unlocking the courtyard.

transforming underutilezed spaces to foster community
and belonging in the neighborhood

BAS I Diploma I 2024 | Iselin Furøyen Absalonsen

INTRODUCTION

PROCESS

PROGRAM

THE LABYRINTH

PAVILLIONS

GARDEN AND GREENERY

introduction
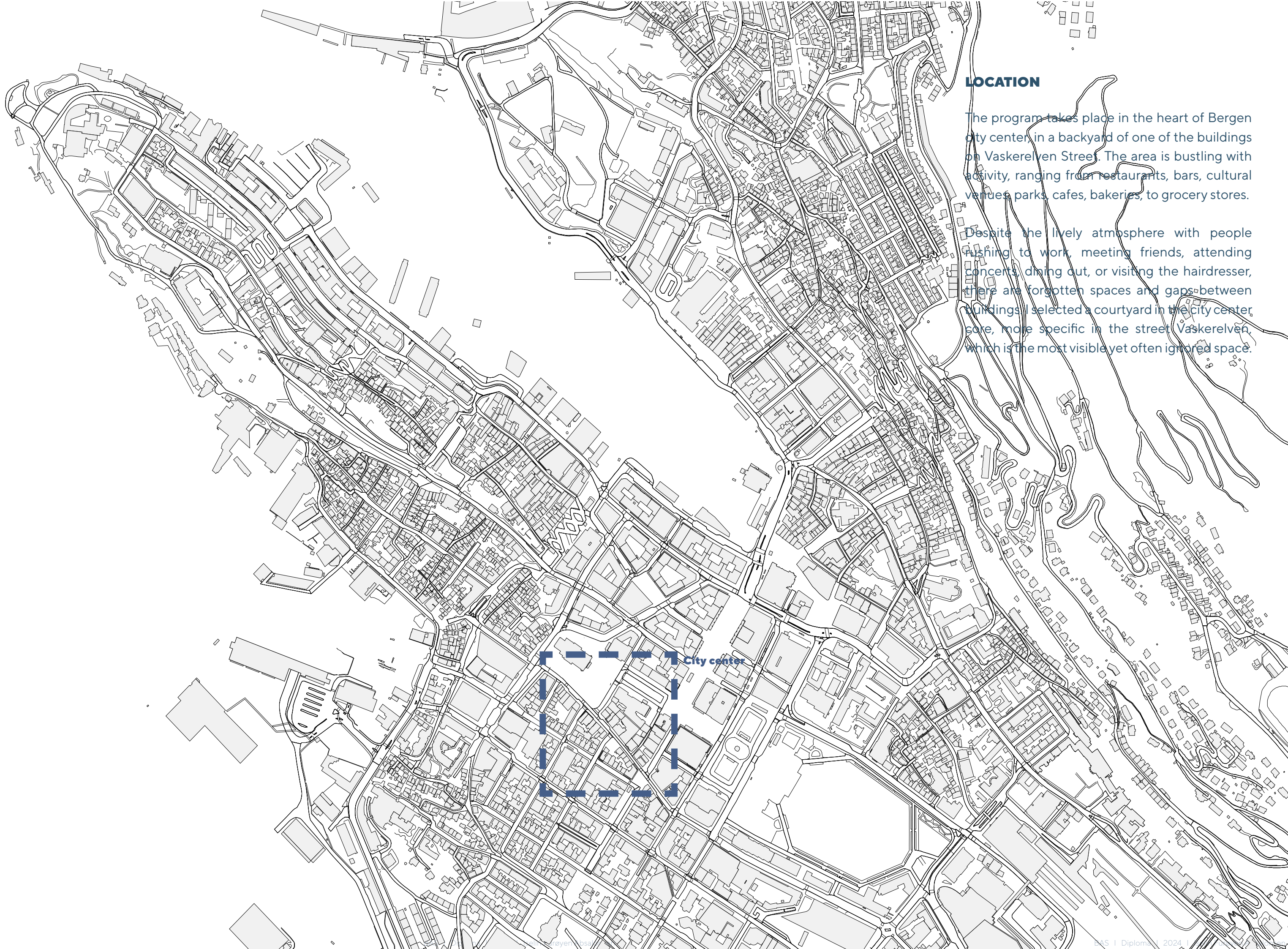
LOCATION

The program takes place in the heart of Bergen city center, in a backyard of one of the buildings on Vaskerelven Street. The area is bustling with activity, ranging from restaurants, bars, cultural venues, parks, cafes, bakeries, to grocery stores.

Despite the lively atmosphere with people rushing to work, meeting friends, attending concerts, dining out, or visiting the hairdresser, there are forgotten spaces and gaps between buildings. I selected a courtyard in the city center, more specific in the street Vaskerelven, which is the most visible yet often ignored space.
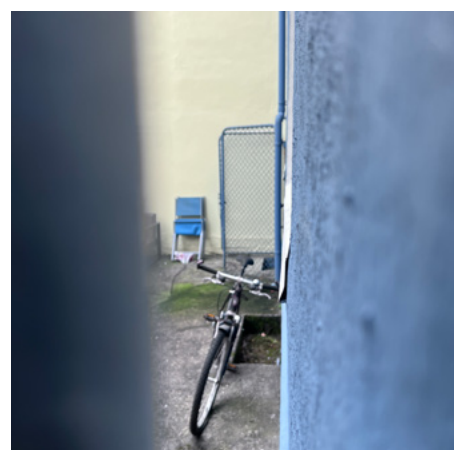
City center

BACKGROUND

Courtyards have a long history of being a space used for various activities and a place to carry out various types of work. Historically, Bergen has used them as both small gardens to grow vegetables, a place for children to play, hang out clothes to dry or a place for neighbors to meet.

Today, Bergen has several courtyards that are closed off, forgotten and become an empty space used for either parking, storing garbage or absolutely nothing.
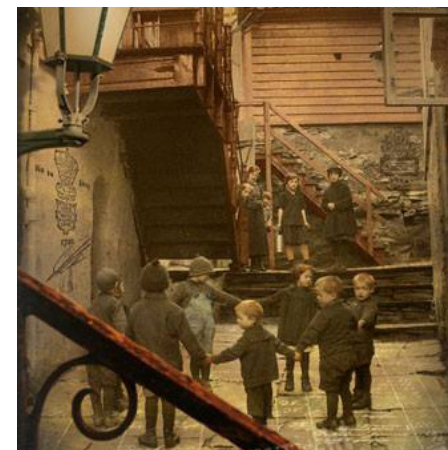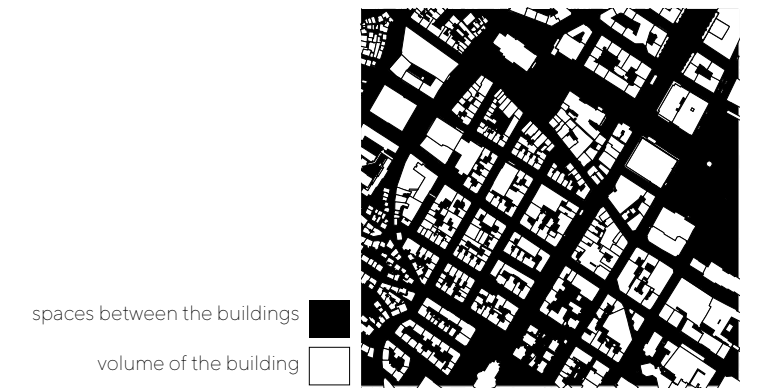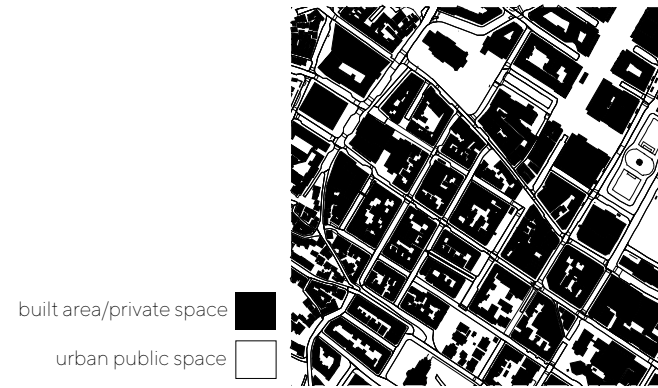

From top left:
Courtyard in sandviken (1912) - Courtyard in Bergen city center (1950) - Courtyard in Hans Holmboes gate (1940) - Nordnes (1908) - Vaskerelven (1900)
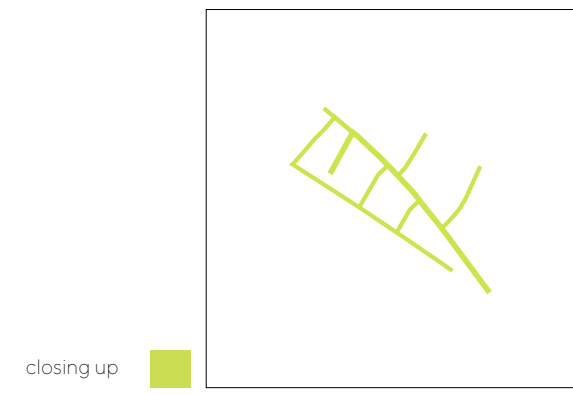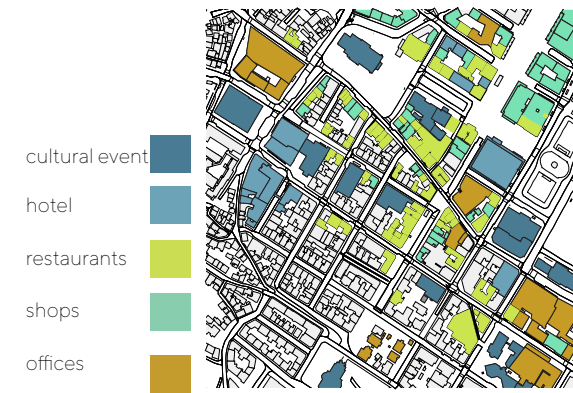
How the courtyard ive chosen to focus on is today

process

built area/private space ■

urban public space □

spaces between the buildings ■

volume of the building □

PROCESS

To embark on the journey of revitalizing this underutilized courtyard, a mapping exercise was undertaken. This involved meticulously documenting the surrounding urban context, meticulously charting the flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and carefully identifying the negative spaces created by vacant lots.

This detailed analysis revealed the site's lack of adaptation to street-level activities and the dominance of cars in the urban landscape.

Private ■

Semi private ■

Public ■

Semi public ■

Apartments ■

cultural event ■

hotel ■

restaurants ■

shops ■

offices ■

strucutre - streets ■

closing up ■

open for cars ■

closed for cars ■

1:10000

- Very satisfied / Veldig fornøyd
- Satisfied / Fornøyd
- Neutral / Nøytral
- Dissatisfied / Misfornøyd
- Very dissatisfied / Svært misfornøyd
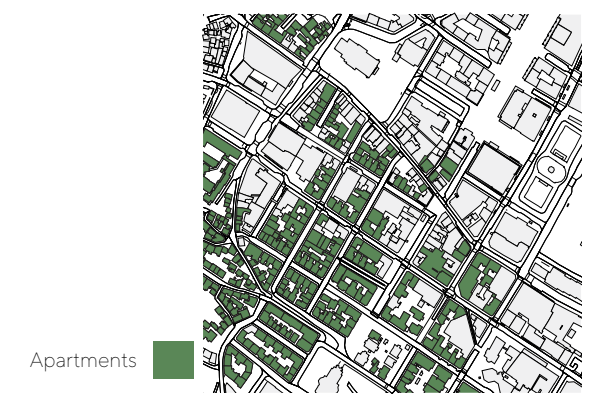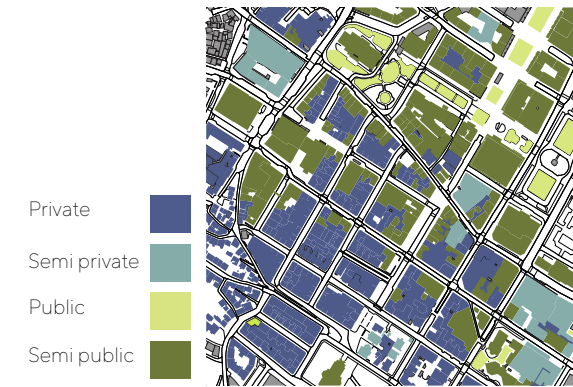
SURVEY

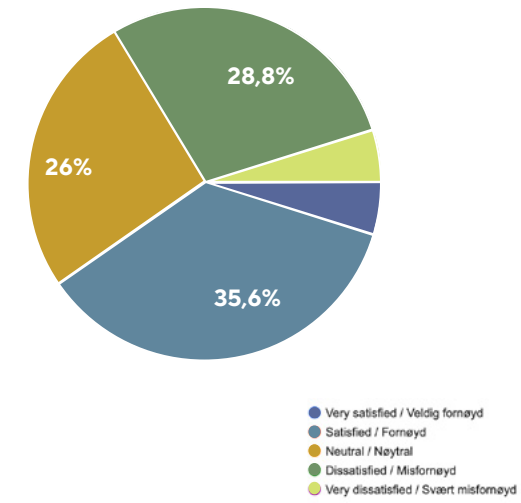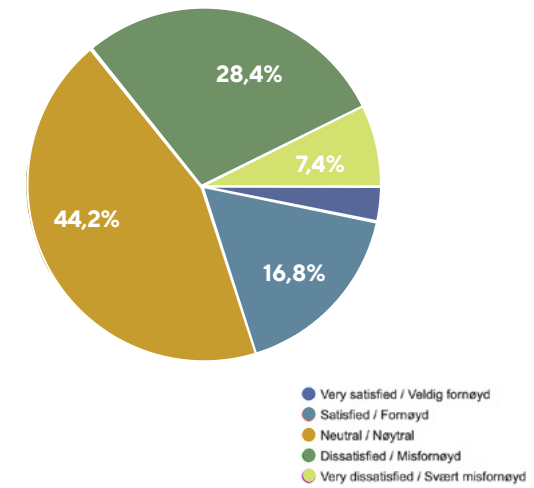Bergen is known for its strong opinions on everything from new things that come to how cobblestones should be placed in the streets. Therefore, I created a survey where I asked them what they think, what they like/dislike and what they think about the parking space. In a way, you are asking for many strong and strict opinions, but this part has been an important part of the process of understanding what is needed in the heart of the city. Most people felt that green space and a place to be were the two most important themes and something that was needed.

Question: **How satisfied are you with the current alloca-tion of spaces for parking use in Bergen city center?**

- Very satisfied / Veldig fornøyd
- Satisfied / Fornøyd
- Neutral / Nøytral
- Dissatisfied / Misfornøyd
- Very dissatisfied / Svært misfornøyd

Question: **How satisfied are you with the current condition of this parking lot across the road from Kulturhuset in Vaskerelven?**

- Very satisfied / Veldig fornøyd
- Satisfied / Fornøyd
- Neutral / Nøytral
- Dissatisfied / Misfornøyd
- Very dissatisfied / Svært misfornøyd
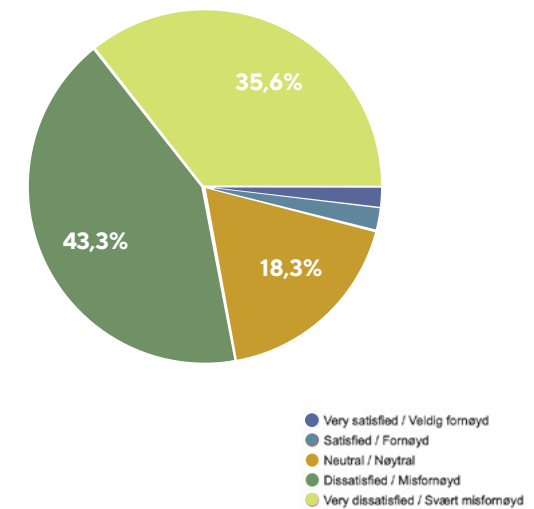
1:1

My 1:1 observation was conducted using timelapse to observe how the open area of the lot, the parking lot, was used. This was necessary as the area is locked and inaccessible without permission. By filming twice a day, once a week for three weeks, I made some interesting observations:

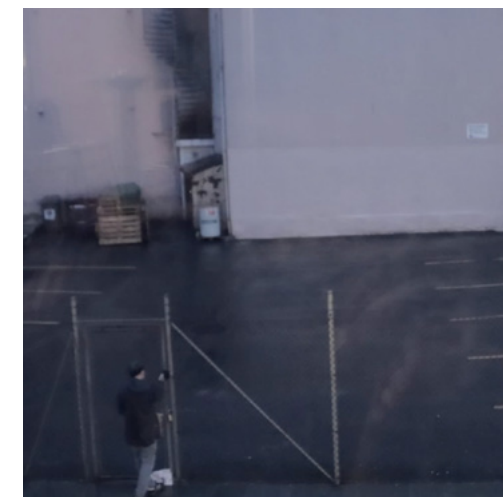- Residents use the open area for practical purposes, such as easily pushing strollers or wheelchairs.

- Workers park there and use the area as their workspace for a short period.

- For the most part, it is used for private parking and becomes a dark and uninviting area in the evening.

- In a way, it can be seen as an inhospitable and empty space in the evening.
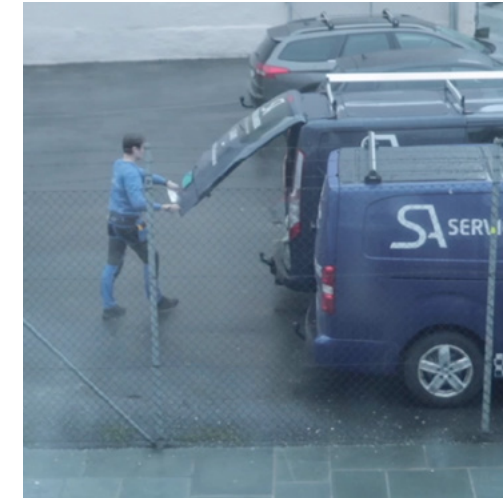
program

PROGRAM

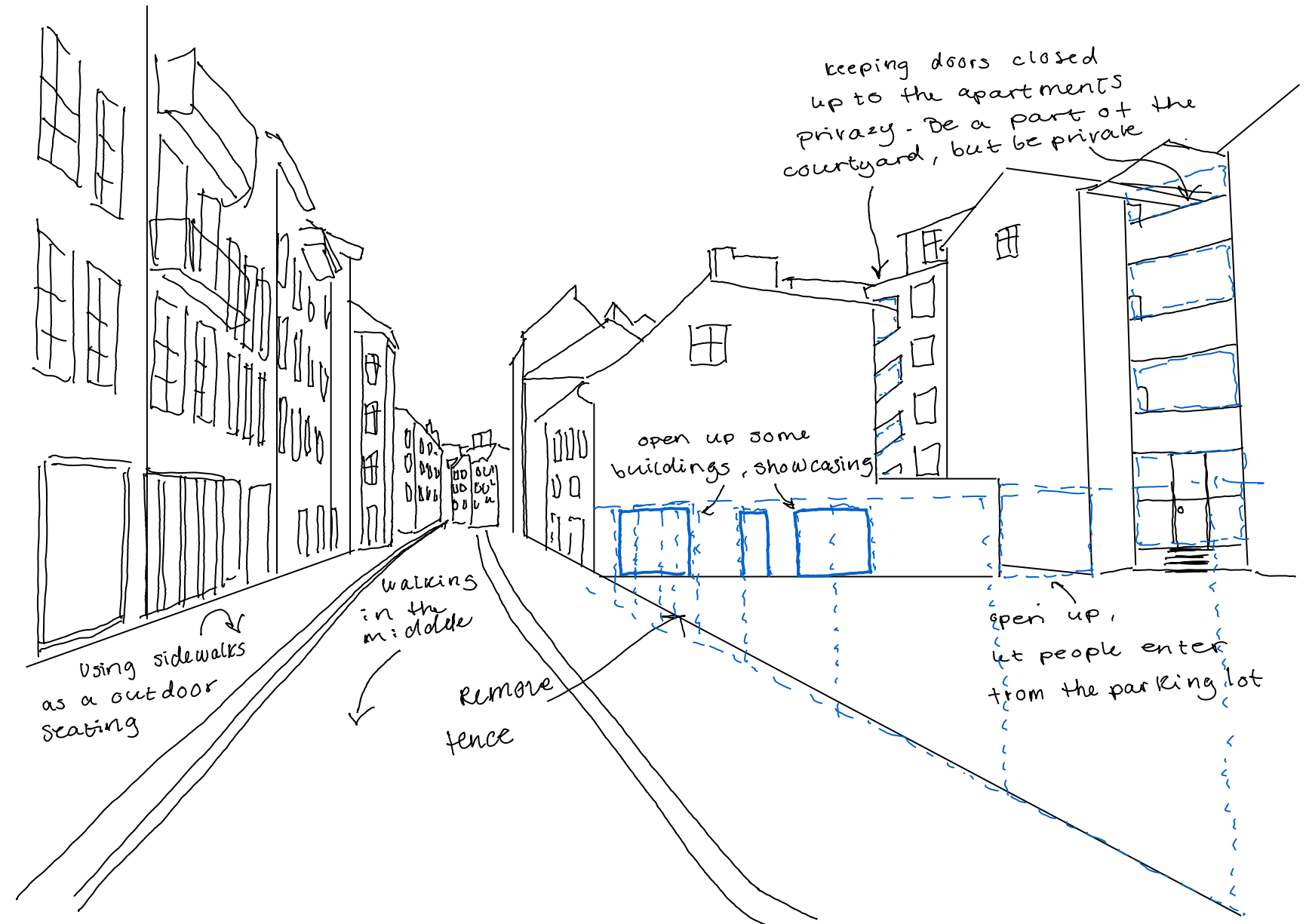The overarching goal of this program is to transform the forgotten courtyard into a vibrant and welcoming space that embraces both residents and visitors, while simultaneously respecting the privacy of those residing in the surrounding apartments. It aims to bridge the gap between urban and local uses, fostering a shared space that caters to the needs of both groups.

The buildings encircling the courtyard house a diverse array of businesses, including restaurants and shops. While these establishments share the backyard with the surrounding residents, their activities primarily unfold within the confines of their respective storefronts, leaving the backyard largely untouched.

The program seeks to integrate these businesses into the revitalized courtyard, offering them the opportunity to expand their operations and create engaging outdoor experiences.

keeping doors closed up to the apartments privacy. Be a part of the courtyard, but be private

open up some buildings, showcasing

open up, let people enter from the parking lot

walking in the middle

Using sidewalks as a outdoor seating

Remove fence

"CAN I WALK HERE?"

In the heart of a city, it's natural to expect outsiders to take their place in the urban landscape. How can we accommodate everyone and at the same time create a "common ground" for both parties? One of the studies I conducted investigated how a simple bench can make outsiders question, "Can I really walk here?"

One of the places in Bergen where you can find a good example of this is Nordnes. Everyone can walk wherever they want through the narrow alleys.

However, as soon as there are a few flower pots, a small chair, or a bench that the neighbors share among themselves, you automatically start to wonder if you are entering someone's property, even though the alley outside their door is for everyone. They lay claim to it by adding a personal item.
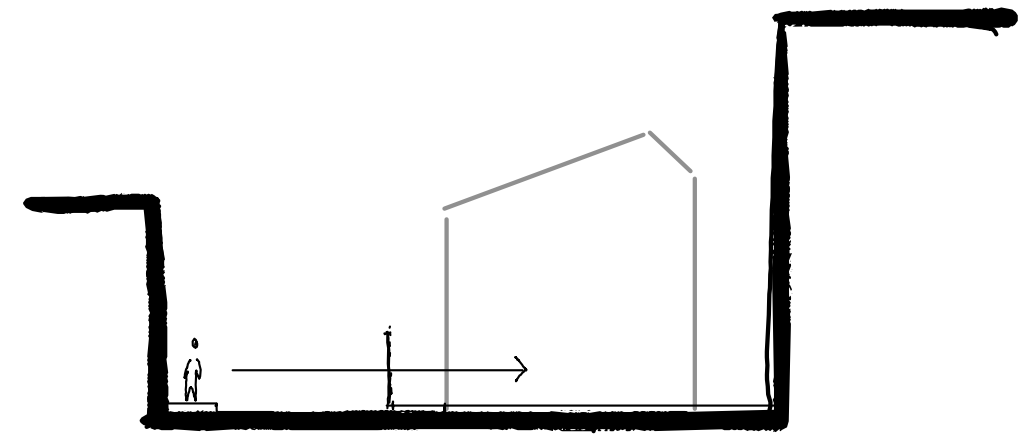
CAN SEE BUT NOT INTERACT WITH PARKINGLOT
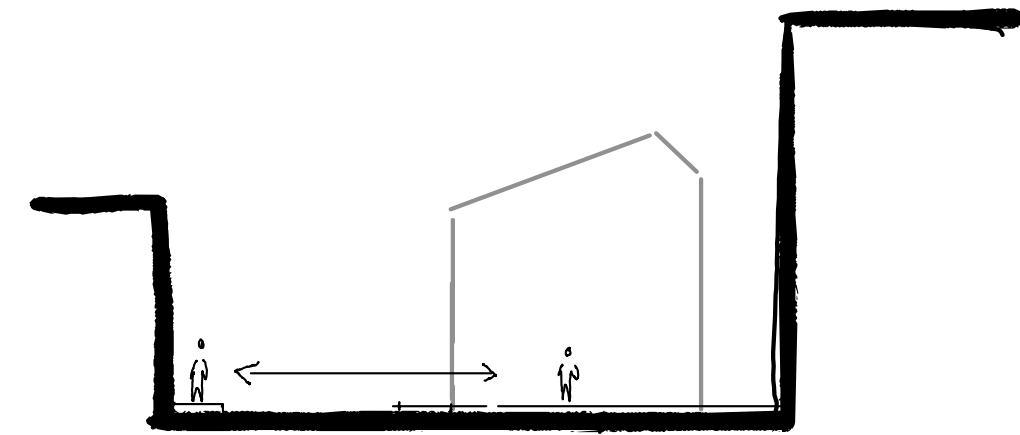
CAN SEE AND INTERACT WITH PARKING LOT
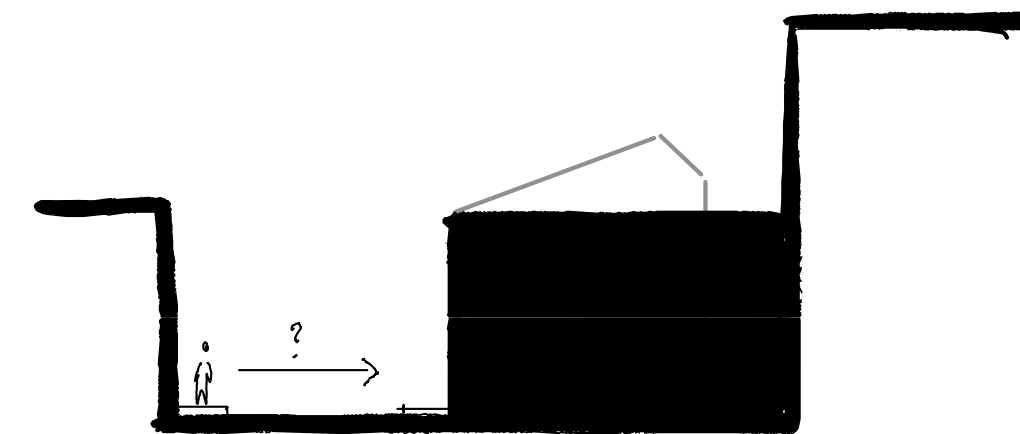
CANT SEE OR INTERACT WITH THE PARKING LOT

the labyrinth

FINDING OPENINGS

As I explored and tried to understand the layout of the courtyard, it became clear that the further you went in, the narrower it became. To preserve this unique feature, I chose to open up some passages to create even more openings to walk through.

For example, I opened up an old "smau" (which means a small, narrow alleyway in Bergen dialect) that had been bricked up. To continue the same atmosphere, I chose to create small passages between the pavilions to create an extension of the movement into the backyard.
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REMOVING ALL OF
EXSISTING WALLS
(EXEPT BEARING)

USING ONE BUILDING
FOR THE PUBLIC
TO USE MAKING
MORE PEOPLE FROM
THE OUTSIDE TO FEEL
SOME SORT OF OWNERSHIP

MAKING "PASSAGES"
INTO OTHER COURTYARDS
FOR THE LOCALS OR
PEOPLE IN GENERAL?

BALCONIES IN TREE OF THE
BUILDINGS WHERE ITS ONLY
APARTMENTS
USING THEM FOR THE
PEOPLE WHOS LIVING
THERE.
INTERACTING WITH
THE COURTYARD,
BUT ITS PRIVATE

REMOVING FENCE

Level 2

Level 3

Level 1

MAKING LEVELS
ACTING LIKE
HALF PRIVATE AND
"PUBLIC" + IS
STILL POSSIBLE
TO ENTER EVEN
IF YOU DONT LIVE
THERE

THIS COULD POTENTIAL
USED FOR BOTH
RESTAURANTS AND
CULTURAL EVENTS

"GRENDAHUS"
OPEN UP THE GROUND
FLOOR IN THE
COURTYARD FOR
THE PEOPLE WHOS
LIVING THERE TO USE

REMOVE "SHEDS"
MAKING MORE OPEN
SPACE

PUBLIC · PRIVATE
SEMI PUBLIC
SEMI PRIVATE

OPEN UP SOME
OF THE ROOMS TO
GET VIEW FROM ONE
SIDE TO THE OTHER
MAKING MORE LIGHT
INTO THE COURTYARD
AND MORE VIEW TO
WHAT IS HAPPENING
INSIDE THE BUILDINGS
FROM BOTH SIDES.

REGNBUEPLASSEN
USED FOR THE CAFES
AROND DURING
SPRING/SUMMER
MAKING MORE
PERMANENT SEATING

REMOVING
DOOR AND WALLS
ADDING WINDOWS

pavillions

URBAN, LOCAL AND URBAN/LOCAL

The parking lot is the elephant in the room for this project. It is a large area that is currently covered in asphalt and barbed wire fences.
Some of the responses from the survey were that there was a lack of green space, a place to stay or a meeting place.

The concept of "Urban, Local, and Urban/Local" serves as a guiding principle throughout the design process.

It acknowledges the inherent tension between the urban realm, characterized by its bustling activity and public accessibility, and the local realm, defined by its private and residential character.

The design strives to harmonize these contrasting spheres, creating a space that seamlessly integrates both urban and local elements.
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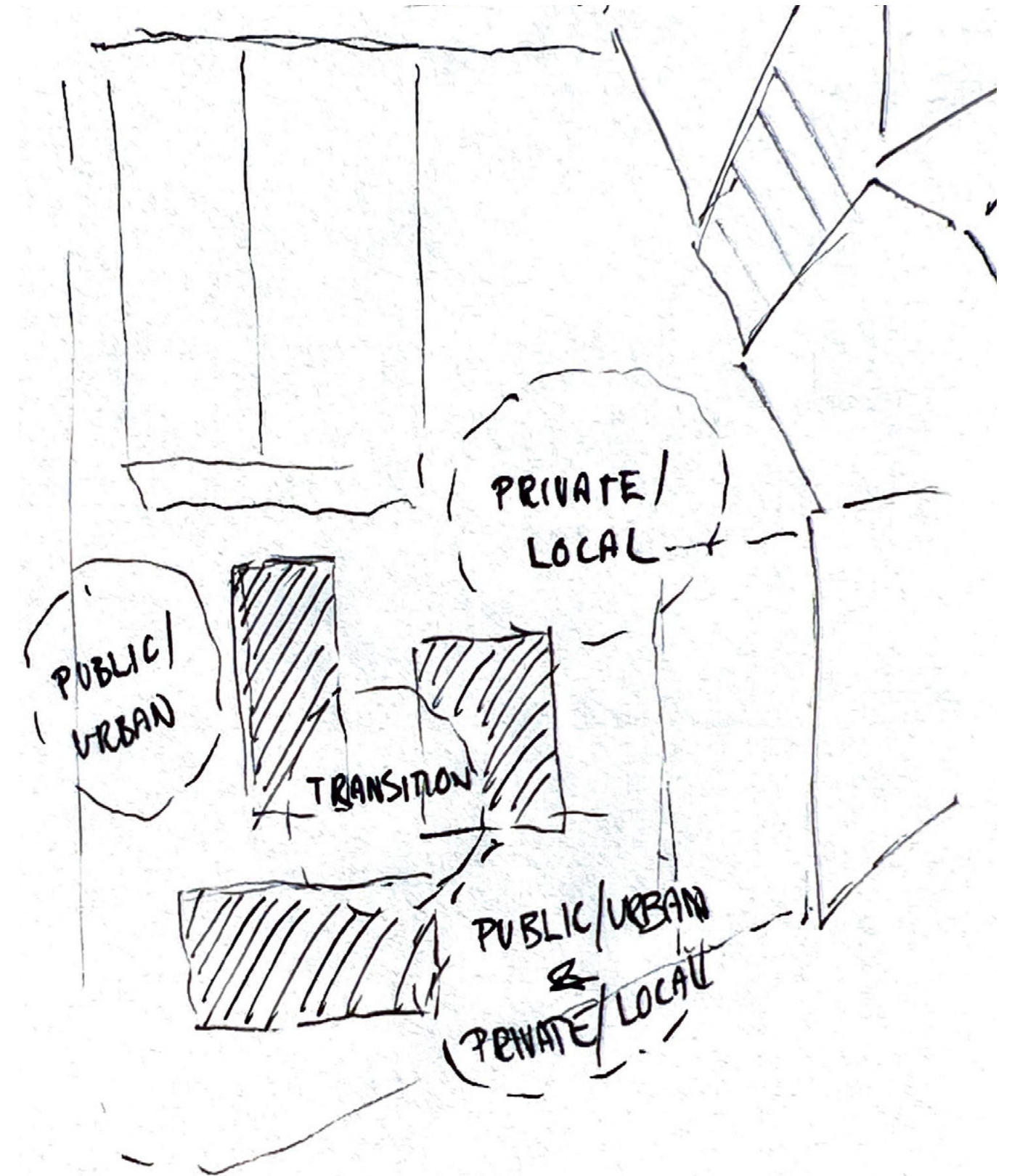
0.1 URBAN PAVILLION

The Urban Pavilion is envisioned as a hub for public activity, catering to the needs of visitors and passersby. It draws inspiration from the surrounding restaurants, offering them a flexible extension for hosting special events, outdoor dining during warmer months, or collaborative market initiatives with nearby shops.
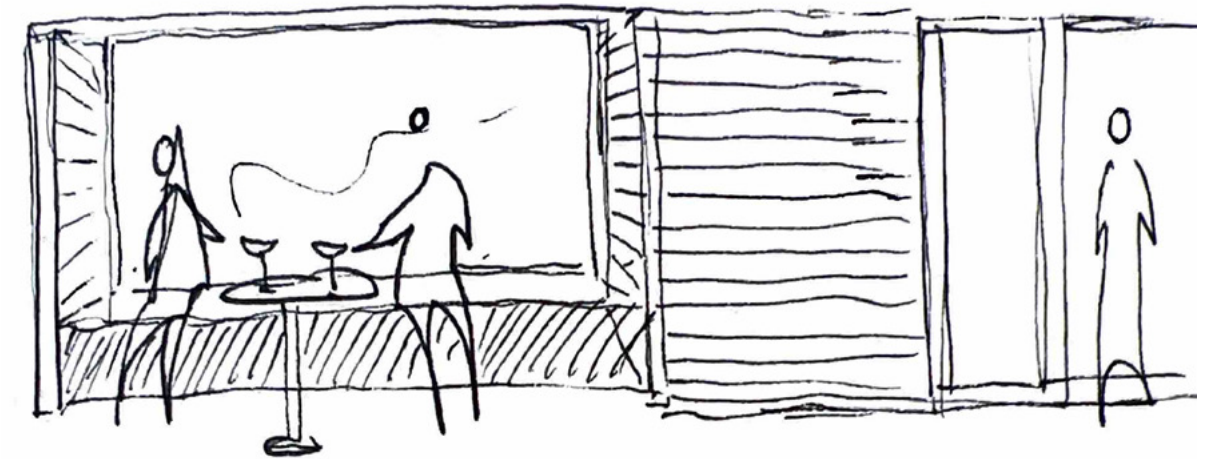

0.2 URBAN / LOCAL

The Urban/Local Pavilion occupies a position slightly further back, bridging the gap between the Urban Pavilion and the Local Pavilion. Its design aims to foster a sense of shared ownership between residents and visitors, providing a versatile space for community gatherings, private celebrations, or informal meetings.
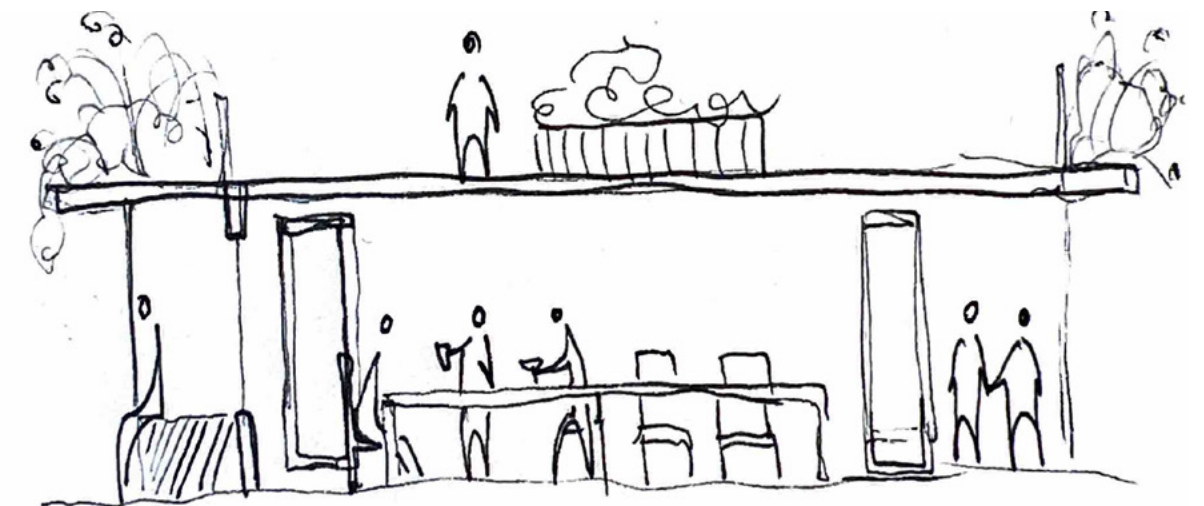
0.3 LOCAL

The Local Pavilion serves as a sanctuary for residents, offering a tranquil retreat and an extension of their private living spaces. It envisions a space where neighbors can come together for communal activities, fostering dugnad and shared ownership of the backyard.
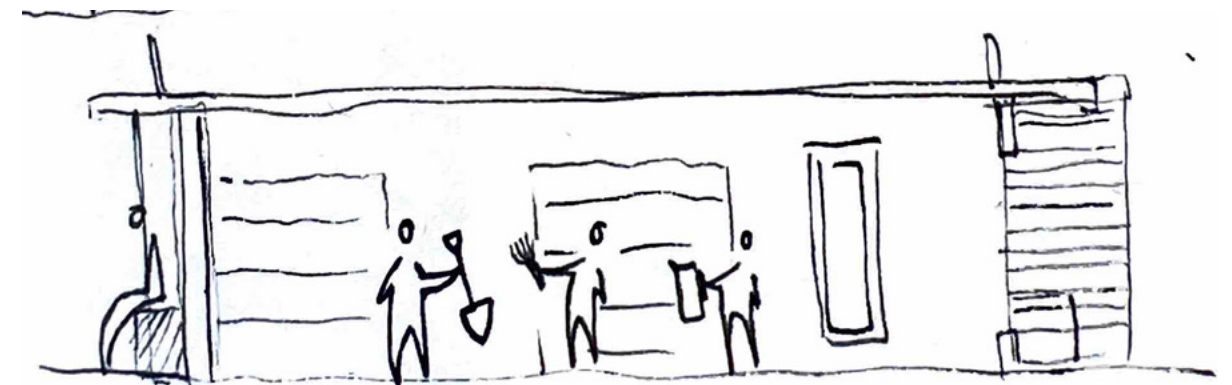
garden and greenery

ADDING GREENERY

A garden has been planted on top of the three buildings. To get there, you have to climb a spiral staircase, and you can walk on all the roofs by crossing the small bridges. As mentioned earlier, one of the wishes was to make the area greener, to soften the hard lines that are both in the streets and inside the courtyard.

The idea is that this is for the locals, but with the possibility for outsiders to use it if possible. Down at street level in the spaces between the pavilions, it functions as a small garden, with trees that stretch up over the buildings, both to "soften" the area and to give those who live there a little more privacy when it comes to visibility.

It was mentioned earlier that I wanted to create an extension of the movement into the backyard, which I chose to do between the pavilions. The space between the buildings should be inviting, but at the same time give the thought:

"Can I walk here?", a bit like mentioned earlier about how you move in alleys, it should have a bit of that feeling to respect that there are thresholds, without there being large signs telling what is allowed and what is not allowed.
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