

Graduation Reflection
Chair of Interiors, Buildings, Cities: The Intimate City

De Wever - A Textile Community Lab

Material research and textile production laboratory with integrated residence

Lea Scholze

Stud. no. 4747607

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Mentors: Mechthild Stuhlmacher, Floris Cornelisse, Prof. Daniel Rosbottom

Building Technology Mentor: Koen Mulder

Delegate of the Board of Examiners: Willem Korthals Altes

the theme / the intimate city

This year's topic of the chair of Interiors, Buildings, Cities is the 'Intimate City'. In the initial phase of research and reflection on the topic I began to define my personal definition of intimacy and an intimate city. Intimacy can be perceived through spatial conditions but also through human and societal perception of a space. Thinking about what influences the human's behavior in space and how the size, haptic and light of the surrounding influence the human's perception were aspects that interested me in particular. Whether an individual perceives a space as intimate or not is mainly subjective. It is not only spatial but also emotional and sociological. Throughout these first reflections on the theme of the intimate city I developed statements how certain elements, people or conditions define the experience of intimacy.

Intimacy created through other people – crowdedness or being alone

Intimacy created through dimensions

Intimacy created through framing

Intimacy created through light

Intimacy created through distance

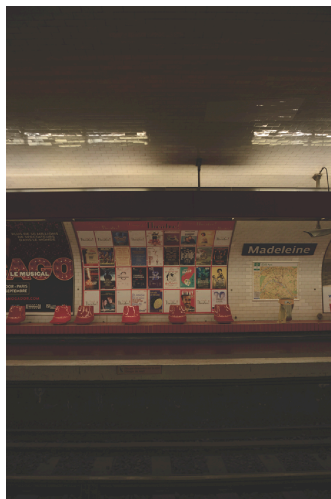
These first observations were gradually translated into three distinct spatial aspects that I was interested in continuing to investigate – Spatial intimacy through: *Light – height – width*.

In the course of the first semester the studio began with an excursion to Paris followed by a trip to Vienna. Especially Paris is a city where intimacy can be experienced at every corner: Passages away from the busy streets, libraries and cafes. Vienna in comparison is a very extensive city, wide boulevards and large buildings. However, also there the intimate can easily be found in cafes or bars, courtyards and public spaces. As a city shaped by high culture, café tradition and monumentality, the enormous buildings show small scale floor plans for public spaces such as the American Bar by Adolf Loos or the Kleines Café by Herman Czech.

One aspect in the history of Vienna, drew my interest in particular: The Salon of the 19th and early 20th century as a social construct: event happenings, that were held in private homes, however as a semi-public environment. These social events, hosted by the landlady, were occasions where people would meet to converse and debate. The salon was a European phenomenon of intellectual culture where contemporary art or music was discussed. With the understanding of the architectural importance of these spaces, I developed an interest in developing a program that could to some extent create a space that could be compared to a salon – a space where people with a specific interest gather.



Intimacy of the Parisian Passage



Intimacy through distance of seating



Transitional spaces of waiting

relevance + potential / the productive city

The overall topic of the 'Intimate City' focuses on the city room, a space within the city which, through its program as well as architecture, offers a valuable addition to the urban construct of the city. The notion of working and living in the same place has been a particular aspect of every city in the past. With industrialization and growth however, especially production and crafts have been driven out of the city, creating residential neighborhoods and separated office or industrial dominated areas. In recent years with the emergence of the idea of the 'Productive City'¹ many cities aim to reintegrate small scale production within the urban fabric in order to reactivate this important aspect of a well functioning city. Without the need to travel long distances between workplace and residence an active community within a neighborhood can be developed and enable the emergence of intimate communal spaces where people can get together. The design of a manufacturing workspace with integrated residence addresses the question of intimacy within work environments and how this can be translated into an architectural project. Cities become denser and more European Metropolises lack affordable housing. The question does not solemnly lie within the size but also within creative arrangement and organization that enables comfortable living on limited space. I believe thus, it is essential to approach architecture that integrates itself architecturally but also socially into the urban fabric of its surrounding.

With the notion of production and the feeling of the port still present in the project area of Antwerp, I became interested in research on the Productive city, which has been emerging in recent years.

Many cities experience a disappearance of small scale manufacturers and local shops. Products can be purchased at a lower price and with less effort online or in larger department stores. As convenient as it might seem for the consumer, it creates problems for the construct of a city, being what it is due to an active community and people interacting with each other when following their daily tasks.

With many neighborhoods transforming into single residential or only office areas, the lack of variation in functions, especially on ground floor level result in activity in certain areas only at certain times. The historical construct of a city, especially a city such as Antwerp, which was flourishing due to its harbor related import & export activities, was built based on craftsmanship and local production.² The producing industry of today is not necessarily polluting, smelling or noisy anymore. Much more, the more advanced technology becomes, the less space is required for efficient production. Production can be integrated into neighborhoods without being negatively experienced. It can offer new possibilities to the community and also create local job opportunities.

Industry usually is not associated with intimacy. More with noise and unpleasant side effects. However, this is not necessarily true. With the decision to address this topic within the scope of the graduation project I aimed to create a space of co-working, co-habitation and a space of creativeness for artists where they can reside and work in the same building. A space where people work together with large machines in rooms that are made in particular for this use, intimacy can be designed accordingly.

¹ <https://www.detail.de/artikel/gewerbe-stadt-gemeinsam-zukunft-gestalten-32176/> - accessed 12.05.2019

² The production of musical instruments, the trade with textiles or diamonds which is strongly present until today are only a few examples.

research vs design / methodology

With the project location set in Antwerp, Belgium, the site and program were to be developed by the student. The research in Antwerp thus needed to occur on various levels simultaneously. Besides searching for a suitable site, we also all conducted research into Antwerp specific programs that hold a public value and that may contribute to the urban fabric in an intimate context. With my overall interest in the Productive City, I researched the historic port area which currently is under great development to become a flourishing residential neighborhood: Het Eilandje. Parallel to historical research of the neighborhood I also focused on thematic literature in relation to Antwerp.

Archival research, including visits to the neighboring Felix Archive in Antwerp helped me to a great extent in the development of the theme in order for it to relate to my personal interests in the scope of the industrial micro-production and co-existence of multiple uses. Furthermore the analysis of local historical typology supported the aim to create a coherence between the topic of the Intimate City in relation to the program and the chosen site - a relatively small vacant plot on the Oudeleeuwenrui. Located in the southern part of the historic port, surrounded by various historical storage buildings, according to old writings and documents, the previous building originally was used as residence as well as industrial production site. This nearly extinct co-existence of industry and living, however, seems to develop new possibilities with the emergence of Industry 4.0.³ The site, with its original industrial use and housing thus offered a possibility to return to this type of typology, including craftsmanship within a residential building.

From these findings I began reflecting on various possible small scale productions that could be integrated into the site and simultaneously be a benefit for the local community. With Antwerp being known historically for its linen trade, and today for it being a center of fashion design, the implementation of a textile research and production lab arose as an idea. Creating a place where artists, students, locals and professionals can get together to follow creative ideas, work and learn from each other. A visit to the Textielmuseum in Tilburg helped me to develop a room program which would allow various ways of production and machines.

But with this decision, more questions arose as well: *Where is the intimacy in a textile lab?* I believe that production spaces certainly also have an intimate aspect to them, it is a question of design and successful creation of an atmosphere that can make a space intimate. Thinking of the idea of a salon, a space where people get together to discuss and converse on cultural topics of their interest, can that not also be a place of a community where people work together to produce? Creating a space where people can meet to follow their creativity in an intimate environment is the aim of the project. With thematic decision having been made, more spatial questions began to arise:

How can the relatively small size of the site provide possibilities for multiple uses and a combination of creativity, creative arts and residences with the preservation of a comfortable condition for all parties?

How can the topic of Intimacy be embedded in a space of a small scale industrial production and what aspects let it be experienced by everyone, visitor as well as artist and resident?

How can construction methods and materials contribute to a flexible and adaptable usage of the space over time?

In the beginning the challenges I faced were mostly regarding the building site and its limitations due to neighboring buildings as well as its narrow and long shape. With the constraints towards the Rubens Stapelhuis in the west and its windows towards the site, unchangeable conditions and challenges influenced and stimulated the development of the initial volumes. In the process of design, the decision to integrate the Rubens Stapelhuis in the program seemed facilitating and an essential decision in the continuation of the project. I began to work on multiple levels simultaneously, continuously knitting them together for the project to become a whole, addressing various aspects of architecture, our society and the topic of intimacy in contrast to my own chosen program of the industrial and the city. In reflection it becomes apparent to me how I gradually zoomed further into more detailed research. What

³ <https://difu.de/veranstaltungen/2019-03-18/produktive-stadt-neue-chancen-fuer-nachhaltige-urbane.html>

started with research on programmatic solutions, volume finding and historical background of the site turned into specific research on small scale housing solutions, the challenges I faced in the location and arrangement of the vertical circulation or the aim for creation of a similar experience for all users of the site. Precedent studies of floor plans helped to a great extent in the development of suitable cores and the clear linear orientation of the technical spaces through the centre of the building. Constant reminders for clarity and simplicity supported the concentration on creation of spacious apartments that distinguish themselves through openness and transparency.

On a spatial level, the building creates visual connections between all different usages that promote the co-existence. On the one hand, the program enables the building to be very transparent, with a visual axis leading through the whole length of the building on the first two floors. This transparency also becomes visible in the front facade towards the Oudeleeuwenrui which, as a patterned brick facade gradually becomes more transparent to the center of the building. The ground floor offers accessibility to everyone with a textile production area in the back of the site, a small shop and showroom where the products are exhibited and sold. A Café/Restaurant is situated on the second floor above the main entrance. The organization simultaneously transitions from a very public base to a more private upper floor design, which is accessible for residents with an extensive roof garden and community spaces creating the transition between the production space and the apartments. Small scale short- and medium-term apartments for artists and individuals who can actively contribute to the community of the building and the wider neighborhood, offer a more private and subsequently detail oriented aspect to the project.

The decision for materials based on structural requirements, especially for the production spaces were accompanied by decisions based on thematic and atmospheric choices. The production levels are kept in concrete in combination with wood-concrete composite floors. On the upper residential floors, the main construction material is timber, creating a lighter structure and a more intimate atmosphere for the resident. Furthermore the choice of timber enables a facilitated construction procedure with the possibility of pre-fabrication for a large extent of the upper floors. The choice of materials - brick facade, timber structure or concrete as well as specific window types or green roofs required extensive research into manufacturers and products which I believe did contribute to personal improvement of a technological understanding.

Throughout the whole design process I tried to remind myself continuously of my initial definitions of intimacy through light, height and width. With the creation of partially higher production spaces and lower working spaces towards the sides, I create atmospherically varying areas within the production. The transition between the existing and the new also goes along with a change in height and narrowing transition spaces. As the existing building offers less natural light into the building furthermore a contrast in light as an atmospheric element of intimacy becomes apparent. Concluding, throughout the design process I faced various challenges which I believe I was able to solve through a continuous focus on various aspects of design and the research into various scales of design. Reminding myself that the intimate city for me, should be a place which can be inhabited by the user and create a refuge within the urban city fabric but does not necessarily need to be a space of calm or quietness but much more it can be a space of production and innovation.

Reference Websites for further Information on the Productive City:

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Atelier Rotterdam: The Productive City

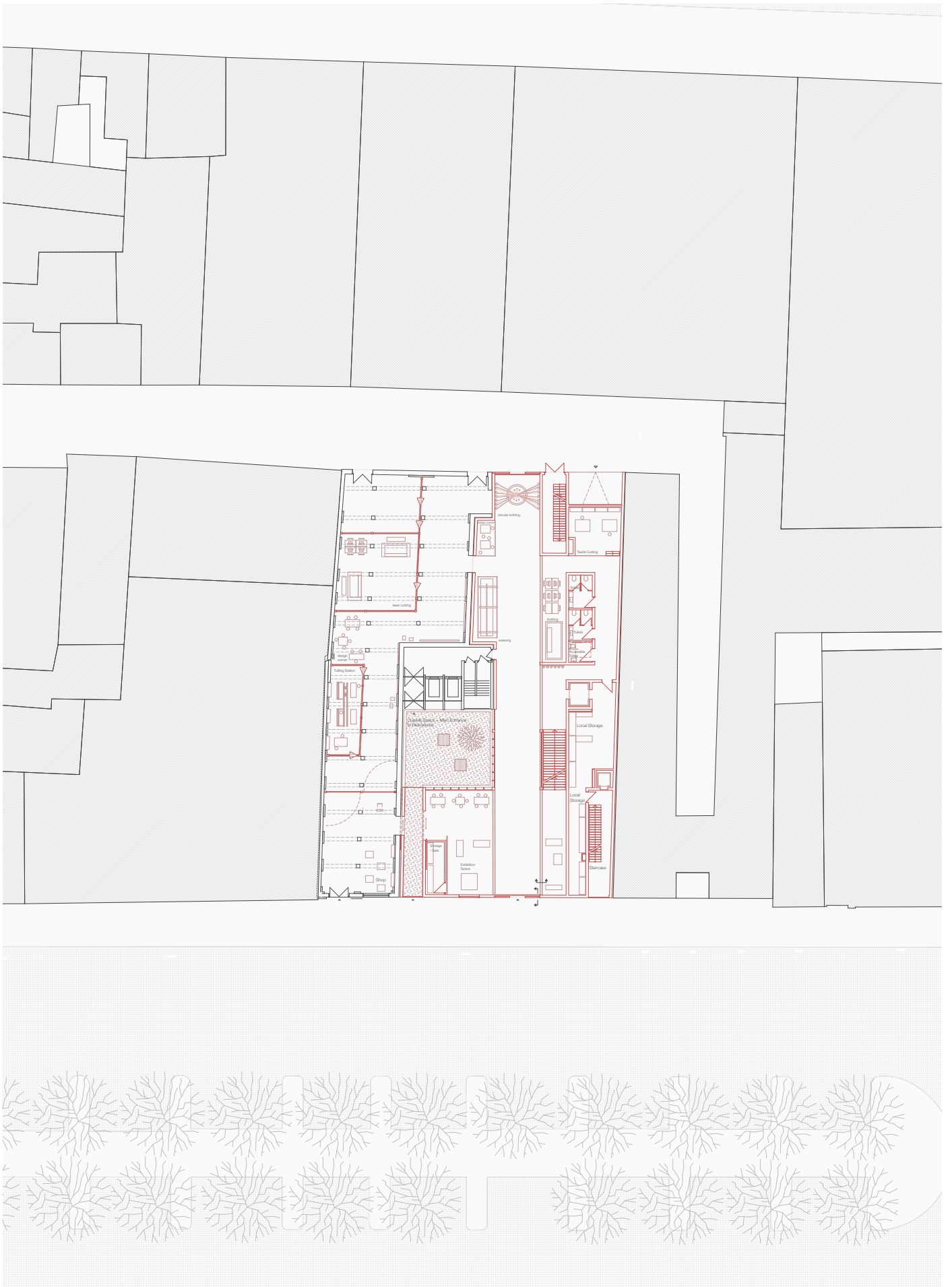
https://iabr.nl/en/projectatelier/partm2_book

Produktive Stadt - neue Chancen für nachhaltige urbane Quartiere.

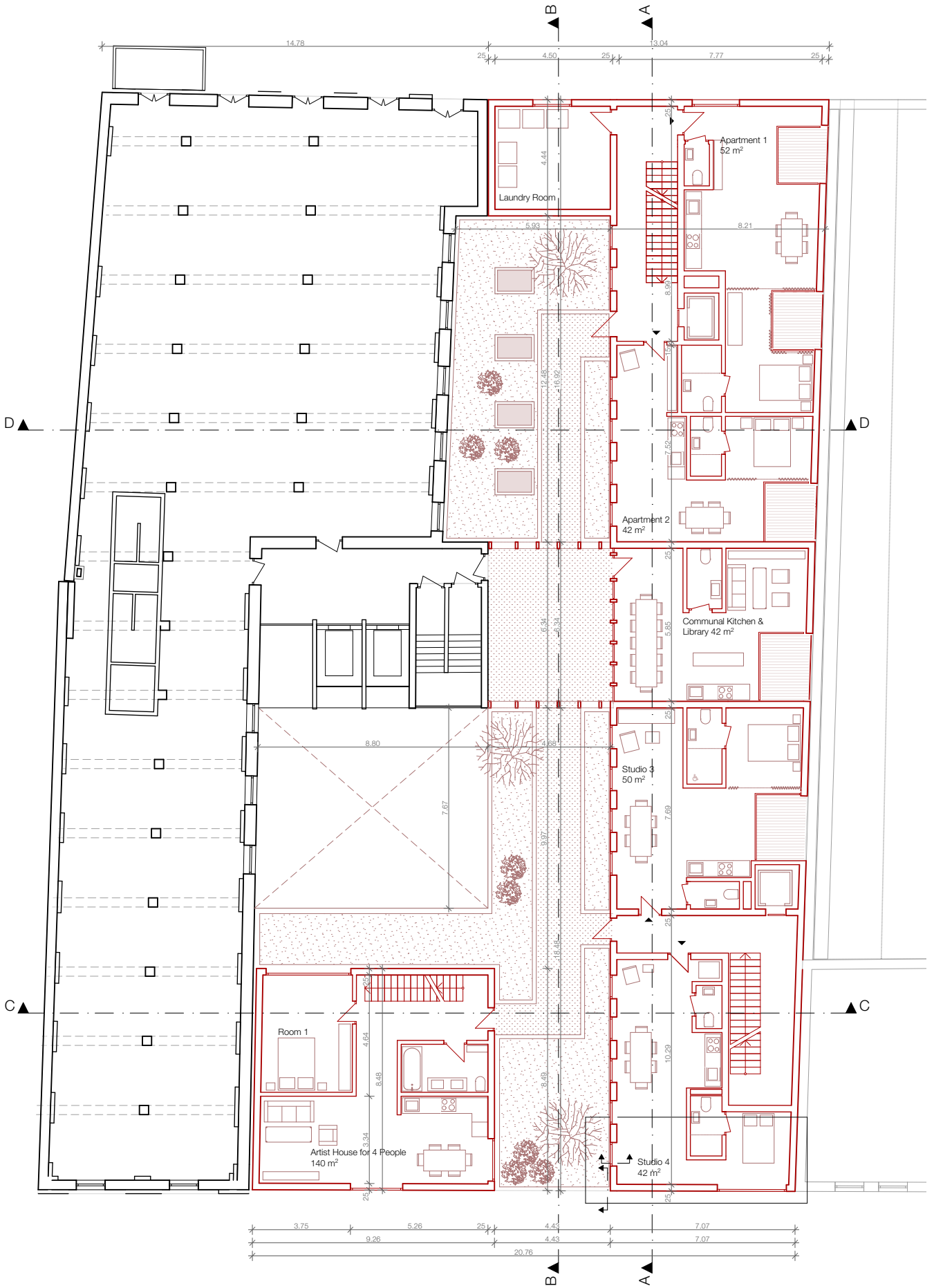
(Productive City - new chances for sustainable urban quarters)

<https://difu.de/veranstaltungen/2019-03-18/produktive-stadt-neue-chancen-fuer-nachhaltige-urbane.html>





Ground Floor Plan 1:500



Floor Plan 2nd Floor | 1:200