Reflection
ExploreLab 23

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Polis of Eudaimonia

This thesis project was set around a fascination to design a "place" for friends after their retirement, on the last track of their lifecycle. A "place" to act as a breakthrough from the loneliness that people face in an after retirement stage, a "second chance" for being active and feel to offer in the world. Beeing part of ExploreLab gave me the opportunity to explore a fascination in order to evolve it, make it tangible, and move on an architectural design.

The research project that I carried resulted in five booklets looking at notions such as philia and memory, as well as portraying the concepts of Polis and history of a landscape, that can be identified on the traces left, in this case, an island of exile. Although the research reflected my personal interests to a large extent, the notions are also intended to reveal new design strategies and attitudes that can inform the design practice.

The observations made on my research outlined the qualities I want to achieve and identified the base of a community that differentiates with what already exists, adopting to the Greek particularity. A narrative evolved to create this community based on the virtue of Philia and the values of a Polis. The community is an experiment of how people could interpretative their lives after retirement, being active and leaving in an Autarky community. Autarkeia is the Greek word that is used since the ancient times to describe self-sufficiency.

To begin with, Philia was a notion that had to be understood and communicate. A Greek Philia is a virtue that leads to the human flourishing. The Greek philia was a springboard for citizens to have an input in the political life and it was an act of freedom. It was the glue which bonded entities of different types and of different scales that functioned on the individual and political level as well.

Greek philosophers felt free to provide normative theories of what friendship should be like because their shared ethical framework was eudaimonistic. Eudaimonia is a Greek word most frequently translated as 'happiness', but it is more accurately translated as 'human flourishing' or 'well-being'. Though this sounds somewhat less natural, it has the advantage of cancelling the implication that eudaimonia was some transient state of subjective contentment. Eudaimonia was more than this and reflected the way that the point of living, for the Greeks, was not merely to be content, but to live well and thus to achieve repute and lasting fame.

Philia acts as a breakthrough for society and in extent is strongly connected with the creation of communities. Parallel to that, and according to Aristotle cities are knit communities with no strong distinction between public and private life. This occurs not because the laws claim so but because of cities cooperate "of a friendly feeling that comes from sharing their lives and goals with one another"[1]. Therefore, philia as a virtue creates the ideal base for a utopian City-state, a community that shares the same aims and values, so the pursuit of happiness is a cooperative enterprise.

A city-state. A Polis. A community of citizens whose practices and norms are arranged in respect to the beliefs and powers of the dominant sub-society, Friendship in this case. However, Polis is equated with the territory and its residents (or some part of them). So Polis has to do with a certain geographical location and the citizens that it hosts. In the case of this research, the Citizens are friends. People that hold a last long relationship and have as a guide the memory that brought them together.

It is interesting to address at this point the way Philia occurs in the Modern Greek times. If we look closer to the Greek society, we can understand that the core of Philia is still seen as a virtue as a highly important principle that lets you act and move forward in life. Philia has a social character and Greece can be seen as deliberately dense due to the cultural demand for constant social interaction and physical closeness. It is not by chance that what defines Greek community is the "table". Tables are the vehicles of every gathering. From the kitchen table that acts like the private meeting point, until the kafeneion tables that flood every corner of a leftover 'public' space, there is a range of different uses of space around tables where food, coffee and information is constantly being consumed. On my design strategy, I tried to maintain this concept, the importance of the gathering space, an aggregation of volumes around an empty area that gives you opportunities for social interaction.

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1. Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle
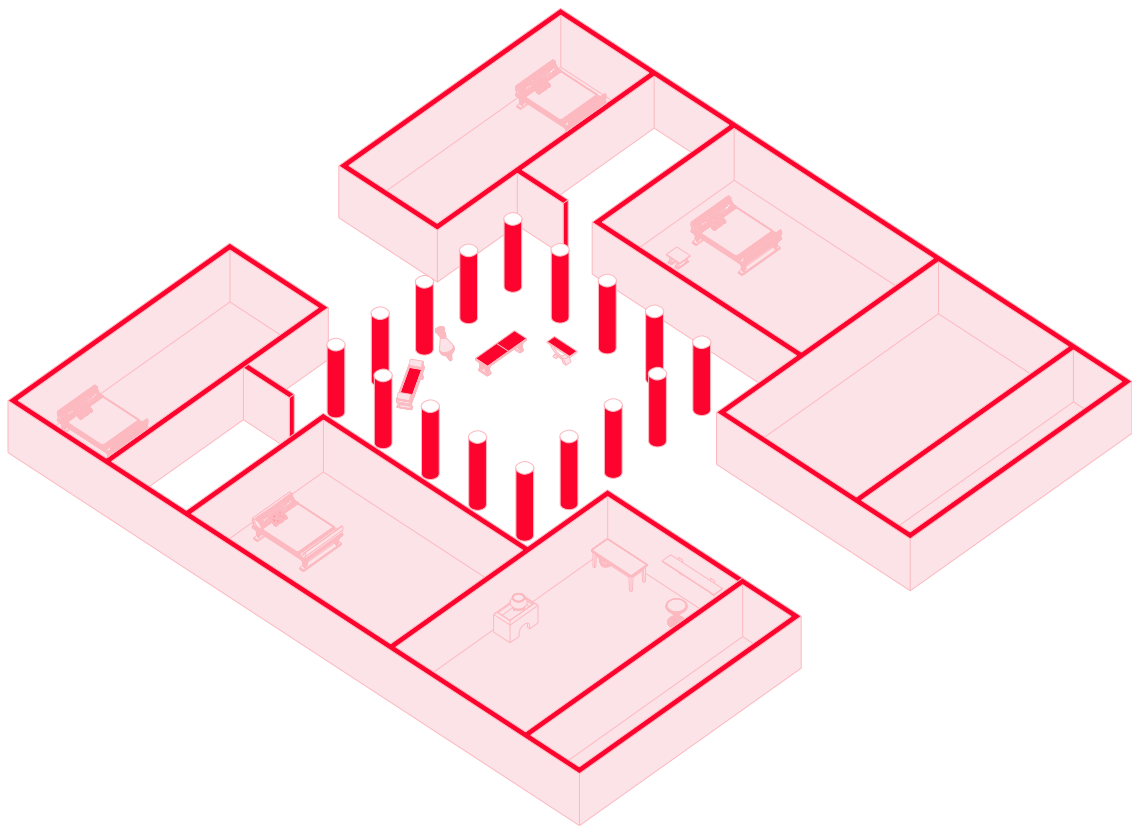
OIKOS

"Building sin Ancient Greece, were set on this spatial concept: an aggregation of
volumes around an empty central area"

-the basic unit of society
-empty space: the heart of the house, the place where people **stay and spend most
of their time together**

However, as we already seen Philia does not only occur between people of the same age. Philia is much more complicated and many times can be connected in between people of different generations. It is an alteration of Philia, with different qualities. By adding the generation gap a highly interesting weaving is achieved. Philia is not any more viewed as an arête which is only used to support (in multiple means) the others, but the importance of the knowledge of the older generation in accordance to the younger appears. It is a balance between the teacher to student. The wisdom with the strength. The nature to nurture.

Adding this twist in the philia the community that I am aiming for is modified. It is not anymore only about elders but about of cooperation, coexistence between generations. What can these mean? Moreover, if the connecting element was before about individual memories of people that bond them together, now has to do with a collective memory. If memory is understood as an active process, in this case, memory is the translation of an experience, knowledge to another generation; it is called inheritance. Moreover, because of the existence of the inheritance, a friendship can occur. While the elder transmits their wisdom, their knowledge that ageing offer to them, they achieve to make the infinite of life sweeter, they leave something behind and that creates a pleasure. From the other side, the younger receive knowledge that has to be filtered from the immaturity and the pureness of their age in order to achieve flourishing. An exchange like that is seen as a philia.

Memory is no more a sterile look at the past in a nostalgic way but is an element that actively searches for hope in the past. It is a way to contemplate the future by looking backwards. It is a critical activity, is a productive process of filtering the past to move forward. Looking forward to a Polis, a community that learnt from the past is aware of the present and want to go forward in a dialogue between generations, friendship and nature. Time in that sense adds another layer and add texture on design process.

For the project location, I decided to look at Gyaros, an island that was used as a place for exile from the Ancient times. Besides, it could not fit more the history of Gyaros that is defined as an exile place to move forward. Not only because of its emptiness, its purity in landscape and goods, but mainly because a landscape of that history acts as an exile for the elders. An exile though that with the adding of the new generation brings hope and integration. It is the perfecting setting for a performance like that, for a dialogue to start. A dialogue that is concerned with independence, autonomy and self-governance. A dialogue that the four virtues of a Polis according to Plato will rule: the Wisdom, the Prowess, the Prudence and Justice.

The proposed programme for the design project is to make a small Polis, the Polis of Eudaimonia. The programme accommodates: private units for the elders, agora and workshops, a logistic part that is looked by the Youngers, sleeping spaces for the younger generation, farms for animals and vegetation producing local goods (helping the local economy), units for tourists and first aid nursery. Also, I am aiming for a self-sufficient Polis, which means that it is also energy sufficient.

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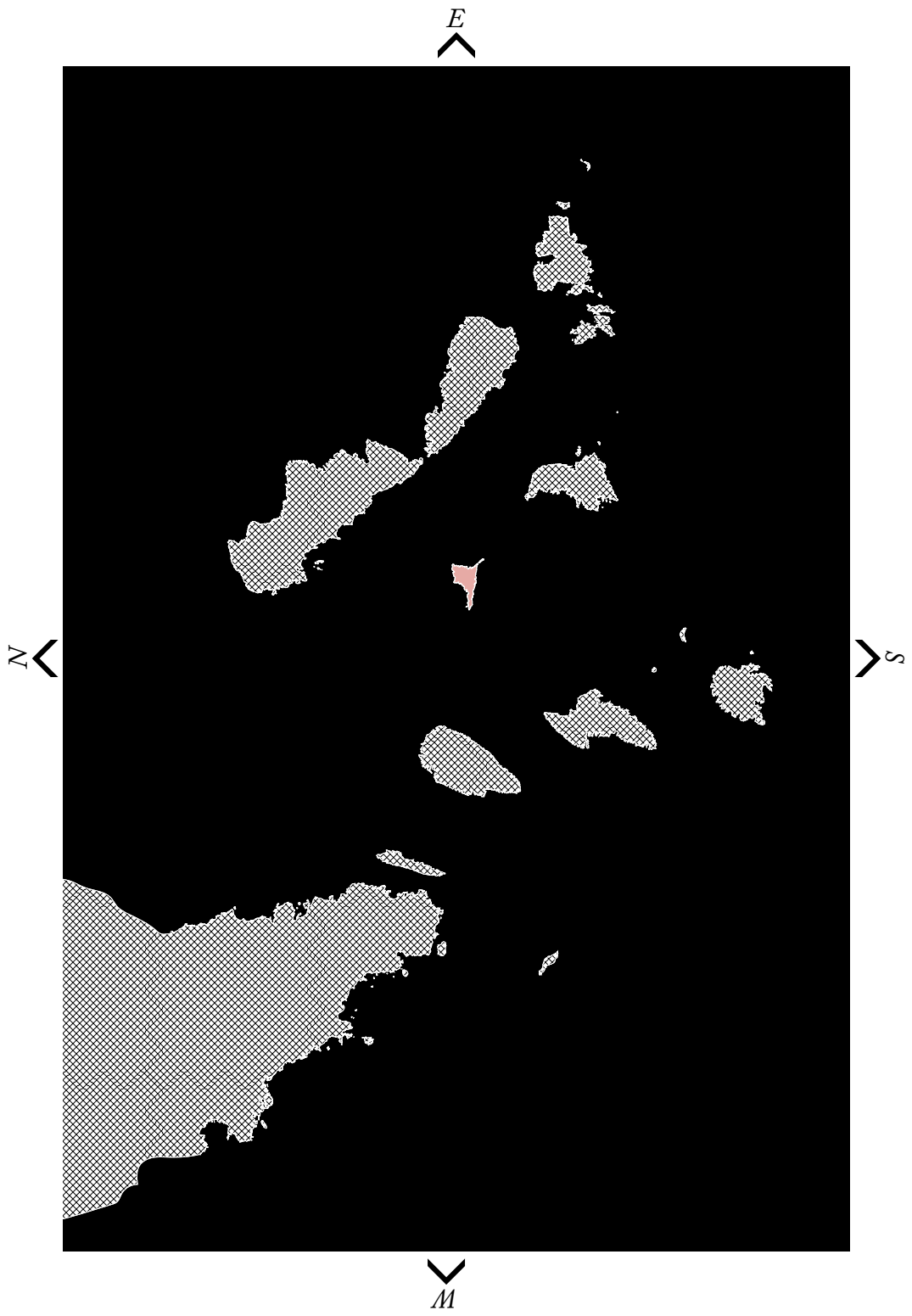
GYAROS

The intention is to break through the history of the exile by adding the Philia. The characteristic of a prison as Foucault was saying is the limitation of freedom. Philia as already said is an act of freedom itself. The architectural means I am using, are trying to explore the progressive claiming of freedom. It is accomplished a relation between freedom and horizon. Passing through the Polis, the horizon is modified until the point the elders are located, that the horizon, as well as the freedom, are the most effective. Arriving in the port and moving towards the ex-prison, you are faced with the most limiting perspective, while 'climbing' up the horizon opens up and lets you more freedom. Arriving in the port and moving towards the ex-prison, you are faced with the most limiting perspective, while 'climbing' up the horizon opens up and lets you more freedom. The path that someone follows is from the port towards the hill. During this "climbing", the observer can identifies what living in Greece is, what the ideals are, but also to understand what ageing in combination with Philia can offer you: Freedom.

Having the opportunity to work in an already existing place, I have added a new layer of meaning to the site without erasing its own history. The prison is seen as an Acropolis on its own, ruling with its morphology. It is highly important for me to bring different scales together without neglecting the landscape. My intention was not to erase the layers of history formed the island but to work with them and that is the reason that some parts left untouched. The interventions that have been used were made to achieve the feeling of freedom and experience what is Greece: light, odour, wind and aggregation of (white) volumes around an empty space.
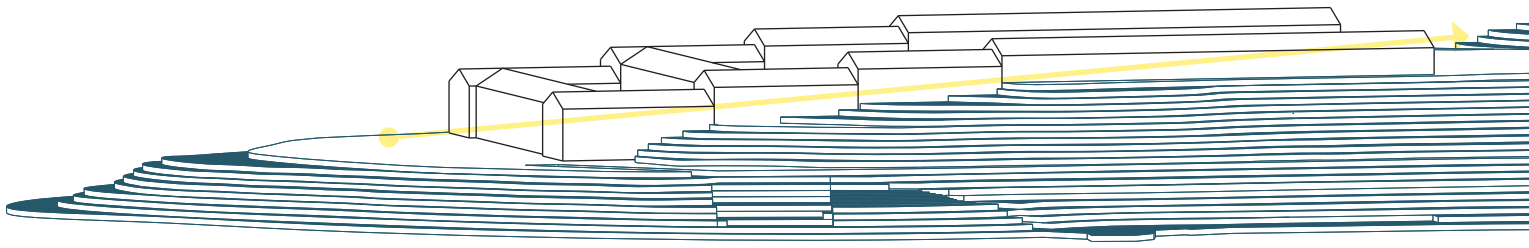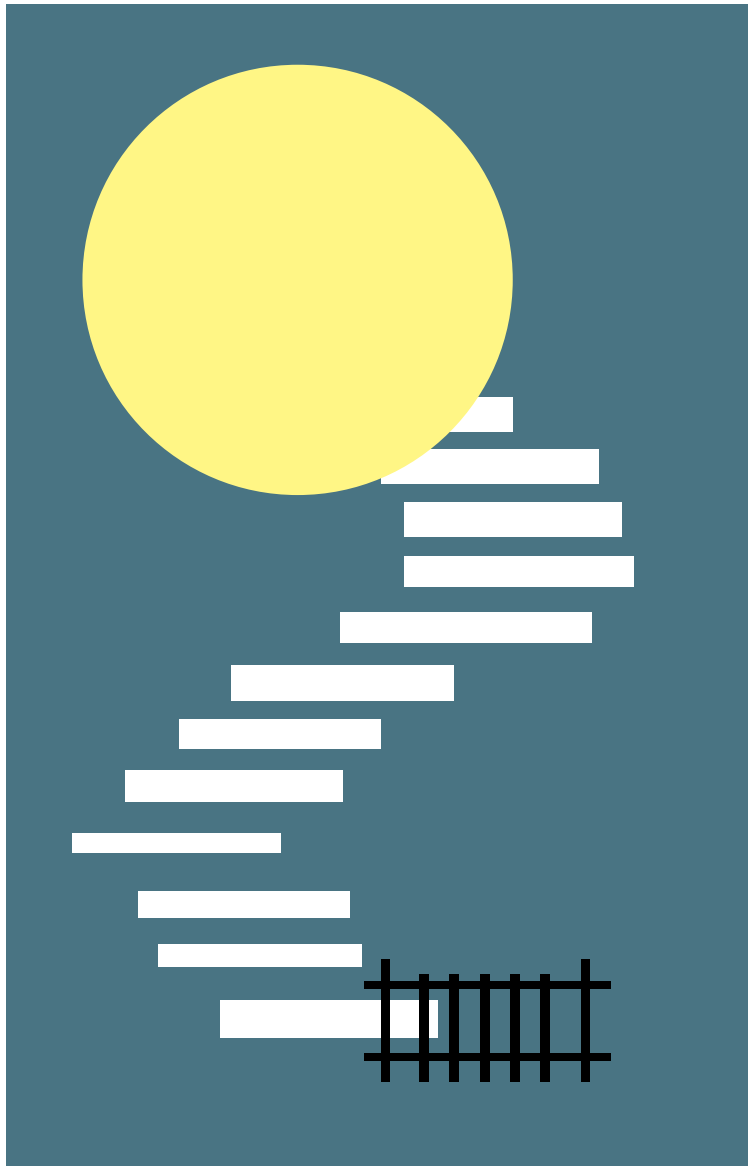
Towards Freedom
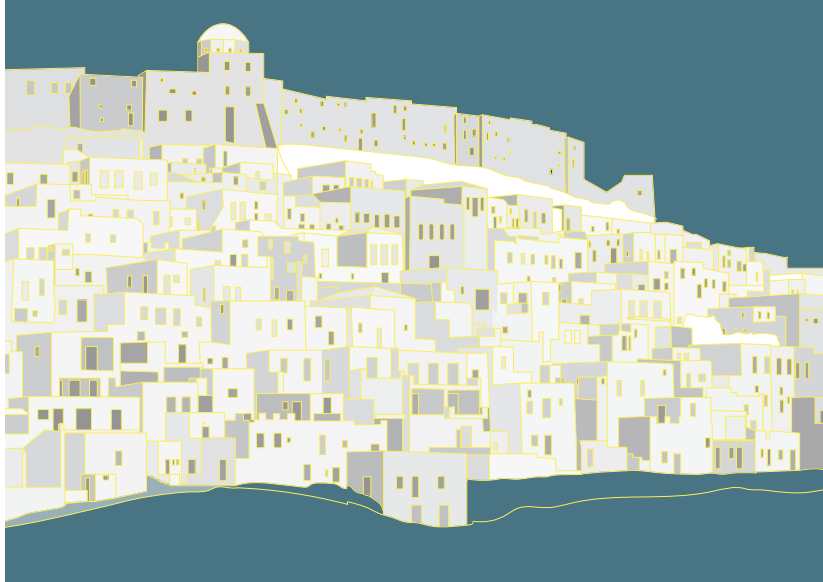
Aggregation of volumes

Wind & Odour

Light