

RESEARCH PLAN

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M I C R O R A Y O N M I C R O C O S M

A STUDY OF
INTEGRATED SPACES
FOR LIVING, WORKING,
AND SOCIALIZING
IN POST-SOCIALIST
LANDSCAPE

Methods of Analysis
and Imagination
MSc3/4 A Matter of Scale
AR3MET105

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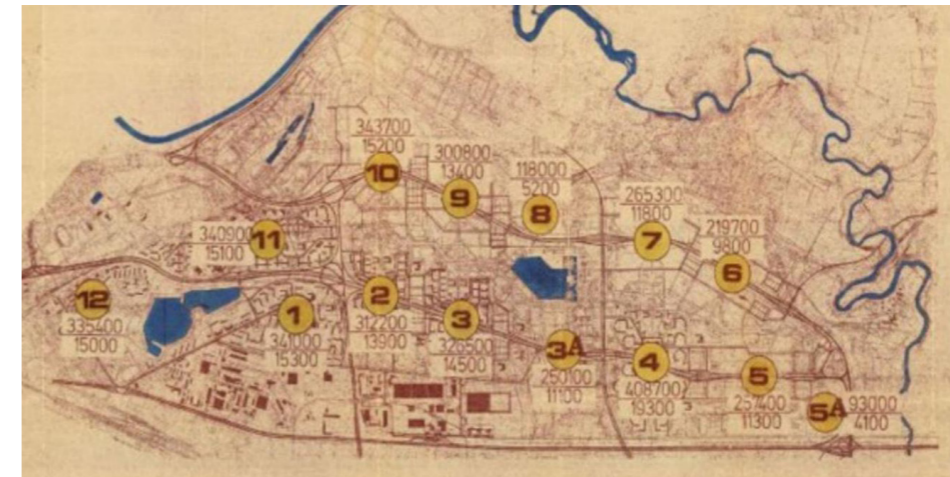
LASNAMAE UNFINISHED

In the dynamic landscape of urban development in Tallinn, Estonia, the district of Lasnamäe stands as a canvas rich with historical nuances and contemporary challenges. Drawing upon insights gathered from interviews conducted during my field trip and information sourced from online platforms, it is evident that the district has acquired an unfavourable reputation, a perception influenced by the looming spectre of unfair segregation and the frequent unjust portrayal of Lasnamäe as a Russian-inhabited ghetto.

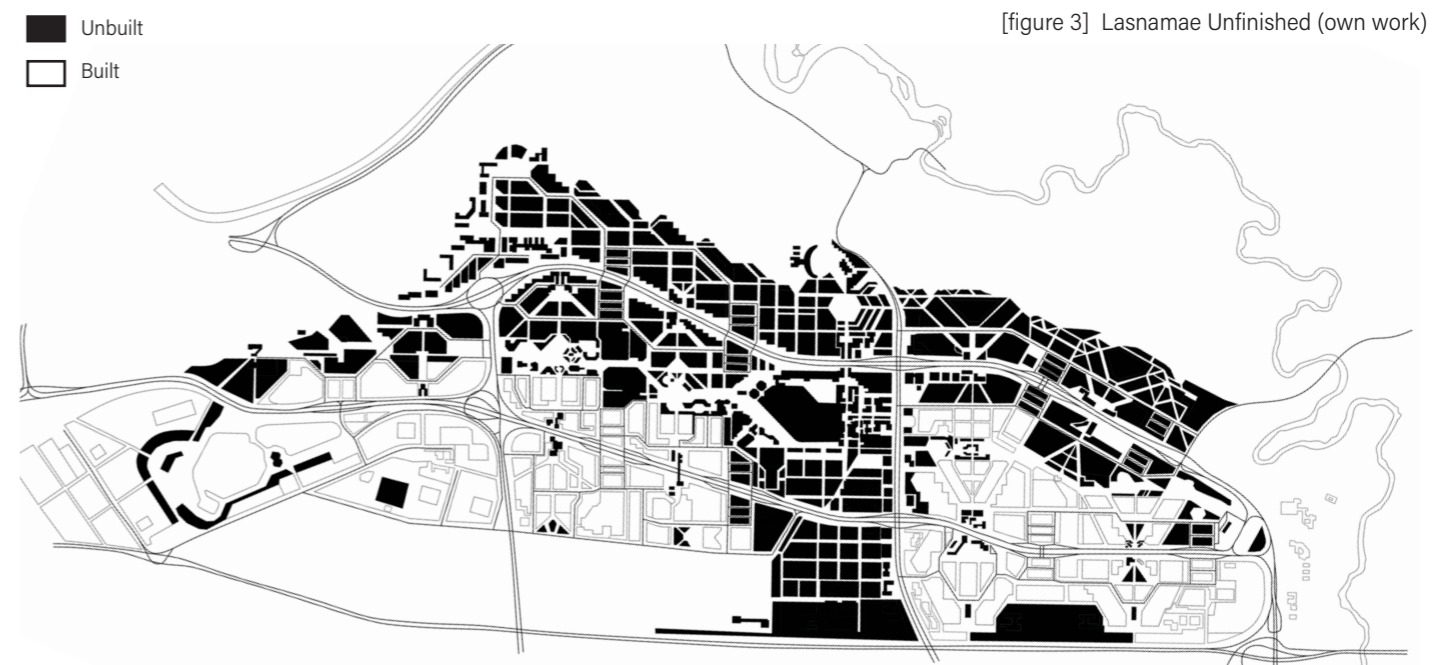
The district bears the scars of a tumultuous history and an organizational plan that fell victim to geopolitical shifts. Originally conceived with a vision of *microrayons* [Figure 1-2] – each intended to feature a centre with public amenities and commercial shops within a 500-meter radius from each residential buildings – the district's reality diverged drastically from this plan: the Soviet Union's collapse and Estonia's newfound independence in 1991 abruptly halted the intended development, leaving less than one-third of the district realized [Figure 3]. The aftermath forced residents in the 90s to navigate their daily lives amidst construction rubble, leaving the majority of the microrayon centers unbuilt or replaced



[figure 1] Numbered microrayons of Lasnamäe (1970s, Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum).



[figure 2] Lasnamäe Soviet Concept Masterplan (1970s, Eesti Arhitektuurimuseum)



[figure 3] Lasnamäe Unfinished (own work)

[figure 4]
Mustakivi centre
(own work)



PROBLEMATIQUE

by parking lots and sprawling commercial complexes, that showed little or no concern for the quality of public spaces.

The streets became dominated by blank facades of large chain stores and fast-food establishments, adorned only with oversized signs, catering more to the scale of cars than human pedestrians [figure 4].

Furthermore, along the residential streets, the substantial scale, architectural monotony and vast ground-floor distances of modernist residential buildings contribute to a pervasive sense of alienation and disconnection from the environment.

The primary concern that propels this research is the noticeable absence of purposefully designed spaces and infrastructures beyond mere residential buildings. This critical deficiency has cast a veil of neglect over the district, transforming it into a mere dormitory where inhabitants retreat solely for rest, leaving the streets bereft of life and activity.

However, upon closer examination, a hidden narrative unfolds: Contrary to the perceived sterility, pockets of life persist. Commercial basement shops [figure 6], have sprung to life, fostering a unique social fabric.

The resilient inhabitants of Lasnamäe have ingeniously repurposed the underutilized spaces beneath the concrete surfaces of aging residential panel Soviet blocks erected in the 1970s. Unfortunately, some of these adaptive spaces are facing closure, grappling with the tension with colossal capitalist malls and stores that have sprouted in areas left unbuilt since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

My fascination lies in this hidden world, where work, life, and community intersect, a catalyst for urban revitalization that presents both challenges and opportunities and that forms the backdrop upon which my research unfolds.

Thus, my research question guiding the trajectory of my inquiry is:

“How does the integration of living, working, and social spaces challenge modernist monofunctional urban practices?”

The following subquestions consequently arise:

1. In what ways do the integrated live-work spaces challenge traditional zoning regulations within Lasnamäe in its post-socialist era?
2. How do spaces, like local basement shops, in residential Soviet blocks, shape the spatial practices and sociocultural dynamics of the district? what role does adaptive reuse play in sustaining these businesses and fostering a sense of place in the district?
3. How does the emergence of commercial malls in Lasnamäe, impact the local basement shops and the lived experiences of residents? how they now can coexist? what are the implications for the cultural and economic identity of the area?
4. How do the integrated live-work and leisure spaces in Lasnamäe adapt to evolving societal needs, considering generational transition and the changing aspirations and lifestyles of the community?

INSUFFICIENT ARCHITECTURAL PROPOSITIONS AND HUMAN OCCUPATION

Socialist urbanism, rooted in the concept of housing workers in close proximity to factories, defined the spatial dynamics of Lasnamäe: the district was in fact built near *Dvigatel* industrial area, now transformed into a modern business center, Ulemiste. This shift has inadvertently compelled the residents of Lasnamäe to embark on daily commutes to go to work in other areas of the city, fragmenting the once-cohesive relationship between living and working spaces, as dictated by the socialist policies of the time.

Yet, amidst the sprawling sterility, a subtle rebellion manifests itself through the emergence of local basement shops. The sleeping district lacked the necessary entertainment and service facilities and the economic freedom of the 90s gave impetus to the emergence of basement shops (Jogisaar, 2014).

As stated by Stoler (2013) - the comprehension of sociopolitical transformations can be achieved through the analysis of the afterlives of what remains, delving into the exploration of entities that have transcended their temporal origins, persisting altered forms - we can see how many people appropriate buildings designed

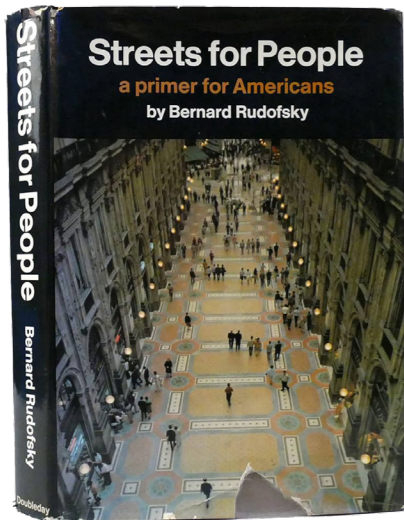
for a single function for both living and working.

These are spaces where the daily life of inhabitants challenges predetermined architectural plans.

Lasnamäe's basement shops are living echoes of an era marked by suppressed customs and regulated lives during the Soviet occupation, signalling a deep-seated yearning for autonomy and individual enterprise. Some structures prove insufficient in accommodating the fluidity of human behaviour in daily life. These small businesses, reminiscent of the entrepreneurial surge in post-Soviet countries during the 1990s, reflect a collective desire to reclaim the streets and defy the functionalized segregation imposed by socialist and modernist zoning theories.

The narrative of my research will unfold on the backdrop of a transformative shift from the rigid urban image dictated by modernist and socialist urbanism zoning to a more intimate, pedestrian scale.

Hollis (2015) emphasizes that here the overlapping of public and private spaces, including the integration of home and



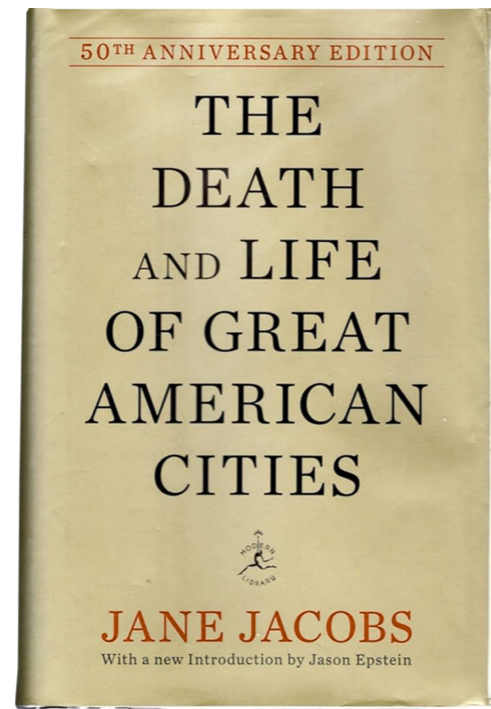
Rudofsky B. (1969). Streets for People. Anchor Press, Doubleday.

workplace, have been overlooked and not explored due to the monofunctional approach traditionally applied by Modernism. The intricate and diverse structures that once supported myriad home-based occupations, such as buildings, sheds, courts, and yards, were replaced by austere blocks of high-density “Model Housing.”

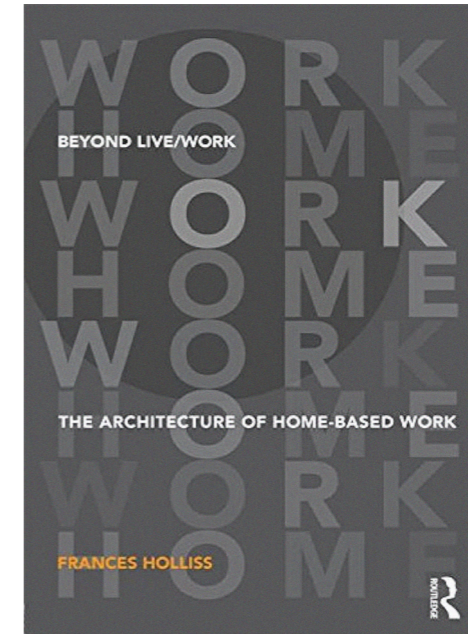
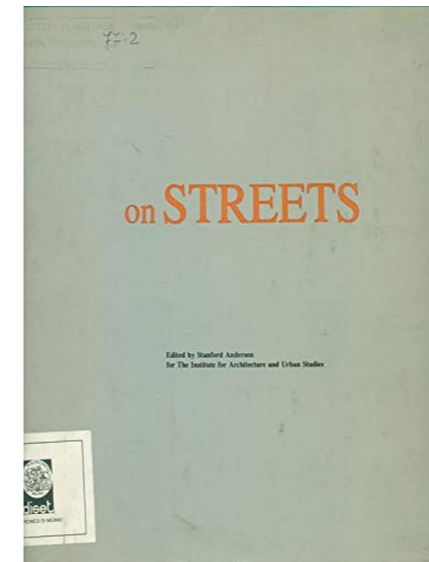
Jane Jacobs (1961) famously asserted that

“you can’t make people use streets they have no reason to use.”

Jacobs J. (1961). The Death and Life of Great American Cities. Random House, New York.



Anderson S. (1978). On Streets. MIT Press.

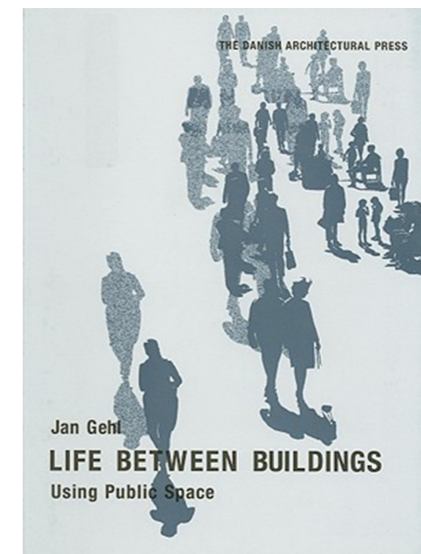


Holliss F. (2015). Beyond Live / Work: The Architecture of Home-based Work. Routledge.

This insight underscores the importance of creating stimulating and attractive ground-floor spaces. Without such incentives, a vicious cycle results, where the lack of activity perpetuates further inactivity.

“Nothing happens because nothing happens” (Gehl, 2011).

Jacobs (1961) further emphasized a substantial quantity of stores and other public places sprinkled along the sidewalks of a district provide concrete reasons for people to use the sidewalks. Hollis’s findings uncover a network of well-acquainted and often highly regarded, responsible home-based workers. Embedded in the daily life of their neighbourhoods, they serve as the backbones of local communities, contributing to social cohesion and providing an invisible layer of security.



Gehl J. (2011) Life Between Buildings. Using Public Space. Island Press

UNVEILING URBAN NARRATIVES

The designed hybrid spaces I aim to explore in my research have the potential not only to create open stores but also to generate job opportunities, addressing significant societal challenges such as unemployment and the need for commuting: 31% of the unemployed people in Tallinn are in Lasnamäe (Cerezo, 2021). By integrating diverse functions within the district, they can become hubs of activity throughout the day, fostering a sense of community and providing both economic and social benefits to the residents of Lasnamäe.

In my research, I employed photography as a primary method to visually analyse the presence of local basement shops in Lasnamäe. During my field trip, I captured over 80 images, highlighting the prevalence of this phenomenon in the area [figure 6s]. The extensive visual documentation serves as tangible evidence that the integration of small businesses into the fabric of the community is not only present but also potentially indicative of a desire among residents to activate and utilize urban spaces for both living and entrepreneurial activities. This inclination is evident also in the photographs I took depicting residents tending to the land surrounding their residential blocks [figure 5]. These images coupled with the insights obtained by the interview with Maria Derlos, an urban activist of Lasnamäe, about existing urban gardening projects vividly demonstrate a desire among the community not only to inhabit the ground floor and basement spaces of the buildings but also to extend their influence to the areas surrounding the structures.

Despite encountering language barriers that hindered direct communication with

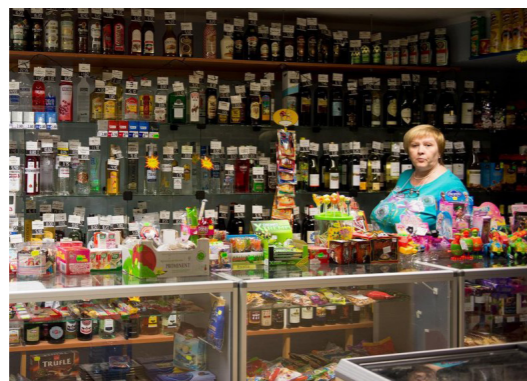
[figure 5] Lasnamae Gardening (own work)



the basement shop owners, I addressed this limitation by collecting interviews from long-time residents of Lasnamae. Respondents shared memories from their childhood and teenage years, emphasizing how these stores were integral to the community. From purchasing candies to meeting friends, the shops served as hubs for social interactions and economic support within the neighborhood.



[figure 6] Lasnamae Basement Shop interior (postimees.ee News)



[figure 6] (own work)
From left to right:
1. Bar
2. Hairsalon and Pawnshop
3. Family Medicine Center
4. Fashion Studio
5. Laundry Shop
6. Jewelry Shop
7. Hairsalon
8. Hairsalon and Comuter Repair Shop
9. Esoteric world and Tarots Reading Shop





[figure 6] (own work)
From top to bottom:
1. Shoeshop and Locksmith Shop
2. Hairsalon
3. Grocery Store

[figure 6] (own work)
From top to bottom:
1. Hairsalon
2. Computer Repair Shop
3. Sewer Shop

[figure 6] (own work)
From top to bottom:
1. Hairsalon
2. Grocery Store and Hairsalon
3. Animal Clinic

[figure 6] (own work)
From Top to bottom:
1. Fashion Studio - Second Hand Shop
- Shoemaker Shop
2. Tools Shop
3. Shoemaker Shop

[figure 6] (own work)
From Top to bottom:
1. Hairdresser - Cellphone Repair Shop
- Fashion Studio
2. Grocery Shop
3. Shoe Shop

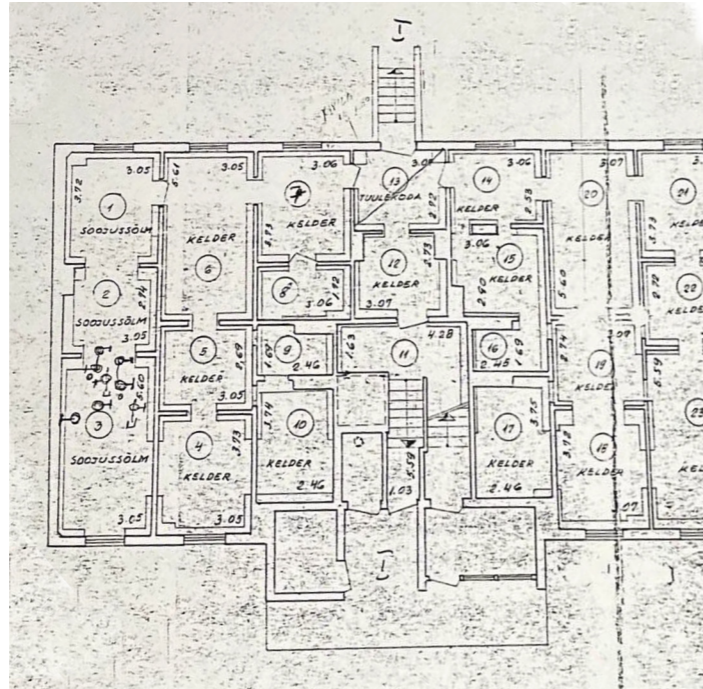
[figure 6] (own work)
From Top to bottom:
1. Fashion Studio
2. Homemade Dumplings Shop
3. Bar

Through my photography, I also documented the challenges faced by these basement shops. Some images portrayed closed doors and deteriorating store signs, highlighting instances of failure or closure [figures 7]. Factors contributing to closures ranged from the stores being too small to meet city regulations (Tisler, 2015) to the inability to compete with larger commercial malls in the vicinity: over the past four years, 209 stores with an area of less than 100 square meters have closed, while 29 large supermarkets have been added. Also, some owners of small shops attract customers by offering products that competitors do not have, sometimes of their own production, for example, culinary products (MK-Estonia, 2014).



[figure 7] Closed Basement Spaces and Failed Basement Shops

[figure 8] Archive
Drawing of the
basement floor of a
Residential Soviet block
in Lasnamäe



In conjunction with the photographic analysis of these spaces, I integrated an examination of plans sourced from the urban and architecture archive of the city. The archive drawing [figure 8] delineates these spaces as basements (*kelder*) - earmarked for storage, utility rooms, or potentially additional living space -, vestibules (*Tuulekoda*), and heating or energy centers for the building (*Soojussolm*).

Observation made during my visits inside these spaces suggest that basements, initially designed for purposes such as storage or utility, may have been utilized as additional living areas and consequently repurposed to accommodate local shops.

This adaptive reuse stands as a testament to the resourcefulness of the community in addressing economic needs and optimizing available resources in the Lasnamäe district.

ATLAS JOURNEY

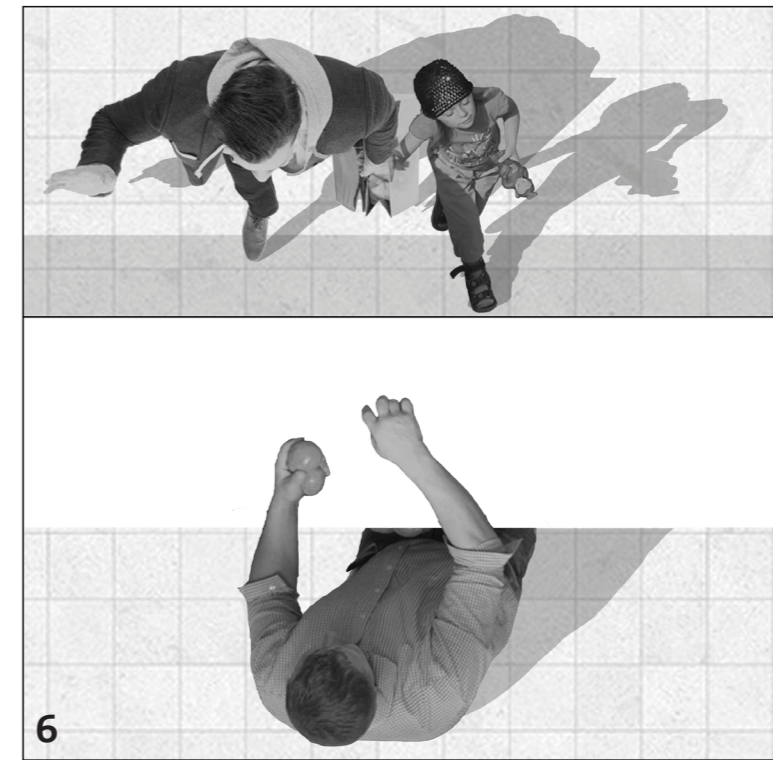
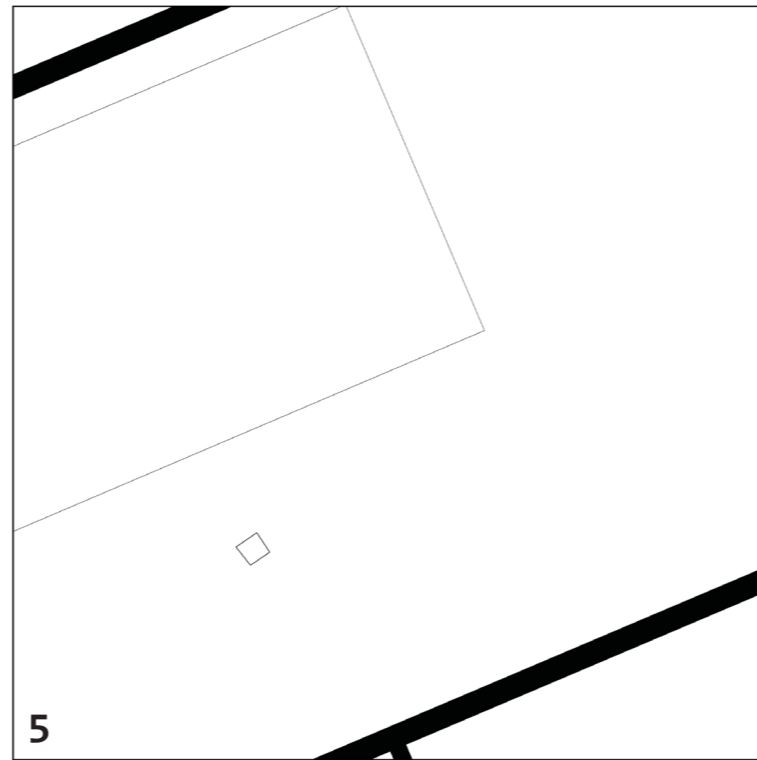
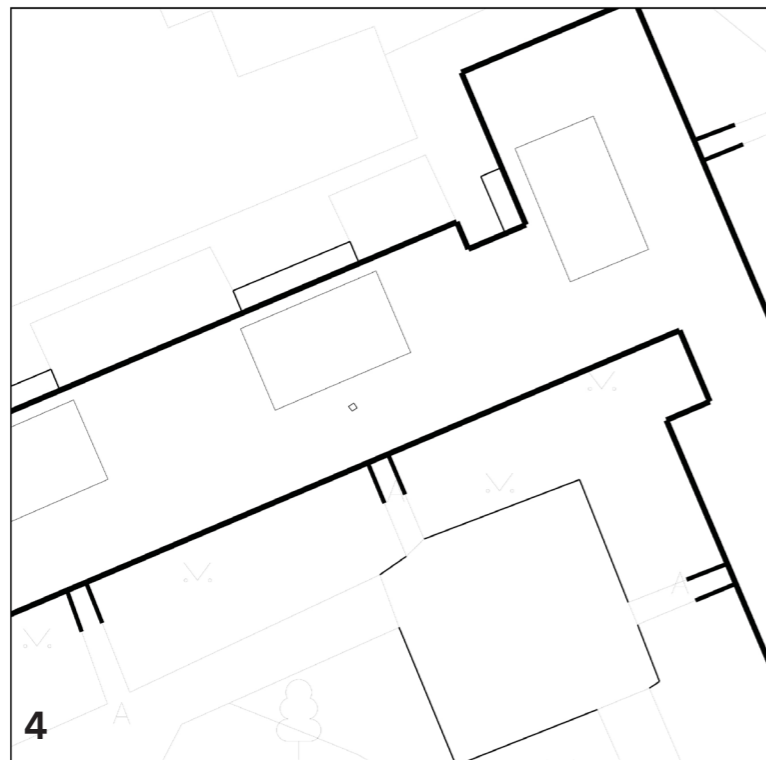
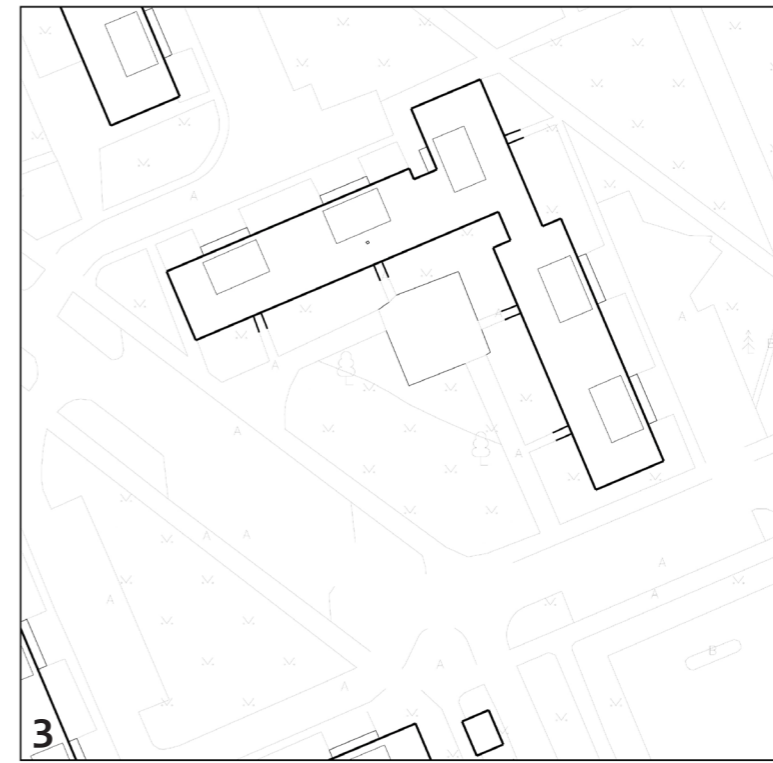
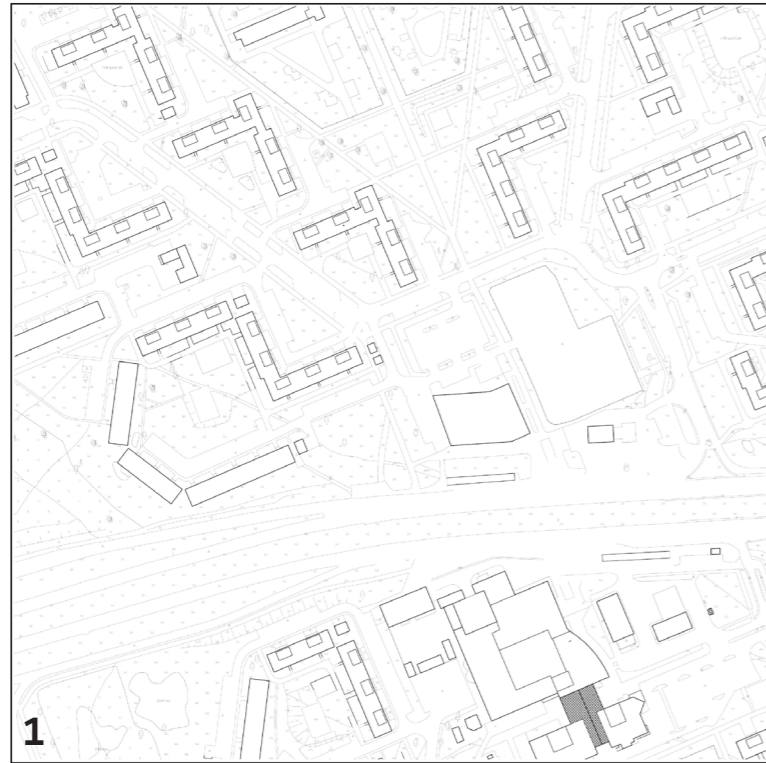
Inspired by the spatial journey narrative portrayed in the book “Cosmic View: The Universe in 40 Jumps” by Kees Boeke (1957) [Figure 9], my research plan employs a sequence of scale-specific plans to illuminate the nuanced fabric of Mustakivi [Figure 10], a Soviet-era microdistrict in Tallinn. The central narrative will revolve around the imagined path of a father and son, encountered in a basement shop, as they embark on a journey toward Mustakivi center for grocery shopping, with a deliberate stop at a commercial basement shop known for its homemade Estonian dumplings. This methodical sequence of representations aims to provide a holistic view of Mustakivi, employing varying scales to reveal the intricate relationships between people, spaces, and commercial activities within this Soviet-era microdistrict.

[figure 9] Reference:
Boeke K. (1957). Cosmic View,
The universe in 40 Jumps.



[figure 10] ATLAS JOURNEY (Future own work):

1. 1:2000 - Mapping
 - This scale provides an overview of the commercial relationships within the microdistrict. The map illustrates the proximity of commercial basements to the Mustakivi center, emphasizing key commercial hubs. The narrative highlights the start of the journey from the residents' home, depicted at the left corner.
2. 1:1000 - Facades study
 - This scale delves into the streetscape, emphasizing the deliberate emptiness of the surroundings, except for the presence of commercial basements. This representation aims to underscore the stark sterility of the streets, with a focus on the façade. The narrative progresses as people walk towards their destination.
3. 1:500 - Facades with Commercial Basements and Courtyard Analysis:
 - At this scale, the focus sharpens on the facades, detailing the architectural interaction with commercial basements. Additionally, a nuanced analysis of courtyards is presented, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the built environment.
4. 1:200 - Basement Plan of the Building:
 - This scale zooms further into the built environment, providing a detailed basement plan of the building. It unravels the spatial arrangement within, contributing to the narrative's unfolding complexity.
5. 1:50 - Inside Commercial Basement Shop with Furniture:
 - At this scale, the representation dives into the intricacies of the commercial basement shop. Detailed depictions of furniture and interior layout contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the space.
6. 1:10 - People Interaction Zoom:
 - The final scale, at 1:10, offers an intimate portrayal of people interactions. This zoomed-in perspective captures the essence of the narrative, marking the conclusion of the journey as the characters engage within the microcosm of the commercial basement shop.



[figure 10] ATLAS JOURNEY
(future own work)

PRECEDENT STUDY



Jaama Turg Market, Tallinn, Estonia

In my research, I intend to delve into various examples and case studies to explore the possibilities of hybridizing work and living spaces. In the 19th century, this fine-grained mixed-use approach encouraged the development of neighbourhood social networks and stimulated local economies. Shopkeepers, craft artist living above their shops [Figures], and doctors and dentists incorporating their homes with surgeries were commonplace (Holliss, 2015). Understanding these historical precedents serves to strengthen my argument that the modernist shift disrupted not only architectural diversity but also social and economic cohesion within communities. Hybridizing work and living spaces is not a new or radical concept; it has deep roots in vernacular architecture that will inform the development of my project, which seeks to reintegrate the diverse functions that were once harmoniously intertwined in the urban fabric.

Suq at Fez, Morocco



The typology of case studies I will employ spans active streets such as bazaar streets, squares, market buildings, and galleries.



Machiya Street, Tokyo

Through these examples, I plan to extract architectural elements, functions, and insights into the lives and professions of people residing within these existing spaces, that allows me to understand the specific needs required for the successful creation of a hybrid space [Figure 11].

In my research, I intend to delve into that allows me to understand the specific needs required for the successful creation of a hybrid space.



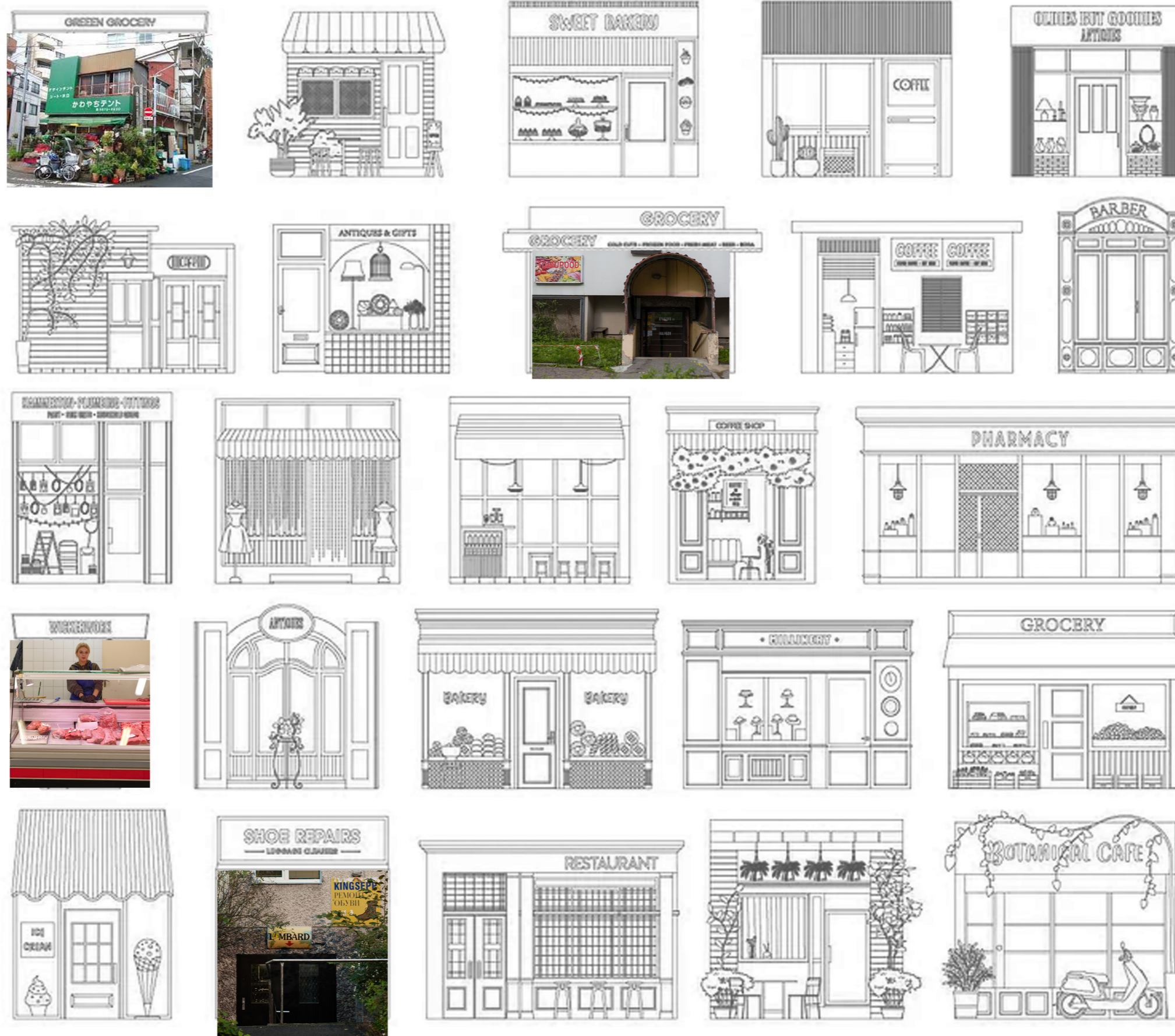
Piazza delle Erbe, Padova, Italy



Keskurg Market, Tallinn, Estonia

A. J. Diamond and B. Myers. Students' Union Housing





[figure 11] Catalogue of extraction from Precedent Studies (Future own work)
Source of base drawing: Storefronts CADBlocks (toffu.com)

MICROECONOMY FOR MICRORAYONS

Building upon my discoveries, my research hypothesis takes shape: Inspired by the understanding that residential areas and buildings can transcend the conventional monofunctional shelter concept, I propose a paradigm shift – viewing them as dynamic spaces capable of integrating diverse activities, like living, working and leisure, fostering community bonds and social life.

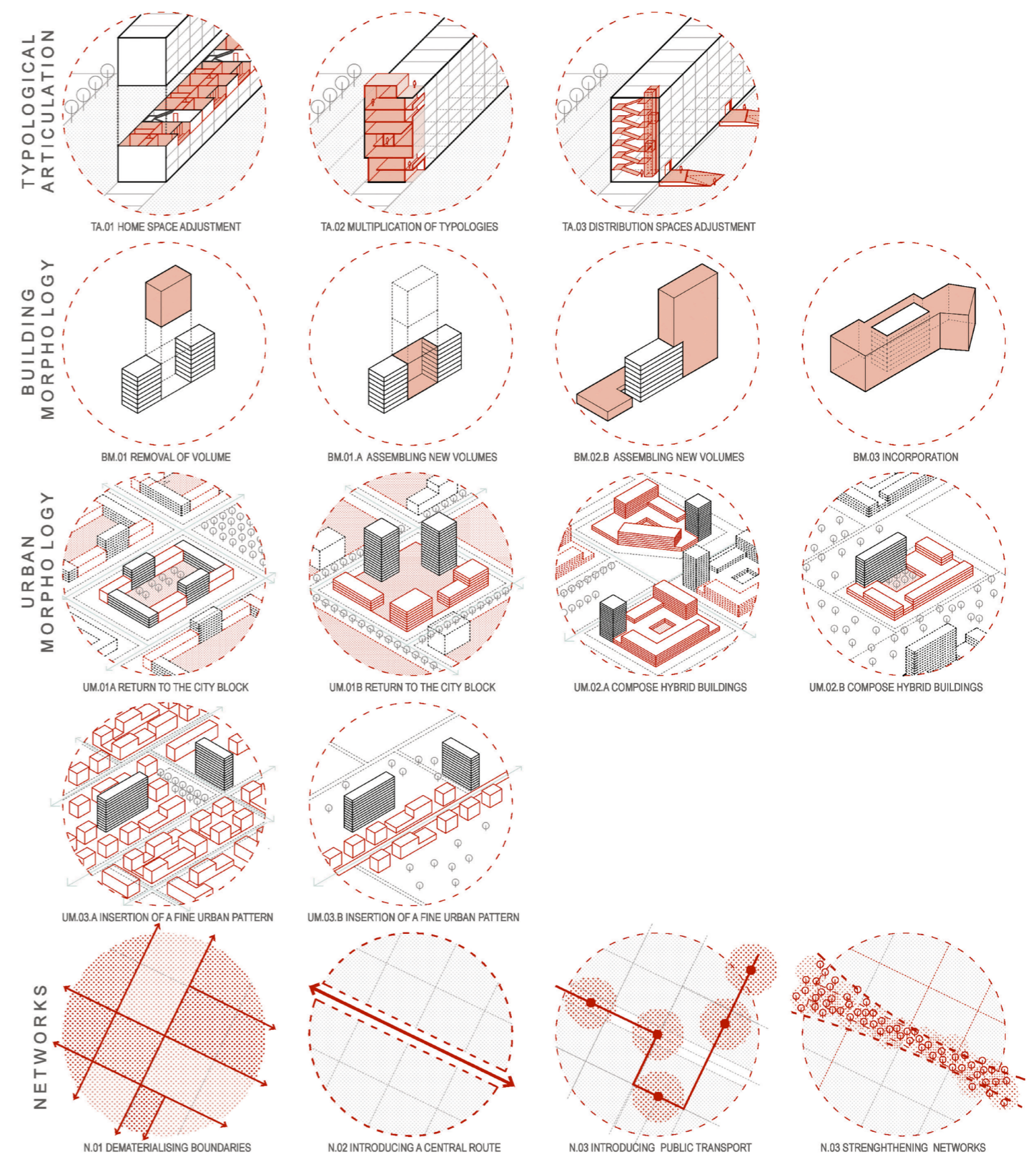
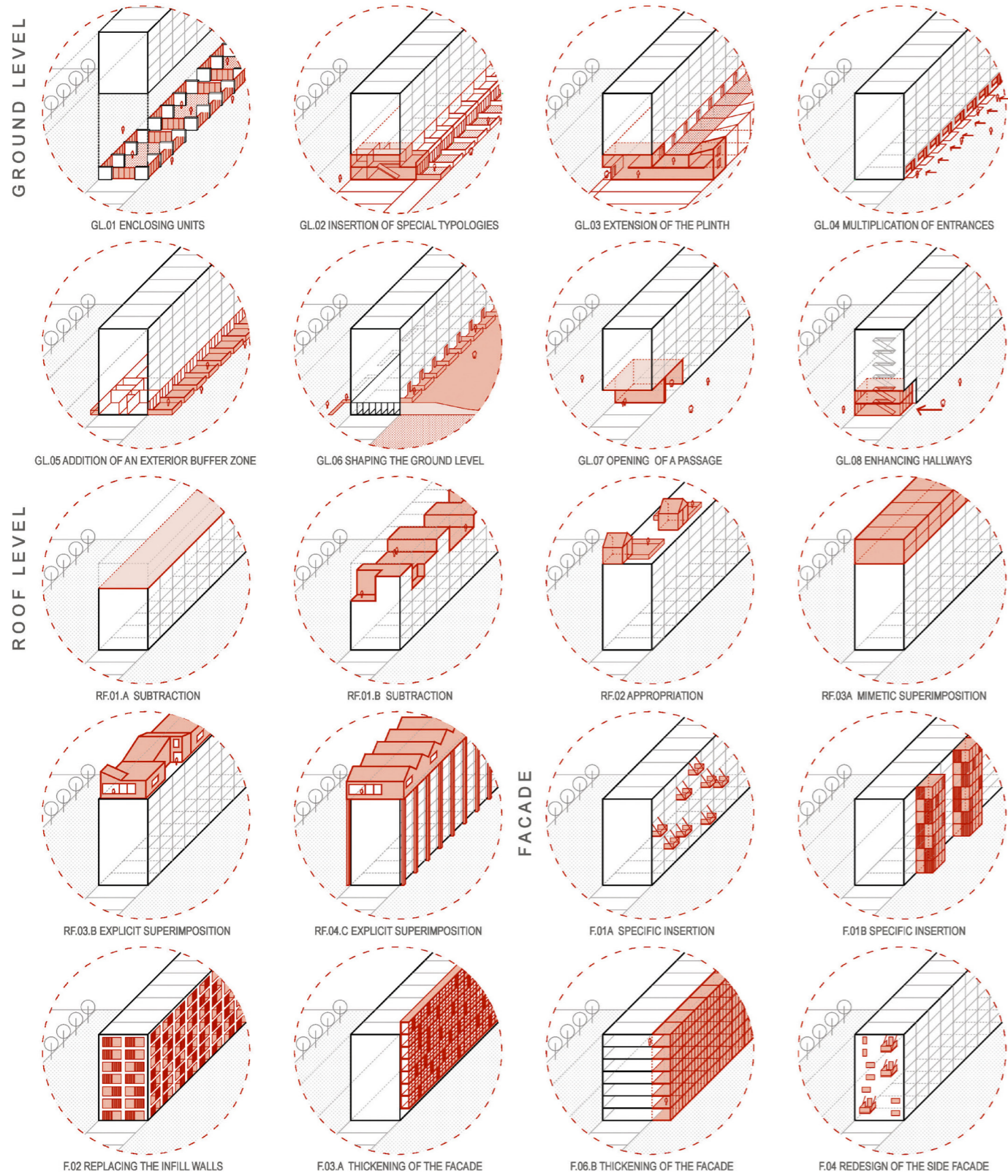
Recognizing the need for the redevelopment of Lasnamae's residential blocks, my ambition involves a project for the transformation of these socialist-era structures that entails the addition of amenities or extensions to these existing buildings [figure 12].

The prefabricated housings are not energy efficient and no longer attractive to the inhabitants. In addition to its poor physical state, this type of housing does not meet the current needs and lifestyle of residents: the housing areas of the post war period were based on a universalist view on the human being. Thus, the architectural ideals were in line with the welfare state's political ideals of equality.

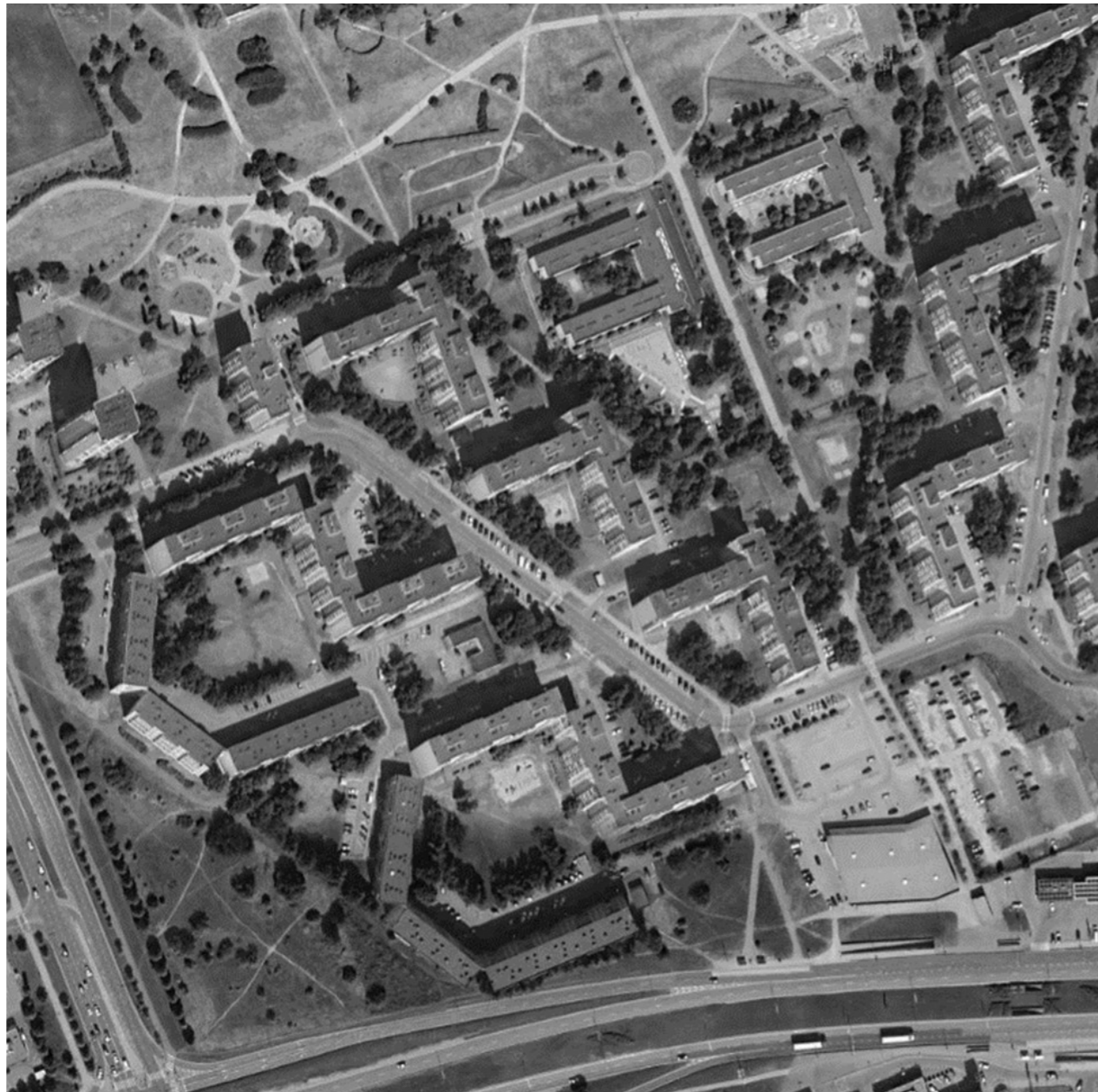
In the following decades, societal individualization emerged, and equality as an ideal was replaced by diversity. This led to a critique of universalism's focus on average

human needs, and the housing areas suddenly appeared architecturally uniform and as oppressive to the human needs of individuals. Today, several governmental renovation programs are implemented in different countries. However, these projects usually are limited to insulation and energy efficiency of prefabricated housing (BAUA, 2022). The overarching objective of my project will be to establish areas for both production and consumption, with a focus on micro economy as a tool for facilitating employment opportunities for district residents and creating a sense of place and belonging within their local community.

However, I acknowledge that the integration of this mix of activities poses challenges, particularly in the coexistence of work and living spaces and the boundaries between private and public. I am intrigued by Hollis's typology of *Community Live/Work Spaces*, which addresses some of these problems, like the social isolation inherent in home-based work. My aspiration for this project is to yield revitalized spaces that will function as dynamic social hubs and will offer residents dedicated areas for socializing and gathering.



[figure 12] Diagrams of residential transformations
Reference Source: Lepratto F. (2018). Housing Bricolage



[figure 13] Chosen Location: Mustakivi, Lasnamäe



[figure 14] Preliminary Sketch for Design Proposal (own work)



[Figure 15] Mustakivi Courtyards, Lasnamäe (own work)

In the pursuit of this vision, I will explore its potential implementation in the courtyards of Mustakivi, particularly focusing around its main axes [Figure 13-14] that people traverse most frequently and where basement shops concentrate the most.

These small businesses are, however, grappling with closure due to the encroachment of colossal capitalist stores and commercial malls in the microdistrict's center. While these larger establishments often lack character in their interaction with public spaces, presenting blank facades that contribute minimally to the vibrancy of streets and courtyards - the residents of Lasnamäe find convenience in the offerings of capitalist stores, appreciating the accessibility of diverse products in one place.

Analysing the position of basement shops in the area, I discover that, contrary to fostering a competitive atmosphere, the commercial basement shops indirectly depend on the presence of these larger stores.

A careful examination of the map [Figure 13] reveals a strategic positioning: the basement shops align precisely with the main axis street of the microdistrict, that leads directly to the bustling center where

[Figure 16] Mustakivi Courtyards, Lasnamäe (own work)

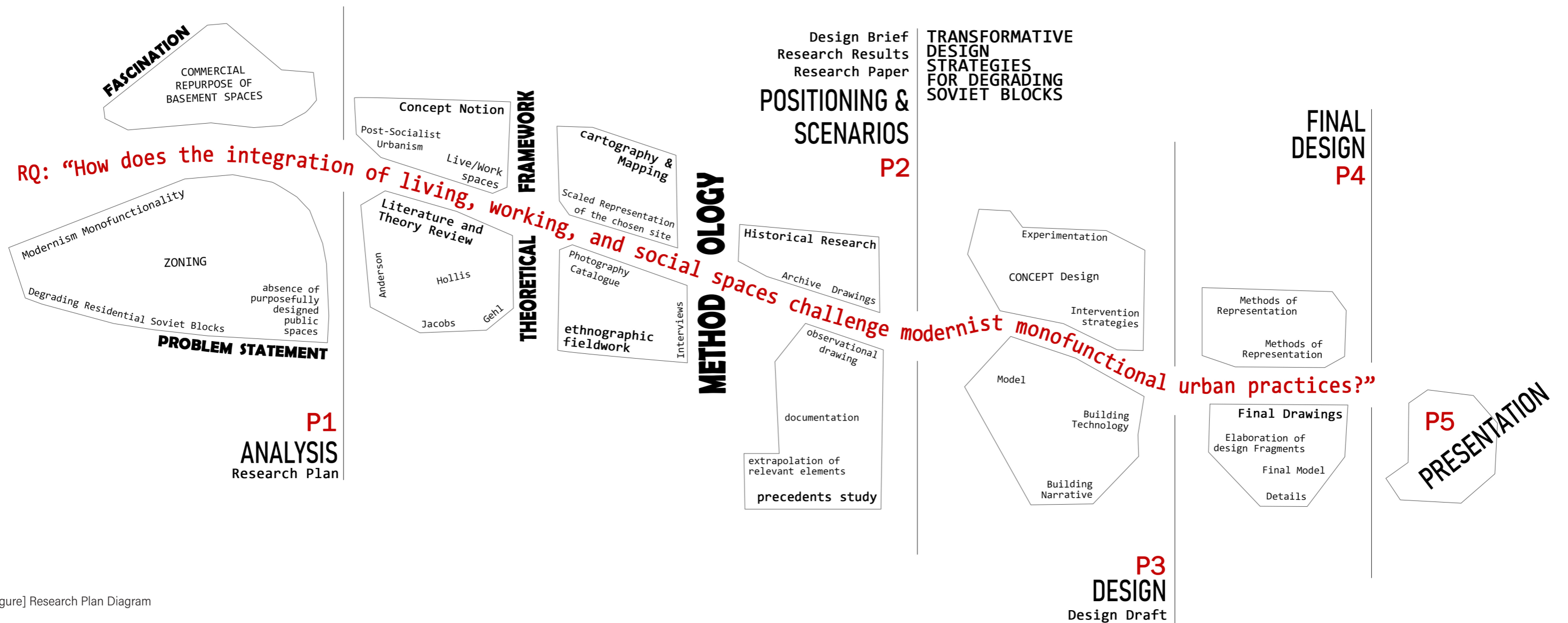


people routinely visit for groceries and commercial purposes. The interdependence becomes evident, emphasizing that fostering a symbiotic relationship rather than competition is crucial for the overall vitality of the urban landscape.

The challenges and closures experienced by basement shops [Figure 7] can be also attributed to the dispersed arrangement of housing blocks within expansive open spaces, lacking alignment with streets or well-traveled footpaths. For instance, it is worth noting that basement shops in the courtyards of Mustakivi [Figure 14-15-16] faced difficulties and closed or weren't even placed there because these areas, despite offering the same spaces, do not fall within the most frequented pathways of residents.

In my project, I aim to inject attractions and amenities into these sterile and empty characteristics, not only to prevent the potential demise of basement shops but also to enhance the overall quality of streets and degrading courtyards in the area. Drawing inspiration from successful and vibrant streets in previous case studies, I plan to incorporate typical characteristics like enclosed spaces and active facades. This approach aims to create a new pathway at

a human scale—an alternative to the main axes of Mustakivi frequented by noisy cars—revitalizing the courtyards and streets of the microdistrict. By dissecting the interplay between spatial design, economic activities, and community engagement, this research aspires to chart a course toward a more vibrant, inclusive, and people-centric urban future for Lasnamäeand, by extension, for cities facing similar post-socialist challenge.



[figure] Research Plan Diagram

SELF ASSESSMENT

In retrospect, my journey through the past months of my graduation project in architecture has been marked by a sense of accomplishment and personal growth. The liberty to explore various dimensions of our chosen topic initially posed a challenge, as I constantly craved to engage with a multitude of ideas and grappled with the fear of losing important aspects in the process. The guidance and critiques from professors and studio lectures played a pivotal role in guiding me away from moments of lost and struggle.

The transformative impact of a field trip became evident as it brought order to the chaos of my thoughts, revealing incongruences with my preconceived notions, particularly concerning the absence of clear proof of a vibrant Russian community in Lasnamae, like other examples of ethnic enclaves. The fieldwork itself exposed me to an unexpected and multilayered image of the place that doesn't align to negative media portrayals and external stereotypes.

Challenges arose during interviews with residents due to language barriers and concerns about privacy. However, I successfully gleaned insights through online articles, but also through observations

and interactions, particularly noting the dynamics between basement shop owners and their clients.

In the critical analysis of existing literature, I identified gaps and areas for further exploration. Notably, the concept of live-work, integral to my research, was found to be largely absent in socialist planning due to the foundational opposite concept of zoning. This realization sparked a commitment to contribute new insights to the field, particularly in exploring how this typology could be implemented in socialist buildings. In conclusion, I am enthused about future explorations and delving deeper into my project.

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