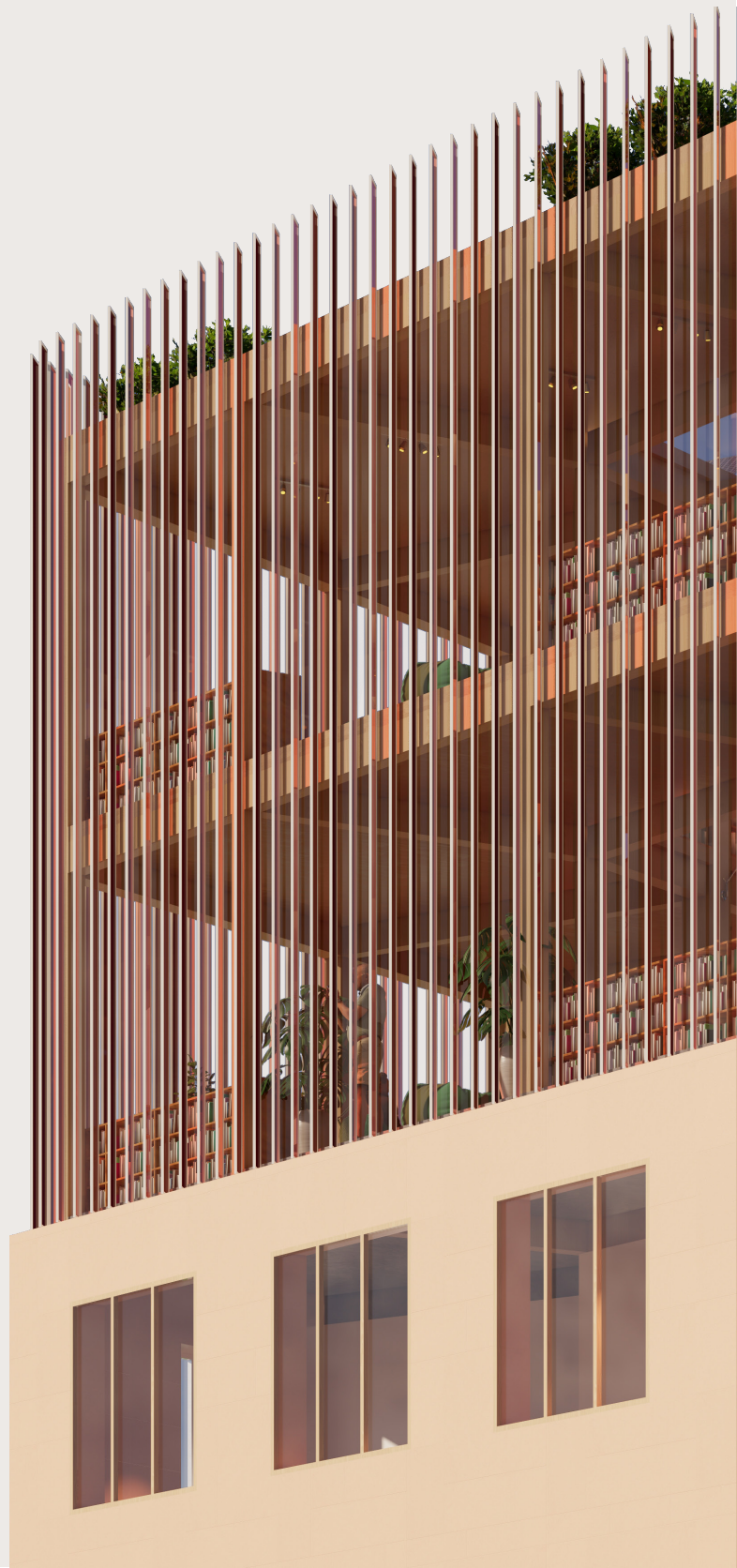# *Shared* Grounds

A landscape for Intergenerational Learning and Exchange

AR3AP100 | Public Building Studio
P5 | Graduation Reflection
Haraldsgade neighborhood, Copenhagen

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A visit to **Nørrebro, Copenhagen**

The graduation project began with preliminary research aimed at understanding Copenhagen's urban fabric, its Five Finger Plan, Danish culture, and the diverse communities that inhabit the city. The neighborhood of Haraldsgade in Nørrebro district was then virtually explored through google street views and pictures, with a focus on understanding its historical evolution. The spatial and social dynamics of the neighbourhood is characterized by large industrial land, transformed factories, social housing, and educational institutions. Shaped by its industrial past, the area experienced a decline in production in the mid-1900s, leading to the closure of factories, many of which were converted into social housing. This shift transformed the urban landscape into a predominantly residential area, with only a few factories repurposed for other functions. The blending of industrial and residential spaces contributed to social fragmentation and spatial isolation within the neighbourhood.

Typology of **Intergenerational** spaces

As one moves through the neighbourhood, there is a clear separation of spaces used by different age groups. Children are commonly seen in playgrounds, while youth occupy places like Bolsjefabrikken or self-established community spaces, university students are concentrated in dormitory spaces, and the elderly are often found strolling outdoors alone. In an interview with Buddha Bikes, a representative shared that families tend to leave the neighbourhood once they have children, potentially due to concerns about safety or a lack of adequate amenities for children. Furthermore, unlike other age groups, the elderly often lack spaces specifically designed for their needs, leaving many to wander alone in their neighbourhoods.

The University of Copenhagen has around 13 departmental buildings in the southern part of the neighbourhood but only two student dormitories. These dormitories resemble enclosed "shoeboxes" with no balconies and minimal engagement with the surrounding environment. This suggests a strong demand for a permanent and centrally located student housing and cultural hubs where young people can spend their time in engaging, enjoyable ways.

In response to these observations, the public building is designed through the concept of "intergenerational spaces to foster social inclusion, cohesion, health, wellbeing, and understanding across different generations. It can be envisioned as a space that fosters intergenerational exchange, where the elderly, youth, and children can learn from one another, while also strengthening community ties and keeping the neighbourhood engaged and connected.

Aaptive reuse as a design strategy

The concept of intergenerational spaces guided the search for a location that could bring together different user groups. A triangular plot in Haraldsgade, marked for demolition due to the closure of surrounding industries, stood out as a suitable option. Within this plot, a building located at the central edge Figaro, a former hairdresser's headquarters was chosen. The building offered a unique setting, as it opened up to a green zone, with a café on one side and an educational institution on the other. This intersection naturally served as a pause point for people, especially with the cafe's outdoor seating encouraging social interaction.

Figaro, a small three storey building with an octagonal shape, posed challenges in fitting all the required programs inside. Since the adjacent green zone was elevated and not easily accessible, the decision was made to reroute the road and extend the landscape directly to the building. This not only created a long, continuous pedestrian zone but a new cycling and walking path around the edge of the site was also introduced to make the area more inviting and safer for all age groups, encouraging broader use of the space.
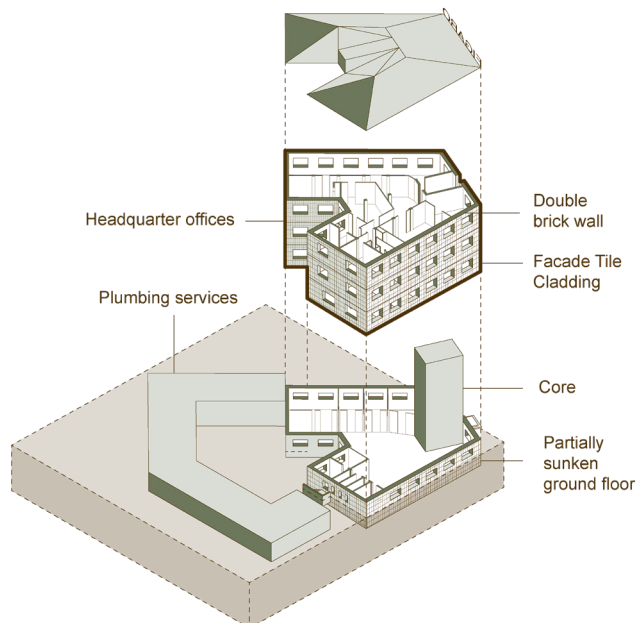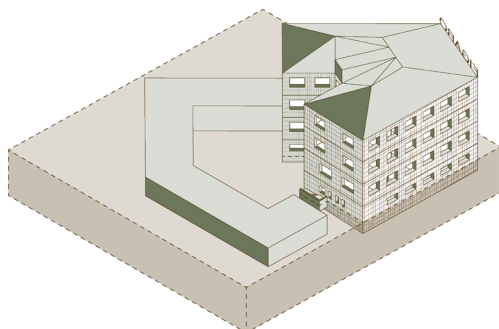
The project focused on reusing Figaro by keeping its facade while redesigning the interior layout. It also involved a close study of the existing surroundings and rethinking how people move through the area. A new landscape strategy helped smooth out movement patterns and aimed to attract and
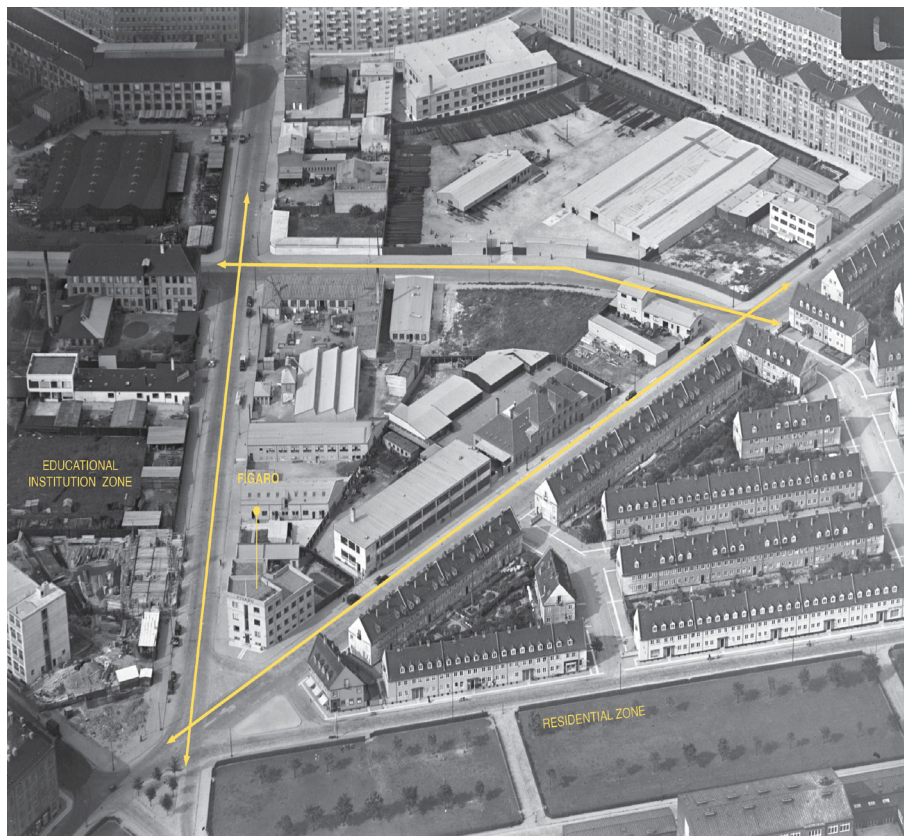
Figaro in its urban context

Figaro, a factory and is the
Headquarter of the Danish Hair Dressers &
Cosmeticians Associations, 1935

In response to a conflict, the organization constructed an
octagonal building resembling a fortress or castle, where
Social Democrats and union activists gathered to have
their hair cut.

Headquarter offices

Plumbing services

Double
brick wall

Facade Tile
Cladding

Core

Partially
sunken
ground floor

Understanding Figaro, its form and programs

connect users of all generations.

With this idea of a 'public condenser' and considering the observations during the site visit, following **research question** has been investigated as guidance in my design process:

How can a public building be designed by readapting Figaro to foster intergenerational learning and collaboration for the community of Haraldsgade?

Research and Design influence

The research played a key role in shaping the design by providing insights into the needs and preferences of different user groups, as well as identifying programs the neighbourhood currently lacks. It formed the foundation for the idea that Figaro should act as a public anchor point, drawing people in through a variety of engaging functions.

At the same time, the design process influenced the direction of the research. As the project progressed, it became clear that creating an inclusive environment required more detailed consideration such as incorporating ramps for accessibility, textured pathways for users with mobility aids, and amphitheatres to offer spaces for rest and gathering. The landscape strategy had to support multiple access points from surrounding buildings, prioritising ease of movement and connectivity.

To address this, two ramps were placed at either end of the site, along with a lift and multiple staircases and amphitheatres spaced out at regular intervals. This resulted in eight access points, allowing flexible circulation and providing safe evacuation routes if needed. Another key design decision was to guide movement vertically by arranging the programs in a sequence that transitions from public to more private uses, and then back to public functions at the top. This not only encourages users to explore the upper levels but also offers them panoramic views of the neighbourhood.

Approaches and Challenges

While the core concept of the project was clear from the beginning, the design process involved multiple rigorous iterations particularly regarding how much of the existing Figaro structure should be retained and how the surrounding landscape could be optimized to enhance green space. One of the major challenges was the existing condition of Figaro's ground floor, which was partially sunken and received limited natural light, making it unsuitable as a welcoming public area. This led to the initial idea of removing the ground floor entirely to create an open, accessible space at street level.

However, as the project focused on adaptive reuse, any intervention had to ensure structural stability between the preserved and new elements. Several structural strategies were explored, including suspending the building using a central core, introducing large trusses at the first-floor level to bear the load, and experimenting with various configurations of columns and cores. These iterations revealed the complexity of working with an existing structure, which inherently imposes constraints on spatial experience and user flow.

Over time, it became clear that some of these interventions compromised the original character of Figaro and were neither cost-effective nor environmentally sustainable. During the P3 review, with guidance from tutors Antonio, Ger, and Sang, a more balanced approach emerged. Their input helped steer the project towards retaining most of Figaro's structure while improving openness and daylight access. Their suggestion of removing the front and rear facades of the first two floors facing the landscape, and introducing a double-height entrance space created a more inviting environment.

This stage of the project provided a valuable insight into the importance of striking a careful balance between preservation and transformation when retrofitting existing buildings, ensuring that functional requirements are met without compromising spatial quality.
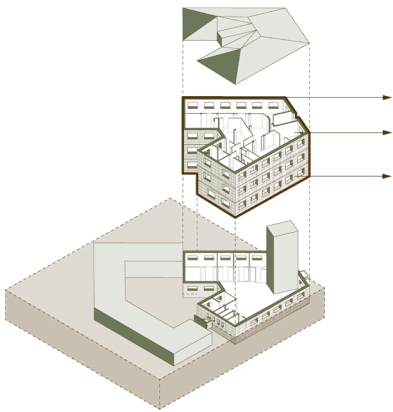
ELIMINATE

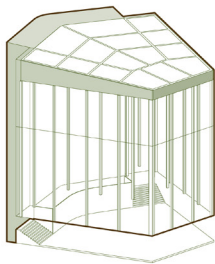Eliminating the circulation core
and the adjacent structure
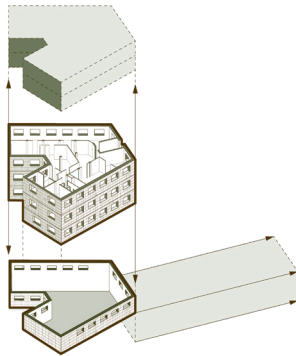
ADD

Adding volumes as per new
programmatic needs
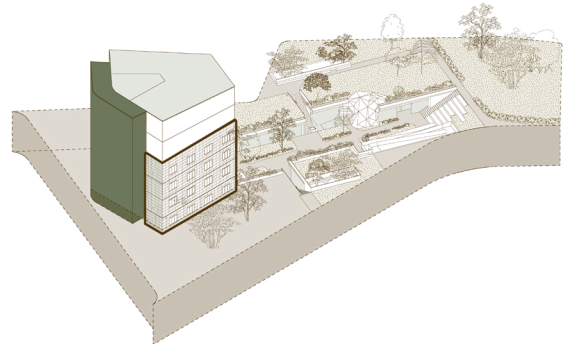
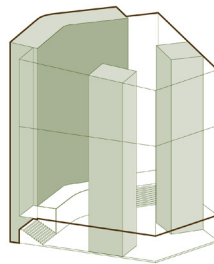REIMAGINE

Reimagining the front edge as an extended
green landscape and pedestrian zone,
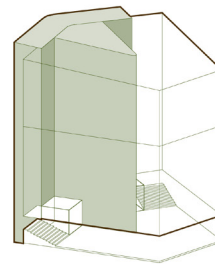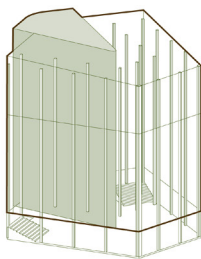providing safe and accessible entry for all
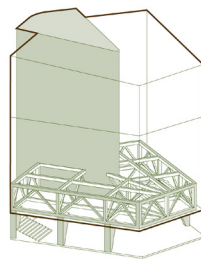
Form transformation
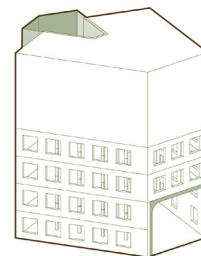

CANTILEVERED ON ONE CORE

TWO CORES IN THE CENTRE

T SHAPED CORE TO
COVER MORE AREA

PERIPHERAL COLUMNS

STEEL GIRDER TAKING THE LOAD

STEEL PORTALS

Form iterations

Academic & Societal value

Academically, the project aligns with themes of hybridity and architectural re-adaptation. It integrates a mix of functions, including private student dormitories, flexible communal spaces, and a public community library located at the top level, which also serves as a panoramic viewing point of the surrounding neighbourhood. The design adopts a sustainable and circular approach, retaining over 80% of the existing façade, and responds sensitively to its context by considering both pedestrian flows and connections with adjacent buildings.

At its core, the concept of intergenerational communities aims to bring people together by acknowledging and accommodating their diverse backgrounds, abilities, and cultural identities. As architects, it is our responsibility to create inclusive environments where everyone feels welcomed. In this context, repurposing a structure previously marked for demolition serves as a strategic approach not only supporting sustainability, but also contributing in the revitalisation of neglected or underutilised urban areas.