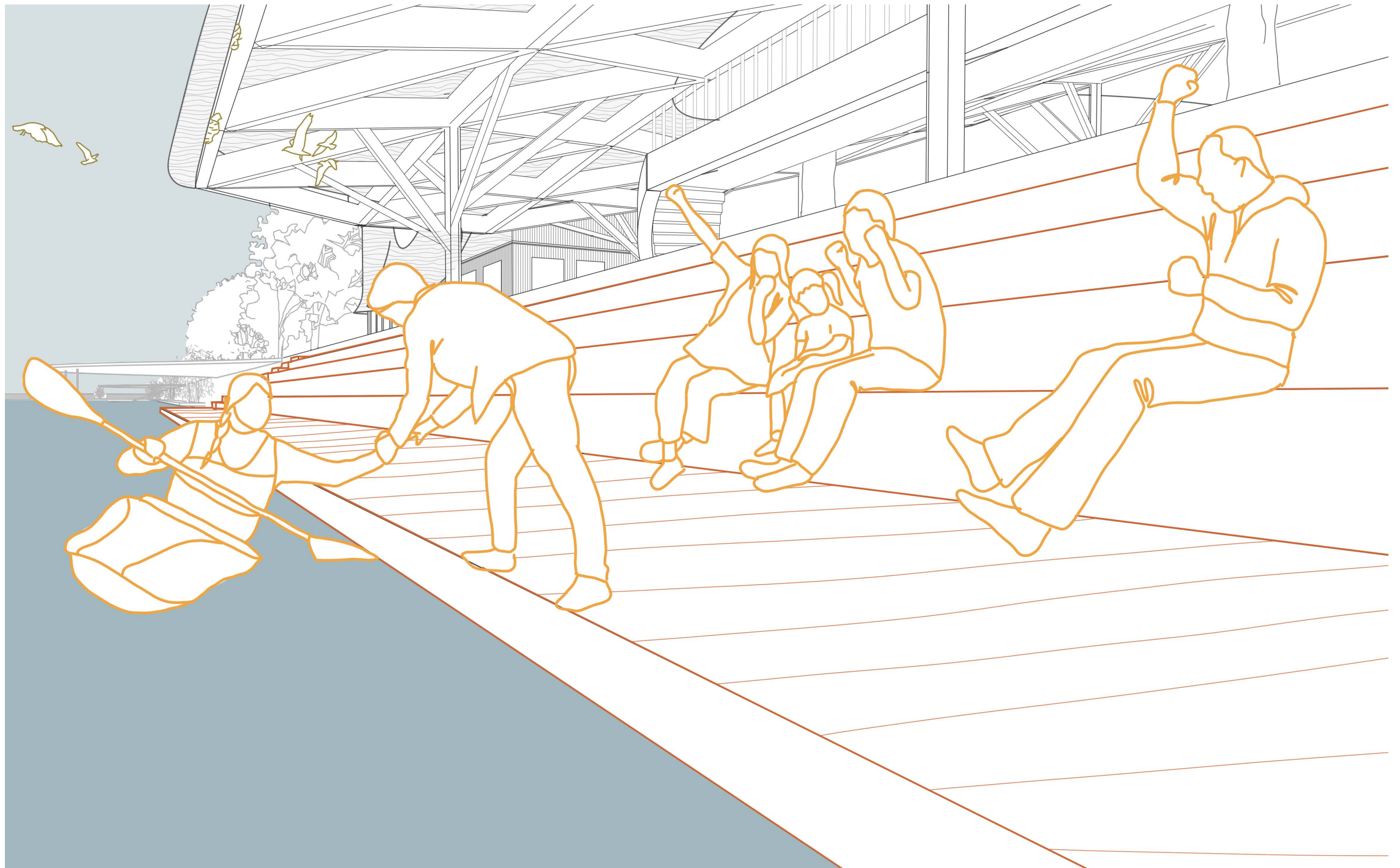


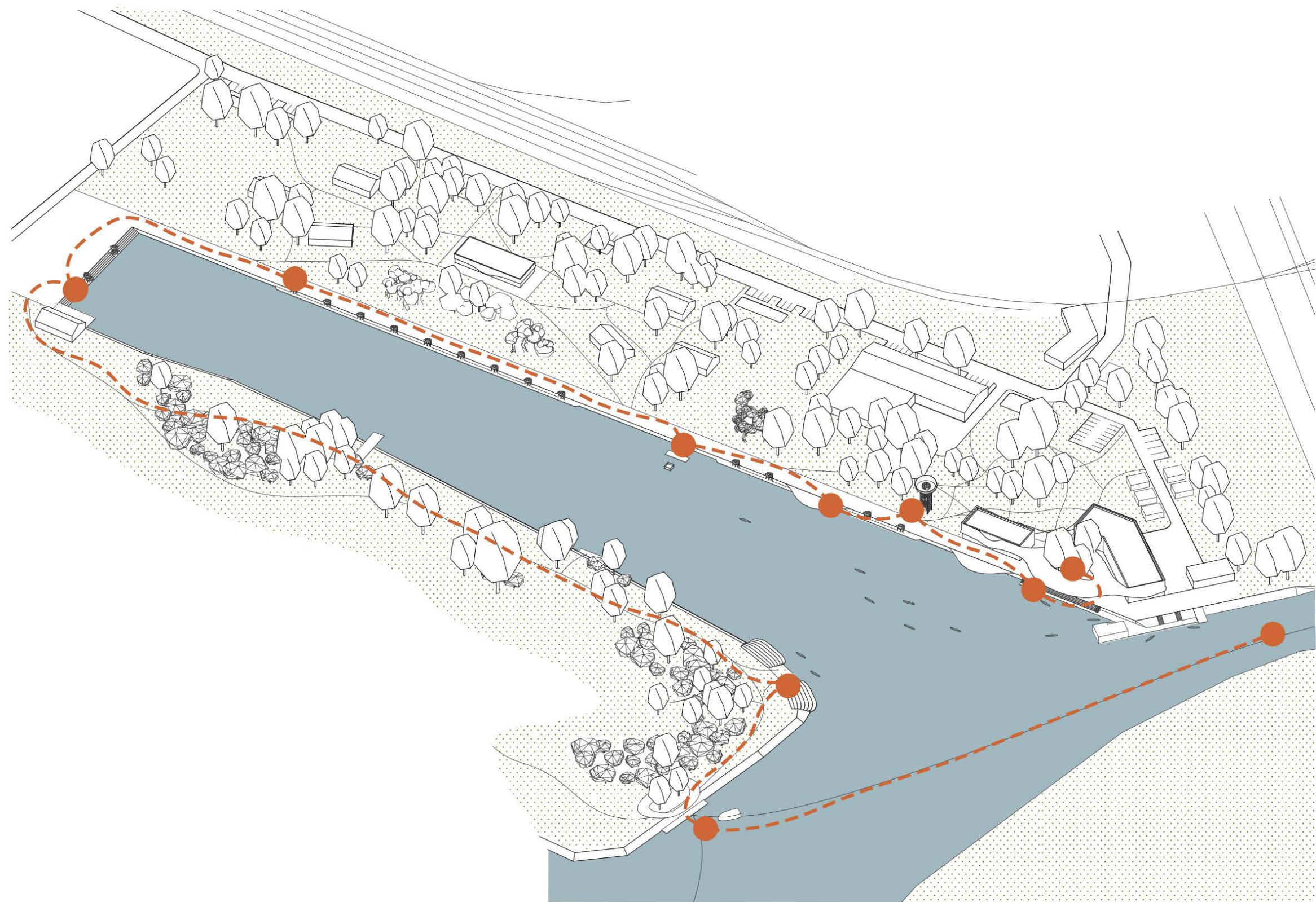














reflection





Thank you