

# Dutch business Commons

**sebastian vork**

non-speculative housing  
within and against the housing market

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Built Environment

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**Dutch Housing Commons**

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## **contents**

5	Preamble
9	Theoretical framework
10	Precedents
11	Speaker groups
17	Setting
19	The play
23	Act 1: Housing Commons
47	Act 2: Public Frameworks
81	Act 3: Spatial Agency
99	Act 4: The Project
147	Act 5: The Dinner
154	Model pictures
166	Drawing set
199	Acknowledgements
201	Bibliography

## **preamble**

This stage play features a fictional polylogue between people of different professional backgrounds on the imaginative and future development of housing commons in the Netherlands. The play, which is set in the year 2043, offers its spectators an optimistic and critical image of the future of housing commons in the Netherlands and reflects on this speculative transformation of the Dutch housing market. Housing commons are depicted as a non-speculative way of housing in which a variety of facilities are being shared to alleviate the overly stressed Dutch housing market. Housing commons are presented as a publicly recognized way of living besides private homeownership and social housing. The play culminates in a visit to 'Het Rek', an imaginative example showcasing this new generation of housing commons in the Netherlands. The project – realized between 2027 and 2031 in the city centre of Nijmegen – houses roughly 150 people and several common facilities.

The play is constructed by five acts. During the first three acts the protagonists are travelling by train from Amsterdam – the symbolic heart of the *Randstad* – to Nijmegen – the symbolic heart of the *Bandstad*. In the fourth act the group visits 'Het Rek'. During their visit, the group is guided by the projects' architect interacting with the building and its dwellers. The fifth act takes the shape of a reflective dinner and concludes the play.

**act 1** The first act kicks-off in Amsterdam on 14 September 2043 and introduces the spectator to the Dutch housing commons. The train ride starts at Amsterdam central station in the morning. During the train ride they start discussing the housing crisis which prevailed during the 2020s in the Netherlands. In conversation, the group introduces housing commons and explores its characteristics. At the end of the act, the group reflects on the shift in thinking about housing that occurred in the Netherlands during the 2020s and the importance of architectural imagination during this housing evolution.

**act 2** During act two of the play the group is still traversing through the Dutch landscapes. The group starts focussing on the more technical aspects of housing commons. In the first place the regulatory framework of housing commons is being discussed. The regulatory framework entails the regulatory constraints and possibilities of housing commons in the Netherlands. This is followed by the architectural framework, in which the group discusses the relevance of architectural imagination regarding the development of housing commons. The next scene covers the financial constraints and possibilities of housing commons and the final scene of the second act dives deeper into the legal aspect of housing commons.

**act 3** The third act of the play covers the last stretch of the train ride towards Nijmegen. This act is dedicated to the concept of spatial agency. In the first scene, the concept of spatial agency is carefully brought to the attention of the spectator to establish a clear image of spatial agency and its importance regarding housing commons. The second scene focusses itself in more detail on the design process of housing commons and the role of the spatial agent and architect within this process.

**act 4** The fourth act starts with the group's arrival at Nijmegen central train station. At the train station they are being awaited by the architect of the project they are about to visit. The first scene is dedicated to the introduction of the building in which the historical context and former purposes of the building are being clarified. During the second scene the guided tour – executed by the architect – of the building starts. During the tour the group and the architect will cover eleven design principles throughout the building. At each stop the architect explains the particular spatial solutions and at certain moments dwellers of the building joins the group to enlighten the group even more!

**act 5** The play is concluded by the fifth act. The fifth act of this play uses the setting of a communal dinner to reflect on the project and the discussions.

## theoretical framework

The play explores the potential of fiction as a tool for social change through speculative conversation and design. By using script as a medium, the different perspectives of the protagonists – which were collected through interviews – are brought together in an integral, fictocritical, multi-vocal polylogue. Besides the fictocritical conversation, speculative design is being used to showcase the potential of architectural imagination regarding social change. This way of writing and composing a narrative can be gathered under a writing style called *fictocriticism*. Fictocriticism was brought to life to support emancipatory developments within society to ultimately support social change. The script of this stage play embraces this style of writing and explores the potential of fictocriticism as a tool for changing the Dutch housing market. It illustrates the potentials and challenges of housing commons in the Netherlands. The content of the script has been established through conducting interviews among housing commons experts. Furthermore, the established and fictional polylogue is enriched by excerpts from several publications on housing commons. The play takes place in the year of 2043, which marks the fictional twentieth anniversary of a different housing market in the Netherlands. Therefore, for the sake of this play, the statements from the interviews were reassembled to fit them to the year of 2043. The content of the interviews remained unchanged. However, the author has speculated with the statements and placed them in the future as events which have taken place in the past, transforming them into given facts. Through this reassembly of statements and transformation of the context, new insights are created regarding the otherwise extremely unyielding and conservative (Dutch) housing market.

## precedents

While conducting the interviews several precedents were discussed. These precedents are built or unbuilt housing common projects within the Netherlands or Switzerland and served the purpose of clarifying the statements of the interviewees. The script is strengthened by these specified precedents through informal and analytical hand drawings. These hand drawings provide imaginative intermezzos throughout the script guiding the spectator.

The precedents:

- Kalkbreite in Zürich <sup>CH</sup>
- De Nieuwe Meent in Amsterdam <sup>NL</sup>
- Zollhaus in Zürich <sup>CH</sup>
- Hardturm in Zürich <sup>CH</sup>
- Zwicky Süd in Dübendorf <sup>CH</sup>

The hand drawings of the precedents are highlighting several design principles which were distilled during the analysis of the housing common projects. The precedents are analysed through different lenses. At first, the precedent is presented within its urban context. Secondly, the building itself is highlighted. Lastly, remarkable dwelling types and the entrance area is illustrated. Throughout the spatial research on housing commons the entrance area was found as a crucial part of housing commons. Therefore, this spatial aspect of the precedents was given additional attention.

## speaker groups

The cast of this stage play was established by four distinctive speaker groups covering the complete spectrum of the Dutch housing market. By covering the complete spectrum, it is aimed to create an integral polylogue between the different speaker groups. The distinctive speaker groups are the dwellers, the institutions, the theorists and critics and the creators. Within the speakers groups a distinction is made between protagonists and choruses. The protagonists are brought to live through interviews conducted among housing common experts. These interviews were conducted between May and June 2023. The choruses of the different speaker groups are represented by literature review to enrich the polylogue.

As creator of this play, I integrated my own voice throughout the fringes of the script parallel to the statements of the protagonists and choruses. The fringes of the pages are used to clarify certain statements through providing more context or to share the author's own interpretation on certain topics. Furthermore, the fringes of the script were used to highlight certain design principles which have been discussed and used during the design process. In addition to that, the fringes are being used to refer to the precedents.

### speaker group - dwellers

This speaker group represents the dwellers throughout the play. The statements of this speaker group are collected from an interview of prospective cooperative dwellers which was conducted on May 26, 2023. The dwellers are both part of a young housing cooperative called 'De Lage Dremfels' in Amsterdam.

### protagonists

PAULIEN KLAP is a product engineer from the Delft University of Technology and co-founded the housing common *De Lage Dremfels* in Amsterdam together with four others in November 2022.

JONAHVAN DELDEN is urban designer from the Delft University of Technology and accounts as one of the four other co-founders of the housing common *De Lage Dremfels* apart from Paulien Klap.

### speaker group - institutions

The speaker group of institutions is derived from three interviews which were conducted on May 23, 2023, and June 5, 2023. The interviewees represent respectively a municipality, a bank and a developer. Together they contribute to the current debate on housing commons in the Netherlands. Besides of the interviews, cited phrases and quotes are taken from (semi-) governmental reports and studies published between 2021 and 2023.

### protagonists

ANNET AKKERMA is policy advisor at the municipality of Rotterdam and accounts as the principal advocate of cooperative housing within Rotterdam as part of her focus on innovative ways of dwelling within and beyond the current boundaries.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE works as senior financial expert on housing projects at the German *GLS Bank* which is specialized in financing cooperative housing projects in Germany. Currently, *GLS Bank* is also involved in several Dutch cooperative housing projects.

EWOUDE DEKKER works as an independent developer at *Creating Living Spaces*. He sees himself as an atypical developer focusing on creating better places within the city of Rotterdam

JAN BOVY works as an independent developer at *Creating Living Spaces*. He sees himself as an atypical developer focusing on creating better places within the city of Rotterdam



### **speaker group - theorists and critics**

This speaker group represents the sound of theorists and critics. This speaker group is on the one hand established from two interviews which were conducted on May 13, 2023, and June 8, 2023. Most of the cited phrases and quotes are taken from articles, books and lectures published between 1957 and 2022; a few are taken from talks and lectures which took place during earlier phases of the project.

### **protagonists**

ANNE KOCKELKORN is professor in History and Theory of the City and the Architecture of Urban Housing at the Ghent University and is co-author of *Cooperative Conditions: A Primer on Architecture, Finance and Regulation in Zurich* which will be published in 2024.

ARIE LENGKEEK is urban planner and curator of various initiatives ranging from art to public programme and is co-author of *Operatie Wooncoöperatie: uit de wooncrisis door gemeenschappelijk bezit* which has been published in 2022.

### **chorus of theorists and critics**

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS: Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *“Spatial Agency: Other ways of doing architecture”* (2013)

DAAN BOSSUYT: Frederico Savini and Daan Bossuyt, *“Housing Commons as a degrowth planning practice”* (2022)

HOUSING CRITIC 1: Peter Marcuse and David Madden, *“In defense of housing: The Politics of Crisis”* (2016)

HOUSING CRITIC 2: Cooplink, Dutch society for existing housing commons and establishing housing commons

HOUSING CRITIC 3: Rainer Hehl, Patricia Ventura and Sascha Delz, *“Housing the Co-op: A Micro-Political Manifesto”* (2020)

HOUSING CRITIC 4: Massimo de Angelis and Stavros Stavrides, *“An Architektur; Beyond Markets or States: Commoning as Collective Practice”* (2009)

HOUSING THEORIST 1: Arie Lengkeek and Peter Kuenzli, *“Operatie wooncoöperatie: uit de wooncrisis door gemeenschappelijk bezit”* (2022)

HOUSINGTHEORIST 2: Anne Kockelkorn and Susanne Schindler, *“Cooperative Conditions: A Primer on Architecture, Finance and Regulation in Zurich”* (2021)

IRINA DAVIDOVICI: Irina Davidovici, *“Ideology and Collective Life: Zurich’s New Cooperatives”* (2017) and *“Hybrid Commons: Housing Cooperatives in Zürich”* (2022)

IVAN ILLICH: Ivan Illich, *“Atlas of Places: Dwelling”* (1957)

JOSTA VAN BOCKXMEER: Josta van Bockxmeer, *“De Correspondent: Zolang beleggers huizen bouwen, wordt wonen nooit betaalbaar”* (2022)

PETER KUENZLI: Peter Kuenzli, *“Wooncoöperatie als game changer”* (2022)

TOM AVERMAETE: Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta), *“Zürich Housing Commons”* (2021)

### speaker group - creators

This speaker group assembles the perspectives of the ones who create housing commons in collaboration with dwellers and the assistance of institutions. Their statements are derived from one interview which was conducted on June 1, 2023. The remaining statements are derived from lectures, books and informal talks during the early stages of the research.

### protagonists

MIRA NEKOVA is an architect and co-founder of *Time to Access*, an architecture and research office in Amsterdam focusing mainly on cooperative projects. *Time to Access* is one of the architects working on the new housing cooperative *De Nieuwe Meent* in Amsterdam.

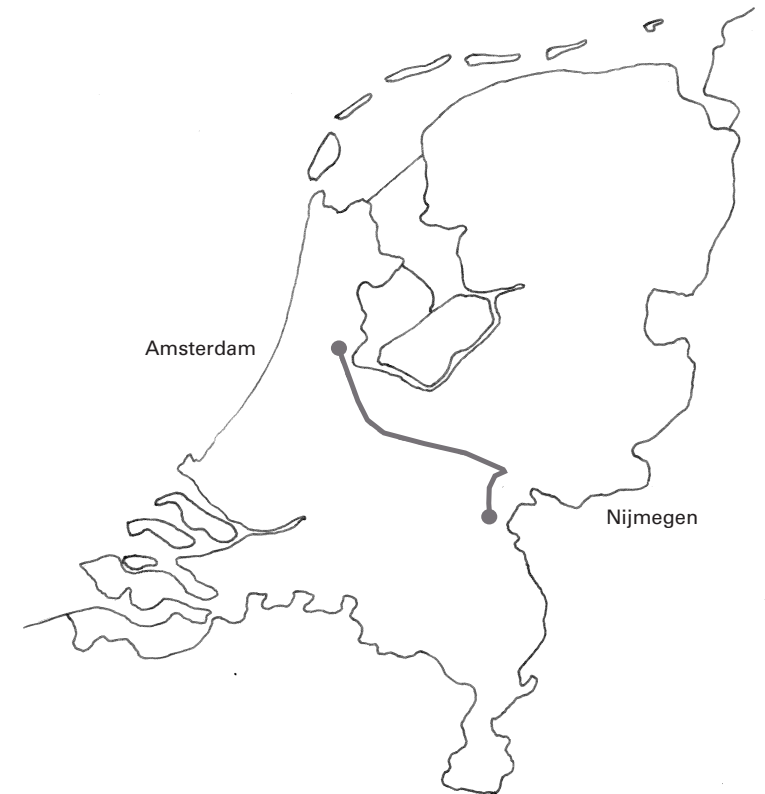
### chorus of creators

JEREMY MCLEOD: Jeremy McLeod, "University of Queensland: Architecture lecture" (2017)

FLORIS ALKEMADE: Floris Alkemade, "Archined: Het getal van een miljoen woningen is een onzinnig getal" (2023)

### setting

The shift in thinking and focus (from the *Randstad* towards the *Bandstad*) is represented by the train ride from Amsterdam (the symbolic heart of the *Randstad*) towards Nijmegen (the symbolic heart of the *Bandstad*). Therefore, the train ride itself becomes the symbolic underlying message of a shift in thinking.



## the play: introduction

The year 2043 marks the twentieth anniversary of the rebirth of the Dutch housing market. As part of renewed policymaking on housing in the Netherlands, the development of housing commons in the Netherlands has taken a giant leap forward. As a result of political reformations at the end of 2023, the Dutch political landscape shifted completely. After a longstanding tradition of liberal and conservative leadership within the Dutch parliament, social and progressive parties took over. At that time, the fresh leadership was confronted by a society which was characterised by market driven policymaking and numerous arising crises. Among these several crises, the housing crisis accounted as one of the most persisting. Naturally, as one would expect from a social and progressive government, the housing crisis became one of their main priorities.

After its appointment in February 2024, the refreshing approach of the new government proved its merits, and its resolutions were executed accordingly – which were being made during the elections on November 22<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning (in Dutch: *VROM*) was granted more authorities and the highly debated strategy of producing 1.000.000 dwellings – in ten years – was put on hold. The government concluded it would be more beneficial to define a coherent strategy for the long term instead of producing 1.000.000 homes from a state of panic. In the beginning, this shift in policymaking resulted in a lot of confusion and a variety of critical reactions. However, when the carefully curated *Zesde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening (ZeNO)* was presented by the Minister of Housing and Spatial Planning in December 2024, the public belief in Dutch spatial planning was restored. The introduction of the *ZeNO* re-established a longstanding tradition of a centralized approach on housing and spatial planning after decades of absence.

Before the 2020s, the Dutch housing market was dominated by private homeownership on the one hand and social housing on the other hand. In between these two forms of living a problematic gap had been established. Moreover, the prevailing system left little opportunities for the commons. After the political shift in 2023, the government recognised this problematic gap could be resolved through other housing possibilities by supporting the development of housing commons. The *Zesde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening (ZeNO)* opted for housing commons as this designated antidote. To ensure a successful development of housing commons in the Netherlands, the *ZeNO* facilitated crucial financial, legal, and regulatory instruments. The government started a comprehensive fund to support housing commons in the Netherlands and ensured to streamline procedural trajectories. This political belief in housing commons as a new way of dwelling in the Netherlands promoted a remarkable growth of experimentation regarding housing typologies among architects and designers. It even resulted into the resurrection of the *NNAO (Nederland Nu Als Ontwerp)*. The former *NNAO* was conceived in 1984 as a thinktank and platform to encourage the discourse on spatial planning by a group of researchers and designers. Back then, the *NNAO*'s main objective was to withstand the demise of spatial planning in the Netherlands. The resurrected version of the former *NNAO* basically started from the same point of view as in 1984. In 2025 several young and energetic architects, designers and researchers re-established the *NNAO* which grew exponentially in a short period of time. The group decided to carry-on the same denomination of the *NNAO*, since the concept of *Nederland Nu Als Ontwerp* regained its urgency again.

Since the introduction of the *ZeNO* in 2024, housing commons are nowadays – anno 2043 – accommodating nearly 700.000 households in the Netherlands, representing roughly eight percent of the Dutch housing stock. Especially in the early days of its development, the *NNAO* played a significant part throughout the development and architectural imagination of

< author's note

The former *NNAO* was founded in 1984 by architects and designers. Their most influential contribution to the Dutch architectural discourse was the exhibition 'Nederlands Als Ontwerp' in 1986 inviting many Dutch architects to freely speculate what the Netherlands could look like in 2050.

housing commons in the country. The Dutch housing commons witnessed a true evolution over the past twenty years and became a desirable way of living besides homeownership and social housing. The housing evolution resulted in a rich variety of examples of housing commons throughout the Netherlands. Some of these projects already earned the denomination of 'golden oldy' and won many – architectural – prizes, while other projects only recently were inhabited by their new dwellers. Throughout the past twenty years, the traditional view on housing typologies changed and consequently innovative housing typologies have been adopted. For instance, the idea of cluster dwellings – which originally started in Switzerland – are a widespread concept in the Netherlands nowadays as well. The early projects have showcased the numerous possibilities of housing commons and paved the way for their future development in the Netherlands.

## **act 1: housing commons**

scene 1:	The housing crisis	24
scene 2:	Housing commons	28
scene 3:	Shift in thinking	40

### **cast**

Anne Kockelkorn, Annet Akkerma, Arie Lengkeek, Benedikt Altrogge, chorus of institutions, chorus of spatial agents, Daan Bossuyt, Ewoud Dekker, Floris Alkemade, Housing critic 1, housing critic 2, housing critic 3, housing critic 4, housing theorist 1, housing theorist 2, Irina Davidovici, Ivan Illich, Jan Bovy, Jeremy McLeod, Jonah van Delden, Josta van Bockxmeer, Mira Nekova, Paulien Klap, Peter Glas, Peter Kuenzli, Tom Avermaete

### **setting**

On September 14, 2043, a group of housing commons experts – among them the dweller, the cooperative, the municipality, the bank, the developer, the academic, the advocate and the architect – has been brought together to analyse and discuss the current state of the Dutch housing commons. To do so, the group visits a housing common in Nijmegen which is called ‘Het Rek’, completed in 2031. Nowadays, Nijmegen accommodates 18 housing commons. Although each example of housing commons tend to establish their own unique project, ‘Het Rek’ is not exceptional among Dutch housing commons, and shares many characteristics with other projects realized elsewhere in the Netherlands over the past 20 years. ‘Het Rek’ was chosen by the group of experts to function as the backdrop of their discussions and reflections and to spatially demonstrate the status quo of Dutch housing commons.

## scene 1: The housing crisis

*[Amsterdam, September 14, 2043. It is a quarter to nine in the morning and the group has gathered at platform 4 at the train station. They are waiting for the 08:54 intercity train heading towards Nijmegen to visit a housing common. The train ride towards Nijmegen takes 1 hour and 23 minutes and has no transfers. Some people of the group know each other while others are meeting for the first time.]*

*[the play starts]*

JEREMY MCLEOD *[seemingly excited for today]*: It is beautiful to witness the current state of the Dutch housing market, today! Until the 2020s, the production of housing was mostly handled by the market within the Netherlands, just as in the rest of the world. That was the main issue. Housing was designed for profit not for humans.

*[the others nod and hum unanimously]*

HOUSING CRITIC 1: Indeed! And consequently, the expenses of housing were by far the largest economic burden for many households. For a few others, housing was a source of wealth, status, profit, and control. Housing meant labour for those who construct, manage, and maintain it ... speculative profit for those buying and selling it ... income for those financing it ... tax resource for the state ... while it was a significant financial burden for dwellers themselves. The undoubtful protagonists of housing.

HOUSING CRITIC 2: In the Netherlands this resulted into an unbalanced housing market regarding private ownership, market tenancy and subsidized tenancy during the 2010s and 2020s.

### author's note >

To demonstrate the problematic Dutch housing market during the 2020s, a simplified overview of housing possibilities is given in relation to yearly household incomes:

- < €40.000  
subsidized tenancy representing roughly thirty percent of the Dutch housing stock during the 2020s
- €40.000 - €80.000  
market tenancy representing roughly ten percent of the Dutch housing stock during the 2020s
- > €80.000  
homeownership representing roughly sixty percent of the Dutch housing stock during the 2020s

PETER KUENZLI: This inequity regarding the housing market in the Netherlands can be explained as follows. In 2020 a regular single family house would cost around €450.000,- and the financial institutes were prepared to loan households four to five times their income. As a consequence, their yearly income should lie around € 80.000 or more. At the other end of the spectrum sat subsidized tenancy. In general, someone was eligible for subsidized tenancy by a yearly income of € 40.000 or lower. The remaining group of people ... with a yearly income between € 40.000 and € 80.000 ... was automatically devoted to market tenancy. However, the living expenses of market tenancy were relatively high, and the options were rather limited. This resulted in a considerable and problematic gap within the Dutch housing market: the housing crisis.

*[In the meantime, the intercity arrives. The group enters and takes place on one of the upper decks of the train to get a good view of the Dutch landscapes which they will traverse this morning. The conversation directs to the fundamentals of the status quo regarding the arena of housing in the Netherlands.]*

HOUSING CRITIC 1 *[continues]*: This was indeed one of the themes the Dutch depicted as the housing crisis throughout the 2010s and 2020s. However, we need to be careful with the concept of crisis and the usage of this concept. The idea of a crisis implies that inadequate or unaffordable housing is abnormal, a temporary departure from a well-functioning standard. But for many working class and poor communities, housing crisis was the norm for decades. In fact, the housing crisis was a predictable and consistent outcome of a basic characteristic of capitalist spatial development ... housing was not produced and distributed for the purposes of dwelling for all ... it was produced and distributed as a commodity to enrich the few. The housing crisis was not a result of the system breaking down but of the system working as it is intended. We used the concept of crisis to highlight the ways that the contemporary housing system is unsustainable by its very nature.

JOSTA VAN BOCKXMEER: The government was aware of this housing crisis and gap between private ownership and subsidized tenancy. However, instead of fundamentally changing housing policy the government depended on bigger institutional investors, such as pension funds. It was expected that these institutional investors would solve the housing crisis by producing affordable housing filling the gap between private ownership and subsidized tenancy. However, the production of this type of affordable housing was never thought of as financially lucrative, according to these pension funds. Therefore, the gap remained until the government fundamentally changed its housing policy in 2024. Before then, investors depicted housing primarily as a profitable commodity.

HOUSING CRITIC 1: This was a conflict between housing as lived, social space and housing as a profitable commodity. A conflict between housing as a home and housing as real estate.

*[While the group continues its conversation, the cityscape of Amsterdam is slowly passing by. The plots situated between the historical parts of the city and the railways have been filled up intensively and creatively during the past decades, in response to government policy favouring inner city densification over urban sprawl. In many cases it has resulted in inspiring and challenging examples enriching the city's urban landscape.]*

HOUSING CRITIC 3: By defining housing primarily as a profitable commodity, involving many powerful stakeholders, it became a fundamental trigger of the housing crises. Since access to adequate and affordable housing has always been a right to everyone, it was our duty during the 2020s to reclaim housing from the logics of personal needs and make it work for collective interest. Instead of promoting speculative operations for a minority, the micro-political agency of the practice of the commons were able to transform housing into a matter of mutual necessities and a resource for the common good.

HOUSING CRITIC 4: Exactly! Moreover, this was also applicable against the background of the many crises that we were facing

during the 2020s. Thinking about the commons and practicing the commons became particularly urgent at that time.

ANNE KOCKELKORN *[inspecting Amsterdam's cityscape]*: It was also key to resist an urbanisation that is profit driven.

DAAN BOSSUYT: Considering housing as a social good and not as a commodity implies a degrowth perspective within a world which was ... during the 2020s ... still highly market driven by a presumed never-ending economic growth.

HOUSING THEORIST 1 *[exited]*: To reimagine and re-establish housing as a social good within the Netherlands during the 2020s, a powerful antidote was needed. The establishment of a third way of living in the Netherlands ... next to private ownership and tenancy ... offered this powerful antidote after the political shift in 2023. This third way went by the name *housing commons*. Housing commons were ... and still are ... supported by external funding but withdrawn from speculative markets by law and therefore capable of remaining accessible for all users through payable rents.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: Housing commons are in between the market and realm of non-speculation. They're not sheltered like social housing. They must sustain themselves.

PETER KUENZLI: Simply put, within the Netherlands one could choose between merely two flavours of housing until 2020. Either the market was decisive ... in the case of private ownership and market rental ... or the state was decisive ... in the case of subsidized rental. The gap between these two flavours of housing was becoming more problematic every year. Therefore, after 2023 the government went for the inevitable choice to start shaping a new third way of housing within the Netherlands ... the Dutch housing commons!

## scene 2: Housing commons

[09:07 - The train traverses smoothly through the outskirts of Amsterdam and soon exchanges the cityscape for more rural surroundings. The outskirts of Amsterdam are well known for its visionary and almost utopian housing projects from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The critique on these projects has always been substantial referring to the immense scale of the projects and the socially unsafe places. Some of them have been preserved. However, many projects were demolished and replaced by less experimental and rather dull examples dating from the 2000s and 2010s, as if designers were too afraid during that period to make the same mistakes within their design as thirty years earlier by their colleagues.]

[the play continues]

PETER KUENZLI: Even though housing commons were depicted as the only viable direction to solve the housing crisis in the Netherlands during the 2020s, it took some time before housing commons were considered as a desirable and respectable way of living besides homeownership and tenancy.

ANNE KOCKELKORN [*nods understandingly*]: A delay of twenty years within housing policy is perfectly understandable though. This can be exemplified by Zürich's referendum in 1907 which defined housing as a public-sector responsibility. However, the new regulatory system in Zürich on housing policy only started to function in 1924 when the city of Zürich decided to lower the cooperatives' equity requirements from ten percent to six percent.

HOUSING CRITIC 2: The Dutch housing market has shown a similar evolution. Housing commons had been growing in popularity ... especially within certain circles ... in the Netherlands for some time and reached momentum at the beginning of 2020s. Back then, we anticipated that housing commons as a third way of living could eventually take up five

## precedent: Kalkbreite

project: Die Kalkbreite  
architect: Müller Sigrist Architekten AG, Zürich  
location: Zürich (CH)  
timeline: 2006 - 2014  
dwellers: 250 people  
facilities: courtyard, guestrooms, communal kitchen  
commons: cafe, cinema, restaurant, bar, shops

## text

Under this working title, a handful of district residents and professionals began to materialize their vision of a sustainable and innovative development of the Kalkbreite site in 2006. One year later, the group was established as the broadly supported and well-networked Kalkbreite Cooperative, which was granted the 6,350m<sup>2</sup> site by the City of Zurich under building laws. After many participatory processes, the vision was condensed into a project that mastered the complex local conditions and at the same time transformed the requirements of a socially and ecologically pioneering urban living space into contemporary architecture. (source: *Genossenschaft Kalkbreite*)

In 1898 the sanitary conditions of industrial workers' housing were examined. This study paved the way to define housing as a public-sector responsibility in 1907. However, it took roughly two decades before cooperative housing fully thrived within Zürich, after establishing the Swiss Housing Federation in 1919 and lowering the equity requirements from ten to six percent in 1924.

< author's note



# Die Kalkbreite

Zürich (CH)

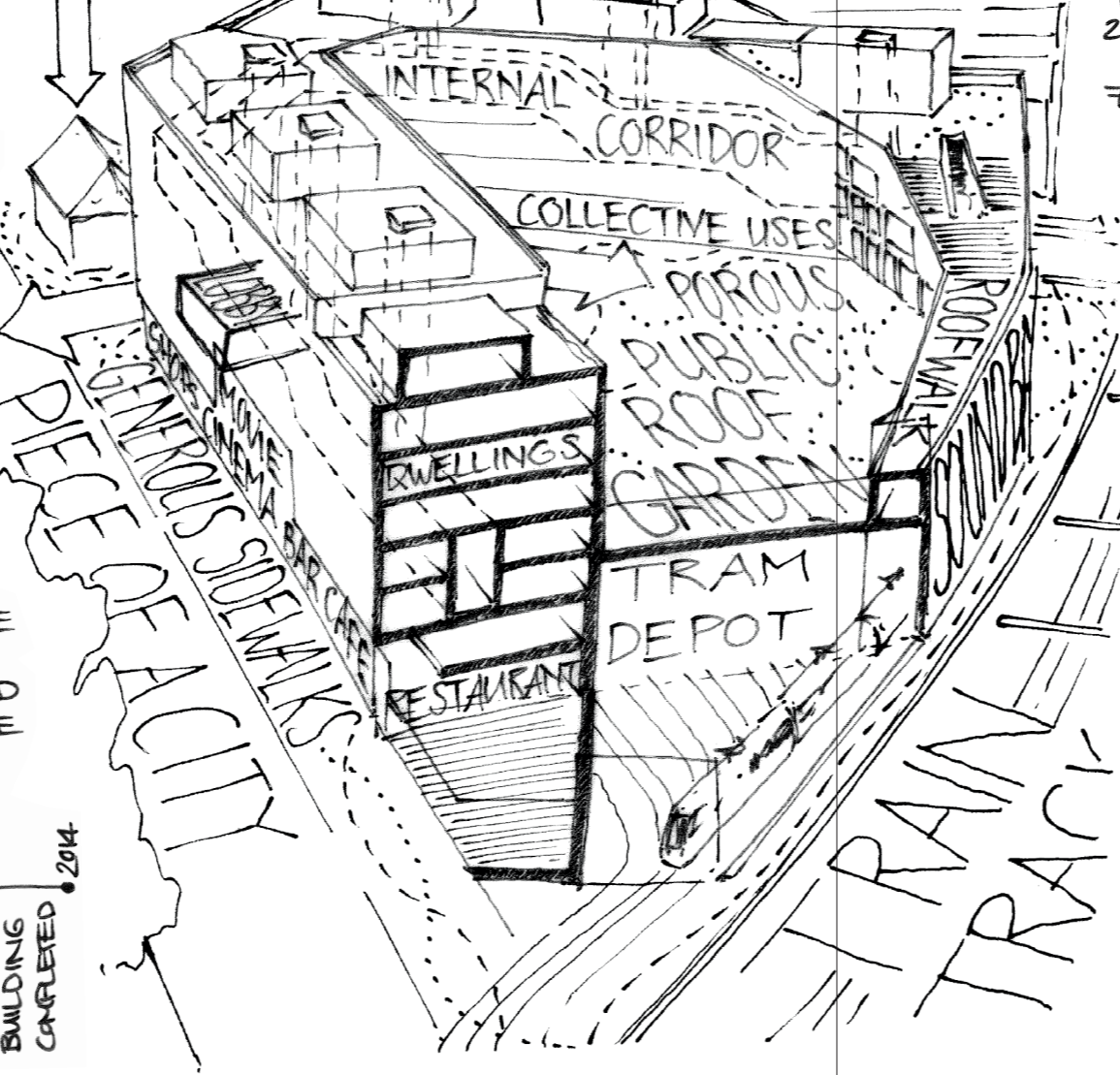


PIECE OF A CITY  
THE KALKBREITE COMPETITION WON PARTLY BECAUSE OF THEIR ADMINISTRATIVE SUCCESS TO REINTEGRATE THIS PART OF THE CITY AGAIN WITHIN THE URBAN FABRIC "EIN NEUES STÜCK STADT"

THEREFORE THEY HAD TO ACCOMODATE THE TRAM DEPOT. THE ARCHITECTS DECIDED TO "SIMPLY" RAISE THE WHOLE BUILDING AND TO COVER THE DEPOT BY A GARDEN

## COMMONS FOR THE CITY THROUGH PUBLIC COURTYARD AND FACILITIES AT STREET LEVEL

PRESERVED TYPICAL SWISS HOUSE ON CORNER



CHF 62 500 000,- FINANCE  
6% EQUITY  
24% FUND ROULEMENT  
70% BANK LOAN

THE BUILDING MASS IS RATHER "CHUNKY" WITHIN THE URBAN SURROUNDINGS

### CREATIVE LAND USE

LIFTING THE GARDEN CREATED MANY POSSIBILITIES SUCH AS THE SHELTERING FUNCTIONS TOWARDS THE STREETS AND TRAM TRACKS RESULTING IN A PEACEFUL GARDEN

### MORE WITH LESS

THE AVERAGE DWELLING SITS AT 32,6 M<sup>2</sup>/PERSON

MANY SHARED FACILITIES ARE IN PLACE SUCH AS:

- SHARED KITCHENS
- ROOF GARDENS
- HOTEL
- OFFICES
- LAUNDRY

### DWELLING TYPOLOGY

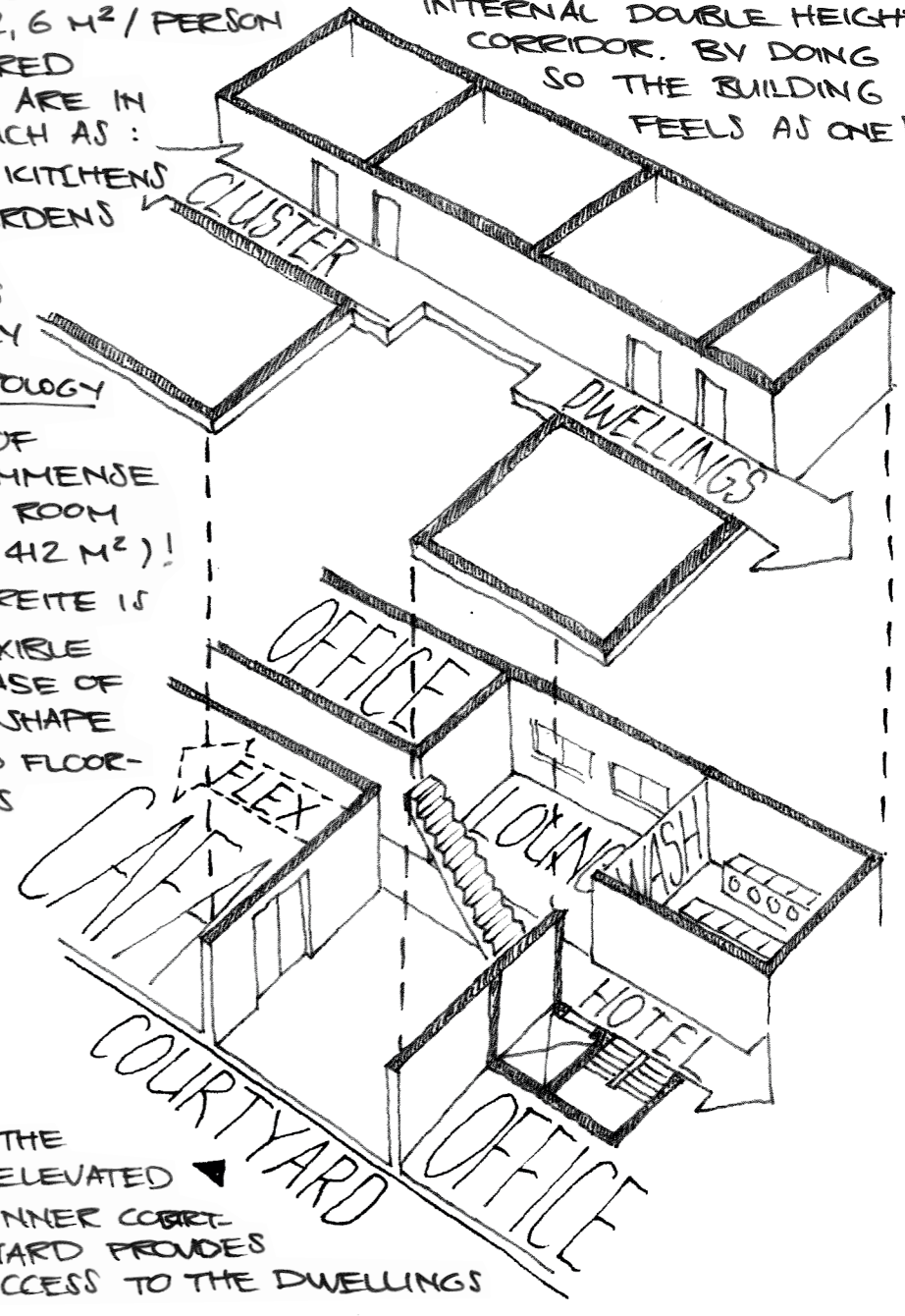
THE VARIETY OF DWELLING IS IMMENSE FROM 1 TO 17 ROOM APARTMENTS (29 - 412 M<sup>2</sup>)!

### FLEXIBILITY KALKBREITE IS

NOT A VERY FLEXIBLE BUILDING BECAUSE OF ITS UNIQUE SHAPE AND FIXED FLOOR-PLANS

### CIRCULATION

THE WHOLE BUILDING IS CONNECTED BY A GIANT INTERNAL DOUBLE HEIGHT CORRIDOR. BY DOING SO THE BUILDING FEELS AS ONE!



THE ELEVATED INNER COURTYARD PROVIDES ACCESS TO THE DWELLINGS

to ten percent of the Dutch housing market. When we look at the Dutch housing market of today ... roughly 20 years after the political shift in 2024 ... this scenario has unfolded itself. Currently, nearly 700.000 households have found their home in one of the numerous housing commons within the Netherlands.

MIRA NEKOVA [*nods*]: Housing commons indeed gained a lot of recognition in the Netherlands during the 2020s among the wider public. In general, growth of public recognition helps to gain more leverage during the making of new policy and regulation. The only risk we faced back then was the danger of too much talking and no action! Simultaneously, building costs and interest rates were rising persistently, creating an unhealthy construction climate. This slowed down the development of housing commons intensively in the beginning. As a result, the appetite of prospective housing common initiatives faded away at the end of the 2010s. Luckily, the combination of the housing crisis and the shift in political thinking came at the right moment in 2023.

ARIE LENGKEEK: However, how do we define housing commons precisely? I recall from the 2020s, housing commons were unknown among the wider public in the Netherlands. Even though, housing commons already were seen as a desirable way of living within certain circles. In other cases, housing commons were confused by traditional housing corporations. Which operated from a significantly different point of view.

ANNET AKKERMA [*turning to Arie*]: Indeed! Whereas housing commons are initiated by the citizens themselves, housing corporations are appointed by the government to carry out housing dedicated to households below a certain income. Besides this legal obligation, housing corporations are regular businesses which are driven by financial incentives as well. Therefore, they do not operate from an idea of non-speculation. Their earnings originate mainly from the rents of their tenants. Moreover, the government and municipalities

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During the 2020s housing corporations (*wooncorporaties*) were appointed by the government to provide social housing. Housing cooperatives (*wooncoöperaties*) on the other hand were bottom-up initiatives from individuals and designated to provide non-profit housing.  
**author's note >**

guarantee housing corporations cheaper land values. Plainly put, the difference between housing commons and housing corporations has always been significant. Therefore, the terminology was somewhat misleading at that time.

*[While the train enters the rural surroundings outside of Amsterdam, the dwellers – Paulien and Jonah who founded their housing common in 2022 in Amsterdam – start elaborating on their values regarding housing commons.]*

PAULIEN KLAP: During the first years after the establishment of our housing common *De Lage Dremfels* in 2022, we experienced difficulties as well when explaining the characteristics of housing commons.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: Back then ... apart from the misleading terminology of housing corporations ... confusion also arose from the difference between housing commons and another bottom-up approach to housing called *CPO* which stands for *Collectief Particulier Opdrachtgeverschap*. Since *CPO*-projects were also bottom-up initiatives, it helped to boost the public recognition of bottom-up initiatives in general. However, the differences for many people were not clear at that time and consequently more confusion arose.

PAULIEN KLAP: And if people had heard about housing commons, they would compare it to *De verschrikkelijke jaren tachtig* which was a Dutch tv-series broadcasted in 2022. The tv-series displayed a collective of people and children living together during the 1980s. The image of a tree-hugging hippie sect in which members share basically anything dominated the public opinion in the Netherlands. This image attracts and lures specific groups of people. At the time when we were establishing *De Lage Dremfels*, we believed this way of living should be accessible and attractive to the majority as well and this is what we still aim for within *De Lage Dremfels* today.

< **author's note**

*De Lage Dremfels* is a housing common located in Amsterdam and founded in 2022 by five young professionals. Among them are Paulien and Jonah.

< **author's note**

*De Verschrikkelijke Jaren Tachtig* is a Dutch tv-series broadcasted in 2022 highlighting the absurdities and hilarities of co-living during the 1980s in the Netherlands.

To clarify the origin of the terminology of housing commons, at the beginning of the 2020s the Dutch housing commons – as we know them today – were originally housing cooperatives or *wooncoöperaties* in Dutch. However, this resulted in a lot of confusion as we have witnessed earlier in the play. Therefore, the NNAO opted in 2025 for a new and more open-ended terminology regarding housing cooperatives.

The designated terminology for housing cooperatives in the Netherlands would be housing commons or *woonmeent* in Dutch. This new terminology dealt with the problematic confusion and consequently gained public support within the Netherlands.

**author's note** >

ARIE LENGKEEK: Absolutely! This absence of a clear and tangible image of housing commons was of great importance during the early stages of the development of housing commons in the Netherlands. Moreover, people in the Netherlands had a hard time to accept the idea of not owning a house.

PAULIEN KLAP: I agree, Arie. To many people the financial benefits of owning a private home, outweighed the benefits of housing commons in the beginning of the 2020s. Paying a monthly rent was thought of as burning your money. Homeownership ... on the other hand ... allowed people to grow their own financial capital. Consequently, people came up with the idea of buying a house within *De Lage Dremfels* to financially support our housing common. However, this would go against the concept of non-speculation which is distinctly interwoven with housing commons.

IRINA DAVIDOVICI: Housing commons are entities which provide up-to-date, hygienic, and affordable housing for people from every walk of life, without seeking profit or engaging in business speculation. Their members are not mere renters but effective shareholders with protection and voting rights. Rental income is reinvested in the housing common's budget, helping to maintain the housing stock, cater to the needs of inhabitants and repay loans. In time, rents become consistently lower than on the market, a main factor in understanding the popularity and longevity of housing commons as an alternative model to traditional homeownership.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: By making use of the term housing commons instead of cooperative housing the Dutch stumbled upon less prejudices because of the abstractness of the definition. The terminology of commons involves fewer negative or politically charged connotations. Furthermore, the concept of the commons entails more qualitative than quantitative aspects, which proved to be beneficial to the practice of architecture as well, throughout the last two decades.

ANNET AKKERMA: Besides the fact that an alternative terminology was beneficial to the practice of architecture and to defy negative connotations. It proved to be beneficial in other ways too. For many prospective inhabitants, the establishment of a housing common counts as a way of living. However, because of the variety of judiciary constructions ... in terms of living together ... cooperative housing saw itself degraded as one these many judiciary constructions. These judiciary constructions were mostly thought of as a constraint rather than an advantage. At the municipality of Rotterdam, the terminology of housing commons enabled us to encompass every alternative way of living without excluding one.

TOM AVERMAETE: At our research group in Zürich, we defined housing commons as collective, non-profit types of home ownership. Among these types one finds housing cooperatives, public and municipal housing, and foundations, all associated with a variety of participative and shared facilities.

IRINA DAVIDOVICI: That's interesting, Tom. I would like to go deeper into this matter. During the 2020s, I stated that housing commons even represent a hybrid form of commons. Since housing commons have always been coupled to the state agendas and market instruments that have rendered them possible. They never operate in isolation from, but as hybrid between the state and market, the tension between original idealism and pragmatic institutionalization. Housing commons only prosper with the explicit support of state and market agencies. They did not develop in a void, but in reaction to a problematic status quo, such as scarcity of housing or of tenant rights. Housing commons can be viewed as niche enterprises, guided by principles other than short-term profit. To achieve a substantial building stock, they tend to rely on legal and financial mechanisms for gaining access to suitable sites and for building on them. They can hardly expand or survive in the long-term without the explicit support of political governance. The durability of housing commons is therefore largely dependent

on their complementarity with centralized welfare structures. Thus, the sector of housing commons ... often described as a third way between market and state welfare models ... operates less as an alternative, than as a hybrid sharing characteristics with both.

HOUSING CRITIC 4: This is true in every way. If you tend to believe that a single community with its commons and its enclosed parameter could be a stronghold of liberated otherness, then you are bound to be defeated. You can not avoid the destruction that comes from the power of the state and its mechanisms. Therefore, you must understand them to deal with them. Your analogy of the hybrid commons explains this perfectly.

HOUSING THEORIST 1: Furthermore, when the book *Operatie Wooncoöperatie* was published in 2022, the concept of sharing seemed unmistakably interwoven with housing commons. In fact, it has always strengthened the housing commons and its community. For instance, the housing commons golden oldie in Zürich ... *Genossenschaft Kalkbreite* ... accommodates the library of things. This library houses numerous objects of inhabitants which can be used by any other inhabitant such as machinery, skis, and kids' toys. In this way the library of things supersedes private ownership and stimulates the concept of sharing. The rules and mutual respect within this space are of great importance. Sharing and trust go hand in hand. The same idea applies to the allocation of collective spaces within *Kalkbreite*. The collective spaces are not designed by predetermined programme. Consequently, the inhabitants can decide democratically what type of programme is assigned to these collective spaces.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE [*Exited*]: Genau! Housing commons are also liveable and attractive due to their physical and non-physical social systems which are in place, such as guest rooms and shared spaces. Therefore, from experience, within these projects people are more likely to live there compared

**precedent >**  
Kalkbreite  
see page 29

**design principle >**  
the concept of  
shared luxury which  
translates to less  
individually owned  
facilities. However,  
in reaction to that  
the facilities which  
are being shared  
are more qualitative  
and therefore more  
durable.

to traditional rental houses. And that is I think the key; that you provide more than merely a house. Housing commons can literally develop into castles or small villages including hotel rooms, urban farming, restaurants and so on. It's not only about living it's also about sharing facilities together.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: In addition to that, to share facilities and other things together is way more practical and sustainable in the long run. Consequently, dwellers of housing commons are using their square meters more efficiently and can limit their square meters to the minimum. This idea also applied to the establishment of *De Lage Dremfels*.

JEREMY MCLEOD: Too right! Build less and give more, is my motto.

*[When the train is aligned to the Amsterdam-Rijn Kanaal between Amsterdam and Utrecht, the train conductor comes by to check the group's train tickets and overhears their conversation. She is triggered and doesn't hesitate to interfere.]*

TRAIN CONDUCTOR: Sorry to interrupt, I'm intrigued by your conversation regarding housing commons. Recently, I moved into a housing common in Rotterdam and I have enjoyed it very much since then. Before I moved to the housing common in Rotterdam I have lived a very lonely life. You see ... I'm sixty-two years old and my husband passed away five years ago. Because of the housing commons, I was able to move to the more vibrant inner city of Rotterdam. Otherwise, I could have never afford a house like this and in addition to that my neighbours are friendly and diverse in age!

PAULIEN KLAP: That is so nice! I'm glad you've shared your story with us. It demonstrates the multi-disciplinary ideology of housing commons. Within *De Lage Dremfels* we went for the concept of co-reliance as well ... in which multiple generations would take care of each other. We envisioned younger people taking care of some heavier duties for the elderly and vice versa,

"build less and give more" (more with less) which translates to the idea of smaller individual dwellings and instead using collective areas are to bring dwellers together and to use less square meters.

< design principle

author's note >

Elinor Ostrom was a Nobel prize winning political scientist and economist from the US. She researched the concept of the commons extensively and gave form to the well known design principles for Commons Pool Resource (CPR) institutions.

the elderly could take care of some duties like baby-sitting.

IRINA DAVIDOVICI: This is a beautiful example of the informal mechanisms which are part of housing commons. Housing commons are based on principles of cooperation, sustainability ... in the broadest possible sense ... and their ongoing experimentation with dwelling typologies to reflect dynamic social trends.

HOUSING CRITIC 4: Moreover, commons are not simply resources we share. They involve the resources which are being shared, the community of their users, and the rules according to which the sharing takes place.

TOM AVERMAETE: Indeed! At ETH Zürich we adopted the concepts of *res communis*, *lex communis*, and *praxis communis*. *Res communis* refers to the resources we share, *lex communis* to the codes and conventions, and *praxis communis* to the social practices within the commons.

HOUSINGTHEORIST 1: This analogy is in line with Elinor Ostrom who states that durable commons characterize themselves by a clear set of rules which are anchoring the commons themselves. At the same time these rules are under constant negotiation among its inhabitants. Commoning as a verb.

### scene 3: Shift in thinking

[09:15 -The train had picked up its pace along the Amsterdam-Rijn kanaal. Meanwhile the group discusses in what way the status quo of the Dutch the housing market shifted completely over the past twenty years.]

IRINA DAVIDOVICI [after taking a zip of her takeaway coffee]: In the case of Switzerland during the 2020s, housing commons counted as the third most established stakeholder in the production of housing, with a share of five percent. Although it did trail a long way behind market tenancy at fifty-seven percent and private homeownership at thirty-eight percent.

HOUSING THEORIST 1: During the 1980s the Dutch housing market was comparable to the Swiss housing market of the 2020s, in that sense. The share of housing commons in the Netherlands was not noteworthy during the 1980s ... tenancy made up around sixty percent and private homeownership around forty percent. This ratio has been inverted during forty years of conservative policymaking on housing in the Netherlands, resulting in a housing market dominated by private homeownership at the end of the 2010s. It can be argued that the financial benefits of homeownership ... through the *hypotheekrenteaftrek* ... and the financial detriments of housing corporations ... through the *verhuurdersheffing* ... initiated by the government were most influential. And even then, most people in the Netherlands depicted housing corporations as a heavily subsidized way of living. Luckily this mindset has changed during the past twenty years.

ANNET AKKERMA: Just as in Switzerland, housing corporations and housing commons in the Netherlands evolved from a cooperative mindset during the twentieth century. However, while the development of housing commons in Switzerland

< **author's note**  
*Hypotheekrenteaftrek* allowed homeowners to reduce their tax burdens through their mortgage interest rates. On the other hand, was the *verhuurdersheffing* responsible for larger financial burdens at housing corporations.

**design principle** >  
creative and innovative approach towards land use

flourished again during the 2000s and 2010s, this development stayed off in the Netherlands at that time.

JAN BOVY: I would say the Swiss have always been more used to think from a collective point of view, compared to the Dutch.

EWOUDE DEKKER: This mindset of collectivity is also deeply rooted in the Swiss political systems, in which every voice is heard through referenda, from the lowest to the highest political level. Up until the 2020s, the Dutch political thinking moved to a more Anglo-Saxon model, in which the state's interference was held to a minimum. From that point, it took a lot of effort to retire from this Anglo-Saxon way of thinking ... after the elections of 2023 ... and to move to a model in which the collectivity sits again at the core of society. A true shift in culture took place in that sense and this evolution is still ongoing.

IRINIA DAVIDOVICI: The public recognition of housing commons in Switzerland has always been subject to an entrenched cultural mindset that values collectivity and strategic alliances over individual interests. And this was also much needed in the Netherlands.

HOUSING CRITIC 3: It was indeed urgent at that point to favour cooperative ownership over private ownership. The fundamental role that organization of territory and uneven allocation of land plays for social organization in general ... and the production of livelihoods in particular ... puts ownership at the centre of the social question. To change the condition of uneven distribution and to foster equitable forms of development, privatization of property should be prevented, and cooperative forms of ownership and land management should be favoured. This was of utmost importance for affordable housing production since the price of and access to land has always been one of the most defining aspects of successful production of housing commons.

HOUSINGTHEORIST 1: Regarding the development of housing commons in the Netherlands, it was extremely important to put an eternal restriction on speculation with respect to housing. Consequently, housing commons are legally exempted from any form of speculation and has always formed one of its leading principles.

IRINA DAVIDOVICI: This pursuit of decommodification or non-speculation may be understood not merely as the removal of housing from the market and the rejection of short-term profit, but also as the voluntary relinquishing of a few individual freedoms for the benefit of many.

PETER KUENZLI: And by decommodifying housing ... among other aspects ... housing became more affordable over time which represents one of the ways in which the benefits for many are displayed.

HOUSINGTHEORIST 1: This way of thinking and acting based on the concept of decommodification was completely new within the Netherlands during the 2020s. Especially, given our Anglo-Saxon inspired political model, back then.

MIRA NEKOVA: Inhabitants of housing commons had to obtain a different mindset compared to the traditional way of thinking in which private homeownership was considered as the status quo.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE: Regarding the financial considerations of housing commons, the most significant shift that occurred in thinking was for people to understand that inhabitants were not responsible for paying the loan. In fact, it was and still is the building itself which is effectively taking care of the loan. The *GLS Bank* always ensures that the loan is as high as the rents of the inhabitants can pay back the loan from the building without any personal risk. People are not responsible for paying the loan. It's merely the tenancy contract which brings together

*GLS Bank* is a German ethical bank and was until 2023 the only bank financially supporting housing commons in the Netherlands  
< author's note

the inhabitant, bank, and housing common. In that sense, the inhabitant is financially reduced to a traditional tenant who needs to fulfil the payment of the rent every month. From the moment when a prospective inhabitant understands this principle, the financial story gets significantly simpler.

EWOUDE DEKKER: During the 2000s and 2010s it became a tendency to acquire property at a bargain during times of crisis and to unload this property at a high point. The acquired property remained unchanged and would not contribute anything to society, while the developers and investors made profits on these types of actions. This has changed over the past years due to new policymaking within the government.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE: Banks have also changed over the past years. Already during the 2020s the *GLS Bank* has not supported projects that were not in line with the Paris Climate Act. Back then, we wanted to underline that such projects were simply too detrimental for the future. Since then, many banks endorsed these criteria regarding their policy on loan allocation.

ANNET AKKERMA: Obviously, the Dutch government has changed as well during the past two decades since the political shift in 2023. Governmental entities began to trust their citizens to self-organise. The Dutch historical political structure ... which relied to a greater extent on self-organisation and cooperative structures ... has been partly restored and the government is still working on this evolution. During the 2020s the Dutch people consumed housing instead of used housing because of the Anglo-Saxon way of thinking. Nowadays, luckily, this shifted towards a more social and progressive approach.

*[While the train progresses through het Groene Hart, Peter Glas mentions his study on the climate effects on the production of housing in the Netherlands.]*

CHORUS OF INSTITUTIONS: Another shift in thinking took place regarding Dutch spatial planning. For a long time ... until

the 2020s ... new urban developments would take place on the periphery of existing cities and villages. This resulted in urban sprawl. We ... among others ... plead for urban development within the boundaries of existing cities and villages to defy urban sprawl. In addition to that we opted for a re-evaluation of areas outside of the Randstad regarding urban development.

FLORIS ALKEMADE [nodding affirmatively]: Exactly! Around that time, I wrote a short essay on this topic in which I stated that we should choose densification of existing cities over urban sprawl. We proved to be right. The Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning adopted this strategy in 2024. As a result, urban sprawl has now been minimized throughout the Netherlands and amazing spatial solutions emerged within cities and villages creating truly pleasant living environments. These spatial examples are ranging from intelligently integrating new housing blocks within existing urban fabrics to spectacular reuse projects appropriating vacant buildings within cities.

*[The train approaches the suburban areas of the Netherlands' third biggest city: Utrecht.]*

PETER GLAS: I was also happy to see that the Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning shifted its focus from the almighty Randstad toward the non-Randstad areas for new developments. The original housing policy documents of the 2020s ... which were cancelled after 2024 ... displayed this inexhaustible focus on the Randstad, perfectly. Back then, the government wanted to produce 1.000.000 new homes in the Netherlands of which 820.000 were projected in the Randstad, which always counted as a vulnerable area for flooding. In retrospect, the government made the right decision to cancel these plans of producing 820.000 homes in the Randstad since the possibilities of flooding have become more pressing during the last two decades because of climate change.

In 2022 the minister of Housing and Spatial Planning presented its strategy to produce 100.000 homes per year until 2030. This would have ultimately led to 1.000.000 homes in 2030. However, experts had many doubts and the feasibility turned out to be unrealistic.  
< author's note

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De Warren is a housing common based in Amsterdam and established in 2023.

EWOUDE DEKKER: An important factor within this shift of thinking was a shift in culture. This took many years to evolve.

JAN BOVY: Yes, at some point ... during the 2020s ... we had to acknowledge the fact that these shifts in thinking and culture take several years. However, it was much needed.

ARIE LENGKEEK [clearly exited]: I agree and since public support was missing in the Netherlands back then, presented a clear image of how housing commons could develop successfully, was extremely helpful during the 2020s. It helped to seduce people and to convince them to join the movement of housing commons!

DAAN BOSSUYT: Therefore, prior to and during this evolution it was of utter importance to concretize this utopia of housing commons by making use of architectural imagination.

ARIE LENGKEEK: Exactly! At the end of the 2020s, housing commons still counted as either something which was in line with your vocabulary or not, and the Dutch architectural examples were rather limited and counted as niche solutions in most of the cases. At one of side the spectrum, you would find expressive examples such as the *De Warren*. At the other end of the spectrum, you would find rather dull and unimaginative examples of housing commons. Therefore, we needed a broader spectrum of new imaginative Dutch examples!



## **act 2: Public frameworks**

scene 1:	regulatory frameworks	48
scene 2:	architectural frameworks	56
scene 3:	financial frameworks	62
scene 4:	legal frameworks	72

### **cast**

Anne Kockelkorn, Annet Akkerma, Arie Lengkeek, Benedikt Altrogge, chorus of institutions, chorus of spatial agents, Daan Bossuyt, Ewoud Dekker, Floris Alkemade, Housing critic 1, housing critic 2, housing critic 3, housing critic 4, housing theorist 1, housing theorist 2, Irina Davidovici, Ivan Illich, Jan Bovy, Jeremy McLeod, Jonah van Delden, Josta van Bockxmeer, Mira Nekova, Paulien Klap, Peter Glas, Peter Kuenzli, Tom Avermaete

### **setting**

The group is still traversing through the Dutch landscapes after having called at Utrecht central station. Having introduced housing commons and while discussing its origins, the group starts focussing on the more technical aspects of housing commons. The more technical aspects entail topics such as regulatory, financial and legal frameworks and the importance of architectural imagination.

## scene 1: regulatory frameworks

*[09:23 - After the train has called at Utrecht central station, continues the train towards Nijmegen. In Utrecht the effects of a renewed housing policy are visible as well. Since the city of Amsterdam practically exceeded its limits in 2030, many people decided to relocate themselves in other cities. Utrecht gained immense popularity during that time and consequently had to produce many housing possibilities. These new dwellings were located mostly at the former train depots of Utrecht.]*

HOUSING THEORIST 2: Before housing commons in the Netherlands could fully thrive, it needed to grow beyond individual initiatives. Housing commons needed political support, which was largely dependent on public opinion. Public opinion within the Netherlands needed to support a commitment to use-value of housing over market-value.

ARIE LENGKEEK: Exactly. Until the 2020s, most people living in the Netherlands believed that as a tenant you would be wasting your money. The market-value of housing outweighed the use-value of housing and consequently private ownership was seen as the most preferred ... and perhaps only preferable ... way of living in the Netherlands. Consequently, the concept of housing commons ... in which private ownership is not allowed ... did not stand a chance. This changed of course after the shift in political thinking in 2024.

EWOUDE DEKKER *[towards Arie]*: Even though the rise of the Dutch housing commons only began in earnest during the 2020s, the financial crisis of 2008 provided an early incentive for their support. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, housing commons were seen as a lucrative alternative when compared to project-developer developments. Back then, such developments were not cost effective anymore and consequently housing commons came into the picture to

### < author's note

Housing, constructed and managed from a market-value point of view, is always subjected to profit-driven decision making. Use-value on the other hand counts as the antidote to market-value, since use-value legally can not be driven by profit.

### author's note >

At some point it became favourable to shorten the duration of the project realisation since many initiatives during the 2020s collapsed because of endless bureaucratic processes.

keep the production of housing on track. Housing commons were mainly attractive during this economically challenging period because of its alternative perspective on speculation. In addition to developers, politicians became interested in housing commons as well. Housing commons enabled politicians to fulfil their political agendas on housing. Their approach was more pragmatic than ideological.

JAN BOVY: Yes, the pragmatism behind the thinking of politicians and developers is very remarkable. In project development the potential risks and financial feasibility take centre stage. One of the more substantial risks during this process is the possibility of unsold property. In the case of housing commons, the users are already known which eliminates this potential risk. This phenomenon is demonstrated through the following example. A commercial developer obtains a piece of land to conceive new dwellings to ultimately sell them on the market. The process of developing housing is a relatively slow process as you may know. For that reason, a developer needs to speculate on future needs of prospective and unknown dwellers. At the time the dwellings are nearing completion the needs of the prospective buyers can be already different, resulting in unsold property. In the case of housing commons, on the other hand, the prospective dwellers are closely involved throughout the design and building process of the project. Consequently, the risk of unoccupied property can be seen as eliminated. In addition, the possibility of any alterations in needs among the prospective dwellers can be incorporated into the design simultaneously resulting into more resilient and future-proof dwellings.

EWOUDE DEKKER: Even so, during the development of housing commons there were some risks as well. One of these was caused by the duration of the project realisation. Before the 2020s, the realisation time of a project could take up to seven years from initiation to finalisation. This meant that members of the housing commons in some cases lost interest along the way and ultimately dropped out. The process of making design

or policy choices could also be tedious, as ... ideally ... every prospective dweller was involved from beginning to end.

JAN BOVY: After the markets recovered from the 2008 crisis, project developers regained their trust in traditional, commercial developments. Simply because they generated more revenue in a shorter time. This was deemed necessary as the past years had been extremely unsuccessful for project developers. At the same time municipalities needed to fulfil their political agenda and targets regarding the production of housing. They thus spoke 'the same language' and understood each other, which meant that the procedures for commercial developments proceeded faster than ever before.

[The group transverses through suburban areas of Utrecht and slowly the landscape transforms into vast green areas.]

ANNET AKKERMA: Some municipalities, such as Rotterdam, have always been in favour of housing commons. However, before the 2020s, the prevailing conditions within the municipality of Rotterdam were insufficient to support successful pilot projects within Rotterdam. This was concluded by a report from *Platform31*.

JAN BOVY: However, the municipality of Rotterdam did not facilitate the development of housing commons either. During the 2020s commercial parties and cooperative parties were still treated differently when it came to the acquisition of land. In the case of commercial developers, the municipality would be merely interested in the willingness of the developer to buy without having them to comply to any set conditions. The cooperative parties, however, had to justify themselves regarding several set conditions resulting in a considerable pile of paperwork.

EWOUT DEKKER: This thinking of the municipality of Rotterdam aligned to the general thinking of municipalities ... at that time

... in which municipalities mainly focused on the maximization of land value to subsequently redistribute the revenue among its citizens according to the political beliefs of that time.

ANNET AKKERMA: But at that time basically everyone ... municipalities, financial institutes, prospective dwellers, architects, and so on ... was gaining new insights on housing commons. Just like *De Nieuwe Meent* in Amsterdam, which currently serves as one of the canonical examples of housing commons in the Netherlands.

MIRA NEKOVA: However, the fact that housing commons were forced to find financial support outside of the Netherlands, showed that the Dutch were not taking themselves seriously. Housing common initiatives diverted to Germany to acquire funding. I am sure that Benedikt from the *GLS Bank* will have more to say about this when he returns from the toilet.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: Moreover, I always sensed a certain distrust in bottom-up initiatives within the Netherlands during the 2020s. People believed that it was needed to have expert knowledge to establish housing commons in the Netherlands. In Zurich the opposite has been the case throughout history. It is not the cooperative system as such, it is the cooperative system which is inscribed in the thinking of public benefit. Consequently, these cooperative initiatives can then integrate themselves within a much wider capitalist system for their own interest. This exemplifies the notion of hybrid commons brought up earlier by Irina.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: Fortunately, the regulatory conditions in the Netherlands regarding housing commons changed significantly after the political reforms of 2024, which helped to remove the prevailing distrust in such bottom-up initiatives. These regulatory changes supported the development of our housing common ... *De Lage Dremfels* ... immensely as well. When we started *De Lage Dremfels* in 2022, the building

precedent >  
De Nieuwe Meent  
see page 53

< author's note  
Platform31 is a nationally operating platform providing counseling on, for example, housing policy to governmental institutions.

climate in the Netherlands was rather challenging. In addition to the restraining political regulatory framework, the rising costs of construction materials and the debate on nitrogen disposal created a rather complex situation. We argued that housing commons could make a difference within these challenging conditions based on the principle of sharing which allowed us to build more efficiently and more economically.

MIRA NEKOVA: In addition to that, the principle of non-speculation helped to continue construction companies during these challenging times as well. Since profit was not pursued among the housing common initiatives.

### **precedent: De Nieuwe Meent**

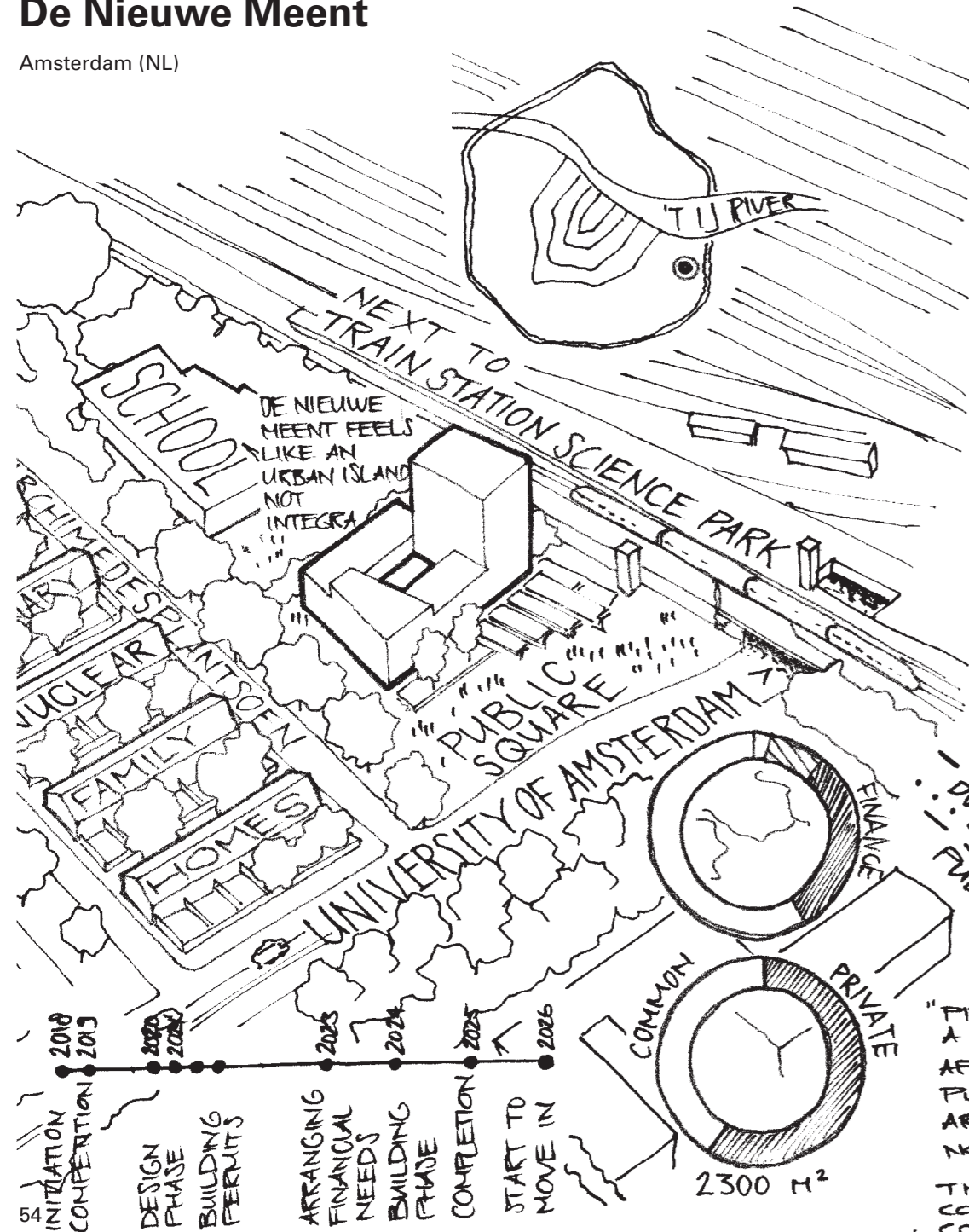
project:	De Nieuwe Meent
architect:	Time to Access & Roel van der Zeeuw
location:	Amsterdam (NL)
timeline:	2018 - 2025
dwellers:	50 people
facilities:	courtyard, living room, communal kitchen
commons:	cafe

### **text**

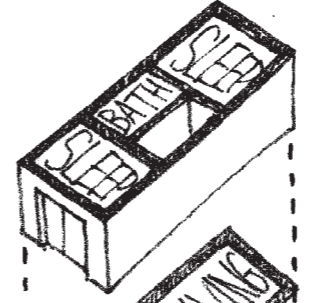
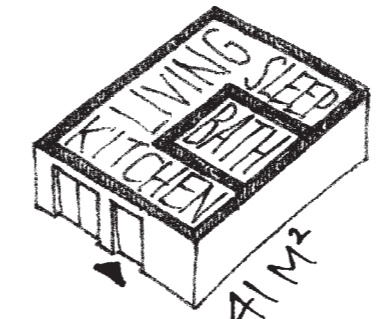
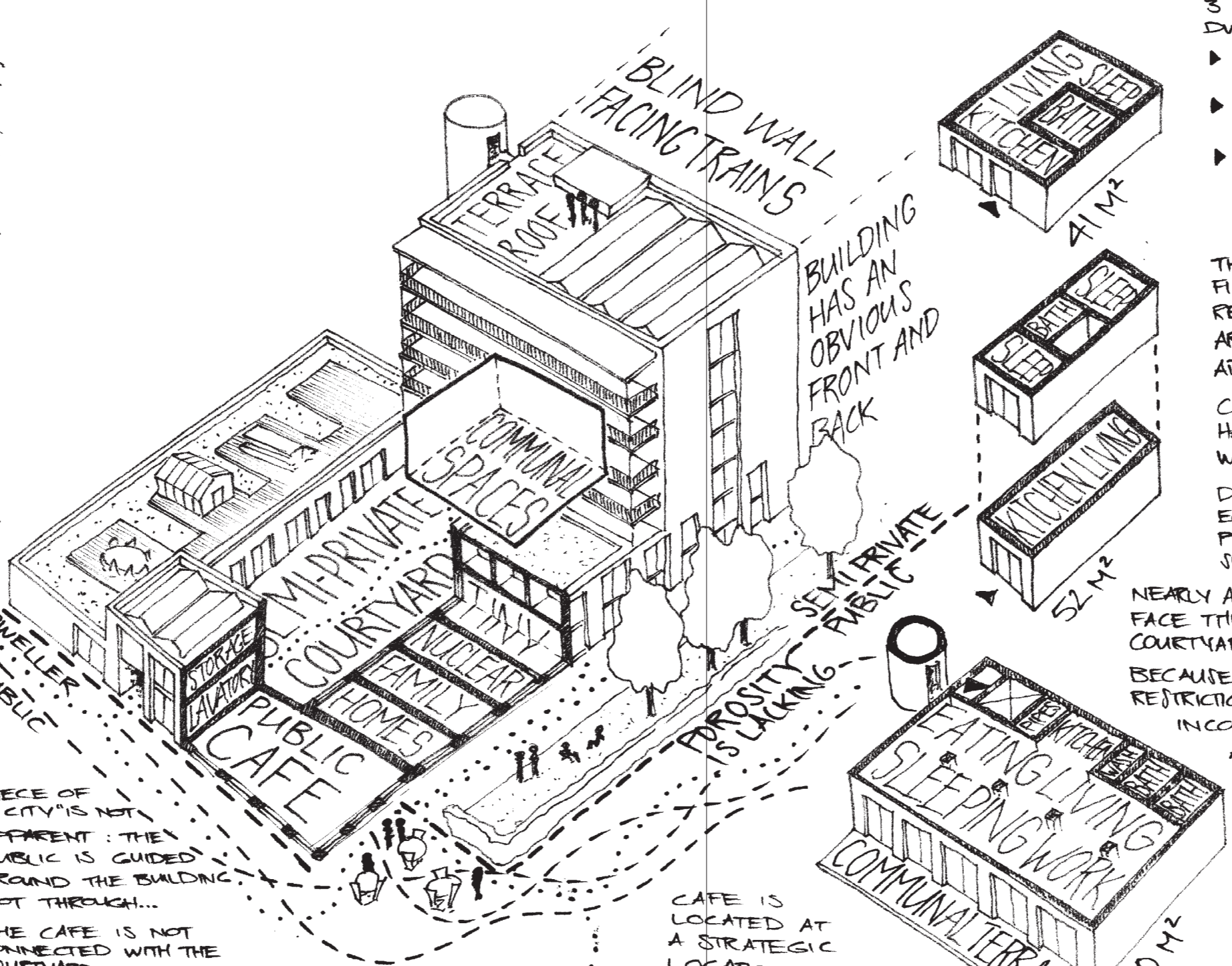
de Nieuwe Meent (dNM) is the first housing cooperative in Amsterdam that is organised entirely around the principles of commoning. We understand commoning as the shared and participative use of resources, such as land (“meent”), water, food, energy, education, housing, income, social services and care. *(source: de Nieuwe Meent)*

# De Nieuwe Meent

Amsterdam (NL)



"PIECE OF A CITY" IS NOT APPARENT: THE PUBLIC IS GUIDED AROUND THE BUILDING, NOT THROUGH...  
 THE CAFE IS NOT CONNECTED WITH THE COURTYARD



## 3 TYPES OF DWELLINGS:

- ▶ SOCIAL ONE FLOOR HOUSING (41 M<sup>2</sup>)
- ▶ SOCIAL HOUSING DUPLEX (52 M<sup>2</sup>)
- ▶ SOCIAL HOUSING CLUSTER DWELLING (180 M<sup>2</sup>) 5 UNITS (25 M<sup>2</sup> PER UNIT)

THE BATHROOMS ARE FIXED, THE REMAINING FUNCTION ARE FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE

CLUSTER DWELLING HAVE THEIR OWN WASHING MACHINE

DWELLING ARE EQUITABLE TO PROMOTE EASY SWAP OF HOUSING

NEARLY ALL DWELLINGS FACE THE SEMI-PRIVATE COURTYARD

BECAUSE OF MUNICIPALITY RESTRICTIONS VARIETY OF INCOME GROUPS AMONG DWELLER IS LIMITED

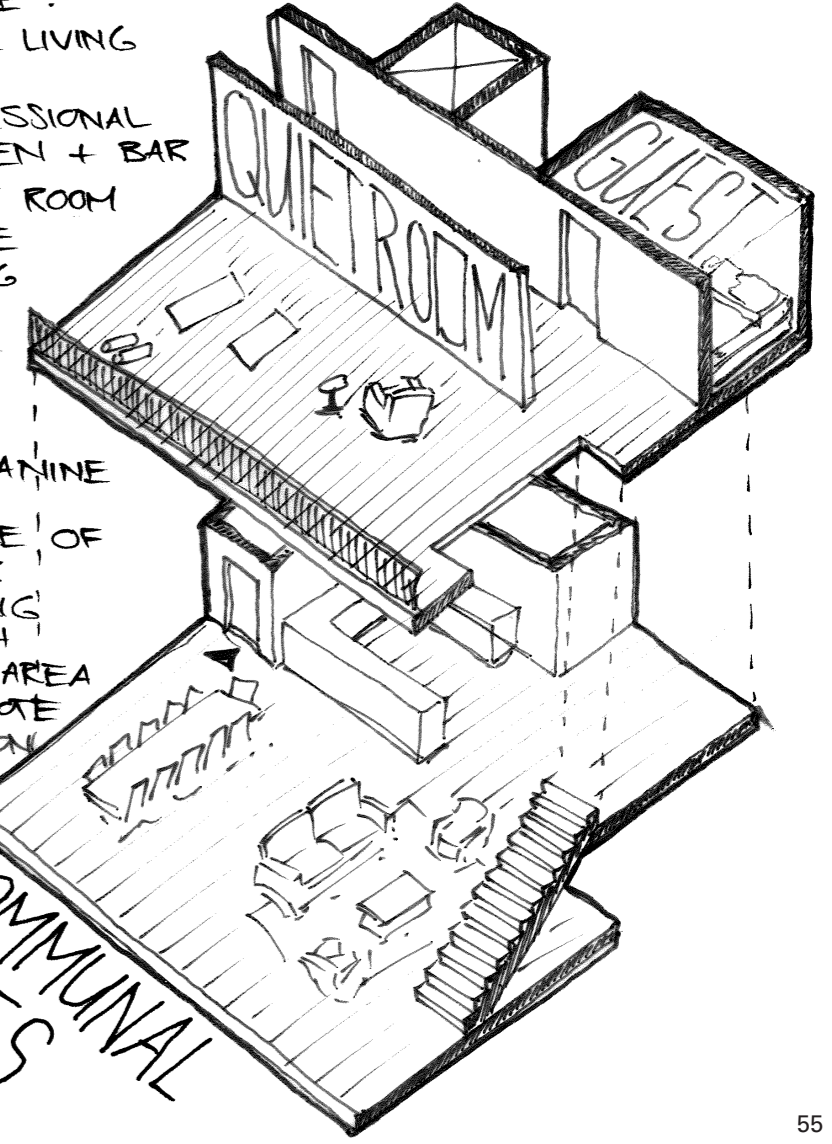
MORE WITH LESS PER PERSON  
 23 M<sup>2</sup> PRIVATE  
 19 M<sup>2</sup> COMMON SPACE

SHARED LUXURY BECOMES THE MESSAGE:

- ▶ LARGE LIVING AREA
- ▶ PROFESSIONAL KITCHEN + BAR
- ▶ GUEST ROOM
- ▶ LARGE DINING AREA
- ▶ QUIET ROOM ON MEZZANINE

ENTRANCE OF CLUSTER DWELLING THROUGH SHARED AREA TO PROMOTE INTERACTION

COMMUNAL SPACES



ALL NON-CLUSTER DWELLINGS CAN EASILY ENTER COMMUNAL SPACES THROUGH COURTYARD.

## scene 2: architectural frameworks

[09:32 - After a short stop at train station Driebergen-Zeist the train continues its way towards the east of the Netherlands. The train station of Driebergen-Zeist has been used as a new hub for future housing developments in the Netherlands, because of its ideal location next to Utrecht. The city of Utrecht planned to build a maximum of 1500 dwellings in this area. However, because of its ideal location the final number of dwellings exceeded their expectations. In the end 2500 dwellings were conceived and many of them were housing commons. Partly because housing commons tend to use their surroundings more efficiently, more dwellings were conceived in the end.]

ARIE LENGKEEK: In my opinion we needed two things ... during the 2020s ... to support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands. We desperately needed physically built examples of housing commons that allowed people to witness the merits of housing commons and we needed to compare the merits of housing commons with traditional ways of housing.

HOUSING THEORIST 2: Traditionally, public opinion, public policy, and architecture are mediated through design guidelines and housing regulations. However, public opinion can be swayed by the tangibility of architecture. A striking example is the highly experimental cluster floor plan designed by *Duplex Architekten* for *Hunziker Areal* in Zurich, which was included in federal design guidelines ... *Wohnungsbewertungs-System* ... only a few years after the project's realisation. Its inclusion signified an epochal shift: a move beyond the nuclear family as the normative household model.

MIRA NEKOVA: This is indeed a powerful example of architectural imagination. It is an architect's duty to imagine what is possible, but perhaps not yet tangible for the public. As an architect you're the leader of a project. The architect produces this architectural imagination and is the only stakeholder able to oversee the entire building process.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: I'm also an architect by training and therefore I want to believe that the potential of making things visible through architecture has an impact on public opinion. However, I think public opinion doesn't really change through architectural imagination, alone. I think architectural imagination matters when societal consensus is large enough to build a certain project. The *Kalkbreite Genossenschaft* in Zürich shows this through its architectural competition. The design competition in 2008 helped to build the collective consensus on types of living together. And what I find very impressive in Zürich is the involvement of a public jury throughout the competition. These were open hearings for the people of Zürich which were and are still inscribed within the public policies.

IRINA DAVIDOVICI [*nods*]: This engagement of the public already happened in Zürich during the 1980s when the housing cooperatives experienced some upheaval. The *Stauffacher* squatters manifested their anarchical beliefs in various attempts to engage public opinion, which included mock juries, street concerts and *Dada*-inspired performances. These happenings were commonly related to anti-bourgeois, anti-imperialist, and feminist principles.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: Yes! Successful and pioneering projects ... like *Kalkbreite* and the *Stauffacher* squats ... show that things can be different, and this makes them inspiring. Ultimately, these projects boosted the entire development of housing commons in Zürich during the 1980s and 2000s. However, it was not merely the architecture making these projects successful. In the case of *Kalkbreite*, one could truly speak of an administrative masterpiece. A masterpiece in municipal and organizational administration. The *Kalkbreite* competition entailed for instance the first competition brief prioritizing a robust strategy on land use. Prior to the competition, housing was never considered at that specific location because of noise pollution. But housing, of course, found its way on that plot above the heavy infrastructure of Zürich public transport systems.

### author's note >

The *Stauffacher* squats are dating from the year 1984 and were in Zürich. The establishment of the Zürich housing cooperative *Kraftwerk1* was inspired by the *Stauffacher* squats.

MIRA NEKOVA: The example of *Kalkbreite* reminds me of *De Nieuwe Meent* in Amsterdam. From 2022 to 2026 *De Nieuwe Meent* was seen as a true pioneering project within the Netherlands, displaying the possibilities and challenges of housing commons. The realisation of this pilot project was extremely difficult at that time. The several parties involved ... the architect, the dwellers, the municipality, the bank ... were constantly learning and overcoming new obstacles. What helped us a lot during the process and after that, was the ongoing evaluation of the process itself.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: Architectural prizes can also sway the public opinion in a positive way. Think, for instance, of *De Warren* in Amsterdam. They won the AAP ... *Amsterdamse Architectuur Prijs* in Dutch ... in 2023 which garnered a lot of attention. During the 2020s the Netherlands needed these pioneers and idealists to support a successful development of housing commons.

MIRA NEKOVA [*towards Jonah*]: This is so true. *De Nieuwe Meent* was awarded the AAP a few years later, in 2026. The juries of architectural awards adopted a different set of criteria that focused more on the process of participation among dwellers and examined closely to what extent the project would contribute to the commons of the city. *De Nieuwe Meent* fitted these new criteria. We, for instance, developed a state-of-the-art energy cooperative as part of the organization. We were also the first housing common to use the *Stimuleringsfonds* Amsterdam and obtained a new land-lease structure in Amsterdam. Above all, we designed a new financial product in cooperation with the *Rabobank* creating numerous possibilities to develop housing commons further. Another project, *De Bundel* in Amsterdam, can be seen as the younger sibling of *De Nieuwe Meent*, which could not have been completed without the experience and knowledge that we built up through our earlier work. As a matter of fact, *De Bundel* was initiated by former inhabitants of *De Nieuwe Meent*. Back then, *De Bundel* scaled-up the project towards roughly two hundred people.

< design principle  
commons of the city  
housing commons  
which not only  
serve their dwellers,  
but serve their  
surrounding as well,  
spatially and non-  
spatially

[A young man in its mid-twenties is sitting in of the seats nearby and overhears the conversation of the group. He hesitated to interfere for some moments. However, when Mira mentioned *De Bundel* in Amsterdam, he wanted to share his part of the story as well.]

TRAIN TRAVELER [*still hesitant*]: I'm sorry but I overheard you were discussing *De Bundel* in Amsterdam. You see, I grew at that place. My parents were one of the first inhabitants.

MIRA NEKOVA [*obviously surprised*]: What a coincidence! Would you mind sharing your thoughts?

TRAIN TRAVELLER: Sure! When *De Bundel* was finalised in 2026, my parents were recent graduates from Amsterdam. Amsterdam at that time was an extremely expensive city to live in which was mostly caused by the housing prices. Housing commons gave them the opportunity to find an affordable home in Amsterdam at that time. *De Bundel* was one of these new housing possibilities in the Netherlands and they took the opportunity. *De Bundel* was one of the housing commons in the Netherlands, providing homes for more than one hundred people. Consequently, the mixture of people was extremely diverse in background, education, and salary. Growing up in a place like *De Bundel* added many layers to my childhood. For instance, the building stood out from the neighbouring buildings through its varying balconies and common spaces on the ground floor. Because of my upbringing in *De Bundel*, I currently live in a housing common as a student as well.

MIRA NEKOVA: That's so nice to hear! Thank you for sharing and explaining your view on *De Bundel* as a former resident.

JAN BOVY [*continuing on a more serious note*]: However, people need more than merely success stories. Of course, these successful projects help recognizing potentialities and sway public opinion to a certain degree. But what also helps greatly

is if you can demonstrate the added social added value of such projects to their surroundings as well as to other organizations or public institutes.

ANNET AKKERMA: Municipalities can be inspired and seduced by these success stories as well. However, any visible effect will take some time within the municipality. Municipalities depend on the political beliefs of the council in charge. Their initiatives are based on political agreements that have been made in earlier stages of their term and, so they are obliged to honour these agreements. Therefore, policy changes and new agreements simply take time.

IRINA DAVIDOVICI: This could partly explain a hypothesis that I came up with in 2022. Back then, I stated that the development of housing commons follows a repeatable pattern, from a progressive and even utopian prototype to institutionalization. Since the municipality is apparently not able to cope with new public desires directly ... as Annet was telling ... the public decides to act independently from the state creating these progressive and utopian prototypes. At the beginning of a new term, the municipality forms new political agreements, and these will consequently involve the institutionalization of prototypes that have been introduced before. A similar development occurred in the Netherlands during the 2020s.

MIRA NEKOVA [*nods*]: Definitely, and once these prototypes became part of our urban fabric, the potentialities of housing commons in the Netherlands became visible to everyone. Consequently, we didn't have to justify the merits anymore through conversation. We could simply invite people to visit one of the numerous housing commons of the city. Through the ongoing evaluation of housing commons since the 2020s, the development of Dutch housing commons became an example to other countries aspiring similar housing standards. Furthermore, this ongoing evaluation will never come to an end. Society is constantly changing and therefore it is important

to update our thinking regarding housing commons every now and then!

ANNE KOCKELKORN: In the same way I think architectural knowledge can be used to articulate the various aspects of financialization. Architects can analyse systems ... such as the financial systems ... and visualize problems. Through their analyses and visualisations, architects can imagine what works and what doesn't work.

< **author's note**  
development of Zürich  
housing commons:  
1890 - 1930 first  
generation of housing  
commons  
1930 - 1970 middle  
generation of housing  
commons, residing  
into conformism  
1980 - 1990 ideological  
squats counteracting  
conformism  
1990 - 2020 radical  
housing commons  
pushing its  
development  
immensely



### scene 3: financial frameworks

[09:42 - The train is running through a rather dull part of the Netherlands. The landscapes are dominated by agriculture and some uninspiring forests. The group elaborates on the thoughts of Anne and moves on to the financial frameworks of housing commons.]

ARIE LENGKEEK: While I agree that built prototypes are important to get the public on board, we should not underestimate the importance of financial aspects regarding housing commons either. And, specifically, their principle of non-speculation.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE [after returning from the toilet]: The financial aspect of housing commons consists of three aspects ... building costs, equity from dwellers, and rent. In the end, they must all comply to the principle of non-speculation since this principle is embedded within every housing common.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: The non-speculative aspect of housing commons is indeed what we should really talk about. Non-speculation doesn't mean you cannot make a profit or be profitable. Non-speculation means that you don't speculate on land value or that you don't go beyond the cost-value of rent.

EWOUDE DEKKER [awakes from a small nap]: Indeed! In the end housing commons are also driven by financial incentives. The inevitable speculative aspect of housing commons ... however ... is embedded within the land-value, not in the building itself. To escape from this speculative aspect, it was needed to adopt a different strategy of obtaining land during the 2020s. Therefore, the municipalities opted for ground lease contracts ... or *erfpacht* in Dutch ... instead of purchasing land. This helped housing commons enormously to develop within the Netherlands to refrain itself from speculative acts. Moreover,

< **author's note**  
The principle of non-speculation regarding housing entails the legal obligation to not financially profit from housing as an individual. Instead, profits are redirected into the housing commons or society. This takes on forms such as reducing rents or supporting local initiatives.

The principle of *erfpacht* is based on not selling land to individuals. Instead, land is possessed by the municipality and individuals pay a rent: *erfpacht*.

< **author's note**

**author's note** >  
Housing, constructed and managed from a market-value point of view, is always subjected to profit-driven decision making. Use-value on the other hand counts as the antidote to market-value, since use-value legally can not be driven by profit, which is related greatly to the principle of non-speculation.

**precedent** >  
Zollhaus  
page 65

housing commons should be willing to legally agree on the fact that any form of surplus will not be used for individual benefits.

HOUSING CRITIC 3: Exactly! The profits generated by housing commons are used for different purposes compared to traditional developments. Until the 2020s any monetary resource has been turned into a surplus-generating commodity for speculative markets that can be invested at a global scale and independent from its origins. Cooperative practices countered this trend by directing surplus capital back into their collectively owned commons and thus into local communities and territories. Such circular flows of financial resources not only support local economies, but they also proved to be a powerful tool against the production of housing driven by speculation.

MIRA NEKOVA: Therefore, the underlying economic and social principles of non-speculation are in that sense rather favourable. It allows the housing market to produce affordable dwellings and after a few decades elaborate ecosystems of housing commons have been established in the Netherlands after the 2020s and they are able to sustain themselves. The surplus which housing commons created over time is always reinvested into the ecosystem ... through maintaining the building, or other non-speculative and societal initiatives. At the same time the government has witnessed the social benefits from housing commons as well during the past decades in the Netherlands.

HOUSING THEORIST 2: These ecosystems were already omnipresent in Switzerland and vital to the Swiss housing market during the 2020s. *Kalkbreite* is a good example. In 2019, the *Kalkbreite Genossenschaft* founded a new housing project in Zürich: *Zollhaus*. The establishment of these ecosystems ... that are based on the principles of non-speculation ... takes time though.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: Our housing common *De Lage Drempeles* is nearing its twentieth-first anniversary. Within the next ten

year we expect to build up enough capital to help establishing new young housing commons in the Netherlands. In this way, we intend to contribute to this ecosystem of housing commons in the Netherlands. Back in 2022 ... when we started *De Lage Dremfels* ... this ecosystem wasn't running properly yet, because of the limited amount of housing commons in the Netherlands. But today, this is becoming more and more a reality!

PAULIEN KLAP [*nods affirmatively*]: Yes, we were very fortunate that the Dutch government began to support the development of housing commons after the 2023 elections. Consequently, *De Lage Dremfels* was able to obtain its last funding ... through the government ... to finally start the construction process in 2025. When the government would not have been able to financially support *De Lage Dremfels* ... as well as many other housing commons ... we would have been forced to cooperate alongside commercial parties perhaps. This would have led to conflicting interests since housing commons are driven by non-speculative principles.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: Therefore, the involvement of the government or a philanthropic institute was much needed.

PAULIEN KLAP: At the same time, the involvement of the government was tricky as well. Since the government or municipalities could have imposed certain restrictions onto housing commons as well ... such as restraining the size of housing commons or allocating housing commons to the periphery of the city making them less visible to the public. Fortunately, the government decided to do the opposite and provided the necessary tools and regulatory frameworks.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE: In contrary to the Netherlands ... Germany has a longstanding history on housing commons which started in 1900. Therefore, Germany already knew what the effect of housing commons can be since the system runs

## precedent: Zollhaus

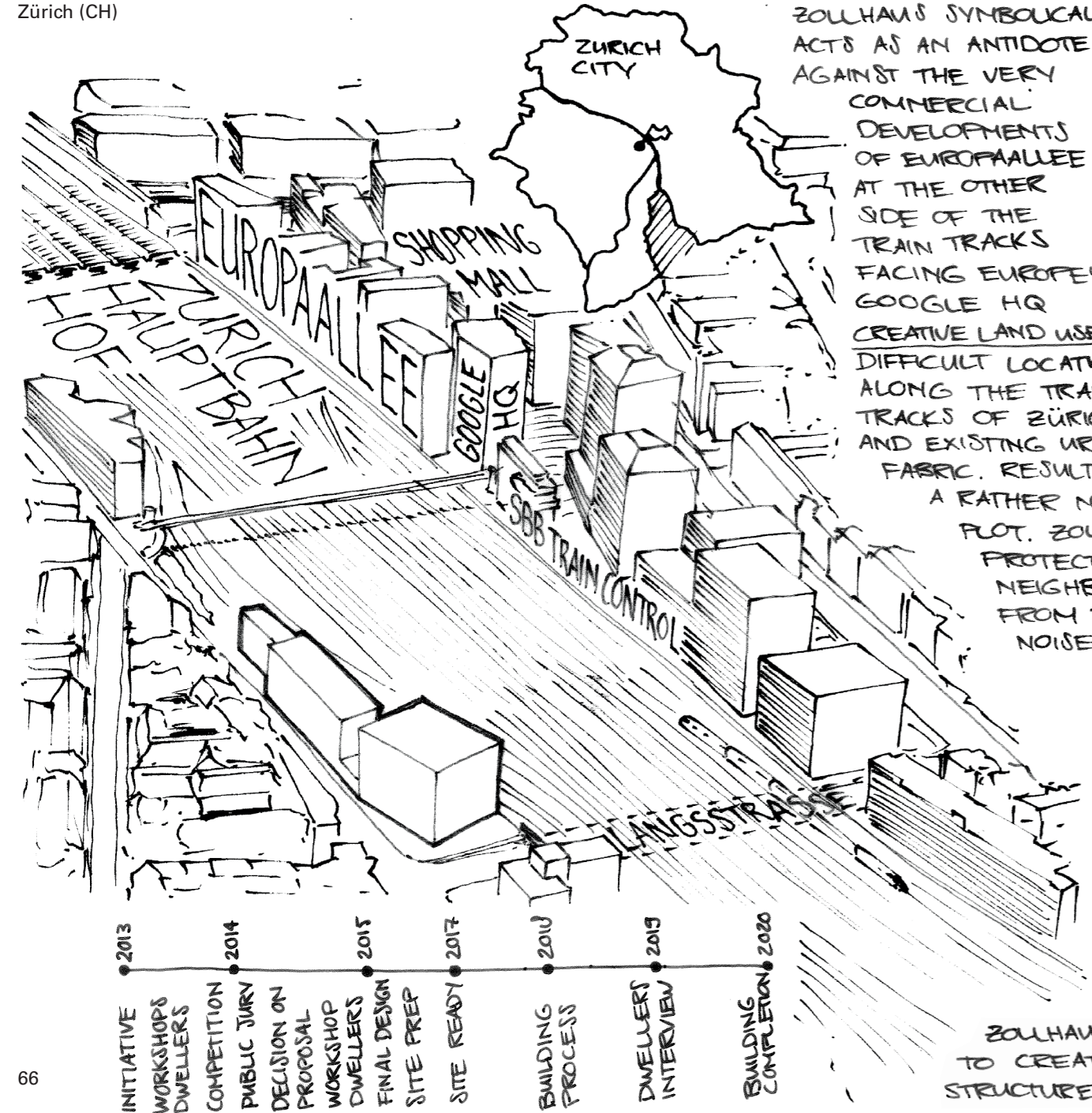
project:	Das Zollhaus
architect:	Enzmann Fischer Partner AG, Zürich
location:	Zürich (CH)
timeline:	2013 - 2020
dwellers:	175 people
facilities:	laundry, roofgarden, guestrooms
commons:	cafe, restaurant, offices, shops, theater

## text

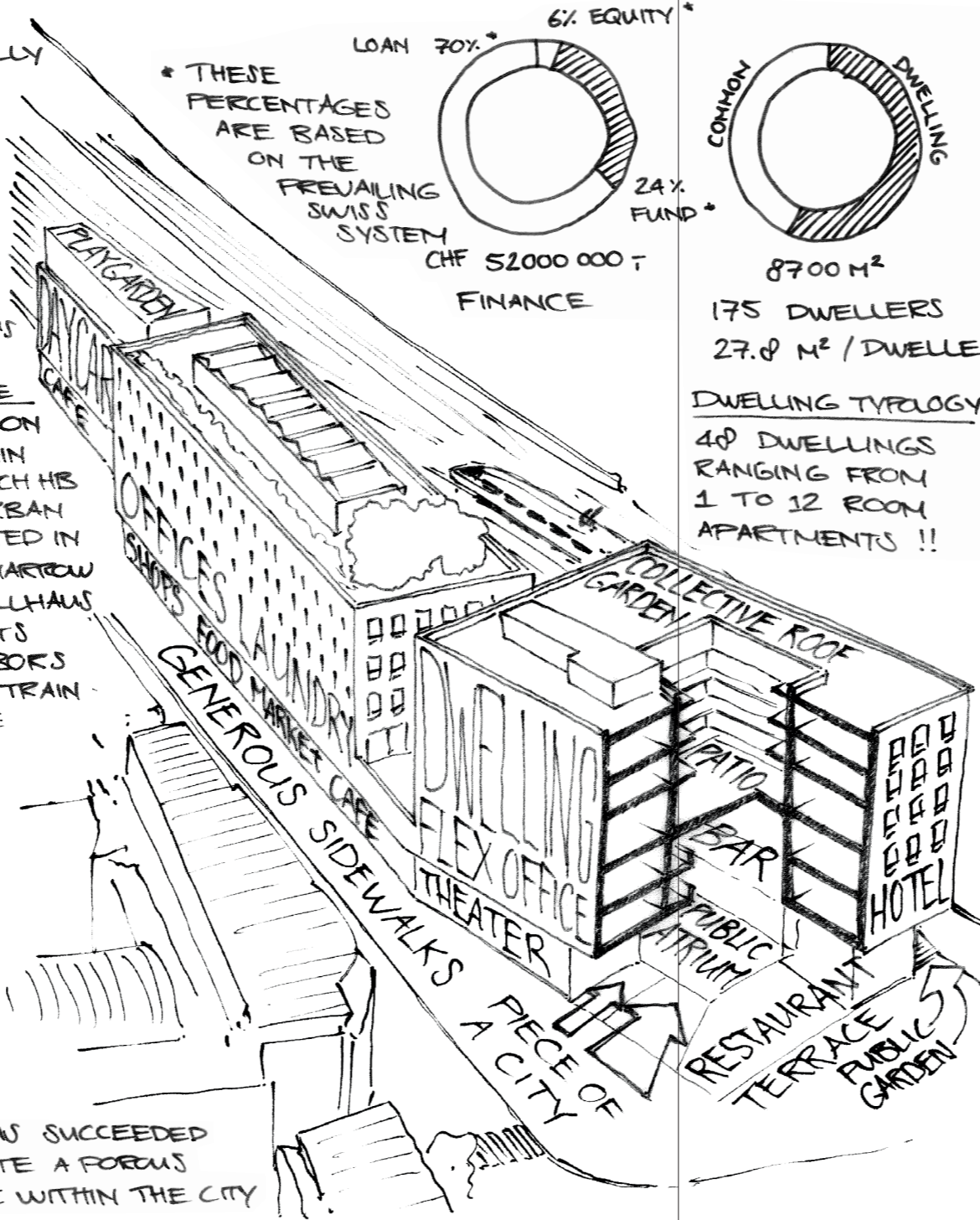
In the midst of the intensive construction phase of the Kalkbreite housing estate, the opportunity arose to acquire another attractive and highly urban building site in the city of Zurich. It was put up for sale in mid-October 2012 by the umbrella organization of Housing Cooperatives Zurich on behalf of the landowners SBB and the City of Zurich. It is almost 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> in size and is located at the corner of Langstrasse/Zollstrasse, near Zurich Central Train Station. (*source: Genossenschaft Kalkbreite*)

# Das Zollhaus

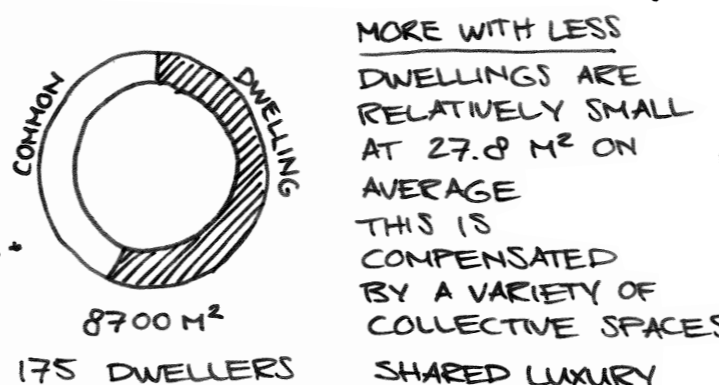
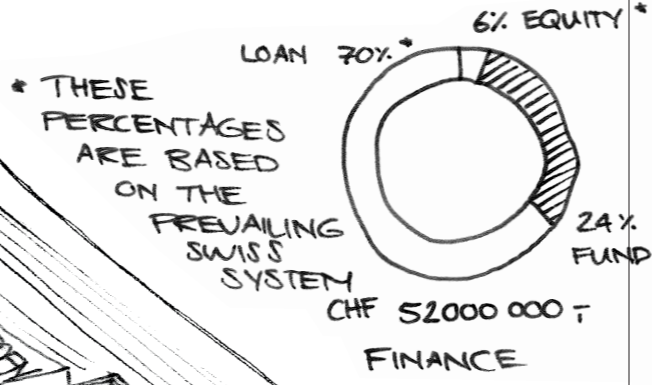
Zürich (CH)



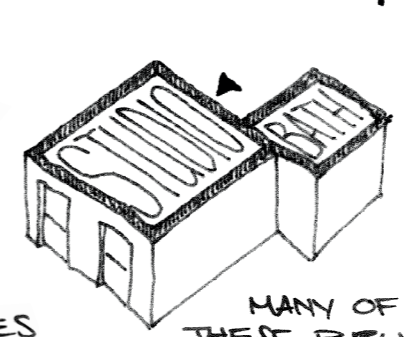
PIECE OF A CITY  
 ZOLLHAUS SYMBOLICALLY ACTS AS AN ANTIDOTE AGAINST THE VERY COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS OF EUROPAALLEE AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRAIN TRACKS FACING EUROPE'S GOOGLE HQ  
CREATIVE LAND USE  
 DIFFICULT LOCATION ALONG THE TRAIN TRACKS OF ZÜRICH HB AND EXISTING URBAN FABRIC, RESULTED IN A RATHER NARROW PLOT. ZOLLHAUS PROTECTS NEIGHBORS FROM TRAIN NOISE



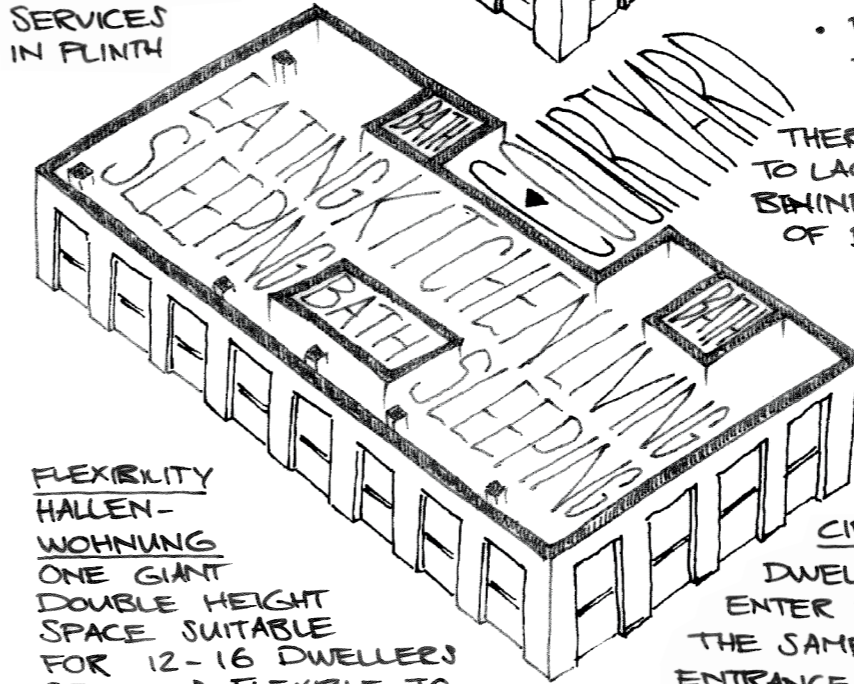
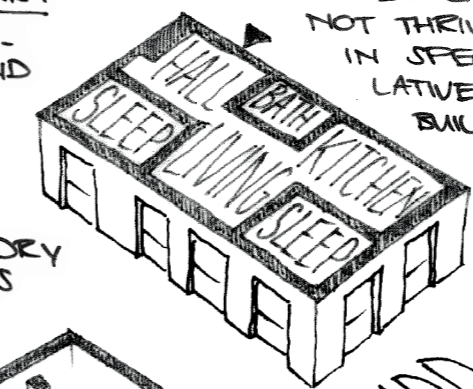
ZOLLHAUS SUCCEEDED TO CREATE A FORUMS STRUCTURE WITHIN THE CITY



MORE WITH LESS  
 DWELLINGS ARE RELATIVELY SMALL AT 27.8 M<sup>2</sup> ON AVERAGE THIS IS COMPENSATED BY A VARIETY OF COLLECTIVE SPACES  
SHARED LUXURY  
 LARGE ROOF-GARDENS AND PATIO  
 GUESTS CAN MAKE USE OF HOTEL SHARED LAUNDRY FLEX OFFICES MANY PUBLIC SERVICES IN PLINTH



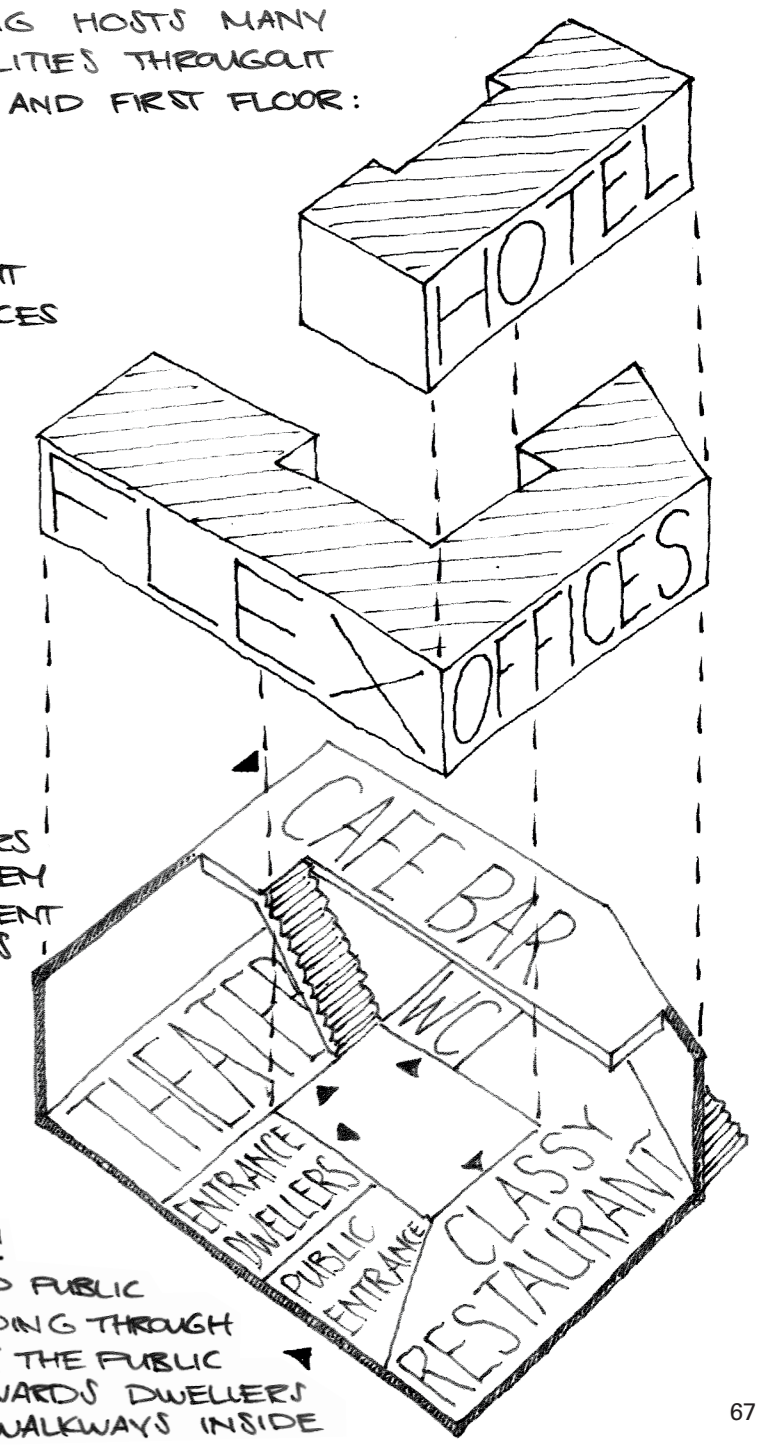
MANY OF THESE PUBLIC FACILITIES CAN NOT THRIVE IN SPECULATIVE BUILDINGS!



FLEXIBILITY  
 HALLEN-WOHNUMG  
 ONE GIANT DOUBLE HEIGHT SPACE SUITABLE FOR 12-16 DWELLERS  
 SPACE IS FLEXIBLE TO APPROPRIATE TO THEIR NEEDS

THE BUILDING HOSTS MANY PUBLIC FACILITIES THROUGHOUT THE PLINTH AND FIRST FLOOR:

- THEATER
- CAFE
- BAR
- RESTAURANT
- FLEX OFFICES
- OFFICES
- DAYCARE
- PUBLIC GARDEN
- HOTEL
- FOOD-MARKET
- SHOPS
- GALLERY
- PUBLIC TOILET



THERE APPEARS TO LACK A SYSTEM BEHIND PLACEMENT OF BATHROOMS

CIRCULATION  
 DWELLERS AND PUBLIC ENTER THE BUILDING THROUGH THE SAME DOOR (THE PUBLIC ENTRANCE) AFTERWARDS DWELLERS USE THEIR OWN WALKWAYS INSIDE

already for more than one hundred years. In the Netherlands, this history and therefore the experience regarding a positive outcome has been absent until the 2020s. The Netherlands didn't know what the effect would be of a new development like housing commons. Nowadays the Dutch know better, luckily. This long-term thinking was a serious issue in that sense.

MIRA NEKOVA: For many stakeholders ... within the building economy ... it was difficult to think on the long term ... 30 years or more.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: Regarding housing commons, one should consider the importance of inter-generational contracts in which you focus on your legacy to future generations.

HOUSING THEORIST 2: Through this long-term thinking, architecture becomes a reliable and lucrative investment property to financial institutes and other investors. At the same time, housing commons are also a reliable and lucrative partner to its dwellers. Due to the implementation of cost-value instead of exchange value, the relative rents will decrease over time without a doubt.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE: From the perspective of a financial institute, housing commons are reliable partners. However, they are not lucrative because of the cost-rents. As a matter of the fact ... in the beginning of the 2020s ... the *GLS Bank* did not make any profit by funding foreign housing commons like the ones in the Netherlands.

PETER KUENZLI: The financial trustworthiness of housing commons thrives on patience. In that sense, I depict housing commons as *geduldig kapitaal* ... which you could translate as slow assets ... in which investors should be willing to wait for thirty to sixty years before they see positive returns. However, they are certain their money sits in a safe place and at the same time their money serves the greater good ... the commons.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE: Exactly, housing commons are truly secure debtors. The dwellers of housing commons like to live there and therefore wish to remain part of the housing common. This means that they are motivated to pay their rents properly. From experience, after the first ten years the project starts running itself, the rents are getting lower than the market rents and consequently it becomes very attractive to live there.

HOUSING THEORIST 2: Another layer of security is added through the fact that housing commons are backed by the state and banks are backed by state as well. In this way the system is guaranteed financial stability for the long term.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE: In the 2020s the banks in Germany provided seventy percent of the project funding. The remaining thirty percent came from the inhabitants themselves.

JONAH VAN DELDEN [*somewhat agitated*]: In the Netherlands, we objected to this principle of bringing in thirty percent by yourself as inhabitant. When you expect people to bring in this kind of money, you know beforehand what kind of people will live there: only people who can afford it.

PAULIEN KLAP: Therefore, we opted for bringing in a maximum of five percent of individual equity ... which in the case of a regular one-person studio would account for five thousand euros. In the case of Germany ... this amount grew towards thirty thousand euros ... which meant that many middle-income households would not have been able to pay this amount of money beforehand.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE [*continuing peacefully*]: The financial aspect of housing commons depends on the different interpretations of the people within the country. In Germany people are used to the idea that you need to bring in thirty percent of the funding through your own money. That is a lot of money. However, in Germany everyone knows this and is used

to it. Consequently, the system works. In addition, the public bank offers financial support and loans to finance cooperative shares for people who are not able to bring in this amount of money. The biggest problem in the Netherlands was that it was not in the mind of the Dutch people to save money and to use this money to bring in equity on their own.

ANNET AKKERMA: The Germans indeed have a stronger tradition of saving money. Over there, it goes without saying that you bring in a significant amount of your own money when acquiring a home.

*[The train stops at train station Veenendaal - De Klomp. This train station has been used as a transport hub for major housing developments during the last decades as well. Comparable to Driebergen - Zeist.]*

MIRA NEKOVA: In the Netherlands ... around the year 2023 ... it wasn't even possible anymore to find a bank willing to give a housing common this seventy percent loan because of the rising rents. Housing commons were treated as traditional commercial entities and therefore an alternative treatment wasn't an option for them. In reaction to that, we developed an innovative financial product in cooperation with the *Rabobank* specifically designed for housing commons in the Netherlands. The housing commons who came after *De Nieuwe Meent* thankfully made use of this new financial structure! In the end the bank funded fifty-five percent and the remaining forty-five percent was funded through crowdfunding, a deposit for each dwelling and *Stimuleringsfonds* through the municipality. In addition, a solidarity fund helped people who were unable to pay the deposit of four thousand euros. As you can see, we had to be rather creative to complete the funding of *De Nieuwe Meent*. Luckily, the financial system changed to support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands. Recent examples ... such as *De Lage Drempeles* ... were able to implement this new financial framework.

HOUSING THEORIST 2: These cases ... such as *De Nieuwe Meent* ... exemplify that housing commons came from far and were forced to be creative and financially organise themselves during the years before 2023. This counters one of the bigger misconceptions in which the public thought housing commons were heavily subsidized within the Netherlands.

PAULIEN KLAP: In the early 2020s ... before the reforms of 2023 ... the rising interest rates and building costs in the Netherlands created an extremely difficult climate to develop housing commons. Because of this financial insecurity, prospective inhabitants were obliged to put in a lot of effort voluntarily. However ... as we experienced throughout the development of *De Lage Drempeles* ... it was not easy for everyone to spend one day per week on its establishment. This negatively affected the accessibility of housing commons and made these governmental financial incentives rather decisive at that time.

#### scene 4: legal frameworks

[09:48 - The train calls shortly at train station Ede-Wageningen. During the short stop many students are boarding and leaving the train. The train station functions as an important transportation hub of the Wageningen University. Simultaneously, the group has moved towards the higher situated areas of the Netherlands with respect to the sea level.]

ANNET AKKERMA: Personally, I always thought of housing commons as the ideal tool for mixing various income groups. However, during the 2020s municipalities were constrained by alternative political agendas.

PAULIEN KLAP: We witnessed this in Amsterdam, too. During the 2020s it was still allowed in Amsterdam to restrict housing commons on what type of dwellings they could produce. During that period middle-income housing was rather limited and commercial developers did not think of middle-income housing as lucrative. Therefore, the municipality of Amsterdam obliged housing commons to either construct social housing or middle-income housing.

MIRA NEKOVA [*nods*]: Indeed! Due to this regulatory constraint, the possibilities for housing commons were rather limited while the mixture of various income groups has always been extremely interesting. Through this mixture within housing commons, dwellers can directly or indirectly assist each other in various tasks and responsibilities.

PAULIEN KLAP [*exited*]: Definitely! It would have been beneficial for us ... within *De Lage Dremfels* ... to also attract higher income households, such as older people who suffer from loneliness and need assistance. The elderly would bring in more equity for instance and in return they would be guaranteed of friendly and supportive neighbours. Over time, the policy of the

municipality has changed and nowadays it is possible to mix several different types of income within housing commons.

ANNET AKKERMA: I fully agree! However, back then the political agenda of municipalities led to other outcomes, as you know. As Paulien was mentioning, during the 2020s, the stock of middle-income housing sat at a low point. Consequently, municipalities saw the urge to produce more middle-income housing within their cities. However, the production of middle-income housing was not thought of as beneficial by investors. Therefore, municipalities were forced to look for alternative solutions. In the 2020s, housing commons in Rotterdam were depicted as the designated housing type to fill this gap of middle-income housing. Apparently, the same applied to housing commons in Amsterdam.

MIRA NEKOVA: From 2020 and onwards we noticed that these regulatory constraints were disadvantageous for new housing commons to develop. Therefore, we opted for housing commons to decide on their own mixtures of housing types, within certain boundaries.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: These examples demonstrate the distrust in bottom-up initiatives within the Netherlands which was prevailing until the 2020s.

ANNET AKKERMA: Since the 2020s we indeed started to notice that citizens became more empowered. They saw the urge interfere within the public discourse. As a municipality, it is seductive to refrain yourself from the public and to retreat in your ivory tower. However, we realized that this strategy was not working anymore and luckily, we changed our vision. We started to interact with the public through engagement within the neighbourhood.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: It is important for the government ... but essentially for every stakeholder ... to think in public benefit.

Look at the administrative masterpiece of *Kalkbreite* as I mentioned earlier this morning.

IRINIA DAVIDOVICI: The winning design concept of *Kalkbreite* was "*Die Kalkbreite: Ein neues Stück Stadt*" ... which translates to "a piece of a city" ... accepting the encounters and juxtapositions of interests which are specific for urban life.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: These land use competitions were extremely important and interesting indeed. The idea of public benefit and public value, that you inscribe within these competition briefs. For the municipality it should be important to decide on which criteria you evaluate the competition entry. One of the criteria is the quality of programme of the collective facilities and the contribution to the collective benefit. That's inscribed in the criteria for the evaluation of land use.

*[The train is moving through a beautiful part of the journey as it traverses along the fringes of the Veluwe National Park.]*

MIRA NEKOVA: This is interwoven with the development of the zoning law within cities. For a successful development of housing commons in the Netherlands it was needed to change the idea on the zoning law as well. Participation needed to be more integrated within the zoning law and it was crucial to accommodate the unexpected. Housing commons have always been and will always be dynamic and fluid entities. Consequently, it was needed to reserve this regulatory wiggle room for them.

HOUSING CRITIC 3: Exactly! The allocation of land titles to housing commons needed to be inscribed in official planning frameworks, coordinated by the government. This not only allowed housing commons to access central locations and gain visibility within official developments, but it simultaneously promoted, diversified, and mixed urban neighbourhoods.

< **design principle**  
piece of a city  
housing commons  
tend to become part  
of the city through  
porous courtyards and  
routing.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: In Zürich, the typology of housing commons has been inscribed in the zoning law for a long time already. For instance, you don't need a special building permit when you remain within the original building plot. This leads to a flexible organization of the building mass on the parcel. It ultimately facilitates the unique spatial characteristics of housing commons. It is easier to develop more dense buildings with courtyards and openings towards the streets. Originally, it was meant for high rise development in Zürich. But during the nineties it became more and more important to develop these flexible typologies of housing commons which you find in Zürich. This allows housing commons to articulate the relation between building and the urban fabric.

### **precedent: Hardturm**

project: Siedlung Hardturm  
architect: Stücheli Architekten & Bünzli Courvoisier  
location: Zürich (CH)  
timeline: 1993 - 2001  
dwellers: 250 people  
facilities: courtyard, laundry, ateliers, offices  
commons: daycare, restaurant

### **text**

During the real estate crisis of the 1990s, a short period of opportunities opened up in which the young Kraftwerk1 cooperative was able to take advantage of the helplessness of the building speculators - to dare to experiment with housing. With its diverse housing types, its ecological construction and the residents' say in planning and design, the first Kraftwerk1 settlement set standards that influence today's housing development in Switzerland and contributed to the renaissance of the Zurich cooperative movement. *(source: Kraftwerk1 Bau- und Wohngenossenschaft)*





### **act 3: Spatial agency**

scene 1:	The spatial agent	82
scene 2:	Design process	87

#### **cast**

Anne Kockelkorn, Annet Akkerma, Arie Lengkeek, Benedikt Altrogge, chorus of institutions, chorus of spatial agents, Daan Bossuyt, Ewoud Dekker, Floris Alkemade, Housing critic 1, housing critic 2, housing critic 3, housing critic 4, housing theorist 1, housing theorist 2, Irina Davidovici, Ivan Illich, Jan Bovy, Jeremy McLeod, Jonah van Delden, Josta van Bockxmeer, Mira Nekova, Paulien Klap, Peter Glas, Peter Kuenzli, Tom Avermaete

#### **setting**

The train ride reaches its final stages, and the group is nearing the city of Nijmegen. The group has spent nearly one hour together on discussing several aspects of housing commons. During the final stages of the train ride, the group starts discussing the principle of spatial agency. Housing commons and spatial agency are closely interwoven and has influenced the design process of housing commons in several ways.

## scene 1: The spatial agent

*[09:58 - The group slides into Arnhem train station. The train station was designed by the famous Dutch architect Ben van Berkel and notorious because of its complex and organic shapes corresponding to the hilly topography around Arnhem. After a short stop the train continues its journey in the opposite direction towards the final stop: Nijmegen.]*

IVAN ILLICH: Dwelling has always been an activity that lies beyond the reach of the architect. Not only because it is a popular art ... not only because it goes on and on in waves that escape its control ... not only because it is of a tender complexity ... but above all because no two communities dwell alike. Architects can do nothing but build and therefore ... especially in the case of dwellings ... they need to cooperate with other stakeholders and understand the other stakeholders.

MIRA NEKOVA *[nods]*: I agree that no two communities dwell alike. This is especially true for housing commons. Therefore ... in the design process of housing commons ... the architect takes on new roles that differ from the traditional role of protagonist. In the case of housing commons, the architect cooperates with prospective dwellers during the design process.

HOUSING CRITIC 2: Indeed ... during the design process of housing commons ... the architect should not be the main protagonist during the design process. The architect is there to serve prospective dwellers, not overrule them.

MIRA NEKOVA: However, the merits of the involvement of an architect within these types of participatory design processes should not be underrated. The architect can make the project more efficient, more realistic, and more feasible through thoughtful management of the different parameters involved.

This used to be one of the main competences of the architect. However, in the Netherlands ... by the early 2020s ... these responsibilities had been handed over to developers and consultants.

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS *[after having found a seat]*: Indeed, architects' protection of the small patch of territory ... that is designing buildings ... has allowed others to claim larger networks. Therefore, it is encouraged that architects challenge the restrictive nature of the term "architectural". During the 2020s it was urgent to step over the self-defined boundaries of the architectural profession to support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands.

MIRA NEKOVA: The enlargement of the field of architecture that occurred in the past twenty years can be clearly distinguished in the design process of housing commons. As I mentioned earlier this morning ... throughout the design process of housing commons the architect has taken on a more expansive and less-bounded role once again ... by cooperating closely with prospective dwellers.

JEREMY MCLEOD: Since the 2020s ... architects took on different responsibilities and appearances as well ... such as the role of the lobbyist and advocate.

MIRA NEKOVA: Yes ... from the early 2020s ... the belief among architects grew to become an allrounder.

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS *[exited to have boarded this train]*: Yes! Apart from our traditional tasks as architects we had to act as spatial agents as well!

ARIE LENGKEEK *[also exited]*: I fully agree! The movement of spatial agency gained a lot of momentum during the 2020s, once people came to understand what it encompassed.

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS: Yes, nowadays there is a shared understanding of the concept of spatial agency. However, in the beginning of the 2020s, this wasn't the case. The thinking behind the term "spatial" ... instead of "architectural" ... originates from the intent to put architectural intelligence in a much broader spatial field, one that acknowledges social, global, ecological, and virtual networks. To ultimately inspire architects to a much richer set of activities that give new scope and hope for architectural activity. Furthermore, spatial agency acknowledges the fact that social space is dynamic and intractably political and therefore the production of space is a shared enterprise. On the other hand, "agency" implies the transformative engagement with structure by being alert to the constraints and opportunities that structure presents. Structure is seen as the way that society is organized. As a result, building is not necessarily the best solution to a spatial problem. Therefore, spatial agents are aware of the fact that there are other ways of making a spatial difference.

*[The group crosses the river Nederrijn which allows some wonderful views on the river and its surroundings landscapes.]*

ARIE LENGKEEK: The concept of spatial agency acknowledges that the spatial configuration of people's environments partly defines how people structure their existence. It suggests a kind of reciprocity. This reciprocity can be illustrated by the process of creating pleasant environments for people and on the other hand how these environments influence their daily routines and habits. I think this approach is inherently linked to the concept of spatial agency and which makes it a beautiful concept!

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS: Furthermore, a spatial agent must be responsive to the longer-term desires and needs of the multitude of others who build, live in, work in, occupy, and experience space. In this way, agency fits the identification of the temporality and contingency of spatial production, because

< **author's note**

Spatial agency: using architectural intelligence in a much broader spatial field (beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture) to engage transformatively with structure (the way society is organized) by being alert to constraints and opportunities that structure presents.

< **author's note**

A spatial agent does not necessarily have to be an architect.

in being alert to the coming wants and needs of others, one must project visions and solutions onto an uncertain future.

ARIE LENGKEEK: In the case of long-term desires and needs the aspect of materiality plays an important role. For instance, in Japan every layer of material corresponds to a certain time of replacement. This is inherently interwoven with the cycle of production of these materials. The consciousness of material among Dutch people was lost during the 2000s and 2010s. Architects and others ... acting according to the concept of spatial agency ... contributed to this development extensively. Consequently, long-term thinking ... through material awareness ... is nowadays more embedded within society.

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS: Precisely! In addition to materiality, also the changing needs and desires of users were considered more carefully upfront during the design process. The popularisation of spatial agency thus also resulted in more multi-use spaces, adaptable structures, and projects that privilege the passage of time.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: This example of material awareness ... resulting into long-term thinking ... exemplifies the idea that every story is always a constellation of several stories ... such as mechanism of politics, finance, and architecture. This makes them interesting, but sometimes also intangible and complex to grasp.

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS: One of the key aims of spatial agency is the uncovering and making visible of these intangible and complex stories to ultimately develop new perspectives. These new perspectives should support the transformative incentive of spatial agency. These new perspectives are created through a willingness to expose oneself and one's work to constant criticism of other stakeholders and to new questions, which is intrinsically interwoven with the concept of spatial agency. Spatial agents operate by bypassing, penetrating

or hijacking institutions or other organizational structures. Moreover, they work open source ... they work as volunteers for non-governmental organizations and charities ... they understand the production of space as something that involves dialogue and always seeks the other ... they recognize the radical potential of architecture and planning and work to raise awareness and to put critical and speculative ideas in the next generations ... they question the status quo ... they understand making, writing, and acting as tactical manoeuvres but also as informed and committed action which affects the course of events.

## scene 2: Design process

*[10:11 - As the train has left the city of Arnhem, the journey is nearing its end. The landscapes between Arnhem and Nijmegen are dominated by agricultural activities and smaller rural villages such as Elst and Bemmel. To follow up on the principle of spatial agency, the group starts discussing the design process of housing commons.]*

JONAH VAN DELDEN: In the past two decades, architects have increasingly adopted the role of a translator, this new role aligns perfectly to the concept of spatial agency.

MIRA NEKOVA: The new generation of architects indeed adopted an innovative and exiting role within the design process of housing commons. They know the ins and outs of the financial, legal, and regulatory aspects of housing commons. This knowledge is of utmost importance especially during the early stages of the design process.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: By collecting and analysing a wide variety of data and input from several stakeholders, today's architects are strategically outlining the core values of a group in cooperation with the dwellers themselves.

MIRA NEKOVA: The group's core values symbolize their desires and requirements. These core values steer the design process, and the architects facilitates this process.

ARIE LENGKEEK: Through these core values, the group of dwellers ... in cooperation with the architect ... establishes a commonly supported desire to create their ideal housing common. The design process of housing commons is thus very different from projects that stem from individual desires and that are driven by the market and consumerism. For me,

this is fundamental to the design process and spatial agency in general. It allows for a certain unbiased attitude towards societal concerns, such as housing policy.

CHORUS OF SPATIAL AGENTS: Exactly! Spatial agents understand that the creation of objects should not be driven by the speculative demands of a globalized monetary economy. Instead, they see buildings as one of society's most important assets. Furthermore, the user should be always in the mind of the spatial agent as its prime matter of concern.

ARIE LENGKEEK: When addressing spatial agency, to me it is important to talk about the art of commissioning a project, which we call *opdrachtgeverschap* in Dutch. In what way do we shape these housing commons which enable the dwellers and spatial agents to invent new housing typologies and innovative configurations of communities. Housing commons represent the collective housing desires of the public which raises the question: *"How do we envision our way of living in thirty or fifty years and how do we ensure these dwellings are still serving the societal needs of the future?"*

IRINA DAVIDOVICCI: Housing commons ... such as *Kraftwerk1* and *Zwicky-Süd* in Zürich ... have historically used architecture to explicitly signify their different ideologies. This was always represented through a variety of typological and iconographic motifs. This would range from cluster-apartments to wide, covered, and communal terraces and walkways.

JONAH VAN DELDEN: Yes! The eschewing of speculative demands has influenced the design process in a positive way. Architects ... anno 2043 ... are aware that the design process of housing commons needs to be flexible. The project brief is constantly changing throughout the process, since the spatial agent is mediating with a large group of individuals. Therefore, the process of shaping a project brief is different than before. Furthermore, architects cooperate with a group of people who

## precedent: Zwicky Süd

project: Zwicky Süd  
architect: Schneider Studer Primas, Zürich  
location: Zürich (CH)  
timeline: 2012 - 2016  
dwellers: 250 people  
facilities: courtyard, laundry, public walkways  
commons: restaurant, cafe, hotel, work spaces

## text

On the site of the former Zwicky spinning mill, where the city of Zurich, Wallisellen and Dübendorf come together, a new quarter has been created on the banks of the Glatt river between old factory buildings, a motorway, furniture stores and a railway viaduct. Kraftwerk1 has had a significant impact on the development on the construction site. The settlement combines living, working, culture and services and thus helps the agglomeration to become a city. The "Good Buildings of the Canton of Zurich" awards, the "Golden Rabbit" from Hochparterre and the "Umsicht-Regards-Sguardi 2017" award from the SIA (Swiss Association of Engineers and Architects) praise the courage for density, for urbanity, for doing and for living ecological, economic and social sustainability.

### < precedents

Kraftwerk1  
see page 77  
Zwicky Süd  
see page 89

### < design principle

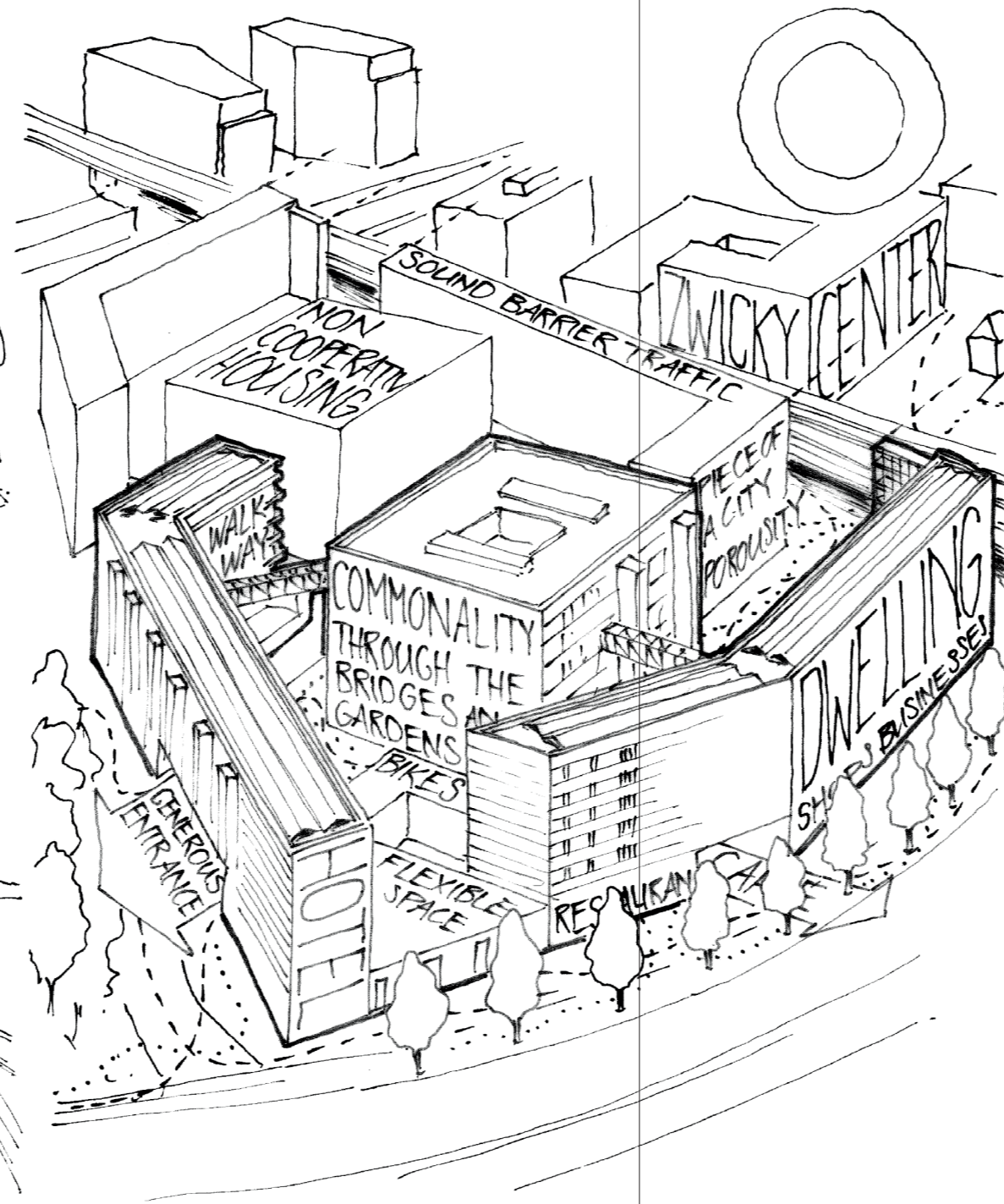
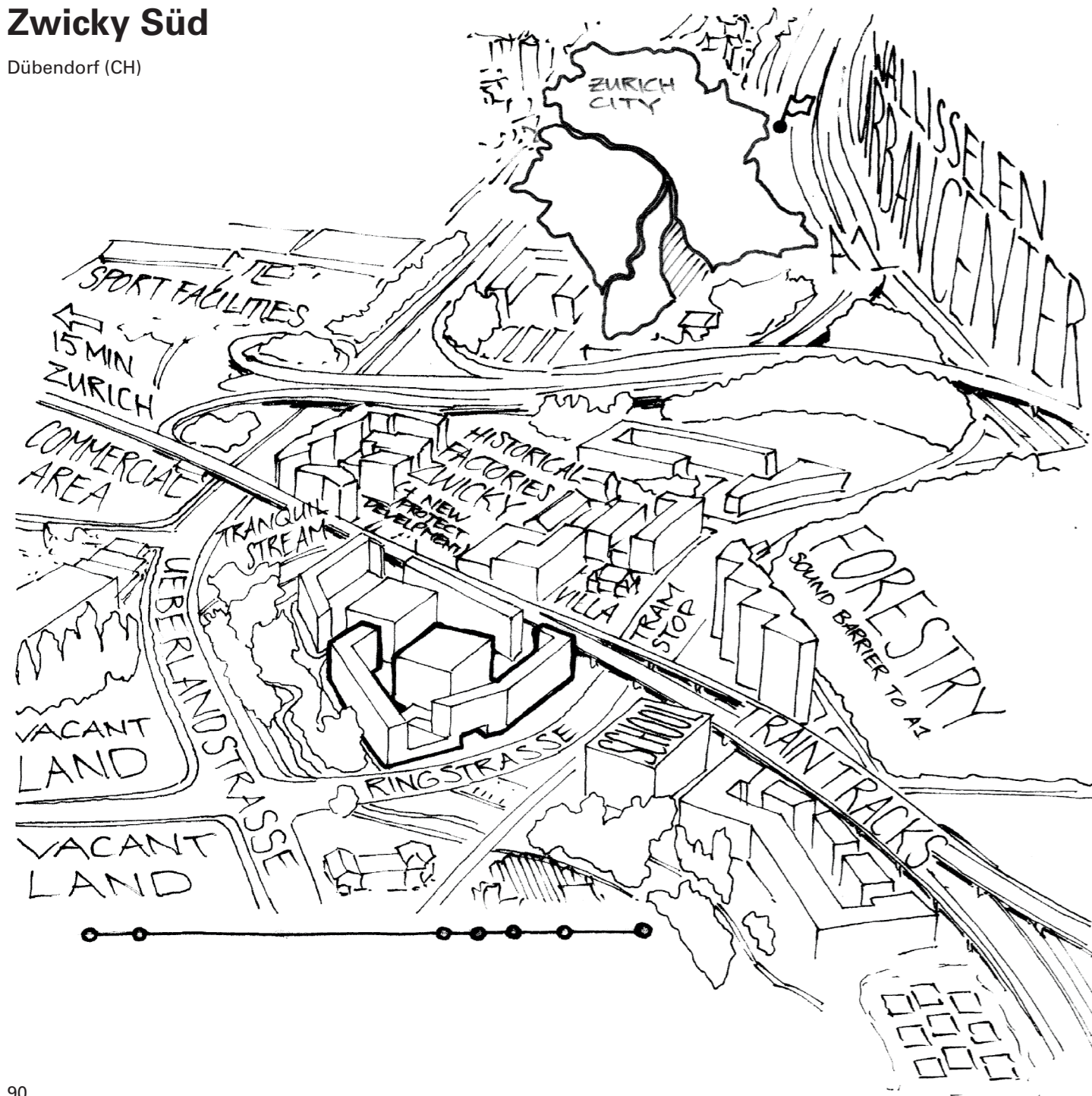
experimental  
apartment typologies  
like cluster apartment

### ^ design principle

wide, covered and  
communal terraces  
and walkways

# Zwicky Süd

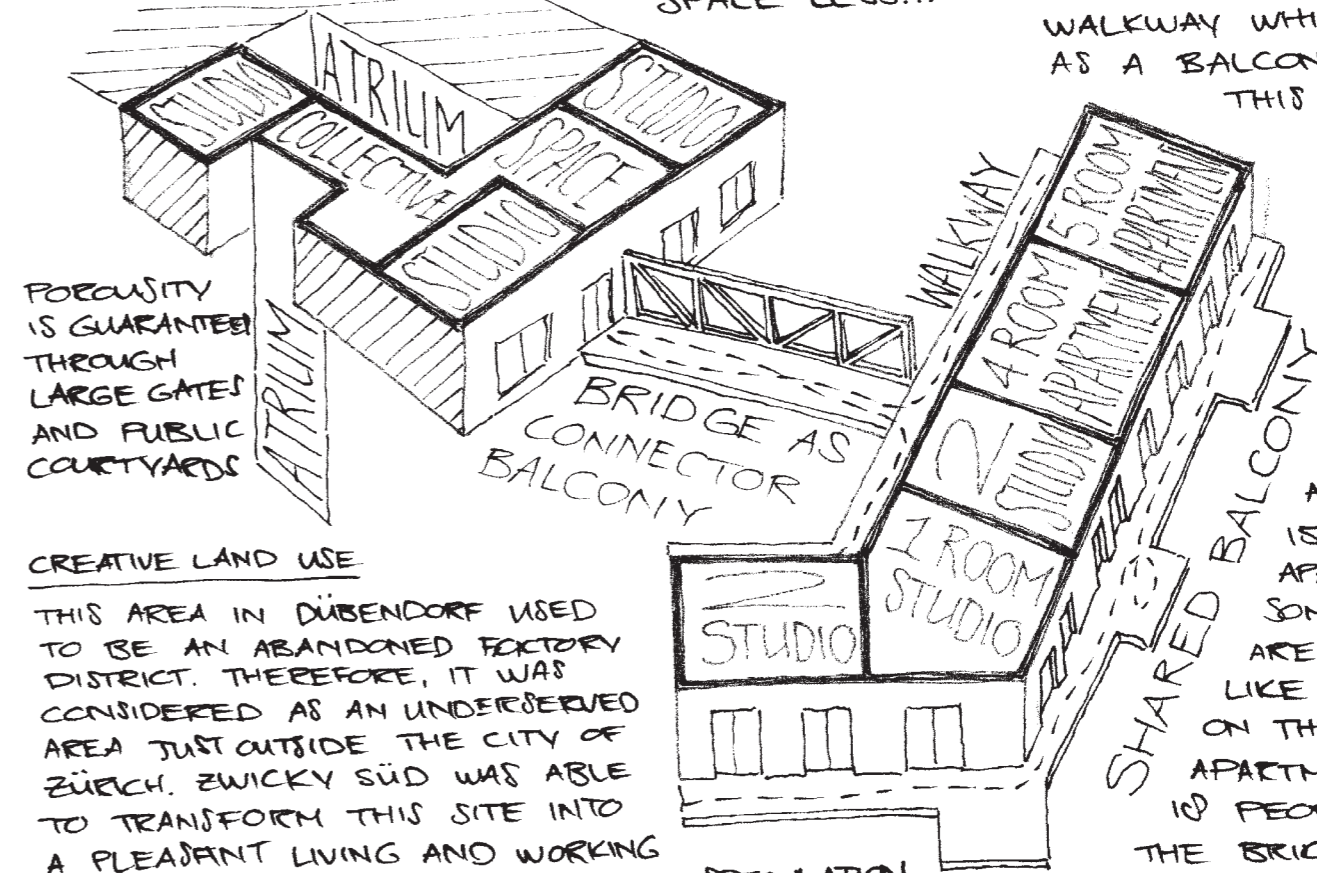
Dübendorf (CH)



## PIECE OF A CITY

ZWICKY SÜD IS PART OF A LARGER URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN DÜBENDORF. IT IS INTERESTING THAT HALF OF THE PROJECT IS NON-COOPERATIVE HOUSING. EVEN THOUGH THE ARCHITECTURE IS SIMILAR, THE WALKWAYS ARE PRIVATISED AND PEOPLE TEND TO

FILL UP THE OUTDOOR SPACE LESS...



## CIRCULATION

THE DWELLINGS ARE REACHED BY AN EXTERNAL, GENEROUS WALKWAY WHICH ALSO FUNCTIONS AS A BALCONY. THROUGH BRIGGES THIS SPACE IS EXTENDED

## DWELLING TYPOLOGIES

IN TOTAL ZWICKY SÜD HAS 125 DWELLINGS THEY VARY FROM 1-ROOM APARTMENTS TO

15-ROOM APARTMENTS SOME OF THEM ARE SCATTERED LIKE THE APARTMENT ON THE LEFT. THIS APARTMENT HOST 10 PEOPLE AND USES THE BRIDGE AS BALCONY

PROXIMITY IS GUARANTEED THROUGH LARGE GATES AND PUBLIC COURTYARDS

## CREATIVE LAND USE

THIS AREA IN DÜBENDORF USED TO BE AN ABANDONED FACTORY DISTRICT. THEREFORE, IT WAS CONSIDERED AS AN UNDERSERVED AREA JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY OF ZÜRICH. ZWICKY SÜD WAS ABLE TO TRANSFORM THIS SITE INTO A PLEASANT LIVING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT BECAUSE OF ITS NON-SPECULATION

are not experienced in commissioning a project, in contrary to professional developers.

MIRA NEKOVA: During the design process of housing commons the once conventional role of a professional developer is absent. In the past two decades, I have witnessed how this role of the professional developer was taken over and shared between the dwellers and the architect.

EWOUDE DEKKER: Since the 2020s one started to wonder what the conventional role of a professional developer entails. Does a developer have to be an independent and commercial serving individual capital gain? Before the 2020s this was the accepted status quo. After the 2020s this was questioned and changed.

ANNE KOCKELKORN: Before the early 2020s, the relation between developer and architect used to be more interwoven in the Netherlands ... through consortia. This was quite problematic.

JAN BOVY: After 2023 ... rather than working with a professional developer ... housing commons were initiated by a person or a small group of people who initiated a project and who adopted a more active role in the design process. These people became the developers of today acting according to the principles of spatial agency.

PAULIEN KLAP: Back in the 2020s... during the first of years of *De Lage Drempeles* ... we indeed took on a variety of tasks and responsibilities ourselves. We became spatial agents in that sense. By resolving these tasks within our group, we became extremely cost-efficient. We were the acting developers of our own project. However, it must be said that this process was quite time consuming.

MIRA NEKOVA: During the 2020s this was indeed very common among young housing commons. The dwellers were expected to

fulfil the traditional responsibilities of a professional developer. However, in many cases the dwellers lacked experience. The architect would bring this experience to the table during the design process. Together they took on these responsibilities traditionally assigned to professional developers. The architect thus gained a lot of responsibility throughout the process, and the cooperation between dwellers and architects became extremely important as they were acting both as spatial agent.

*[The train crosses the river Waal and the landscape abruptly changes from rural to urban surroundings. The river clearly marks this distinction. After the train has crossed the river, it runs through a nineteenth century gate and follows a bike path which is intensively used by several bike commuters.]*

ARIE LENGKEEK: This new notion of the developing person instead of the professional developer aligned with the double role which prospective dwellers adopted throughout the development of housing commons in the Netherlands. Of course, they are the prospective users, but at the same time they are also the commissioning party. Therefore, the social aspect of commissioning housing commons becomes crucial. The development of housing commons should not be reduced to the fulfilment of the group's current housing needs but should be extended to long-term thinking, as I discussed with Anne before.

IRINA DAVIDOVICI: However, this intensive effort asked from ... non-experienced ... individuals is not for everyone. What we saw is that housing commons constitute a contested common, treading a fine line between collectivism and exclusivity. As Balmer and Bernet put in 2015: *"this type of collective projects, involving hours of voluntary work, thus requiring a rather specific lifestyle and cultural capital of a certain kind, is not for everyone."*

**author's note >**  
Balmer and Bernet published several articles on housing commons throughout the past decades.



ANNET AKKERMA: Yes, this was our experience within the municipality of Rotterdam during the 2020s too. Many times, we saw that young housing commons were not able complete their journey because of financial issues. Back then, many people thought that housing commons would be an affordable way of living. However, housing commons accounted as a different way of living, not necessarily a cheaper way of living. In our view this had to do with the fact that dwellers are not professionally trained for these types of operations and consequently inefficiencies start occurring throughout the process.

JAN BOVY: This is exactly why we opted for streamlining the design process. With several stakeholders involved during the design process everyone benefits from streamlining to a certain extent.

EWOUDE DEKKER: It is true that when the time projection of a project runs too far into the future, uncertainties and risks can influence the overall process greatly and inefficiencies can take over. Therefore, to support the development of housing commons in the Netherlands it was necessary to streamline the design process to support and sustain creativity on the one hand, and to assess realistically whether initial goals are being met and if needed to take appropriate measurements, on the other hand. This approach is closely aligned with Irina's notion of hybrid commons.

MIRA NEKOVA: In terms of the decision-making process, it also helps to formulate clear core values ... as we discussed earlier ... to rule out several inefficiencies during the design process. By doing so the dwellers and spatial agent can make choices more consciously and more rationally.

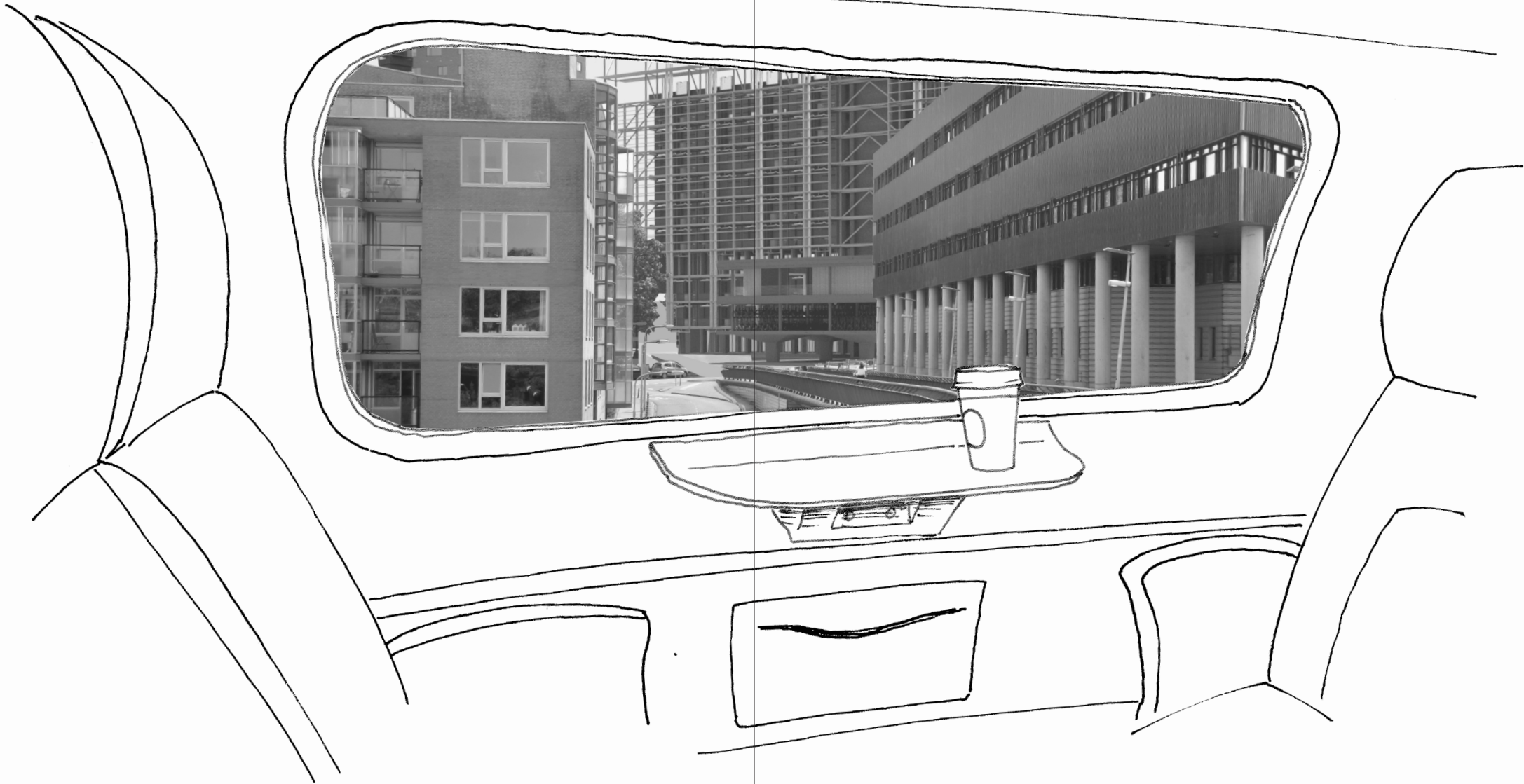
PAULIEN KLAP: As part of this process of streamlining regarding *De Lage Drempeles*, we legally embedded that every member of our housing common was entitled to on every decision. As we

were aware that this could result in a rather lengthy decision-making process, we prioritized topics and decisions that the dwellers wanted to have a say on. For other topics we gave the architects freedom and relied on their expertise. To us it was important to set out these rules of the game before starting the design process.

ARIE LENGKEEK: It is indeed advisable to rely on the expertise of architects in certain matters. If not, the design process can become rather messy and unstructured. The dwellers outline their desires and requirements clearly in cooperation with the architect. This process is followed up by the architect translating the desires and requirements into a spatial solution. It is even better when several architects devise spatial solutions through design competitions that allow them to illustrate and test their strategies. In Switzerland this culture of competition is more embedded and is even obligatory for projects like housing commons.

*[Before the train arrives at the train station of Nijmegen, the group gets a glimpse of the project they are about to visit. At the end of the intensively used bike path, the building reveals itself amidst a variety of expressive buildings.]*

JONAH VAN DELDEN *[after noticing the building]*: Look! You can already see 'Het Rek' from here. I'm curious what we will witness today!



#### **act 4: The project**

scene 1:	The arrival	100
scene 2:	Creative land use	112
scene 3:	Piece of a city	113
scene 4:	Expressive murals	116
scene 5:	Urban commons	118
scene 6:	Building entrances	120
scene 7:	More with less	122
scene 8:	Dwelling typologies	124
scene 9:	Flexibility and adaptability	132
scene 10:	Public and private	133
scene 11:	Regulatory frameworks	136
scene 12:	Long term thinking	137

#### **cast**

Anne Kockelkorn, Annet Akkerma, Arie Lengkeek, Benedikt Altrogge, Ewoud Dekker, Jan Bovy, Jonah van Delden, Mira Nekova, Paulien Klap.

#### **setting**

After the group's arrival in Nijmegen their visit to the 'Het Rek' starts. During the project visit to the building in Nijmegen, the group discusses the numerous design principles which they notice around the project. The architect explains its thinking behind the building philosophy and guides them through the building. The group meets some inhabitants with whom they converse regarding their experiences. Design principles which are being discussed, are for example the equality of dwellings, the principle of shared luxury, and the importance of flexibility and adaptability throughout the project.

## scene 1: The arrival

*[10:21 – After leaving the train, the group exits Nijmegen's train station through its main entrance. At the main square of the train station the group is being awaited by the architect of the project who will function as their tour guide for today. Behind the architect, the building is clearly recognisable as a housing common. The façades are transparent and behind them unfolds a universe of the dwellers own interpretation on dwelling. The architect starts explaining.]*

THE ARCHITECT: Welcome to Nijmegen, everyone! I'm delighted to show you ... as experts on housing commons ... around the project today.

ARIE LENGKEEK: Thank you for having us here today!

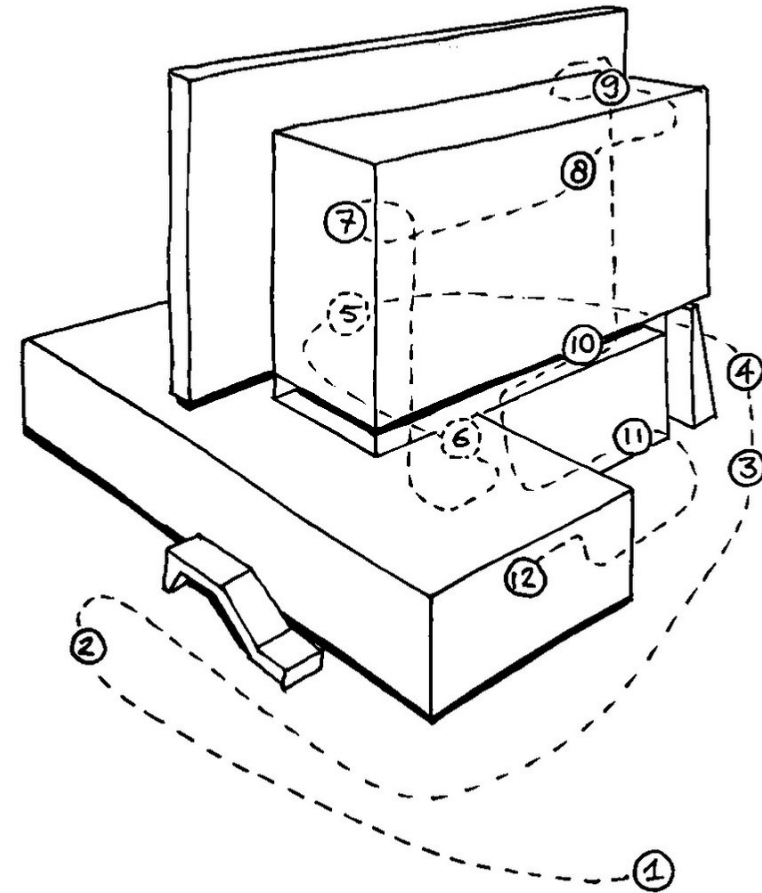
THE ARCHITECT: It is a true pleasure. Before we start our tour through the building, I want to explain a bit of its history. Even though, I assume every one of you is aware of the so-called Dutch housing evolution that took place during past twenty years, I will briefly touch upon the important moments in this history as they were crucial for the project behind me. The housing evolution started after the parliamentary elections on November 22nd, 2023. The Dutch voted progressively for a considerable part and consequently social and progressive parties took over, after a long stint of liberal and conservative leadership. In 2024 the Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning was reinstated and the carefully curated and well-known ZeNO – Zesde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening – was published to provide a new perspective on housing in the Netherlands. As part of the ZeNO, new ways of dwelling were introduced, including the idea of housing commons. From that moment, the Dutch housing commons took flight! Nijmegen was no exception and started promoting housing commons as well. On top of that the city of Nijmegen opted to transform existing buildings. The former tax authorities office – Belastingkantoor in Dutch – is an

example of the municipality's strategy. The construction started in 2027 and the first groups of dwellers moved in from 2031. Nowadays, roughly 150 people reside within this building.

BENEDIKT ALTROGGE: Thank you for reminding us on the importance of the Dutch housing revolution in the light of housing commons. I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit more on the history of the building as well.

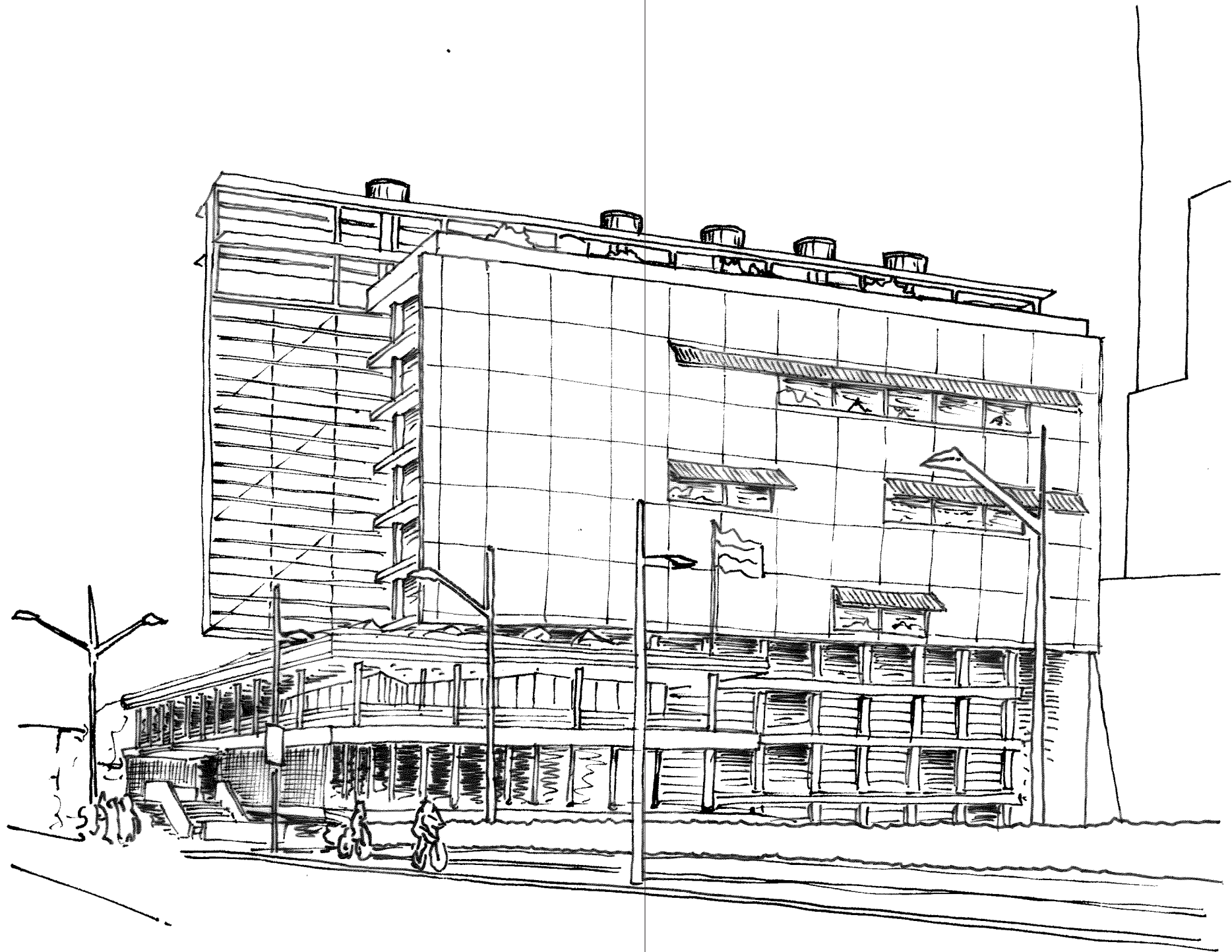
THE ARCHITECT: For sure Benedikt! The *raison d'être* of the building behind me starts with the *Rijksspreidingsbeleid* that was in use from the 1960s until the 1980s within the Netherlands. As a spatial planning policy, the *Rijksspreidingsbeleid* was designed to distribute employment opportunities more evenly throughout the Netherlands. At that point, during the 1950s, the Randstad was flourishing in terms of employment opportunities. However, the Bandstad lacked a diverse spectrum of employment opportunities. As a result, young and higher educated people left the Bandstad to seek employment in the Randstad, resulting in the decay of the Bandstad. The government of that time, led by prime minister De Quay, was eager to turn this decay around and therefore decided in 1960 to relocate a significant part of (semi-) governmental activities. Consequently, the headquarters of the Dutch post services moved to Groningen, the headquarters of the police moved to Apeldoorn and the tax authorities established office buildings in major cities throughout the Bandstad, including Nijmegen. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, however, the *Rijksspreidingsbeleid* was heavily criticized by the public and therefore terminated in 1980. The termination of the *Rijksspreidingsbeleid* marked the beginning of empty office buildings throughout the Netherlands. The tax authority office in Nijmegen can be seen as a direct result of this *Rijksspreidingsbeleid*. It was designed by the Dutch architect Jan ten Have at the end of the 1970s and was completed in 1973. The beginning of the twenty-first century marked the digitalization and automation of many duties and activities of the tax authorities. Therefore, traditional office buildings

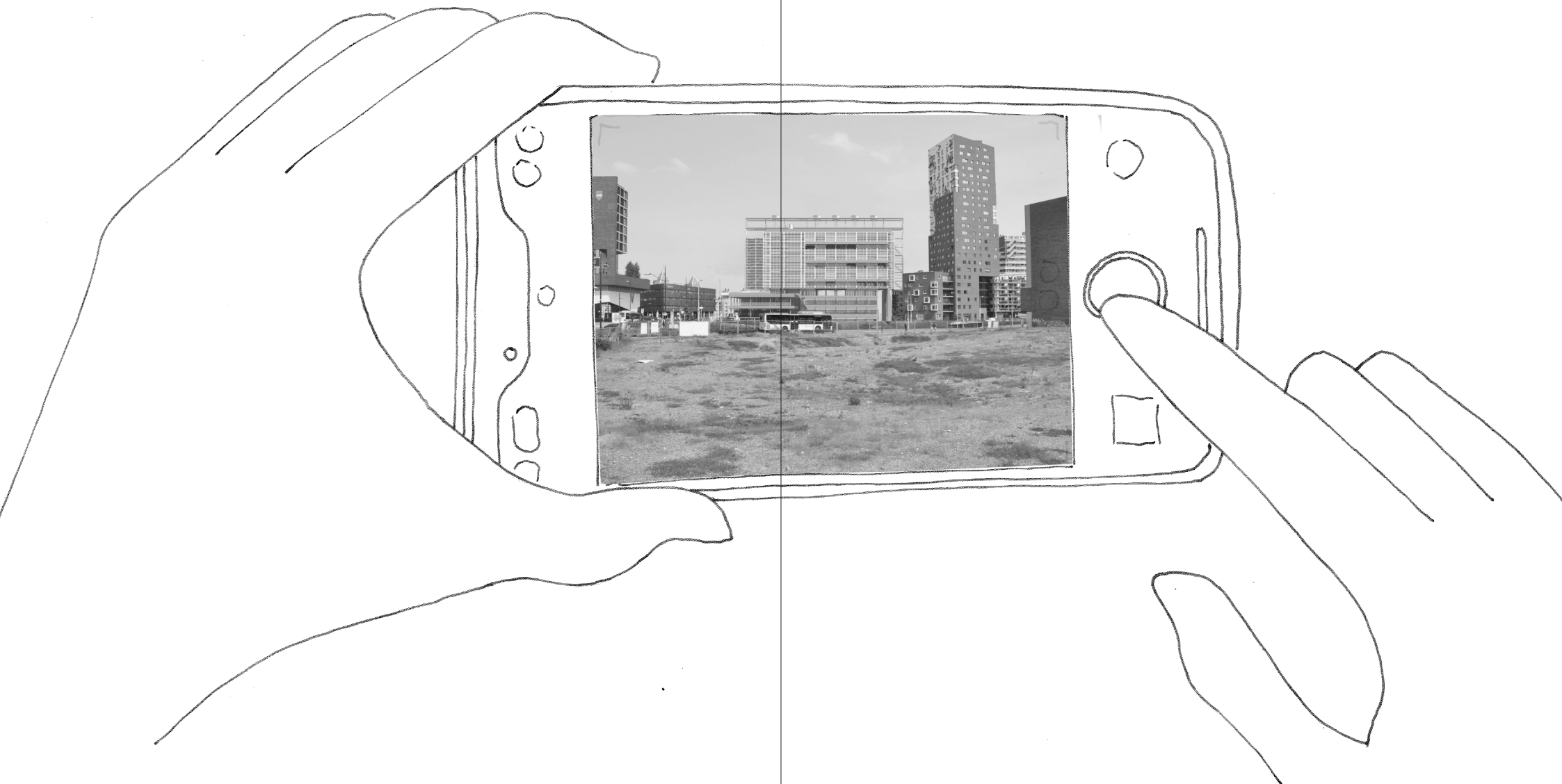
< **author's note**  
*Rijksspreidingsbeleid* accounted as a spatial planning policy to spread out employment opportunities more evenly throughout the Netherlands which was in use from the 1960s until the 1980s.



^ **overview guided tour**

scene 1: The arrival (Stationsplein in front of train station) scene 2: Creative land use (Stieltjesstraat in front of former police office) scene 3: Piece of a city (south-east corner of the building) scene 4: Expressive murals (bike passage east corner of the building) scene 5: Urban commons (public square northside of the building) scene 6: Building entrances (main entrance at the heart of the building) scene 7: More with less (collective space on the eighth floor) scene 8: Dwelling typologies (collective walkway eighth floor) scene 9: Flexibility and adaptability (roofgarden) scene 10: Public and private (multi-purpose space on third floor) scene 11: Regulatory frameworks (cafe on ground floor) scene 12: Long term thinking (podium space on second floor)







**author's note >**  
In 2025 several young and energetic architects, designers and researchers established the NNAO which grew exponentially in a short period of time. The group decided to carry-on the same denomination of the NNAO, since the concept of *Nederland Nu Als Ontwerp* regained its urgency again.

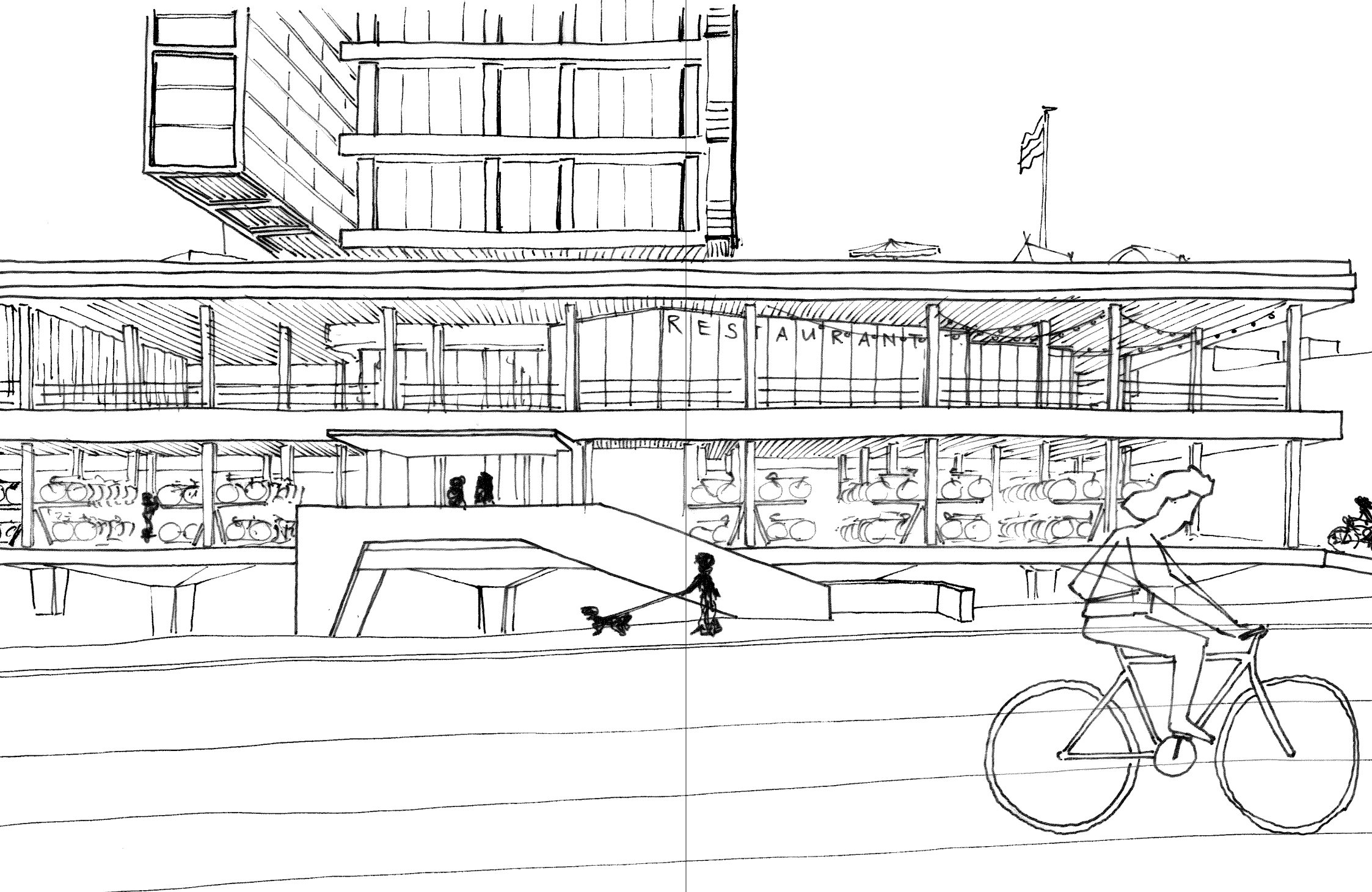
became obsolete and the same applied to the building behind me. In 2015, the tax authorities vacated the building. From that moment on, many temporary solutions were devised for this building, such as a refugee shelter. At a certain point, however, it was suggested that the building should be demolished by 2027. But, the ZeNO, which was introduced in 2023, led to a different outcome. From a sustainability perspective the government started supporting the transformation of obsolete office buildings. The NNAO played a significant role regarding this development and many architects of the NNAO focussed on transforming existing buildings instead of erecting new ones. Since I have been a member of the NNAO and having conducted research on housing commons in Nijmegen during my studies in Delft, the city of Nijmegen approached me to transform the city's tax authority office into housing in 2025. As mentioned earlier, construction started in 2027 and the building was completed in 2031. Here are some images of the building that I took in 2023.

*[The architect displays a selection of images on the pavement in front of the train station.]*

MIRA NEKOVA: What strikes me when I look at these images is the wide variety of facades in this area. They are all screaming: "look at me!" The former tax authority office on the other hand breathes modesty and honesty.

THE ARCHITECT: I agree, and therefore we decided to preserve this typological building mass of the 1970s – including its podium and slab – to refrain from this competition in architectural expression that was clearly going on at that time. In contrast to that, we decided to use the facade as a medium of public expression which resulted in a light and transparent structure. I will show you this in greater detail later. Let's continue this conversation while we walk towards the building!





## scene 2: Creative land use

*[10:39 – After introducing the building, the architect directs the group towards the west side of the building. Here the architect explains its strategy to opt for transforming the building instead of demolishing it. And how this played a crucial role during the many negotiations between the dwellers and the municipality.]*

ANNET AKKERMA: So, if I understand it correctly, the preservation of the existing building mass was an important topic for the viability of the project. However, back in the 2020s the demolition of these type of buildings was still common sense among municipalities. How did you manage to convince the city of Nijmegen not to demolish the existing office building?

THE ARCHITECT: Municipalities regained a certain historical awareness towards their more recent heritage – heritage from the 1960s to the 1980s – and consequently they did not want to simply undo the “mistakes” of the past by demolition. Instead, they saw added value in integrating this part of the city’s history in its urban fabric. However, the city of Nijmegen experienced difficulties finding a developer willing to transform the building into housing, since it would have been not financially feasible for them. Housing commons were invited, as they were known for their more creative approach towards land use. Their budgets are significantly lower compared with commercial developers and therefore, they are eager to explore new possibilities. In the end, we came up with a proposal that aimed to reuse the existing concrete structure in its purest form. The concrete structure would serve as a framework accommodating the fluidity of housing commons; an inhabitable construction site. This idea can be seen best in the podium of the building. We decided to open-up this part of the building for appropriation by the public.

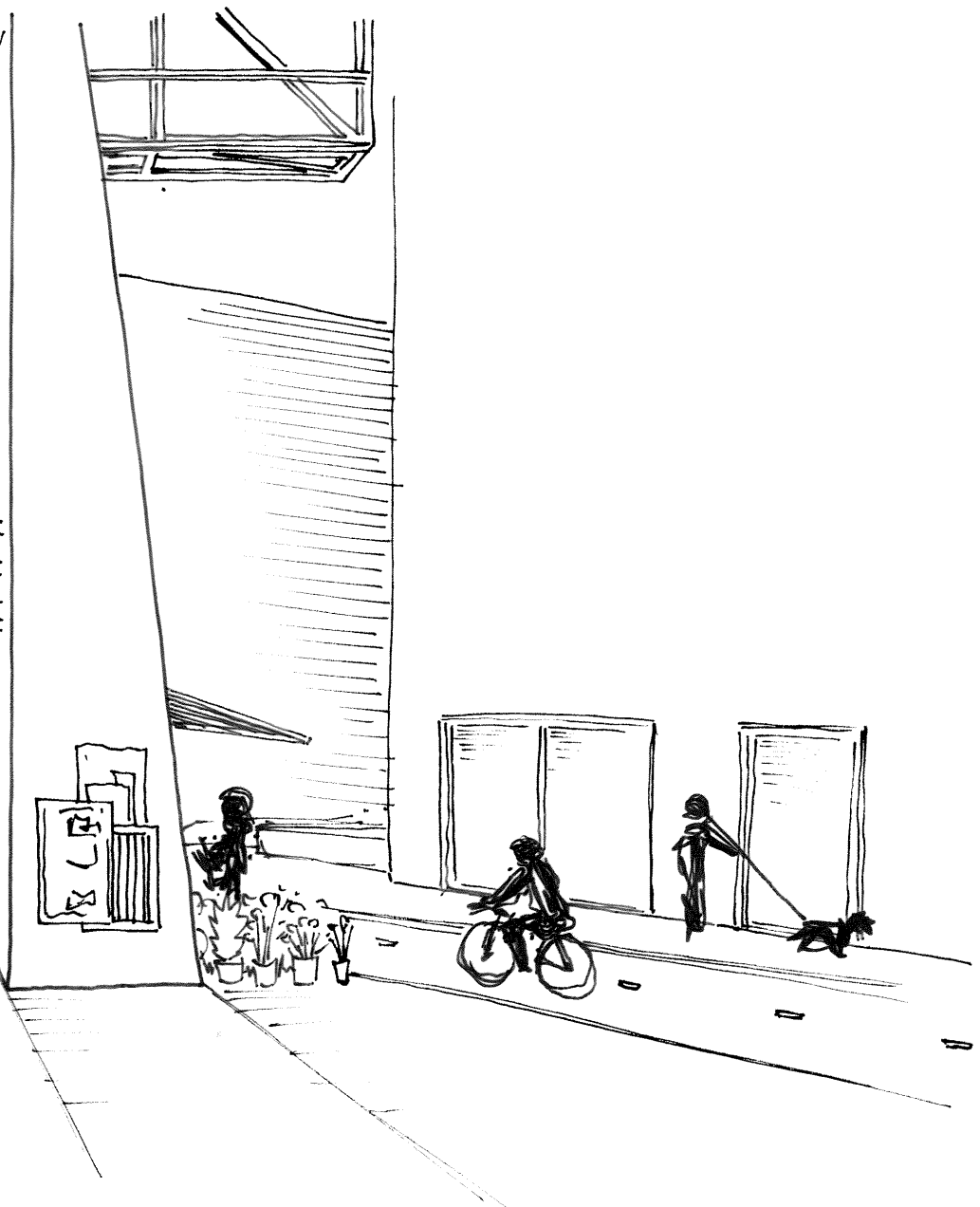
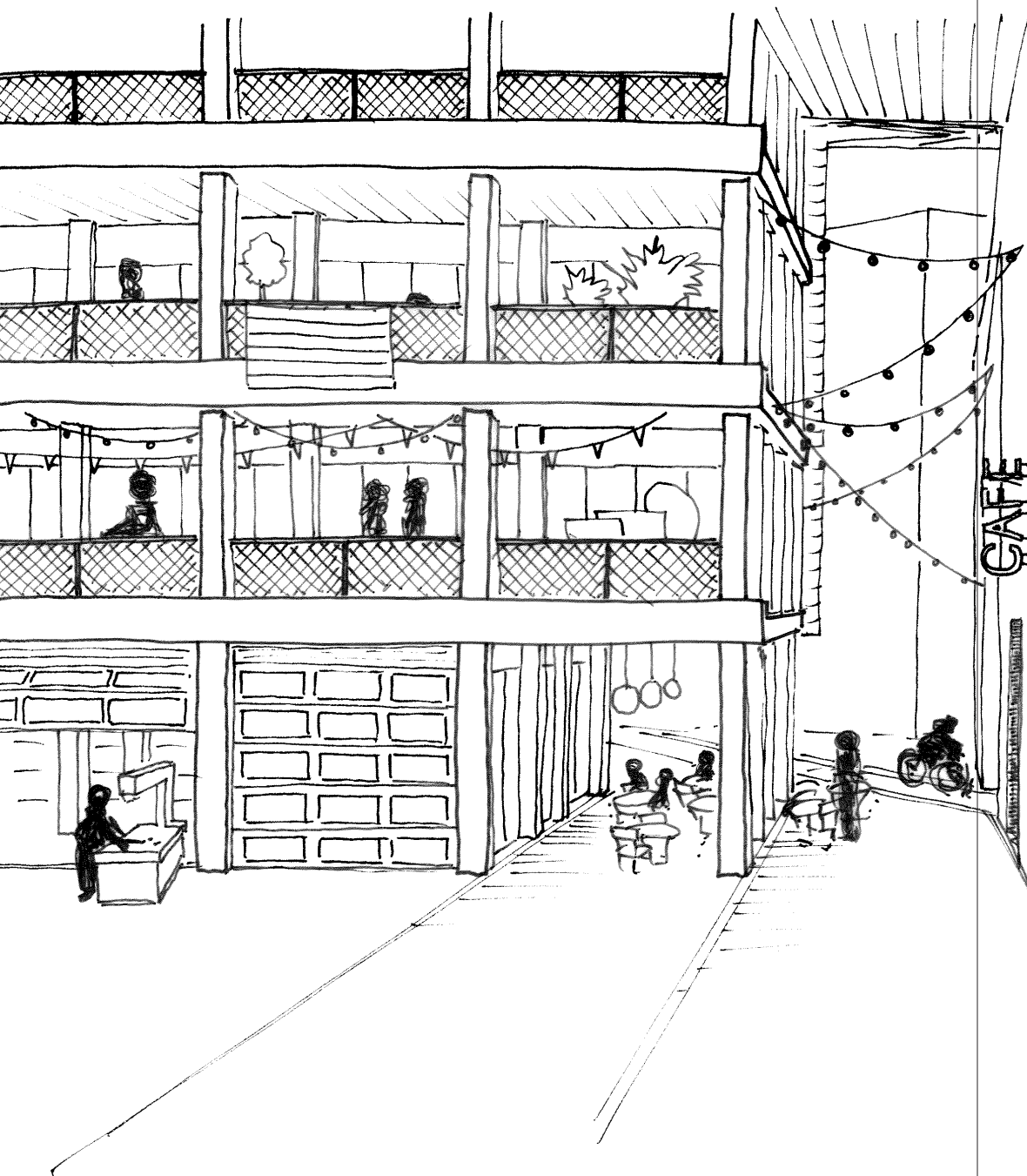
## scene 3: Piece of a city

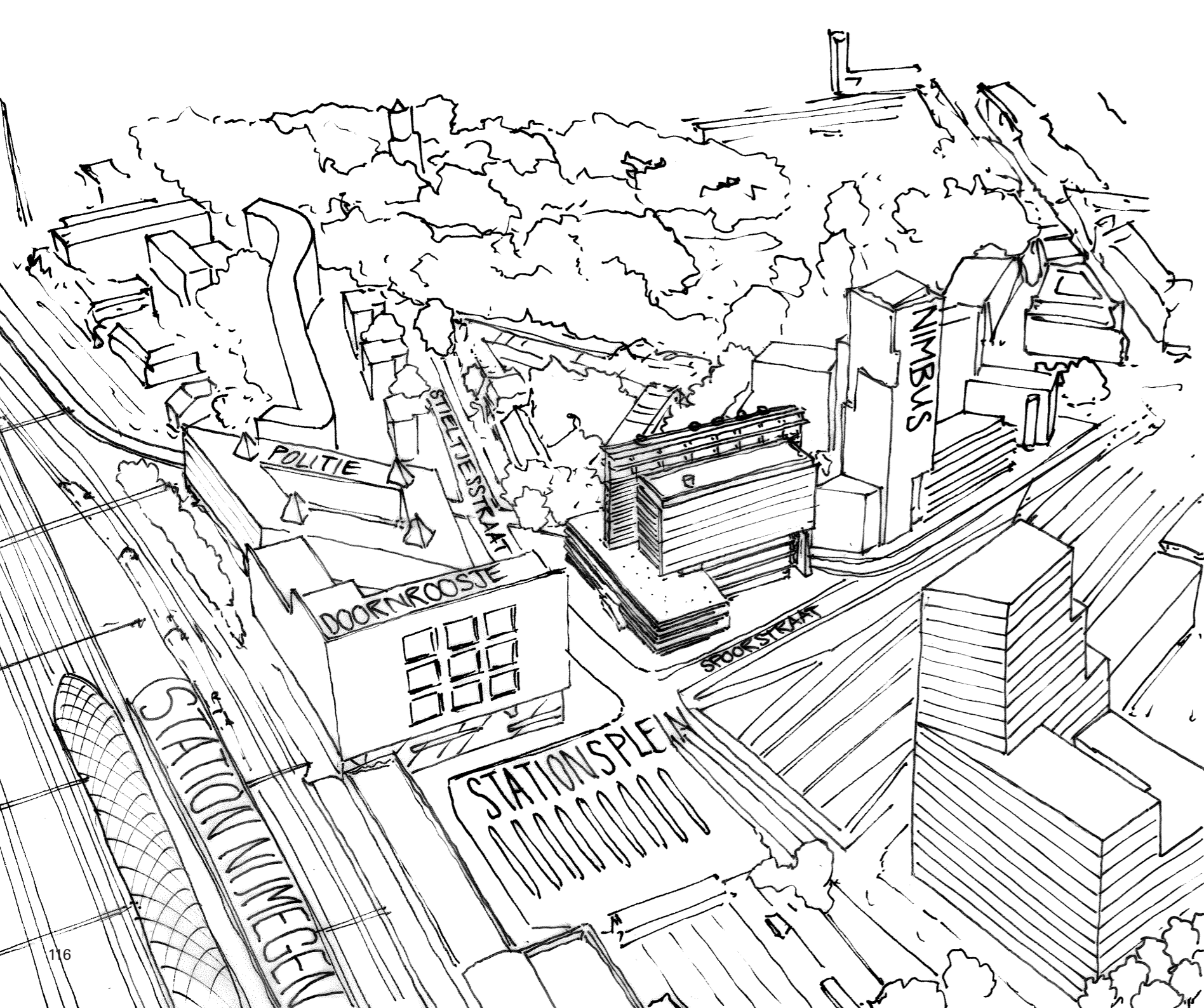
*[10:52 – As the group and the architect follow their way along the south side of the building, the architect starts explaining the reintegration of the building within the urban fabric of Nijmegen. Not merely in a physical way, but in non-physical ways too.]*

HOUSINGTHEORIST 2: Porous building structures that allow the building to become part of the urban fabric are quite common in housing commons. We know many examples in Zürich. How did you deal with this as a designer?

THE ARCHITECT: During the design process the prospective dwellers, the city of Nijmegen and I had extensive meetings. In the first phases of the project, when the municipality was still considering demolishing the building, we had to provide compelling arguments to prevent this from happening. For obvious reasons, the integration of the building in the urban fabric became an important subject during these meetings. The existing building functioned as a floating island and was perceived as an urban obstacle. To resolve this, we extended the bike path that runs down from the Waal river. By doing so we connected the Waal more directly to the city center of Nijmegen and succeeded in activating the public square on the north side of the building. However, the newly extended bike path trajectory clashed with the existing building. We decided to preserve this moment of conflict and took down a section of the existing building. The new structural solution, supporting the upper storeys, was developed as a gateway towards the city and includes a flower kiosk.

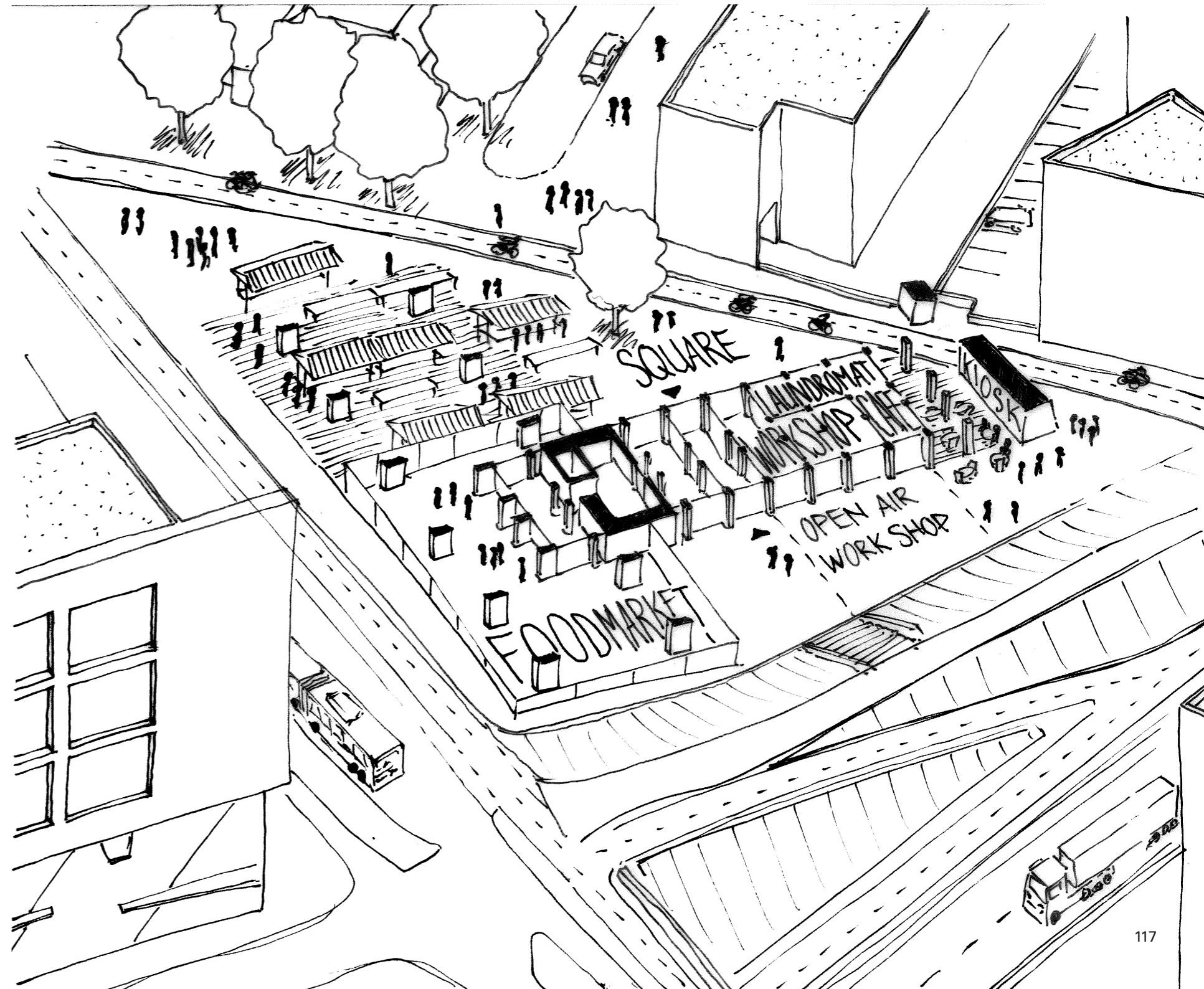
ANNE KOCKELKORN: This approach towards urban planning reminds to the *Kalkbreite* competition: “*Ein neues Stück Stadt*”!

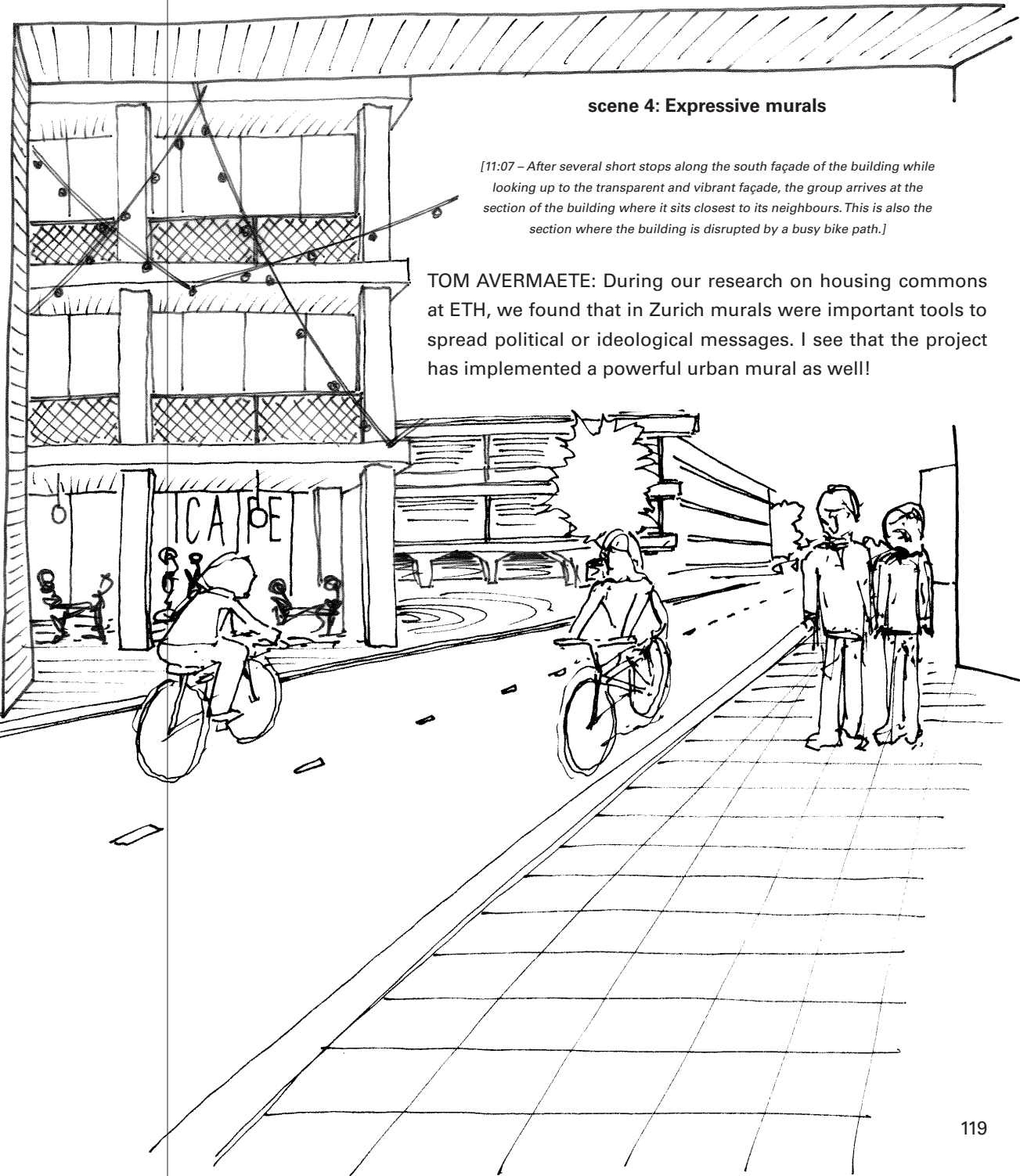
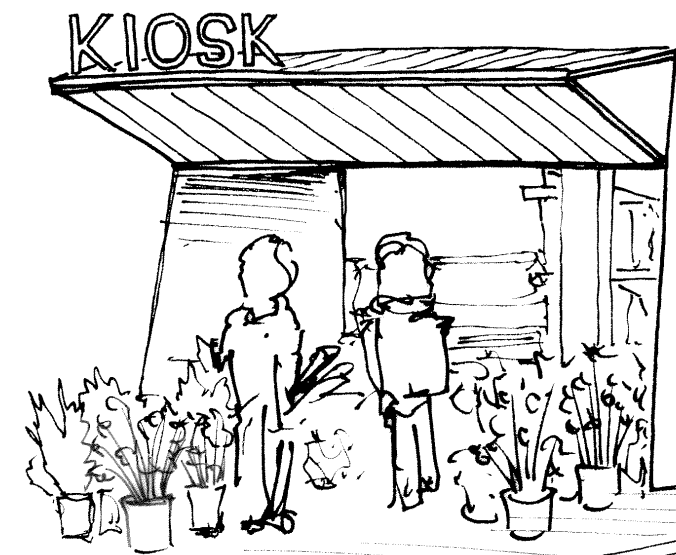




**< within the city**  
 The building is located at the nexus of the Stieltjesstraat and the Spoorstraat. The central train station of Nijmegen sits in front of the building as well as the city's police office and a popular music centre Doornroosje. The bike path that runs along the train tracks is now connected to the city centre and runs through the building.

**piece of a city >**  
 The ground floor of the building uses the existing columns. By doing so, it provides excellent flexibility and becomes a porous urban structure through which people can move freely. The bike path breaks the orthogonality of the plot and defines the public square on the north side accommodating markets and public daily life. The south side of the building opens towards the busy Spoorstraat and functions as an open-air workshop space for dwellers and people from the city of Nijmegen.





**scene 4: Expressive murals**

*[11:07 – After several short stops along the south façade of the building while looking up to the transparent and vibrant façade, the group arrives at the section of the building where it sits closest to its neighbours. This is also the section where the building is disrupted by a busy bike path.]*

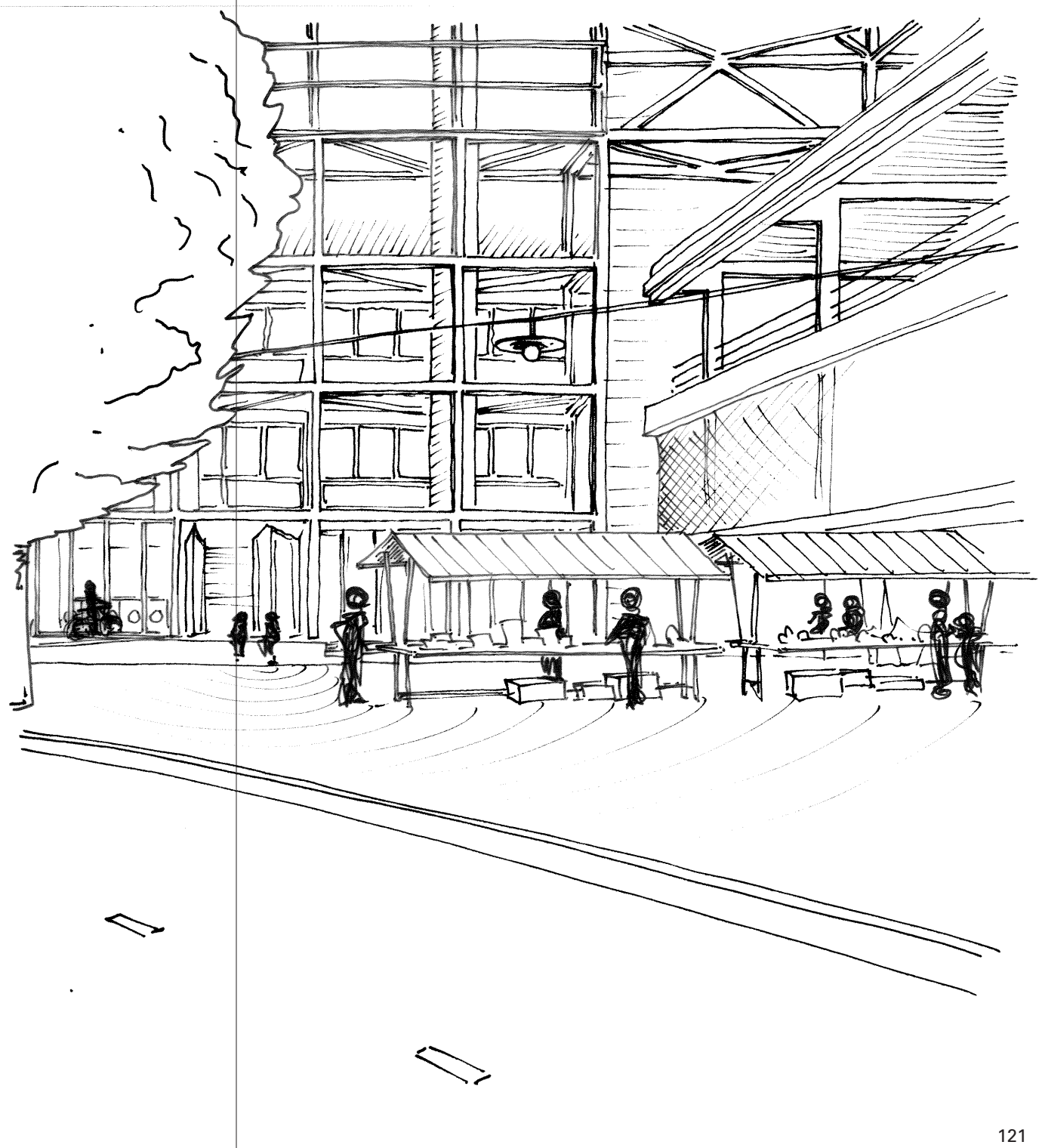
**TOM AVERMAETE:** During our research on housing commons at ETH, we found that in Zurich murals were important tools to spread political or ideological messages. I see that the project has implemented a powerful urban mural as well!

## scene 5: Urban commons

[11:24 – After the group has passed underneath the building, they arrive at the public square located at the north side of the building. At this hour of the day, the square is still enriched by morning sunrays.]

HOUSING THEORIST 2: Housing commons can serve underserved areas, because of their underlying principles of non-speculation. Since housing commons are not forced to return a profit, they are not subjugated to commercial thinking. Consequently, housing commons are able to push more innovative design decisions which are positively effecting their neighborhood. So to say, they are contributing to the commons of the city.

THE ARCHITECT: Exactly! This what we have done in Nijmegen as well. The public square on the north side used to be a rather unattractive parking lot. Nowadays, the public square is determined by a vibrant plinth accommodating a cafe, laundromat, and a workshop. Furthermore, every Thursday and Sunday a local food market is held at the square and the square is kept alive 24/7 by the extended bike path. The location of the building's entrance, at its heart, stimulates movements and interaction beyond the fringes of the plot. These aspects contribute to the urban commons of this project. Furthermore, a public restroom is located within the gateway, next to the flower kiosk, and the square is enriched by a public water fountain.



## scene 6: Building entrances

[11:43 – The group arrives at the main entrance of the building which is located at the hearth of the building, the square, and the plot. The group follows the architect inside where the architect starts explaining the function of the ground floor of the building.]

THE ARCHITECT: We decided to locate the building's entrance at its heart. By doing so we stimulate interaction between dwellers and other users of the building. The entrance area of the building

makes use of some nifty elements, such as a small, elevated bench in front of the post boxes. It allows people to comfortably get rid of their bags while opening their mailbox. The building entrance is designed as a large and central space within the building in which more types of programmes come together to further enhance interaction. The dwellers of the building can use of another, more discrete, entrance. However, by making this entrance area more attractive we stimulate people to enter the building through here.



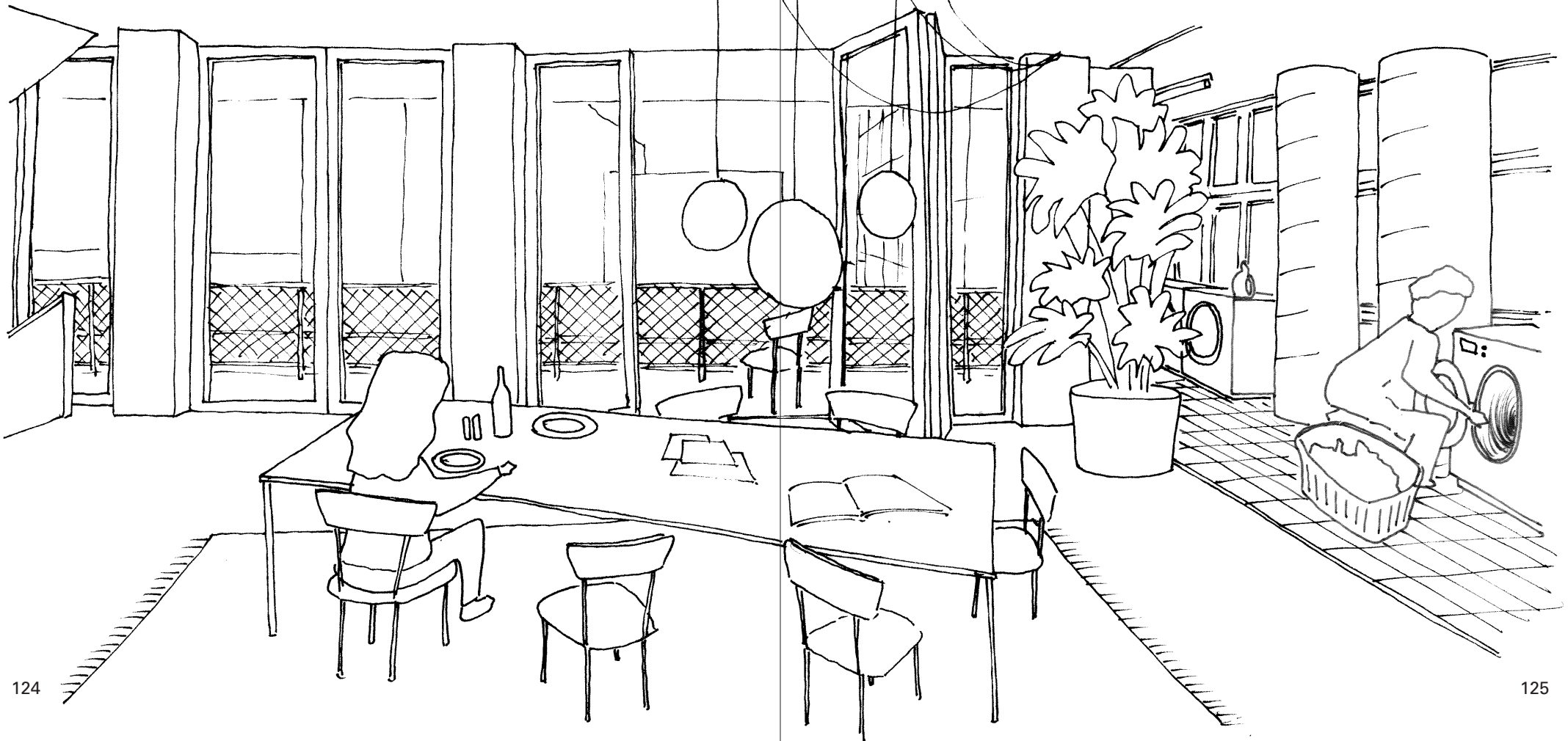
### scene 7: More with less

[11:59 – One of the two elevators takes the group up to its eighth floor. As the group steps out of the elevator they immediately enter one of the collective spaces of the dwellings. It is clearly appropriated by the dwellers in their own unique way. The space is providing its users with a panoramic view of the city of Nijmegen.]

HOUSING THEORIST 2: While some facilities are not provided within personal dwellings, these 'missing' facilities are provided in collective spaces. This is quite common in housing commons.

HOUSING THEORIST 1: Indeed, sharing facilities strengthens the housing commons! *Kalkbreite* in Zürich makes use of the 'library of things', where the dwellers can share their tool for other dwellers to use. The same concept has been used in this building, right?

THE ARCHITECT: Yes, this building has a 'library of things' as well! Furthermore, washing machines, dryers, collective kitchens, and collective spaces are situated here, at the west side of the building. Dwellers decide what type of programme is implemented: gym, dining area, yoga space, music studio...





## scene 8: Dwelling typologies

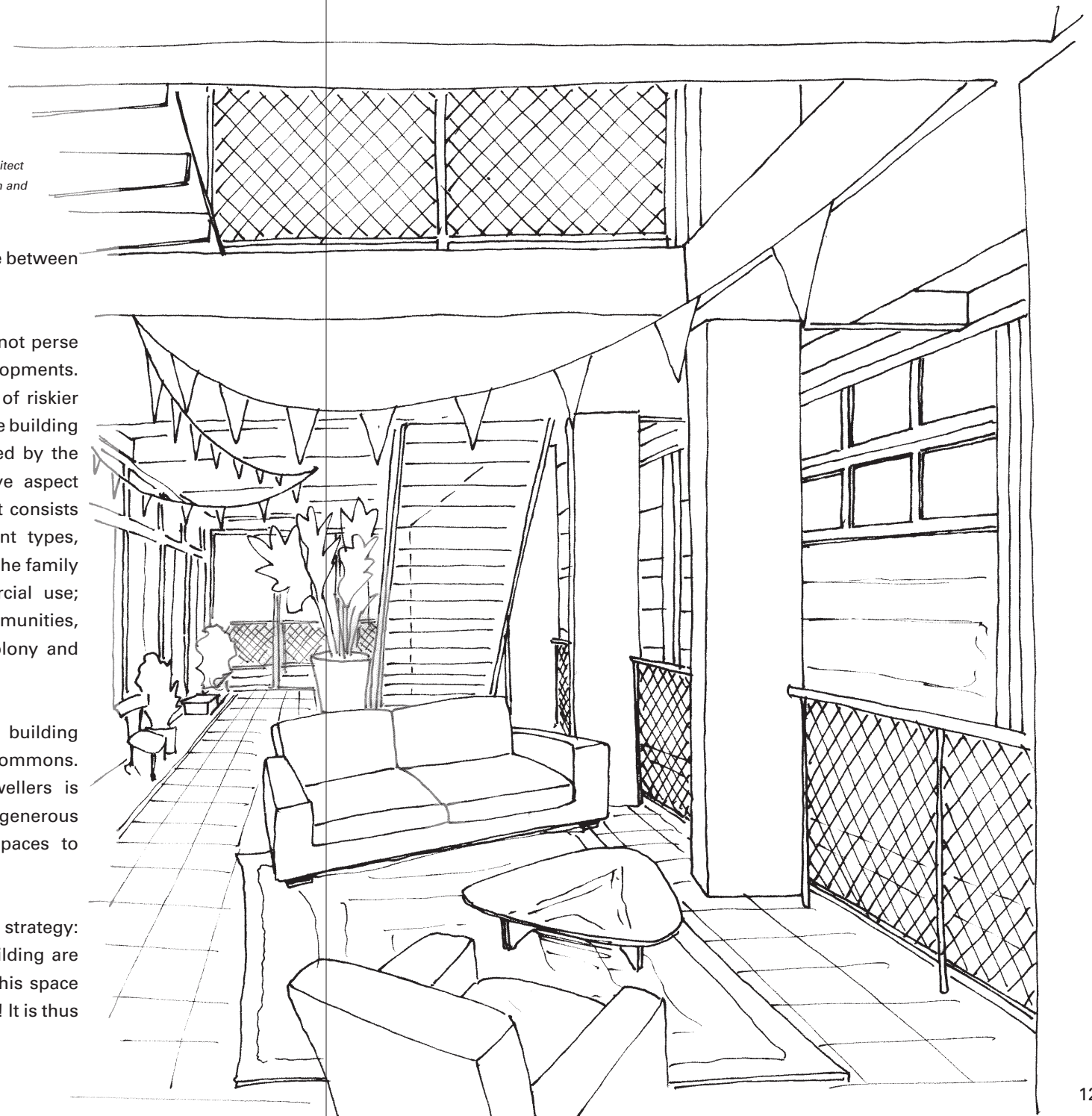
[12:20 – After having seen the collective spaces, the group and the architect continue towards the collective but more private walkways of the eighth and ninth floor.]

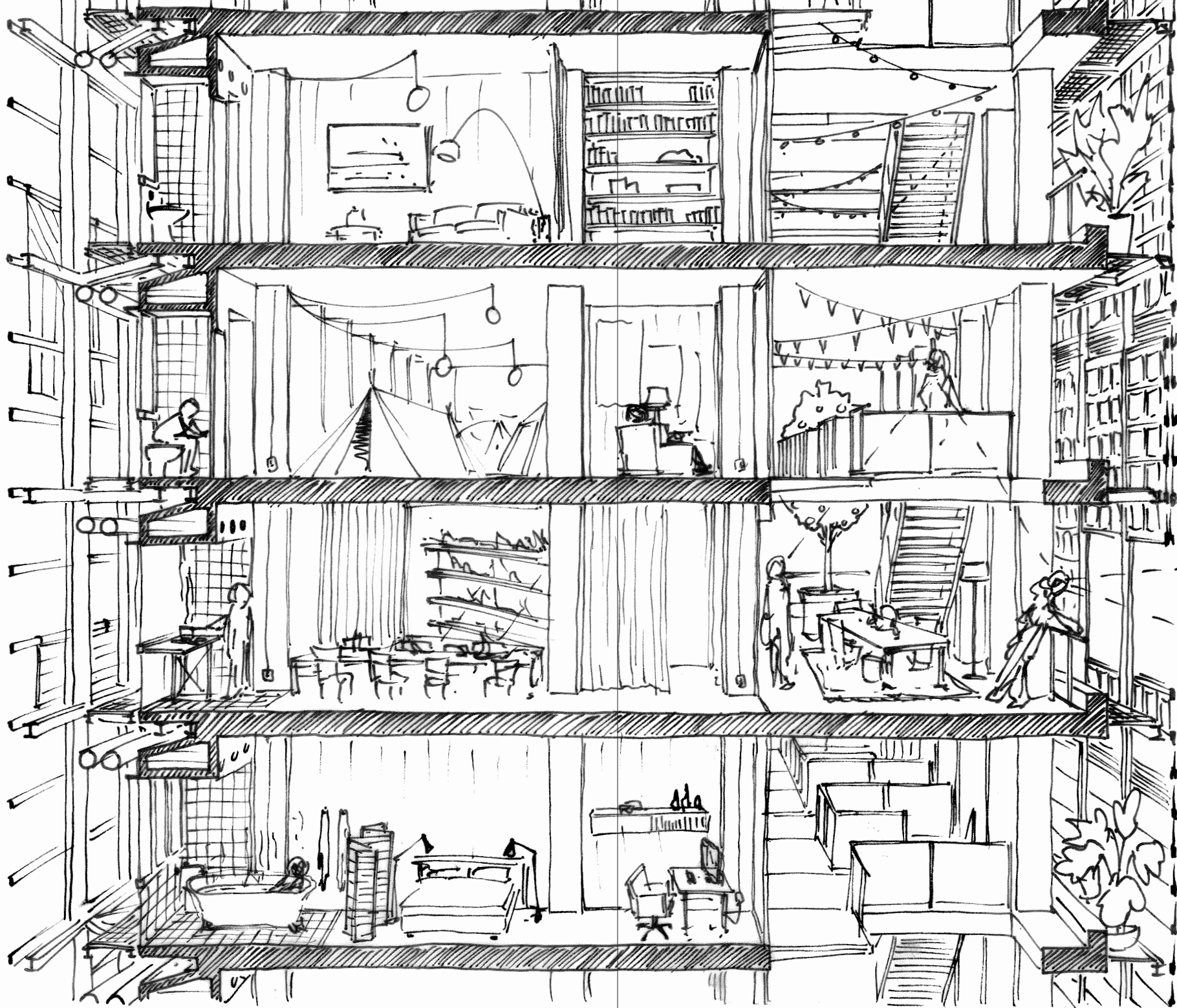
THE ARCHITECT: Irina, how would depict the difference between housing commons and traditional housing?

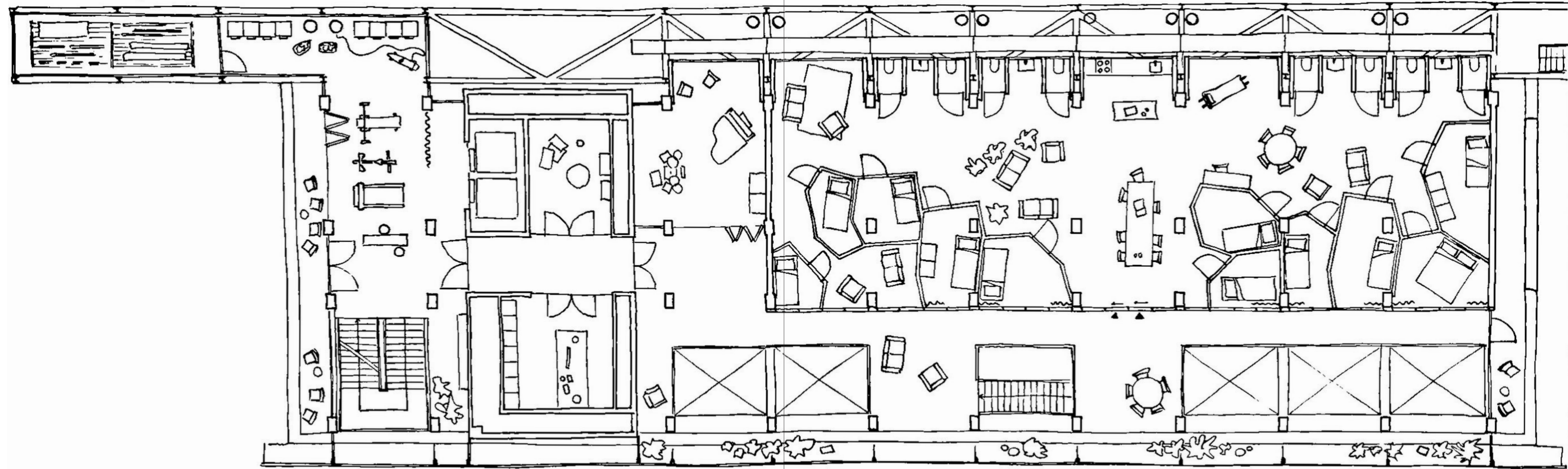
IRINA DAVIDOVICI: In Zürich, housing commons are not perse distinguishable from other, more conventional developments. One mark of distinction is cooperatives' acceptance of riskier approaches: experimental apartment types, sustainable building technologies, the use of unlikely locations overlooked by the housing market. Architecturally, the most innovative aspect of the recent cooperative developments is internal: it consists of in-house communal facilities and new apartment types, emphasizing forms of communal living alternative to the family model. Mixed residential, communal, and commercial use; implies the idea of dense instantly lively, porous communities, deliberately contrasting both the perimeter block colony and the isolated suburban building.

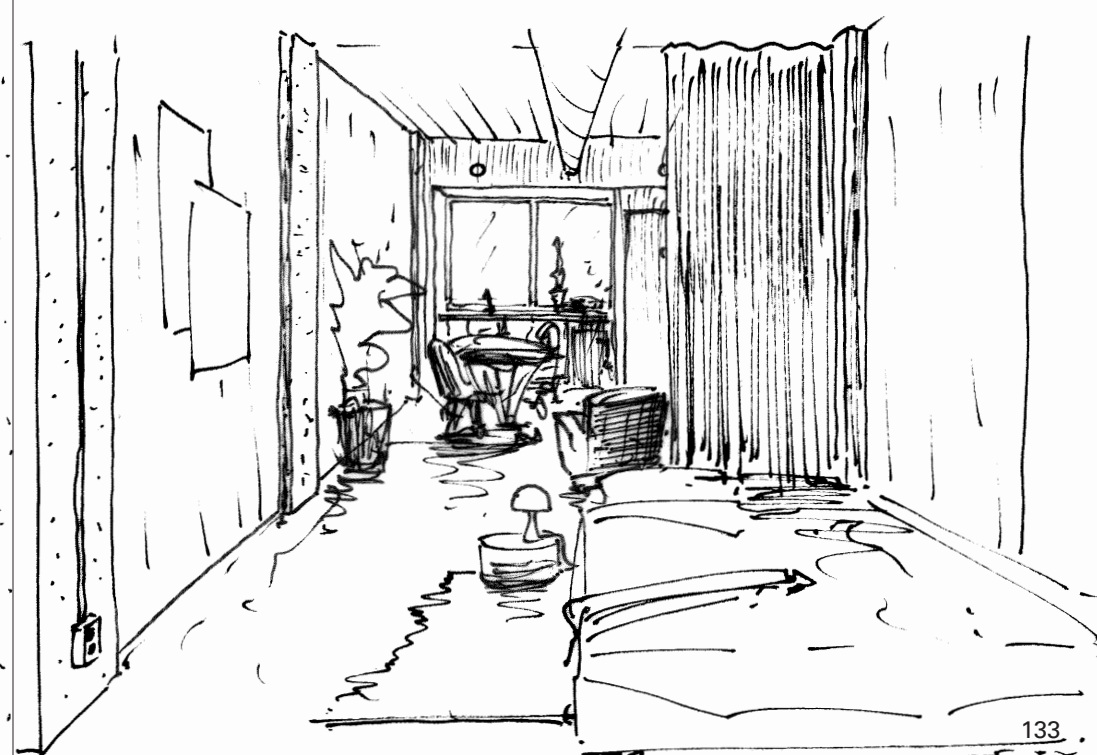
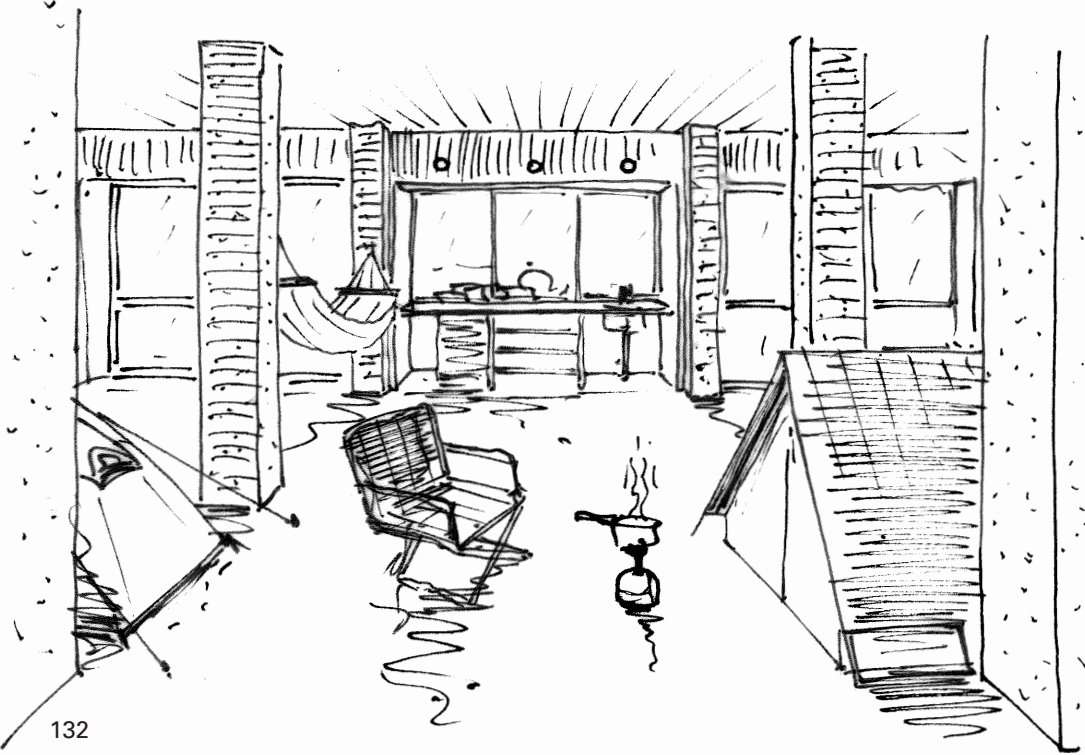
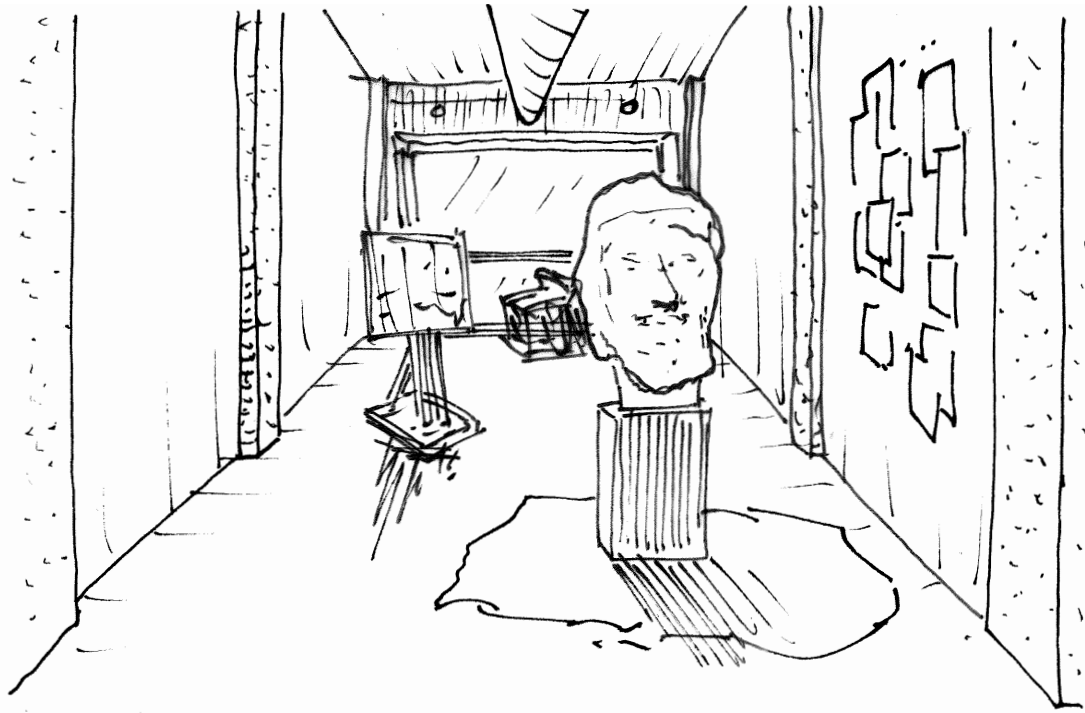
MIRA NEKOVA: Indeed, the commonality within the building is extremely important in the case of housing commons. Therefore, stimulating interaction between the dwellers is crucial. Architecturally, this can be done through generous walkways, collective spaces, and double height spaces to connect two floors physically.

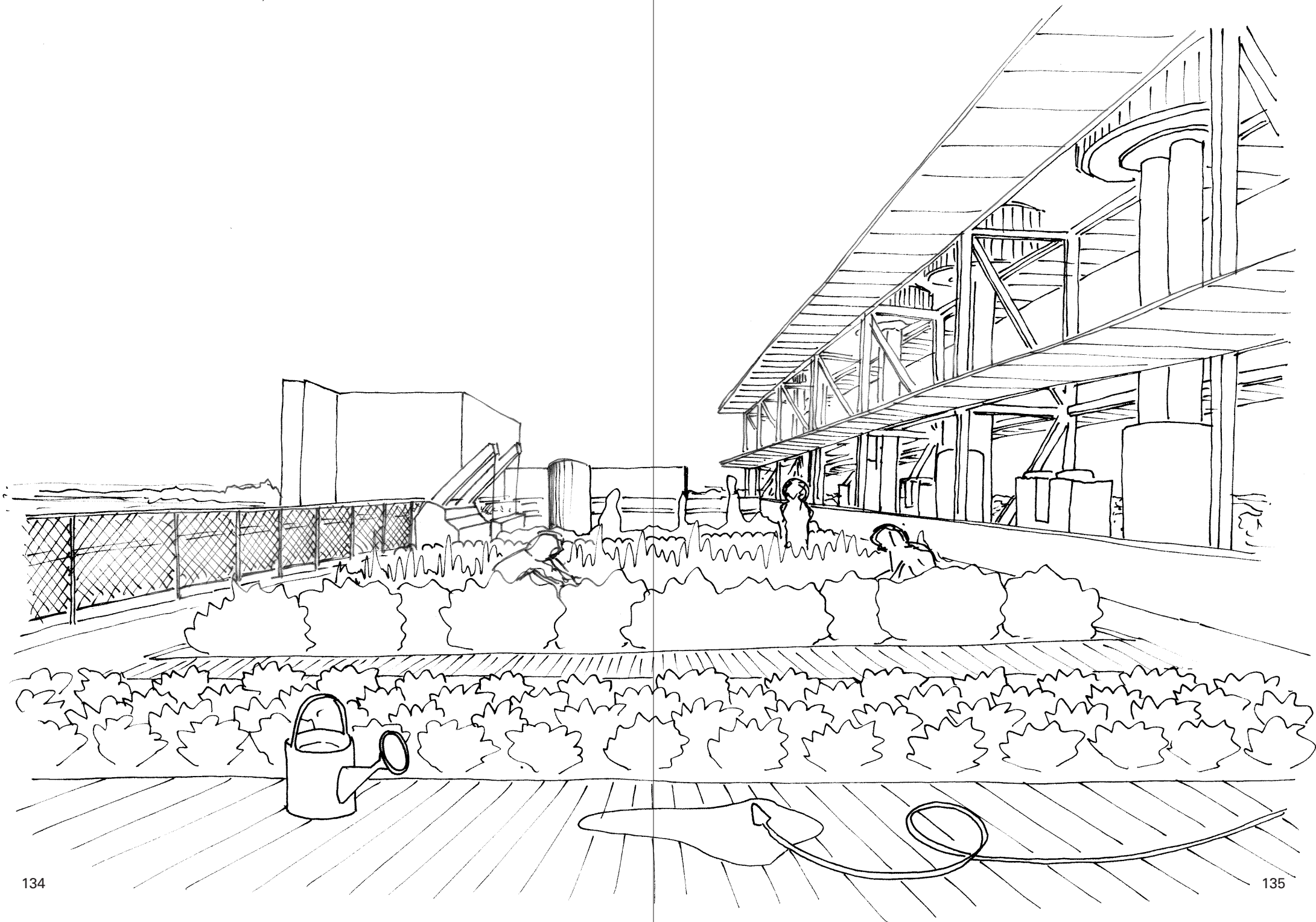
THE ARCHITECT: In this building we opted for such a strategy: The generous walkways on the south side of the building are clad with operable garagedoors that can transform this space into a giant balcony facing the city during the summer! It is thus a pleasant space all year round.











## scene 9: Flexibility and adaptability

*[12:55 – The group decides to go up the roof of the building by using the staircase which is leading them towards the roof garden.]*

THE ARCHITECT: From the roof garden you have a good view on the technical heart of the building. To guarantee optimal flexibility and adaptability within the building, we decided to place the installations externally on the north side of the building. This technical slab is topped by wind turbines, rainwater storage, solar systems, and other installations. By doing so we succeeded in disconnecting all systems with a lifespan shorter than 25 years from the building itself. These systems often develop faster than the buildings themselves. Therefore, it makes sense not to integrate them, but to rather design them as an ephemeral external structure that allows modifications over time. Consequently, the building remains free from technical shafts and installations and allows complete appropriation by its dwellers. The technical slab became a highly efficient and ultralight structure. The concrete structure of the building on the other hand is treated as a dumb and generous space to be appropriated according to the needs to the dwellers.

## scene 10: Public and private

*[13:21 – The architect guides the group to the third and public floor of the building via the evacuation staircases. This was not the most logical route to arrive at the third floor. However, the architect simply thought this route would be a more fun experience for the group.]*

THE ARCHITECT: Here we are, on the third floor of the building. This floor sits at the same level as the roof of the podium. Therefore, we decided to use this floor as a public and collective space that can accommodate unexpected future uses. For now, the space is used for small concerts, organized by the residents of the building as well as other people from Nijmegen. However, many other functions have preceded its current state. Maybe we could ask one of the dwellers to elaborate more on the purpose of this floor.

DWELLER 1: Being able to give purpose to this space is a pure luxury for us. Every month, we come together within the public assembly within the podium, and we discuss several matters. One of these matters is the use of this floor. Dwellers and citizens are invited to pitch their ideas and afterwards a democratic voting system determines the future purpose of this space.

DWELLER 2: For some time, this space was used for workshop and office spaces for young entrepreneurs. Some dwellers assisted them during the arrangement of several legal matters, for instance. We also hosted some artists in residence a few years ago. This floor became their studio and exhibition space! It was amazing to walk by every now and then to see the artists working on their projects.



## scene 11: Regulatory frameworks

*[13:48 – The group arrives at café Blauw located at the ground floor of the Podiumtoren. The architect has reserved a large table where the group sits down to have a quick lunch. The tour has made them hungry. Not only in terms of food but in terms of more inside information as well.]*

ARIE LENGKEEK [while enjoying his sandwich]: I'm curious to hear more on the regulatory frameworks of the project. Such as the timeline of project and how you managed the financial story.

THE ARCHITECT: The project initially started around 2026. At that moment, it became clear that the agreement between the municipality and the refugee shelter would come to an end. Together with the prospective dwellers we started developing ideas and concepts. During the design phase we worked closely together with the municipality of Nijmegen. Many aspects of the project depended on their cooperation. We worked closely together with Rabobank as well by making use of the financial structure inherited from De Nieuwe Meent. In the end we obtained a loan from Rabobank covering seventy percent of the total budget. Six percent was covered by the dwellers themselves. The remaining twenty-four percent was covered by the government through funds. As you can see (and probably know by now) the current financial climate regarding housing commons shares many characteristics with the Swiss financial system. At the end of 2029, we obtained the building permit and consequently the construction started. The building was finished in November 2031. During the past 12 years, the building has changed in use and will probably change again in the future. The programme of a school, hotel or office could also work perfectly. However, until we solve the housing shortage in the Netherlands, we will likely stick with the current purpose of this building: housing!

## scene 12: Long term thinking

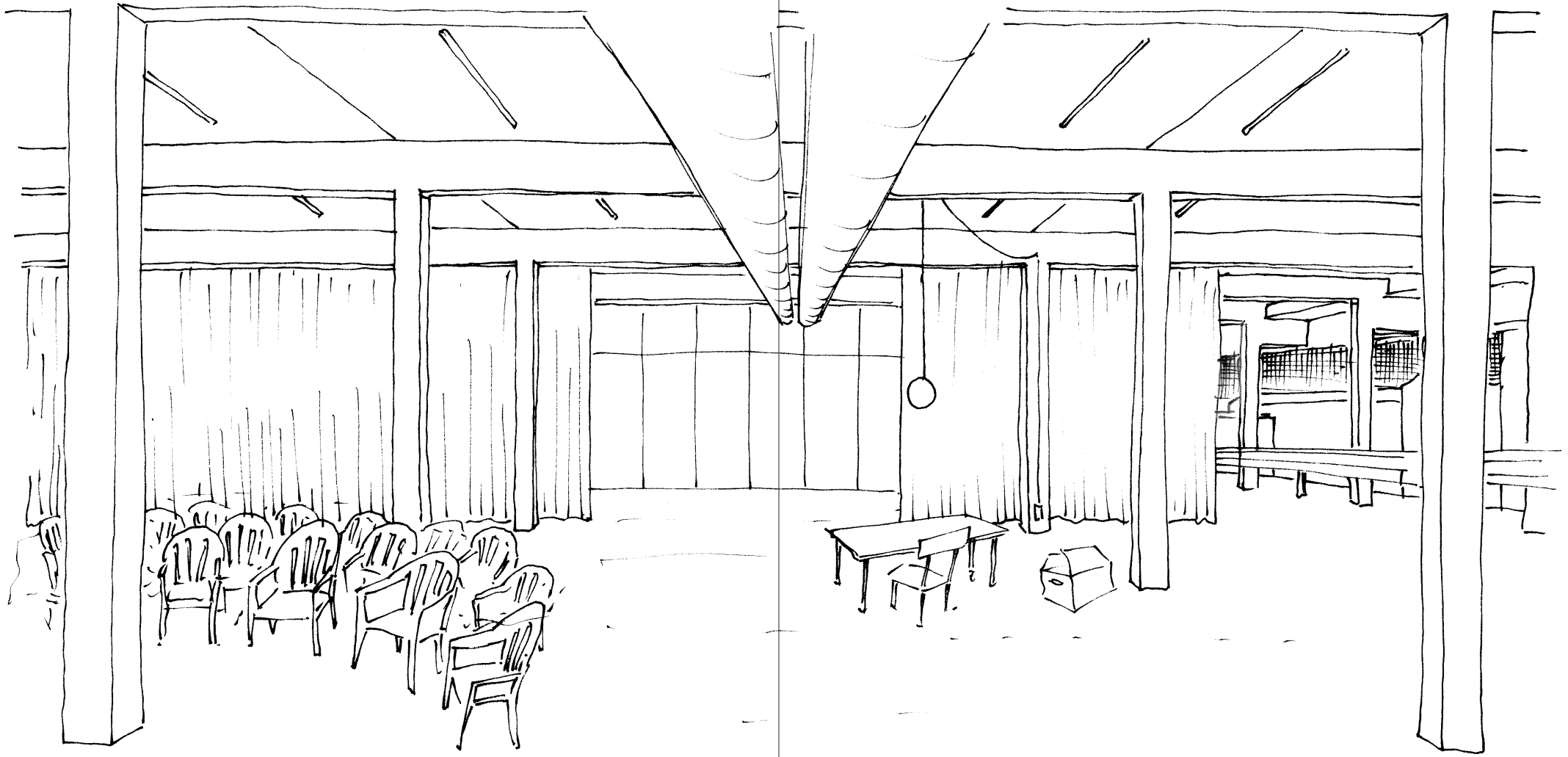
*[15:01 – When everyone has finished their lunch, the group is still very much interested in seeing the Podium section of the building. They leave the café and enter this section of the building by traversing the public square again.]*

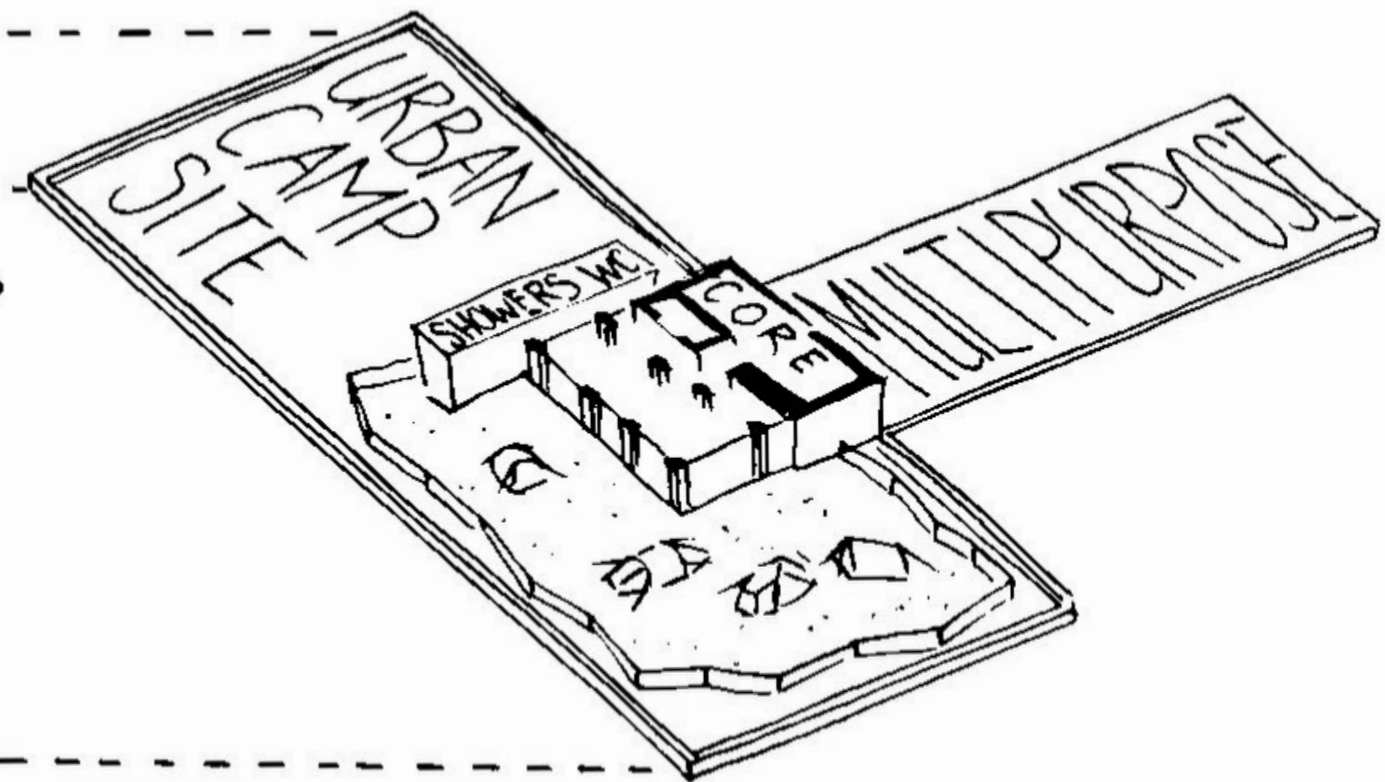
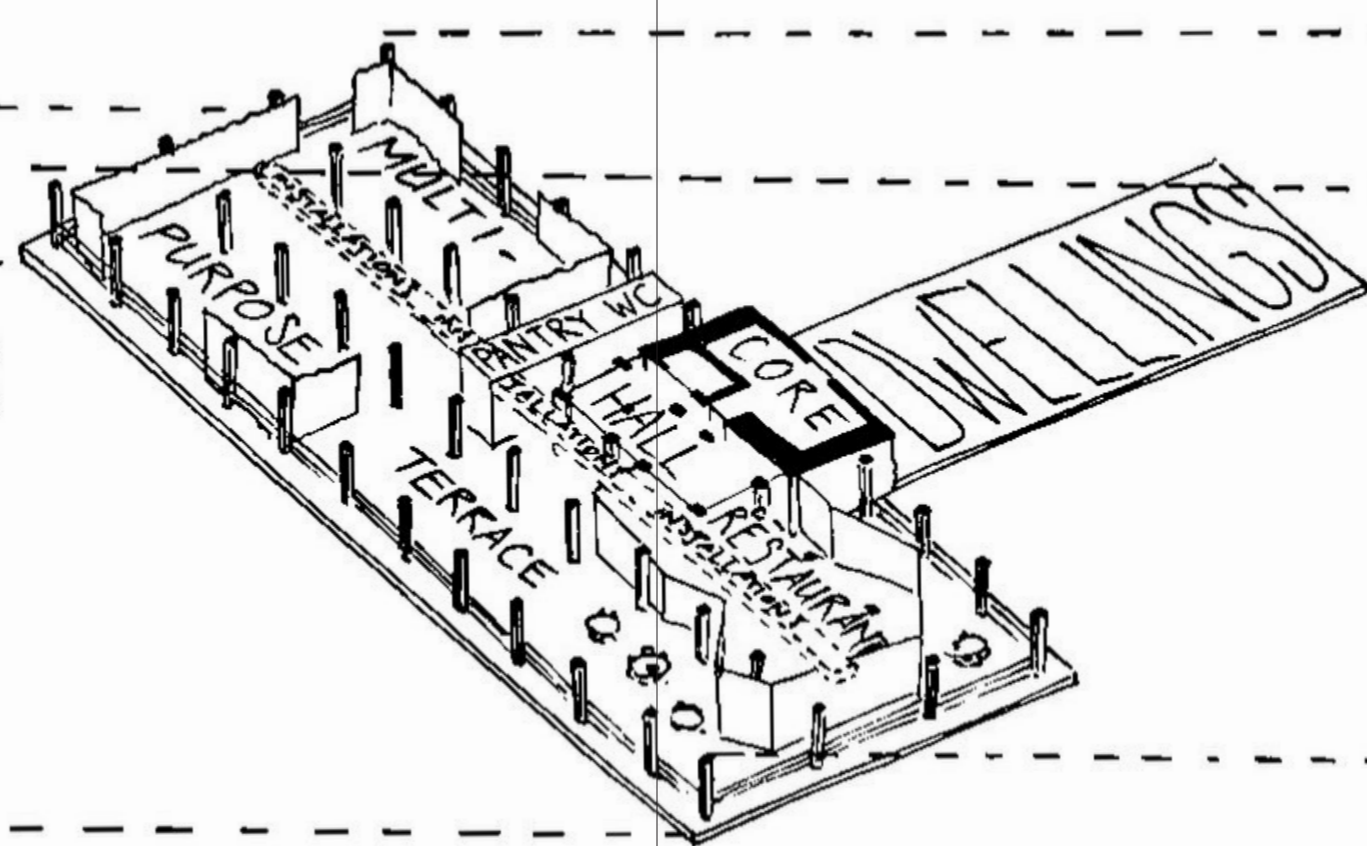
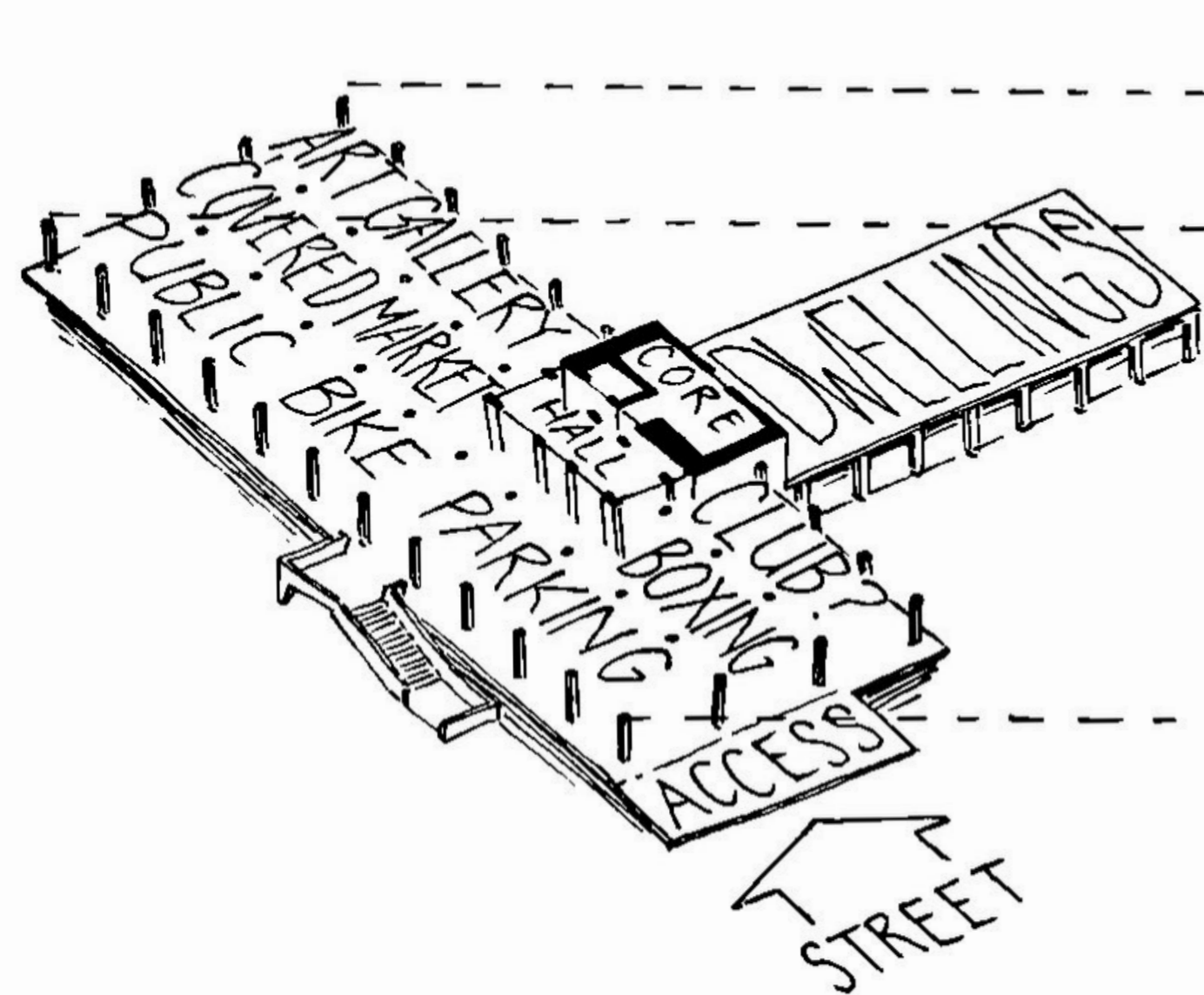
ANNE KOCKELKORN: As we have discussed earlier, the fact that housing commons are not subject to speculation leads to a different understanding with respect to design decisions. Furthermore, in many cases, the public benefit of the project is inscribed within the core values of the project. This results in a more considerate way of seeking for new tenants and users, since any form of pressure – because of commercial goals – is non existing. Therefore, housing commons can think and act on long term decision making.

THE ARCHITECT: Indeed! Therefore, we intentionally left the podium of the building vacant for future unexpected purposes. During the first years after the project's completion, the first floor of the podium served as a bike parking. Since the municipality was updating the public bike parking in front of the central train station, the bikes needed to be stored elsewhere. Nowadays, the podium hosts a sheltered and non-sheltered food market on the ground floor, a large exhibition and lecture space on the first floor and a pop-up restaurant on the second floor. By doing so we returned this part of the building to city!

HOUSING CRITIC 1: This is an excellent example of housing commons serving as architectural typologies accommodating the constantly changing commons and its society in which we live nowadays.







## **act 5: The dinner**

### **cast**

Anne Kockelkorn, Annet Akkerma, Arie Lengkeek, Benedikt Altrogge, Ewoud Dekker, Jan Bovy, Jonah van Delden, Mira Nekova, Paulien Klap.

### **setting**

The group concludes its day in a pop-up restaurant which is currently located in the podium section of the building. A wonderful dinner is being served by the restaurant which is run by two dwellers of 'Het Rek'. The group reflects on its conversations and thoughts of today and look towards a future in which housing commons are part of the Dutch society. To summarize the day the different speaker groups, elaborate on the compelling arguments which are most important to them.

## scene 1: The dinner

*[19:23 – The group of housing commons experts has gathered around the dinner table. They are about to enjoy a wonderful dinner prepared by some of the dwellers. Prior to the dinner the architect starts its speech.]*

THE ARCHITECT: First of all, I would like to thank you for joining our guided tour through the building today. It was an honour to explain and showcase the project in greater detail to you as housing commons experts. As the guided tour has come to an end, I have prepared some words in which I reflect on the design process and the design for the building itself.

Prior to the design phase and during my studies in Delft, I have researched Dutch housing commons (anti-speculative or cooperative housing) in greater depth. The research project was guided by the concept of spatial agency. The concept of spatial agency aims to put architectural knowledge in a much wider context and instigates to act transformatively inside and outside the system. As a result, I aimed to put my architectural knowledge in a much wider context by reimagining a transformed Dutch housing market. In the end, the aim of this research project was to acquire more knowledge and feeling regarding the development of housing commons in the Netherlands and to ultimately establish an integral conversation regarding this topic between the several stakeholders (academic, architect, bank, cooperative, critic, dweller, developer, municipality).

During this research project several precedents were brought to my attention and many design principles were identified which were used throughout other housing commons. The lessons from my analysis on the precedents and the distilled design principles have informed the design process and the final design. On the other hand, during the design process I faced the challenge of designing a housing project within a

rather conservative Dutch housing market at that time, during the 2020s. Fictocriticism gave me the opportunity to deal with the Dutch housing market in an experimental and powerful way. Through using fiction, I shaped a speculative reality to showcase other ways of housing within the Netherlands when we (as academics, architects, banks, cooperatives, critics, dwellers, developers, municipalities) act differently. Fictocriticism, fits the concept of spatial agency very well, since spatial agency opts for the use of other tools besides the act of building.

As part of the concept of spatial agency, I took the liberty to address other political and spatial concerns as well – besides reimagining the Dutch housing market. Back in the 2020s – during my architecture studies in Delft – demolition of existing buildings was depicted as the default instead of the exception. Existing buildings were relentlessly assessed by municipalities, developers and architects as objects restraining future growth. This accounted to many typologies, among them obsolete office towers. The transformation of office towers in the Netherlands was not flourishing during the 2020s and many transformed office towers were unsuccessful in my opinion. Consequently, the transformation of office towers was not depicted as “sexy” and therefore not attractive to architects, resulting in more unsuccessful examples. When the city of Nijmegen commissioned me in 2025 to start the process of transforming the former building of the tax authorities in Nijmegen, I was destined to use this building as an exemplary transformed office tower. By doing so, I aimed to establish a political tool to stir up the discourse on housing typologies within the Netherlands. The purpose of fictocriticism helped me in many ways throughout this process. Furthermore, by working on a project outside of the Randstad, I aimed to shift our relentless focus from the Randstad to the Bandstad. Back in the 2020s most developments were happening or were planned within the Randstad. However, around that same period many (semi-)governmental reports showed a general distrust from the people from the Bandstad towards the Randstad resulting in rising polarisation within the Netherlands.

Through reimagining the Dutch housing market and by the integration of topics such as the office tower transformation and a shift in thinking from the Randstad to the Bandstad, I aspired to encourage others (academics, architects, banks, cooperatives, critics, dwellers, developers, municipalities) to critically rethink these topics for themselves as well. The research project aimed to establish an imaginative reality in which the housing market would be transformed by the upheaval of housing commons. The design project on the other hand showcased my investigation towards a different way of doing architecture related to the concept of spatial agency. Combined, I hope to transfer these thoughts and findings to others and to continue this collective process.

*[the dinner starts and the play ends]*

**appendices**

154 Model pictures

166 Drawing set

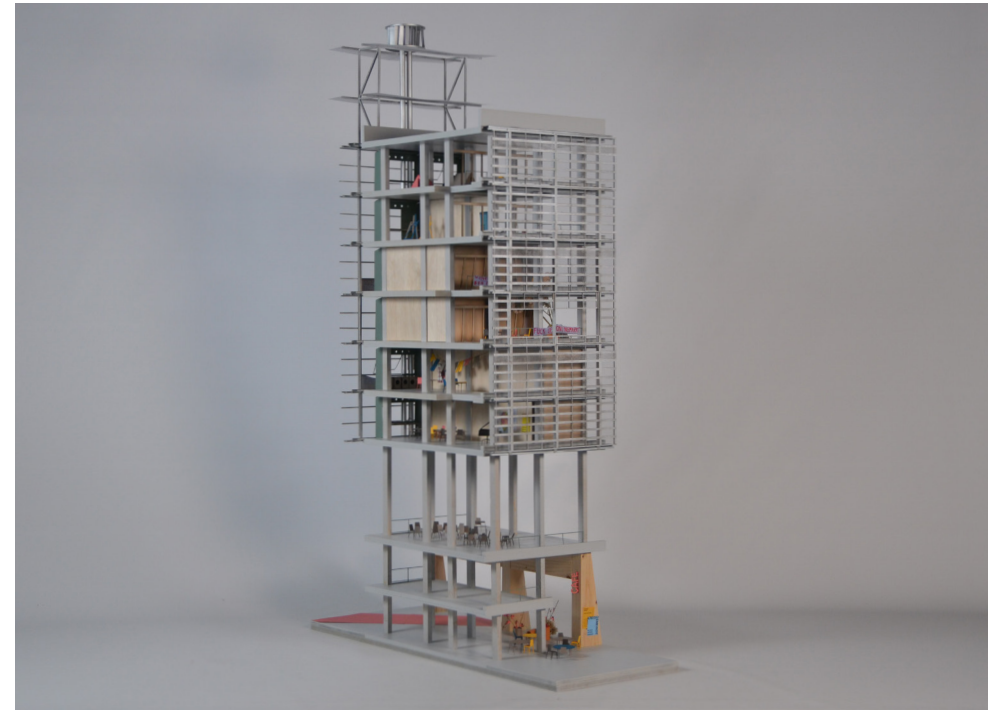
192 Computer generated images

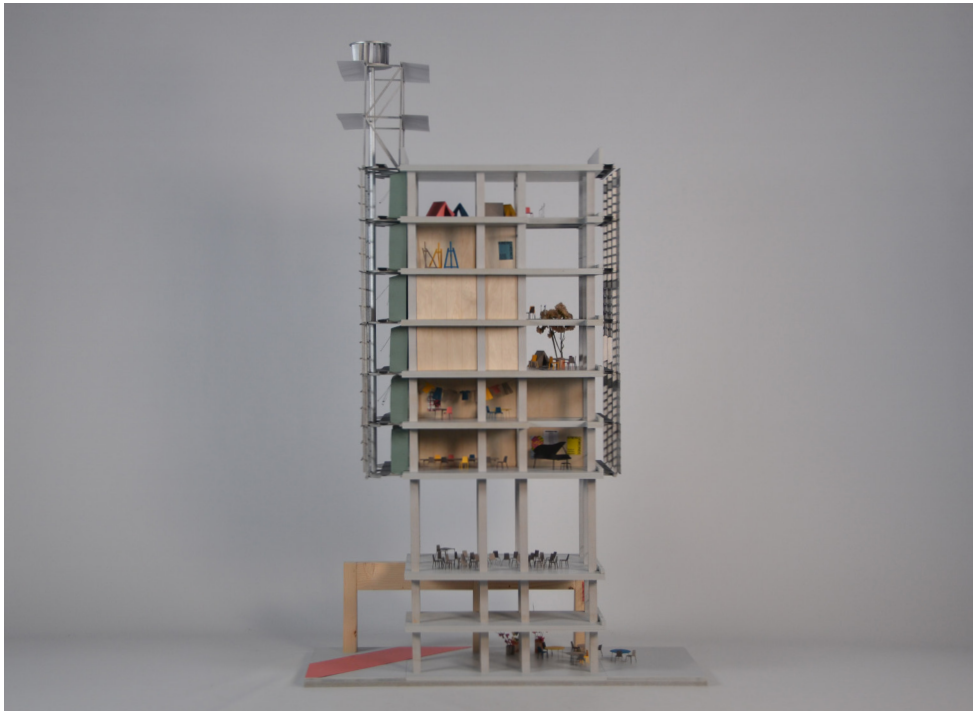
### model 1.33

A demonstration of how the building can be appropriated by its dwellers over time. The structural grid of the model exemplifies the existing concrete structure of the building. However, the appropriated spaces within the structural grid are excerpts selected throughout the building and brought together within one three-dimensional section. The structural grid becomes a cabinet displaying possibilities of appropriation. The model is concluded on both sides by two contrasting facades. The north facade functioning as a highly intelligent and rational facade accommodating installations and shafts. The south facade functions as a transparent and light veil to display how the building is appropriated by its dwellers.

*(80 x 33 x 132 cm)*

materials: mdf, abachi, cardboard, acrylic glass





section view



south facade



north facade





south facade detail



north facade detail



communal roof garden



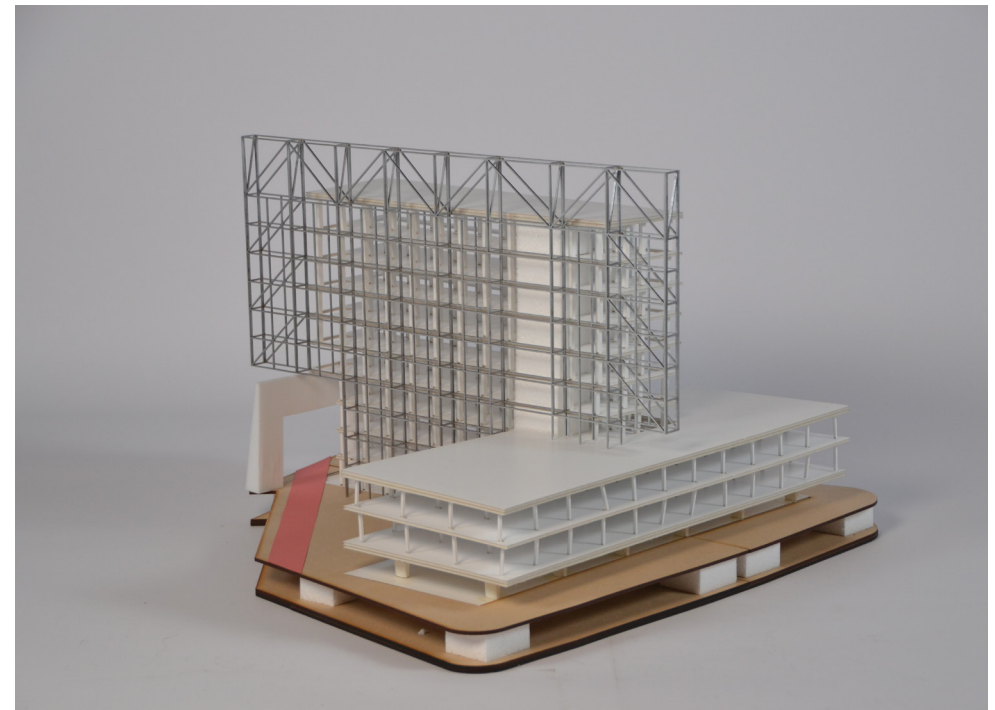
double height walkway

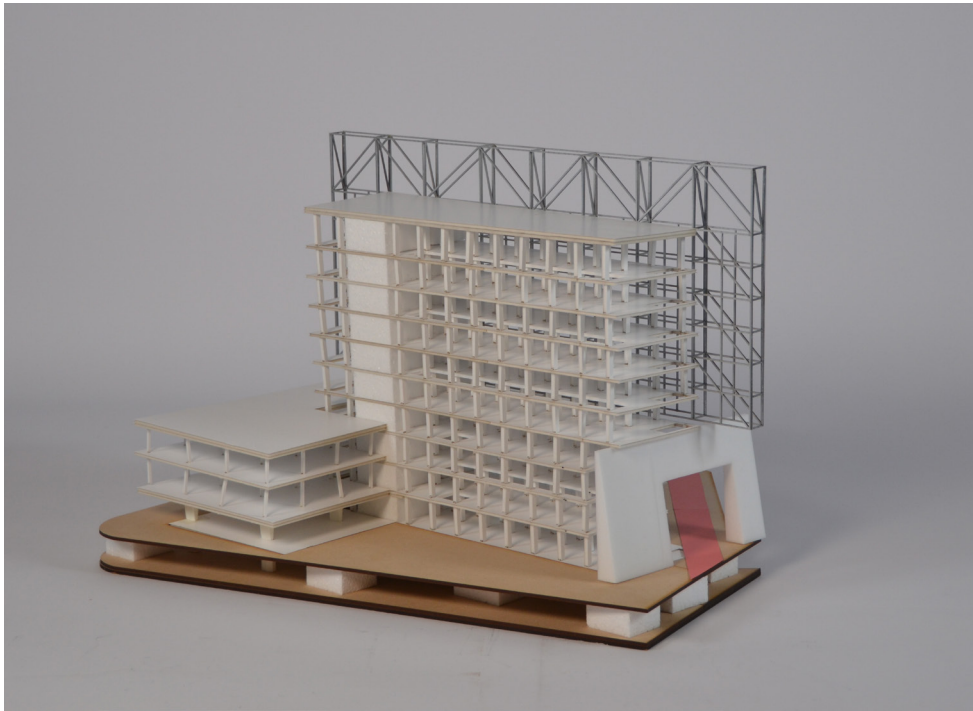
### model 1.100

A wireframe model demonstrating the overall concept of the building. The existing concrete structure of the building is exemplified by a white wireframe model. The existing structure of the building will be treated as a generous but unintelligent space which can be appropriated by its dwellers due to its flexibility. The existing concrete structure is functionally supported by a light and steel exoskeleton. This structure accommodates the technical aspects of the building, such as installations and shafts. Since these components entail a shorter lifespan, it is wise to not integrate them within the building. Consequently, the existing concrete structure can be kept untouched and therefore remains flexible throughout time.

*(72 x 74 x 51 cm)*

materials: mdf, foamboard, foam, cardboard





south east perspective



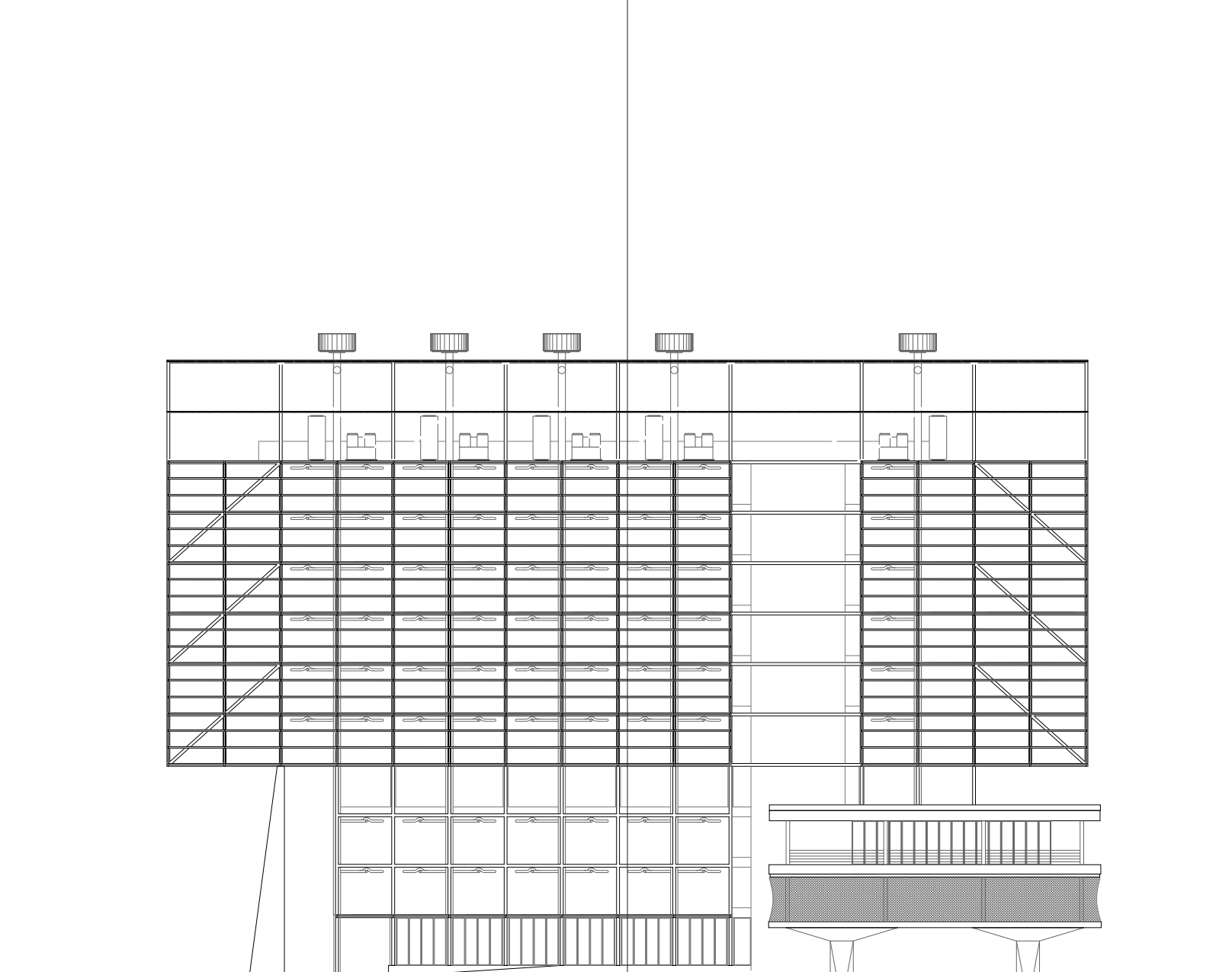
north east perspective

siteplan



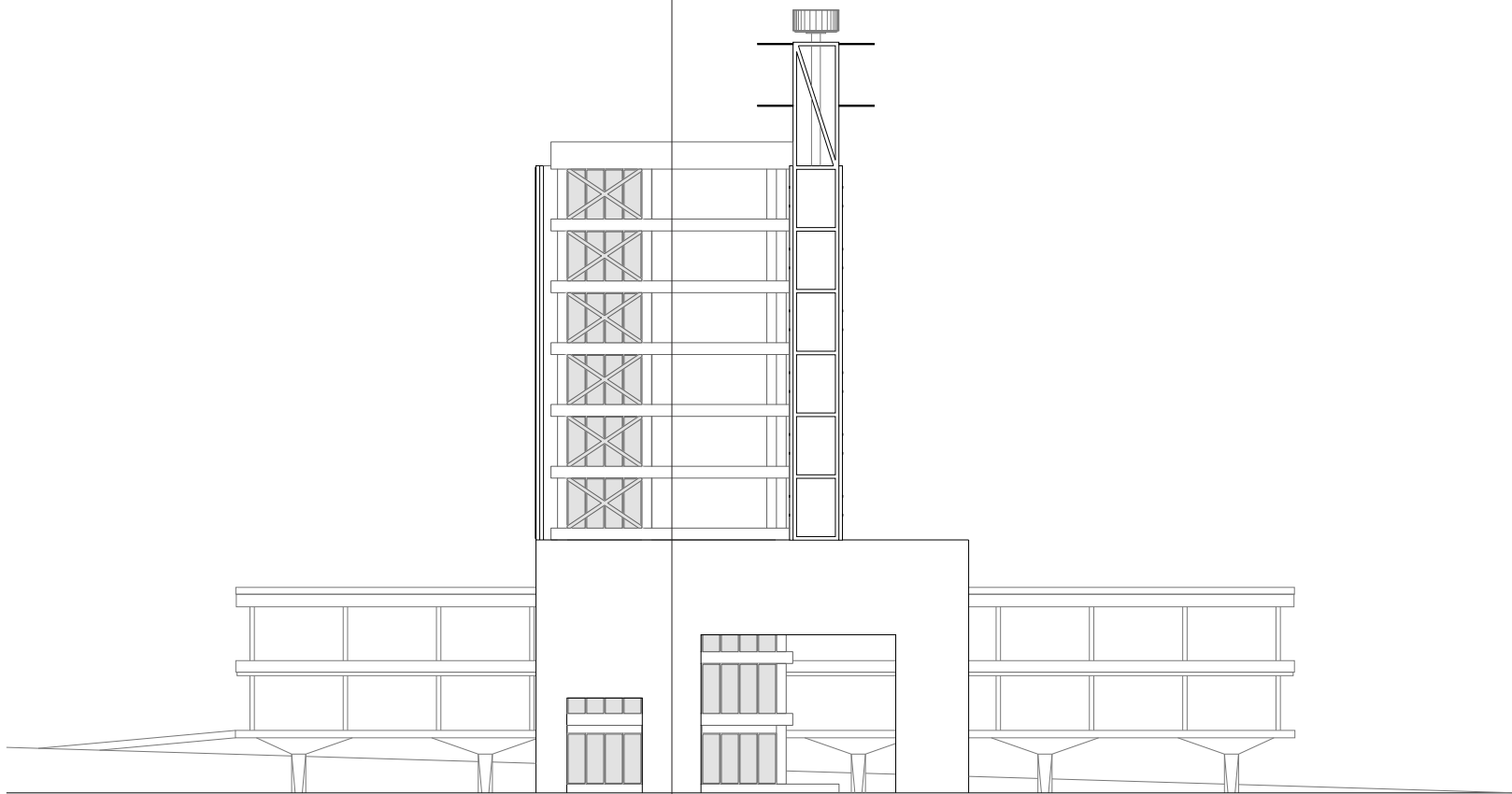
elevation north

1.400



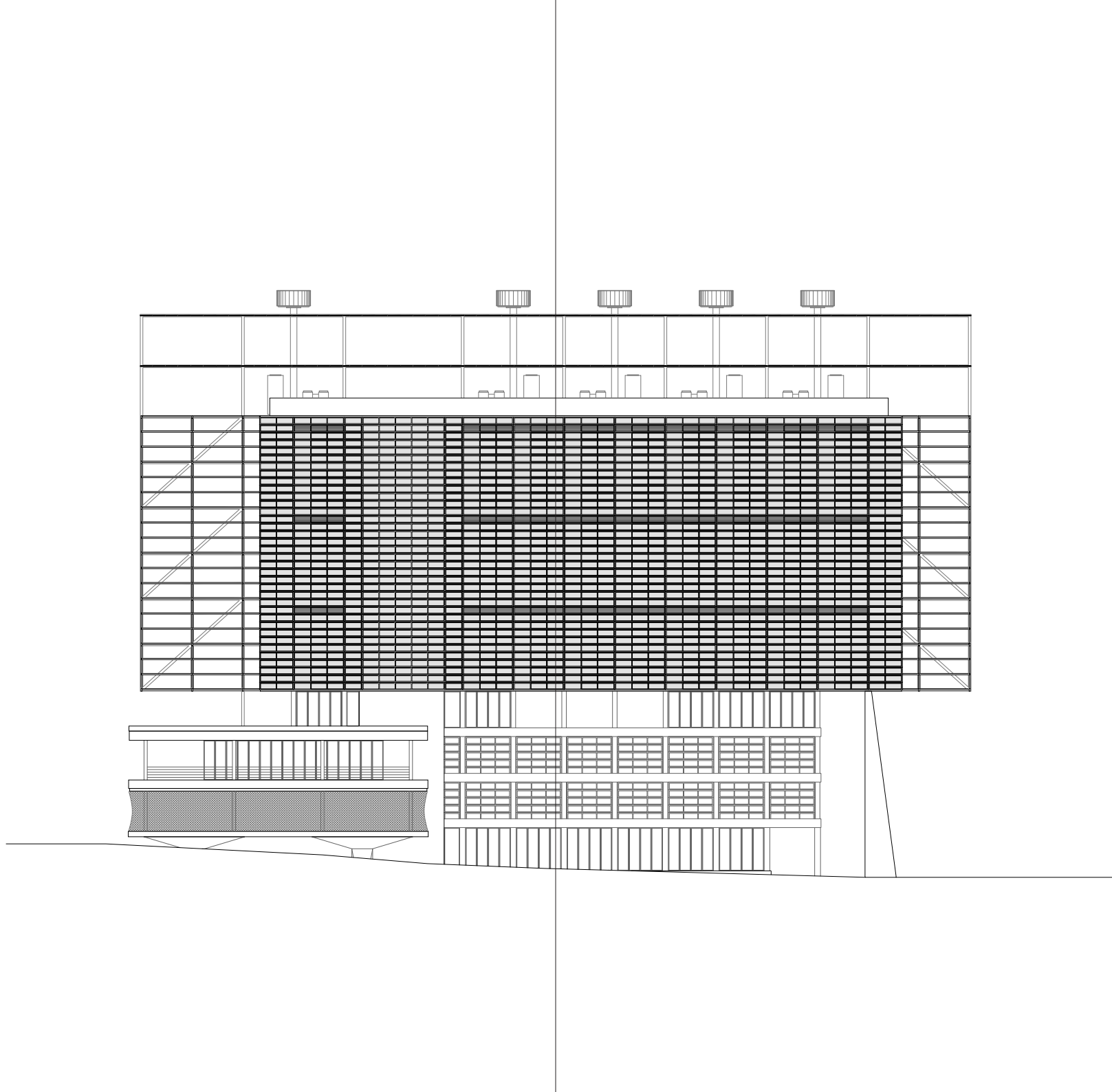
elevation east

1.400



elevation south

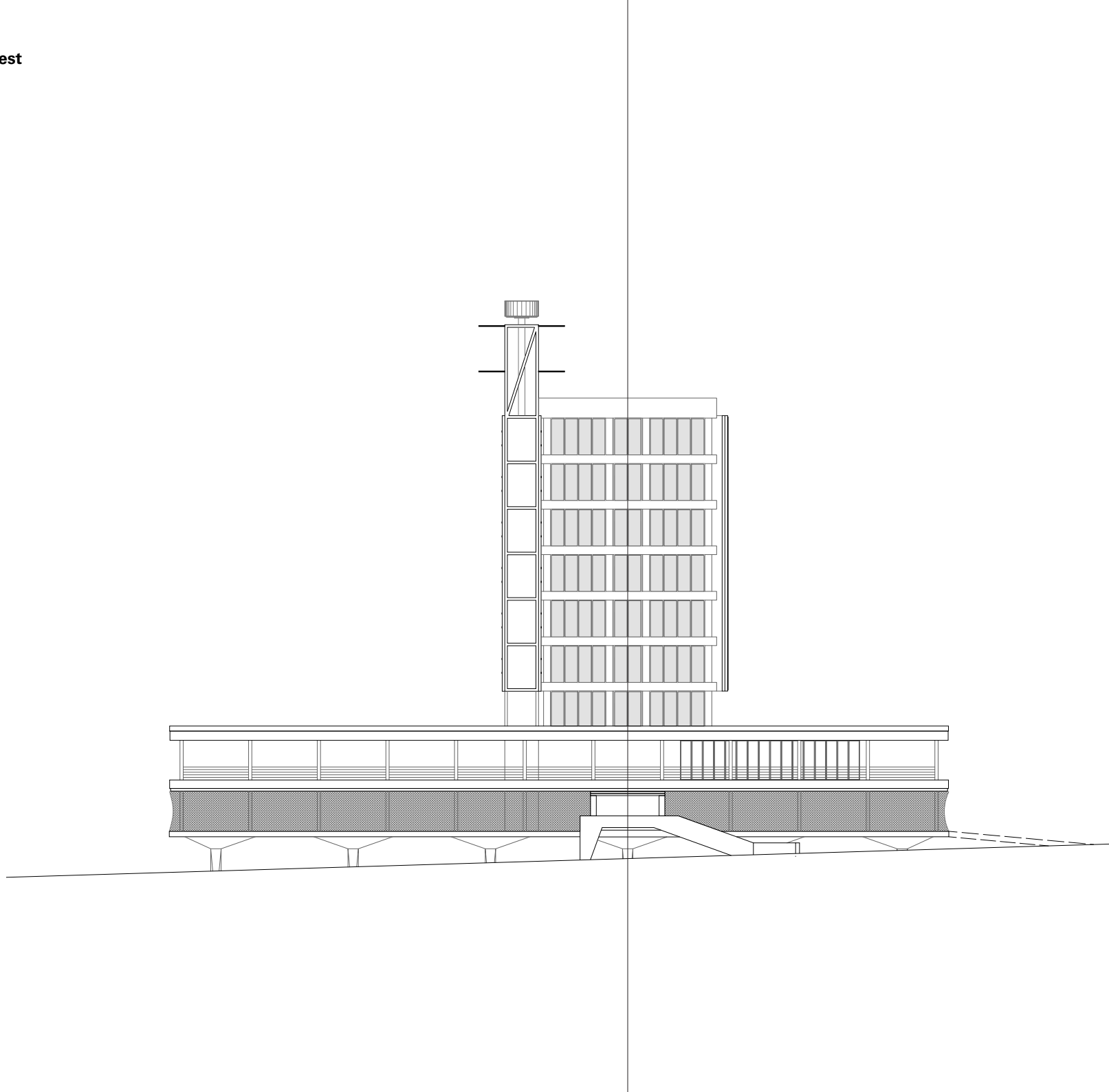
1.400



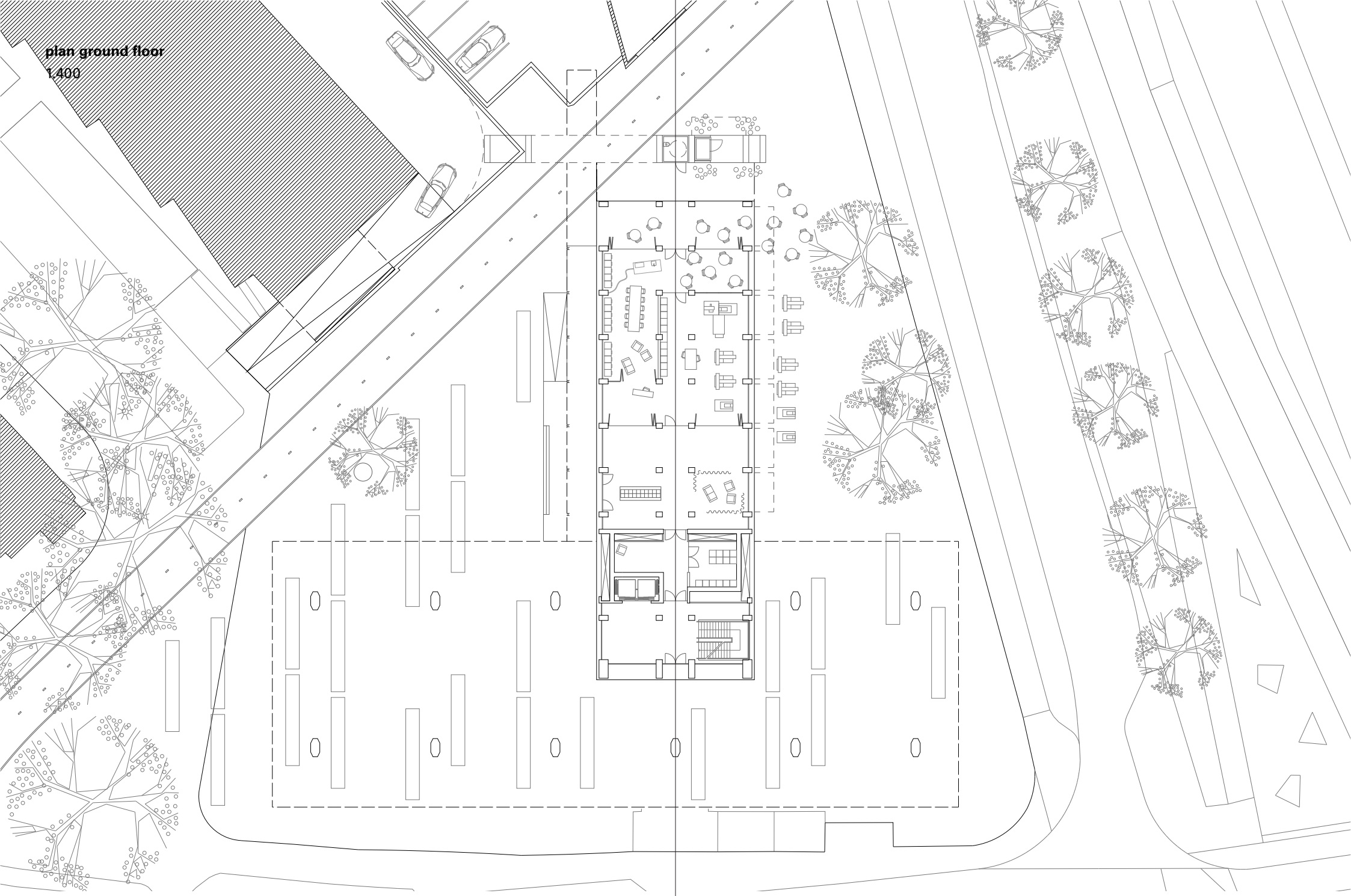


elevation west

1.400

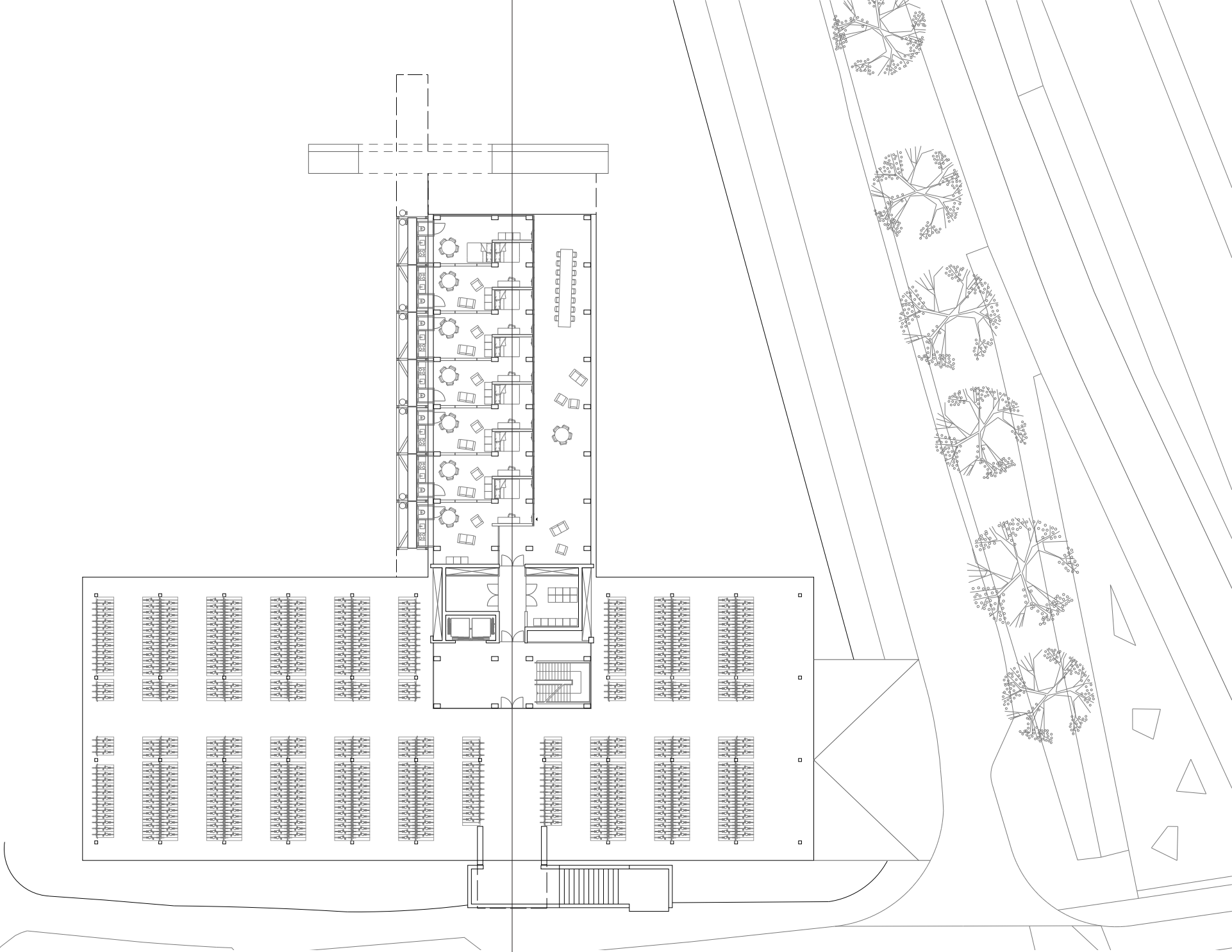


plan ground floor  
1.400



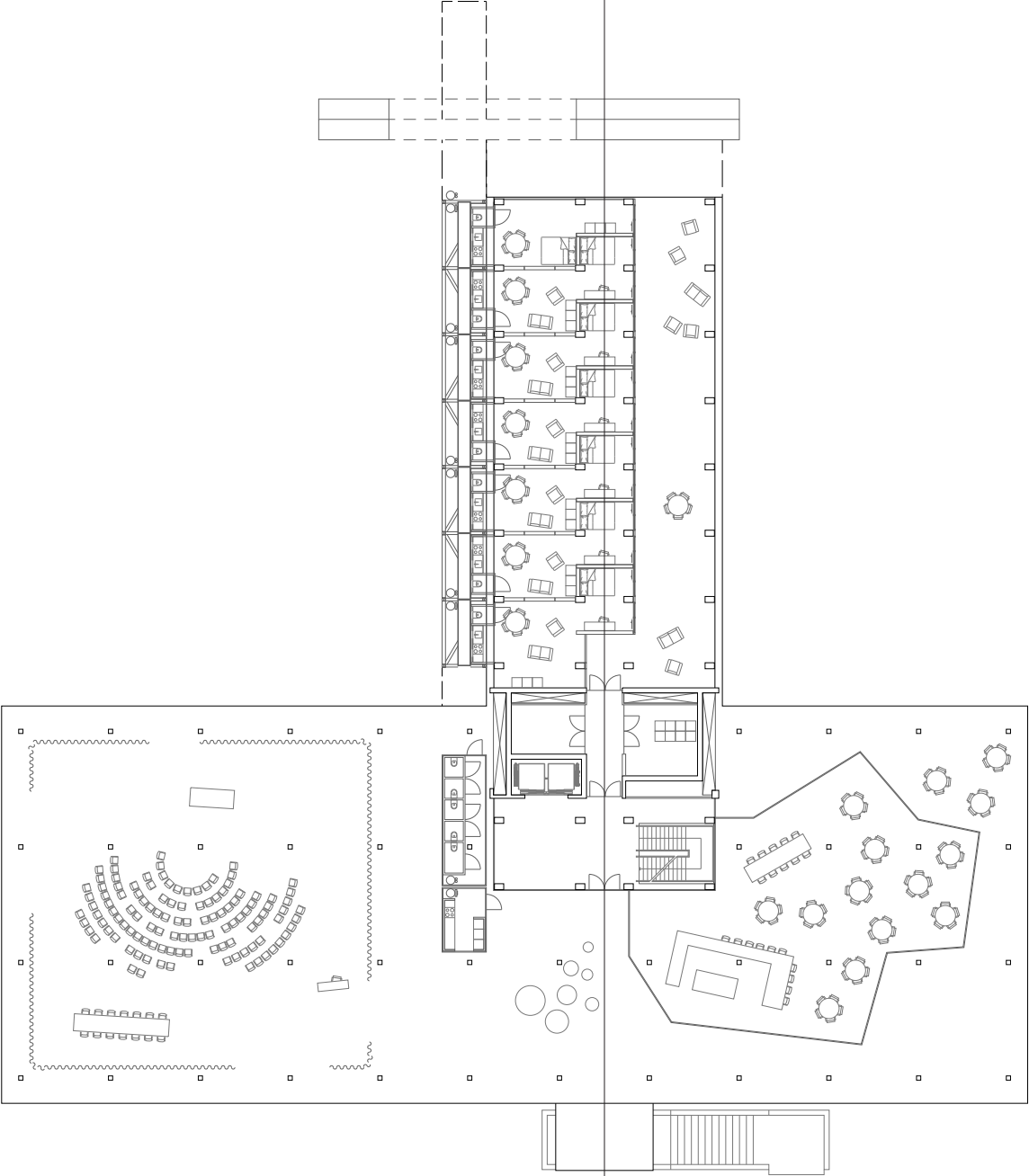
plan first floor

1.400



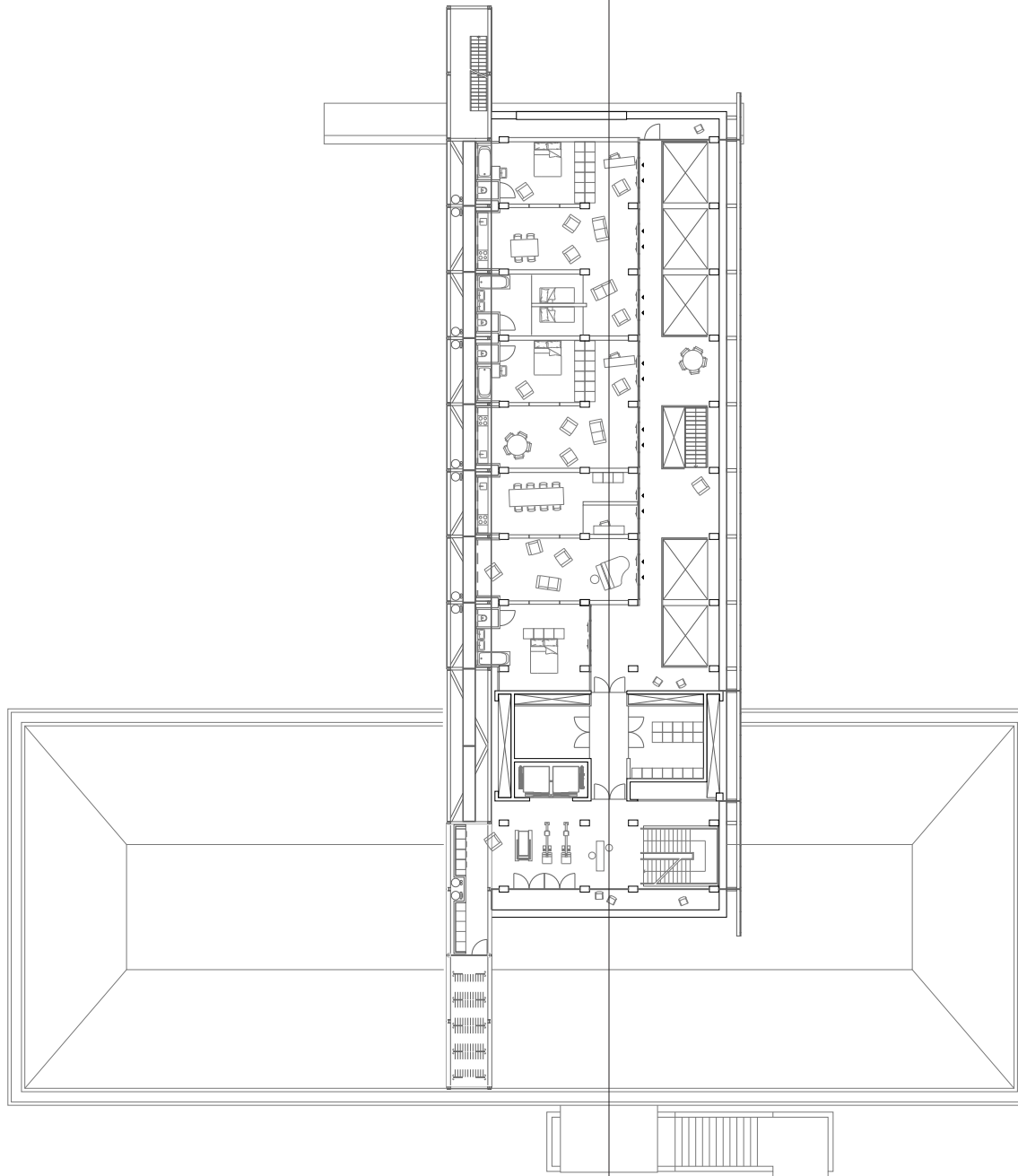
plan second floor

1.400



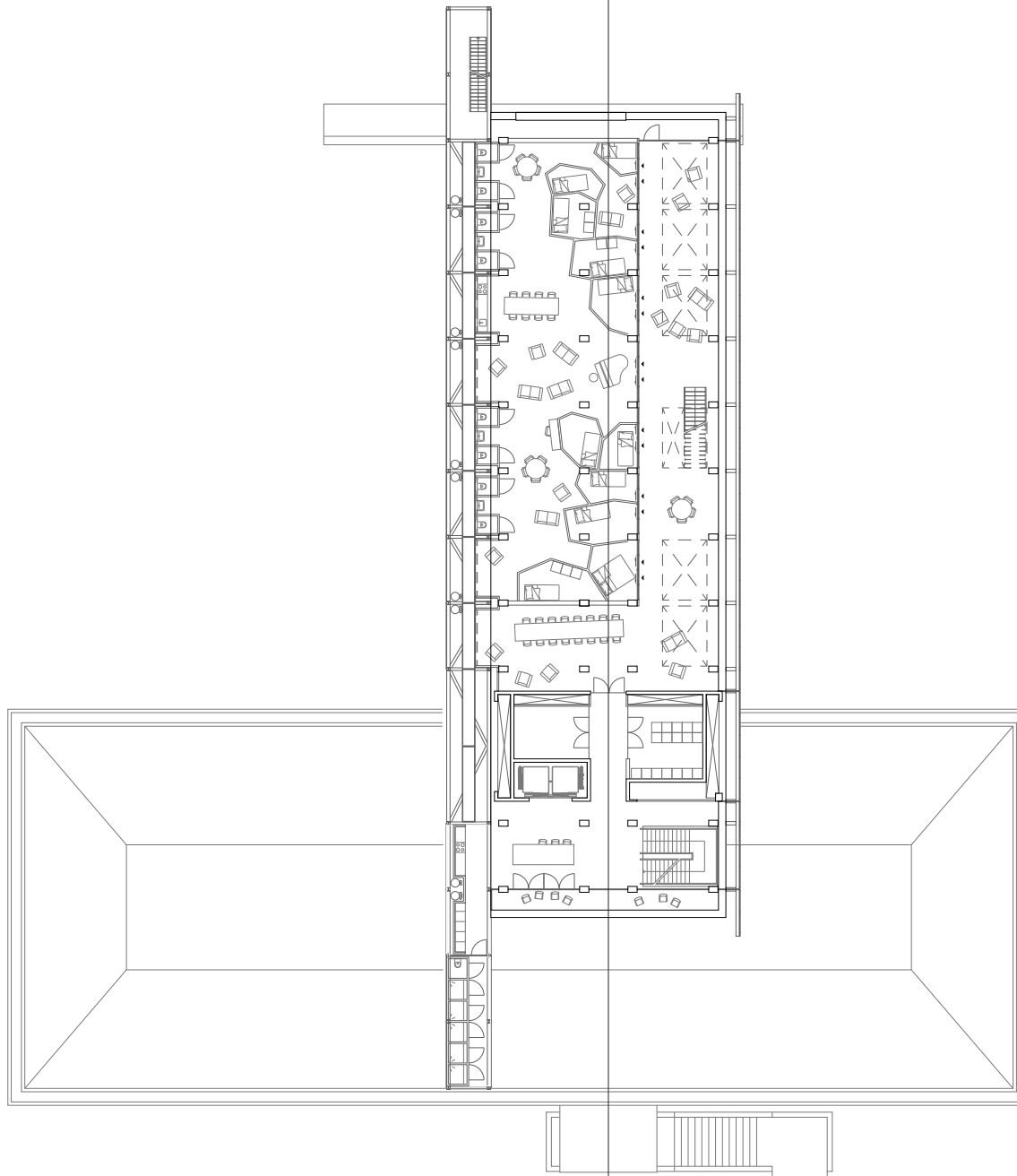
plan fifth floor

1.400



plan eighth floor

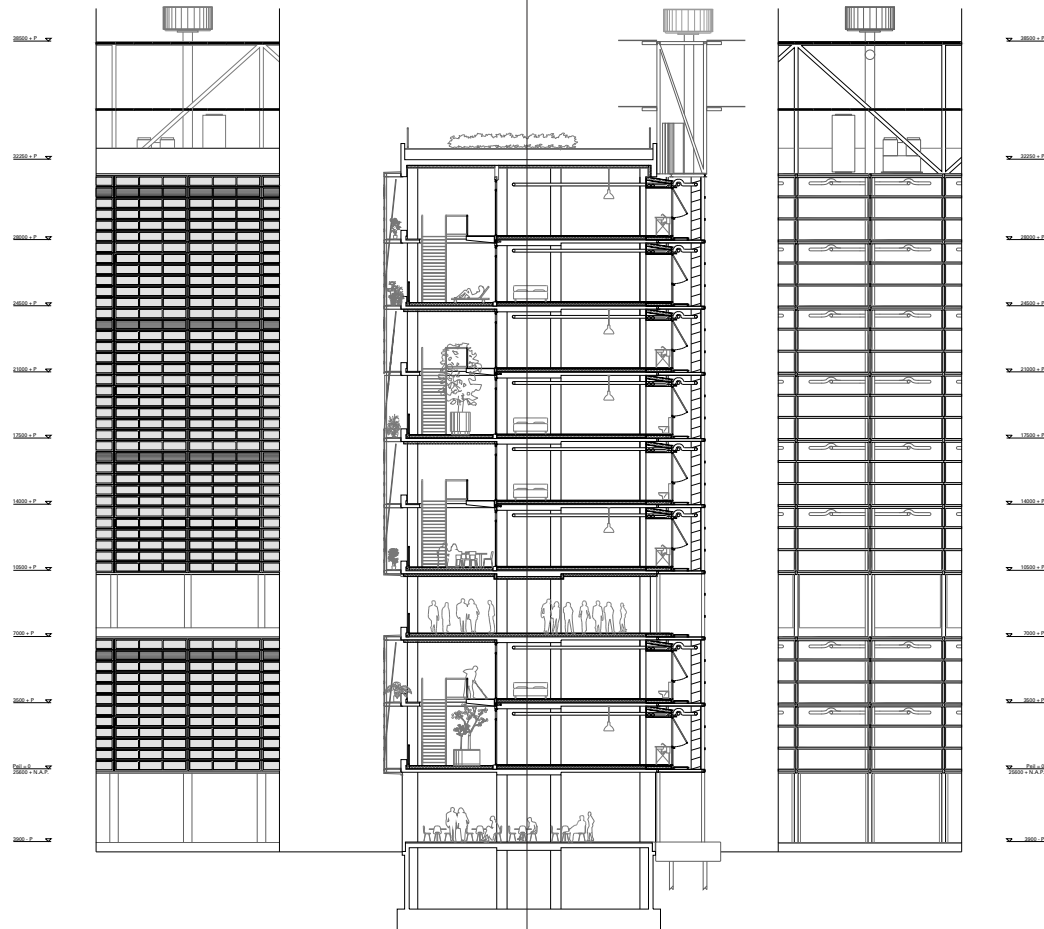
1.400





section transversal

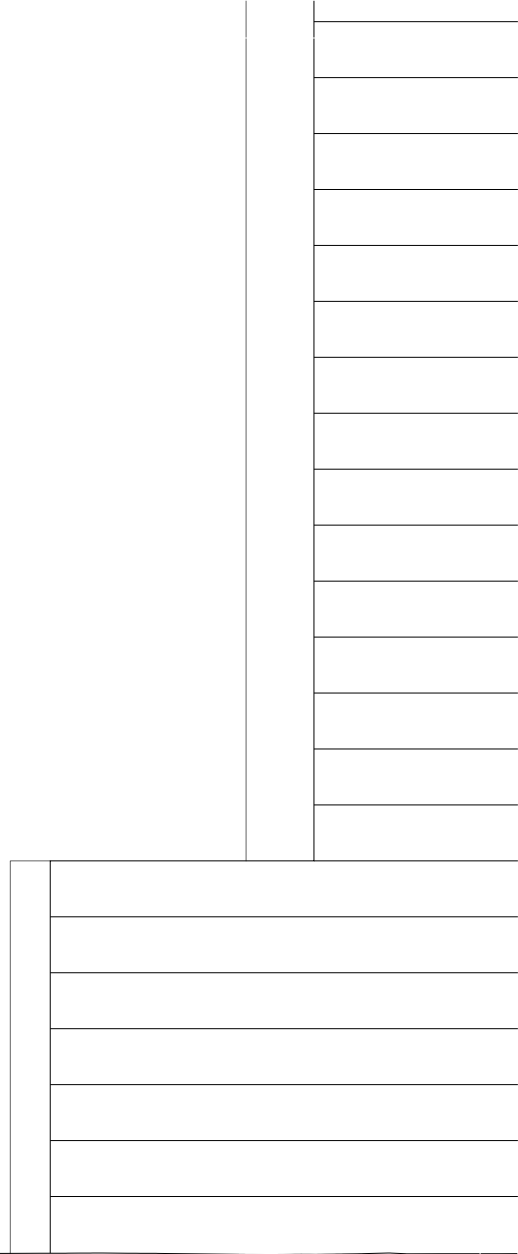
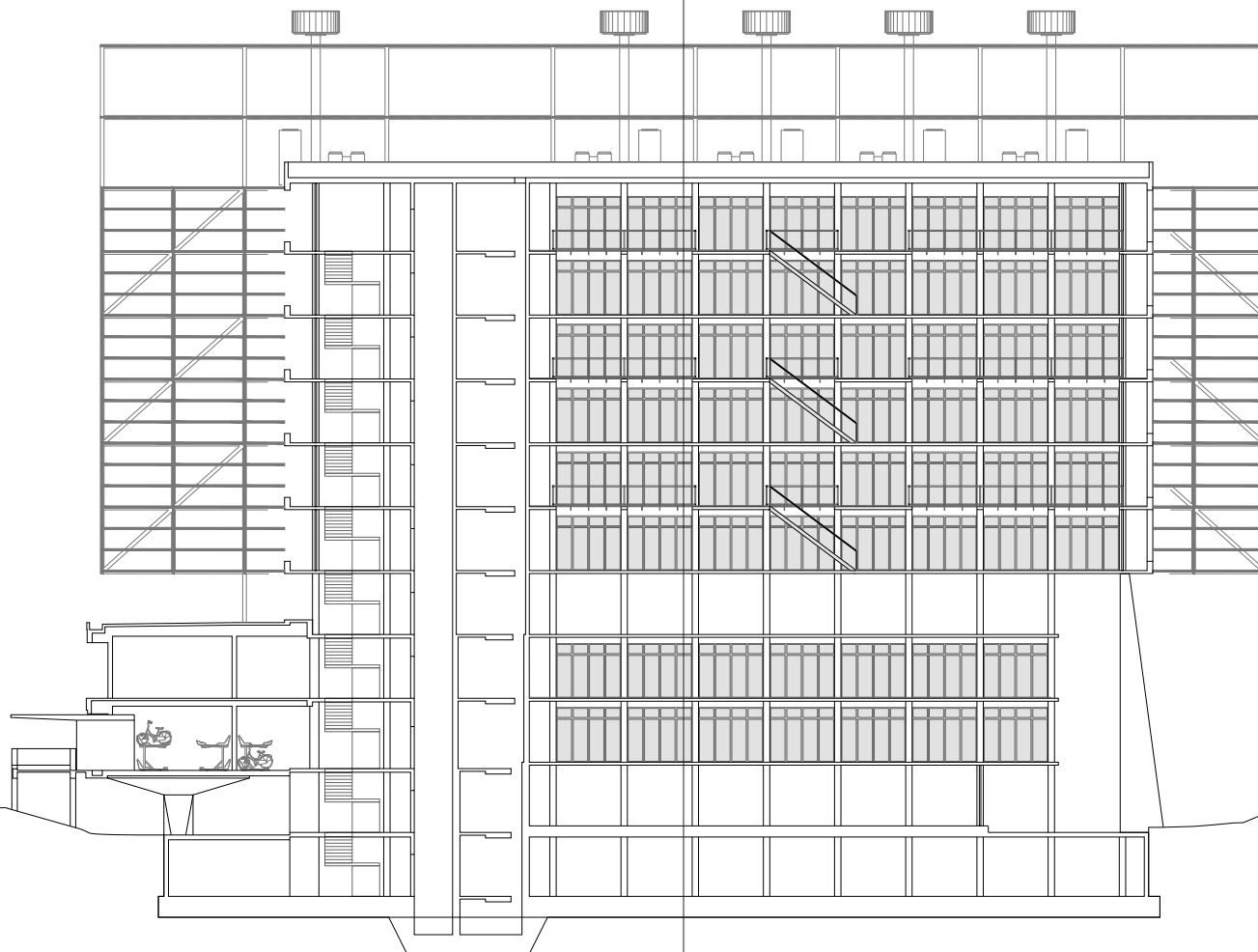
1.400





section longitudinal

1.400





perspective from train station



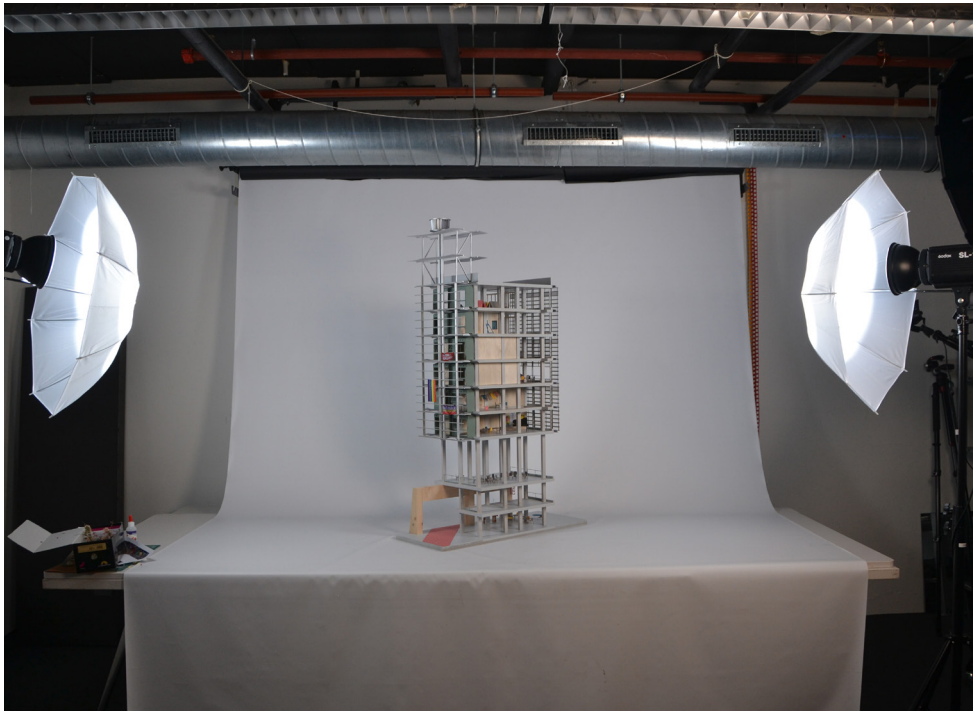
frontal view south facade



perspective from bike path



perspective from parking lot



work in progress



final presentation

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Yael von Mengden	
Mathilde Siderius	
Toon Verkerk	
Daniel Simon	

## **bibliography**

### **protagonists**

the protagonists were brought to life through interviews

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Anne Kockelkorn, 13th of May, 2023 (Rotterdam)

#### Interview 2

Benedikt Altrogge, 23rd of May, 2023 (online)

#### Interview 3

Paulien Klappe & Jonah van Delden, 26th of May, 2023 (online)

#### Interview 4

Mira Nekova, 1st of June, 2023 (Amsterdam)

#### Interview 5

Ewoud Dekker & Jan Bovy, 5th of June, 2023 (Rotterdam)

#### Interview 6

Annet Dekker, 5th of June, 2023 (Delft)

#### Interview 7

Arie Lengkeek, 22nd of June, 2023 (Rotterdam)

## chorusses

the choruses were brought to life through literature review

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**abstract**

This stage play features a fictional polylogue between people of different professional backgrounds on the imaginative and future development of housing commons in the Netherlands. The play, which is set in the year 2043, offers its spectators an optimistic and critical image of the future of housing commons in the Netherlands and reflects on this speculative transformation of the Dutch housing market. Housing commons are depicted as a non-speculative way of housing in which a variety of facilities are being shared to alleviate the overly stressed Dutch housing market.

**cast**

Anne Kockelkorn	Jan Bovy
Annet Akkerma	Jeremy McLeod
Arie Lengkeek	Jonah van Delden
Benedikt Altrogge	Mira Nekova
Daan Bossuyt	Paulien Klap
Ewoud Dekker	Peter Glas
Floris Alkemade	Peter Kuenzli
Irina Davidovici	Tom Avermaete
Ivan Illich	

**setting**

The setting of this stage play is determined by a train ride - from Amsterdam to Nijmegen - and a project visit to a housing common in Nijmegen.