

# REFLECTION

## BEYOND GENERIC: DESIGNING FOR MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

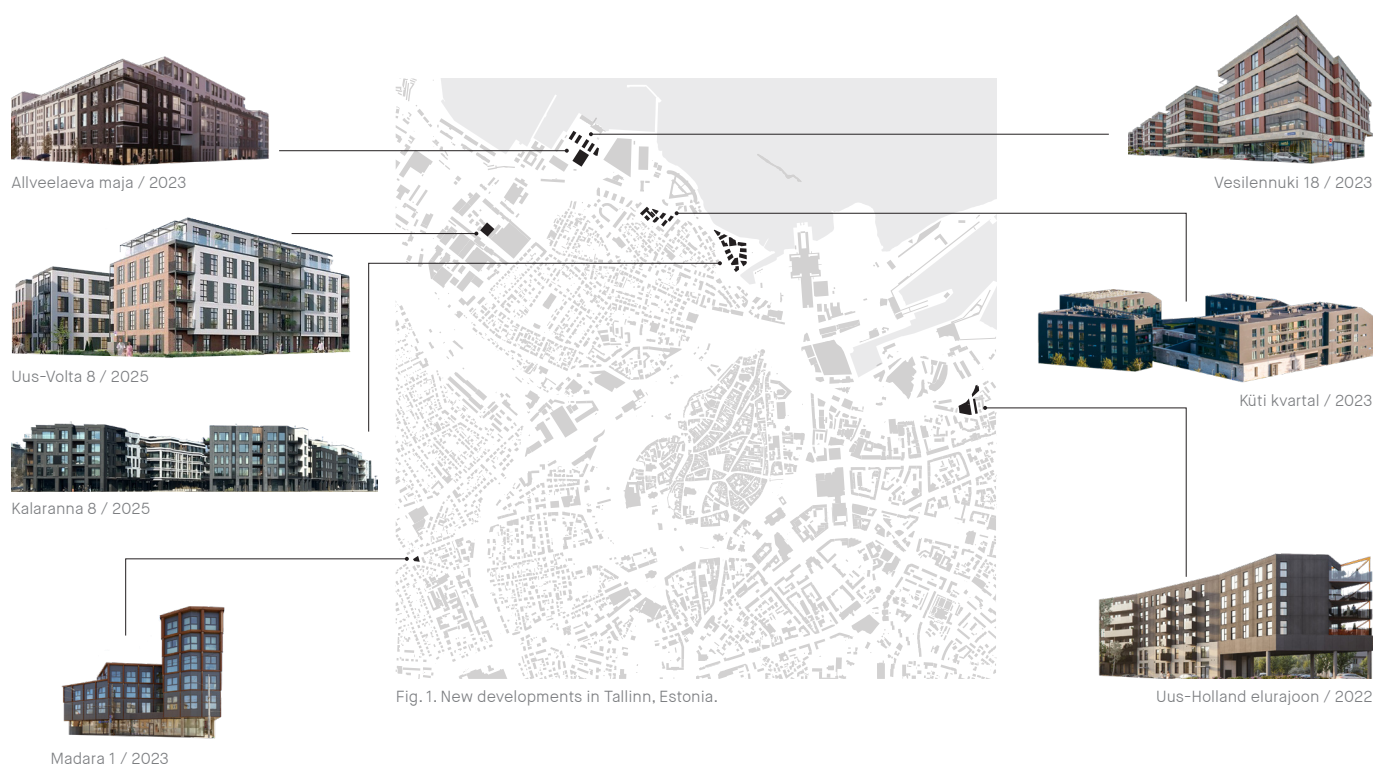
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## THE STARTING POINT

This graduation project began with a critical observation of the monotony and rigidity found in many recent housing developments across Tallinn and other European cities. Despite differences in material or facade articulation, these developments often share a similar spatial logic, resulting in repetitive layouts and an absence of spatial diversity and urban identity (Fig. 1). From an urban perspective, they are inward-looking volumes with minimal engagement with the public realm. On a human scale, they prioritize efficiency over experience, offering little opportunity for appropriation, interaction, or differentiation. The ambition of my thesis emerged in response to this condition: to investigate how architecture can mediate between individual life and collective form, avoiding both aesthetic superficiality and functional standardization.

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE ARCHITECTURE TRACK AND MASTER PROGRAMME

This research trajectory aligns closely with the objectives of the Architecture track within the MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences programme. The project critically examines residential architecture not merely as a technical or typological exercise, but as a spatial and cultural construct situated within broader urban systems. Through both analytical and projective methodologies, it engages with architectural form, public space, and material strategies to propose a new form of mixed-use development. It also draws upon the programme's interdisciplinary framework, incorporating urban research, spatial design, and generative form exploration.



## RESEARCH & DESIGN

Initially, I hypothesized that introducing multiple housing typologies within one development would produce spatial richness and counteract generic outcomes. However, as the design developed, it became apparent that this strategy, though varied in form, risked becoming compositional rather than transformative. Typological diversity alone did not create the complexity or openness I was aiming for. This realization marked a critical turning point in the project and led to a redefinition of the architectural problem.

The focus shifted from typological multiplicity to a deeper investigation of structural logic and spatial integration. A central research question emerged: How can structural systems be designed to support spatial and social adaptability, while retaining architectural identity? By prioritizing the interaction between public and private space, I developed a core structural framework composed of a transparent, open ground floor — conceived as a communal urban hall — layered with vertical circulation and housing cores that support fragmented, tree-like residential towers. Between these elements, a semi-public garden terrace acts as a spatial and social mediator.

This spatial configuration was informed by site-specific analysis of Tallinn's urban fabric and climate conditions. Additionally, research into human well-being and architecture highlighted the significance of spatial diversity, visual permeability, and shared environments in fostering mental health, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging. These insights shaped both the structural and experiential logic of the project.

The resulting structure operates not as a static form, but as a dynamic spatial system. In response to a self-imposed design inquiry — how can a housing system's facade express diversity and individuality — the structural framework supports a rich variation of housing units. Elements such as balconies, loggias, and facade fragments are allowed to emerge, shift, and rotate based on orientation, views, and resident needs. This approach enables the facade to evolve at a human scale, balancing coherence with variation. In this way, research and design formed a recursive loop: findings from spatial studies influenced architectural form, which in turn reframed the research agenda.

## METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION & FEEDBACK INTEGRATION

The design methodology evolved from a prescriptive, typology-driven approach toward a systems-oriented framework grounded in spatial relationships and adaptability. Early mentor feedback played a significant role in challenging the rigidity of my initial strategy. Comments questioning the project's spatial vitality prompted a shift in focus toward porosity, ambiguity, and the in-between.

In response, I incorporated perspective-based design testing. The use of personas became a tool to explore how different user groups — children, elderly residents, remote workers — might experience and navigate the building. This method supported the development of layered, non-linear spatial sequences and informed decisions about vertical circulation, shared spaces, and thresholds.

While I began the project with an emphasis on control and formal clarity, I learned to embrace a degree of indeterminacy in the system — allowing for flexibility not only in unit arrangement but also in programmatic assignment and temporal use. The feedback I received consistently encouraged me to translate abstract ambitions into spatial logic, and I gradually internalized this principle through the design process.

## ACADEMIC & SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

The academic contribution of this project lies in its reframing of residential architecture as a spatial system rather than a closed product. By moving beyond typological stacking and engaging with structural, social, and environmental parameters simultaneously, the project contributes to the discourse on adaptability and user agency in housing. It also addresses broader questions of urban integration and public accessibility, proposing a model where housing developments participate in the life of the city rather than retreat from it.

On a societal level, the project responds to contemporary concerns around inclusivity and spatial justice. Rather than designing for a singular user or lifestyle, it proposes a spatial framework that accommodates change, plurality, and collective use. The open ground floor — functioning as a transparent urban hall — is conceived as an ethical gesture toward shared space in the city, offering not only amenities but also dignity and visibility to everyday social interactions.

## TRANSFERABILITY & FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The project's structural and spatial system demonstrates potential for application in other urban settings. Its logic is not site-dependent but condition-responsive, allowing it to be adapted to different densities, cultures, and climatic constraints. A key outcome of the thesis is a design system that is possible to adapt through computational tools, enabling housing units, such as balconies, loggias, and facade fragments, to respond to site-specific factors such as solar orientation, privacy, and views. While not the project's primary driver, computational methods proved valuable in testing adaptability and visualizing spatial outcomes.

The final phase of the graduation process will focus on refining and detailing selected components of the system, including the structural cores, facade fragments, and public ground-level spaces, to demonstrate both its architectural coherence and systemic versatility.