

REFLECTION PAPER

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Methods of Analysis and Imagination
"A Matter of Scale"

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND DESIGN

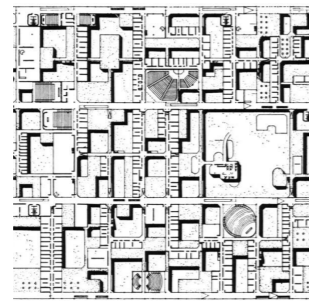
Opting for the studio theme of “A matter of scale,” which emphasizes the development of an architectural project with a human scale and positive urban impact, aligns seamlessly with my research direction. By selecting a site where such qualities are lacking, I aim to construct an alternative reality that prioritizes the human scale, thereby fostering community and enhancing the quality of urban life.

My research focus into the exploration of integrating spaces for living, working and socializing within monofunctional post-socialist residential district, like Lasnamae in Tallinn. The primary concern that drives this research is the noticeable absence of purposefully design spaces beyond mere residential buildings, a deficiency that has cast a veil of neglect over the district. However, some residents have ingeniously repurposed the not used basement spaces at the base of their residential blocks into commercial shops, manifesting the boom of economic and individual freedom of the time [Figure 1]. These are spaces where the daily life of inhabitant challenges insufficient architectural plans, reflecting a desire to reclaim the streets from the functionalized segregation imposed by socialist modernist theories. So, my fascination lies in this hidden world, where work life and community intersect, with the hope of revitalizing these decaying initiatives into a project that reinterprets the relationship between commercial activities, work, and living.

From the outset, my research provided me with a design solution that I encountered during a field trip, where I discovered the coexistence of work and living spaces. This observation became the foundation for my project, which aimed to reinterpret this domestic behaviour within a market-house hybrid building situated in the expansive courtyards formed by these blocks. My design concept sought to create an alternative urban environment, diverging from the modernist urbanism of the site and leading to the investigation of the Mat Building typology, inspired by North African and traditional urban patterns, characterized by its geometries, spatial configurations, and urban elements such as courtyards, squares, and lively streets. Through research on its evolution and contemporary interpretations [Figure 2], I incorporated elements of this typology into my project. Central to my methodology is the constant use of architectural references, which prioritizes a deep understanding of existing architectural principles and values to be repurposed in present times. Thus, it is evident that research and design were inextricably linked, each informing the other in a continuous cycle of influence.

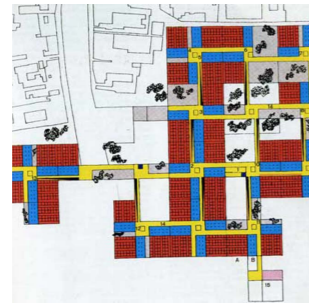
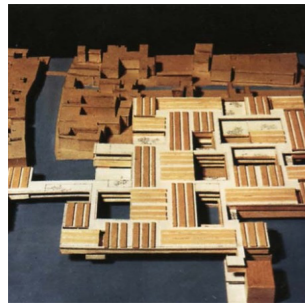


[Figure 1] (own work)
Basement Shop



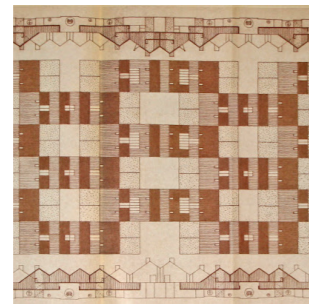
THE FREE UNIVERSITY OF
BERLIN
Candilis - Josic - Woods And
Schiedhelm
(Berlin, Germany)

1963



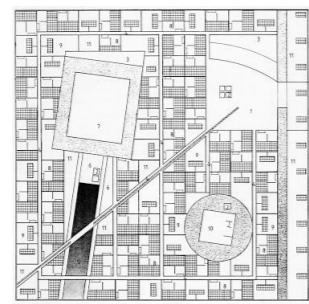
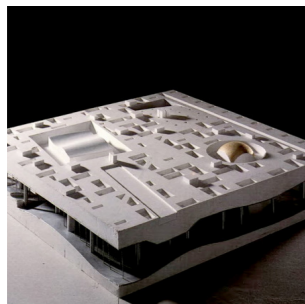
VENICE HOSPITAL
Le Corbusier
(Venice, Italy)

1965



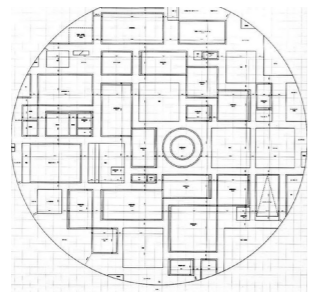
KASBAH
Piet Blom
(Hengelo, Netherlands)

1973



CONVENTION CENTER
OMA
(Agadir, Morocco)

1990



21ST CENTURY MUSEUM
SANAA
(Kanazawa, Japan)

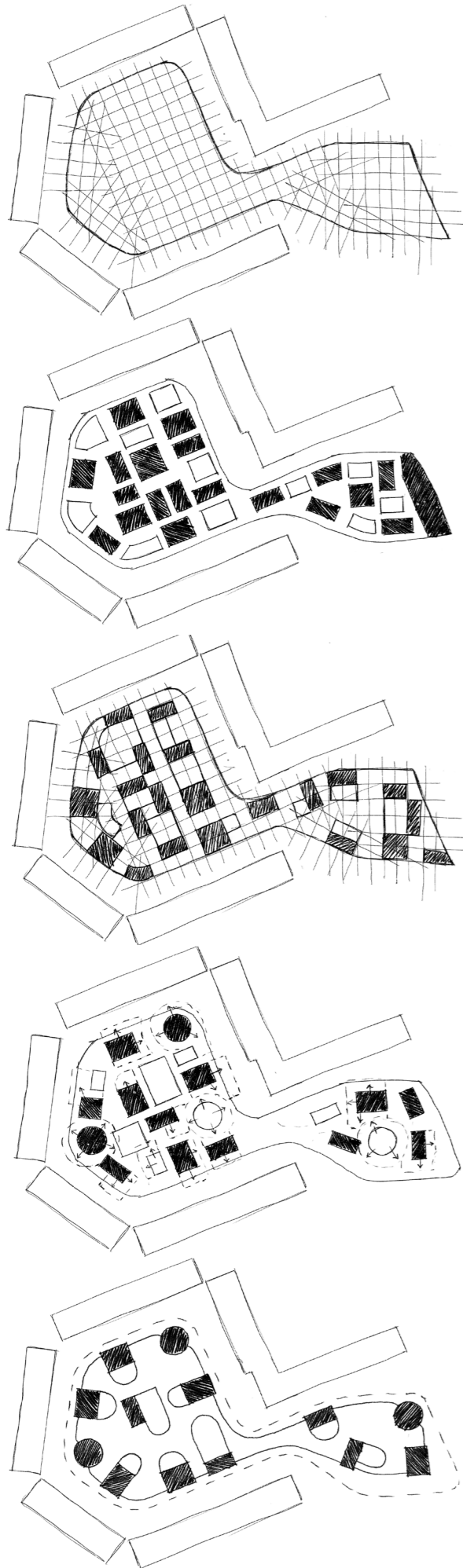
2004

The initial research phases provided a solid foundation for the project that allowed me to start the design process early, already from P2. However, numerous challenges arose throughout the design process, as I struggled to translate research findings into a cohesive building configuration. Multiple iterations were necessary to achieve the final design [Figure 3]. One significant challenge involved the role slab, which initially functioned solely as a separator between the ground floor's market functions and the residential area above. This created a sense of disconnection, as if the two parts were distinct entities rather than a cohesive whole. However, I successfully resolved this issue by perforating the slab and enhancing visibility and continuity throughout the two floors. This transformation allowed for a seamless integration of the market and residential spaces, creating the visible traditional typology, throughout the slab, of a shop-house. Additionally, technical challenges emerged, notably the inability to implement natural ventilation due to surrounding residential buildings blocking airflow. Despite this setback, I transformed the slab into a semi-intensive green roof, mitigating heat accumulation and enabling a natural cooling process, while also incorporating water collection systems. What initially posed a problem ultimately became a robust feature of my design, demonstrating the adaptability and resilience of the project.

Throughout the journey, the design process was anything but linear, characterized instead by continuous back-and-forth, questioning, and exploration of various facets of the topic and design. Particularly, as I grappled with finding the right composition for my building, my mentors and their critiques guided me away from moments of lost and struggles and helped me refine my design vision. Despite the initial hurdles, I have transcended the rigidity that once characterized my composition skills, for which I tended to separate elements in a disjointed manner rather than seamlessly blending them together, preventing the achievement of the elegance and coherence of my projects. In contrast to previous attempts where insecurities were apparent, my composition is now more harmonious and exhibit a sense of confidence and clarity in a rustic, sleek and geometrically dynamic architecture.

As the final phase of the graduation period unfolds, my focus will shift towards ensuring the continued success and adaptability of the project. Recognizing the importance of catering to the diverse needs and preferences of the shop owners, I will work to implement measures that allow for greater adaptability and customization of the commercial spaces. This not only fosters a sense of ownership and participation among the shop owners but also upholds their right to personalize and occupy the space according to their individual requirements.

[Figure 2]
Research,
Mat Building Evolution



[Figure 3] (own work)
Sketch, Design Evolution

ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PROJECT AND THE WIDER CONTEXT

The graduation project topic explores a pressing issue of the fundamental human right of Dignity, a sense of worthiness, honour, or respectability inherent in every human being. Some neighbourhood creates environment where nobody wants to live if they have any choice at all, due to a lack of dignity. The existing housing in my chosen site does not meet the current needs and lifestyle of the residents: they were based on architectural ideals in line with the soviet welfare state's political ideals of equality. But the housing suddenly appeared architecturally uniform and oppressive to the real human needs of individuals as in the following decade, societal individualization emerged, and equality as ideal was replaced by diversity.

Buildings designed with dignity often pay attention to human scale and equitable amenity, ensuring that individuals are not compromised based on their financial or social-economic status. Dignity is partly achieved through the ability to contribute to others, which is most effective when there is genuine familiarity among individuals. Therefore, spaces designed with dignity naturally facilitate encounters and connections between people. However, dignity also arises from our ability to provide for ourselves, thus spaces designed with dignity enable individuals to earn a livelihood where they reside if they desire. Moreover, engaging in meaningful work within an affordable living environment not only benefits the immediate community but also addresses the longstanding issue of the separation between home and workplace. This integration alleviates the need for excessive commuting, promoting a more balanced and sustainable lifestyle. As a design result, I developed a hybrid building that integrates residential and commercial spaces, creating a micro-economy system of production and consumption. This system elevates individuals, making them dignified and self-sufficient, while also fostering social interactions and a sense of belonging within their local community.

Moving forward, there is significant potential to expand upon my project by firstly applying similar strategies to address analogous issues in other courtyards or areas within the same district. In this way, this approach positions my project as a prototype with transferable solutions applicable to comparable contexts. But it also offers an opportunity to apply acquired knowledge and adapt it to areas where other social housings lack the same essential amenities.

My graduation project has the potential to raise awareness about this pressing issue and contribute to the international discourse. For instance, through a critical analysis of existing literature, I identified gaps and areas for further exploration, notably the absence of the live-work concept in socialist planning due to zoning principles. This realization has motivated me to contribute new insights to the field, particularly regarding the implementation of this typology in socialist buildings. In conclusion, I am excited about the prospects of further exploration on this topic.