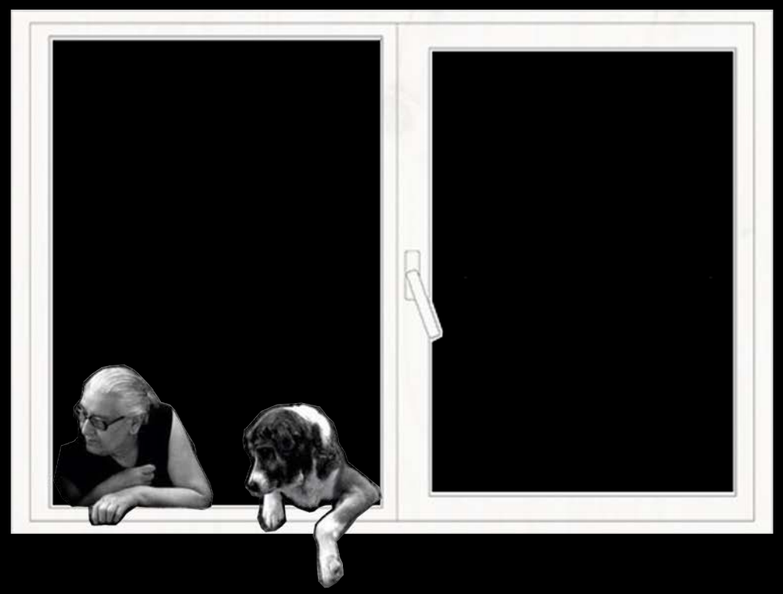
Fostering trauma recovery through citizen participation

Reshaping public space through trauma-informed urban design in Alytus, Lithuania

Greta Samulionytė



Colophon

Fostering trauma recovery through citizen participation: Reshaping public space through trauma-informed urban design in Alytus, Lithuania.

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Design of the Urban Fabric I Graduation Studio
“Embracing plurality, growing porosity”

First mentor I Leo van den Burg
Second mentor I Juliana E. Gonçalves
Delegate I Henri van Bennekom

Fig. 3: Photograph of author and her dad, in her childhood garden in Ramučiai, Kaunas, 2001.

Fig. 2: Photograph of the author's grandfather in their allotment garden near Alytus, 2022.

Motivation

Originally from Lithuania, I moved to Denmark with my parents in pursuit of a better life but have kept a strong strong bond with my country of origin. Growing up in a cultural setting vastly different from Lithuania, I spent much of my time observing people and reflecting on the differences between the two cultures. When I began studying architecture, I felt a need to understand why certain places, like my grandparents' home, seemed frozen in time, along with a particular worldview. Over the many years, this place remained unchanged, a fact that both intrigued and unsettled me. This observation became the foundation of my thesis.

Abstract

This research delves into the intersection of collective trauma and urban design within the micro-districts of Alytus, Lithuania. It aims to understand how participatory urban design can facilitate the healing of collective trauma while enhancing public spaces. The research focuses on the long-term renovation of buildings constructed during the Soviet occupation, a process impacting 60% of Lithuania's population. Alytus, our case study, has an urban fabric that was marked by the stamp of modernistic prefabricated blocks, that presents a unique challenge and opportunity for addressing collective memory and trauma.

Employing a multi-method approach, this research integrates literature reviews, case studies, spatial analysis, and participatory design exercises to explore the spatial dynamics of trauma recovery. Central to the study is the development of an engagement strategy based on trauma research, and the design of a participatory tool and process to test the initial phase of this new strategy. This strategy emphasizes the need for trust-building, safety, inclusivity, and community connectivity in micro-districts.

Key findings suggest that examining the process of building and public space renovation through the lens of trauma necessitates rethinking and challenging the existing tools and methods used in participatory design sessions involving public, private, and civic stakeholders. The project proposes a new three-step participatory strategy for designing public spaces in micro-districts. In addition to identifying the urban and social issues of the Vidzgiris micro-district, the research presents a vision for transforming public spaces. This transformation proposes a new hierarchy and identity for various public spaces, aiming to facilitate both individual and collective trauma recovery.

The research proposes that reshaping the existing participatory process can aid in acknowledging and recovering from collective trauma caused by the soviet occupation. This participatory process fosters learning, exploring and transforming together, and aims to enhance shared spaces to promote social cohesion among residents. The focus is on three distinct public spaces: the courtyards, the green corridors, and the railway park. These areas are examined for potential spatial interventions aimed at promoting both individual and collective trauma recovery, while also enhancing the spaces through the lens of climate mitigation.

Contributing to the broader discourse on urban resilience, this study offers insights into how cities can address historical traumas through thoughtful urban planning and design. It underscores the potential of urban design as a tool for recovery and community rebuilding, providing a framework adaptable to other post-traumatic urban contexts globally.

Keywords: Collective trauma, public space, micro-districts, citizen participation, urban design

Intro

This chapter will unveil the introduction and explanation of the problem we wish to uncover in this project. It will also shortly introduce the location of interest, Lithuania, and give you an overall insight to what themes this thesis addresses further.

Introduction

Urban environments are not merely collections of buildings and infrastructure but are deeply intertwined with the social and psychological fabric of their inhabitants. The design of these environments can profoundly impact the mental health and well-being of communities, particularly those recovering from collective traumatic experiences. This research focuses on the building stock and public space renovation process in Alytus, Lithuania, a city marked by decades of soviet occupation, which left indelible scars on both the urban landscape and the collective psyche of its residents. The study explores the potential of participatory urban design to facilitate recovery from collective trauma and to enhance the functionality and aesthetic quality of public spaces within the city's micro-districts.

Problem statement

In Alytus, the pervasive uniformity and stark functionality characteristic of a modernist urban planning are apparent. These features often discourage community interaction and contribute to a sense of isolation among residents. Furthermore, traditional urban planning approaches in Alytus have typically been top-down, neglecting the specific needs and valuable insights of local residents. This research addresses the pressing need to understand how urban design can be a tool to aid acknowledgement and recovery of collective trauma in public space.

Alytus, Lithuania

Alytus, Lithuania, a city with personal significance to me as my grandparents have resided here for over 40 years. It holds a special place in my heart as a destination I visited frequently during my upbringing, serving as a cornerstone in shaping my understanding of Lithuania, its micro-districts, and its people.

Alytus, recognized as the regional capital of Dzūkija, is home to approximately 50,000 residents (Wikipedia, 2023). Over the years, the city has witnessed significant upheavals and transformations, yet it has retained a sense of familiarity and continuity throughout my recollection spanning the past two decades.

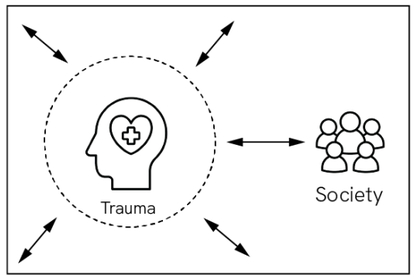
Fig. 4: Google maps image of Alytus, Lithuania.

Research plan

This chapter will introduce the hypothesis, research aims, the main research question and subquestions. The second half will look into the methods and frameworks (theoretical, analytical and conceptual) that will help guide the research on course.

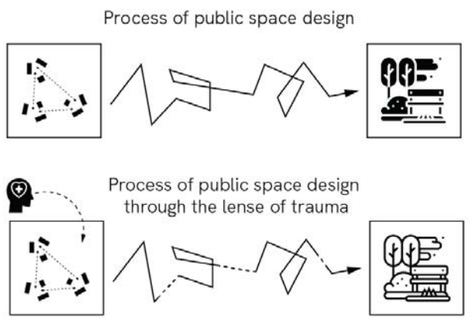
Hypotheses

Although it may not have been explicitly emphasized throughout the process, a hypothesis served as the initial inspiration for the research. It emerged from the initial exploration of collective trauma and the reflection on the process of public space design. The hypotheses were used in the process as a way to broadly ground the research.



Environment

There exists a link between trauma and our environment, which is both the built and social environment, influencing our mental well-being and our need for social interaction



When looking at the public space design, adopting a trauma-informed approach would suggest a rethinking of the design process for urban planners and designers

Fig. 5-6: Research hypotheses.

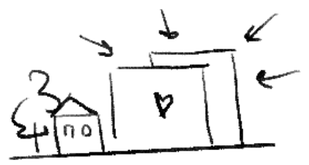
Research aims

The aim of this research is to increase knowledge in the interlink of trauma and urban design, by understanding how trauma affects people and the way they use and behave in the environments, we as urbanists, design. The idea is to look into existing literature on trauma and see how it could educate and inform on urban design, specifically the process of public space design.

The aim can be divided into these objectives:

Decrease the knowledge gap between trauma and urban design by analyzing their relationship.

Through the initial objective, seek to understand how public spaces can be designed for the better with the knowledge of trauma and trauma recovery.



To test the achieved understanding through the case study of Alytus.

Research question

Based on my personal motivation, problem statement and hypothesis, I formulated a main research question. The main research question defines the field in which I propose changes, the specific type of trauma that is connected to Lithuania as a whole and a specific type of space and urban fabric typology.

How can participatory urban design facilitate the healing of collective trauma while also enhancing public spaces within micro-districts in Alytus, Lithuania?

Research sub-questions

To simplify the process, we can break down the main research question into subquestions, gradually addressing the overall inquiry.

Understanding trauma

1 What is (collective) trauma? What is its history, definition and effects on the individual and collective?

2 How does the socio-spatial environmental context influence the occurrence and perpetuation of collective trauma, especially in micro-districts?

These initial questions, one and two, aim to provide a basic understanding of trauma and its complexities. Since discussions on trauma within urbanism are limited, it's important to revisit fundamental concepts, understand their origins, definitions, and their impact on both the individual and the collective. The second question helps uncover how current social and physical environments influence trauma.
To answer these questions, I used literature review, unstructured interviews, spatial analysis and multi-media review of movies and archival photographs.

Link of trauma and urban design

3 How can trauma inform the urban design process of public space in micro-districts in Alytus, Lithuania?

By answering the third question, I was informed upon the existing processes and initiatives behind public space design in micro-districts in the country. I gained insight into the stakeholders behind and what obstacles there are when there is a wish to transform the spaces between the blocks.
To answer this question, I used literature review, unstructured interviews and stakeholder analysis.

The last two questions, four and five, unfolded what existing initiatives were within the characteristics of a recovery enhancing public space. It helped me answer what kind of participation is needed to create such spaces, and whether the tool, that are popular now and seen as innovative are facilitating the creation of the spaces.

Recovery avenues

4 What role can top-down and bottom-up initiatives play in healing from collective trauma in public spaces in micro-districts?

5 What is the impact of technology-driven engagement strategies on trauma recovery?

To answer these questions, I used literature review, stakeholder analysis and multimedia review.

Methodology

To address the research question and sub-questions for this project, a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed. Recognizing the individual and personal nature of trauma, a range of methods were carefully selected to approach the problem from different levels of participation in society as a researcher. A diagram illustrating these levels of participation is available on the following page.

Literature Review
The intersection between trauma and urban design was explored through a comprehensive literature review. This review encompassed a wide array of sources, including books, essays, reports, and articles relevant to the interconnected themes and their broader implications. Special attention was given to sourcing literature from both local (Lithuanian) and international contexts, facilitating comparative analysis and global reflection on locally presented insights.

Mixed-media review
In addition to the traditional literature review, a mixed-media review was conducted to complement our understanding of the topic. This review included documentaries, artworks, websites, and other forms of media deemed relevant and educative on the topic. This approach aimed to provide a more subjective perspective on the culture and population, enriching our understanding of the topic.

Governance analysis
To comprehend the processes of urban design and the power relations within the governing system, a stakeholder analysis was undertaken. The focus was to understand the presence of stakeholders across different scales, ranging from the building to the state level.

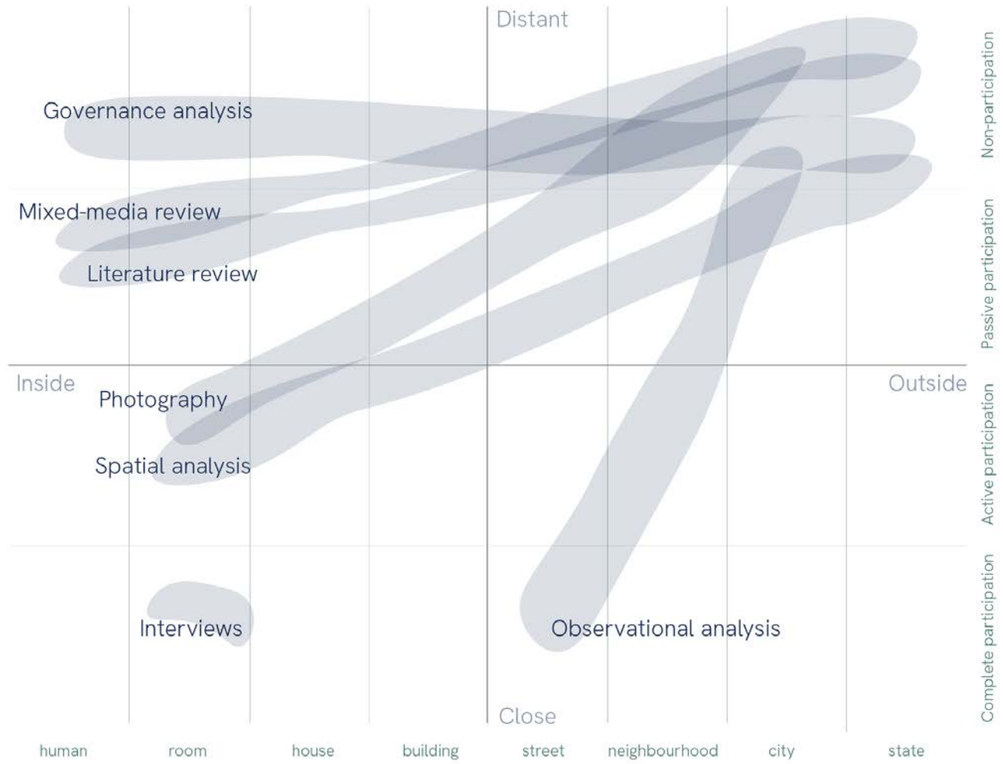
Spatial analysis
To gain insight into the aesthetics and functioning of the built environment, a spatial analysis was conducted. By analyzing spatial data, I aimed to understand the patterns, relationships, and trends within my focused areas.

Ethnography research
Ethnographic research was employed to understand the culture and how people utilize certain spaces identified through spatial analysis. This research was approached two-fold, focusing on both behavioral analysis using Jan Gehl's observational methods (Gehl & Svarre, 2013) and conducting unstructured and semi-structured interviews with locals.

Research-Design-Test
The tool development process happened through the steps of research-design-test. Initially, the tool was tested on paper, which later evolved into transparent cards. Subsequently, a participatory scenario for the tool was created and tested once before adjustments in the design were made. When one cycle was finished another would be created in order to test different means.

'Deconstruction'
The method of deconstruction was used in the development of the tool and in spatial analysis. It is a method that allows you to visually deconstruct and reconstruct images and use this for the base of questioning.

Fig. 7: Diagram of participation as a researcher.



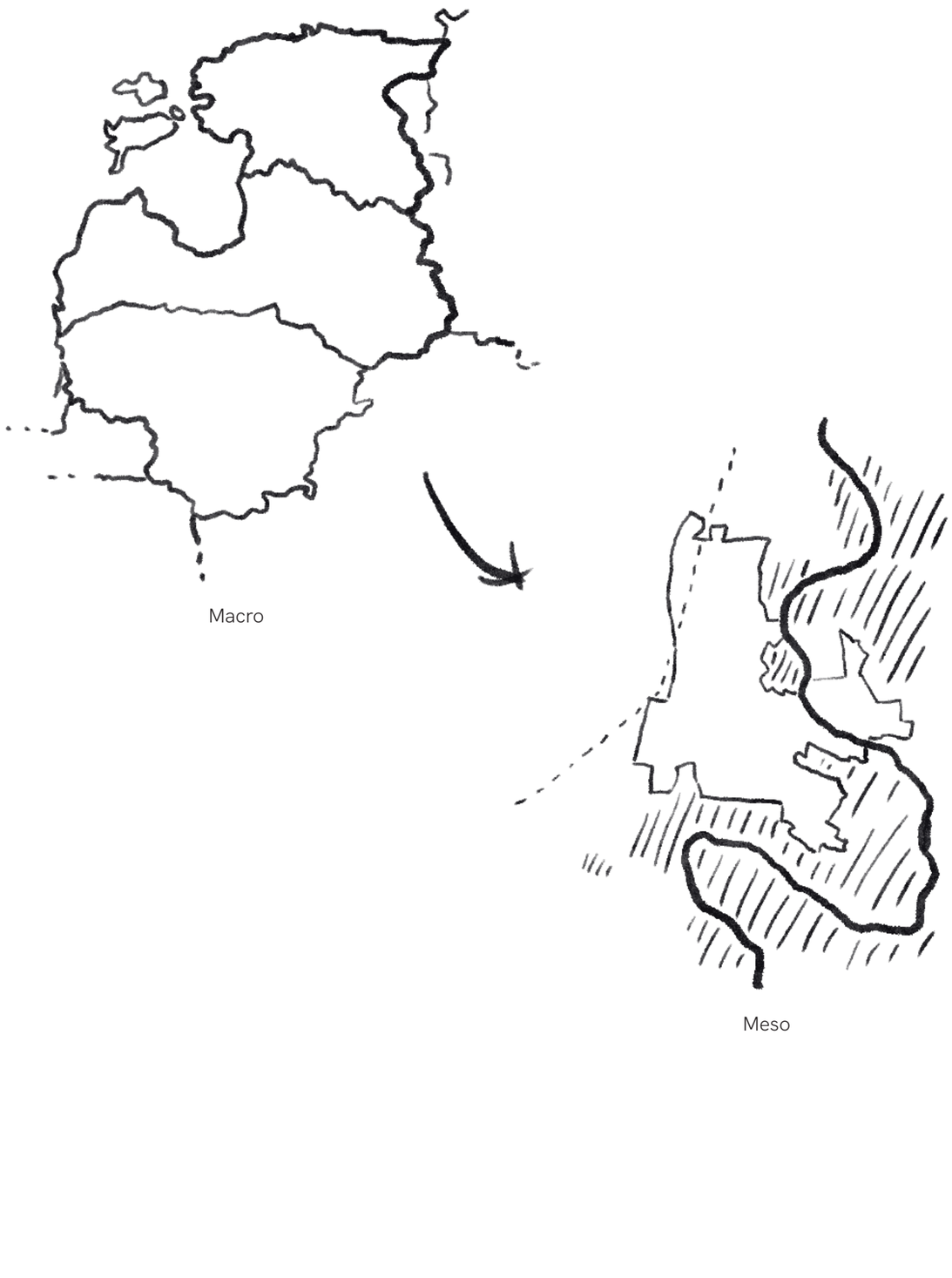
Participation as a researcher
Most of the methods employed in this study did not necessitate direct participation in society. The literature review, mixed media review, and governance analysis could all be conducted through desk analysis. However, to truly understand how the theories and concepts manifested in the culture, particularly given the novelty of the topic, active participation in society was essential. As a result, three trips to Lithuania were undertaken to utilize methods and gather qualitative insights from citizens.

Analytical framework

In the investigation of the connection between trauma and urban design, research and analysis will be closely intertwined. Research activities will encompass a thorough exploration of relevant topics within the field, utilizing methods such as literature reviews and mixed-media reviews. The analytical phase will involve mapping various findings and delving into the specifics of our chosen city, Alytus. This will include mapping the characteristics of micro-districts, identifying trauma-related spatial elements, and examining any additional factors that may emerge during the process.

Both research and spatial analysis will operate across multiple scales, including the macro, meso, and micro levels. At the macro scale, we will adopt a broad perspective, tracing the historical timeline with a focus on key events such as occupation, modernist urban planning, and their intersection with trauma. Moving to the meso scale, our attention will shift to Alytus, where we will analyze the existing characteristics of micro-districts and trauma-related spatial elements using maps and image deconstruction techniques. Finally, at the micro scale, we will closely examine the individuals directly affected by trauma, exploring their behaviors in both public and private spaces, from city blocks to individual apartments and personal belongings.

Fig. 8: Skecth of the scales of the analytical framework.



Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides an overview of the concepts, models and theories that was used to unfold the research of the intersection of trauma and urban design.

Collective trauma
(Gailienė, 2021)
Collective trauma refers to the aftermath of shared historical events, as the soviet occupation in Lithuanian history. While individuals within a collective may not share identical experiences, the trauma manifests differently based on cultural, environmental, and generational factors. This concept illuminates the enduring impacts of historical events on communities.

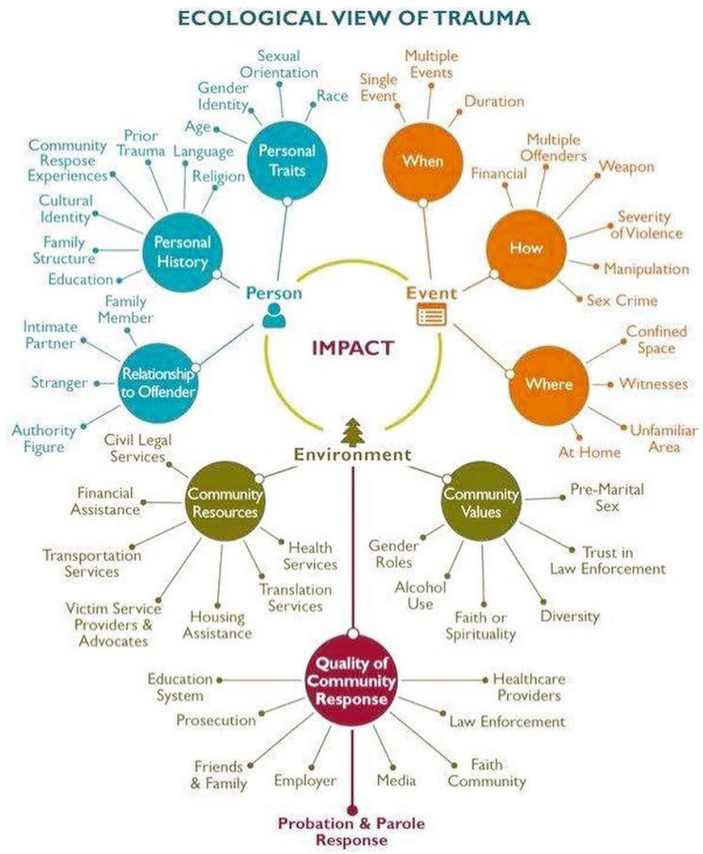
Intergenerational trauma
(Gailienė, 2021)
Building upon the concept of collective trauma, intergenerational trauma explores the transmission of trauma across multiple generations. In contexts marked by historical traumas like occupation, visible marks of trauma persist through cultural practices, upbringing, and societal mentality across successive generations. Understanding intergenerational trauma sheds light on the long-term effects of historical events on urban communities and informs strategies for healing and resilience-building.

Ecological view of trauma model
(Harvey, 1996)
The ecological view of trauma model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding trauma recovery within diverse individual and community contexts. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the social, cultural, and political dimensions of victimization and acknowledges the role of resilience in recovery. Central to this model is the concept of "ecological fit," which highlights the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environment in facilitating healing from trauma. By emphasizing community interventions and the potential of the environment as a healing agent.

Framework for empowerment
(Schneider et al., 2018)
The framework for empowerment was made based on an extensive analysis on different publications using the terms "empower" and "empowerment" in HCI (Human-Computer Interaction). It includes different notions of empowerment and classifications on the characteristics. The framework can be used as a guiding tool for design development and idea generation. Likewise, it can be used as a way to analyze existing tools.

Ladder of citizen participation
(Arnstein, 1969)
The ladder of citizen participation offers a structured framework for understanding the various stages of citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Ranging from minimal involvement to substantial participation, this concept delineates degrees of citizen influence, from tokenism to genuine partnership and control. Originally formulated in 1969, this concept has evolved to encompass contemporary understandings of participatory democracy and community engagement in urban planning and governance.

Fig. 9: Ecological view of trauma (Harvey, 1996).



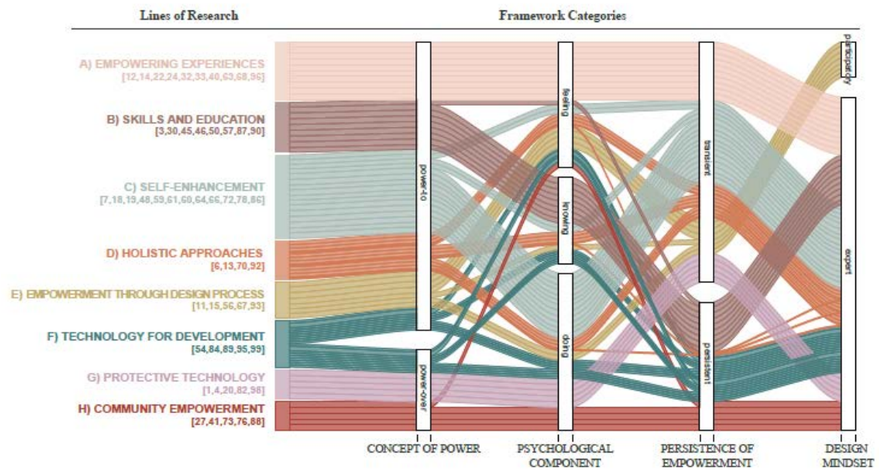


Fig. 10: Framework for empowerment (Schneider et al., 2018).

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationships between theories and concepts, proposing how spatial interventions could contribute to achieving the research aim.

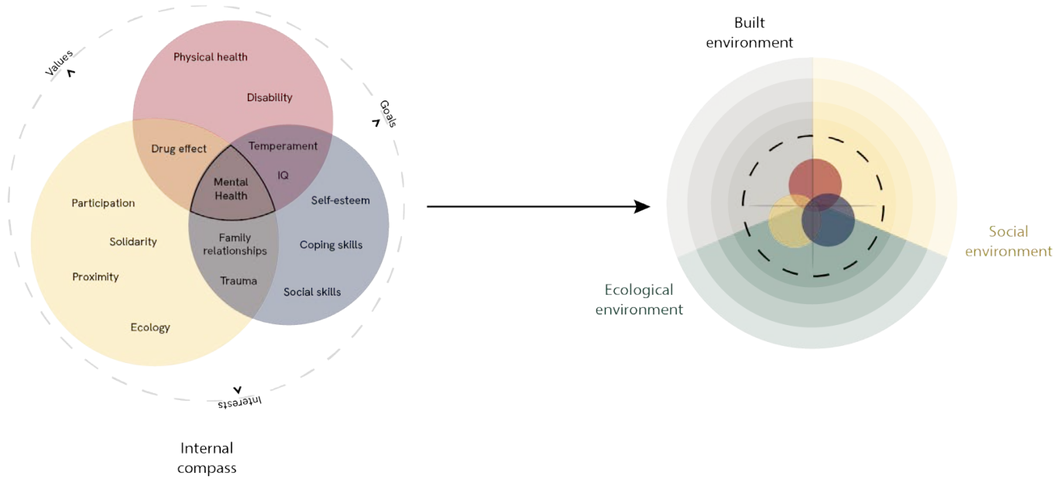
The internal compass
The three colored circles represent the biological, psychological, and socio-environmental fields that collectively shape mental health, functioning as an internal compass. This compass guides values, goals, and interests, becoming particularly evident during cultural clashes, where one's behavior or reaction may appear unusual to others.

Environmental layers
Humans constantly interact with various layers of the world: built, ecological, and social. These layers extend across different scales, from blocks and micro-districts to cities and states. Our behavior, influenced by our internal compass, is always situated within a specific layer of this environment.

Past-present-future
Our internal compass and current location exist in the present, but they are influenced by past actions and the surrounding environment, which will shape the future.

The whole picture
The conceptual framework suggests that an individual, guided by their internal compass and situated in a specific environment, can be affected by interventions initiated by top-down or bottom-up. These interventions can help individuals acknowledge past events that shaped their present and support their trauma recovery journey. The interventions can occur on different scales. In our diagram, one intervention appears at the city scale. This could manifest as a park or square, or perhaps a new community house in the city center, facilitating social interaction and recovery.

Fig. 11: Conceptual framework zoom



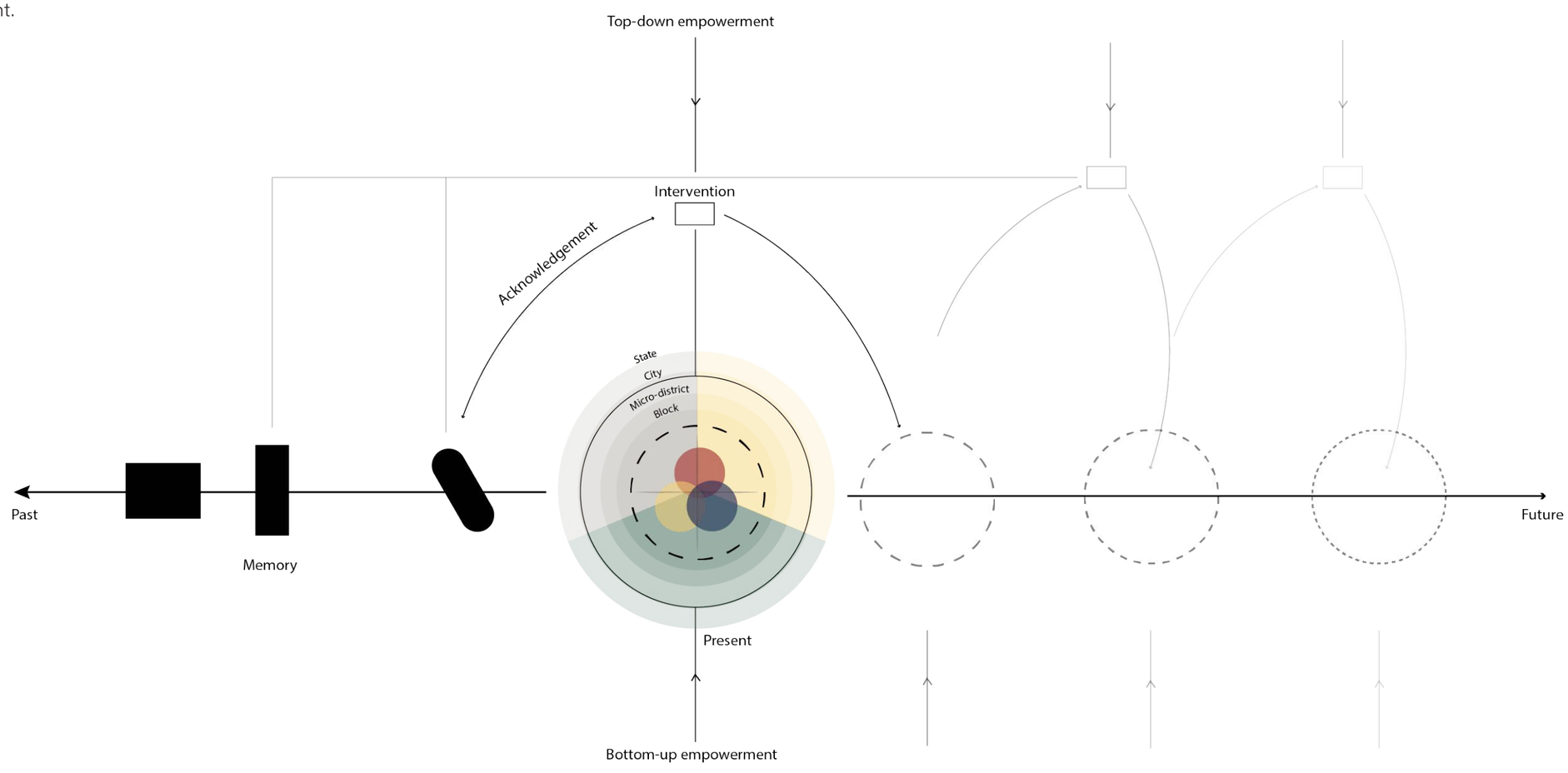


Fig. 12: Conceptual framework

Research

In the following chapter we will unfold our research through the scales of macro, meso and micro. Each scale will have a short introduction of its own, where you will be informed on what the following subchapter holds.

Macro

In this chapter we will dive into a crash course into the history of Lithuania. Then select moments from the history that has been a crucial shaping factor for the urban fabrics, drivers of change today and mentality of population, which we will unfold further. We will likewise, what participation means and look into the effects of trauma and how it affect the work of urban planners today. Lastly, we will unfold the current urgencies of the urbanized landscape today, and get closer to what this thesis is really about, the micro-districts.

Lithuania throughout centuries

Lithuania's history dates back to 1009. King Mindaugas ruled in 1253, succeeded by Gediminas, under whom Vilnius became the capital. The Battle of Grunwald in 1410 saw a united Polish-Lithuanian force triumph. Facing the Russian Empire, they formed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth through the Union of Lublin. In the 17th century, war with Russia led to occupation and the burning of Vilnius in 1655, followed by a devastating plague that halved the population. Despite resistance attempts, culture preservation came at great personal risk (Baranauskienė, n.d.; Rowell, 2006; Eidintas et al., 2015).

World War I and II
Amid World War I in 1915, Lithuania fell to the Germans, and a fleeting independence in 1917 was cut short by renewed Russian invasions. Three wars ensued, with Poland claiming Vilnius as its capital from 1920 to 1940. The upheaval continued in World War II, marked by Soviet occupation, deportations, and an uprising cut short by German forces. The Soviet return in 1944 transformed Lithuania into the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic until its declaration of independence in 1991. Joining the EU and NATO in 2004 marked a pivotal moment (Eidintas et al., 2015).

In the 50 years of occupation, which was brought by Russians and Germans, a large-scale repression and deportations damaged the country indescribably. It not only killed 30% of the population, but it erased a big part of the cultural and academic community, while strengthening a collective fear of society. No one slept easily at night.

Independence and Post-Soviet Lithuania
In 1991 Lithuania became an independent country. Up until this time much of the population had experienced cruelties and many had searched for help in numbing their pains through alcohol (Gailienė, 2021). The historical events had brought moral trauma. It had broken the moral health of many, in terms of forcing people to live in a regime that held down the main human nature elements – freedom, responsibility, the freedom of speech, voluntary participation in society and of defending your beliefs (Gailienė, 2021, page 180). People had to adjust with their original inner compass in order to be part of a corrupt society. They were constantly living with double moral standards, of their true self and the one they showed in society. With time the effect of this resulted in a split in their own identity, many experiencing psychological issues and their internal compasses, that encapsulated their biological, psychological and socio-environmental whole, was ruptured and shaken. With independence the suicide rate skyrocketed (Gailienė, 2020). People were more lost than ever.

The struggles of a new country
After becoming independent the country had to create their economies anew, address the issue of energy independence, look for new markets and find their place in Europe and the world. There was a wish to reach a western-european standard of living but on a soviet-economic base (Lithuania Explained, 2022). This turned out to be harder than expected. A huge shift was made going from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one, which also brought with it a market economy. The country experiences mass economic change and privatization, with that the economic inequality also grew. As symptoms of social discontent, and people being disappointed and desperate with the current situation, a lot of aggression came to surface. There was a sudden desire for revenge in the society, which was also a sign of mistrust in the government and the justice system (Malinauskas, 2013).

Lithuania today
The turbulent years of Soviet occupation and perhaps, more what came after, is still something that the country is struggling to grow out of. There still exists a huge mistrust in society. It is not only towards state institutions but likewise fellow citizens (LRT, 2022). There is a mixed feeling towards being positive towards the future in the country, depending on the geographical position. Likewise, around 47.8% of Lithuanians feel unheard by authorities and don't feel valued in their contributions. There is also a feeling that there is not enough promotion of citizen participation in the government-led initiatives. Most of these things are a pattern in all three countries of the Baltic Countries (Giedraitytė et al., 2022).

“I’ve always felt like I had to be afraid. Not of an external factor, but rather - of myself. More precisely, I fear being myself. Maybe it’s my personality. However, it seems typical for those who grew up in the Soviet Union. To hide, to shrink, to conceal, to lie. Back then, these traits helped you to survive, whereas today these are the symptoms of servility. The times have changed. How to get rid of this inner slave?”

Outtake from the film “Homo Sovieticus”, 2021, initial scene.

Occupation: to hide, to shrink, to conceal, to lie

For someone who was born in a “free” world, it has been hard to grasp what the feeling and way of Soviet everyday life was. Directed by Ivo Briedis and Rita Rudusa, both hailing from the Soviet Union, the film “Homo Sovieticus” aims to shed light on this aspect through the lens of its citizens.

Reflecting on her experiences, Rita Rudusa shares, “During the Soviet era, I was annoyed by its falseness. What you heard is not what you saw. I used to argue with my mom about the fact that I was also supposed to conform. I became a journalist when Latvia regained its freedom. It seemed that - at last - everything will be for real. I’ve worked in the free press for 30 years now, but I still have a feeling of unease and falseness. It lives inside me.” (Briedis & Rudusa, 2021).

The movie unfolds the main intentions of the Soviet era – creating the Soviet citizens. A person that seems at core to be an opportunist, one that was shaped to not rebel against their leadership, to take as little individual responsibility and to stand straight and in a line, when asked to (Briedis & Rudusa, 2021).

The life of the deported

During the Soviet era, despite claims of multiculturalism, ethnic Russians were elevated as the dominant and central element, shaping the state itself (Zverko, 2023). Conformity was paramount for citizenship, prohibiting individuality or criticism of the regime under threat of deportation.

Tragically, around 33% of Lithuania’s population faced deportation, resulting in the loss of countless lives. Those with dissenting beliefs or strong opinions were swiftly removed, along with their families, to prevent the transmission of their ideas. Today, Lithuania openly grapples with the stories of these deportations, with books, websites, and public discourse shedding light on their spatial dimensions (Černoušek, n.d.)

A case - Irena Špakauskienė

At the age of twelve, Irena Saulutė Valaitytė-Špakauskienė found herself torn from her homeland and thrust into the depths of Siberia during the first wave of deportations in 1941. Her family’s fate was sealed by the actions of her father, a marked man in the eyes of the Soviet secret police, the NKVD.

In the middle of the night, NKVD officers came into their home, and moved them to the train stations without any explanation. Men and women with children would be packed into different wagons and sent off to Siberia. If attempted to flee, they would be killed instantly. For a month, Irena endured the grueling journey, finally arriving in Biysk. From there, they trudged to a remote mountain town, where they lived on the minimal food of herbs boiled over open flames. Their respite was short-lived as they were shuttled off to Tit-Ary, an island in the frigid north, where they were forced to relocate seasonally. Life revolved around fishing and construction work for the NKVD, while children scavenged for firewood. The harsh conditions claimed many lives, including Irena’s mother, who only lived to 44.

In 1947, Irena was allowed to seek education in a bigger city. Amidst, she tried escaping and returning to Lithuania multiple times, but was caught by officers and sent back. Finally, in 1958 she managed to return and could live under a false identity in Kaunas.

In 1989, when the Soviet Union started to collapse, Irena returned to Siberia to collect her mothers remains and bring them home. She felt the need to do that, as she was restless of the thought of her family remaining there (Černoušek, n.d.).

Irena’s tale is just one among countless others of families torn apart by deportation. Even those left behind in Lithuania endured the anguish of uncertain returns, awaiting news of loved ones’ fates.

The theater of the absurs of the gulags

Reflecting on life in the Soviet Union, the options seemed clear. Either you faced deportation as a consequence of your past or present actions, perhaps for vocalizing dissent or displaying opposition to the regime. In such cases, you and your entire family, along with close friends, were forcibly transported to the harsh conditions of Siberia. Whether you returned years later depended largely on luck and your determination to survive. On the other hand, if you stayed in Lithuania, you were subjected to a systematic indoctrination aimed at shaping you into the epitome of the Soviet ideal citizen. Every facet of life, from literature and art to theater, cinema, and education, was meticulously tailored to promote conformity while suppressing any form of dissent or divergent thinking.

As a child, life carried on without much contemplation. You accepted the norms around you, having never experienced anything different. You were subject to subtle manipulation, yet unaware of it. Despite restrictions, there was still room for outdoor play and youthful exuberance, albeit within prescribed limits. Returning home to an apartment indistinguishable from your friends’, you found conformity even in the décor—choices were limited, and individuality was discouraged.

Your relationship with your parents seemed typical, though you never probed deeply into their lives, nor they into yours. Knowledge of resistance movements or dissent was shielded from you, as your parents feared repercussions. Thus, you lived a seemingly ordinary Soviet childhood, oblivious to the future judgment that would condemn such a life as oppressive and traumatic.

Fig. 13: Outtake from the film “Homo Sovieticus” (Briedis & Rudusa, 2021)

A shift in the built environment

In the Soviet Union, architecture and urban planning was a very visible political tool. In 1940, with the initial Soviet occupation, a legislative act on land nationalization was made, which meant that all land was the property of the public (Drėmaitė et al., 2023). A new system was introduced where a national architectural council oversaw planning nationwide, and each city had its own commission (Drėmaitė et al., 2023). This system aimed to organize and control urban development. Efforts were focused on repairing damaged cities and rebuilding key infrastructure like bridges and power stations, as well as housing. Cities began to take on a similar appearance, with central squares, public buildings, wide streets, and plenty of green spaces like parks and waterfronts (Drėmaitė et al., 2023).

One notable aspect of city planning was the emphasis on separating industrial areas from residential ones, with industries contributing to the construction of housing as the population grew (Drėmaitė et al., 2023).

In 1964 a new scheme on industrial and urban development was approved. Under this scheme it was decided to develop ten regional centers with principles, such as i) all regional centers would have radius of about 50-60 km, ii) all regions would have a population of 200,000-600,000 and iii) the regional centers would have a population of at least 30,000-50,000 (Drėmaitė, n.d.).

Along the main five cities: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai and Panevėžys, five more industrial cities, new regional centers, were planned to be developed first, these included: Alytus, Marijampole, Utena, Plungė and Jurbarkas (Drėmaitė, n.d.).

In the coming 50 years of Soviet occupation the built environment undertook a change with each Soviet leader. In this research there is no need to look at all of them, but rather focus on the time between 1956 and 1970, where Nikita Khrushchev was in charge.

Birth of the Khrushchevka
Around 1956 the way 3-4 storey residential houses were made was primarily of brick and block masonry. The way of building was still seen as “traditional” with brickwork and plaster, and a masonry structure that let for narrow windows and large walls. Traditional pitched roofs were made of wooden structures and covered with tiles or tin (Drėmaitė, n.d.).

Simultaneously, visions of the future residential constructions were being discussed. The USSR began sending Soviet architects to Western Europe and Scandinavia to be inspired by new construction techniques. A few years later, the residential buildings modeled by French engineer Raymond Camus, were being built in Vilnius (Drėmaitė, n.d.). These 5 storey residential blocks later became known as “Khrushchevka” (Messori & Ilio, 2019).

After the first testbuild of the 5-storey residential building in Vilnius was successful , the monotone and repetitive, but modernistic, urban fabric became a sign of new times in cities, one of them being Alytus.

Fig. 14-15: Prospective scheme of industrialization and urbanization of the Lithuanian SSR, in which regional centers (circle), new regional centers (square) and new industrial cities (triangle) are located (Drėmaitė, 2023).

Fig. 16: Alytus, Lithuania, winter 1972 by Zenonas Bulgakovas.

Alytus

During the Soviet Occupation, Alytus emerged as the site for the USSR's largest military alliance. The city, previously ravaged by German invasion, was gradually reconstructed with aspirations of becoming a prominent regional center, as briefly mentioned before (Zepkaite, 2004).

A significant expansion plan devised in 1939 fueled growth on the left side of the river. Roads were strategically laid to connect the military base with neighboring cities, while a railway took form, aiming to connect the city center and link to both northern and southern regions of Lithuania, particularly integrating with Alytus's industrial sector (Zepkaite, 2004. Tereškinas, 2017).

Today, the railway, which is still in use, remains a prominent feature in the city's layout, serving as a guide to comprehend its expansion. During initial fieldwork in Lithuania, efforts were made to locate older city maps to gain deeper insights into this expansion. However, it proved challenging as many archival materials were destroyed post-independence, deemed obsolete at the time. Consequently, pinpointing the timeline of district constructions became difficult. Nonetheless, through careful observation of buildings, materials, and references in literature, an approximation of this expansion was crafted.

Fig. 17: "New times" 1971, Alytus, Lithuania, by Zenonas Bulgakovas.

A stamp in the fabric

The modern residential buildings became a symbol of the future and formed new districts that adapted the soviet urban planning term “mikrorayon,” best translated as “micro-districts”. These areas, exemplified in Alytus, consisted of multiple residential units built to accommodate the growing population in the newly stamped regional center.

In the city layout, industrial zones are marked in light red to the north, connected to the historic town center by a network of multi-lane roads. The micro-districts, developed between 1960 and 1980 (Miškinis, 1999), are positioned along these roads. To the north are the initial two micro-districts, Putinai and Dainava, while on the opposite side of the road and former railway—now a green strip flanking the major roads from west to east—stand two more micro-districts. These later developments, established around 1975, saw residents moving in as early as December 1978, even before the roads were fully completed, often navigating muddy paths from their workplaces to reach their homes. Current residents reminisce about the vast fields of farmland that stretched to the west of the Vidzgirio micro-district. They recall how the city abruptly transitioned from dense urbanity to open farmland without warning—a memory they find amusing and unique, particularly because they moved to the area early enough to witness this.

The micro-districts acted like stamps, quickly accommodating the growing population in each city but often leaving a mark of repetition in the urban landscape. The residential buildings were constructed primarily for functionality and speed. Interaction with neighbors mostly happened outside or in the stairwells, which were necessary to access apartments. The spaces between the residential buildings don’t encourage social interaction, a notice we’ll explore further in later chapters.

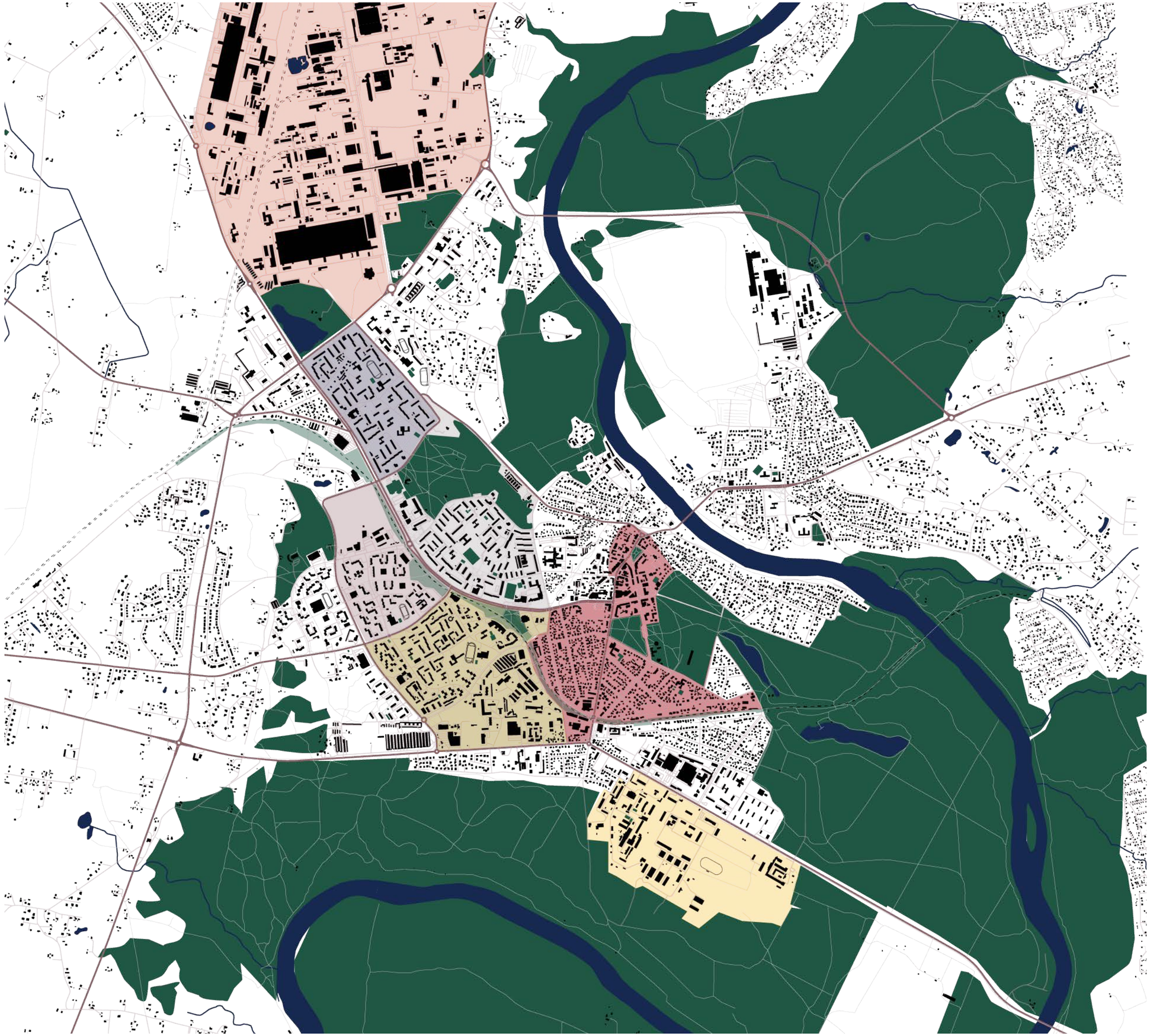
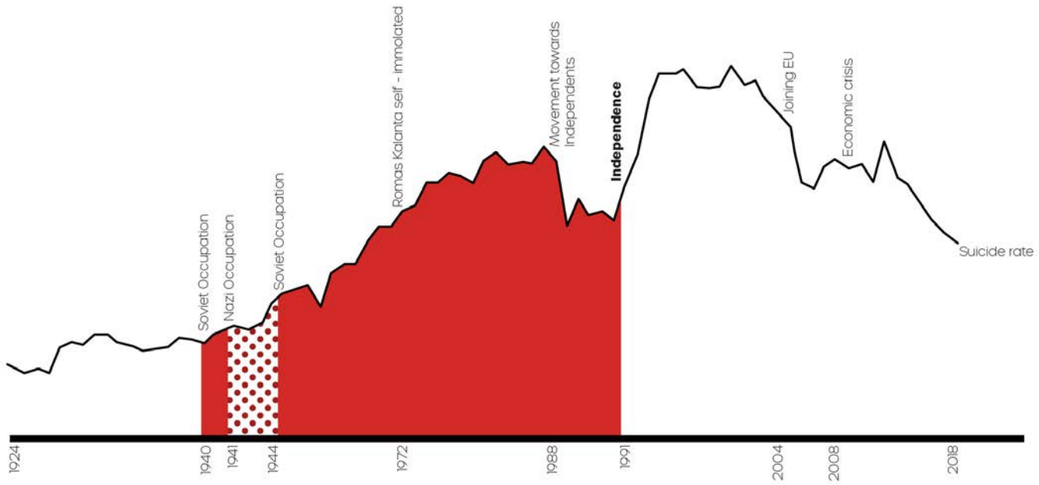


Fig. 18: Map of Alytus’ urban fabric

Fig. 19: “Vidzgiris micro-district”, 1979, by Zenonas Bulgakovas. Image showcasing the old railway that used to go through the city center. Today the railway doesn’t work and the space has been turned into a linear park connecting the whole city from east to west.

Fig. 20: Timeline of occupation in Lithuania with suicide rate and highlighted events.



Independence og the after-effects

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuania witnessed a dramatic surge in its suicide rate. Liberated after half a century of occupation, the nation found itself at a crossroads, dealing with newfound freedom and uncertainty (Gailienė, 2021, p. 2).

Independence posed a monumental challenge — breaking free from a long-standing system of control was a victory, yet it also brought a sense of loss. Many individuals found themselves adrift, losing not just their jobs but also their sense of purpose and direction. Their internal compasses (Assor et al., 2021), once calibrated to the demands of the regime, now wavered amidst the tumultuous transition (Gailienė, 2021). This disorienting landscape drove some to take their own lives or seek solace in alcohol (Gailienė, 2015), while others resorted to violence, leading to a historic surge in crime rates by 1995 (UN, 2021) as seen in fig. 21. The crimes varied from murder and murder attempts to attacks on personal property, as seen in fig. 22. The advent of a market economy saw the rise of gangs, perpetuating the deep-seated mistrust fostered during the soviet era.

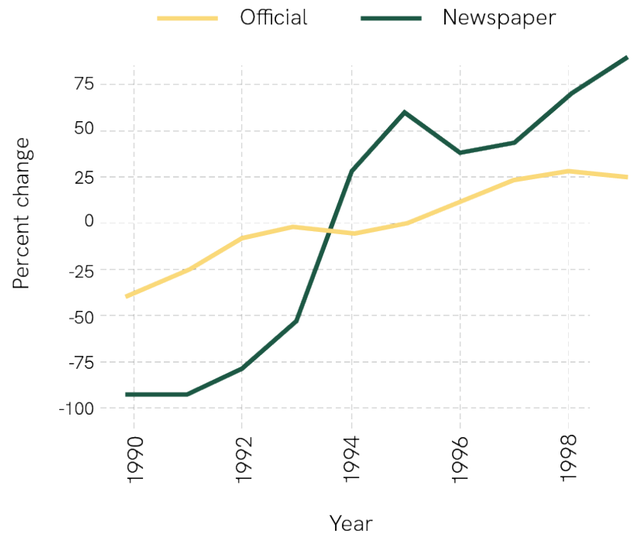
The shift in economy also increased the inequality in cities. Before everyone was pushed down to be equal, now privatization happened. You were allowed to buy property, which eventually everyone did. Former state-provided housing now belonged to residents, with public land shrinking to a mere 2% (The Government of The Republic of Lithuania, 2021). This era, dubbed the "wild nineties," saw the unchecked rise of neoliberalism, granting individuals newfound freedom to amass wealth or engage in illicit activities.

Echoes of the Past in the Present

Even today, Lithuania and its people remain shadowed by geopolitical unease, mistrust, and uncertainty. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with its common adversary, evokes haunting memories of the past for many. However, the circumstances in Ukraine today differ significantly from the occupation of three decades ago. Technological advancements have reshaped the nature of war and the broadcasting of news, offering perspectives unimaginable thirty years prior. Yet, Lithuanians discern patterns reminiscent of their own history in the news coverage of Ukraine.

Lithuanian television recently aired "Erasing the Nation," (Grzywaczewski, 2023) a program that vividly portrays the impact of war by showcasing Ukrainian cities and the destruction wrought upon their cultural and historical landmarks. As the curator navigates these scarred landscapes, local inhabitants offer poignant reflections on the significance of these sites, often attributing their targeting to Russia's desire to obliterate cultural heritage and create a tabula rasa. This viewpoint also resonated in the documentary, as a Polish citizen articulated "A belief in smashing the system... destroying it... and only when we wreck everything can we create something new" about the time of Soviet occupation (Briedis & Rudusa, 2021).

The conflict in Ukraine serves as a poignant reminder of Lithuania's own past traumas. While not experiencing a 21st-century war with Russia, the resonance lies in the perceived assault on cultural identity. The republication of Danute Gailiene's "Ka jie mums padare" in 2021, originally published in 2008, unfolds collective trauma, as a result of years of Soviet occupation in Lithuania. It is a book that has laid the basis for this research, as it not only unfolds of the event of occupation, but more precisely how such a regime can affect you both mentally, physically but also in the way you behave in your environment.



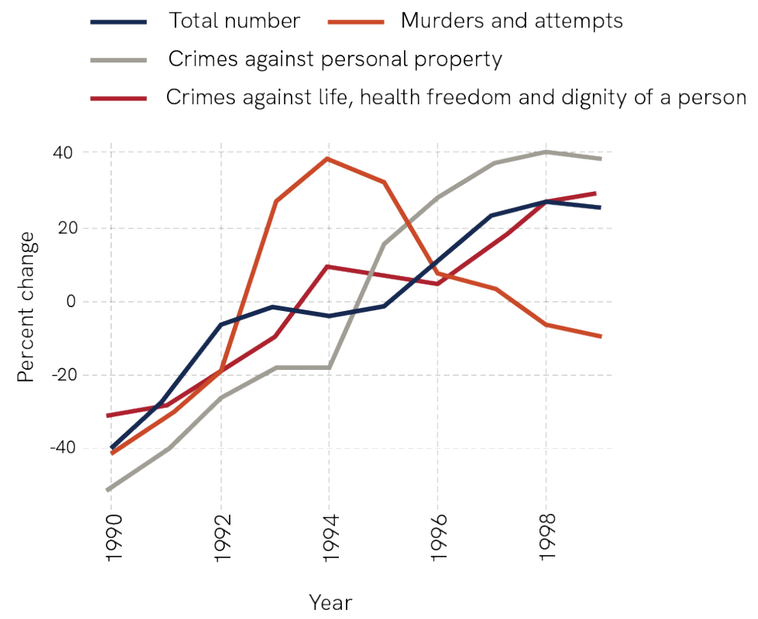
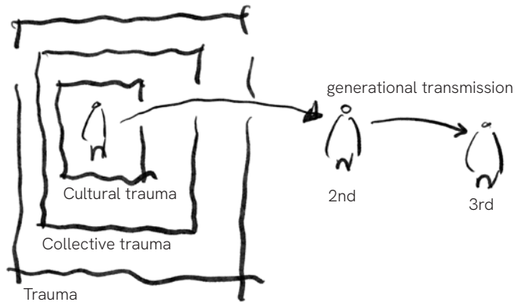


Fig. 21-22: Registered crime numbers in Lithuania 1990-1999.

Fig. 23: Conceptual trauma diagram and its intergenerational transmission.



Trauma

Trauma impacts everyone – ourselves, our friends, our families and our neighbors. One does not necessarily have to encounter it directly to feel its effects (Kolk, 2014). These traumatic experiences leave traces, which can be on larger scales like in our histories, collectives or cultures (Koh, 2021), resulting in historical, collective and cultural trauma. In other situations, the effects may be close to one self, coming from events in our grandparents' and parents' lives that have been passed down to us, making it intergenerational or transgenerational trauma (Gailienė, 2021).

The word trauma originates from the Greek and means wound. Today the word can have several meanings depending on the field it is looked through. In psychology, trauma is "any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitude, behavior and other aspects of functioning" (APA, 2018).

Collective or cultural trauma
For trauma to qualify as collective, it must first involve two or more individuals. Likewise, the shared experience which the trauma is a result of, should to a degree be similar for all individuals. As a collective it is impossible to share an identical experience, so it is important to understand that for the collective, the experience was similar but not identical. Perhaps, a very known example of this are the Jews who were killed during the Holocaust. Many of them were killed, and endured other horrible things, while some survived it. The total experience of all the individuals were not identical, but they have an understanding of the event as a shared experience (Koh, 2021). Another example, which this research is focused on, is the countries that were occupied by the Soviet Union. All those countries shared an experience of sameness, but with small differences which were determined by their cultures values and norms.

If trauma is based on one's identity, ethnicity or culture, it goes beyond collective trauma and into cultural trauma. Cultural trauma is a particular type of collective trauma (Koh, 2021).

The difference between cultural and collective trauma, comes to shine when you think of them through scale. As in fig. 23, collective trauma is the result of an event that happened to a bigger group of people, like the soviet occupation. While cultural trauma is the same trauma that happened to the big group of people, but in some way affected by identity, ethnicity and culture, making it a subgroup of collective trauma. In our case, each country who was once part of the Soviet Union has a wound of cultural trauma, but in whole they suffer from collective trauma.

Cultural trauma tends to be looked at as very dangerous, as it is inert and tends to persist and continue for longer than other forms of trauma, even crossing generational boundaries (Sztompka, 2000). If a cultural trauma is not tamed and transferred to a later generation, it may disturb those individuals' normal psychological development (Gudaitė & Stein, 2014).

Intergenerational and transgenerational trauma
Much like traditions get passed down through families, so can people inherit trauma. Generational trauma, with its subcategories of intergenerational and transgenerational, describes the motion of trauma that passes through generations. The passing of trauma happens through our everyday lives – through biological, environmental, psychological and social means (Gillespie, 2023).

It is important to state that the different research found on the transmission of trauma as a key idea is contradicting. Some studies confirm its existence, others do not, but the results also depend on the research methods used (Gailienė, 2019).

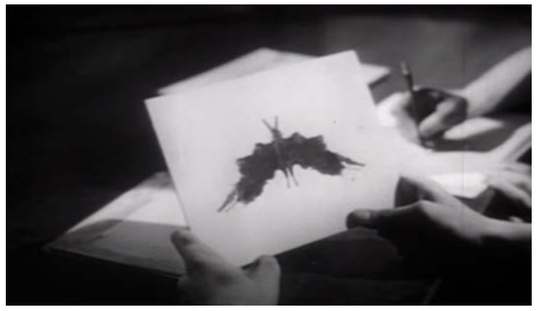
In this research we lean on the studies that confirm the idea that trauma can be passed down through generations. This is based on the observations made by the author, which leans on her upbringing and traditions passed down through her family. Looking from the author's perspective, she is the third generation, in the intergenerational system, which is also known to be called the three-generation phenomenon (Rekašiūtė, 2022).

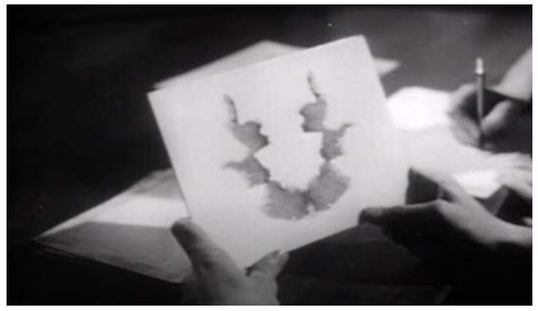
The second and third generation
A study was conducted on the repressed people and their adult children, in means of understanding their health and psychological well-being. The study showed that the second generation tend to be more sensitive and vulnerable, they present more post-traumatic symptoms compared to the general population. "In qualitative interviews, the adult children of repressed persons indicate that, during the years of the occupation, they often experienced fear, anxiety, and discrimination, and they felt that the repression of their parents had an impact on their own lives." (Gailienė, 2019). Studies also show that the repression affected families also passed on positive factors, such as psychological resilience to their children and grandchildren. They gained a "sense of coherence" (Gailienė, 2019).

Other studies on intergenerational transmission of resilience showed that the second and third generation are psychologically healthier and more hopeful. This is strongly linked to the participants' knowledge of their family history (Kazlauskas & Želvienė, 2015). In the cases of patients who did not independently understand the link of their trauma to the past of political repression, had a certain defensiveness regarding the collective trauma. They expressed denial and dissociation, as well as made compensatory strategies and had regressive reactions in relation to the subject being mentioned at therapy. Within therapy for many individuals with an upbringing at the time of repression the main help was needed in confronting their family history. It was also about restoring a constructive relationship between the ego and authority, because the regime had often resulted in a lack of inner authority in patients (Gailienė, 2019).

There are now new disciplines, such as neuroscience, psychopathology and neurobiology, that have taught us that trauma produces actual physiological changes. We now know that trauma affects the brain area that communicates the physical, embodied feeling of being alive (Kolk, 2014).

Fig. 24: Snippets from the documentary showing the Rorschach test.





This hospital is one of the many for the caring treatment of the psychoneurotic soldier. These are the casualties of the spirit, the troubled mind.

Men who are damaged emotionally...born and bred in peace. Educated to hate war. They were overnight plunged into sudden and terrible situations. Every man has his breaking point and these in the fulfillment of their duties as soldiers were forced beyond the limit of human endurance.

Here are men who tremble... Men who cannot sleep... Men with pains that are nonetheless real because they are of mental origin... Men who cannot remember... Paralyzed men, whose paralysis is dictated by the mind... however different the symptoms, these things they have in common - unceasing fear and apprehension, a sense of impending disaster, a feeling of hopelessness and utter isolation.

Transcription of the introduction of the documentary "Let There Be Light" by John Huston, 1980, on the treatment of trauma experienced by soldiers returning from war.

Fig. 25: Snippets from the documentary featuring a patient who was experiencing momentary emotional swings. He thought he didn't deserve to go back to his family.

“It is significant because memories are an intrinsic part of us - they are the database or the content of the self. They ground it in a remembered reality that constrains what the self can be now and in the future, and what it could possibly have been in the past. Because of this, memories are not some sort of mental wallpaper that merely provide a backdrop for the self. They are alive, free, sometimes alien, occasionally dangerous mental representations that can overwhelm as easily as they fulfill.” (Conway, 2006)

When considering the history of trauma, there was a time when it was not extensively studied, and individuals were simply described as suffering from memories (Kolk, 2014).

A notable aspect of this historical perspective relates to soldiers returning from war. These soldiers, appearing to struggle with adapting to normal life, often engaged in a kind of pretense, hoping to reconnect with their past selves. Eventually, many would encounter situations triggering anger, bringing back memories from their wartime experiences (Kolk, 2014). Among those returning from the Vietnam War, a common pattern was withdrawal and detachment. In 1941, psychiatrist Abram Kardiner termed this condition ‘traumatic neurosis,’ which has since evolved into what we now know as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Bessel van der Kolk, who began his career as a psychiatrist in 1978 at the Boston Veterans Administration Clinic, encountered challenges in diagnosing veterans due to the limited understanding of trauma in the textbooks of that era. One of his patients, Bill, a Vietnam veteran, became the first participant in Kolk’s nightmare study. Bill, after the birth of his first child, experienced a sudden and overwhelming recollection of witnessing dying children in Vietnam when he heard his baby cry.

As part of the study, Bill underwent a Rorschach test, where he had to interpret images from inkblots. This test is depicted in a scene from the 1980 movie on Fig. 7. During the test, Bill claimed to see the children who had perished in Vietnam within the inkblots. It’s important to note that the nightmare study included not only Bill but also numerous other veterans. The findings revealed that traumatized individuals tend to project their trauma onto their surroundings.The study also showed that trauma affects the imagination. Five out of twenty one veterans saw nothing in the ink, because they had lost their capacity to let their minds play (Kolk, 2014).

Fig. 26: Snippets from the documentary featuring a patient who was unable to look the therapist in the eyes due to shame from the experienced events.

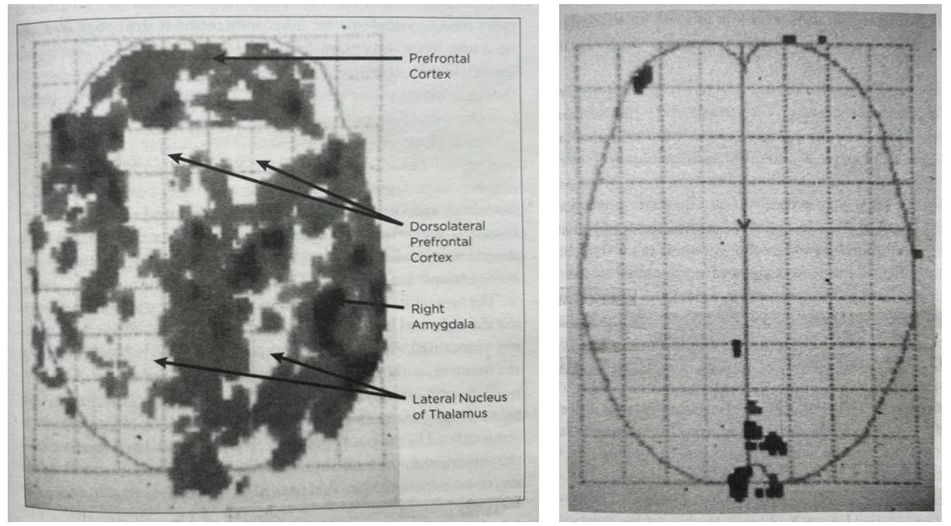


Fig. 27-28: fMRI scan of Stan Lawrence’s (left) and Ute Lawrence’s (right) brain in a flashback.

Trauma affects everyone very individually, for some it stays as a purely mental burden for others it is also physical. To understand how the brain and the body is affected, let’s look into the main pain points in those areas.

Impaired time perception
In many cases trauma is something that challenges your perception of time. It can disrupt the function of your frontal brain region, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), which is responsible for distinguishing between the past, present and future experiences (Kolk, 2014). This can many times lead to flashbacks where the brain fails to understand whether the traumatic event is occurring in the past or present.

Fragmented memory
Trauma can also affect the lower part of the brain, the thalamus, which combines sensory information to create what we know as memories. As a result, traumatic memories are often encoded as fragmented sensory imprints rather than a cohesive narrative with a clear timeline. This can lead to intrusive images, sounds, and physical sensations haunting the individual (Kolk, 2014).

Depersonalization and dissociation
As a response to an event, individuals may experience depersonalization, where the mind goes blank. This reaction, akin to dissociation, involves momentarily disconnecting from one’s physical self, effectively shutting off the brain (Kolk, 2014).

Many times the reactions individuals have to trauma is rooted in their past. It often has a correlation to their upbringing and patterns of reactions. How exactly these key points look on the brain can be seen through a case of Ute and Stan Lawrence.

Picturing the brain
To provide a visual illustration of how trauma affects the brain, I’ll share a case from the book “The Body Keeps the Score.” This case involves a couple in their forties, Stan and Ute Lawrence, and the impact of a car crash in 1999. Stan and Ute, residents of Ontario, were en route to a business meeting in Detroit when they encountered a dense fog, severely limiting their visibility. Stan had to abruptly slam the brakes to avoid colliding with a truck, causing their car to end up sideways on the highway. In the next moment, several cars collided into each other, with Stan and Ute’s vehicle being the thirteenth in an eighty-seven-car pileup—a tragic incident that became the worst road disaster in Canadian history.

Recalling the event, Stan attempted to open the door and window but was unsuccessful due to the severe damage to the car. He vividly remembered a girl screaming in a car that caught fire, and despite efforts by a truck driver to extinguish the flames, the girl’s life could

not be saved. The truck driver then broke the window of Stan and Ute's car, helping Stan get out. Ute, frozen in her seat, was eventually lifted out with assistance and taken to the hospital in an ambulance. Fortunately, aside from a few cuts, they were physically unharmed (Kolk, 2014).

After the immediate danger had passed and they were back home, the aftermath of the trauma began to manifest. Fearful of sleep, plagued by constant jumpiness, and on edge, Stan and Ute turned to alcohol to numb their fears. Intrusive images from the crash haunted them, accompanied by persistent questions about alternative scenarios—what if they had left earlier or stopped for gas? After enduring this for about three months, they sought professional help (Kolk, 2014).

During that period, the medical professionals aimed to examine the brains of Ute and Stan before suggesting any treatment. Employing images, sounds, smells, and various sensations, the doctors induced flashbacks in both patients, aligning with the intended outcome for the fMRI scan (Kolk, 2014). In order to understand the scans, the most important thing to remember is that certain parts of the brain are in charge of certain functions.

The case of Stan Lawrence
In Fig. X, the scan of Stan reveals asymmetrical brain activity, with more gray mass on one side and diminished activity in large areas on the left. Additionally, a significant region in the front of the brain, known as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), exhibits notable differences. The DLPFC plays a crucial role in facilitating our ability to navigate between past, present, and future experiences, serving as a "timekeeper," as described by Kolk. In this scan, it suggests that the timekeeping function collapses during flashbacks. Stan's brain fails to distinguish whether the traumatic event occurred in the past or is currently happening, even within the MRI machine long after the incident.

Further analysis indicates a lack of activity in the lower part of the brain, specifically in the right and left thalamus. The thalamus acts as a "cook," combining sensations from the ears, eyes, and skin to create a sensory "soup" for our memory. This sheds light on why traumatic memories are often recalled as fragmented sensory imprints—images, sounds, and physical sensations—rather than a cohesive narrative with a clear timeline (Kolk, 2014, page 79).

Drawing connections to the treatment of soldiers, from the documentary, a recurring pattern emerges in therapy sessions where therapists prompt individuals to recount their experiences. When men initiate their stories and encounter obstacles, therapists often intervene with questions like "what happened next?" aimed at encouraging a linear narrative of the traumatic event. However, many individuals struggle to provide a coherent answer and instead recount the story in fragments, lacking a cohesive structure (Huston, 1980).

The case of Ute Lawrence
When looking at Ute Lawrence's scan, it is quite a contrast to Stans. Ute's response to the traumatic event was to go numb; her mind went blank, resulting in minimal activity shown in the scans. This reaction is termed depersonalization (Kolk, 2014). In the documentary, there are instances where men similarly zone out when asked about their past, momentarily disconnecting from their physical selves and staring into nothingness, effectively shutting off their brains (Huston, 1980).
Later, when both Stan and Ute began treatment, they both had a very different road towards repair.Traditional talk therapy proved ineffective for Ute, as discussions about the event caused her to go blank. However, through conversations, Kolk discerned the origin of Ute's coping mechanism—blanking out. This mechanism had its roots in her childhood; when her mother shouted at her, Ute learned to blank out her mind. Years later, this coping mechanism resurfaced during the crash (Kolk, 2014).

For Ute, Stan, and others in similar situations, the primary challenge lies in reestablishing a connection with the present and rediscovering a sense of aliveness. As many traumatized people tend to get stuck in the past, and feel truly alive in the moment of the traumatizing event, their biggest goal now is to exercise being in the present (Kolk, 2014). Despite the challenges posed by contemporary technology and constant stimuli, this remains the essential path forward.

To fully and securely live in the present, the abandoned brain structures need to be reintegrated. Bessel van der Kolk introduces two approaches for achieving this— the bottom-up and top-down methods, which will be further elucidated in a later chapter.

Trauma and the body

For numerous decades, Western Sciences largely overlooked the connection between the body and mind, despite its prominent practice in traditional healing systems in countries like India and China. Today, recognizing this link has revolutionized the comprehension of trauma and recovery.

In times of crisis, the struggle for survival not only happens in our brains but also the rest of our bodies, usually felt in your gut and heart.

As in the example of Stan and Ute, in the situation of a horrible car crash, we have three states to go to, as a result of our situation. Taking the example of Stan and Ute facing a devastating car crash, our responses typically fall into three states, as elucidated by Stephen Porges: i) social engagement, ii) fight or flight, and iii) freeze or collapse. When feeling threatened, our natural inclination is to activate the first state, seeking support and comfort from those around us in a tribal manner. If this proves futile and the danger intensifies, the body transitions to the second state, where one either confronts the danger or flees to safety. Ultimately, if escape is impossible, the body resorts to self-preservation through shutdown, resulting in the freeze or collapse state (Kolk, 2014).

Returning to Ute, her immediate response to danger was an instant freeze, while Stan navigated through the first state and, with assistance from the truck driver, fought his way out of the car to aid Ute.

Fortunately, our body instinctively reacts in these ways, often realizing the extent of our actions only after the event. The challenge arises in the aftermath, where individuals may neglect addressing their trauma and remain active in the same state as before, perpetually trapped in a cyclical pattern.

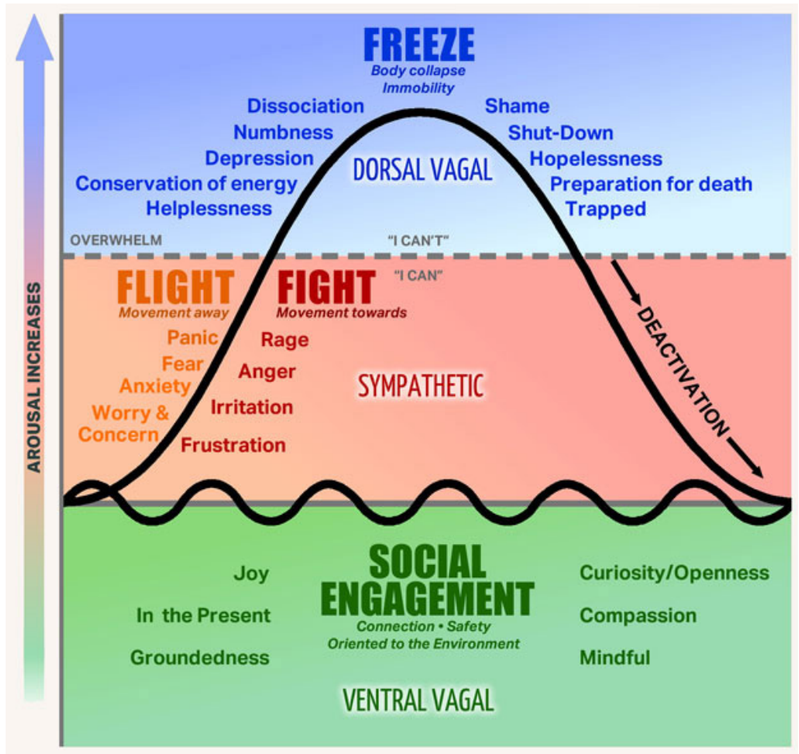


Fig. 29: Diagram of Stephan Proges' Polyvagal Theory

Towards healing or repair?

"It does not make sense to talk about healing in such situations but rather of repairing wounds from an historical event" (Koh, 2021). When discussing the process of addressing trauma, there is a divergence in literature where some employ the term "healing," while others critique it and prefer "repair" or "recovery". Just as when one sustains an injury and forms a wound, remnants of that wound persist either physically or psychologically. I want to emphasize that using the term "healing" does not imply a return to the pre-event state; instead, it signifies overcoming the persistent concerns and gaining confidence in one's "new" self within their environment. Various approaches have been developed for healing from trauma in general, and we will explore three of them.

Mary R. Harvey
The ideas behind the ecological view of trauma rests in understanding that trauma can be healed not only clinically but also through the environment the individual resides in. The author states that "...vulnerability to victimization and individually varied response and recovery patterns are multi-determined by interactions among three sets of mutually influential factors" (Harvey, 1996, page 6) – a person, the event and the environment. Together the factors define the person-community ecosystem, within which an individual experiences, copes with and makes meaning of potentially traumatizing events (Harvey, 1996).

She highlights seven steps towards recovery. 1) Authority over the remembering process, 2) Integration of memory and affect, 3) Affect tolerance, 4) Symptom mastery, 5) Self-esteem and self-cohesion, 6) Safe attachment and 7) Meaning-making and pin-points that some individuals have managed to recover without clinical intervention.

She proposes trauma-focused interventions as a way to repair the lack of clinical resources. Interventions that would enhance the person-environment relationship, by reducing isolation, fostering social competence, supporting positive coping and promoting belongingness (Harvey, 1996).

Bessel van der Kolk
In this book, Kolk presents avenues of recovering from trauma. He states that one size does not fit all and recovery is shaped by the individual. He proposes a top-down and bottom-up approach towards recovery. The top-down approach implies talking, reconnecting with others, and allowing ourselves to know and understand what is going on with us, while processing the memories of the trauma. The bottom-up approach implies letting the body have experiences that contradict the helplessness, rage or collapse that is the result of trauma. In the middle, there is the clinical approach of taking medicine that shuts down inappropriate alarms, or by using other technology changing the way the brain organizes information (Kolk, 2014, page 3). In his book he specifies bottom up approaches as examples of yoga, theater and movement and dancing.

Danute Gailiene
Based on a review of various sources, Danute Gailiene perceives the path to recovery as initiated by the crucial act of acknowledgment. Gailiene highlights the significant role of the third generation in fostering societal recovery. Through mediums such as art, theater, film, and other reflective works, this generation has contributed to a multifaceted examination of the past from diverse perspectives. Gailiene emphasizes that a substantial step in the recovery process involves not only acknowledging the occurrence of traumatic events but also recognizing that they are now in the past, while affirming the injustice of those events. This acknowledgment is deemed essential not only at the individual level but also within the broader scope of society (Rekašiūtė, 2020, Gailienė, 2021, 2019).

All three sources see recovery as the ability to come back and fully live in the present. To become the leader of your own memories, acknowledge the events, let your body feel what is necessary and understand that reconnecting with others is a crucial element in recovery. Likewise all sources empower individuals to exercise the ability to go back to memories of the past, in order to work with them in the present to be able to recover from them in the future.

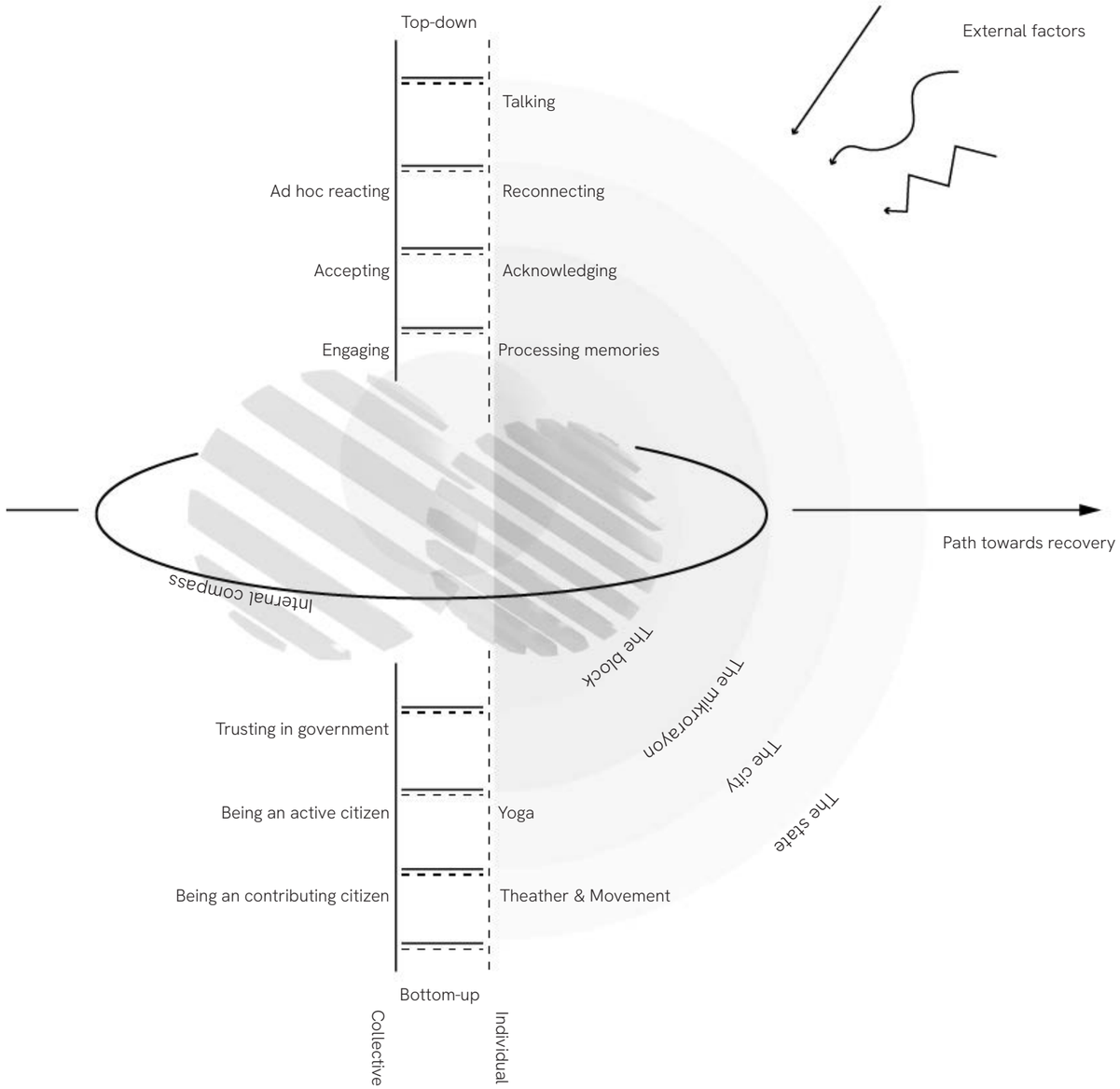


Fig. 30: Overview diagram aiming to connect the different paths of recovery with the environment.

Participation

So how have the historical events shaped the population and how does participation in society look like today? Let's see...

During the Soviet Union participating in society was allowed but under strict rules, you had to act and behave in a certain way, and in no means could you express yourself freely if it was not within the frame of the regime. No citizens had the right to own anything and the knowledge of what happened outside of the Soviet Union was limited. Architecture manipulated the population to all be seen as equal, again pushing you towards a certain path, the one of becoming a good Soviet citizen.

When the country became independent, all the rules that were pressed on you under the regime were suddenly gone, and that turned into chaos. There were no rules. Self-expression was allowed and it was usually expressed as violence, which later became clear to be one of the initial signs of trauma. Privatization and the market economy turned some into winners while others lost greatly and still to this day live on the nostalgia of the Soviet times. People started emigrating in search for a better life and a new goal was set - becoming part of the European Union.

Today, Lithuania is part of the European Union and NATO, which gives us at least a little hope that we will be protected in case Russia chooses to expand its invasion on Ukraine towards the Baltic countries. Likewise, participation in society now means voting, protesting against new laws and marching through the city center on different occasions. Self-expression is now welcomed, and if you feel unseen, there is always the option to travel to the west to experience true freedom. At the same time, trauma still lingers in the air, and regional disparities have come to see the daylight. Likewise, the past looks you in the eye everyday, as 60% of the population goes home to one of the modernistic blocks (Euroblogas, 2020), that was built under the Soviet Union, reminding them daily of an oppressed past.

So even with a positive progression of participation in society, there are still elements that have been holding on since the Soviet era. There still exists a huge mistrust in society. It is not only towards state institutions but likewise fellow citizens (LRT, 2022). There is a mixed feeling towards being positive towards the future in the country, depending on the geographical position. Likewise, around 47.8% of Lithuanians feel unheard by authorities and don't feel valued in their contributions. There is also a feeling that there is not enough promotion of citizen participation in the government-led initiatives (Giedraitytė et al., 2022).

Authors reflection

What role can urbanists play in addressing trauma? The specific methods and approaches remain unclear, necessitating further research and analysis.

Before we jump further and look at the micro-districts from a closer look, there are already things we can summarize as concluding points. From this section we learned that the country's rough past is something the population is still struggling with, and it becomes especially visible through participating in society. Mistrust towards authorities and fellow citizens is still present. From a trauma recovery point, healing can happen on many different levels and through diverse approaches, but as urbanists, we cannot force this upon people. We can only do what we do best, reshape the built environment. This means that our approach going further will be leaning on the idea that healing can happen through public spaces. It is still important to consider the factors of private spaces, when thinking of reshaping the public ones.

Similarly, it's crucial to recognize that the environment plays a pivotal role in one's recovery process. It should foster a sense of comfort, provide opportunities to connect with others to build community, and enable individuals to establish a sense of belonging. In the upcoming chapter we will go in depth with the analysis of Vidzgirio, and through spatial mapping try to answer whether Vidzgiris already offers these objectives, and if not, what can be done to improve the space.

Meso

In the upcoming chapter, we'll delve deeper into micro-districts, examining their composition, contents, and the evolution of their original concept versus their current reality. We'll visually dissect them to comprehend their various components and explore their potential contributions to trauma recovery.

Micro-districts

When examining the different cities of Lithuania, one can easily identify the various micro-districts by their repetitive patterns of residential buildings, greenery, and locations on the outskirts of city centers. Taking a look at the six cases presented on the right page featuring cities like Vilnius, Klaipeda, Marijampole, and Siauliai, it's clear that while they share common characteristics, micro-districts come in diverse shapes and sizes. Google Maps images also display a range of residential buildings beyond those discussed previously. The initial 5-story residential buildings were just the beginning; subsequent developments introduced different series and taller structures, like the 12-story building in Fabijoniskes, Vilnius, shown in the second picture.

We'll explore the essential elements defining micro-districts through the case of Vidzgiris in Alytus. To start, let's discuss the core principles of urban planning.

A 1-2-3-4 system

Micro-districts were conceived as integral components within a larger urban framework. Typically, a city's core would be centralized around elements discussed in the preceding chapter: prominent central squares and abundant green spaces. Surrounding the city center would be districts accommodating roughly 25,000 to 50,000 residents. Within these districts, micro-districts like those in Alytus or other cities would emerge, varying in shape and size but often identifiable by their repetitive layouts. Micro-districts typically housed between 6,000 to 10,000 residents. Lastly, these micro-districts were composed of housing groups, each capable of accommodating up to 2,000 residents, creating a system akin to nested Russian dolls.

This urban structure also reflected a hierarchy of needs. The city center was envisioned as a place residents would visit sporadically, while district centers would be frequented more regularly, and everyday life would unfold within the micro-districts. Other facilities such as recreational areas, specialized spaces, and industrial zones would be strategically situated in the intermediate spaces of this decentralized system.

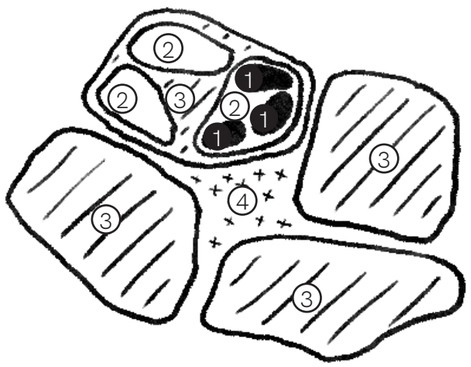


Fig. 31: 1-2-3-4 step system of cultural and domestic services in the city. (1) Housing group, (2) Micro-district, (3) District and (4) City. Sketch made by author based on (Dremaite, 2023).

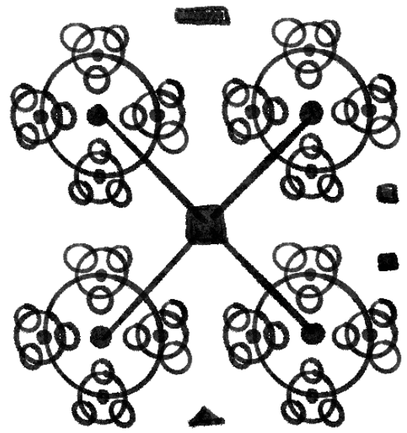


Fig. 32: Step system of services: daily, periodical and episodical with:

Sketch made by author based on (Dremaite, 2023).

Terminology

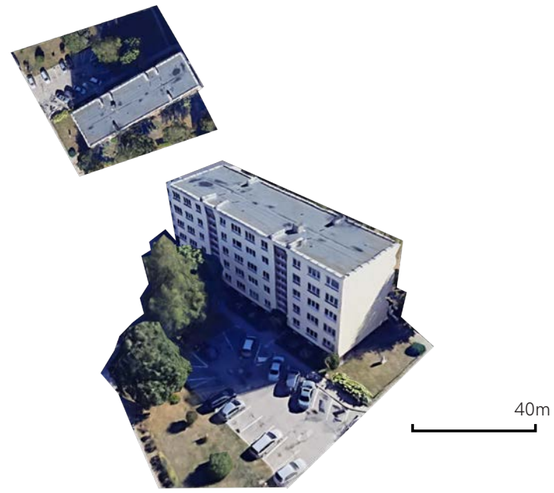
Before delving into the micro-district of Vidzgiris, it's essential to grasp the meaning of certain terms within the context of Lithuania.

City
Alytus, situated in the southern region of Lithuania, serves as a prominent regional center. Initially established as a resort town, it underwent transformation into an industrial hub during periods of occupation. Despite this transition, the city maintains its connection to the Nemunas River and boasts extensive access to verdant forests and urban parks. Presently, Alytus seeks to define its identity, overseen by local municipal governance comprising a mayor and diverse departments responsible for various city services.

District
Alytus is segmented into distinct districts like Vidzgiris, Putinai, and Dainava, each delineated by administrative boundaries encompassing residential, commercial, and natural areas, including forests and protected zones. At this level, local groups, associations, or non-profit organizations may operate and initiate community activities.

Micro-district
Micro-districts, integrated within larger districts, are residential enclaves planned and constructed between 1960 and 1990. Designed to form self-sustaining communities within the urban fabric, they are often characterized by uniform architectural styles. At this scale, local groups, associations, or non-profit organizations also play a role in community engagement and initiatives.

Housing group
Housing groups represent clusters of residential buildings or houses within specific areas, often sharing communal spaces like front or backyards. The size of these groups varies based on micro-district layouts. While residents may recognize one another, interactions may be limited. Meetings between housing group representatives from each building occur at this scale.



Block
Blocks are individual residential volumes, varying in size and layout based on micro-district planning. If looked at the 5-storey buildings, they typically house two stairways serving around 30 apartments. They house residents who elect representatives responsible for advocating on their behalf. Semi-private zones, like stairwells, are shared among homeowners within each block.

Fig. 33-37: Images derived from google maps.

Micro-district characteristics

Upon closer analysis of several micro-districts, some of which are made visible on the following page, certain characteristics emerge.

Prefabricated residential buildings
The primary feature of a micro-district is its prefabricated residential buildings, which vary in type and height. Vidzgiris, for example, encompasses buildings ranging from 5 to 10 stories, each with its unique smaller details, such as external stairway details, main entrance roofs or windows.

Front-and backyard
Depending on the composition of the residential blocks, a front and backyard might be formed. In Vidzgirio, residential buildings are positioned to create distinct front and backyards. The front yard typically serves as parking space and block entrances, while the backyard offers a quieter green space, sometimes blending with parking areas.

Schools, kindergartens and outdoor areas
Micro-districts are equipped with schools and kindergartens, often named after the district itself, such as “9th Vidzgirio Gymnasium.” Vidzgiris boasts multiple schools and kindergartens, accompanied by athletic stadiums and basketball courts for recreational activities.

Garages
Between blocks, various types of garages are found, providing safe parking and gathering spots for residents. These spaces serve as places for car maintenance and social interactions.

Recreational spaces
Transitional green spaces between residential buildings facilitate pedestrian movement and community interaction. These green pathways offer residents a pleasant environment for commuting between different areas within the micro-district.

Commercial zones
Some micro-districts include commercial zones with grocery stores and essential services. More specialized needs are met in district or city centers.

Surrounding roads
Micro-districts are bordered by main roads connecting them to the broader city infrastructure. Secondary roads within the micro-district provide access to residential parking areas.

Surrounding areas
Surrounding micro-districts, public green spaces like forests, and commercial areas influence the context of a micro-district. In Vidzgiris, neighboring areas include a city park, an unfinished district, and commercial zones dominated by chain stores.

Of course, with a more in-depth analysis of the micro-districts, not only in Lithuania, we would be able to find more detailed characteristics of the districts. However, for the present moment, these points offer a sufficient understanding of the key features inherent in micro-districts.

Fig. 38-43: Micro-districts from different cities (Vilnius, Klaipeda, Marijampole and Šauliai). Images from google maps.

Vidzgiris, Alytus

For a more in-depth analysis of the micro-district, we will look at the micro-district of Vidzgiris in Alytus. We will deconstruct it through different means in the following pages, but for the quick overviews of what surrounds the micro-district and a reminder of its location, I invite you to look at these two maps.

Fig. 44: Map, from Google Maps, of Vidzgiris with sketched details.

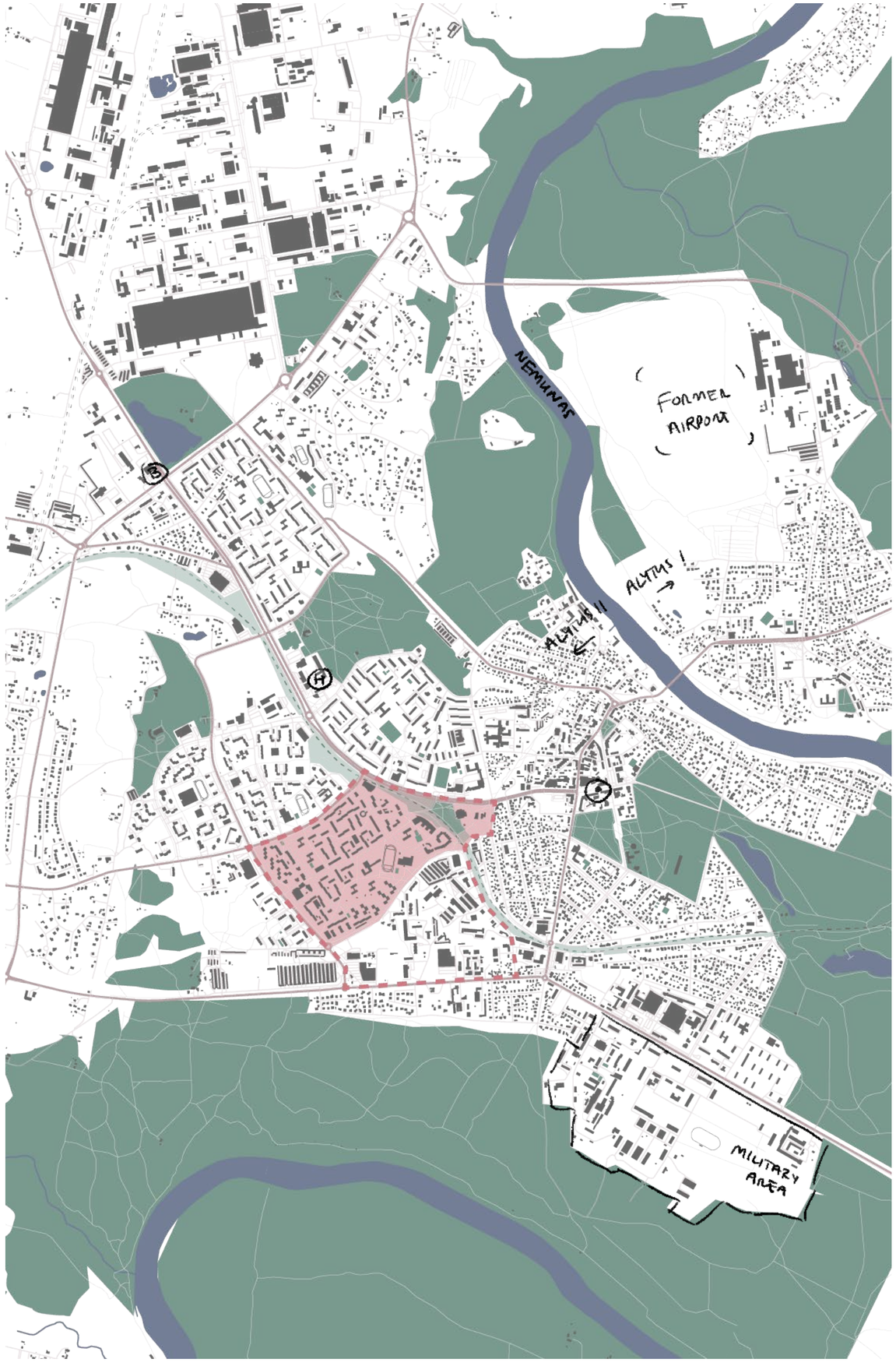


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Fig. 45: Map (on the next page) of Vidzgiris district and micro-district.

Vidzgiris district
Vidzgiris micro-district

Volume analysis

The map illustrates the distribution of residential structures highlighted in blue, alongside various other volumes, in red, such as garages, transformer stations, and public amenities like commercial outlets, kindergartens, and schools.

Within the residential zones, Vidzgiris predominantly features 5-storey Khrushchevka buildings. The tallest structures, reaching up to 10 storeys, are interspersed among other volumes. Notably, a cluster of four 10-storey buildings stands alone to the west.Other facilities typically range from 1 to 4 storeys and are interconnected with open exterior spaces, although these are not delineated in detail on the map, but discernible by their absence. Despite the apparent uniformity in building heights, closer inspection reveals a diversity in architectural aesthetics. It might not be big differences, but upon closer look, facade or balcony colors, difference in window sizes and styles, stairway external details and material details, some constructed from brick rather than prefabricated concrete units.

The analysis highlighted a major concern: the extensive presence of 5-storey structures lacking diversity in aesthetics and the building volumes, due to their form, lack engagement with the surrounding public spaces. There's a pressing need to visually enhance them and establish clear distinctions for better navigation. Moreover, numerous underutilized facade spaces offer opportunities for converting them into green facades to bolster climate resilience or serving as canvases for local artists.

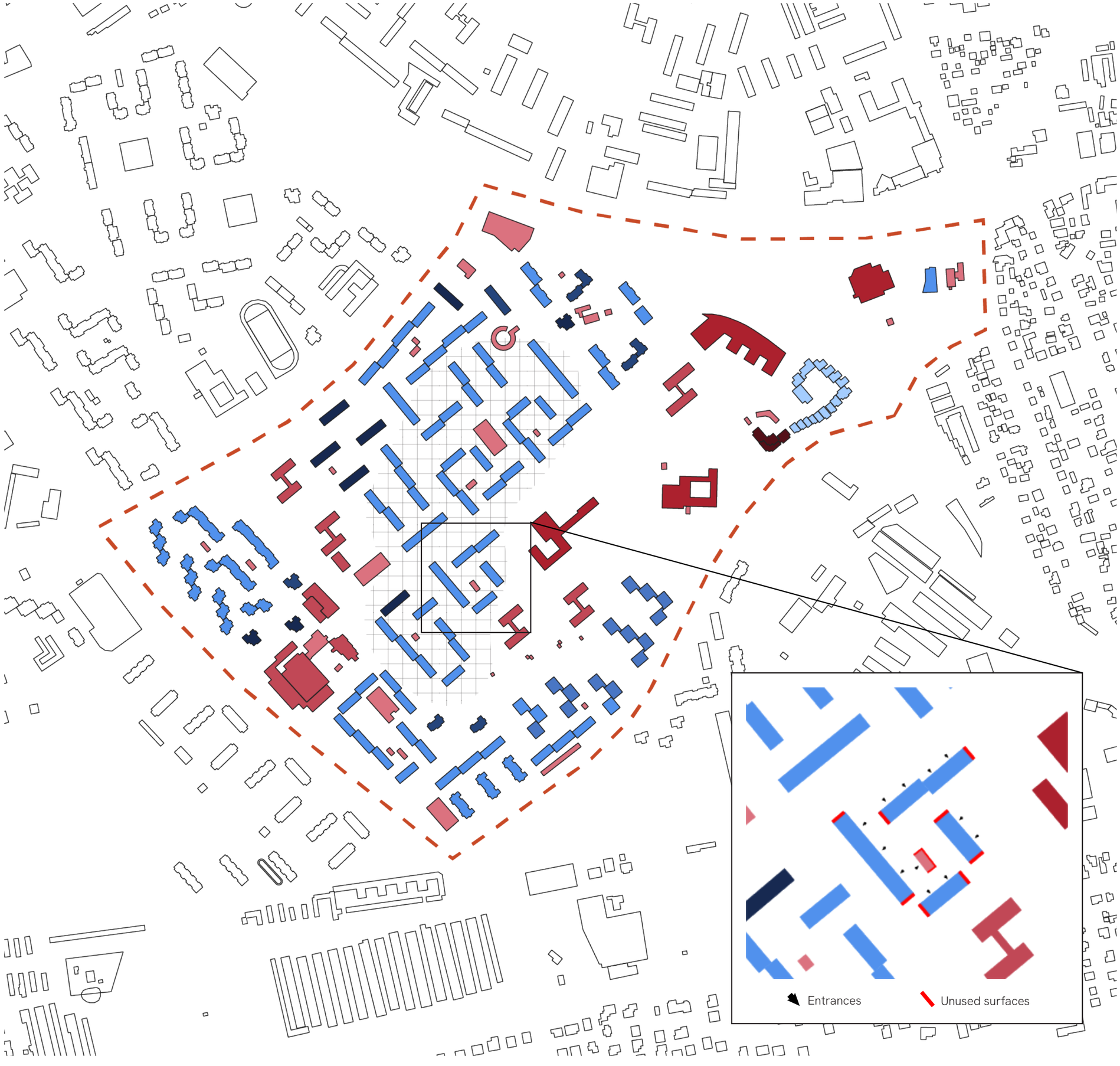

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Fig. 46: Height map of Vidzgiris micro-district

Residential

- 2-2.5 storey (single family homes)
- 5 storey building
- 6 storey building
- 9 storey building
- 10 storey building

Other

- 1 storey
- 2 storeys
- 3 storeys
- 4 storeys

9 and 10-storey volumes

Fig. 47-48: Highlighting Points A and E. Point A offers a vantage point overlooking the school's sports facilities with a backdrop of the 10-storey buildings, while Point E showcases a unique 9-storey structure featuring distinctive windows for the stairway, a feature exclusive to this particular building in Vidzgiris.

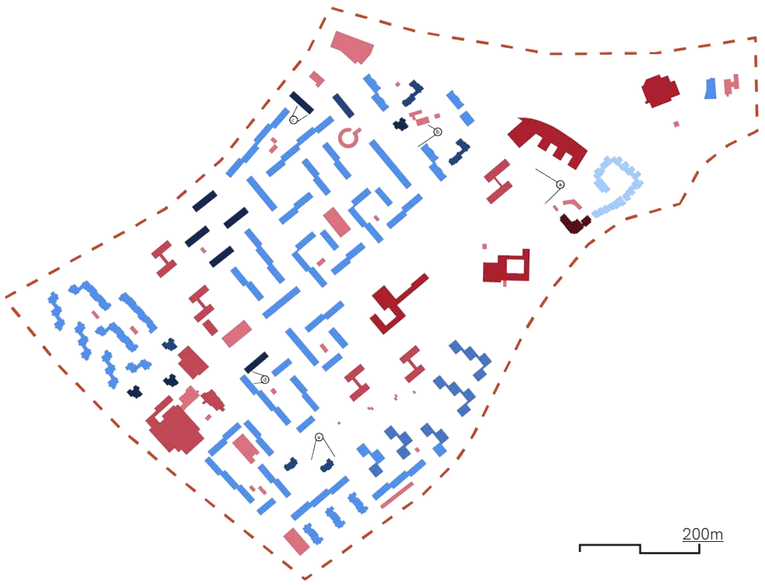

Fig. 49: Map showcasing where the different pictures of the 9 and 10 storey buildings are taken.

Fig. 50: Featuring Point C. A 9-10 storey building is situated in one of the more challenging topographical locations, as depicted in the image. This structure also has the distinct green balconies.

Fig. 51-52: Featuring Point D and B. Showing the how tall volumes connect to the landscape, with 1-storey commercial buildings, that was initially garages, and the 5-storey volumes in the back. The picture to the left also showcases the merged 10-storey and 5-storey building.

5-storey volumes

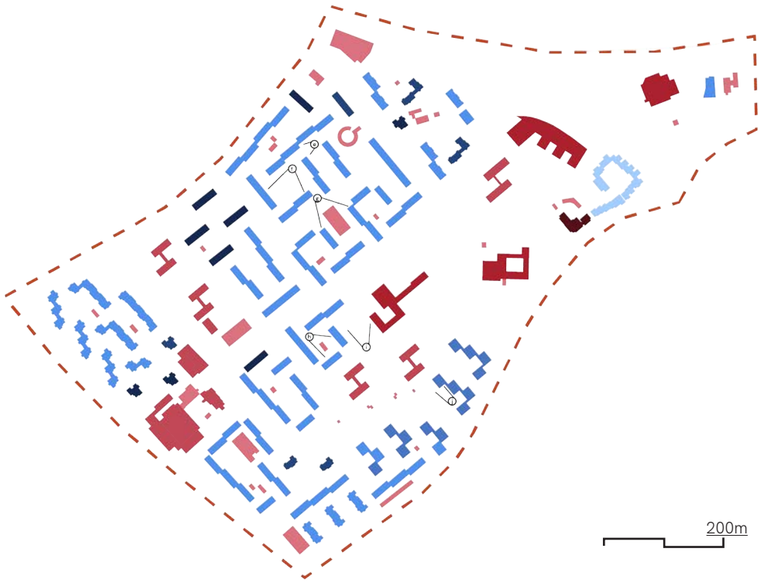

Fig. 53: Map showcasing where the different pictures of the 5-storey buildings were made.

Fig. 56: Featuring point I. This segment reveals the pedestrian street nestled between the 5-storey blocks and the school. The combination of typography and greenery provides a charming disguise for the somewhat dull and chilly facades during the spring season.

Fig. 54-55: Showing point H and E. The image on the right presents two building blocks, with one having undergone renovation, now adorned in a fresh coat of green paint, while the other, situated behind the transformer, remains unchanged from its original construction. Notably, neither of these buildings engages with the adjacent public space.

Fig. 57-58: Showing point F and G. On the left, we observe a common transformation of public space into a sizable parking area for residents. Meanwhile, on the right image, we witness the appearance of the garages from one angle. When approached from this side, the parking garages appear as a simple platform nestled between the blocks.

Other volumes

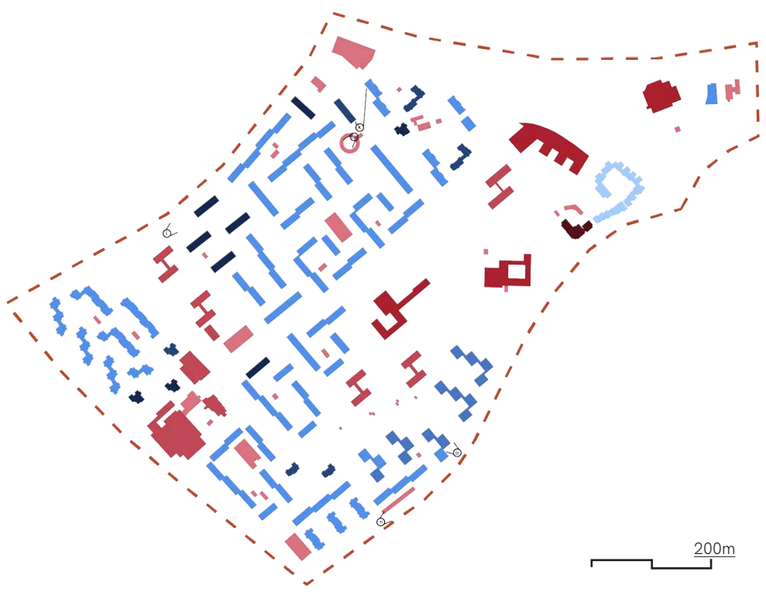

Fig. 59: Map showcasing where the different pictures of the 5-storey buildings were made.

Fig. 60-61: Showing point K and L. The first image depicts the commercial chain store, Norfa, while the second image showcases the local shoe repair shop. These small-scale establishments emerged after independence, as locals took the initiative to establish businesses catering to essential needs.

Fig. 62-63: Showing point M and N. Both images illustrate garages, with one featuring a round design, while the other presents a linear volume configuration.

Fig. 64: Featuring point O. Another local shop, this time a grocery store.

Mobility

The map illustrates the various modes of mobility within Vidzgirio micro-district and the adjacent railway park. A defining characteristic of the micro-district is the presence of main roads encircling the area, highlighted in orange. However, what sets this micro-district apart is the existence of secondary roads that link it to various parking entrances. Primary pedestrian pathways are situated in the interstitial spaces, connecting several key public facilities. Further details are provided on the following page. Notably, the city's only well-connected bicycle lane runs alongside the railway park. Regrettably, no bicycle lanes have been identified within the Vidzgiris micro-district.

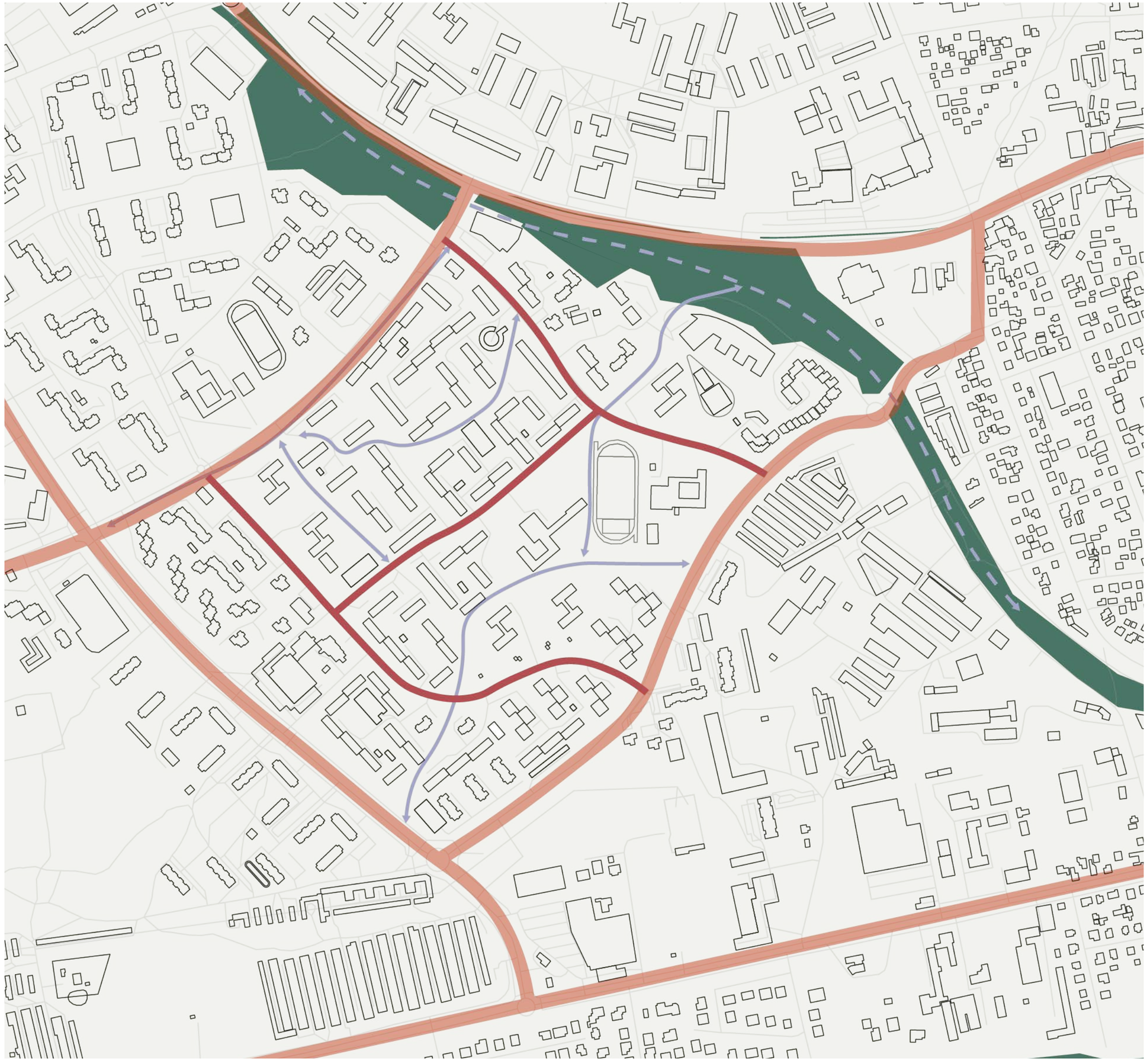

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Fig. 65: Map of mobilities in Vidzgiris, Alytus.

- Car, main road
- Car, secondary road
- Pedestrian, main paths
- Pedestrian and cyclists, main path

Functions and green zones

The map illustrates the functions and selected green spaces within the Vidzgiris micro-district. Functions, including three main commercial zones and smaller local stores dispersed throughout. Additionally, four distinct H-shaped kindergartens and two higher education schools, each equipped with nearby sports facilities like stadiums and basketball courts, can be identified.Almost every other courtyard houses a transformer, while garages are scattered more loosely.

In terms of green areas, the railway park serves as a noise barrier and connector for the micro-district and the city, while other green spaces vary in connectivity, with some extending further than others. Courtyards are primarily dominated by parking, with only one exception. Larger green zones have potential for various activities but are currently underutilized, mainly serving pedestrian traffic and hosting a few benches.

The analysis reveals a notable absence of connectivity among the current green spaces. Not only are they disconnected, but those existing between blocks are solely utilized for transit, lacking sufficient activities for alternative use. It's regrettable since these spaces, untouched by car traffic nor primarily occupied by parking, hold immense potential for transformation and connection. The crucial question revolves around the nature of this transformation and its feasibility in establishing connectivity among them.

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Fig. 66: Map of functions and greens spaces in Vidzgiris, Alytus.

Used and unsued zones

The map showcases the used and unused spaces within the micro-district. It builts on our recent map, on green spaces and functionality, as it sees a correlation between the main green spaces, connecting pedestrian mobility in the micro-district, and actively used spaces. Main used spaces are centered around the main connecting green space, which stretches between the railway linear park and the other end of the micro-district. However, there's a notable gap where this green space fails to connect to any existing extensive green areas, suggesting potential for creating a new destination, particularly considering the plain open space and utilized garage rooftops.

The other green space situated between the blocks, devoid of attachment to any established green system, appears devoid of activity, lacking even basic amenities like benches for resting. This predominantly green area holds the potential for comprehensive transformation, with consideration for the unused facades of the 5-storey building blocks and the vast garage rooftop, seen as point "G" in the initial analysis.

Based on this assessment, it becomes evident that there's a need to enhance the connectivity between existing internal green spaces within the micro-district and to establish some form of destination. While one side is connected to the railway linear park, the other side appears lacking. This leads us to the question posed in our personal reflection: does the current spatial configuration of Vidzgiris micro-district offer any sense of comfort? The photomontage highlights deficiencies such as the absence of benches, active communal spaces beyond sports facilities connected to schools, and a dearth of community gathering areas apart from the garages, where gatherings of men are common. Moreover, the spaces in between lack identity, making it challenging to foster any sense of belonging.

The primary concern revolves around how to improve the existing green spaces and soft mobility connections within the micro-district. To address this, we turn to a case study in Moliérebuurt, located south of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, for insights and potential solutions.

Fig. 67: Map of used and unused spaces in Vidzgiris, Alytus.

Case study: Moliérebuurt

As a design exercise, done during the studio intensive of Design of the Urban Fabrics, a similar case, of a neighbourhood or housing group was found in the Netherlands. More precisely, a housing group in Molierebuurt, an area in Rotterdam South.

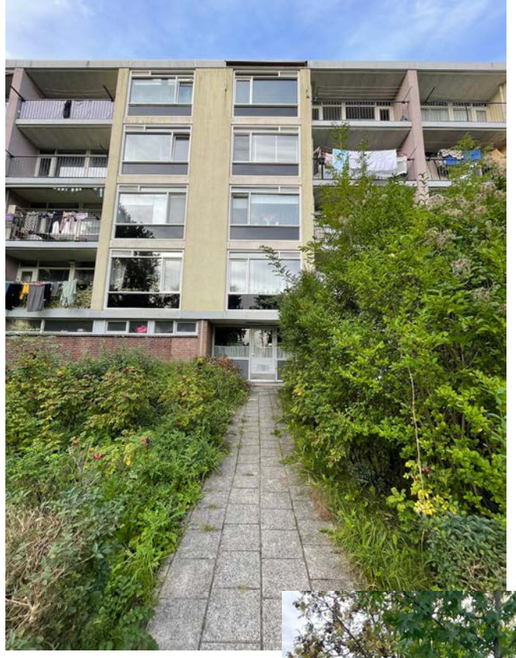
The area was chosen due to its similar size of the housing group, around 15.000 square meters, fragmented housing blocks, 5-storeys and a raised ground floor, parking dominating the frontyard, plain green spaces and repeptitiveness.

During the studio intensive for Design of Urban Fabrics, a comparable case study was undertaken in the Netherlands, specifically focusing on a housing group located in Moliérebuurt, within Rotterdam South. This selection was based on similarities in size of the housing group (approximately 15,000 square meters), fragmented housing blocks, uniform five-storey structures with raised ground floors, predominant front yard parking, plain green areas, and repetitiveness in volumes.

The neighborhood of Moliérebuurt goes beyond what you can see in the image below. However, the zoomed perspective highlights the repetitive volume structures and the surrounding dense green spaces to the south, juxtaposed with a park to the north, drawing parallels with the Vidzgiris micro-district. In the beginning of the year, during this analysis, there was an intention to physically visit the marked site in red and observe how residents utilize the spaces surrounding the housing blocks. This endeavor served as both an exploration of whether cultural differences influence Lithuanians' utilization of public spaces and an examination of the potential influence of urban form and architectural volumes on such behavior.

The photographs on the next page, give you a quick look into the red marked area, which will be our focus on the coming pages.

Fig. 68: Map, from google maps, of Moliérebuurt with sketched details. Map not in scale.



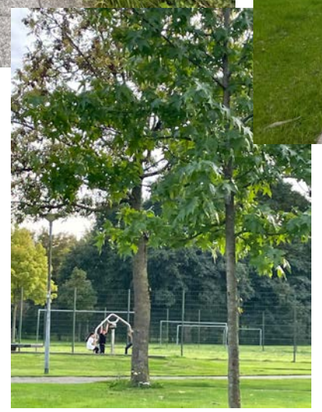


Fig. 69-71: Showing the backentrance into the blocks, the pathways in the shared public area and children playing on a swing further away in the public area.

Fig. 72-74: Showing main entrances to the blocks and a facade that is semi-open with a mix of balconies and big windows. On the first floor, doors to garages are visible in grey. The second image, showcases the opening between the backyard and frontyard, with green spaces overruling the visual connection. The last image, showcases the new activity zone, which includes training machines and a football field. In between good pedestrian and cycling paths connect the areas.

Well connected green spaces

During the fieldwork conducted in Moliérebuurt, spaces similar to those found in Alytus were noted. These included transitional green areas linking various housing clusters, as well as larger green zones connecting different city districts. These spaces facilitated activities conducive to soft mobility, encompassing both pedestrian pathways and bicycle routes.

Not in scale.

Fig. 75: Conceptual map of Moliérebuurt, Netherlands.

- Waterbodies
- Green areas
- 5-storey building blocks
- Rowhouses with private front and backgardens
- Active zones, playgrounds and soccer fields
- Pedestrians paths
- Cars, main roads
- Cars, parking spaces
- Bicycle, main path

Not in scale.

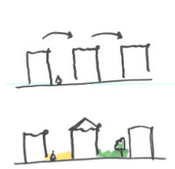
Fig. 76: Conceptual map of green and used/unused spaces in Moliérebuurt, Netherlands.

- Secondary green spaces
- Primary green spaces
- Unused spaces
- Primary used spaces

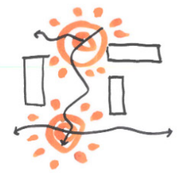
Used and unused spaces
The primary green spaces within the area serve to horizontally link the districts, featuring bicycle lanes and lush vegetation. Meanwhile, secondary spaces vertically connect local housing groups. It's notable that the intersections harbor the most activity within the planned zones. However, a substantial area lying between two similar housing groups remains completely unused and lacks activation from any planned zones.

Observational analysis
In order to ascertain whether the spaces were being utilized as intended or where human activity was concentrated, an observational analysis was conducted (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). The investigation also aimed to determine whether more activity occurred within the inner courtyard or in the vicinity of the blocks. The findings of this analysis were translated into sketches, outlining the key insights gleaned from approximately four hours of observation. The observational study took place on September 26th, 2023, spanning from 12 PM to 2 PM and again from 5 PM to 7 PM. Weather conditions were pleasant, with a cloudy sky and temperatures around 18 degrees Celsius.

Variety in facade plays a big role on the experience on of the surrounding spaces



A hierarchy in spaces is a must when the blocks are repetitive

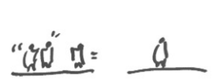


The intersections of green spaces or general soft flowlines are great places to catch people

Greenery can be a great way to create smaller spaces and zones

Parking spaces can be used for more than just parking

The spaces should offer both informal and formal meetings



Spaces should offer individual and collective activities

The ability to sit down and rest should always be present

Fig. 77: Conceptual diagrams of observational analysis in Moliérebuurt, Netherlands.

A proposed transformation

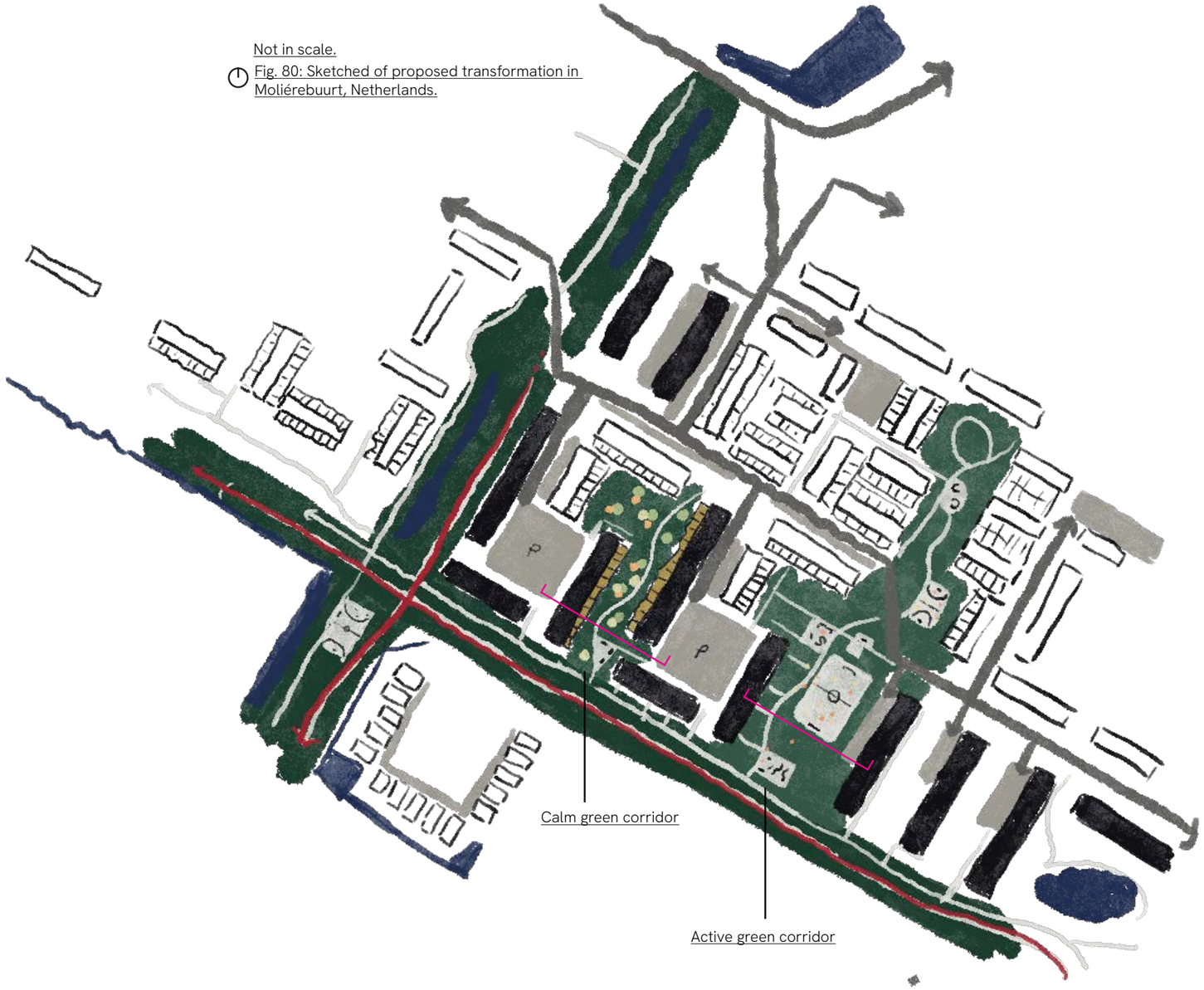
As part of a design exercise, proposed interventions aimed at activating the underutilized spaces in the designated area of Moliérebuurt were developed.

A hierarchy in spaces
A reorganization of the existing spaces is imperative, particularly for the highly neglected corridor, to prevent it from further deterioration into a dumping ground. The proposal entails two main approaches: i) Establishing a serene green corridor by repurposing ground-floor spaces into apartments with private gardens, thereby reclaiming currently unused areas. This transformation would activate spaces adjacent to the building volumes, while the remaining area could be converted into a lush green space featuring diverse vegetation. ii) Enhancing another corridor to become an active hub by incorporating additional leisure and sports facilities, fostering a vibrant atmosphere.

Intersections
Observations indicate that intersections between mobility routes and green spaces serve as popular gathering spots, often characterized by heightened activity and noise levels. These areas are earmarked for transformation to accommodate new activities, aligning with the dual nature of calm and active corridors.

Facades
Findings from observational studies highlight a significant connection between balconies and the inner courtyard, with residents favoring balconies facing the courtyard over those overlooking external greenery. These inner balconies serve as vantage points for observing incoming traffic and pedestrian movement, fostering increased activity and social interaction. An active facade design, characterized by open balconies and visually engaging elements, is essential for creating a welcoming ambiance. This design not only facilitates communication between residents and the outdoor environment but also blurs the distinction between indoor and outdoor spaces. Additionally, encouraging interactions between residents, particularly children and adults communicating from balconies to the ground below, enhances the community feel of the area.

Not in scale.
Fig. 80: Sketched of proposed transformation in Moliérebuurt, Netherlands.



Not in scale.
Fig. 78-79: Sketched sections of the two new corridors.

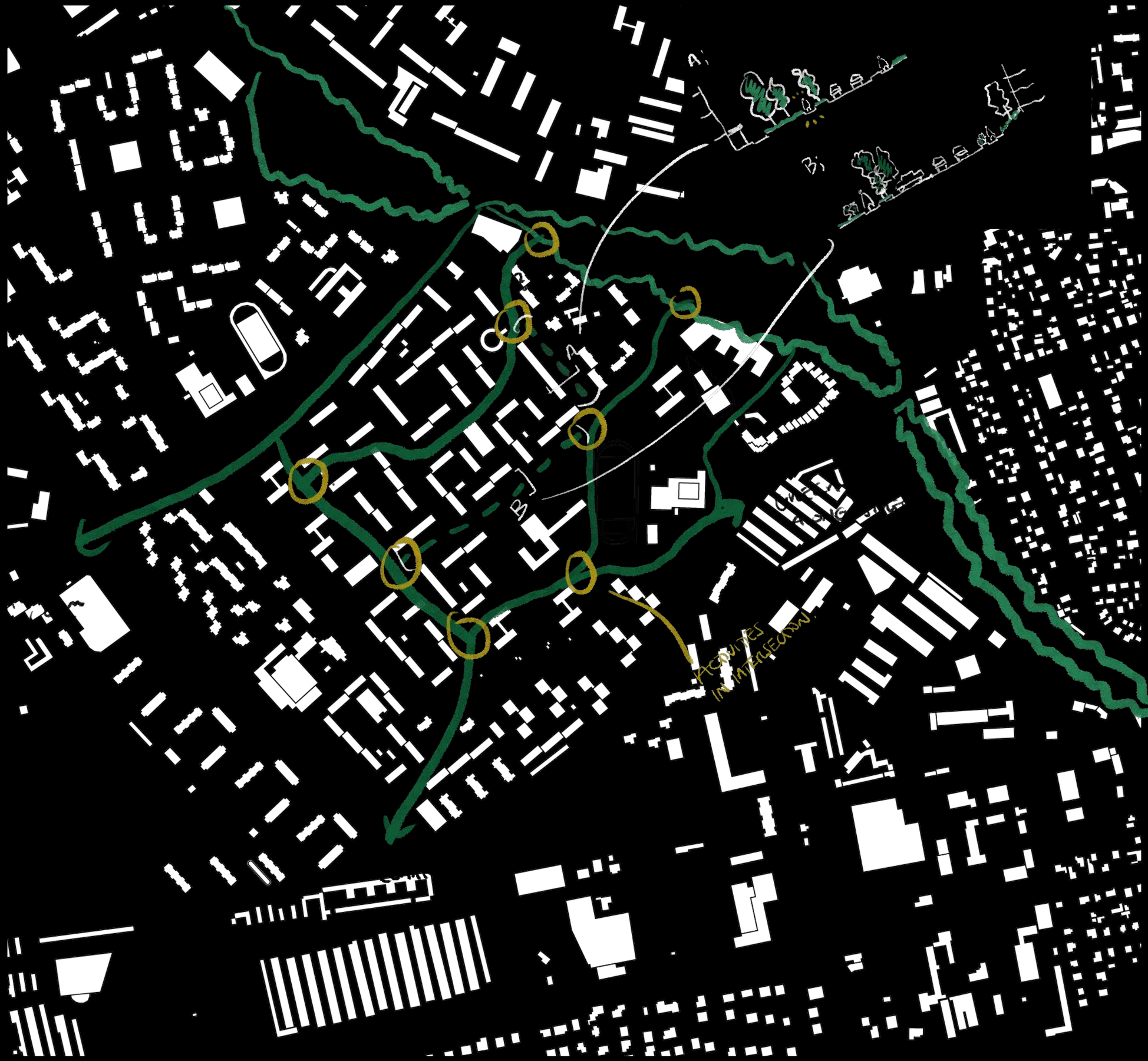
Authors reflection, initial transformation points

The initial spatial analysis of Vidzgiris, looking at the existing spaces and needs towards creating a space for recovery, likewise a the case study, provides us enough knowledge to create initial points towards transformation in Vidzgiris, Alytus.

Enhancing Connectivity between Internal and External Green Spaces
As a way to create comfortable spaces for soft mobility, with a focus on solely pedestrians first, a good connectivity between different destinations is required in the micro-districts. The case study and analysis showcased that planning active and leisure zones in the intersections of mobility and existing green zones can be a solution.
In Vidzgiris, however, many intersections of green spaces are lacking, often disrupted by parking areas or road infrastructure. There's a pressing need to extend these connections. This may involve repurposing unused surfaces within the built environment or reimagining road profiles to accommodate greenery and facilitate pedestrian flow.

Fostering Attachment and Belonging in Public Spaces
Creating attachment and a sense of belonging in public spaces hinges on imbuing these areas with distinct identities and points of connection. Currently, the existing spaces in Vidzgiris lack activities, essential amenities like benches, and opportunities for citizen-led interventions. There's a crucial need to establish a hierarchy and identity for different green spaces while expanding opportunities for citizen engagement in shaping their environments.

As the quote by AKT & Czech (2023) encapsulates, "One participates in space by occupying space, and thereby possessing it. Wanting people to participate in a city also means having to give them a piece of the city".



1:5.000
Fig. 81: Map of Vidzgiris built volumes with ideas sketched on top.

Green connections
Points of interaction
Transformation in streetprofile

Long-term building stock renovation strategy

In 2021, statistical data indicated that over half of the Lithuanian population resides in the typical Soviet-era housing blocks (Butkus, 2021). Nearly 80% of the housing stock in Lithuania was constructed before 1993, with about half of these homes originating from the Soviet era (The Government of The Republic of Lithuania, 2021). Built during a period of lower construction standards, these homes now require significant renovations to ensure comfortable living conditions. Recognizing the need for comprehensive action, Lithuania was tasked in 2021 with formulating a long-term renovation strategy for the national building stock. This strategy aimed to address three main objectives: i) enhance energy efficiency, ii) achieve decarbonization by 2050, and iii) create favorable conditions for the cost-effective conversion of existing buildings into nearly zero-energy structures. Beyond facilitating the renovation process, the strategy plays a crucial role in transforming the energy sector, given its dependency on the building stock.

A few years ago, when this strategy was developed, Lithuania had a registered count of 2.6 million buildings. After excluding irrelevant structures for the long-term strategy, there were 661,000 buildings identified for potential renovation. Unfortunately, only 2% of this building stock is publicly owned (municipal and state properties), limiting the extent to which the process can be planned and controlled from a public perspective (The Government of The Republic of Lithuania, 2021). The majority of responsibility lies with individual building owners, who must independently decide to participate in the renovation efforts.

The process, top-down and bottom-up initiatives

Examining the process from a top-down, the government encourages municipalities to proactively engage in motivating citizens to participate in renovations. In certain municipalities, such as Kaunas and Vilnius, specialized agencies within the municipality focus exclusively on renovation efforts. In contrast, other municipalities consider renovation as one of several tasks to monitor. Municipalities may also take the lead in initiating renovations, particularly targeting buildings with the highest energy usage. In such cases, the municipality seeks approval from homeowners, and upon obtaining it, engages a project manager—often from a non-governmental organization (NGO) or another company. The project manager oversees all stages of the process, liaising with contractors, technical supervisors, and residents throughout (Grušauskaitė, 2023).

From the bottom-up, citizens can independently initiate the renovation of their building. The procedural steps include: i) organizing a meeting with all apartment owners, ii) reaching consensus on financial matters and identifying potential state funds, iii) formalizing an official protocol, and iv) securing a project manager. Regardless of whether the approach is top-down or bottom-up, an agreement from at least 55% of homeowners is necessary for renovations to proceed (Grušauskaitė, 2023).

Current renovation picture

Analyzing the current renovation statistics and the overview map reveals that a majority of cities in Lithuania are currently undergoing the renovation process. Nationally, only 12.4% of buildings, totaling 3,738 structures, have been renovated. Leading the way are cities like Birštonas, Palanga, and Druskininkai, with renovation percentages of 59.7%, 40.9%, and 40.8%, respectively, for existing renovated buildings. In contrast, Alytus, the focus city in this research, ranks 17th with a renovation rate of 15.8% (APVA, 2024).

With renovations still lagging behind the intended yearly goals, alternative strategies have been implemented to incentivize residents to pursue renovations. Transforming the public spaces surrounding blocks slated for renovation has emerged as one such strategy. In Kaunas, a recent initiative has been launched to spur the renovation of building blocks.

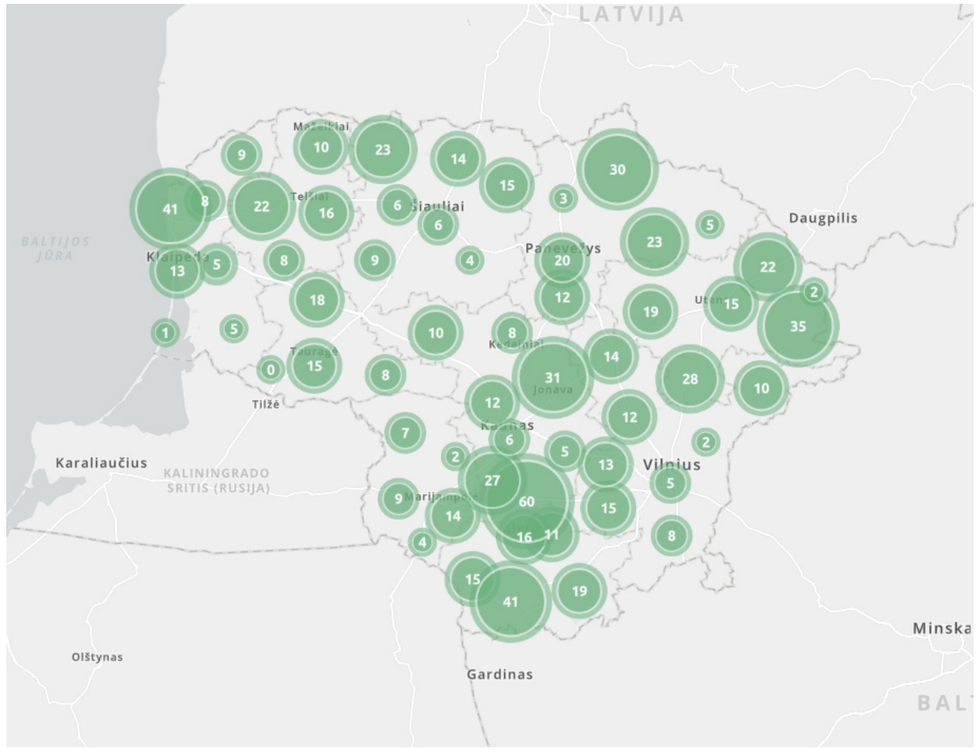


Fig. 82: Map of % (indicated in green circle) of renovated buildings in Lithuania. (APVA, 2024).

A case: Kaunas

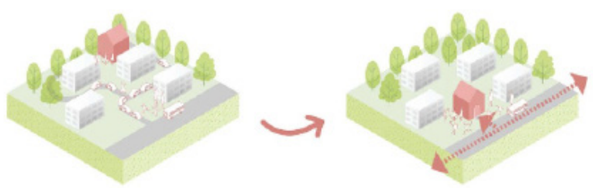
In all cities, the success of the renovation process hinges on the willingness of homeowners, who may have reservations about embarking on renovation projects for various reasons. The agency overseeing the renovation of the building stock in Kaunas has recently unveiled a strategy named “Revolution”. Here, if a collective agreement is reached among a housing group to undergo renovation, the city commits to investing its own funds. These funds are directed towards enhancing the surrounding environment, encompassing areas such as entrances, sidewalks, parking spaces, green spaces, and playgrounds. This strategy not only serves to stimulate renovation activities but also empowers citizens to actively participate in shaping the environments around their homes (KBMA, 2024).

Although this initiative is not specific to Alytus, it stands as the only current processes on collaborative urban fabric transformation through participatory processes. It is likewise, a strategy that affects most of the population. As our exploration of trauma recovery and analysis of Vidzgiris thus far suggests, facilitating trauma recovery involves reshaping spaces to foster community, provide spaces for gathering, establish identity, and cultivate a sense of belonging. These nuanced aspects, which unfold gradually, are likely to evolve through long-term resident involvement. Therefore, delving into a case study from Kaunas will offer insights into the various dimensions of this proposed initiative and its potential impact on trauma recovery.

The main guidelines made in order to keep a cohesive development in the public spaces, has been made through an extensive study of micro-districts in Kaunas (MMAP, 2022). These 10 guidelines serve as a framework for shaping the revitalization efforts and ensuring the optimal transformation of these communal areas. Upon comparing these guiding principles with our analysis of Alytus and the identified needs, it becomes apparent that they also hold relevance for the city of Alytus. Specifically, points 5, 7, and 9 closely correspond to the identified needs of Vidzgiris micro-district.

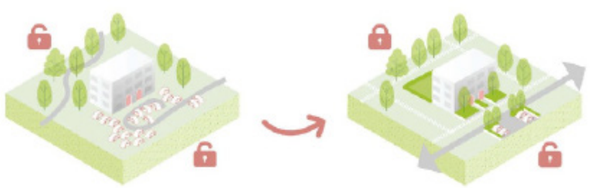
Let’s look at which guidelines accommodate trauma recovery. Guideline 3, which aims to create a hierarchy between private and public spaces, can help foster a sense of ownership and belonging in more private areas. Similarly, Guideline 5, which focuses on enhancing pedestrian infrastructure, aligns with trauma recovery principles by encouraging formal and informal interactions among residents and passersby.

However, beyond these guidelines, there is a noticeable lack of socially focused directives. Including guidelines specifically addressing collective and individual trauma recovery could be beneficial. Additionally, a distinction in the types of public spaces identified—such as public courtyards, green corridors in micro-districts, and city-wide public spaces—could be emphasized in the guidelines, highlighting their different uses and activation methods.



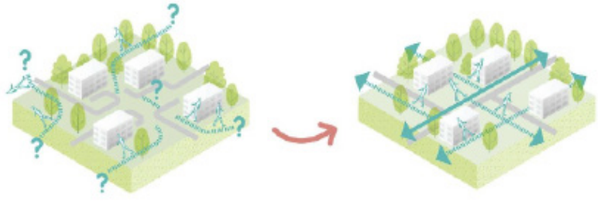
1 An easily accessible social infrastructure

2 Public spaces and accessibility to buildings

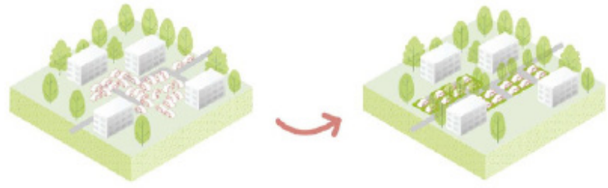


3 A public front facade and a private back

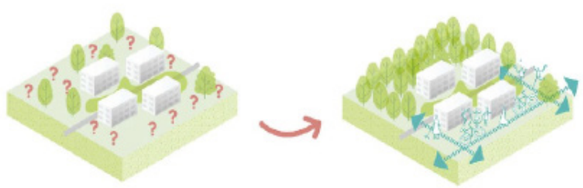
4 Shared infrastructural solutions for the neighbourhood



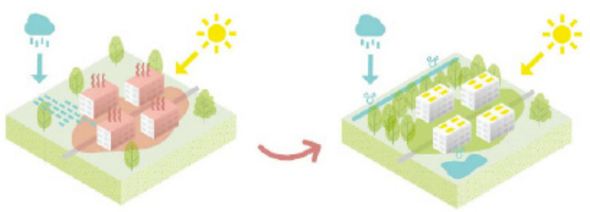
5 Establishment of a pedestrian infrastructure



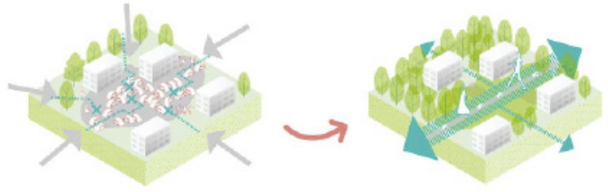
6 Parking solved in the scale of the neighbourhood



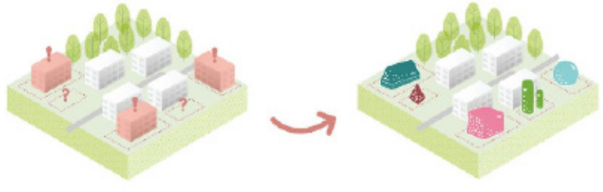
7 Unused space is turned into public recreational areas



8 Neighbourhood is shaped after the microclimate



9 A hierarchy in public spaces, prioritising pedestrians and green space



10 Priority for new typologies

Fig. 83: 10 Guiding principles for the neighbourhood (MMAP, 2022).

“Successful” renovations

Examining some shared images of successful renovations in Kaunas prompts one to question whether the guidelines were considered during the planning process for these transformations. Additionally, it’s worth noting the scarcity of shared images depicting renovations, limiting the ability to provide a comprehensive overview of the projects. While it’s possible to curate the process and present the worst-case scenario, only a few accessible images are available to the public.

The first image (Grušauskaitė, 2023a),depicts a newly renovated front yard of a 5-storey block in Kaunas. The block itself has undergone renovation with added insulation and adorned in yellow and orange hues. Surrounding spaces have been revamped with a fresh layer of asphalt for parking and designated spaces for flowers and bushes. A pedestrian path connects the spaces, albeit with limited width, primarily catering to cars rather than pedestrians.

The second image showcases a larger renovated area (Grušauskaitė, 2023), featuring newly constructed pedestrian paths and a fenced sports facility. However, there are no visible benches or other elements conducive to social engagement in the urban environment.

The third image, although not from Kaunas but from the city of Varena, offers a glimmer of hope. Here, parking spaces have been constructed using permeable concrete blocks, demonstrating a more sustainable approach to rainwater filtration compared to the traditional asphalt parking lots seen in other examples.

Fig. 84-86: Images of “successfull” public space transformations.

Fig. 86-88: Images of the top three places for the price “2023 best renovation”.

As the collaborative renovation process involving both buildings and surrounding spaces is relatively new, let’s focus on the transformations within the blocks themselves. Specifically, we’ll examine blocks competing for the title of the year’s best renovation project of 2023.

Compared to the non-renovated 5-storey buildings initially analyzed in Vidzgiris, it’s evident that the renovated blocks show more activity in the facades. Vertical separations, increased use of color, and larger windows are notable changes. While they may not be the most aesthetically pleasing buildings, they offer more than their non-renovated counterparts. Additionally, the second image, featuring a block with gray and beige hues, bears resemblance to Moliérebuurt. This block exhibits greater transparency with its large windows and thoughtful use of materials.

The existing process

Given the lack of promising examples fulfilling the established guidelines, the inquiry shifts towards understanding the flawed processes contributing to this outcome. Moreover, the absence of elements conducive to trauma recovery prompts questioning whether the goal should be to create spaces explicitly for trauma recovery or if the process of space creation itself should foster recovery in some capacity.

With limited public information available on these processes, we turn to the case of Kaunas (KBMA, 2024b) for insights. Following unsuccessful meetings between the municipality of Kaunas and citizens, an external stakeholder, Bluma, was enlisted to aid in constructing a participatory urban design process. Bluma devised a two-step method for the initial meeting: first, an informative session for 12 representatives from the blocks, utilizing a PowerPoint presentation to highlight existing area problems; second, providing a map and solution cards for representatives to select solutions they deemed suitable for identified issues. Subsequently, scenarios based on citizen input were presented for all housing group residents to vote on (KBMA, 2024b).

Feedback

Feedback on the process was largely positive, with residents appreciating the visual aid of solution cards and finding the meeting informative and educational. Additionally, residents valued the opportunity to engage with representatives from the municipality, the agency (KBMA), and Bluma (KBMA, 2024b).

Stakeholders

Stakeholders involved in the Kaunas case included the municipality, the agency (KBMA), Bluma, a private urbanism firm, Kauno Planas, a private company responsible for drawing projection plans, and citizens represented by 12 individuals from six blocks (KBMA, 2024b).

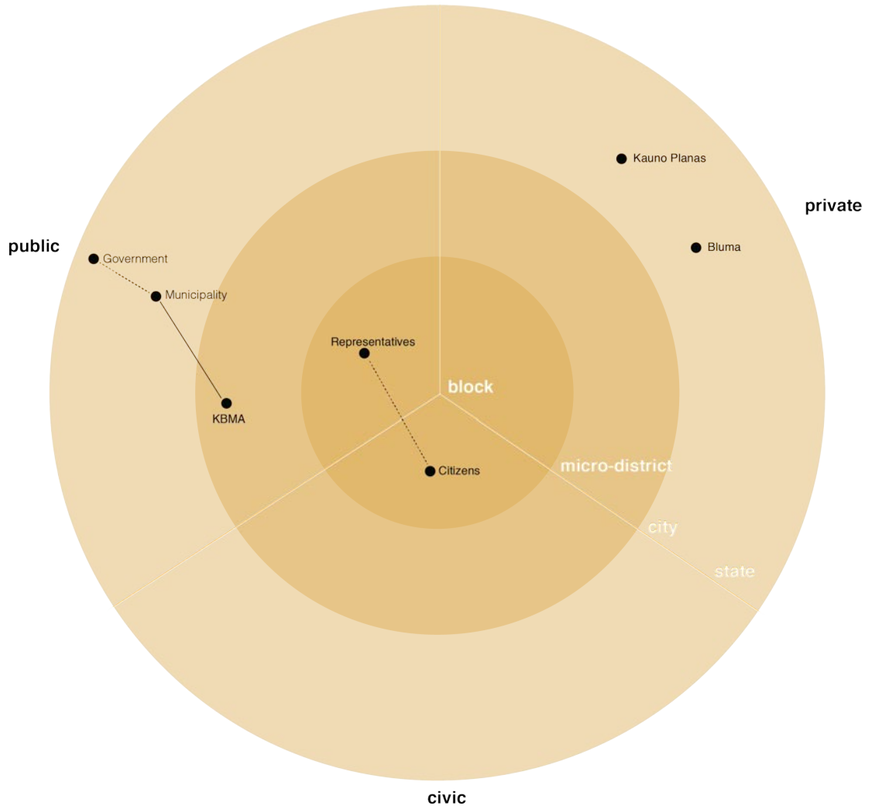


Fig. 89: Diagram of stakeholder analysis involved in the case of Kaunas.

Fig. 90: Diagram showcasing the process in Kaunas, guided by Bluma.

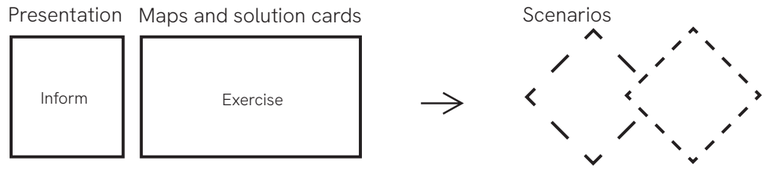


Fig. 91-93: Photographs from the process in Kaunas, guided by Bluma (KBMA, 2024b).

Stakeholder analysis

Examining the stakeholders engaged in this process and those potentially involved, let's delve into the various interests at play in the case of Kaunas.

There are stakeholders with overlapping **interests** in the case of Kaunas, notably the municipality and KBMA. This alignment is natural since KBMA operates as a subgroup of the municipality, sharing common interests and values. Bluma serves as a pivotal intermediary between the municipality, its hired stakeholders, and local representatives. Acting as a vital stakeholder, Bluma facilitates communication and provides essential scenarios to the municipality, which can then be forwarded to Kauno Planas for detailed projection plan development. The process follows a chain-like structure, with citizens serving as the primary contributors of input, collected and curated by Bluma, and then transmitted to the municipality and Kauno Planas for projection.

Regarding **problem perception**, the municipality views the process as a small component of a larger transition toward a greener future, as directed by higher governmental authorities. In contrast, Bluma focuses on communicating local concerns of representatives, ensuring they feel heard, involved, and informed about higher-level governing processes.

In general, all stakeholders share common **goals**, albeit viewed at different scales. The municipality perceives the single renovation as a small step toward a broader green transition in Lithuania and Europe. On the other hand, representatives view it as a necessary step to enhance the local environment, encompassing everything from private apartments to immediate surrounding spaces where cars are parked and daily commuting occurs.

Sustainability
Sustainability is regarded as a paramount objective in the energy transition and the renovation of the building stock. While reducing energy consumption remains the primary focus, achieving a more sustainable living environment encompasses the development of sustainable surrounding areas. The responsibility for disseminating information and education on sustainability lies solely with Bluma, as they oversee the process. However, it can be questioned whether a single meeting spanning a few hours can adequately provide the necessary information on sustainable living, especially alongside the general problem-solving of local issues. This limitation may stem from the municipality's constraints in allocating resources for the initial stages of the process.

Power-dynamics of initiated change
Understanding power dynamics can be gleaned through various analyses, one of which examines the types of power held by stakeholders. In diagram X, we talk about three different types of power: i) Production power, having resources that allow to produce change, ii) blocking power, having ability to block the change and iii) fence-sitters, stakeholders without clearly defined position at present (Bruijn & Heuvelhof, 2008).

When examining the diagram, let's first focus on the private stakeholders, Bluma and Kauno Planas, whose actions are contingent upon whether the municipality of Kaunas has the resources to enlist their services for specific tasks. Consequently, they consistently operate as stakeholders dependent on the municipality.

In scenarios where residents themselves initiate desires for renovation and transformation of surrounding spaces, they wield production power as stakeholders. They may contact KBMA to initiate a process. The municipality, on the other hand, can act as either a blocking or enabling power, depending once again on its resource availability. If too many renovation processes are underway, some may be postponed, with the municipality serving as the sole blocking power in such instances. This dynamic occurs when residents express a desire to participate in initiatives where the municipality funds their public space renovation efforts.

Conversely, if KBMA initiates efforts to encourage high energy-consuming buildings to collectively undergo renovation, residents may serve as blocking or opposing powers.

In conclusion, the most significant power dynamics unfold between the municipality and the residents. All other stakeholders in this context operate as sub-stakeholders aligned with the municipality, as they are contracted by them.

	Stakeholders with production power	Stakeholders with blocking power	Stakeholders with diffuse power
Proponents	Residents KBMA	Municipality	Kauno Planas Bluma
Opponents	Municipality	Residents	
Fence-sitters	Kauno Planas Bluma	Kauno Planas Bluma	

Fig. 94: Diagram of stakeholder power dynamics through production, blocking and diffuse powers.

Stakeholders	Interests	Problem perception	Goals
Municipality of Kaunas	To push the renovation of the overall building stock, to go towards a greener transition (governmental goal)	It is our path into a greener future The citizens are in many cases the problem, as they do not wish to participate in the renovation	To increase the amount of renovated blocks, to decrease the energy consumption and transition towards a greener future
KBMA (Kaunas building modernisation agency)	To push the renovation process To find the best scenario, liked by residents and according to the guidelines (MMAP, 2022)	The citizens are in many cases the problem, as they do not wish to participate in the renovation	To gather input from residents and order Kauno Planas to make a projection plan, so the 1:1 transformation process can take place
Bluma (Biotope Landscape Urbanism & Management Agency)	To curate a process that would help answer what the residents want to see in the transformation of the surrounding spaces To inform the residents of the opportunities within the public spaces To promote sustainable development and link with the guidelines (MMAP, 2022).	The problem is the communication and tools that can help us gain the needed information to create scenarios to everyone's liking	To gather input for scenario building To provide with sustainable and socially engaging solutions To expand the residents knowledge on the possibilities within public space
Kauno Planas	The created a detailed projeciton plan of the liked scenario	The citizens don't know how it works, and most times want things that are not possible when drawing the projection plans, due to typological, geological or any technical solutions	To create a detailed projection plan for the transformation
Representatives	The decrease the energy bills The get a pleasant environment, where you want to spend time	The municipality and other stakeholders in charge do not hear us We are not informed about the process We don't understand where the money goes	To see a nice transformation of the block and surrounding space To get what the money is worth To feel heard and involved, and see that you are able to shape your own environment

Direct connection
Conflict

Fig. 95: Diagram of stakeholders analysis of interests, problem perception and goals.

The process fosters...
Having explored the existing stakeholders and their interests, problem perception, goals, and power dynamics in the case of Kaunas, we must now turn our attention to the process itself, curated by Bluma.

Similar to power dynamics, there are numerous approaches to addressing and evaluating participation in such processes. The renovations and public space initiative, Revolucija, serve as a test for citizen engagement. Here, the municipality, controlled by higher governmental bodies, seeks to involve citizens in the initiative, recognizing that their input will shape the collective aspiration for a greener future. For citizens, participation hinges on demonstrating active interest and directly engaging with the municipality. However, this can only be achieved if residents have access to the necessary information, which must be publicly accessible and easily accessible.

In the case of the process in Kaunas, both engagement and participation are evident, contingent upon who is leading the initiative. However, a notable issue arises from the top-down approach, where engagement tends to be limited to a certain extent. Once citizens have provided their input and scenarios are formulated, the process may conclude, with little opportunity for further extension due to resource constraints.
For citizens, participation in shaping their environment occurs on a daily basis as they navigate their surroundings. However, the tools and informative sessions provided by the municipality are typically offered only once. Consequently, citizens often stand to benefit from multiple engagements with the municipality to facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration in reshaping their environment.

Adjustments for trauma recovery
This also prompts us to question the duration and nature of engagement and participation in the process. From a purely problem-solving perspective, a single meeting akin to the current Bluma model may suffice. However, from the standpoint of trauma recovery, this approach fails to foster positive outcomes. There are several aspects that do not support trauma recovery:

Exclusion of a significant portion of residents: Participation should not be limited to representatives alone. While not all residents may wish to participate, they should be invited to engage through multiple meetings to ensure inclusivity.

Insufficient time for problem-solving: One meeting is inadequate for building trust and facilitating open dialogue. Residents need multiple sessions to feel comfortable and fully understand the involvement of stakeholders in each step of the process.

Educational and inclusive tools: Tools provided should be informative, educational, and inclusive, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of all participants.

Addressing power dynamics: While power dynamics are inherent, they can be deconstructed through meetings held in different settings. Residents should be recognized as experts and treated as equal partners in the decision-making process.

Incorporating health and mental well-being: While Bluma can address some health benefits of the built environment, they may lack comprehensive knowledge. It is essential to involve stakeholders with expertise in health and mental well-being to ensure these aspects are adequately represented in the process.

An updated stakeholder diagram, fig. 96, was made to visually display these missing links to certain stakeholders. An in depth explanation of the connection can be found on the following page.

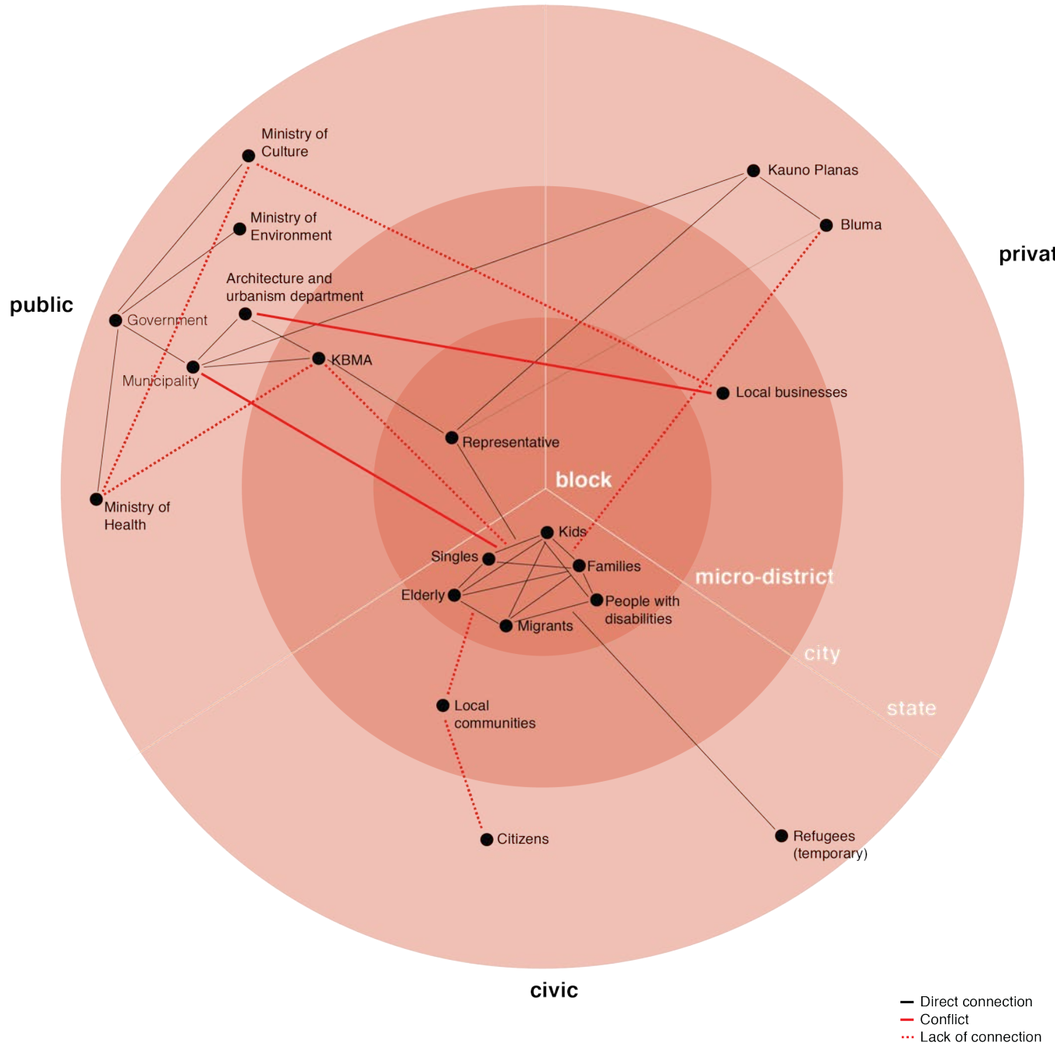


Fig. 96: Diagram of stakeholders, updated through the eyes of trauma recovery.

Direct connections

As emphasized repeatedly, the primary actors in the urban design process are the municipality and its controlled KBMA. It's noteworthy that their architecture and urbanism department is closely intertwined, with KBMA comprising workers from this department and tasked with aligning the city's visions with renovations. The stakeholders are connected to the representatives, who face the challenge of representing the diverse interests of residents. Kauno Planas and Bluma function as episodic stakeholders, heavily reliant on the municipality and its decisions.

Conflicts

In terms of fostering a process of trauma recovery, there's a notable absence of involvement from the architecture and urbanism department, which operates under the municipality's purview but also falls under the jurisdiction of the ministry of planning. Additionally, there's a need to recognize the existence of local businesses established during the initial years of independence, as they play a crucial role in acknowledgment and progress toward trauma recovery. Moreover, the municipality should take into account both the represented and unrepresented voices of residents in the blocks. There should be increased opportunities to listen to citizens directly, rather than solely relying on representatives.

Lack of connection

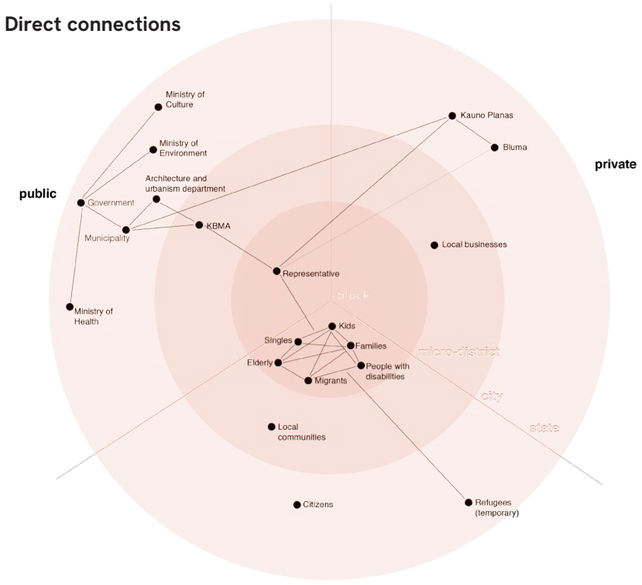
The existing gaps in connections are evident between KBMA and residents with unheard voices. Introducing a representative from the Ministry of Health into the process could provide valuable information and education on health and environmental factors, enhancing the search for solutions. Moreover, establishing links between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Culture, and discussions on spatial elements essential for collective trauma recovery is crucial. Questions regarding the status of Soviet-era blocks as heritage sites or candidates for demolition are pertinent. Similarly, smaller spatial interventions, like local businesses and their built spaces, should be safeguarded as they represent significant steps toward acknowledging the past and addressing associated actions.

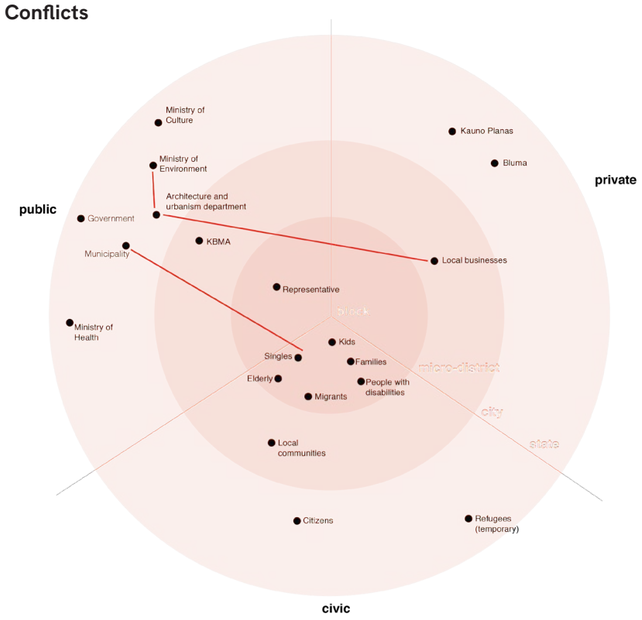
In the civic realm, facilitating connections between existing communities in different districts and local residents should be prioritized. This could be achieved through sharing contact information, making it easier for residents to connect with active local communities or NGOs that organize various activities and gatherings. This information should be accessible across all levels, from the state to individual blocks, serving as a source of inspiration for blocks seeking to form communities but unsure of how to begin.

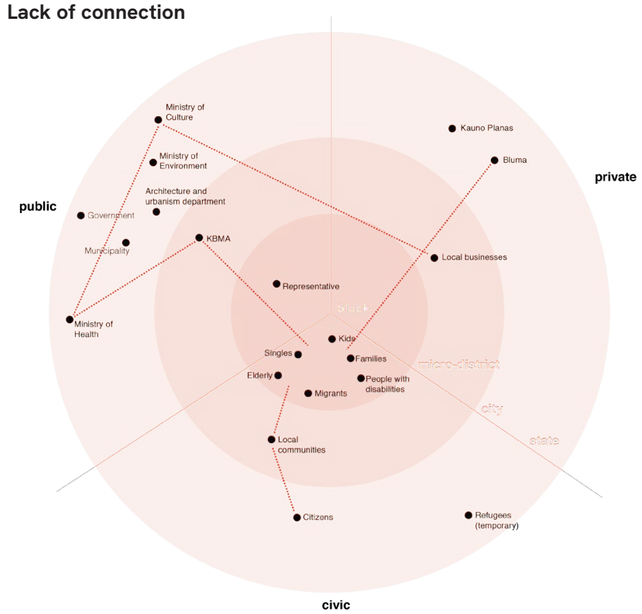
Alytus

Returning to the context of Alytus, it's notable that the only stakeholder absent is an agency similar to KBMA in Kaunas. However, all other stakeholders identified can be transposed to the setting of Alytus.

Fig. 97-99: Diagram of stakeholders, updated through the eyes of trauma recovery, and separated.







Authors reflection

The insights gleaned from examining the process of public space transformation in micro-districts in Kaunas highlight several challenges inherent in this endeavor. Resident participation is essential, given that they are apartment owners, yet the municipality appears reluctant to engage meaningfully with citizens beyond the bare minimum. Their focus seems primarily directed towards seeing more buildings renovated to drive towards a greener future, with little consideration for local-scale concerns. From a trauma perspective, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding informing citizens about the connections between the environment and health and mental well-being. Moreover, there is a need to reconsider our perception of the built environment in the context of the trauma recovery process. Currently, the built environment serves as a constant reminder of the past, contributing to the healing process. However, societal perceptions of Soviet-era blocks as negative, particularly in light of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, warrant a reassessment. Perhaps, there is a need to reframe the discourse surrounding these blocks, highlighting their architectural significance and modernistic design inspired by French influences. Additionally, it's crucial to consider whether these areas should be regarded as heritage sites, encompassing not only public buildings but also civic structures.

Micro

In the upcoming chapter, we'll delve deeper into micro-districts, examining their composition, contents, and the evolution of their original concept versus their current reality. We'll visually dissect them to comprehend their various components and explore their potential contributions to trauma recovery.

Public space

Throughout this project, the term "public space" has been used to refer to the areas surrounding the blocks, often identified as front and backyard spaces in relation to the blocks themselves. To ascertain the true nature of these spaces, we conducted various analyses. Firstly, we conducted observational studies akin to those conducted in Moliérebuurt. Additionally, we examined the diverse elements comprising the public spaces in Vidzgiris, juxtaposing our findings with the narratives shared by local residents, who reminisced about elements of public space that may no longer be present today. Based on this, we formulated a set of characteristics delineating the elements typically found within the public sphere.

Greenery
A predominant characteristic of modernistic urban planning is the presence of open spaces, a feature still evident today. In the public spaces of Vidzgiris, numerous green open areas can be observed, adorned with mature trees, bushes, or newly planted saplings by residents. Furthermore, zones adjacent to the blocks have been cordoned off and transformed into semi-private gardens, showcasing various floral arrangements or artistic expressions. In many instances, the lush foliage of the trees casts a natural canopy, partially concealing the block facades and enhancing the overall ambiance.

Built environment
The built environment comprises a blend of renovated and non-renovated building structures, as detailed in the initial analysis of the meso chapter. Interspersed among these basic volumes are public buildings exhibiting more distinct architectural features, providing visual interest. Additionally, scattered throughout the area are small boxes serving as transformer stations, many of which have been repurposed into quaint stores or have been dismantled altogether. Likewise, garages in either linear or circular forms can be found scattered in the landscape.

Mobility
Pedestrian paths dominate the public space, some of which are paved while others are delineated by grass markings. Although bicycle lanes are present in limited sections, they are typically situated within public parks rather than the immediate vicinity of the blocks. The landscape is predominantly occupied by cars, with extensive parking spaces dominating the area. However, the secondary roads encircling our test site in Vidzgiris minimize the vehicular noise, which is largely limited to ingress and egress.

Activities
Collective sports such as soccer and basketball are the primary activities facilitated around the blocks, often centered around stadiums. Individual pursuits primarily revolve around gardening and utilizing benches located near stairways, with few other amenities available to foster solitary activities.

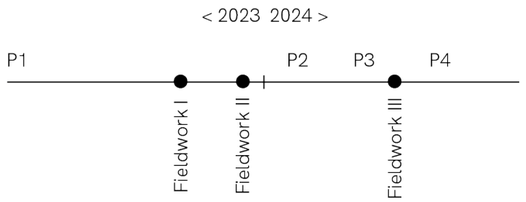
Stories of residents
When residents reflect on the evolution of public spaces in Vidzgiris micro-district, many recall with a sense of nostalgia. They often chuckle as they recount how the landscape has transformed over the years. One prominent observation is the proliferation of cars. Residents reminisce about the early days, circa 1978, when only a handful of vehicles dotted the landscape, with just 5 or 6 parked near each block. Fast forward to today, and the space allocated for cars has expanded significantly, yet still struggles to accommodate the growing number of vehicles. Some households now boast multiple cars to meet their transportation needs.

Another notable change highlighted by residents is the dwindling presence of children. In years past, the micro-district teemed with youthful energy, and every backyard boasted playground equipment—swings, sandboxes, climbing structures—that served as vibrant hubs of activity for neighborhood kids. However, with the passage of time, the demographic makeup has shifted, and the sounds of children at play have grown faint. The absence of playgrounds and the palpable decrease in the number of children underscore the changing dynamics of community life in Vidzgiris.

Observational analysis

In order to understand how people are using the different public spaces in Alytus, an observational analysis, leaning on the methods of Jan Gehl (Gehl & Svarre, 2013) was made. It was made based on three different times, beginning of november, end of december and middle of april. They were never the sole purpose for the fieldwork trips, which means that the observational study was always made in specific time slots, but never for a full day. The different days and times can be seen here:

Fig. 100: Timeline of fieldwork trips.



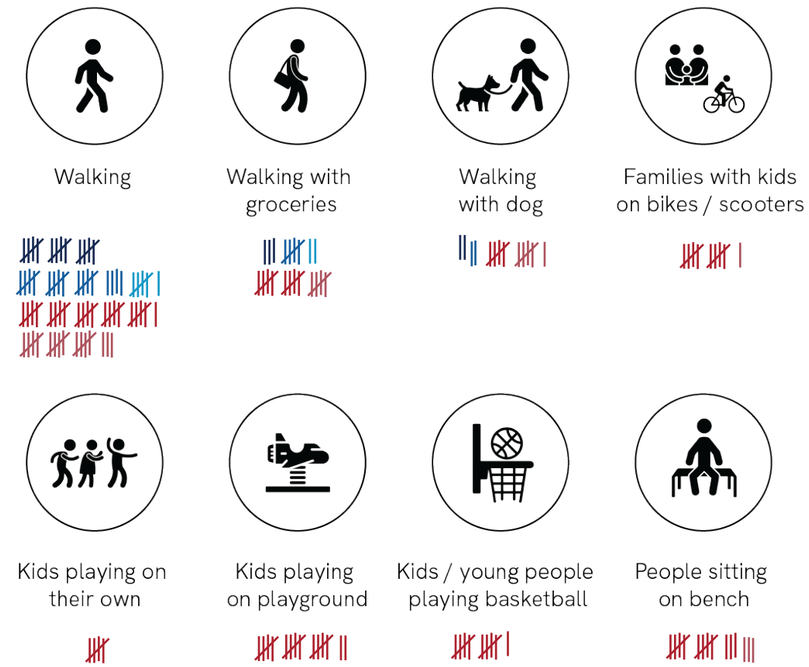
Session	Date	Weather	Timeslot	Location	Total time
1	15/11-23	5 C cloudy	11.10-11.55AM	Vidzgiris	45 min.
2	15/11-23	1 C	17.05-18.00PM	Vidzgiris	55 min.
3	23/12-23	-2 C snow	14.30-15.00PM	Vidzgiris	30 min.
4	09/04/24 sunny	26 C	19.00-21.00PM Dainava	Putinai,	2 hours
5	10/04/24	18 C	09.30-11.00AM	Dainava, Vizdgiris	1 h, 30 min.
					= 5 h, 40 min.

The map on the following page indicates the locations of our study. Originally, we intended to conduct static observational studies focusing on individual public spaces. However, due to minimal activity in most locations, we conducted the study while walking. Although this approach doesn't capture the behavior of people in one specific space, it provides an overall understanding of public space usage throughout the city. Since public spaces between blocks typically share similar characteristics, as discussed previously, this study remains relevant for understanding micro-districts in Alytus.

Observations
Throughout the five sessions, observations revealed a consistent pattern of people engaging in typical activities such as walking, dog-walking, or returning home with groceries. This trend persisted across all sessions. However, with improved weather, a diverse range of activities conducive to collective gathering emerged, including playing, socializing, and tending to green spaces together. Public park playgrounds, particularly popular during the evening hours between 7-8 PM, witnessed significant footfall, likely after dinner and before bedtime. Basketball courts also saw considerable activity, with individuals playing solo or small groups engaging in pick-up games, accompanied by lively chatter. Nearby benches were often occupied by senior citizens, enjoying the spectacle. Towards the end of fall and the beginning of spring, the elderly were notably active in clearing leaves and tending to flower gardens in front of their homes. This activity often attracted others, fostering both collective and individual gardening efforts. Some neighbors seized the opportunity to engage in light conversation from their windows while their neighbors worked in the gardens below.

Overall, areas with designated activities or planned amenities tended to attract more people. No instances were noted of individuals sitting on the grass or engaging in activities deemed unusual.

Fig. 101: Results of observational analysis.



Conclusions
The observational study revealed that people gravitate towards planned spaces, utilizing them for their intended purposes such as basketball playing, children's recreation, and gardening. However, there was a noticeable scarcity of benches, particularly between blocks, indicating a need for more seating options. While newly renovated parks featured additional benches, this deficiency persists in many areas. Furthermore, observed activities predominantly targeted younger demographics, leaving few urban elements catering to the elderly besides benches.

To enhance these spaces, it is suggested to maintain popular features like playgrounds and sports courts while introducing activities tailored to older generations. This could involve incorporating mobility-activating paths or educational signage as standard urban elements. Additionally, diversifying seating options, particularly in green spaces, could improve overall accessibility and appeal. The key challenge lies in designing elements that facilitate year-round use, as current public life is primarily concentrated in the summer months.
The following two pages include the photographs made during the three sessions.

1:10.000

Fig. 102: Map of observational analysis routes and districts in Alytus.

- Putinai district
- Dainava district
- Volunge district
- Vidzgiris district

- Session 1 route
- Session 2 route
- Session 3 route
- Session 4 route
- Session 5 route

Fig. 103-104: Pictures of people cleaning fallen leaves, from fieldwork I, in november 2023.

Fig. 105: Pictures of two people on an electric scooter, driving through the courtyard, from fieldwork I, in November 2023.

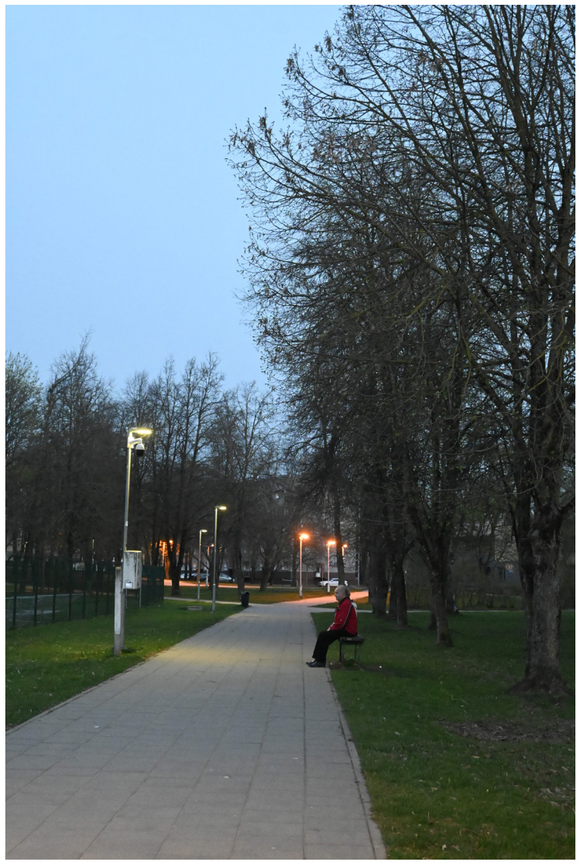
Fig. 106: Pictures of a person walking, from fieldwork II, in December 2023.

Fig. 107-108: Pictures of people walking with grocery bags (left) and with sticks (right) from fieldwork I, in November 2023.

Fig. 109: Pictures of two people talking from the ground and balcony, taken in fieldwork III, in April 2024.

Fig. 110: Pictures of a family walking, from fieldwork III, taken in April 2024.

Fig. 111: Pictures of a man sitting on a bench, from fieldwork III, taken in April 2024.

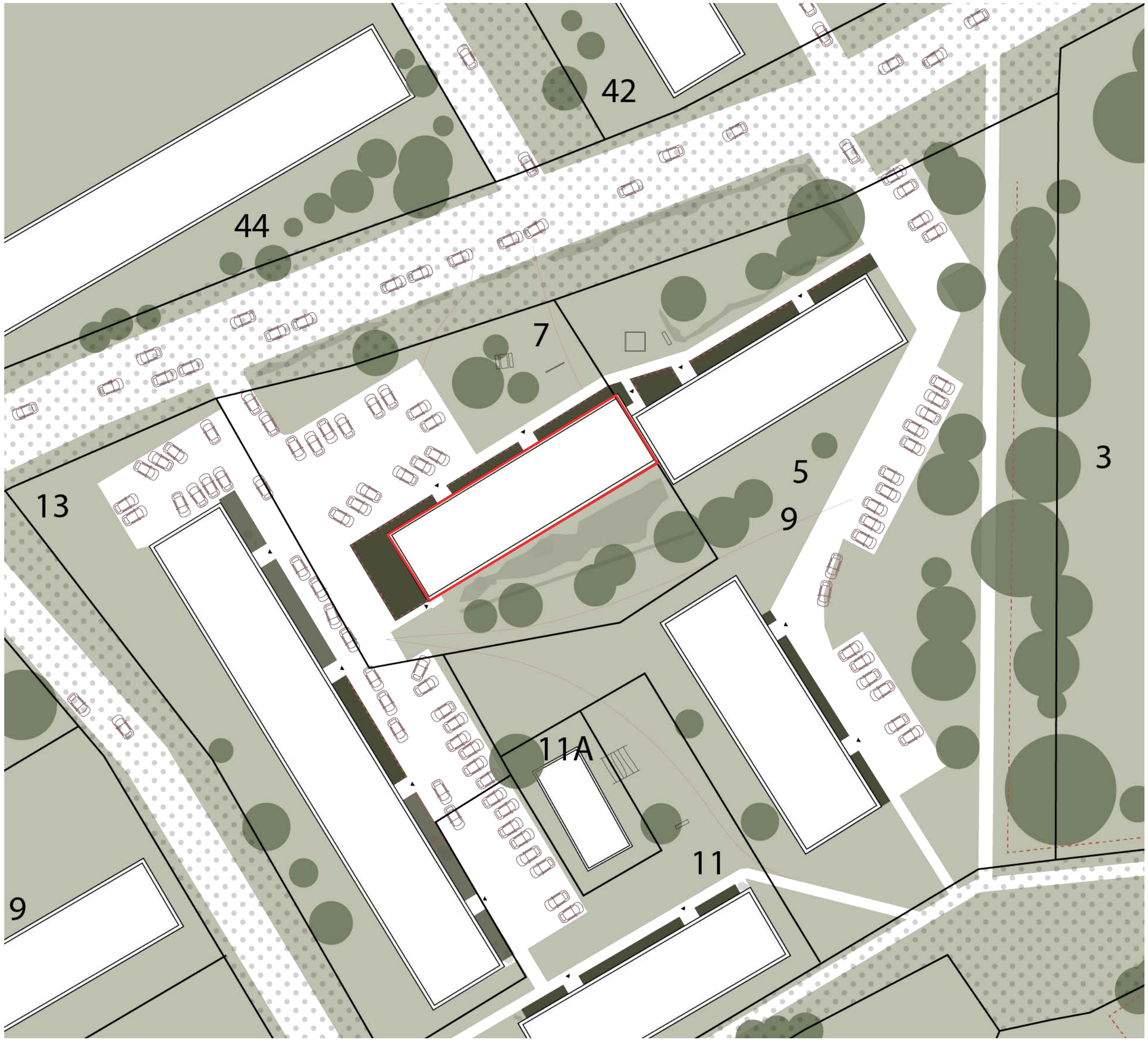


The courtyard

Our focus now narrows to a specific area within the micro-district—a housing group comprising five blocks arranged to form a communal backyard. This focal point, highlighted in red on the map, is characterized by a mix of elements that define its current state. At the heart of this space stands a transformer, a functional but unassuming presence. Nearby, remnants of a bygone era linger—a weathered bench, the skeletal remains of a once-vibrant sandbox, and metal fixtures for air-drying clothes in the summer months. These artifacts, though weathered and worn, hint at the space's history and former vitality.

However, the predominant feature of this area is the sea of cars that stretches along the perimeter, mirroring the length of the longest block to the left of the map. Each block, housing two stairwells, accommodates an estimated 15 apartments per stairwell. By extrapolation, our five blocks collectively provide homes for approximately 180 apartments. Assuming an average occupancy of two individuals per apartment, the population of our focus area totals roughly 360 residents. These residents share not only the parking lot but also the sparse green spaces interspersed throughout the area. As we delve deeper into our design interventions, we must consider the needs and aspirations of this diverse community while striving to rejuvenate and revitalize their shared space.

Land ownership varies within the area. The plots, delineated by bold black lines, illustrate how the courtyard is divided into distinct plots shared by the block or, in our case, by two blocks sharing a larger space. The pedestrian paths and roads are publicly owned. The irregular distribution of the courtyard complicates the renovation process, making it difficult to determine where transformations should occur, particularly if not all blocks are interested in participating.



1:500

Fig. 112: Zoom of building group in Vidzgiris micro-district, Alytus.

- Residential blocks
- School
- "Private gardens" in front of windows
- Publicly owned land
- "11A" Plot number and ownership

Photo montage

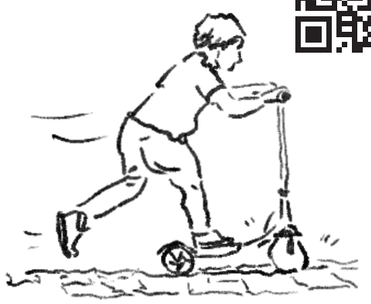
For those unfamiliar with living in a block, capturing the essence of being there presents a big challenge. As revealed in the meso and macro chapters, the block is merely a small volume within a larger system. Understanding the original purpose of these structures is one thing, but comprehending their appearance, atmosphere, and scent after decades of living is another matter entirely.

To offer you a glimpse of this experience, we turn to photographs. The images on the following pages depict a typical apartment within a block, one that has been built in 1975 and inhabited since 1978, witnessing the formation of a family and now housing an elderly couple in their 80s. Through visual storytelling and the sounds permeating from its surroundings, this apartment narrates tales of time.

In the following pages, you will explore three distinct spaces: the backyard, the stairwell and the apartment itself. Accompanied by photographs and sketches and recorded sounds, you will get a chance at catching the atmosphere on a sunny spring day in April. Additionally, detailed descriptions will highlight elements not directly visible in the photographs, yet integral to the atmosphere of the rooms will also accompany you.

QR 1: Soundscapes through the balcony window.

QR 3: Soundscapes of kids on a scooter on the pavement and basketball bounces in the distance.



QR 2: Soundscapes in the intersection of the courtyard and the green spaces connecting the micro-district vertically.

SECOND COLOR?

INITIAL COLOR?

DOOR REPAINTED GREEN A FEW YEARS AGO...

METAL / AVOIDANCE SPACE FOR SECOND FLOOR RESIDENTS.

"WE BUY CARS, FOR A HIGH PRICE"

"LOOKING TO BUY A GARDEN"

THE BEST SECURITY SYSTEM OUT THERE

WINDOWS TO LET MORE LIGHT INTO THE DARK CORRIDOR

QR 4: Soundscape of an open window in the kitchen, facing the street on a sunny day in April.

THE FIGHTING DRAWER

QR 5: Soundscapes of being home alone in the kitchen. Only a clock working in the background.

QR 6: Soundscapes of a car coming into the parking lot in the frontyard at night.

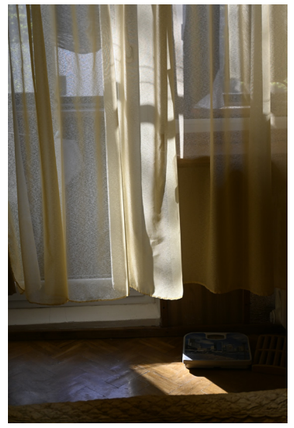


Fig. 113-136: Photographs of Alytus.

The apartment

A sketched plan of the apartment that you just entered can be seen here. It consists of a kitchen, separate toilet and bathroom, three bedrooms, a living room and a store space. Likewise, one side of the apartment has balconies, looking out at the backyard, while the opposite side looks over the front yard with the shared parking space and road.

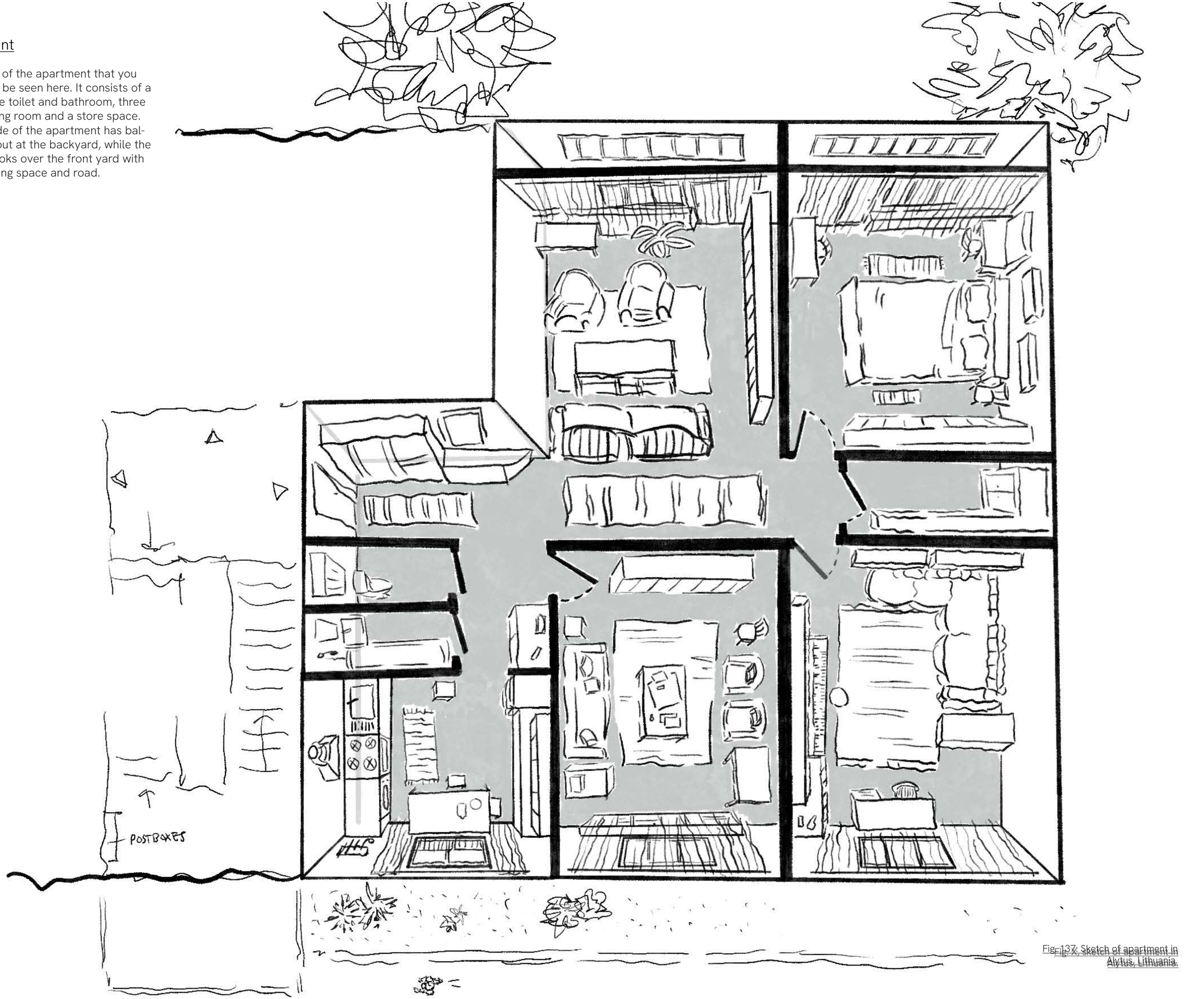


Fig. 137 Sketch of apartment in Alytus, Lithuania.

The windows

As discussed in earlier chapters, the urgent demand for housing led to the construction of uniform buildings devoid of hierarchy or intricate details. The only elements altering the appearance of these buildings were the activities of their residents. Among these, the window emerged as a pivotal glimpse into both homes and lives. Over time, diversity seeped into these windows, with varying curtains and lights visible at night, while balconies transformed through renovations or adorned with plants and personal belongings, reflecting the inhabitants within.

Internally, the window served not only as a source of light and ventilation but also as a canvas for self-expression, albeit within certain confines. As highlighted in the observational analysis on page 104, the window continues to hold significant importance in daily life today. Its value extends beyond mere functionality, particularly for the elderly who may be restricted from venturing outdoors. For them, the window(s) and the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations they offer become a vital connection to life beyond their confines.

Fig. 138: Collage of windows from fieldwork in Alytus, Lithuania,

Authors reflection

Not much novelty emerged from scrutinizing how public spaces were used, except for recognizing the lack of crucial urban amenities nearby and suggesting creative improvements for green areas. As for the residents, the environment around them seemed remarkably unaltered during their forty-year stay, raising doubts about the possibility of behavioral changes without corresponding environmental enhancements.

Behavioral patterns revealed a focus on utilitarian activities like commuting, with recreational pursuits, particularly among younger demographics, more prevalent in summer months. Benches, though few, garner some attention during fair weather, especially those offering a vantage point of points of interest. Winter finds public life observed from indoor vantage points, while warmer seasons may see windows opened for brief exchanges with gardening neighbors. Life appears dichotomous, partitioned between private and public spheres, with scant evidence of communal healing evident in public spaces. Windows serve as both barriers and conduits, affording glimpses into others' lives while safeguarding personal privacy.

It's challenging to anticipate that healing could take place in the surrounding areas, as they generally lack the fundamental amenities necessary for creating a conducive environment: areas for leisure and activity, comfortable seating, adequate lighting, and zoning that offers varying degrees of public privacy. Similarly, there appears to be little to no connection between the residents and their surrounding spaces; beyond merely traversing through them, there's a lack of felt necessity for their presence. Admittedly, the semi-private zones directly in front of the blocks do exhibit signs of individual residents maintaining gardens, but this seems motivated solely by their proximity to the buildings. There's a notable absence of engagement with the larger shared spaces between housing units.

Design

This chapter is going to introduce you to the design elements that came out of almost a year's research on the interlink of trauma and urban design. The design involves: i) an engagement strategy ii) design and test of a participatory tool for the engagement strategy, and iii) application of the results from the tool testing in an initial public space design transformation.

A summary

The multi-scale analysis revealed a notable absence of spaces conducive to trauma recovery within the surrounding public areas near the blocks. Overall, the spaces assessed in Vidzgiris lack several elements necessary to create comfortable and appealing environments. On a broader scale, there's the persistent challenge of negative perceptions associated with living in the blocks, largely due to their Soviet-era construction, which has resulted in the continued presence of underutilized open spaces surrounding them. Over the past four decades, these spaces have shown little improvement; parking areas have expanded while the number of children has decreased, with those remaining often congregating around the school where new sports facilities meet their needs. The intermediate spaces are primarily viewed as transitional, serving solely to facilitate movement between private spaces—home and car—enabling residents to drive elsewhere. This highlights several areas in need of attention.

The current public spaces between the blocks fail to facilitate trauma recovery, and the ongoing process of public space transformation linked to Lithuania's overall strategy for building stock renovation lacks attention to this aspect. There's a noticeable absence of information and education regarding human well-being and health related to the environment. The negative perception of blocks built during the Russian occupation persists, exacerbated by the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, leading to a disregard for the micro-districts and a failure to recognize their need for trauma recovery or appreciate the beauty of their modernistic planning and French influences from the past.

As an initial step, an engagement strategy was developed to explore whether reshaping the process of citizen participation in urban design could foster trauma recovery and to what extent it could address the issues discussed above.

Development of a strategy

The engagement strategy underwent development through a series of steps. Its primary aim was to challenge the current process and investigate whether incorporating therapeutic methods into the participatory process of urban design could contribute to ongoing trauma recovery, not only in the resulting environment but also during the design process itself, as suggested by Harvey (Harvey, 1996).

The process of collective trauma recovery
Examining trauma recovery through a collective lens underscores the pivotal role of the environment, which serves as both the site of the event and the framework for communal relations. In this context, the trajectory of recovery can be abstractly outlined in several steps:

i) **Acknowledgment**: Recognizing the occurrence of the event and its collective impact, fostering a sense of shared experience among individuals.

ii) **Safety**: Establishing a safe space, ideally a public area conducive to gathering, where individuals, with support from others, can begin to address and overcome their trauma.

iii) **Process:** Engaging in various therapeutic approaches, whether through grassroots initiatives or institutional interventions, tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals. For collective trauma, this might involve group activities aligned with common coping mechanisms, such as physical exercise.

iv) **Integration**: Reintegrating into society and public life, fostering a sense of belonging within a specific community and locale.

These steps, informed by research such as that of Gailiene (2023), Harvey (1996), and Kolk (2014), outline a pathway towards collective healing and societal reintegration following traumatic events.

The process of individual trauma recovery
In parallel with the collective trauma recovery process, individual trauma recovery unfolds. When approached through a top-down methodology (Kolk, 2014), where individuals seek professional guidance for their recovery, certain essential steps must be considered.

i) **Initial Meeting**: The first step involves meeting with a psychotherapist to establish a rapport and assess the comfort and suitability of the therapeutic relationship. This initial encounter sets the stage for further collaboration and exploration.

ii) **In-Depth Analysis**: Following the establishment of trust, the psychotherapist conducts a comprehensive examination of the individual's past experiences, delving into the root causes and manifestations of their trauma.

iii) **Recovery Strategy**: Based on the insights gained from the analysis, a tailored strategy for recovery is devised. This strategy may incorporate various therapeutic modalities and interventions aimed at addressing the individual's specific needs and facilitating their healing journey.

These steps, informed by approaches outlined by Kolk (2014), highlight the importance of individualized support and therapeutic intervention in navigating the complexities of trauma recovery. Additionally, the strategies developed through individual therapy can intersect and complement the broader framework of collective trauma recovery efforts.

The link between individual and collective
An essential aspect of both these processes is recognizing that recovery within the surrounding environment requires spaces conducive to each phase of the journey. It's a transition from the private realms of individuals to the public domains of the city, a dynamic and interactive process. In the individual recovery process, the therapist plays a pivotal role, offering guidance and equipping individuals with the necessary tools to navigate each step. If the environment can provide some of these essential resources, it can serve as a supportive link in the recovery journey. Ultimately, both recovery processes aim for reintegration into society, creating an environment that fosters individuals' post-recovery well-being—a space that doesn't hinder progress but rather supports it.

A long-term process
The processes of collective trauma recovery, approached from a bottom-up perspective, and individual recovery, through a top-down approach, are inherently long-term endeavors. They involve individuals engaging with spaces and communities, navigating periods of retreat, reflection, and re-engagement. With each cycle, individuals deepen their awareness, gradually acknowledging and understanding the impact of past events, their present circumstances, and the possibilities for the future. These processes are iterative, marked by ongoing growth and evolution as individuals navigate their journey towards healing and resilience.

The process of urban design
In the process of urban space transformation, specific steps can be delineated from the initial idea to the final transformation. Conceptually, these steps include:

i) **Context analysis** and initial concept/vision development

ii) **Design development** and deeper context-related solution seeking

iii) **Final scenario making**

The process can proceed without direct citizen participation. The initial step may rely on desk analysis and observational studies, where urbanists or architects can glean insights into the space without complete resident involvement. Concept development is then informed by this analysis, observations, and merges with brief requirements, city visions, and relevant plans and policies.

The second phase may involve interaction with other stakeholders, such as municipalities or private developers who may have initiated the transformation request. Finally, the selection of the final scenario is based on criteria influenced by various stakeholders. For some, economic considerations may outweigh other factors, while others prioritize sustainability, climate mitigation, or broader goals.

While citizen participation is not mandatory in the process, the city ultimately serves its residents, making their insights valuable. Their input can shed light on local issues, provide specific insights, and reveal power relations among residents, which may not be fully grasped through desk analysis alone. Therefore, citizen participation enhances the process by offering a deeper understanding of local dynamics and ensuring that the transformed space meets the needs of its users effectively.

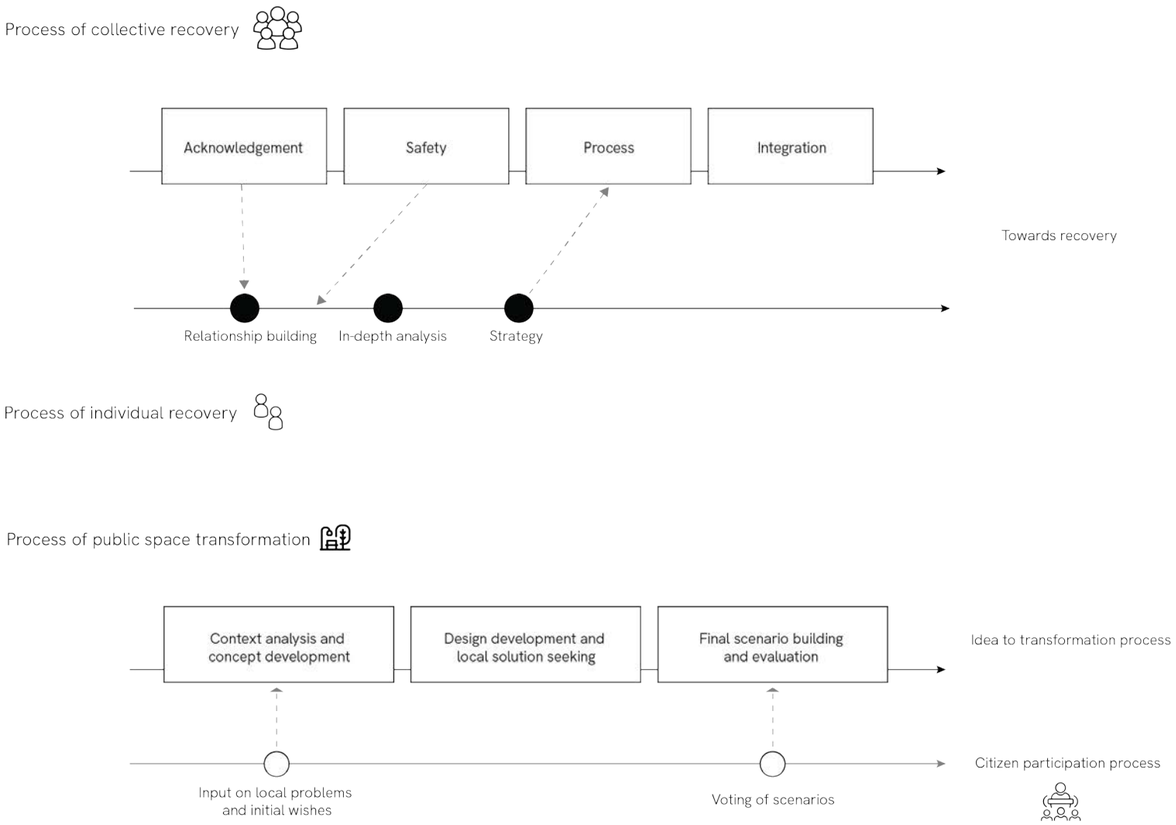


Fig. 139: Overview of the processes of trauma recovery and public space transformation.

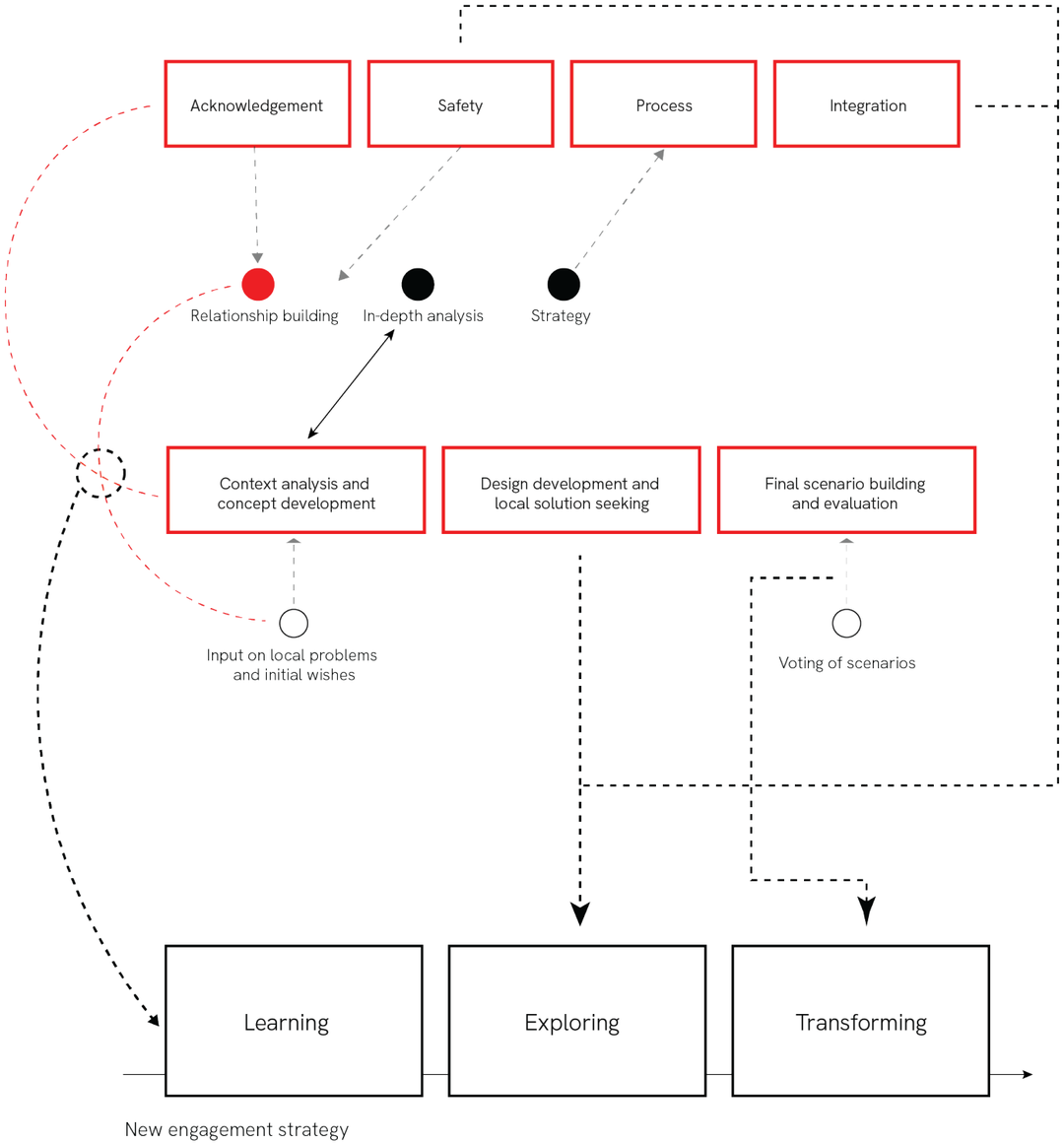


Fig. 140: Diagram of the design process of linking trauma recovery to urban design.

The different processes introduced are depicted in fig. 139, while fig. 140 illustrates how these processes were interlinked to create a new engagement strategy. A key aspect was to examine all existing processes and their starting elements. In individual therapy, the initial meeting is crucial for setting the path toward recovery. This concept was integrated into the new engagement strategy, where the initial meeting between the designer and the space, known as the context analysis, mirrors the first meeting in therapy.

Similarly, the step of finding safety in collective recovery is incorporated into the second meeting. During this phase, the designer can guide discussions about safety within the specific environment, helping residents articulate their feelings and identify what might be lacking for them to feel secure.

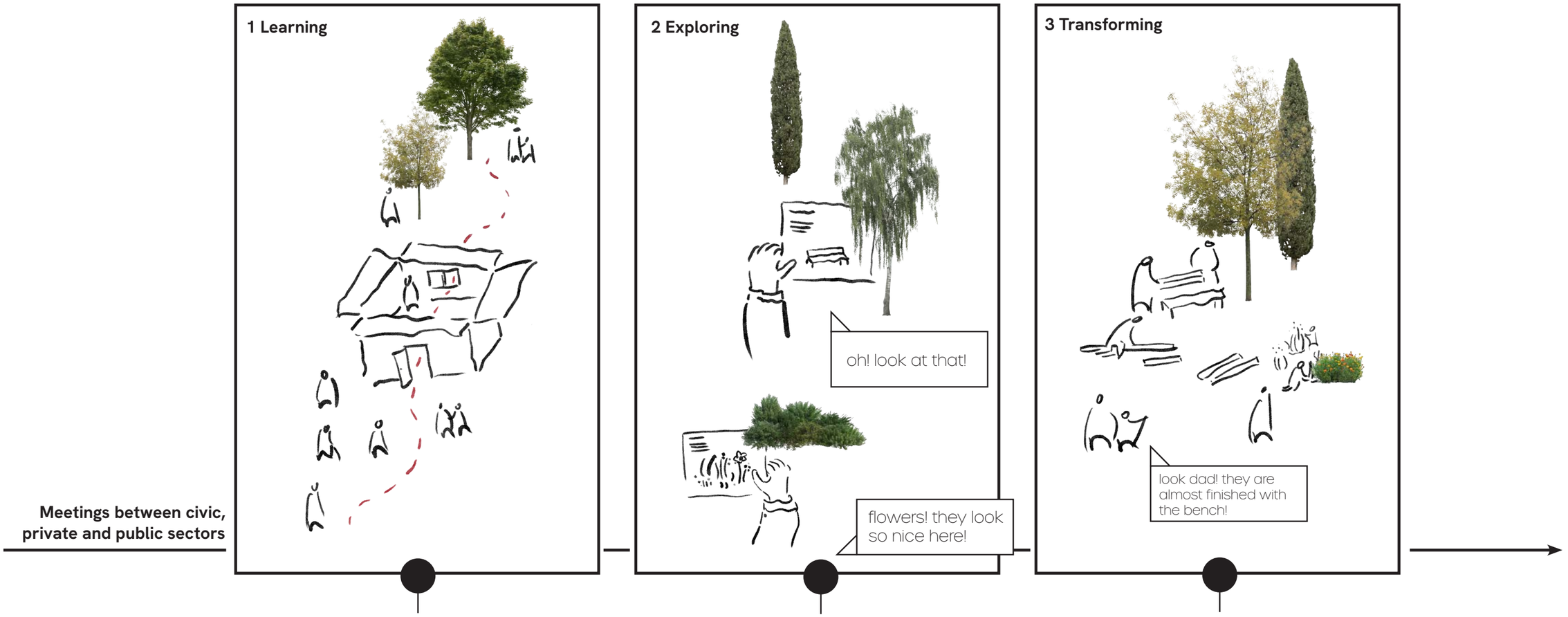
A new engagement strategy

The engagement strategy emerged from the integration of various processes, detailed fig. 140 for a comprehensive understanding. This new strategy proposes three pivotal meetings, each with distinct focuses on learning, exploration, and transformation. From the urbanists' perspective, these meetings are integral parts of the public space transformation process, complemented by additional activities occurring "behind the scenes." For residents, they represent milestones in a broader process of recovery, akin to individual therapy sessions that provide insights for subsequent self-reflection.

Let's delve into the purpose of these meetings through the framework of three key factors: arenas, actors, and aims (Hofer & Kaufmann, 2022).

Aims			Actors			Arenas		
Issues	**Rationales**	**Outcomes**	**Subjects**	**Roles**	**Recruitment**	**Spaces**	**Formats**	**Rhythm**
Learning, initial meeting								
What is your relationship to public space and what relationship would you like to have? This can be done with different scales and elements in mind: block, housing group and micro-district, likewise as blocks, greenery, mobility and activities.	Based on research and lack of public life in the surrounding spaces, there is a need to investigate the causes for that and understand why people don't feel the sense of ownership.	Understand the current relationship the residents have to the surrounding spaces.	Civil society - representatives of residents and others Government - municipality Private sector	Initiators and participants Process curator	Those needed to help do the exercises that will allow for the citizens to understand their relationship to public space Recruitment of the residents through analog and digital medias. Such as posters, newspaper announcements, emails, etc.	If possible the process should be done in the public space, either outside or in an existing community space. If this is not possible it should be done in a public facility like the library, in order to have neutral ground.	Listen and learning Interactive exercises through working groups and group discussions Due to the increase of elderly residents, this should not be done online	Listen and learning Initial meeting is a one kind off event that is part of a fixed long-term engagement process The meeting in itself should be around 2-3 hours, after working hours and include mental and physical activation Due to the increase of elderly residents, this should not be done online
Exploring, second meeting								
What elements do we need to include to acompany the needs and wishes of residents? This can be done with different factors in mind: economic, sustainibility, socially engaging, etc.	Based on research and case studies, the public spaces that the residents helped to design, are usually more used, as the residents feel a sense of ownership, connection and belonging towards them.	This meeting is about the tangible, finding the right solution to the spatialized problems.	Civil society (representatives of residents and others) Government (municipality) Private sector Detailed plan drawing actor	Participant Participant Process curator Advisor	The government needs to hire the private firm, that intends to draw the detailed plan for the transformation to work as an advising actor in the process, so that they can explain the reasons behind why some solution might not be possible	Inside, around a table in a public space, like the library	Listen and learning on what the curator gathered as concluding points from last meeting. New interactive exercise with new stakeholders and goals Pen and paper kind of exercises. Vote on which intervention can be made on a short-term perspective.	Co-designing process in smaller groups, such as design Charrettes, scenario making, etc.
Transforming, third meeting								
Showcase that transformation can happen through local initiatives. The third meeting is about short-term 1:1 interventions, such as benches, bug hotels, tree planting etc.	As the process from idea to final transformation can last years, a push towards community initiated trasnformations should be made from the municipal perspective, showcasing that the residents can easily start the transformation themselves.	This meeting is about the first spatial change, it is like a contract, finishing the participatory process, which allows for citizens to create and receive the first 1:1 urban elements for their soon-to-be renovated space.	Civil society (representatives of residents and others) Government (municipality) Private sector Builders, gardeners, etc	Participant Participant Process curator Guiding 1:1 interventions	Depending on the wished intervention, a new stakeholder is invited to join for this meeting and guide the citizens through the process of building the intervention.	Outside, in the space that is about to be transformed.	Listen and learning on what the curator gathered as concluding points from last meeting. Construct the 1:1 intervention and close of the participatory process. Be informed about the timeframe of the transformation	1:1 intervention done in the community of residents and external stakeholders. This would be a reaccuring intervention, depending on the lenght of the process. If the transformation takes three years, as an examples, three 1:1 interventions should be made.

A three step strategy



What is the relationship between residents and the public spaces?

The initial meeting between the municipality, the residents, and the private curating firm is the most important meeting of all. It provides residents with an opportunity to understand the different stakeholders involved and offer their expert input on the spaces and internal issues. This meeting should foster mutual learning and relationship-building, emphasizing the significance of understanding the surrounding spaces.

Residents should leave the meeting feeling informed and inspired to further engage in the design process. By gaining insights into the perspectives of other stakeholders and reflecting on their own needs and experiences, residents will be better equipped to contribute to more detailed design discussions in subsequent meetings. This initial meeting sets the foundation for a collaborative and inclusive co-design process.

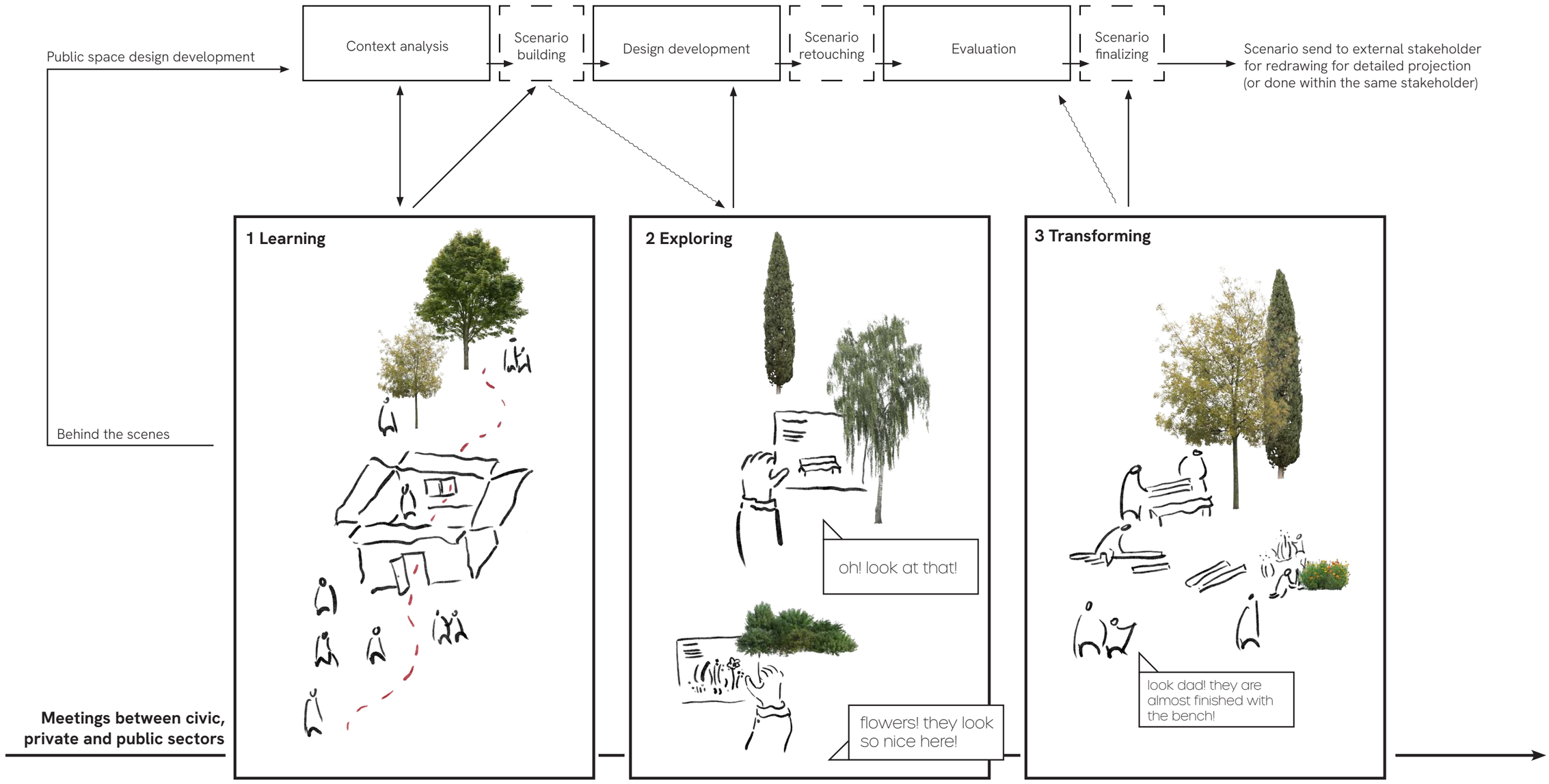
How should the spaces be transformed to accomidate the needs and wishes of residents?

The second meeting focuses on engaging closely with the public space. In this meeting, residents continue to serve as experts, now better informed about current trends and the municipality's desired implementations. Topics such as sustainability and climate mitigation are key discussion points. Case studies highlighting mitigation elements and sustainable practices should be presented, with an emphasis on their economic aspects. This meeting aims to deepen residents' understanding and foster informed discussions about integrating these elements into the public space.

Showcase that the residents can take ownership and start transforming the spaces themselves.

The third meeting is dedicated to collaborative creation and the beginning of the public space transformation. It emphasizes to residents that they are the key decision-makers, capable of making tangible changes with simple materials and tools, such as building a bench or a bug hotel and placing it in an ideal location. This meeting serves as a spatial contract between the municipality and the residents, symbolizing the municipality's commitment to transformation and the ongoing communication that will support this long-term process.

Fig. 141: New engagement strategy.

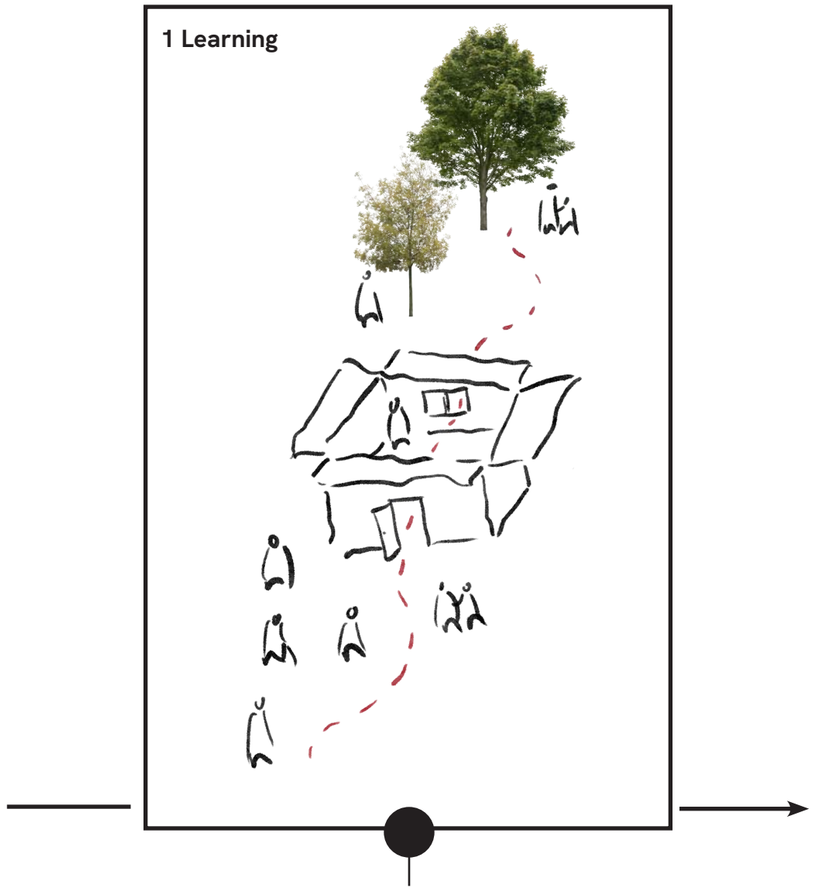


The role of the urban designer and the resident

For the urban designer, the engagement strategy corresponds with the iterative nature design development. The three meetings with different stakeholders offer an opportunity to present their work and receive input for refining the scenarios.

From the residents' perspective, this process affords three occasions to participate in shaping the surrounding spaces. Depending on individual preferences, attendance at all three meetings is not mandatory, as each session begins with a recap and presentation of initial findings and scenario development. For those who already have a clear understanding of their relationship with the public space, they may choose to join from the second meeting onwards, and vice versa.

Fig. 142: New engagement strategy.



Tool development and testing

Since the initial meeting in therapy, as well as first impressions in general, significantly influenced the subsequent collaborative process, it was compelling to test the initial meeting scenario in real-life. With the overarching goal of comprehending the relationship citizens may have with the public spaces surrounding them, an analysis was conducted to identify tools that could aid in addressing this question.

New processes might sometimes need new tools. To identify tools conducive to this purpose, a study was conducted on existing tools and potential elements for the development of novel ones. When examining tools commonly employed in workshop settings or interactions between citizens and experts, certain tools emerge as more prominent than others. In recent times, there has been a discernible trend towards utilizing models, sketches, and other visual aids in engagements with citizens. While these tools can prove advantageous depending on their intended application, some may aid while others might complicate the process for citizens.

In the section on trauma, you were introduced to some of the physical and mental challenges associated with trauma. Some of the effect of trauma might hinder the use of specific tools that today are seen as the most common. This raises the question on whether a tool is needed to accompany the new strategy. Let's first look into the issues with the existing tools in workshop settings.

Sketching
In this scenario, the facilitator guides citizens as they gather around a table. Using a printed plan, the facilitator points out different structures and their relationships, inviting citizens to sketch their vision. However, this approach may not be inclusive, as not everyone is skilled at drawing.

Models
Despite the allure of scale models and their nostalgic resonance with many citizens, evoking memories of childhood play with LEGO or envisioning racing cars through streets, models can pose challenges. For individuals who struggle to mentally visualize or orient themselves within a model, it may appear daunting. Moreover, there can be disparities between what individuals perceive from a model and what is eventually constructed in reality.

Tool for the initial meeting
Determining the optimal tool for understanding individuals' relationships with surrounding spaces remains unclear. Given the abstract and unconventional nature of the question for a workshop scenario, there's a need to create a tool to facilitate this understanding. To guide the development of this tool, we framework for empowerment (Schneider et al., 2018), helping us outline the desired functionalities and objectives.

Tool criteria
Based on the analysis of existing tools and trauma research, we established requirements for the new tool:
i) Scalability: It should accommodate both small and large groups.
ii) Enjoyable: It should be engaging and spark curiosity.
iii) Familiarity: Reflecting familiar or known situations to promote comfort.
iv) Multisensory: Activating both the mind and body for enhanced engagement.
v) Portability: Small enough for easy transportation.

To understand citizens' relationships with surrounding spaces, we designed a tool spatially connected to micro-districts. Inspired by Pattern Language (Alexander et al., 1977) and conversation curating cards (Hill, 2020), transparent cards featuring spatial elements were created. These cards prompt users to answer specific questions, facilitating exploration of the overarching goal. The use of windows as a frame provides a familiar touch, fostering comfort and excitement.

Prototypes
Three iterations of the cards were developed to refine the prototype:

i) Initial Prototype: Tested the concept of overlapping layers to create a visual image. This iteration aimed to assess the feasibility of the design approach.

ii) Information Testing: Evaluated the amount of information required on the cards. This iteration focused on determining the optimal balance of information to facilitate user engagement.

iii) Semi-Structured Testing: Implemented the cards in a semi-structured process to assess their effectiveness in a real-world setting. This iteration aimed to refine the usability and functionality of the cards through practical testing and feedback.

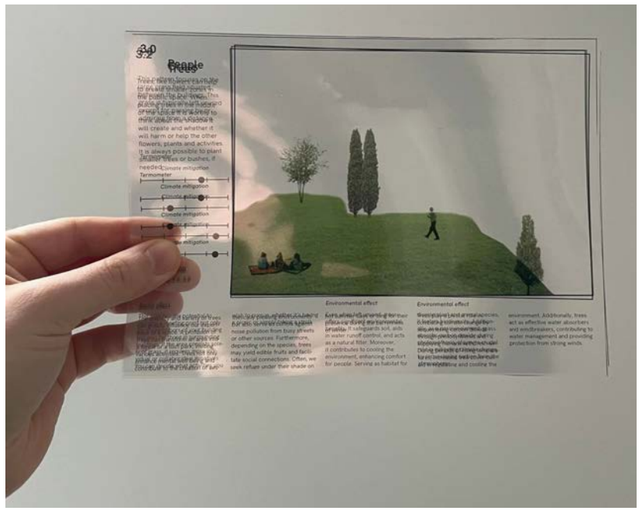


Fig. 143-146: Photographs of the prototypes with the first one to the latest one at the end of the page.

“My window” tool

The prototypes turned into a final deck of cards of 15 transparent paper of 21 x 14 cm. The scenario within the pattern is around 16 x 11 cm and portrays the different elements that can be found in the public spaces, as mentioned in the analysis. Additional elements are added to the card, such as number of card, title, description. The different cards were in categories of: blocks, greenery, mobility, activities and interior elements, they can be viewed in the following pages.

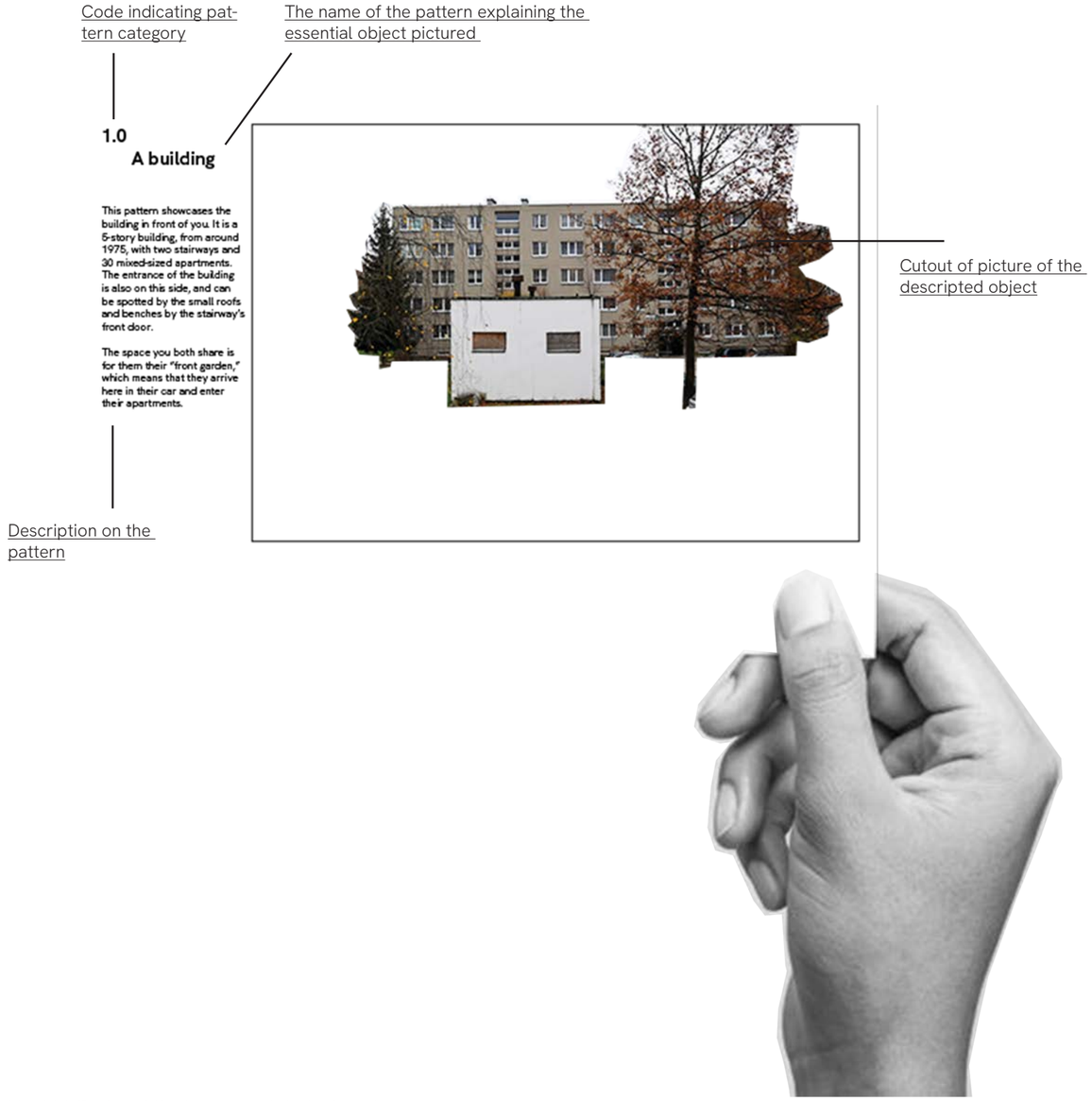


Fig. 147: Design of the transparent deck of cards, the engagement tool.

1.0
A building

This pattern showcases the building in front of you. It is a 5-story building, from around 1975, with two stairways and 30 mixed-sized apartments. The entrance of the building is also on this side, and can be spotted by the small roofs and benches by the stairway's front door.

The space you both share is for them their "front garden," which means that they arrive here in their car and enter their apartments.

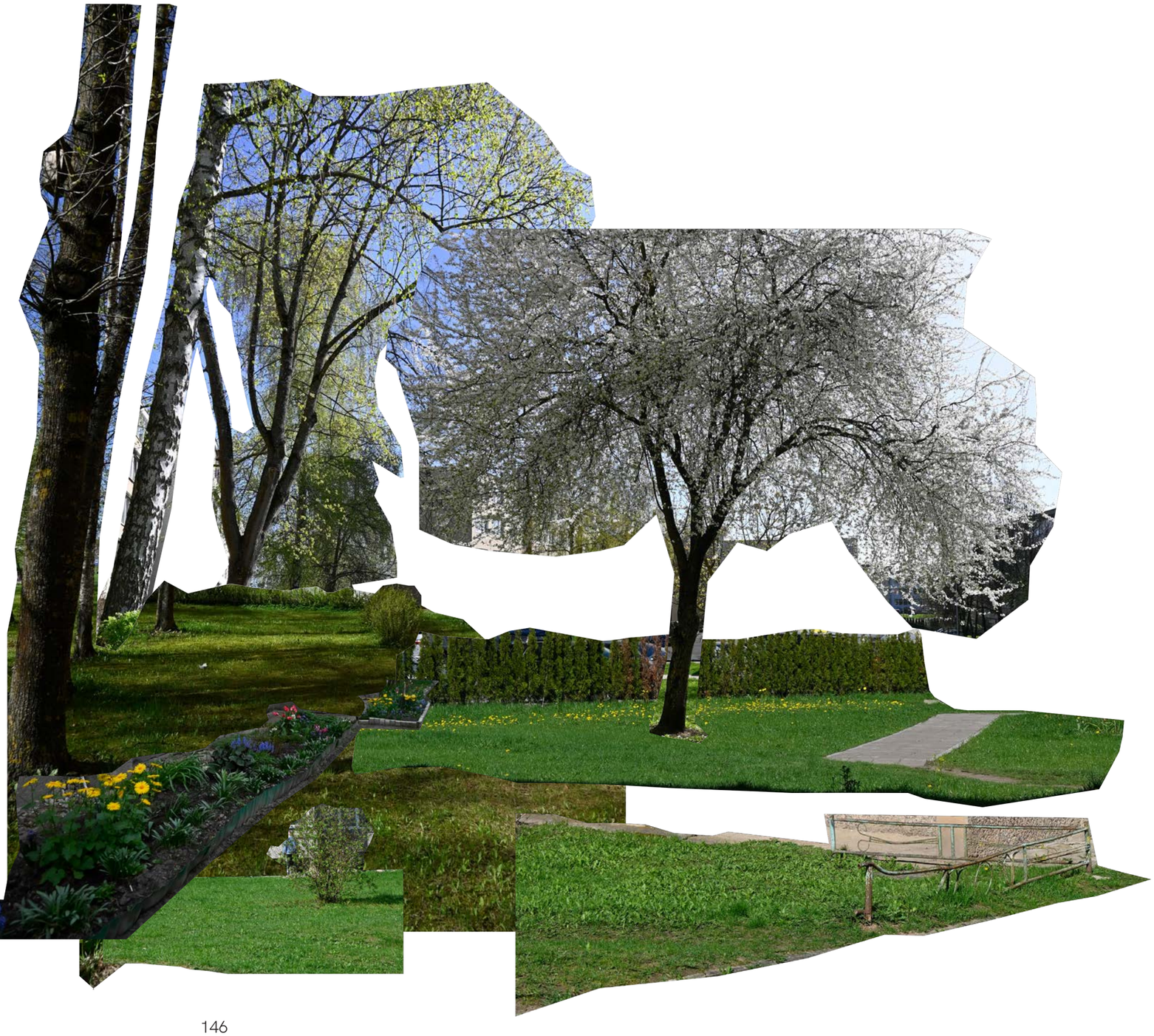
1.1
The renovated building

This pattern showcases the building adjacent to you. It is a 5-story building, dating back to around 1975, featuring two stairways and 30 mixed-sized apartments. Recently renovated, the building now sports a green color, aimed at optimizing the indoor living environment and reducing energy usage.

The entrance to this building is on the opposite side, meaning that the area you both are observing serves as their "back garden."

The blocks

The first two cards feature the residential blocks: one unrenovated block with a transformer in front, and the other renovated and now painted green. These specific five-story blocks were chosen to test the cards with residents from a particular block in Alytus. In other scenarios, different blocks could be used instead. A collage on the left illustrates various potential appearances for the selected block, showcasing the diversity of its possible looks.



2.0
Grass

This pattern showcases the expanse of grass that blankets the large public area in front of your windows. It's a space you share not only with the neighboring buildings but also with the rest of the city.

2.1
Trees

This pattern displays different trees planted in the public area in front of your house. The type of tree isn't as important as recognizing the variety present here. From trees that bear fruit to those with bright colors or nice scents, to ones that shed a lot of leaves, there are many options.

The most common trees in Lithuania are maple, hazel, Scots pine, and English oak.

2.2
Flowers

This pattern displays a variety of flowers in different colors and sizes that can be planted.

Flowers and trees can help divide the public space, creating cozy corners and areas for various activities to take place.

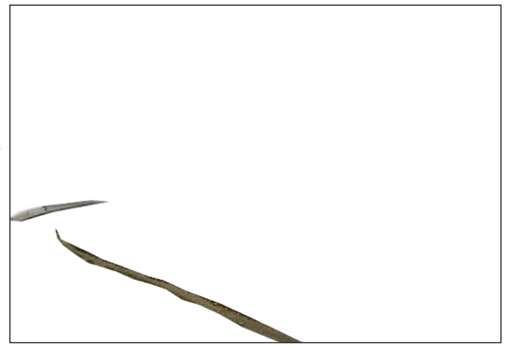
Greenery

The next three cards highlight the green elements of the space: grass, trees, and flowers. The trees and flowers are intentionally depicted separately, reflecting their usual arrangement. When these two cards overlap, they create clusters of trees and flowers, enhancing biodiversity and forming zones or new edges within the expansive open area. This clustering effect and its benefits are also noted in the card descriptions.

3.0
Pedestrian paths

This pattern highlights the pathways that pedestrians use.

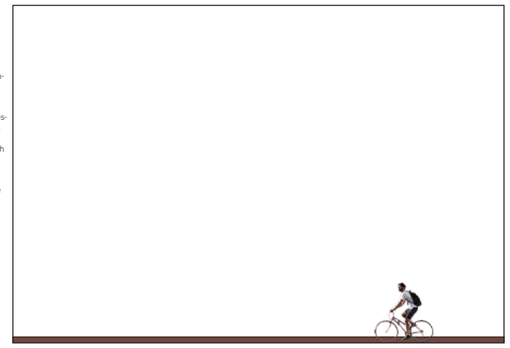
One is a solid pathway designated for pedestrians, while the other is a shortcut through the grass that pedestrians choose to take.



3.1
Bicycle paths and parking

This pattern illustrates potential routes for cyclists. In this scenario, the pathway runs along the edge of the public space, accompanied by a designated bicycle parking area.

Alternatively, the bicycle path could traverse the public space, allowing cyclists to cut across swiftly. However, this decision depends on the desired activities within the public space.



3.2
Cars and parking

This pattern illustrates the significant space that cars occupy in the public area. They not only require roads for driving but also parking space when not in use.

Mobility

These three cards illustrate the existing and potential mobility within the micro-district. The first card depicts cars and a parking lot, a common sight. The second card shows pedestrian paths, often created by repeatedly walking through the grass. The third card introduces a bicycle path, an uncommon feature in this environment. This addition serves as an experiment to observe reactions and sentiments towards integrating such an element into a familiar space.

4.0 Individual activities

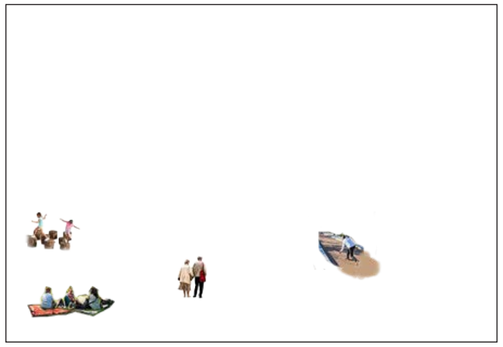
This pattern highlights the various activities individuals can engage in within a public space.

Here, we observe a woman sitting on a bench, a man walking a dog, another woman hanging laundry on a drying rack, and a man simply passing by. These activities don't demand much from the public space, and there are no designated activity zones dictating its purpose. This flexibility allows individuals to utilize the space according to their needs and desires.

4.1 Collective activities

This pattern illustrates the diverse range of collective activities possible in public spaces.

Here, we see a group of people enjoying a picnic, children playing, some individuals going for a run, and others gathered for a game of petanque in the sandy area. These activities don't demand much from the public space, except for some zoning to ensure that different activities can occur harmoniously.



Activities

The two activity cards are divided into individual and collective activities. The individual card features a woman sitting on a bench, a man walking alone, and a man with a dog. Additionally, an existing drying rack is depicted with a woman using it. The collective activities illustrate a mix of potential and current scenarios. While an elderly couple is a common sight today, a group of people having a picnic or someone playing petanque is not typical, despite the space being well-suited for these activities. These elements were included to gauge reactions and serve as conversation starters.

0.1
Tree in front of your window

This pattern shows the tree that blocks your window and your view towards the public space.

It is a tree that is close to your house, and which you cannot see the full image of, only the part of the tree that has grown tall enough to block the second floor, your floor.

0.2
Radiator

This pattern showcases a radiator. One that is placed underneath your window and warms your home.

0.3
Curtains

This patterns showcases curtains that are on the inside of the window. They are there if the sun is too bright, or if you feel like needing more privacy.

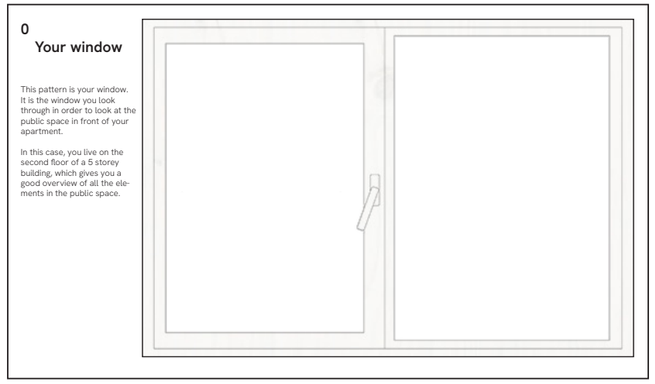
0.4
Flowers on the windowsill

This patterns showcases a flower on the windowsill.

In some cases, with enough flowers, they can almost act as curtains from the outside world.

Interior

The interior elements include a radiator, curtain, flower, and a tree obstructing the view. These elements were incorporated to facilitate observational analysis and to explore whether people consider the interior when thinking about the exterior. Is there a relationship between this?



The window frame

The final card depicts a window frame, serving as the unifying element and foundation for the exercise. It represents a typical window from a five-story building, though it is not drawn entirely to scale.

Initial testing

To evaluate the effectiveness of the new tool and the initial step of the newly proposed strategy, an indepth process was crafted. The development of this process concurrently with the development of the tool and its prototypes. Between the second and final prototype iterations, the cards were tested within this workshop setting. The workshop involved two participants and a curator (myself). The intentions behind the different elements in the tool are explained on the following page.

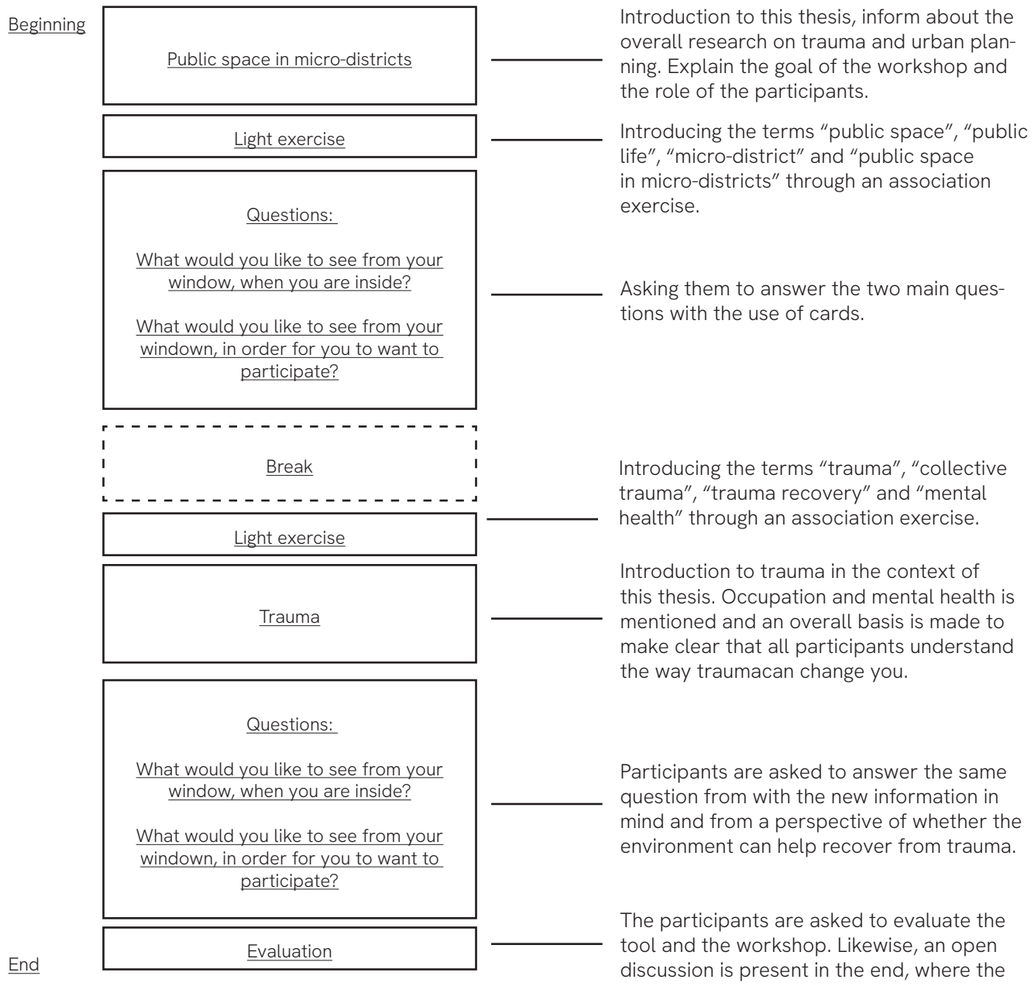
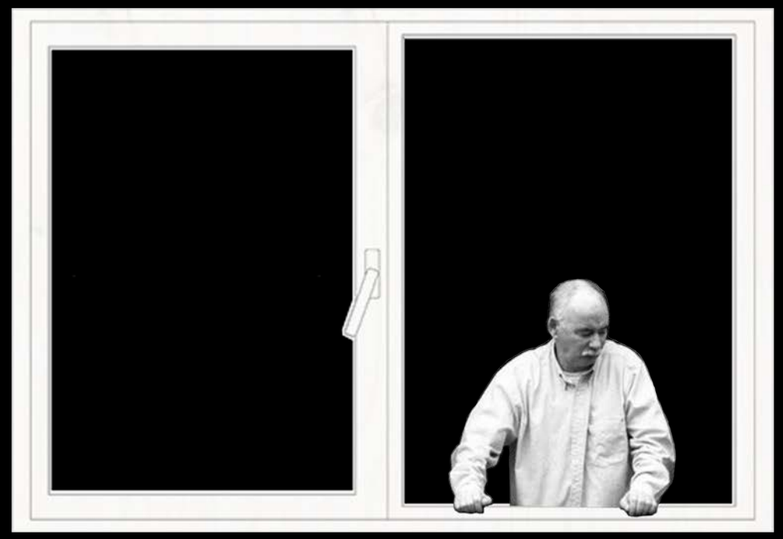


Fig. 148: Diagram of process for testing the initial phase of the new engagement strategy.



The testing of the first meeting with the new tool and a new process was done in a week in April 2024. On the next page you can see an overview of the sessions.

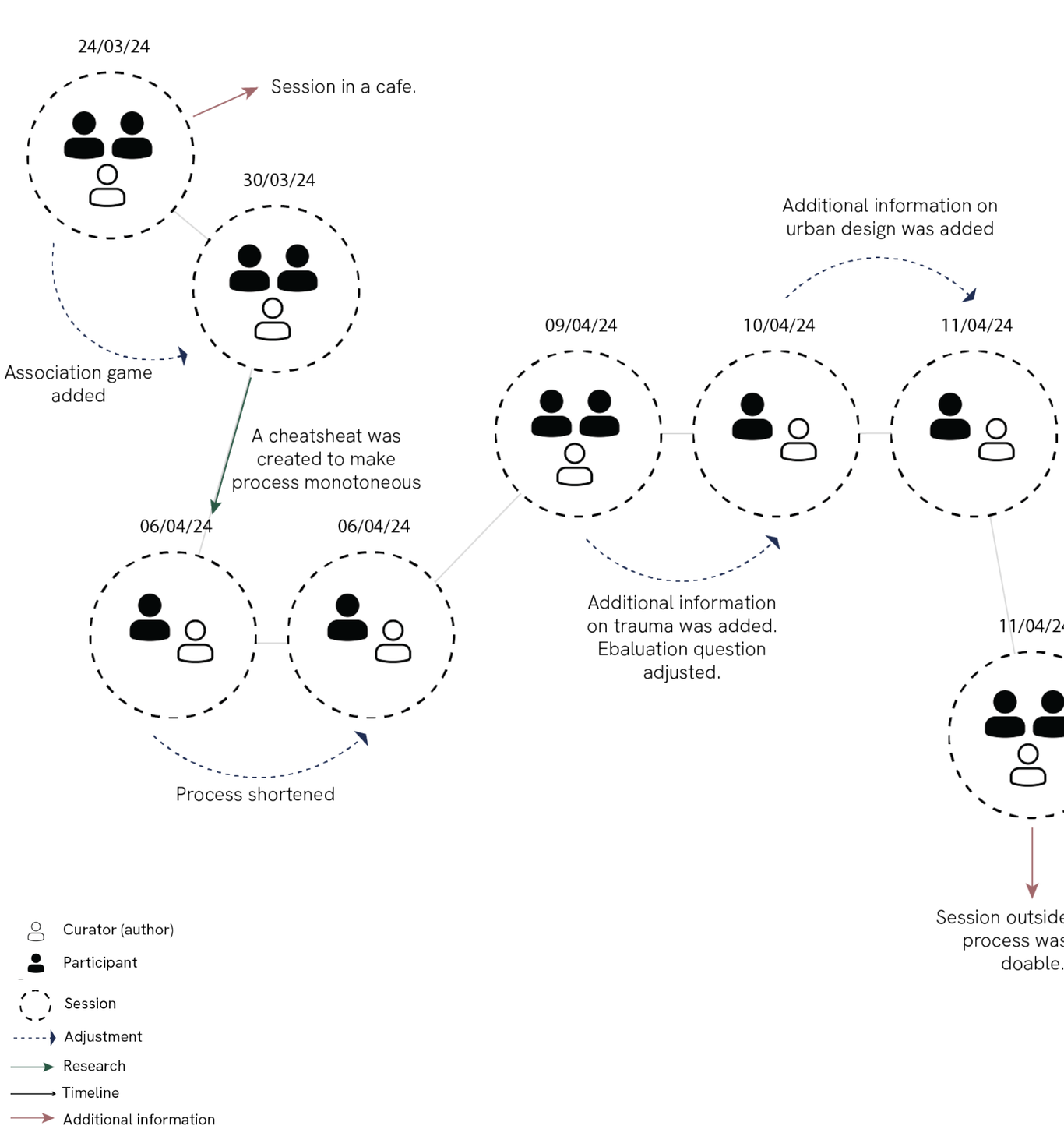


Fig. 149: Overview of the tool development and testing cycles.

Here you can see all the individual answers of the question “**What would you like to see from your window, when you are inside?**” in a randomized order.

Fig. 150: Answers of 17 participants to the question “What would you like to see outside your window, when you are inside?”.

Here you can see all the individual answers of the question “**What would you like to see from your windown, in order for you to want to participate?**” in a randomized order.

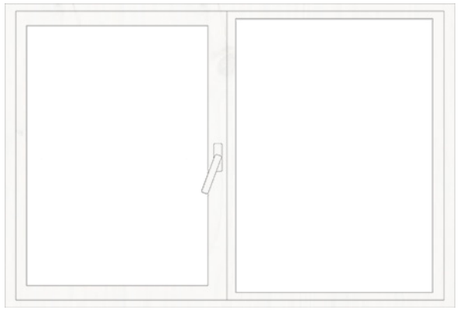
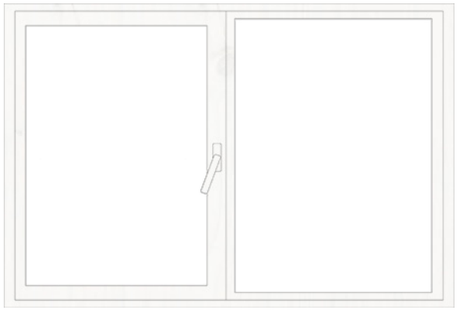
Fig. 151: Answers of 17 participants to the question “What would you like to see outside your window, in order for you to go out and participate?”.

Here you can see all the individual answers of the question "**What would you like to see from your window, when you are inside?**" in a randomized order.

In this section they were asked to think of a hard period in their lives, and reflect on which elements in the public space could have helped them in overcoming this tough time.

Fig. 152: Answers of 17 participants to the question "What would you like to see outside your window, when you are inside?".



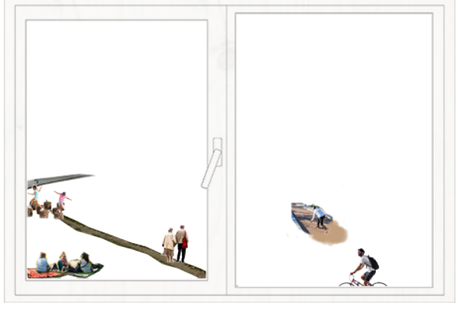










Here you can see all the individual answers of the question "**What would you like to see from your windown, in order for you to want to participate?**" in a randomized order.

In this section they were asked to think of a hard period in their lives, and reflect on which elements in the public space could have helped them in overcoming this tough time.

Fig. 153: Answers of 17 participants to the question "What would you like to see outside your window, in order for you to go out and participate?".

The choice of cards...

The pages before this showcase the selected window scenarios from all the participants throughout all four questions. The overview below showcases the most choicen cards in the different sections, and the newly made window scenarios on the side to the right showcase the compiled new scenarios that the participants would want to see, based on their overall answers.

On the intial question of "What would you like to see from your window when you are inside?", many participants choice grenery and individual activties in both sections.

There is a pattern of wanting to see as much as possible movement in the second question, in the case of "what would you like to see from your window, in order for you to want to go out an d particpate?", where both activities are chosen, and also the pedestrian paths with a special emphasis on the path made by people.

	Section 1		**Section 2**	
	Question 1	Question 2	Question 1	Question 2
The building	3	3	5	2
The renovated building	4	2	2	2
Grass	15	13	11	12
Trees	16	14	9	11
Flowers	15	11	11	11
Pedestrian paths	8	12	5	9
Bicycle paths and parking	5	11	5	6
Cars and parking	0	0	0	1
Individual activities	9	11	7	7
Collective activities	9	15	6	9
Tree in front of your window	8	2	7	8
Radiator	1	0	2	0
Curtains	3	1	4	2
Flower on the windowsill	5	3	7	3

Fig. 154: An overview of the cards selected in the different question rounds.

Fig. 155: The most used cards from the first section of the process.

Fig. 156: The most used cards from the second section of the process.

Results

In total 12 sessions of testing were conducted, with in total 17 participants spanning across all three generations. 9 participants in the 3rd generation, 7 participants in the 2nd generation and 1 participant from the 1st generation. Getting equally as many participants from all three generation were not possible, due to the pressure in time, likewise, through searching, which was done through contact the closest and initiating a snowball affect, it became clear that the 1st generation was the hardest to catch, and simply not within the reach of the week of testing.

Association game
An overall positive feedback was given specifically about the association games. In general, the participants found it a great way to ease into the exercises. In the initial part, many of the answers could be used to verify our analysis of the characteristics of public space in micro-district. Which was nice, as they yet were not introduced to the tool. The answers could in general be categories to either be; elements, activities or descriptions / feelings.

Through the descriptive words there was a clear negative remark linked to the micro-districts, with words such as “dark”, “gray”, “ugly” and “uncomfortable”. The other associations have been visualized through portraits.

Tool
In general, the reaction to the tool was as well very positive. Some participants without waiting started telling about what elements were in their public spaces surrounding their block. The reaction to the overlapping and visual aspects were very positive, and many enjoyed playing with the image making even after the exercises were done. Because the process was neatly guided, many of the participants didn’t read the long description on the cards, rather they found the images very easily understood and the title to be sufficient.

Questions, first section
The participants spend more time answering the question the first time they were asked. This was due to them getting familiar with the cards and the concept of overlapping.

Fig. 157: Overview of the answers of the light exercise, the association game.

In this initial section, there was a pattern of participants choosing a lot of elements all at once, they wanted to see almost everything other than the blocks. Only a few participants included the blocks, renovated and un-renovated, in their image. They explained that for some it was a familiar view and therefore they didn’t mind, and for others it represented potential.

Association game, second section
The second warm-up game which was related to trauma, seemed a bit uncomfortable for some. Before the beginning of the association game it was explained that the intention was not to unfold the individual trauma that participants might have, nor lay on the assumption that these exist. This eased some of the participants. Most of the participants were struggling with finding words to link to “collective trauma” and some didn’t put down any answers. The same pattern was spotted when asked about “trauma recovery”, where one of the more popular answers were “therapy”, “psychotherapy” and “time”.

Questions, second section
Regarding the second section, the participants were asked to answer the question by remembering a tough time in their lives, and thinking whether in that moment the public spaces surrounding their home could have helped them in recovering. The answers showed a very visible pattern of those who wanted to purely see nature, trees, flowers and grass, with sometimes pedestrians paths, but only the ones made by people to indicate that there was life and they were not alone. and on the other hand, the participants that wanted to see people and as much as possible action. This exercise showcased which participants were extraverted and introverted.

Evaluation
After the process, the participants were asked to answer to 9 statements on the tool and the process, with whether they strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree to the statements.The average answers can be seen in the diagram.

Adjustments on the tool
After the process was done, the few very crucial elements were adjustment. Certain sentences in the descriptions were rephrased for better understand and a few elements were added.

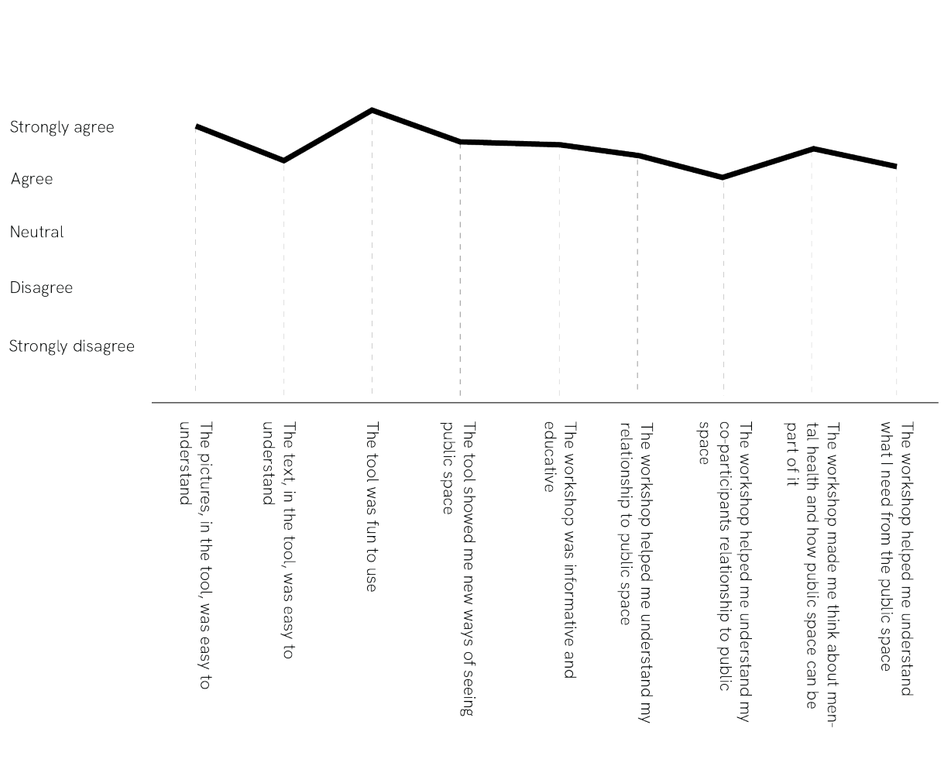


Fig. 158: Diagram of evaluation on the process.

The initial intentions

The primary objective of the testing was to determine whether this new tool could provide insights into the relationship between citizens and their surrounding public spaces in Alytus, Lithuania. Initially, around 10 residents were invited to participate in a workshop scenario conducted in groups, where they would be led through the exercises. Following the initial testing phase, it was decided to proceed with smaller groups consisting of two participants and a curator. This approach allowed for more comfortable and intimate settings, facilitating input on the overarching question while also gathering sub-products.

Participant requiting
Due to time constraints in locating participants within the Alytus block, the search for participants was expanded. Individuals who currently resided or had previously lived in a block constructed during the Soviet occupation were invited to participate. This decision was influenced by preliminary testing and analysis, which revealed that the elements in public spaces within micro-districts had remained largely unchanged. Thus, even participants who had lived in a block 30 years ago could still identify the elements depicted on the cards. A total of 16 participants were gathered from various regions across the country.

Transgenerational trauma
As a sub-focus, the aim was to involve participants from three distinct generations, which according to theory (Gailiene, 2023), are believed to have inherited trauma across family lines. The goal of this generational approach was to recruit a similar number of participants from each generation: i) the 1st generation, born roughly between 1935 and 1945, ii) the 2nd generation, born approximately between 1960 and 1980, and iii) the 3rd generation, born around 1980 to 2000. The hypothesis was that there might be commonalities in responses to the questions among individuals from the same family lineage across different generations.

Association game
The warm-up exercises yielded specific outcomes, particularly in the form of associations generated during the process. Participants were prompted to share one to three words or terms that came to mind when certain words were mentioned. These exercises were designed to gently introduce participants to the upcoming content. They aimed to gauge participants' associations with terms such as "public space," "public life," "micro-districts," and "public space in micro-districts," as well as "trauma," "collective trauma," "trauma recovery," and "mental health." By understanding participants' associations, the curator could address any unexpected responses and clarify the context of the terms within the exercise.

Efficiency in curating
A paper guide was crafted for the purpose of the curator, myself, in order to ensure coherence throughout the sessions. This analog approach encouraged participants to concentrate solely on the task at hand. An illustration of this methodology, along with evaluation questions, is provided on the subsequent page.

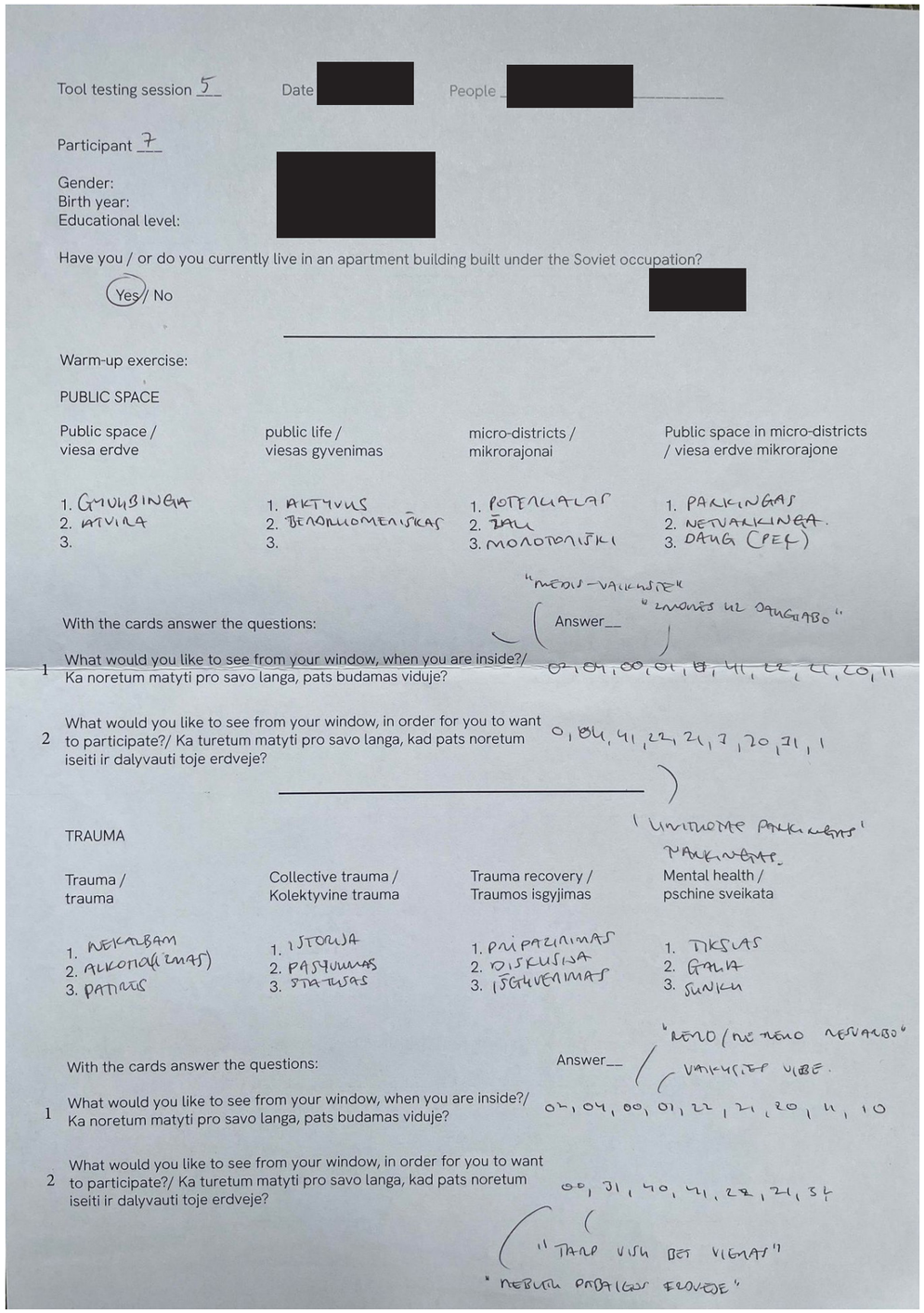


Fig. 159: Photo of the guide that helped stay consistent in the curation of the testing.

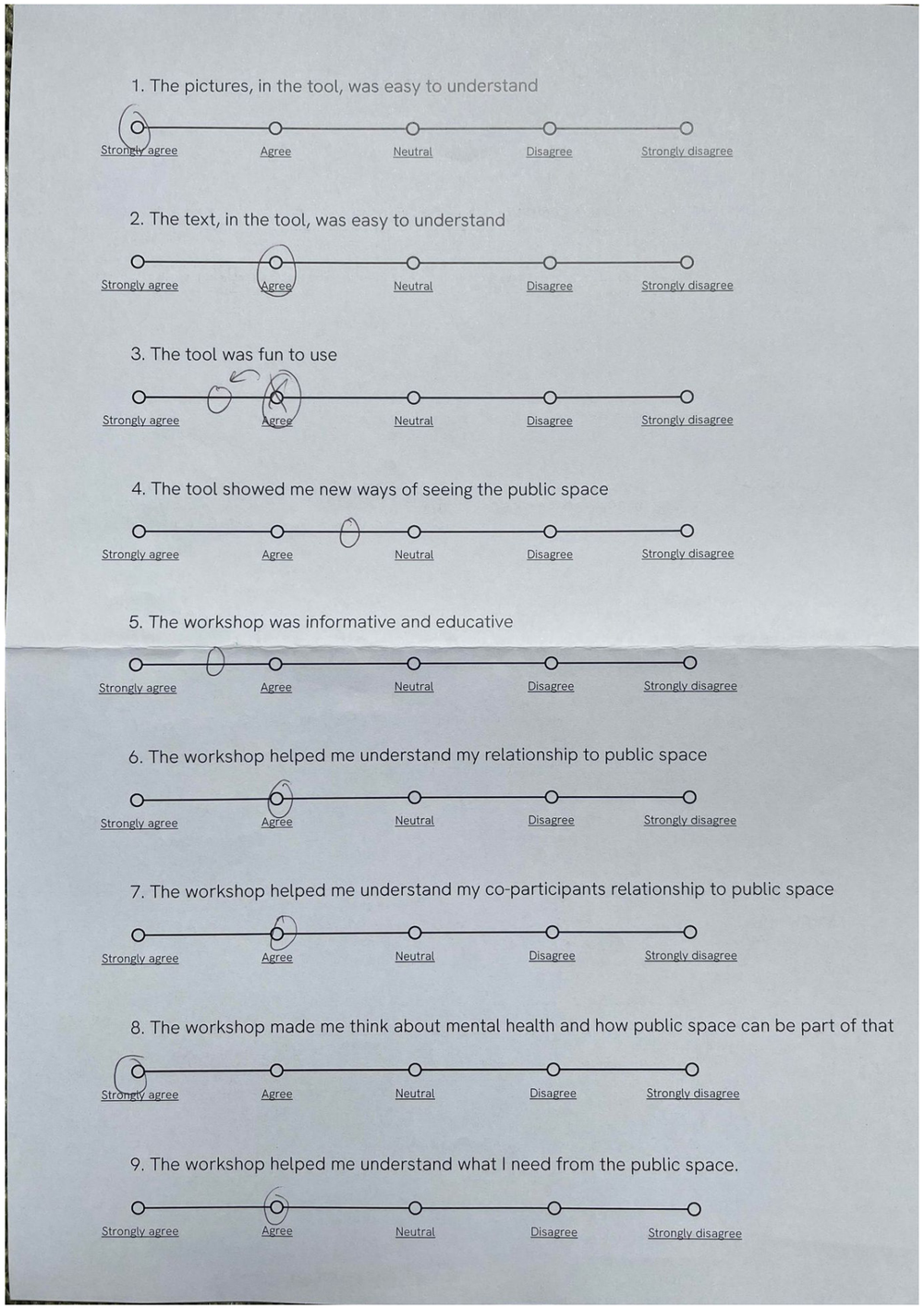


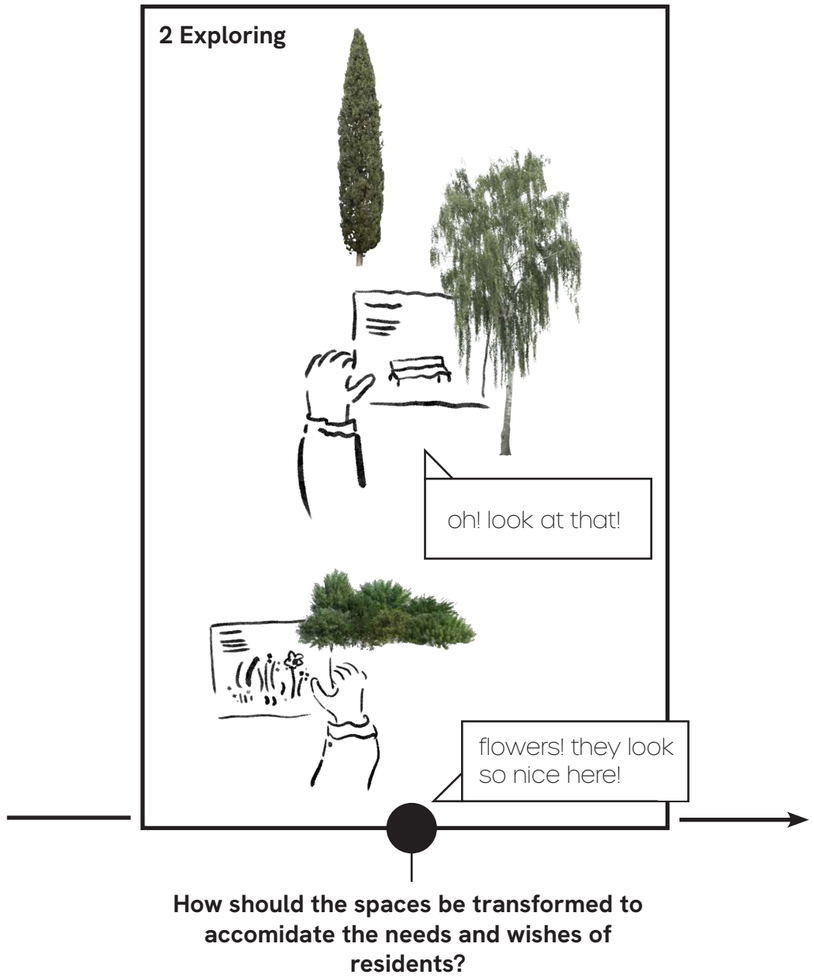
Fig. 160: Photo of backside of the guide, showing the evaluation and the questions.

Authors reflection

Based on the trauma research and the conclusions from the first meeting with the residents, an initial design proposal can be developed. This could include a window display showing the compiled answers, as illustrated in fig. 155-156. However, these answers mainly indicate a preference for greenery and activities, suggesting that residents enjoy having some movement and action to observe from their homes.

The next step would then be to determine what is needed from the first meeting to effectively address the task of the second meeting: How should the spaces be transformed to meet the needs and wishes of the residents?

This question initiates a similar process of design and research that was used to create the “my window” tool and process, which helped us answer the initial question: What is the relationship between residents and public space? Given the limited time, we will focus on key points important for creating a tool or process for the second meeting between the sectors. The brainstorm on the second meeting will help us understand what is needed to highlight and bring from the first meeting, and what should be included in the initial design of the space, the design that is the halfway point of the first and second meeting.



Stakeholder Preparation and Roles for the Second Meeting

As the stakeholders prepare for the second meeting, they come with the understanding, based on the initial meeting, that this session will focus on gaining new information, learning from each other, and solving exercises. The initial meeting centered on the residents, who should now have a clearer idea of their feelings and desires regarding the public space they see from their windows.

The municipal stakeholders, who participated passively in the initial meeting, have been informed that they will need to actively participate in the second meeting. They are expected to present the vision for the micro-districts, outlining the municipality's goals and focus points. For instance, in the case of Alytus, they would be asked to discuss the citys vision – become a comfortable city and how the specific micro-district and courtyard can contribute to this vision. Before the meeting, municipal representatives were asked to prepare a 10-minute presentation covering these points. Similarly, the projecting stakeholder, who is hired by the municipality (e.g., "Kauno Planas" in Kaunas or a comparable stakeholder in Alytus), is asked to provide a similar presentation. This presentation should inform upon the block structures and subterranean elements that must be considered when transforming the space.

The curating stakeholders, who are urbanists or architects, will also present a brief agenda for the day and introduce a new stakeholder: nature. Their presentation aims to address climate change, highlight the existing biological aspects of the public space, and emphasize the need to preserve them. They will also showcase successful case studies of space transformations and strategies to mitigate climate change, considering temperature rises and rainwater management.

The initial part of the meeting will consist of these three presentations, aiming to illuminate the various elements and stakeholders involved, and the potential impact of the decisions to be made during the exercises.

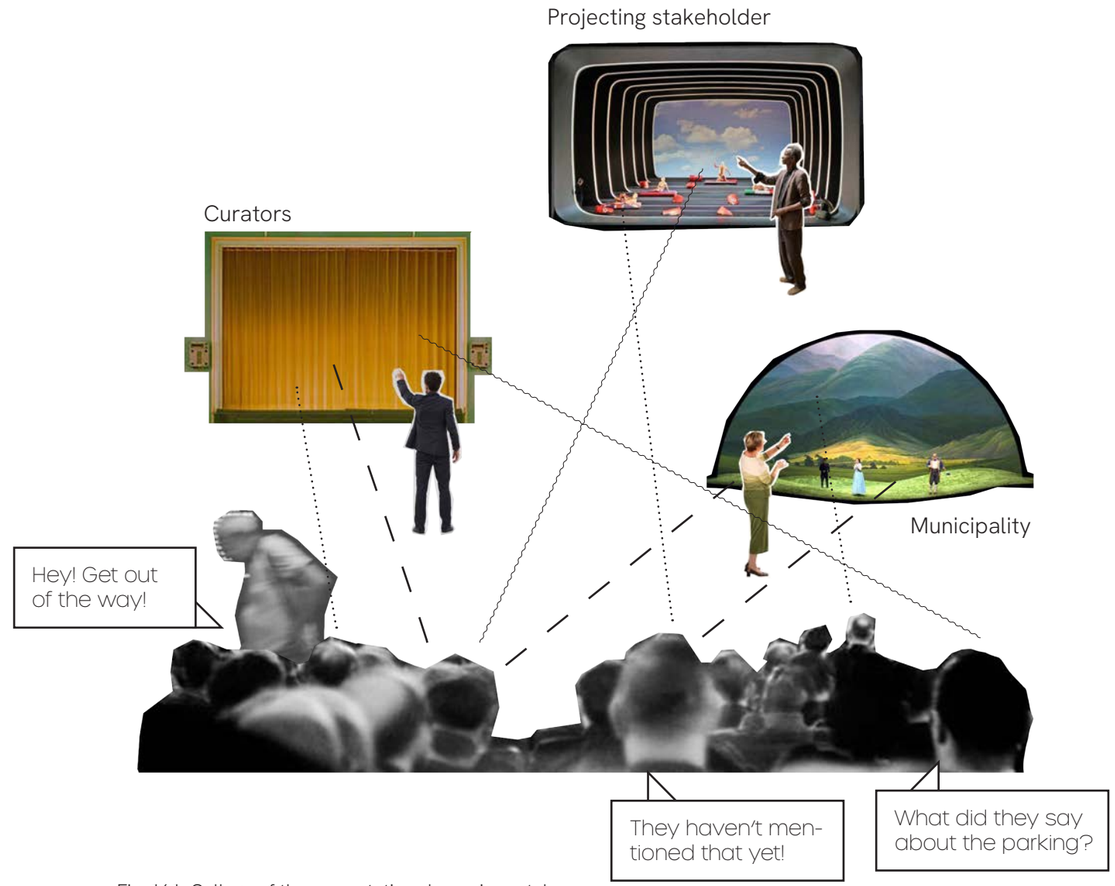


Fig. 161: Collage of the presentations by various stakeholders in the second meeting of the new engagement strategy.

A new plot distribution and ownership rights

As illustrated in fig. 112, the plot distribution in the Vidzgiris micro-district housing group may naturally raise questions about legal ownership. Therefore, a new plot distribution proposal has been developed, focusing on the courtyard areas.

In this proposal, the individual plots of land surrounding each building are reduced in size, maintaining a 10-12 meter buffer around each building. This preserves the existing semi-private green zones, usually gardens maintained by the residents. The shared space, which encompasses the entire backyard or front yard (depending on the block), would remain privately owned by the residents but become a shared responsibility among five blocks instead of one or two.

The zones of focus, marked by the letter F, will be the central points for the second meeting between stakeholders. In these zones, residents can propose what they wish to see implemented.

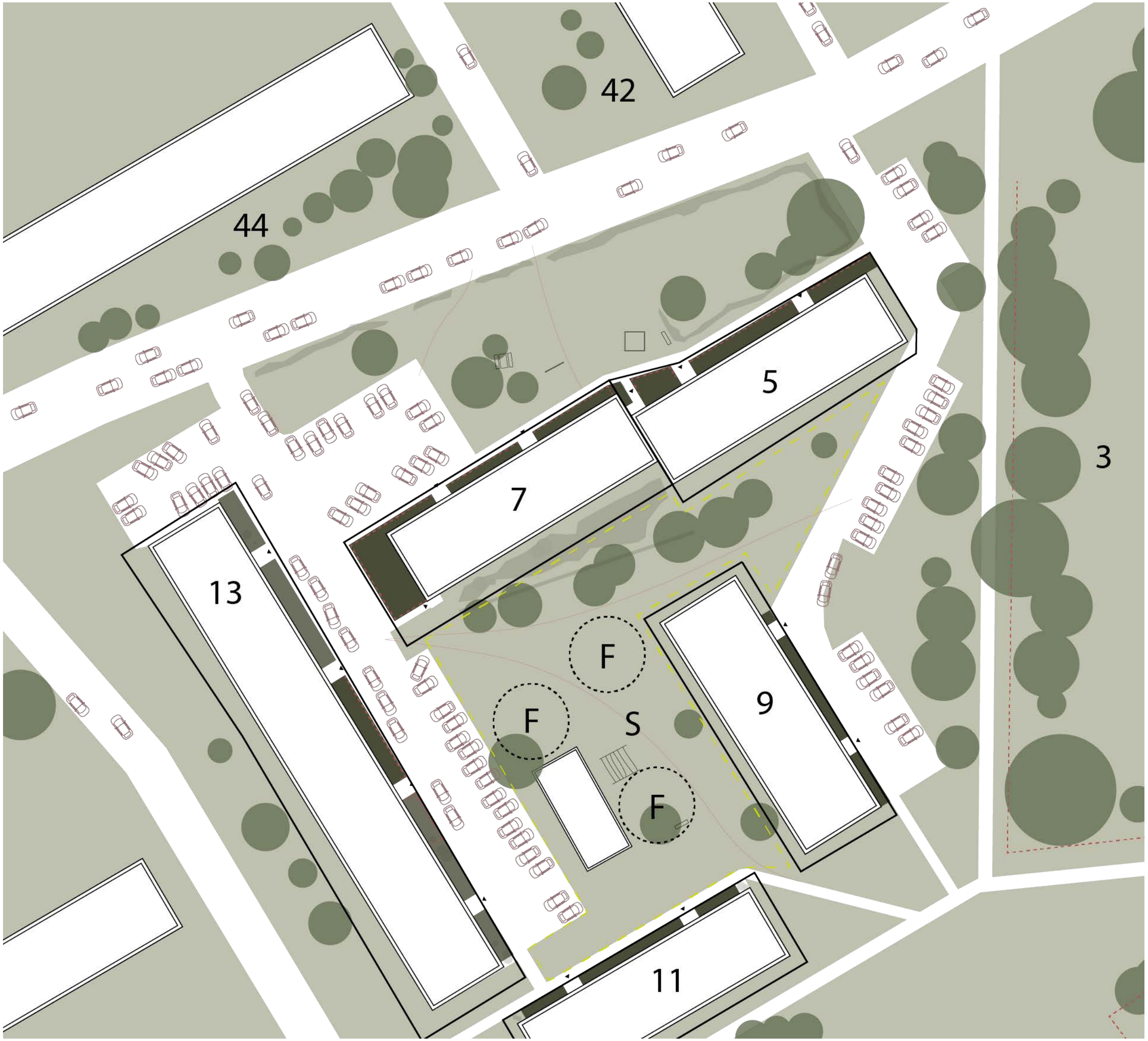


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Fig. 162: Zoom of building group in Vidzgiris micro-district, Alytus.

- Residential blocks
- School
- "Private gardens" in front of windows
- Shared courtyard between blocks
- F Focus points for second meeting
- S Private owned, shared space

Fig. 163: Collage of the focus zones in Vidzgiris, Alytus.

Focus zones

This division into smaller, manageable zones is intended to encourage residents to collaborate and make decisions for specific areas without the burden of considering the entire space. This approach aims to make it easier for residents to reach agreements and address the needs of others in shared spaces if conflicts arise. The proposal also suggests that while the shared space would be owned by the residents, its maintenance would be handled by a hired actor. This means the design of spaces surrounding the focus zones should remain relatively simple, retaining current features such as grass, trees, and existing structures like drying racks.

The focus zones will be central to the exercises in the second meeting. The number of zones addressed will depend on resident participation.

The first zone, located at the edge of the green space, features an old transformer structure and a sandbox ruin. Participants can discuss the transformation of the structure, surface usage, preservation of old ruins, and the potential creation of a barrier from the parking area to foster a quieter and safer environment.

The second zone, situated behind the transformer, includes a bench, a large tree, and an old drying rack. Here, participants can consider the future of these existing elements and potential activities that could be accommodated by the shade provided by the tree.

The third zone, primarily open, invites participants to think freely about the activities and greenery they desire. This zone allows for creative and flexible planning to meet their needs and wishes.

Feedback and feedforward from the first meeting

As previously mentioned, the tool testing yielded numerous positive aspects, reflected in the feedback on both the process and the tool's usage. These positive elements should be retained for the second meeting. Notable positive aspects included the visual tool's effectiveness, the connection to familiar objects, the light exercises that facilitated understanding among neighbors, and the hands-on approach that encouraged solving exercises in person rather than on a computer.

Deconstruction of the zones
The goal of the session is to identify the specific spatial elements, feelings, sounds, and spaces that residents want in the different focus zones. Additionally, it aims to determine which of these elements are priorities for the municipality, especially concerning climate change mitigation. To explore where different choices can be made, the same method of deconstruction will be used. Each zone will be introduced through a deconstructed image, breaking down the elements for detailed consideration and discussion.
For visualizing the method, we will look at the first focus zone. To avoid overwhelming participants with the many different elements that could be discussed, an image deconstruction is made to curate the discussion through five specific elements: the transformer, the pedestrian path, the unutilized grass, the old sandbox, and the cars. These elements are presented as transparent cards, similar to the initial meeting, and are briefly described to provide participants with a clear understanding of the picture in case there is any confusion.

Accommodating material
Alongside the deconstructed image of the focus zone, a selection of themes important to the stakeholders is chosen. Each stakeholder selects two themes, which are then presented as task cards accompanied by specific colors. Figure 164 illustrates the potential important elements from each stakeholder's perspective. This diagram helps identify which spatial elements, approaches, or concepts stakeholders wish to include or discuss during the session. These keywords are then translated into open questions. For example, from the residents' perspective, a question might be, "What kind of activities do we want in this zone?" While other stakeholders might not have an opinion on this question, if residents suggest urban gardening, the project stakeholders could propose a water collection element to support the gardens. This way, even if one stakeholder initiates the keyword and question, others can contribute by suggesting complementary elements or expressing concerns. The task cards serve as conversation starters and assist the urbanist, who acts as both a curator and an advocate for nature, a new stakeholder in this meeting.

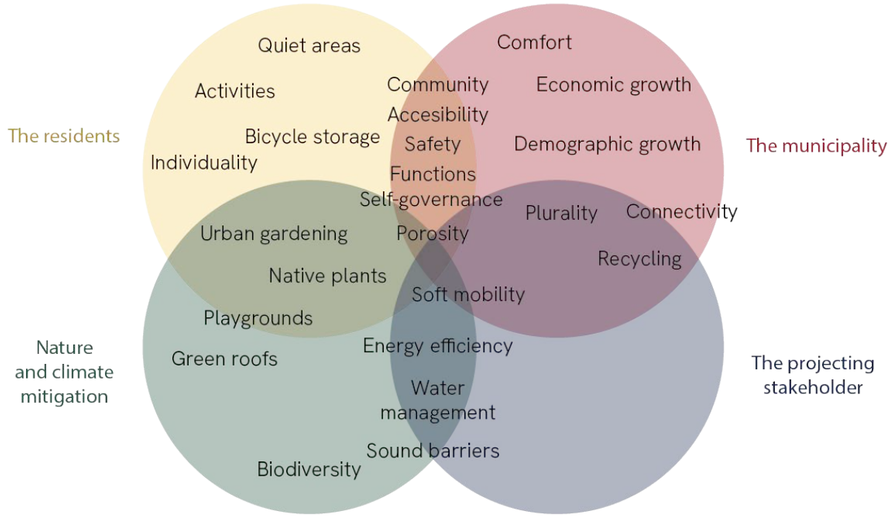

Fig. 164: Important keywords in need of discussion from the perspectives of the different stakeholders involved.

Fig. 165: Deconstruction of the image to single elements from focus zone 1.

The process

After the initial quick presentations by the different stakeholders, participants will be divided into groups. Each group will gather around a table with a representative from each stakeholder. The groups will select a focus zone and create a collage using images, leaves and flower samples, post-it notes with remarks, statements, and other elements in collaboration with the different stakeholders. The process involves discussing the eight questions from each stakeholder's perspective, using the elements on the table, and adhering to a time limit to ensure efficiency.

The goal is to select elements based on the questions, creating a loose visionary collage for each specific zone. This approach aims to help stakeholders understand each other's different wishes, contribute additional elements, and find compromises in the selection of elements. If a compromise cannot be reached, the conflict will be noted on a post-it and added to the college as a point for further discussion. This unresolved issue will be carried forward in the process and, if urgent, addressed either through an additional discussion or by voting in the third meeting.

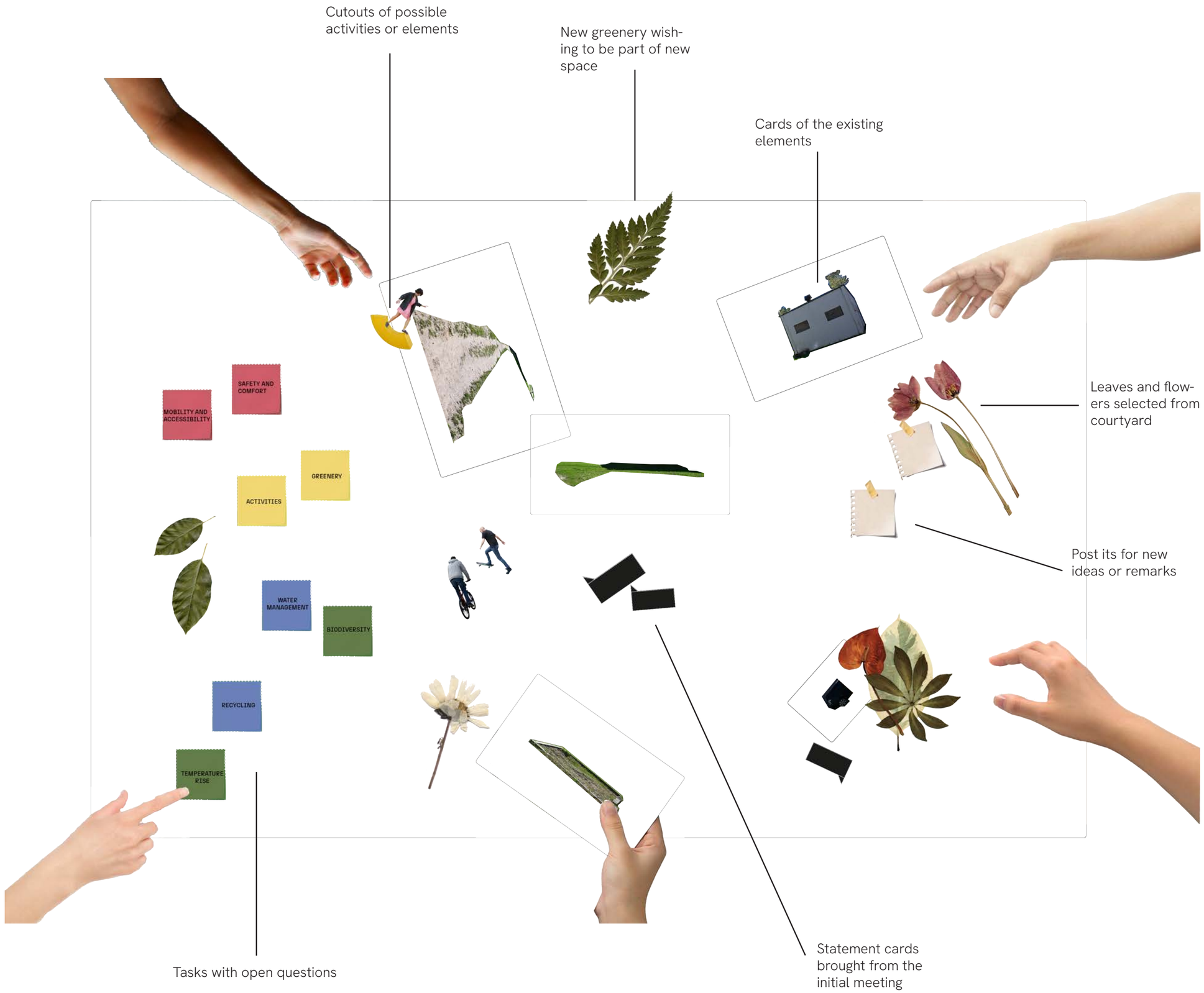

Fig. 166: Image depicting the second meeting and the discussion of elements between stakeholders.

The result

The result of the second meeting will be a collage of elements, both physical and those depicted on paper. By the end of the meeting, there should be three collages representing the three focus zones, each showcasing the desired direction for the different spaces in the public area. If time permits and depending on the number of participants, the creation of visuals for several zones by the same participants can be achieved. This approach also ensures that there won't be identical wishes for all zones, preventing overlap.

This proposed process will need testing to determine what works and what doesn't. However, based on this initial idea of the new process and the new tools required for the second meeting, we can return to the conclusions from the initial meeting. This will help in designing an effective conclusion for the first meeting and aid in initiating the second one.

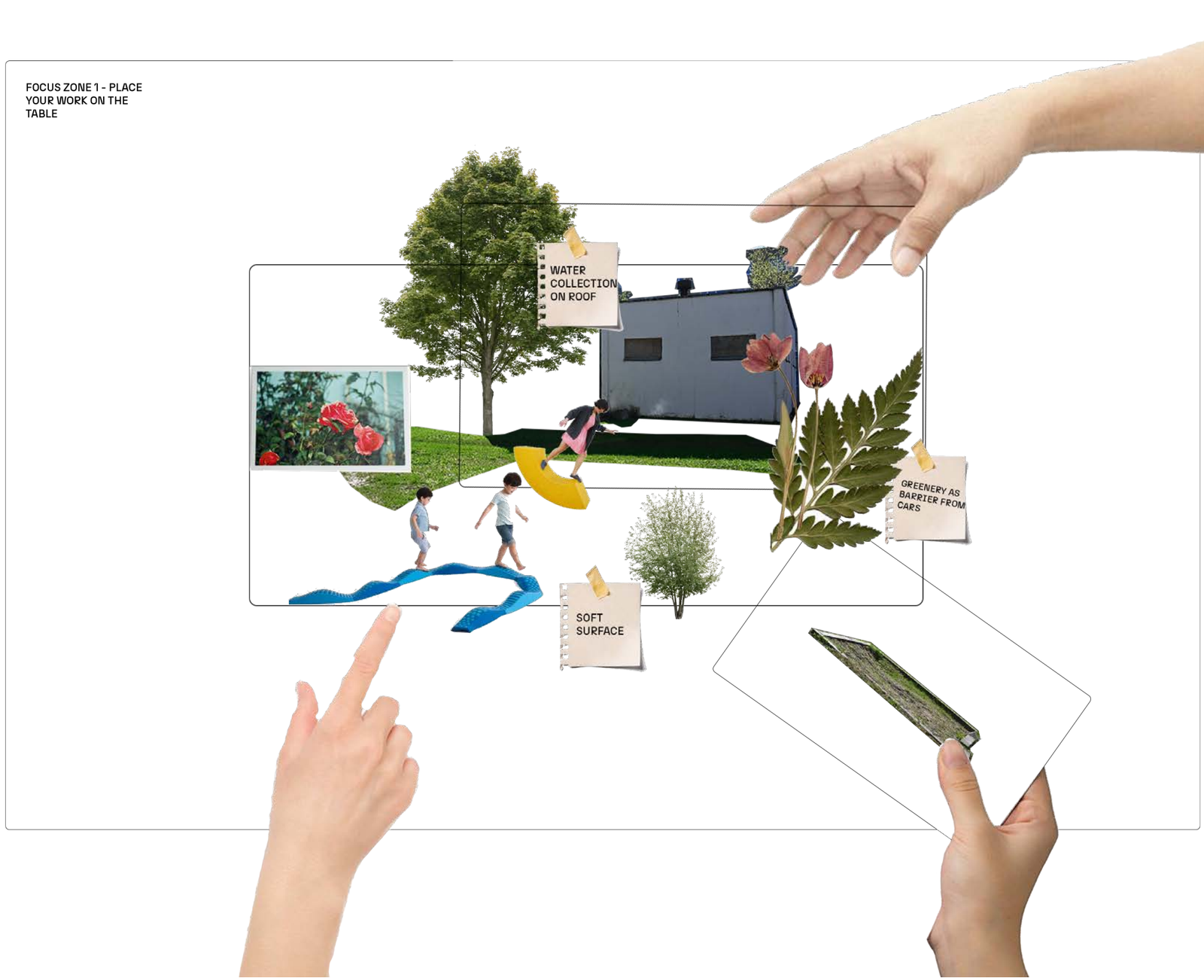

Fig. 167: Image depicting how the concluding collage from the second meeting between stakeholders could look like.

Fig. 168: Three windows of three generations. A summary and highlight of the most interesting aspects from the first meeting in the engagement strategy.

The initial design proposal

The first meeting with the residents provided us with valuable information about the elements in the existing public space they like and dislike, the elements needed for them to enjoy looking at the space from inside, and what needs to be present for them to want to go out and participate in the space.

The second meeting will delve deeper into the options for elements and discussions on specific existing elements. Therefore, it is crucial to extract beneficial information from the first meeting and bring it to the second. The initial design proposal, which could be presented at the beginning of the second meeting, is multi-layered. Firstly, it offers a view of the most liked elements but from a step back, showing several windows to convey the idea that many people have wishes regarding what they want to see, while also sharing a common view.

The second view is a montage of three windows, each representing a different generation. The most important elements expressed by each generation during the sessions are displayed. Additionally, statements are included to help understand the significance connected to the choice of these elements.

Fig. 169: A concluding collage of the initial meeting in the engagement strategy, showing the amount of participants involved...

Conclusions

In this final chapter, I will conclude the research by answering the research questions, sub-questions and discuss the project's results on a broader scale. Alongside this a reflection on the masters, the studio, methods used and other elements will be done. I will finish the last part with some final personal thoughts.

“How can participatory urban design facilitate the healing of collective trauma while also enhancing public spaces within micro-districts in Alytus, Lithuania?”

Recovery from collective trauma can be facilitated by transforming public spaces into environments that encourage both formal and informal interactions. Actively involving residents in the redesign of their shared spaces empowers them to shape their living environments, fostering a sense of ownership, control, and belonging—essential elements for trauma recovery.

Public spaces within micro-districts can be enhanced by creating meaningful, comfortable, and inclusive areas that promote social interactions. Rather than simply replicating past designs, there is an opportunity to rethink and transform these spaces into platforms for community activities and social cohesion, essential for rebuilding trust and mending relationships strained by historical events. This research proposes a new vision and hierarchy for existing public spaces in the micro-district, distinguishing between courtyards, green corridors, and public parks. All share key elements of greenery and connectivity, or lack thereof, and can be characterized as spaces of recovery from both individual and collective perspectives.

The courtyards within housing blocks have the potential to become quiet green spaces for individual recovery, where residents can be alone yet feel together. Smaller zones can form comfortable areas to sit, read, listen, and observe life and nature. This project identifies the significant lack of basic necessities in the courtyards of Vidzgiris. Initial engagement meetings revealed that residents have strong bonds with nature and the movement of people and desire more activity in their courtyards.

Green corridors, which currently serve as pedestrian connectors in micro-districts, can become more active green spaces for collective recovery. These spaces, where residents from different blocks meet, currently lack formal and informal meeting areas. Adding benches, communal activity functions, and art can create new destinations and opportunities for interactions.

Public parks connect micro-districts, facilitating soft mobility with pedestrian and bike paths. These parks gather residents from different areas for activities such as playing in new playgrounds or going on afternoon runs. These spaces act as important connectors in the city and should remain so, but should also be integrated with green corridors through extended bicycle and pedestrian paths with benches and lighting.

Adding value through urban elements is necessary, but more importantly, there must be a participatory process. This project highlights the urgency of a new engagement strategy and new tools to facilitate an informative, educative, and acknowledging co-design process that can lead to recovery.

Additionally, it is important to reconsider the role of micro-districts in cultural and historical contexts. Shifting perceptions from predominantly negative to recognizing these districts as integral parts of the community’s heritage can catalyze healing. Integrating collective history into public spaces can facilitate the processing of collective memories and foster a broader recognition of the past.

Participation in this process requires a continuous exchange of feedback. The dynamics and communication channels between civic bodies and the public need reevaluation to enhance engagement. Allocating more resources to determine the most effective formats and media for disseminating information will enable residents to participate more actively and meaningfully in shaping their society.

What is (collective) trauma? What is its history, definition and effects on the individual and collective?

Collective trauma refers to the psychological, and at times physical, aftermath experienced by a group of individuals who share a common but not identical history of significant events. In this project, collective trauma is the main term used to describe the profound effects on the Lithuanian population due to the major event of soviet occupation, which lasted approximately 50 years. Historically, the concept of trauma was often associated with war or the Holocaust, but today the term is frequently used in a lighter, sometimes sarcastic context among young people. The term was popularized in Lithuania by Danute Gailiene, though our tool testing sessions revealed that many people are still unfamiliar with it.

Trauma manifests differently in individuals, influenced by personal reactions and behavioral patterns developed over time and the circumstances of their upbringing (internal compass). For some, trauma may present psychological barriers that hinder their ability to mentally navigate between the past, present, and future. For others, it may appear as a physical manifestation, a scar left by past events. Collectively, in the context of Lithuania, this trauma often appears as widespread mistrust and a lack of participation in societal activities.

How does the socio-spatial environmental context influence the occurrence and perpetuation of collective trauma, especially in micro-districts?

Based on Harvey’s research, there is a clear connection between the socio-spatial environment and trauma recovery, suggesting that the environment can act as a therapeutic agent if designed thoughtfully. The physical layout and design of micro-districts consistently impact the daily lives and psychological well-being of residents. The uniformity and often deteriorated condition of these buildings act as persistent reminders of past oppressions experienced under soviet rule, reinforcing a collective memory. The unchanged nature of the spaces around these blocks perpetuates the presence of the past, failing to provide the necessary environments conducive to recovery. This includes a shortage of communal spaces, where existing areas only exacerbate feelings of loneliness and detachment, thereby adding to the ongoing emotional strain.

Furthermore, the lack of resources and recognition of the urgent need to revitalize both the residential blocks and their surrounding areas contribute to the stigma associated with living in micro-districts. This stigma reinforces the social isolation of these areas and underscores the critical need for re-envisioning these spaces to support healing and community building.

How can trauma inform the urban design process of public space in micro-districts in Alytus, Lithuania?

Understanding trauma and its effects on individuals and communities underscores the importance of urban design in empowering citizens through self-expression and participation in co-design and co-creation. The literature on trauma and recovery emphasizes the need for safety, predictability, and empowerment. Urban design should provide secure spaces, both active and quiet, with appropriate lighting, visibility, and clear signage. However, as observed in places like Lithuania, urban design fails when residents do not use or know how to use these spaces.

Currently, the urban design process—from conceptualization to realized transformation—is often a closed process involving urban designers, planners, and municipalities. However, in building renovation strategies, this process must include homeowners.There is an opportunity to involve residents in a participatory process for transforming public spaces. The knowledge of trauma recovery is used to create the new engagement strategy which aims to involve, encourage and educate the residents to come together in three meetings and learn, explore and transform the public spaces with the help from each other.

This project demonstrates that, in some cases, the process, and the design of the process, is more important than the final transformation itself.

What role can top-down and bottom-up initiatives play in healing from collective trauma in public spaces in micro-districts?

Top-down initiatives are essential for establishing a framework and allocating the necessary resources for significant urban development projects, including the redesign of public spaces in micro-districts. As in the case of Kaunas, the existing framework (MMAP, 2022) should be updated with trauma-informed principles for micro-districts, including spaces for recovery both for individuals and collectives. Another significant element in this process is funding. Municipalities that are capable often entice residents to participate in renovations by funding the transformation of public spaces. This is an important first step, but the method of transforming these spaces often presents challenges that need addressing.

On the other hand, bottom-up initiatives need more empowerment. There is a noticeable deficiency in active community members, local organizations, and movements within the micro-districts. Empowerment should stem from top-down efforts, with resources allocated to enable local communities to actively participate in reshaping and engaging with their immediate environments.

What is the impact of technology-driven engagement strategies on trauma recovery?

Technology-driven engagement offers several benefits, but it also has potential drawbacks, particularly in the context of traditional trauma recovery strategies. Central to the process of trauma recovery is regaining a sense of time and space and grounding oneself by engaging with the world through all senses, which is crucial for reintegrating into society. Technological engagement strategies, while innovative, may inadvertently exclude certain demographic groups, such as the elderly, and distract from the primary objectives of recovery efforts.

According to the sources referenced in this research, technology-driven engagement strategies have not shown significant benefits within the scope of trauma recovery.

Relevance

Scientific relevance

Knowledge gap
While there is substantial research linking psychology and the environment, a significant knowledge gap exists concerning the relationship between collective trauma (Gailiene, 2023) and urban design, particularly in public spaces within micro-districts. This research represents a preliminary step in a vast field, exploring how trauma-informed urban design can aid collective trauma recovery.

Public spaces transformation in micro-districts
Many projects focus on block transformations, yet there is a notable lack of well-evaluated processes for public space transformation in micro-districts. This research addresses this gap by proposing a new engagement strategy with three steps, facilitating public space transformation through the lens of trauma recovery.

Participatory tool
The outcome of this research extends beyond an engagement strategy to include a spatial tool that integrates knowledge of trauma and urban design through deconstruction and imagery. This visual tool, which gathered valuable qualitative data and received positive feedback, can inform further research on communication between residents, urban designers, and other stakeholders.

Participation in research
This research aimed to test the limits of participation and input gathering as an urbanist, employing diverse methods to foster varying levels of societal participation in Lithuania. Combining traditional research methods with participatory approaches, this study merges qualitative and quantitative data, creating a unique, locally grounded research model that can inspire future studies.

On-going war and potential trauma
Given Lithuania's history of occupation, the findings and processes of this thesis contribute to the knowledge of trauma-informed urban design, particularly relevant for former Soviet countries and potentially globally for regions affected by war crimes. Likewise, the research can provide guidelines for what awaits the existing country of Ukraine, which is currently dealing with an invasion of Russia.

Societal relevance

Spatial collective trauma and trauma recovery
This research explores the spatial dimensions of trauma, examining how it manifests in micro-districts and identifying potential spatial modifications that can facilitate trauma recovery.

"My window" tool
Beyond its scientific value, this tool serves an educational purpose, offering insights into trauma and urbanism. Testing revealed that the deconstruction approach and provided information helped residents understand the urban designer's role and trust their expertise.

Public space distinction
The proposed categorization of public spaces in Alytus—courtyards, green corridors, and public parks—offers concrete strategies to combat the current monotonous transformations in micro-districts.

Alytus, Lithuania
Alytus, the sixth-largest city in Lithuania, served as the focus of this research, providing insights into public spaces and participation in less thriving cities. The study contributed new knowledge on micro-districts and trauma in relation to Alytus.

Collective trauma and micro-districts

This research delves deeply into trauma as a novel field of inquiry, examining how trauma theory can be applied to urban design. By analyzing current public space design processes, the research proposes a new strategy that emphasizes aspects of trauma recovery missing in existing approaches.

In exploring the connection between trauma and micro-districts, the research highlights the stigmatization associated with these areas. Often linked to the soviet era in popular perception, micro-districts are, in fact, products of the modernist era. This negative association leads to micro-districts being undervalued and unattractive to new families. Through a comprehensive review of the history of the built environment and these blocks, the research aims to illuminate the complexities of micro-districts and their origins and current state. The thesis argues that the negative association of micro-districts as "soviet" is deeply rooted in trauma, reflecting a bygone era of reform.

The lack of transformation in micro-districts, particularly in the spaces between the blocks, perpetuates their stigmatization and the trauma associated with them. This observation underscores the necessity of rethinking the design process and reeducating the public. While the new proposed engagement strategy addresses this issue, I advise future urbanists to carefully consider the terminology and methods used to communicate this information.

The engagement strategy

A three-step engagement strategy has been developed, grounded in in-depth research on trauma and an analysis of the existing public space transformation processes linked to building stock renovations. This strategy aims to foster collaboration and mutual learning among private, civic, and public stakeholders. It is designed from the residents' perspective, incorporating observational analysis, personal experiences, and a historical review of micro-districts and their inhabitants. The goal is to address needs unmet by the current processes.

The strategy emphasizes the importance of residents feeling heard, informed, and educated, and understanding how to utilize the spaces around them. It highlights the necessity of interactions between institutional actors and residents to create opportunities for discussion, information sharing, and mutual learning. This approach seeks to overcome the mistrust left by the Soviet occupation. The strategy recommends a minimum of three meetings to address key issues and decide on desired transformations for shared spaces. A longer-term strategy allows residents to participate in at least one meeting.

Flexibility is a core intention of this strategy. Each task is designed to be adaptable, allowing for various methods of engagement and response. The initial meeting, which required tool development and a process phase, serves as an example of how the first interaction between residents, municipal actors, and urban designers could be structured. However, it does not prescribe the only way to conduct these meetings.

The development of the engagement strategy required a thorough examination of existing processes and tools used in participatory design. Approaching the research through the lens of trauma revealed that current tools did not adequately address the needs of residents. Based on this experience, I advise future researchers to prioritize designing for the specific needs of the few rather than the general needs of the many.
This strategy and tool emerged from an in-depth exploration of trauma, and although it was initially not intended to be universally applicable, its flexibility has allowed it to serve a broader purpose. The comprehensive dive into trauma was essential for its development, demonstrating the value of targeted, nuanced approaches in creating effective engagement strategies.

"My window" tool

The tool development was rooted in the spatial and observational analysis conducted in the Vidzgiris micro-district. This spatial participatory tool offers users a visual representation of typical elements in public spaces, specifically those visible from their windows.

The tool consists of a deck of transparent cards, which can be used to deconstruct and reconstruct the public space outside one's window. Each card represents a single element, accompanied by a brief description. This allows users to creatively arrange the cards to envision their ideal view. The tool is designed to be interactive and intuitive, particularly for those familiar with micro-districts.

Process and testing

The tool provides a way to view public space and highlights certain elements to initiate discussion, forming the basis for a two-part process. This process focuses on public space in general and trauma recovery in public spaces. It was tested with 17 participants.

The testing sessions aimed to address the main question of the first meeting while also serving as iterative cycles to improve the tool and process based on feedback from the micro-district residents.

Testing revealed that residents were unaware of the possible link between trauma and micro-districts but found the explanation interesting and comprehensible. Light exercises indicated that participants associated public space primarily with city center areas, not considering courtyards or green corridors as true public spaces. This perception was due to infrequent use or viewing these areas mainly as transit zones. However, participants appreciated the green elements of micro-districts, feeling connected to trees and enjoying the view of flowers, even if they didn't maintain them personally. Additionally, there was a strong desire to see more movement in these spaces.

The participatory sessions also revealed that residents felt comfortable being passive observers in these spaces. They liked the idea of maintaining greenery and adding elements to encourage more activity. However, it remained unclear whether these additions would motivate them to spend more time outdoors. The second and third meetings, which were not fully developed or tested, should focus on understanding what would truly entice residents to go outside.

It seems that residents associate comfort primarily with being indoors, viewing outdoor activities as purposeful rather than leisurely. The challenge for designers is to explore whether the same sense of comfort can be extended to outdoor spaces and to identify what kind of comfort is needed.

For future researchers

This research could not address every issue related to trauma and urban design. Over the course of the year, many questions remained unanswered, and numerous ideas for further research were noted. Here are the main ones:

Psychology and form study
This thesis focuses on micro-districts and the block as volumes where trauma can manifest. While research on psychology and the environment often examines the effects of different spaces and volumes on psychological well-being, adding this layer to the study of micro-districts would be beneficial. Understanding why certain spaces evoke specific feelings and their connection to trauma could provide deeper insights.

Developing and testing
This year allowed me to create a new engagement strategy and test the initial meeting with people who currently live or have lived in micro-districts. For future research, it would be valuable to test all three steps of the engagement strategy. This would enable further development and refinement of the "My Window" tool based on feedback from the third meeting and subsequent interactions.

The distinction in public space
In this thesis, I propose a new distinction in public space based on the Vidzgiris micro-district. To determine whether this distinction is applicable to all micro-districts, further research should be conducted on these three types of spaces in more cities. This would help validate the proposed categorization and its broader applicability.

Reflection

On approach and process

As the topic of the thesis was something highly foreign to me, the research part became essential if not more important than the design part throughout the year. Much of the first half was dedicated to exploring the concept of collective trauma and its potential connections to urban design. While links between psychology, in a broader sense, and urbanism were identified, specific connections between collective trauma and urban design emerged as a significant knowledge gap, underscoring the importance of thorough research. Throughout researching the topic and the links, design was always at the back of the mind, as I specifically would look for traits of spatial elements or trends that were also existent in the urban fabric in Lithuania, to see where connections are or could be.

In this project, both research and design were always interwoven. Perhaps, it is not the research and design that is described in the books, but an alteration of it. The design would not be feasible without a solid research foundation. Given the structure of the graduation program, which allows a full year to focus on a single topic, my personal goal was to prioritize research, keeping design as a secondary but evolving element. This year aimed to deepen my knowledge, while the master's program in urbanism and the chosen studio demanded a final design as outlined in the graduation plan. So, in order to fulfill both goals, a compromise was made.

Reflecting on the entire process, it became evident that the planned process was often set aside in favor of a more explorative and open-ended approach. This shift presented challenges but also significantly pushed me as an urban designer. During the initial months of research, I frequently deliberated on which methods to use or which approaches to take. However, in the end, I didn't strictly adhere to any of the planned methods. Instead, I would often follow my instincts, leading to semi-structured interviews that became too lengthy or tool testing sessions that expanded into discussions about various problems, not just the one at hand.

Despite my efforts to explore new methods and move away from familiar ones, I found myself returning to those I knew were effective. Whether this was out of a need for comfort or a realization that observational studies are integral to my process, it highlighted my natural inclinations as an urban designer.

Adopting such a laissez-faire approach resulted in some inefficiencies, such as delving into deep theories of trauma that were ultimately unnecessary for the thesis. There was also a period of exploring various design outcomes, from a participatory toolbox to a comic strip, before finally settling on the transparent deck of cards. Despite these detours, I believe each step was necessary to achieve the results I have today.

This year of exploration taught me that no matter how well-crafted a plan might be at the outset, if it doesn't allow for flexibility and rerouting, it won't work for me as a designer. Sometimes, the best plan is to have no rigid plan at all, allowing for adaptability and organic development throughout the process.

On studio choice

My initial observation of the lack of public life in Lithuania's public spaces led me to deeply explore the connection between trauma and urban design in Alytus. Recognizing trauma as a deeply personal experience, I aimed to focus my research on a human-centric approach, which drew me to the Urban Fabric studio. Throughout the year, the balance between research and design was uneven. Delving into trauma, a field entirely new to me, often overshadowed the design phase. When it came time to design, it wasn't about creating a typical public space but developing the process for creating one and a tool to facilitate this. Consequently, my thesis became more theoretical than initially intended. Despite this, integrating trauma knowledge into design has made me a better urban designer.
The research reflects the essence of the Masters of Urbanism program: a thesis rooted in a theoretical framework addressing societal issues, then explored through spatialization and deconstruction. My working process was iterative, with continuous sketches and collages attempting to translate theoretical insights into spatial designs, even during intensive periods of trauma theory research.

On plurality and porosity

Plurality in my project is a fundamental concept that manifests in several ways, reflecting the diversity and complexity of the urban fabric and the socio-cultural dynamics within it. Central to the project was giving voice to the residents of the micro-districts and, through a bottom-up approach, understanding how the renovation and transformation process could be shaped from their perspective. Although the primary focus was on the residents of the blocks, the analytical approach extended beyond them to explore the intersection of collective trauma and urban design through various stakeholders. By starting with the residents, the project could adjust the existing top-down approach to renovation, making it more compatible with the design process of the urban designer. Ultimately, plurality was expressed in the continuous variation from local to global perspectives and in the reflective moments where conclusions were drawn.

Porosity in the project refers to the permeability and interconnectedness of urban spaces, facilitating movement and interaction among different areas and user groups. In the context of micro-districts and their extensive green spaces, porosity was initially viewed negatively, as it failed to activate resident engagement.

To address this, a new level of porosity was proposed by enhancing connectivity between green spaces and mobility routes, designing active facades, and creating spaces that encourage social interaction and engagement. Porous spaces, when balanced correctly, allow for fluid movement and engagement, supporting both individual and collective activities in a sustainable and livable manner. However, excessive porosity, as observed in the current state of micro-districts, can be counterproductive, highlighting the need for a carefully considered approach to urban design.

On methods

To address the significant knowledge gap in the selected topic, various ethnographic methods were employed to understand the socio-cultural and behavioral aspects of residents in micro-districts. Semi-structured interviews and observational analysis provided nuanced insights that informed the design process, highlighting the importance of qualitative methods in addressing psychological and social dimensions in urban design. The analytical approach covered macro, meso, and micro scales, aiming to understand the problem from local to global perspectives. Additionally, spatial analysis through mapping, combined with ethnographic analysis, revealed previously uncharted insights and archival gaps. The iterative approach of research, design, and testing proved successful in developing the tool and process, offering valuable insights into potential changes and the tool's effectiveness. Finally, approaching the topic from a bottom-up perspective, by considering local residents as experts and incorporating their insights into the problem, resulted in an interesting and unique project.

The studio's focus on urban fabrics, human-centric design, and participatory methods aligned well with the methods used. The studio prioritized design as a primary research tool, which was not the central focus of my process but did not detract from the project's quality. Design was integrated into the process when necessary but was not the sole focus at all times.

Limitations in studio theme

In the case of my topic choice, I felt that the studio themes were at times more limiting than helping in exploring the intersection of collective trauma and urban design. During my thesis, I encountered the challenge of managing plurality in my research, which also influenced my design. My theme embraces the people that have experienced a specific event in history, and while this group is still large, it excludes a large number of countries by looking at one specific trauma, the collective trauma.

My research explored individual experiences of trauma from both psychological and physiological perspectives. However, it also required abstraction and categorization into groups and populations. This duality was reflected in the design. I developed and tested a workshop scenario with people who shared the experience of living in environments shaped by the soviet occupation. However, when drawing conclusions, I needed to generalize the insights to a broader context.

Consequently, the findings might initially seem similar to other projects that used a semi-private courtyard as a case study. At times, managing plurality felt challenging, as I had to ensure the process and project addressed a wider audience. This occasionally made it difficult to create a solution specifically tailored to the participants in my workshop scenario.

Throughout this year, I often found that the overarching theme, and perhaps the prevailing trend in the Masters of Urbanism at TU Delft, the one of multi scalarity to both facilitated and restricted my exploration of what urban design grounded in trauma research could truly look like. I felt compelled to consistently abstract my local results and extrapolate them onto a global stage, ultimately leaving me with a project that seemed to address everyone and no one simultaneously.

On ethics and the foreign local

Knowing the language and being a familiar face in my grandparents' block in Alytus allowed me to conduct this research with a strong focus on participatory methods. Although Lithuanian is my native language, my proficiency is not at the same level as someone educated in Lithuania, which occasionally became evident. During semi-structured interviews, I sometimes encountered unfamiliar words or phrases and had to ask for explanations. While this might have seemed annoying, participants were often happy to elaborate, providing additional information about their word choices or their origins. This enriched the discussions, especially during the participatory sessions involving associative wordplay exercises.

Despite being a local in an abstract sense, I was also an outsider. Having lived in Denmark for most of my life, my observations during the research often amused the participants. They would say they had never thought about certain things before and reflect on them, leading to more extensive conversations than initially planned. While not always received lightly—some participants were upset by certain comments—most found that the outsider perspective ultimately brought valuable insights.

On the acknowledgement of trauma

This thesis aligns with a broader trend in Lithuania, reflected in the patterns of books being bought and republished, indicating a growing desire to understand and acknowledge the past. My work contributes to this acknowledgment by demonstrating that trauma is not only a psychological and physical experience but also a factor that influences our environmental choices. Additionally, it highlights how many people are excluded from current participatory processes in Lithuania due to the tools and methods used by the organizers.

Discussing trauma is challenging, so I aimed to approach the topic without provoking or imposing assumptions on participants. Considerable time and thought were invested in finding sensitive ways to address trauma. At one point, I considered removing the section on trauma from the participatory process, but I am grateful to my mentor for encouraging me to retain it. The results would not have been as impactful without this crucial component.

Thesis and the wider context

I believe this thesis represents a significant advancement in understanding how knowledge of trauma can be integrated into urban design. It focuses on a specific type of trauma, collective trauma, within a specific environment, the micro-districts. While this might limit its global applicability, the prevalence of micro-districts worldwide makes this study highly relevant.

The insights on trauma also emphasize the importance of the urban design process over the results. The process is crucial for building trust, fostering acknowledgment, and enabling cross-learning. This approach is challenging to implement in an economically driven world, as it requires more resources and time, but it has the potential to yield valuable outcomes.

The research critiques existing tools and methods used in participatory sessions, highlighting how brain and body functions may be affected by trauma. This new understanding reveals many aspects that urbanists often overlook. We claim to design for the disabled, but do we truly consider their needs throughout the process, or only in the final result?

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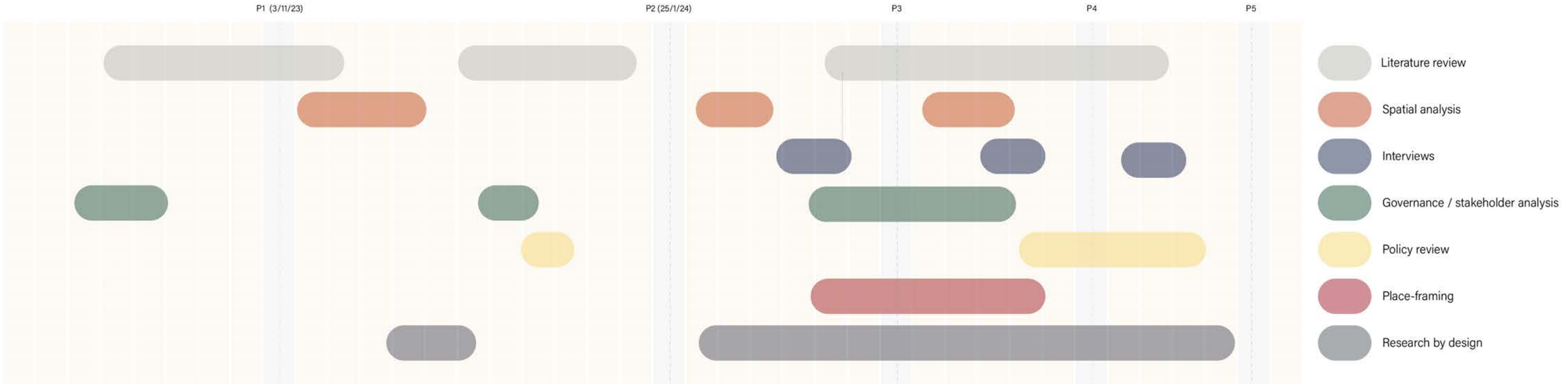
Figures

Appendix

Timeline



Intensives - theoretical exploration

Research plan, initial fieldwork, literature review and spatial analysis

Interviews, research by design, case studies

Tool development, testing

Reflection, tool reshaping, implementation possibility study