

DIPLOMA 2024 ELISABETH WIEERS

VEILED AND ENVELOPING

Layers of covering and uncovering sex workspaces

LEGISLATION CREATING AN IN-BETWEEN SPACE

My project is about the place that sex work occupies in a city, with my focus being Bergen. Using a mix of data and testimonies I have sketched the 'where' of sex workers. Within the limitation of the sex purchase act, limited resources and unnuanced social view, sex work in Bergen occupies a grey zone in which sex workers are left with very little safe spaces to occupy. The first step of my project for me was to map out this grey zone, as it is simultaneously the where but also the why of my project. The law is the biggest influence on the sex workspaces in Bergen.

When looking at the law, the most prominent legislation regarding sex work in Bergen is the sex purchase act. The Sex purchase act makes the buying of sex illegal but not the buying of it. This is meant to encourage sex workers to contact the police or other help organizations. The origin of this law is rooted in feminist convictions. The focus is meant to be shifted on the men buying sex, not just legally but also socially, to help lessen the prejudice against sex workers. The ultimate goal of the law is to abolish sex work, as the belief is held that it is inherently damaging for a woman to be engaged in selling sex, and there is no healthy way to conduct it. Commercial sex, according to these convictions, also damages a community by perpetuation the idea that women are objects to be sold.

In practice, however, it has left the most vulnerable more open to be exploited, especially when it comes to finding a place. Mainly because of the other laws

intersecting with the sex purchase act. The two main ones affecting the place of sex workers are third-party regulation and immigration law.

Third-party regulation is the prohibiting of third parties making money from sex work. This legislation is targeting pimps and traffickers. It is, however, often used as a threat against sex workers. Police will often contact landlords and hotels owners to "warn" them about the sex work going on in their properties and even tell them that by allowing the women to stay there, they themselves could be found guilty of pimping or trafficking.

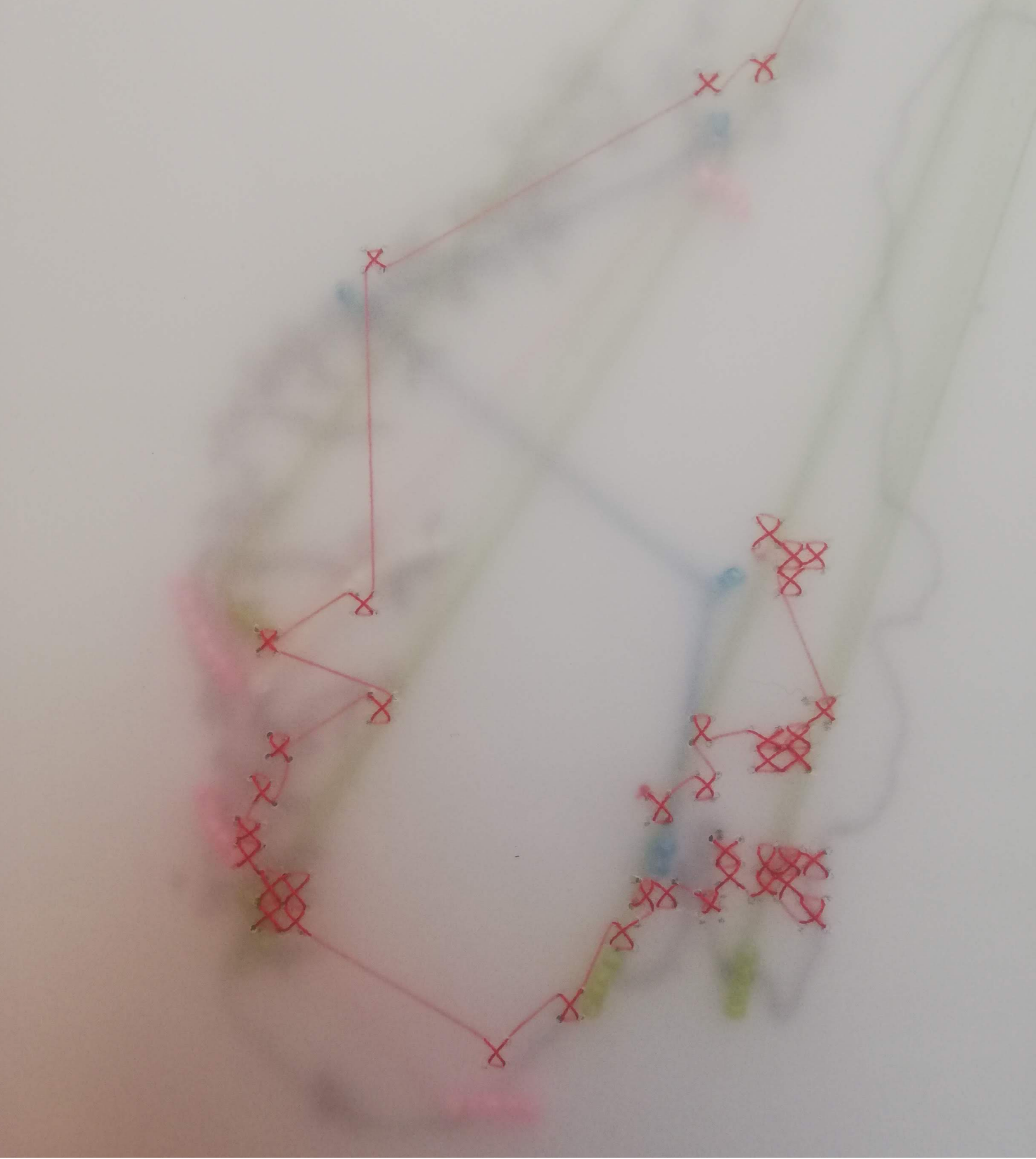
The Immigration law prohibits immigrants from working or earning money without the proper permits. Permits, which you cannot receive to do sex work. With an estimated 70% to 80% of sex workers being immigrants they rarely contact police, out of fear of deportation. Police will uncover where sex workers live and work through online

advertisements. They will arrest clients but also, check the papers of the sex workers and often inform the landlords. By checking their papers these sex workers feel the constant pressure of potentially being deported or that the police will interfere with the lives of their loved ones like kids, if they have them. This forces them to work in more dangerous circumstances, on the street. And even there the pressure still looms.

Because of these complicated legal and social circumstances many sex workers move from space to space and city to city, only staying in one place for a few days at a time. The sex workspaces, which are often owned by third parties, don't move, rather the sex workers move through them. In their travel they miss out on spaces that provide consistent support and it makes it difficult to build up a community amongst colleagues. Outreach programs, like kyrkens bymission, can sometimes be the only consistency while travelling across different places in Norway.



MAP SHOWING TRAVEL PATHS OF SEX WORKERS IN NORWAY, NUMBER OF BEADS SHOWING THE NUMBER OF DAYS THEY ARE IN 1 LOCATION



MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF KYRKENS BYMISSION, A NON-PROFIT HELPING SEX WORKERS AMONGST OTHERS



MODEL SHOWING THE UNCOVERING OF A SPACE FOR SEX WORK

THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF SEX WORKSPACES



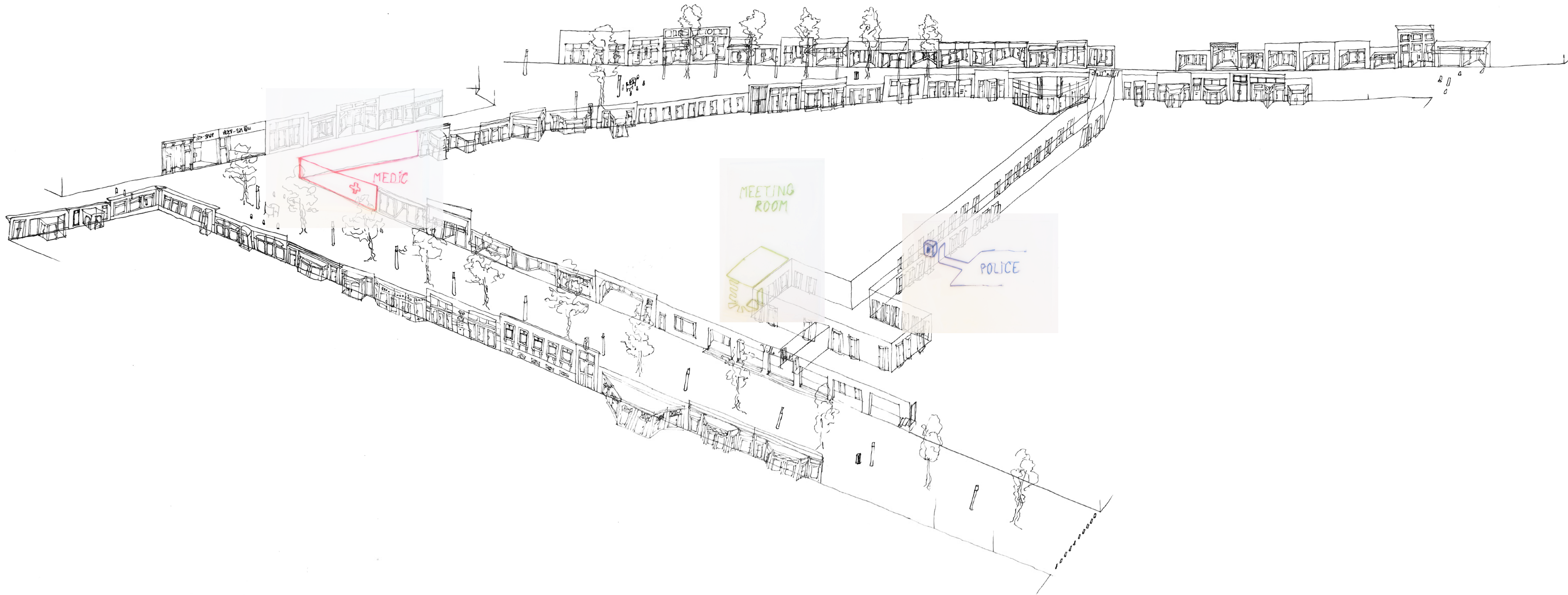
Another consequence of the law is that the clientele has become more scared of being caught but also more violent. This law which is so heavily focussed on the future of sex work, does not provide for a safe and comfortable space to legally work as a sex worker. The intention of the law, to keep women safe, cannot succeed without providing infrastructure to do so. These changes in the law are expressed in the workspaces of the sex workers.

Sex work in Bergen occurs in a variety of spaces of different types and sizes. One consistent element is that they are hidden away from those who don't know where to look. This is the most noticeable way the law and complicated social views surrounding sex workers is expressed into space.

Providing infrastructure for sex work requires a spatial attention to visibility and a delicate balance. Increasing the visibility also increases the risk for sex workers but low visibility consistently excludes them from consideration. The right type of visibility can make the sex workers be viewed as a valued part of the community deserving of attention, consideration and respect, the wrong kind of visibility can lead to more judgement which translates to, in architecture, less infrastructure and ultimately makes the living and working places for sex workers more dangerous. The invisibility of the sex workers directly impacts their access to safe workspaces and other basic necessities.

ELEMENTS OF COMMERCIAL SEX WORKSPACES

An interesting place to look at the relation between legislation and sex workspaces in Antwerp. In Antwerp sex work is legal but only in a certain area in the center of the city. This area also provides accommodations for the sex workers like a medical center, meeting rooms and a police presence. This area also serves as a centre of operations for the whole city. Sex workers who work outside of this center still go here to register and get aid. It is a consistent place for the workers and provide stability. This has made it easier for the city to crack down on trafficking and other crime taking place in the same area.



SPACES USED FOR SEX WORK IN ANTWERP AND SPACES FOR FACILITIES FOR THE WORKERS

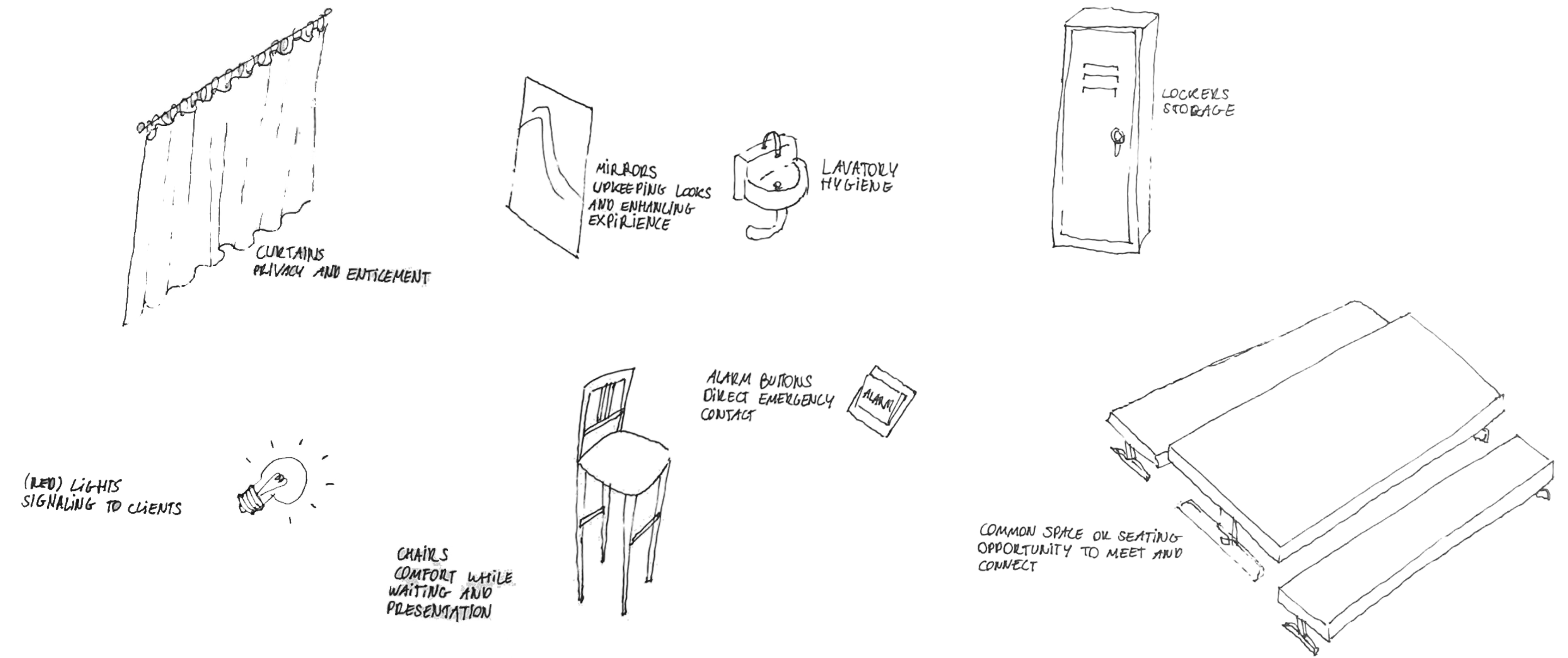


FACADE OF A COMMERCIAL SEX WORKSPACE IN BERGEN



FACADE OF A COMMERCIAL SEX WORKSPACE IN ANTWERP

The changes in the law surrounding sex work legislation in Antwerp were accompanied by renovations on the sex work area. Making the streets walkable and aiming to eliminate crime. When looking at commercial sex workspaces, they share many common elements. They create an architectural language that focusses on signaling the clients and providing safety for the workers.



COMMON ELEMENTS IN SEX WORKSPACES AND THEIR FUNCTION



A ROOM FOR COMMERCIAL SEX IN ANTWERP

SPACES FOR SEX WORK

I am using the historical St. Jørgens hospital as an example of what a sanctioned sex workspace could look like in Bergen. Using the elements and observations from my research. I hope to show people the possibilities, confront their uncomfortable feeling about sex work and perhaps make them see a future where sex work has a safe space in the city and contributes to the quality of it.

The Same architectural elements used in the St. Jørgens hospital can be used in other spaces, for example at a home. With the rise of the use of the internet, sex work is most often conducted at home. Simple interventions to increase enticement, but also provide separation between work and personal space. It gives women control over their workspace and improves safety.



FLOOR PLAN OF ST JØRGENS HOSPITAL



CURTAIN USED AS AN ELEMENT FOR ENTICEMENT



COURTYARD OF THE ST. JØRGENS HOSPITAL

When wanting to create better circumstances for sex workers, changes in the law should be accompanied with changes in infrastructure. For the community to be effective in aiding sex workers, there have to be places for sex workers to meet, create community and be visible in the city in a way that is healthy.

When creating safe spaces for sex workers, you encourage consistency, avoiding travelling so that it is easier to receive aid when needed and by motivating them to be part of the community, you eliminate contact with the people who benefit from them being vulnerable.

Providing legal spaces for sex workers to work can help eliminate the need for them to be invisible and create the opportunity to help shift the view people have of sex workers to a more nuanced one.



ST. JØRGENS HOSPITAL AROUND 1940