

Life

in the

Alleys

POLITECNICO DI TORINO

Department of Architecture & Design



Master's Thesis in Architecture for the Sustainability Design

**Life in the Alleys: Reclaiming In-Between Places in the
Old Center of Bushehr, Iran**

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Abstract

In the relentless march of modernization, historic cities find themselves at a critical crossroads, grappling with the challenges of preservation and adaptation. The twenty-first century witnessed transformative shifts that have altered the essence of urban heritage. The rapid evolution of technology, changes in lifestyle, and the globalization have cast a shadow over the architectural and cultural patterns that defines historic city centers.

Against this backdrop of unprecedented change, this thesis seeks to navigate the intricate complexities of modernization, aiming not only to safeguard the tangible and intangible heritage of these urban fabrics but also to uncover innovative and sustainable pathways for their continued existence and relevance in the contemporary era. Within the broader context of urban revitalization, this research is situated in the historical city of Bushehr in the south of Iran.

Bushehr lies in a vast plain running along the coastal region on the Persian Gulf coast of south-western Iran. It is built near the ancient port city of Rishahr (Sassanian, Riv Ardasher). It was the chief seaport of the country and is the administrative Centre of its province. Bushehr was the main trade center of Iran in the past centuries. The city structures are traditional in style, modest in proportion and cost. Due to its lack of rail connection to the interior of the country and its shallow anchorage, it has lost its position as the primary port of Iran. The strategic location of city of Bushehr has been the main reason for the establishment of the port of Bushehr.

Today Bushehr remains among the most important ports in the Persian Gulf. It has an international airport, and highways connect the city to Ahvaz to the northwest and Shiraz to the northeast. A secondary coastal road links Bushehr to Bandar-e Abbas to the southeast. The old section of central Bushehr has many examples of traditional Persian Gulf architecture from the period 1870 to 1920. Most of these mansions are registered under the list of the national heritage, which among them faculty of Art and Architecture stands as the heart of cultural heritage conservation in the old center, as it has increased social spirits among the residents of the historical quarter. Bushehr is an export market for farm produce from the neighboring and fertile Fars Province. Bushehr's industries include seafood canneries, foodprocessing plants, and engineering firms. The Iranian navy maintains a base here.

Focusing on the broader concept of urban revitalization, this research seeks to inject new life into historic city center. It proposes a holistic and sustainable approach to breathe new life into Bushehr's old center. Drawing from the in-between places, the aim is to transform abandoned public spaces into social and cultural hubs. The vision is not merely to cater to tourism but to reintegrate the area as a livable, dynamic space with diverse daily activities. Emphasizing the significance of social hubs, the design aims to facilitate socialization, cultural exchange, and the fostering of a vibrant community spirit.

In essence, this thesis proposes a strategy that extends beyond traditional tourism paradigms. It suggests a dynamic, sustainable, and culturally immersive transformation in Bushehr's old center, combining history, modernity, and community regeneration. The following sections will delve deeper into the specific details of this transformative approach.

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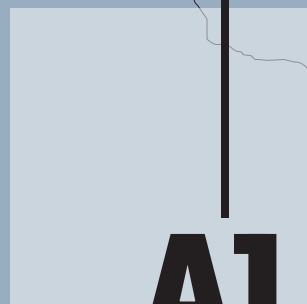
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References



A1

Context





figure. 1: Bandar Bushehr, drawing by Eugène Flandin, 1840.

Geography

Bushehr lies on 7m above sea level, located in south west of Iran. It is located at the northern tip of a small, level peninsula that is connected to the mainland by tidal marshes, close to the head of the Persian Gulf. The expansion of Bushehr's borders with the sea has led to the wide commercial connection of this port with the countries of the Persian Gulf, mainly southeast Asia. Bushehr's port has always had a favorable commercial position in the country due to its central location among southern ports. Thus, this unique location played an important role in the establishment of the city's first settlements.

Since the first and second millennia BC, the historically rich Bushehr Peninsula has been an important hub of culture. Rey Shahr, as it was called in the Elamite era, had significant ties to the Susa civilization, as shown by several artifacts found in the area. The city was strongly defended with walls, ditches, and towers during the Sassanid era, indicating its strategic significance. At the time, it was known as Ram Ardeshir after its creator, Ardashir I. These old fortifications demonstrate the city's strategic location and defensive importance. In the 18th century, Nader Shah Afshar recognized Bushehr's strategic position along the Persian Gulf, establishing a military center and shipbuilding facilities to bolster his naval power. The 1763 treaty with the British East India Company further elevated Bushehr's status as a crucial trading port, drawing international attention and influence. From the 18th to early 20th centuries, Bushehr became a focal point for European colonial powers, particularly Britain and Portugal. This period saw the establishment of the Saadat School, international embassies, and banks, transforming Bushehr into a bustling hub of commerce and diplomacy. The European presence also introduced modern architectural elements, blending with local styles to create a unique urban landscape. These historical developments have profoundly shaped Bushehr's geographical significance, influencing its economic, cultural, and architectural evolution.

Climate

Bushehr province has a warm climate that is hot and humid in the coastal parts and hot and dry in the interior parts of the province. It is characterized by long, extremely hot summers and short, mild winters. Summers in Bushehr is intense, with average high temperature exceeding 38°C.

Bushehr province is one of the low rainfall provinces of the country, and the most important systems affecting it in the winter season are the Mediterranean and Sudanese low pressures, which significantly affect the months of December, January and February with the highest number of rainy days in the whole year.

History

Throughout the centuries, Bushehr's strategic location has played a pivotal role in shaping its destiny. In the 16th century, the city fell under Portuguese occupation, becoming a significant stronghold and trade center in the region. The Portuguese established a fortress and controlled trade routes, exerting influence over the Persian Gulf for several decades before being ousted by Persian forces.

During the Safavid era (1501-1736), Bushehr experienced a renaissance as a center of trade, culture, and architecture. The Safavids, known for their patronage of the arts and architecture, developed the city's infrastructure, constructing mosques, bazaars, and defensive fortifications that still stand as testaments to their grandeur and vision. The period also saw the flourishing of Persian poetry, music, and traditional crafts.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Bushehr became a focal point of British interest due to its strategic location along the Persian Gulf. The British established a consulate and maintained a presence in the city, further shaping its political and economic landscape. This period saw significant modernization efforts, including the construction of roads, railways, and the development of the oil industry, which transformed Bushehr's economy and urban fabric. Western influences also brought new educational institutions and cultural exchanges. In recent decades, the development of Military forces, Navy and the construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, has captured international attention. However it has a significant impact on the urban expansion and has limited the space available for civilian development.

Despite the challenges and upheavals of history, Bushehr remains a vibrant and culturally rich city. As Bushehr looks towards the future, it continues to embrace its heritage while embracing modernity, forging a path forward that honors its legacy.



figure. 2: Bushehr's port, photo taken by Walter Mittelholzer and Albert Heim between 1924 and 1934.

Population

According to the latest statistics, the population of Bushehr province is 1 million 210 thousand 951 people. Of this population, 53% are men and 47% are women. Also, 71.5% of the population lives in cities and 28.5% in villages. Demographic statistics of students show that 260,000 students started the new academic year in this province.

Language

Approximately, all people of Bushehr province (and also the city) speak in Farsi with the indigenous accent. Various kinds of accents exists in Bushehr rural area and villages, with the diversity. However in some parts of Bushehr's province, Arabic is also spoken.

Religion

The city of Bushehr is mainly Muslim and followers of the Shia religion. The existence of mosques in this city is very important, especially in the old context of Bushehr, which has a rich history. Old mosques such as Kufa Mosque, Dehdashti Mosque and Sheikh Saadoun Mosque are not only places of worship but also play an important role in preserving the culture and architectural history of this region. This city is well known for its religious ceremonies and events that are held each year in a specific month and it engages a wide range of local's participation.

- Port
- Military Zone
- Available Coastline



1 The Old Center

2 First Extension
of The City

3 Second Extension
of The City (1960-2000)

4 Latest Extension on the Traces of
the Ancient Hills (2000-Today)

Territorial extension

Three Major Extensions

The old texture of Bushehr is notable for its cohesive and interconnected spaces. Every corner offers unique views of novelty and beauty, making it one of the most remarkable urban fabrics in Iran. Despite the hot and humid climate, the buildings feature extensive open spaces to accommodate the weather, resulting in a dense and complex architectural layout. Overall, this blend of density and openness defines the distinctive character of Bushehr's urban planning and architecture.

In this map the different stages of Bushehr city's expansion through time is visible. Considering the important geographical position of Bushehr, each expansion of the city is mainly dedicated to a certain function. It should also be mentioned that Military areas have occupied a considerable space of Bushehr.

The Proportion

This graph displays the relational and built-up spaces at various stages of the extension. There is less built-up space and more relational space with each extension, as it is clear. Due to climate, the urban texture was once small and thick, but roadways were created when cars became widely used.

The historical core of Bushehr, comprising around 70% of traditional buildings, features interconnected courtyards and narrow alleys, reflecting its dense and cohesive urban fabric.

Recent developments focused on contemporary residential and commercial buildings further reduced density, with more open spaces and planned layouts, improving spatial relations but lowering the density compared to the old center.

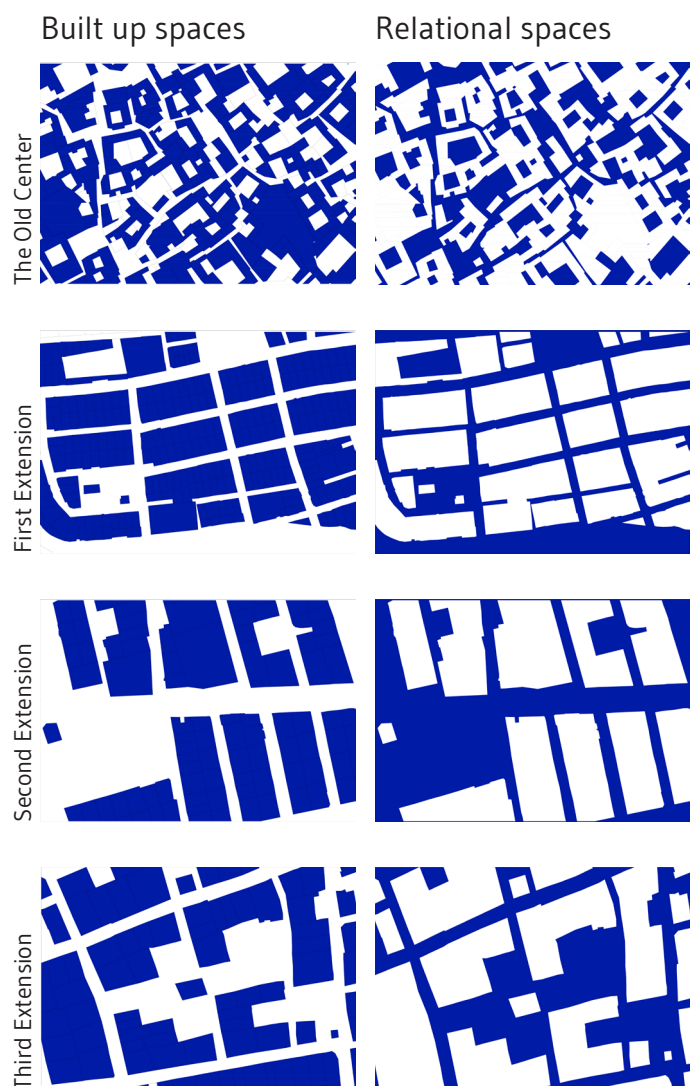


figure. 3: The relational and built-up spaces at various stages of the extension.

Urban Changes

1856–2003

- Wall and Gate of the city; 1856
- Historic texture of Bushehr till 1956, First changed happened Wall and gate of city destroyed
- Historic texture of Bushehr 1964, Enghelab street construction which divided the historical texture into 2 parts
- Historic texture of bushehr till 2003; Conversion of Ahangaran Bazaar to the Ahangaran Street.

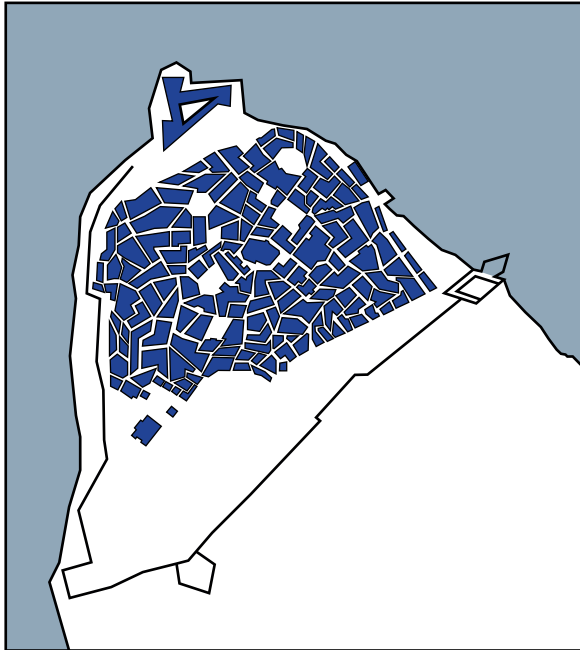


figure .4: The Urban Fabric in the year 1856



figure .5: The Urban Fabric in the year 1956

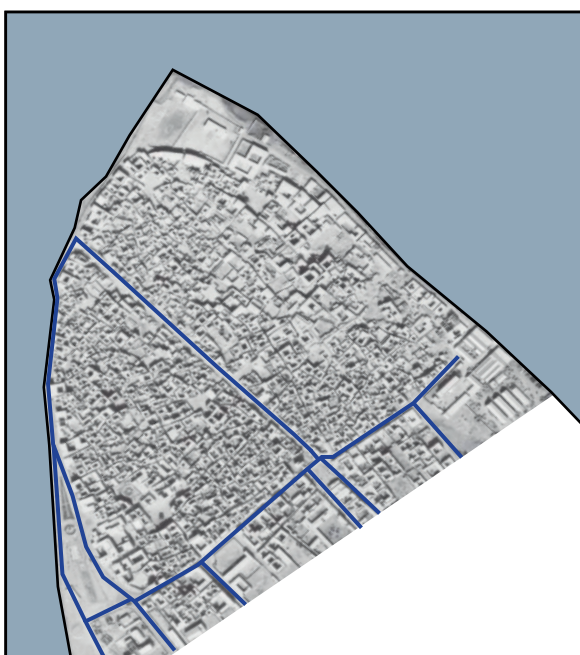


figure .6: The Urban Fabric in the year 1964

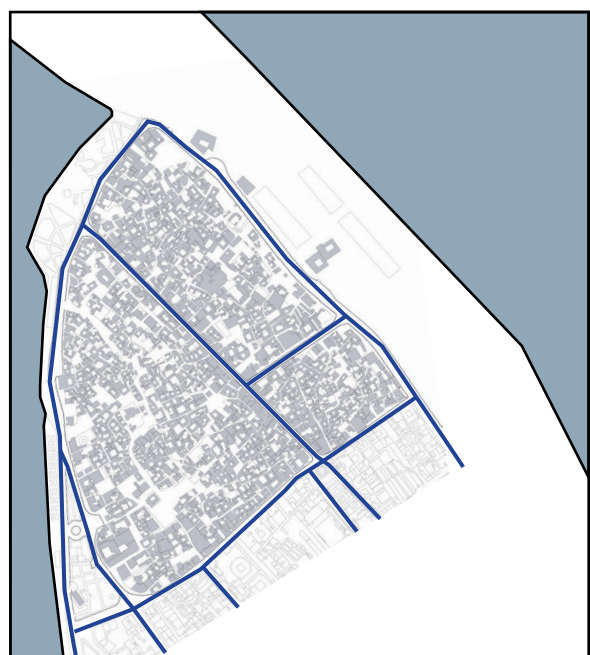


figure .7: The Urban Fabric in the year 2003

Historic Quarters Of Bushehr

The old center of Bushehr is located in the northern point of the city, which is triangular in shape, connected to the sea on two sides and to the land on one side. This old structure is divided into four quarters named Behbahani, Shanbedi, Dehdashti and Kooti, which is the foundation of hundreds of small and big mansions. These quarters have been named according to their original inhabitants, when each clan and group chose a part of the city to reside. In the past, they did not build houses at first, but first established bazaars, mosques, and schools, and by building infrastructure, they encouraged people to build their own houses, which led to establishment of the old center.

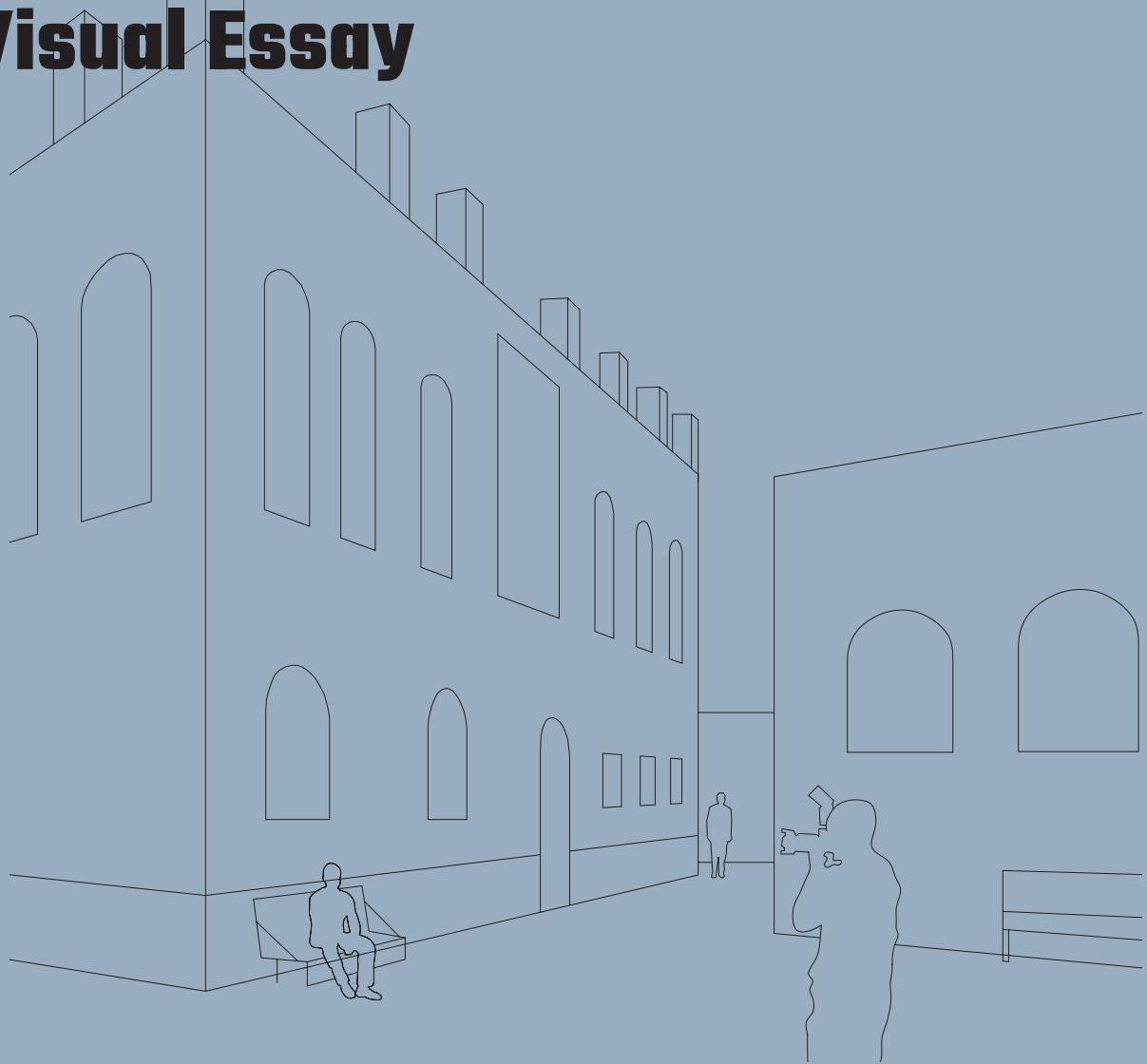
Today, the modern texture of Bushehr is in front of the historical context and people have decided to leave the old fabric and move to the modern context due to the lack of suitable living facilities, which has caused serious damage to the historical fabric, As a result of all the mentioned concerns habitants are losing the sense of the place grounded in the past, the identity of city and the value of the area.

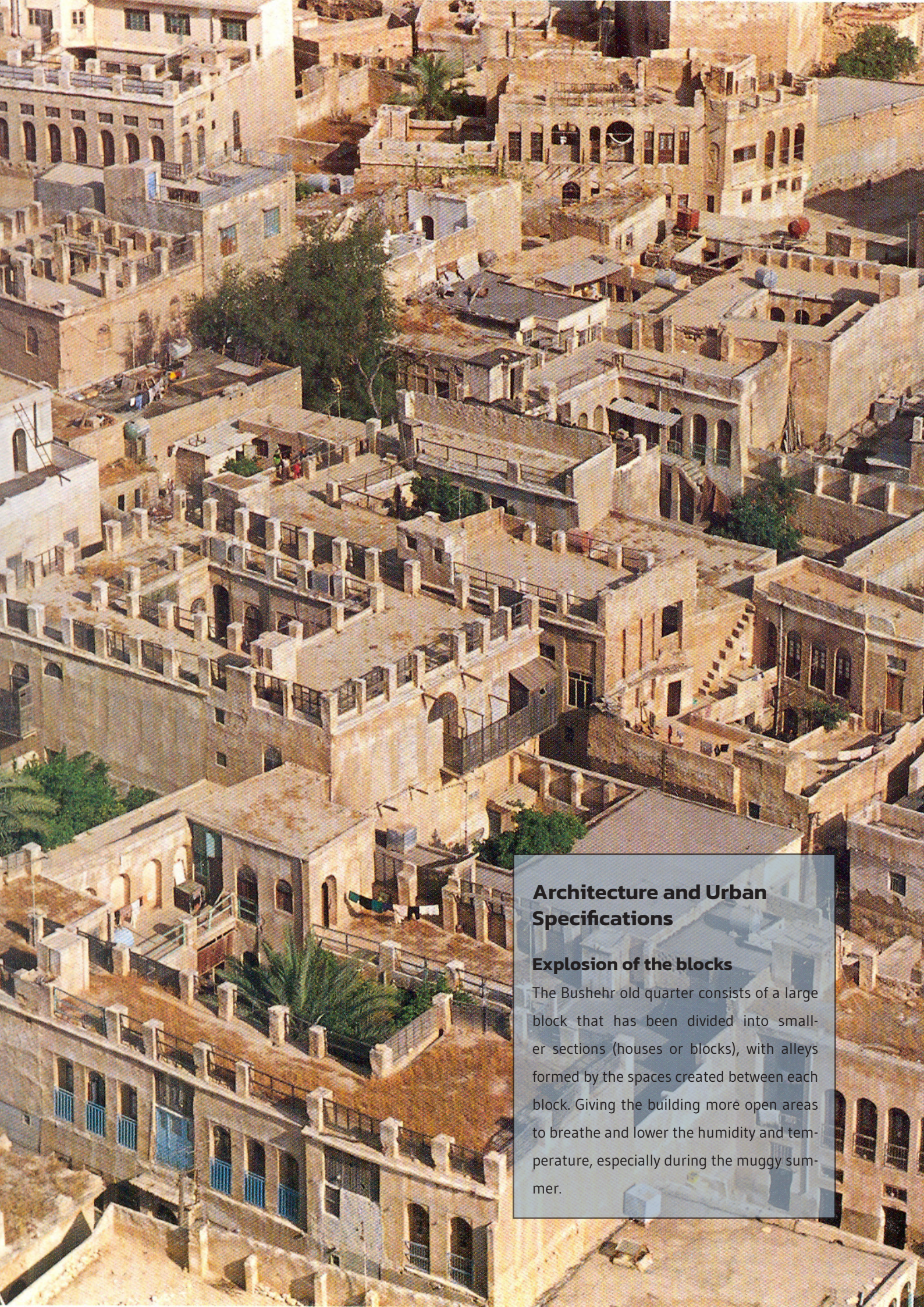


figure .8: Placement of each historic quarter and its important mansions in Bushehr

A2

Visual Essay





Architecture and Urban Specifications

Explosion of the blocks

The Bushehr old quarter consists of a large block that has been divided into smaller sections (houses or blocks), with alleys formed by the spaces created between each block. Giving the building more open areas to breathe and lower the humidity and temperature, especially during the muggy summer.



High density of the quarter

The city walls surrounding Bushehr were still in place when the original quarters of the city were formed. The city only occupied a small area of the land, and its residents choose to live inside its walls for safety reasons. For these reasons, there is a high density in older town. This density was also caused by shading and blinding.



Hieght of the buildings

The majority of the buildings in Bushehr's historic quarter are two or three stories tall, with the first floor typically serving as the service level. Staying above ground level helped to reduce humidity, which was probably the main reason.





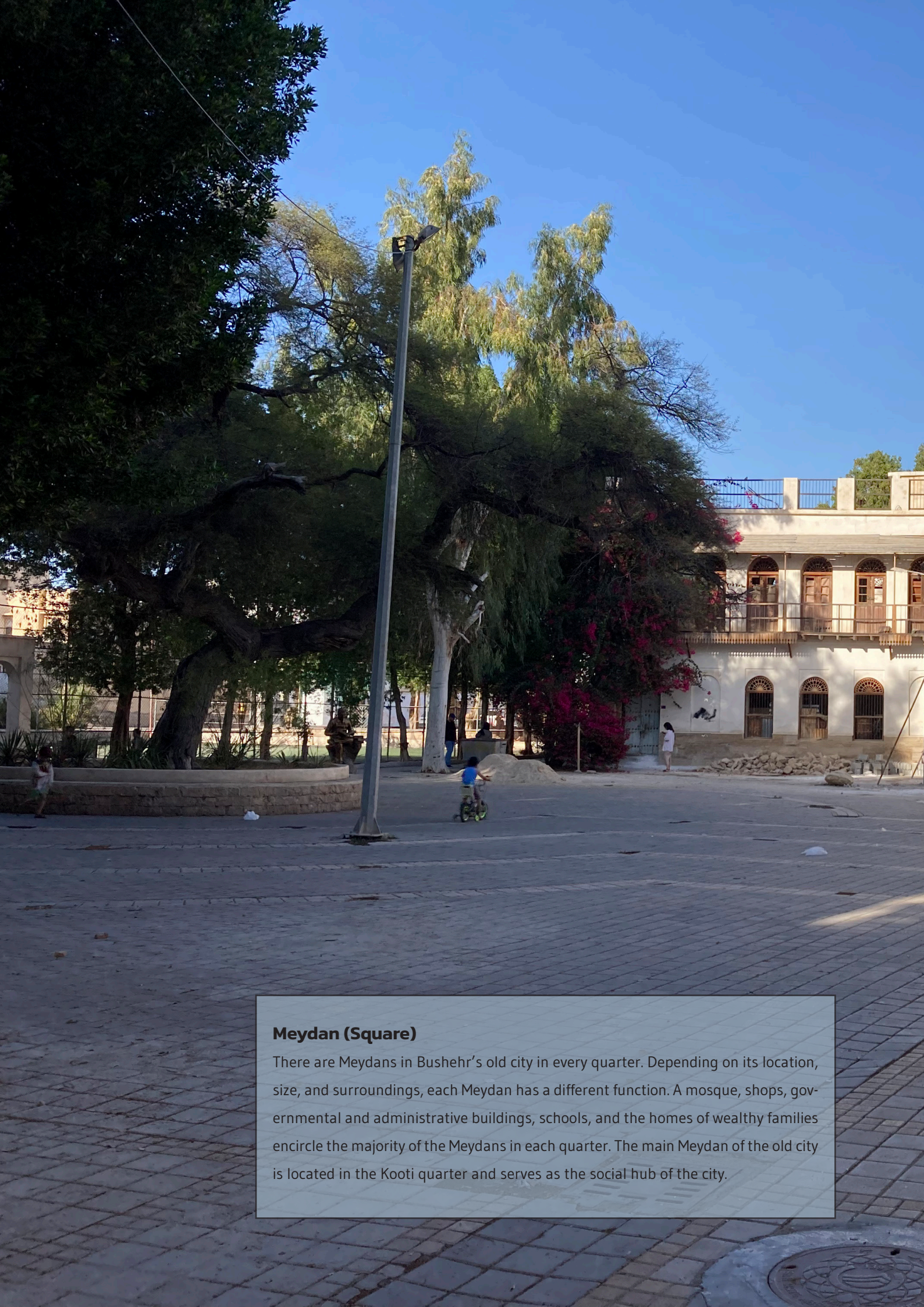
Courtyard

The courtyard's placement inside the home was primarily done for ventilation and humidity reduction. The courtyard was also used for other purposes, such as religious rituals and marriages. Because of the building's height in relation to its dimensions, courtyards typically had shadows during the day. Typically, Bushehr courtyards lack flower beds and have only a single tree as the only green feature. Larger mansions often include two yards: one for the family's exclusive use and the women, and one for visitors and guests.



White Color

The majority of the buildings in Bushehr's historic quarter were white, however the brightness was fading over time. Reducing the temperature and increasing solar reflection was most likely the primary cause.



Meydan (Square)

There are Meydans in Bushehr's old city in every quarter. Depending on its location, size, and surroundings, each Meydan has a different function. A mosque, shops, governmental and administrative buildings, schools, and the homes of wealthy families encircle the majority of the Meydans in each quarter. The main Meydan of the old city is located in the Kooti quarter and serves as the social hub of the city.



Extroverted Architecture

Bushehr's architecture is extroverted and introverted at the same time. Having multiple faces and openings kept indoor and outdoor connection while respecting the privacy.

The urgent requirement for ventilation was most likely one of the causes. Compared to other regions of Iran, Bushehr displays the facades with the most windows in its architecture.





Numerous Openings

In Bushehr's old quarter, the majority of the rooms have 3, 4, 5, or 7 openings on each side. These kinds of openings lower the temperature and humidity in the space and create blinds. These openings usually had a shader outside of the building. Sometimes this shading was provided by the thickness of the walls.



Shenashir (Balcony)

Bushehr uses a kind of balcony known as shenashir. The shenashir's wooden structure includes a wooden cover that serves as a shader. Although this structure is designed in a way to block the visual connection from outside, It does not cover the sunlight and ventilation.



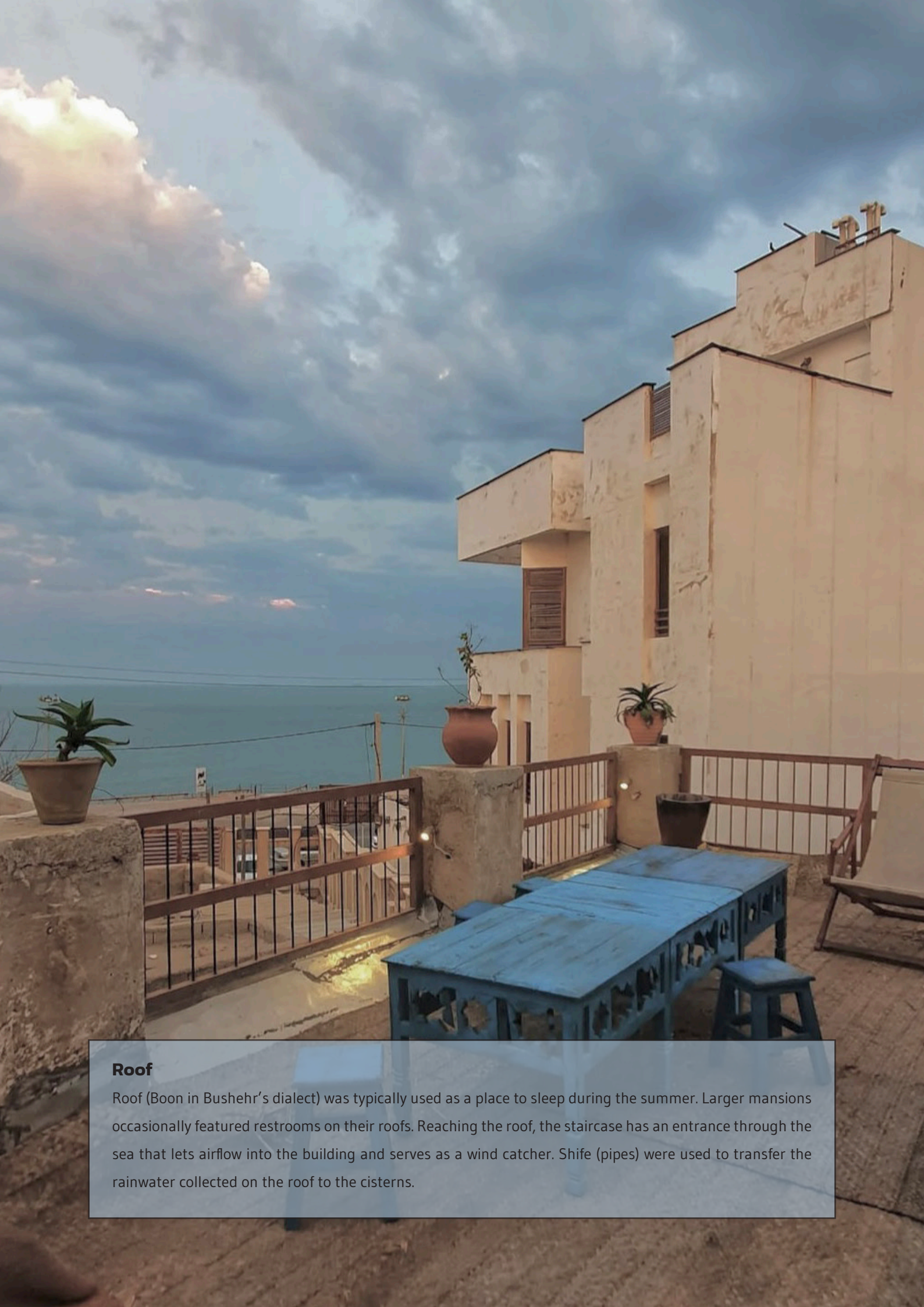
Tarmeh (terrace)

Tarmeh, also known as Ivan in other regions of Iran, is a feature of the traditional architecture of Bushehr. A terrace having two or three covered sides and typically a roof is called a Tarmeh. It was mostly used as a location to sleep on summer nights.



Hashti (Entrance)

Hashti is a small space that works as a filter between the entrance and the house. It is also turning point before entering the main courtyard and was mainly used as a waiting room for guests and short visits.



Roof

Roof (Boon in Bushehr's dialect) was typically used as a place to sleep during the summer. Larger mansions occasionally featured restrooms on their roofs. Reaching the roof, the staircase has an entrance through the sea that lets airflow into the building and serves as a wind catcher. Shife (pipes) were used to transfer the rainwater collected on the roof to the cisterns.



In-Between Places

In Bushehr's architecture, this concept refers to the voids or gaps between the solid urban texture. These spaces in the old center of Bushehr play a significant role in providing ventilation, circulation and social interaction.



Open spaces in built-up area

Open spaces in the dense quarter of Bushehr are mostly created by the intersection of multiple alleys. These spaces often have an irregular form and are surrounded by buildings in different heights. However the existence of various elements such as vegetation, public facilities or mosques can provide important functions such as park, square and open air activities.

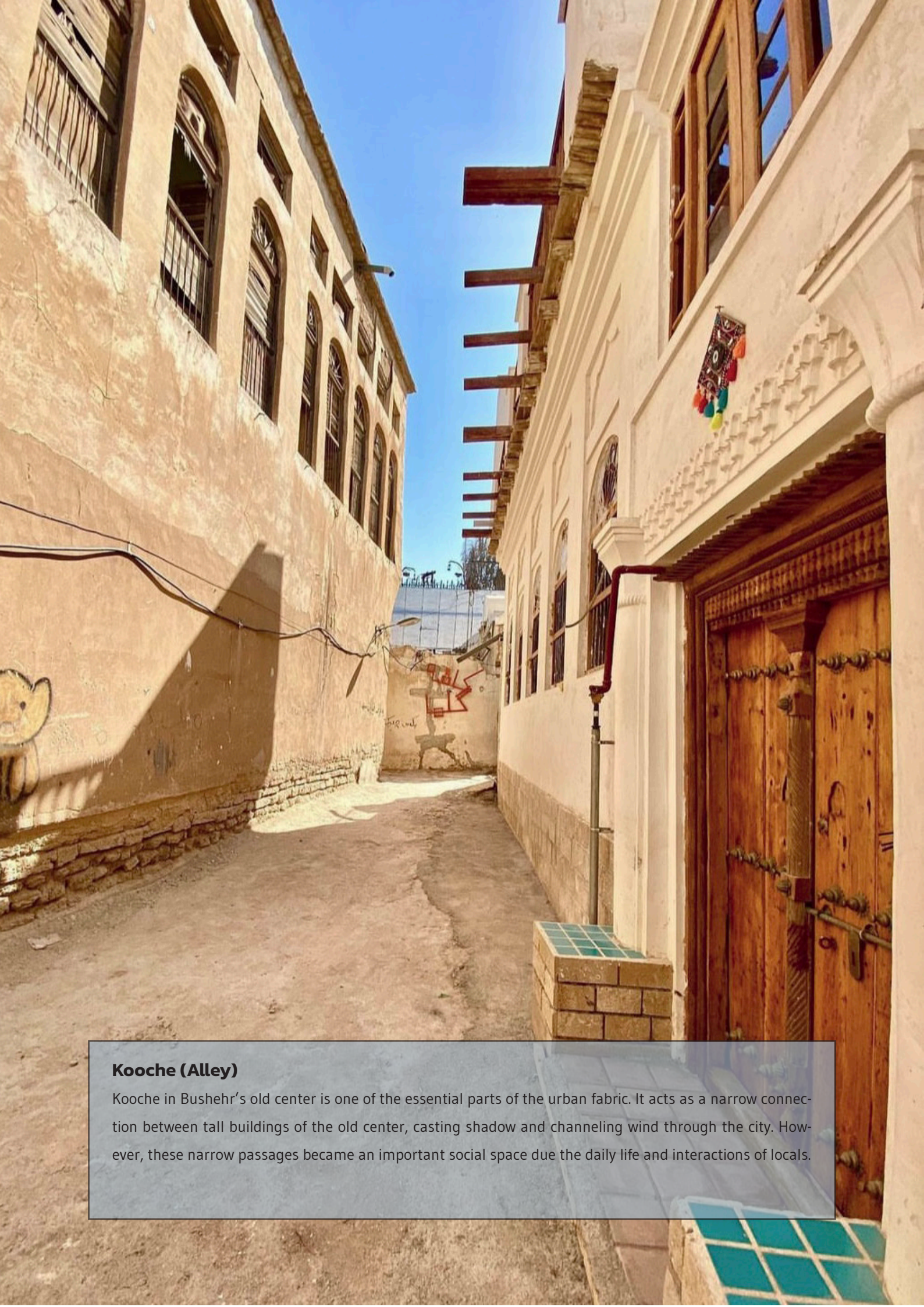


Kooche (Alley) – Music Festival

The importance of music festivals in the old center of Bushehr.

Traditional music of Bushehr has always been a part of the daily life of residents. It became as an annual celebration for the duration of one week which is held in courtyards and alleys. This festival brings a huge potential for public interaction.





Kooche (Alley)

Kooche in Bushehr's old center is one of the essential parts of the urban fabric. It acts as a narrow connection between tall buildings of the old center, casting shadow and channeling wind through the city. However, these narrow passages became an important social space due the daily life and interactions of locals.



Kooche and cultural activities

One of the well known alleys in Bushehr that became a social hub for most of the cultural and traditional activities. This type of Kooche is originally a place where locals and specially university students, gather to drink tea at any time of the day. This narrow covered alley consists of a cafe and shops such as woodcraft and music instruments , which encouraged the cultural exchange and moreover turned into a landmark for





Zone 1 - Kooti Square

The only historical square of kooti's quarter, surrounded by important facilities such as Faculty of Art & Architecture, University's Dormitory, Sheikh Saadon Mosque and Najafi Mansion.



The old tree which is respected as the center and symbol of the quarter





The current constructed elements and pavements in kooti square





The entrance to Faculty of Art & Architecture located in one of the oldest mansions facing the square. (Nozari Mansion)



Faculty of Art & Architecture



The student dormitory of the faculty of Art & Architecture



Student Dormitory



The only kids playground of the quarter







The state of vegetation near the playground and football field



Zone 2 – The Main Car Access

The main car access of the quarter passes through this area which is surrounded by different facilities and activities such as The School, Local restaurant that offers a common kitchen activity with B&B, Museum of Music Instruments and Cultural Heritage Office.







The entrance to the school







The open space next to the school without any urban furniture





Side walk in front of the school with no pavement







The entrance to the Museum of Music Instruments



Open space near the Museum offering a little square





The entrance to the local restaurant





The Historical and Cultural Heritage Office facing an open space









Zone 3 – The Open Space Next To The Commercial Zone

This area is an intersection between residential houses and the mosque. It has the direct connection to the commercial zone and has an entrance to the quarter from the main commercial street.











The Parking spot of this area offering up to seven spots







The covered alley that is the direct connection to the commercial street

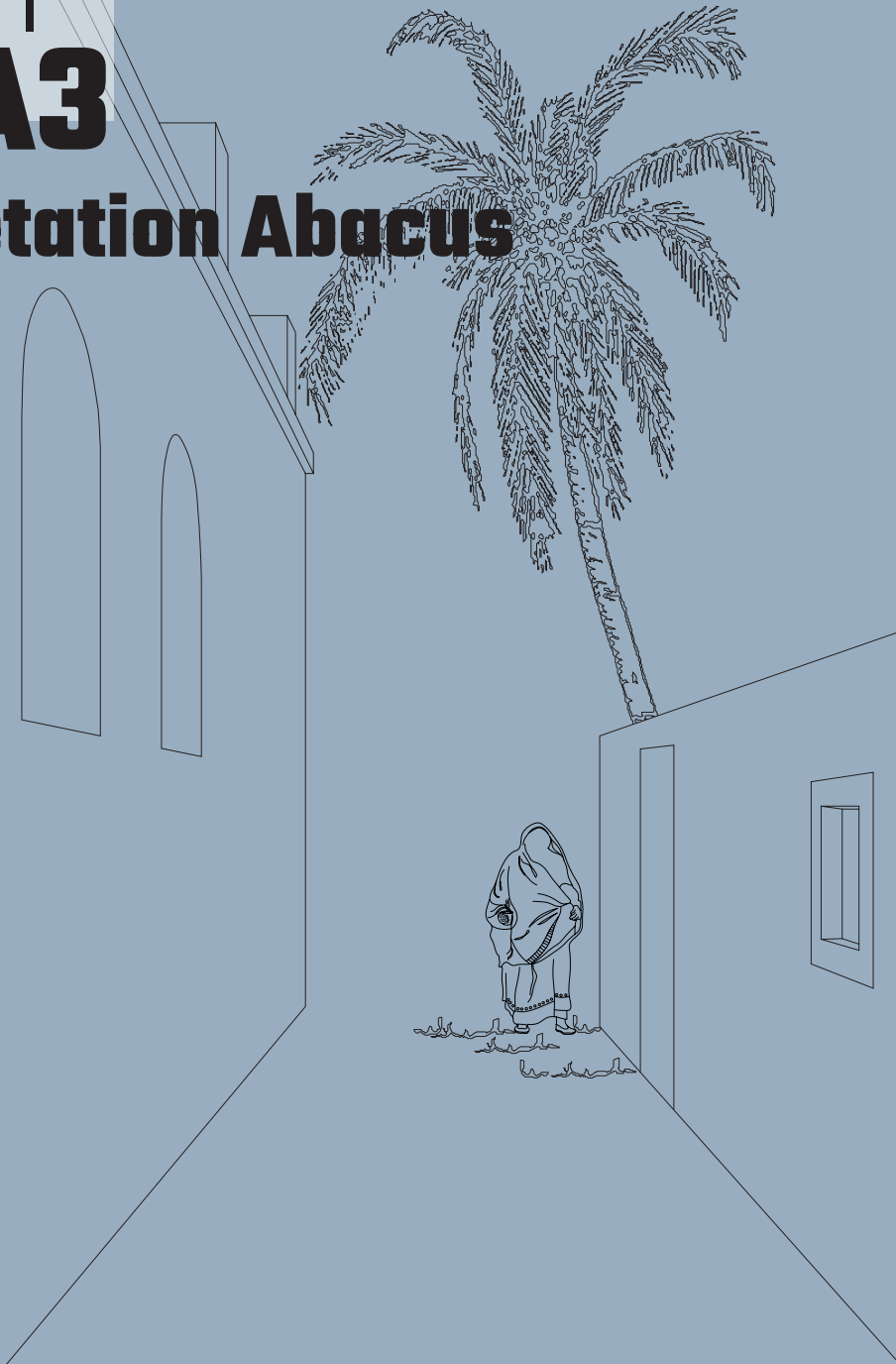


لطفاً باران کنیز

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طالع
یونی

A3

Vegetation Abacus



Vegetation



Ziziphus spina-christi is an evergreen tree or plant native to northern and tropical Africa, Southern and Western Asia. This type of tree has a height between 3 and 8 meters and is mainly used in green areas such as parks and public spaces. There is a thriving market to trade its leaf due to its usage in detergent manufacturing companies. However, the fruit of this tree has always been used by local people.



Conocarpus is a tree with two flowering species of *Conocarpus lancifolius* and *Conocarpus erectus*. It is commonly known as sycamore tree in Iran. It is durable and can withstand conditions such as extremely high temperatures, low drainage, pressurized soil, air pollution, and salty water. It is projected to be the best one for green corridors or green belts in towns and cities.



Phoenix dactylifera, commonly known as date or **date palm**, is a flowering plant species in the palm family, cultivated for its edible sweet fruit. This type of plant is suitable for urban green spaces and is planted on different areas such as squares, boulevards, parks, sidewalks, etc.



Callistemon citrinus is an evergreen shrub. This prickly-leaved shrub grows best in well-drained soils in full sun and is an excellent plant for hot, dry areas. It can be planted in rows on the edge of urban streets and paths or parks, creates a canopy and can act as a fence and windbreak.



Bougainvillea is a genus of thorny ornamental vines, bushes, or trees. It creates visual beauty in terms of shape and color. This plant is resistant to the climate of Bushehr province and even in areas with the lack of water. It can be seen both in urban areas and in private houses, and it is suggested to be planted next to a vertical surface so that it does not create a blockage by growing and spreading on horizontal surfaces like walkways or streets.



Tecoma fulva is a semideciduous, glabrous shrub 1.2 to 4 m tall. It is planted in hot and dry cities but suggested to be placed among other trees. It is suitable for roadsides, parks and gardens for its fragrant and attractive bright yellow flowers.

Forms

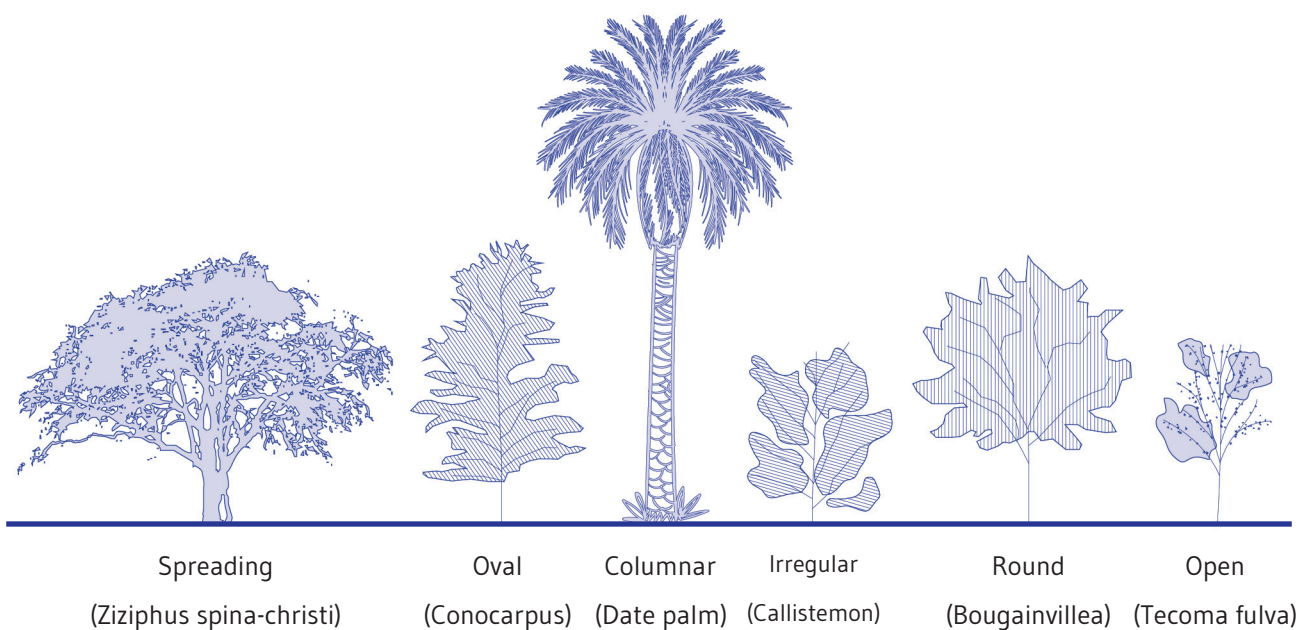
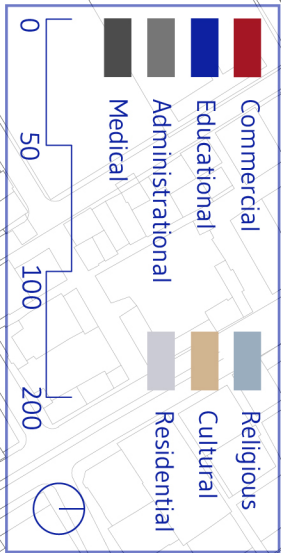
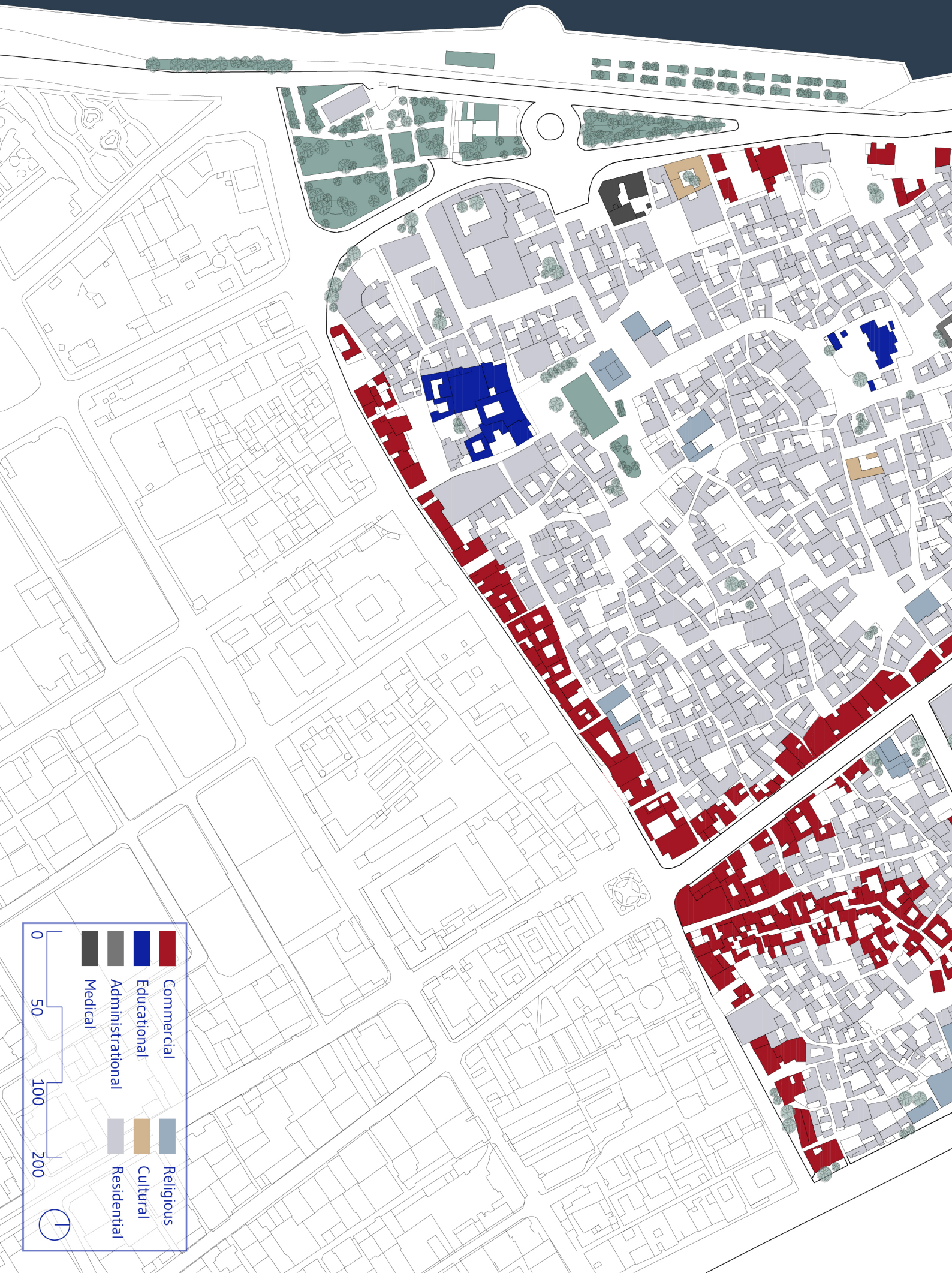


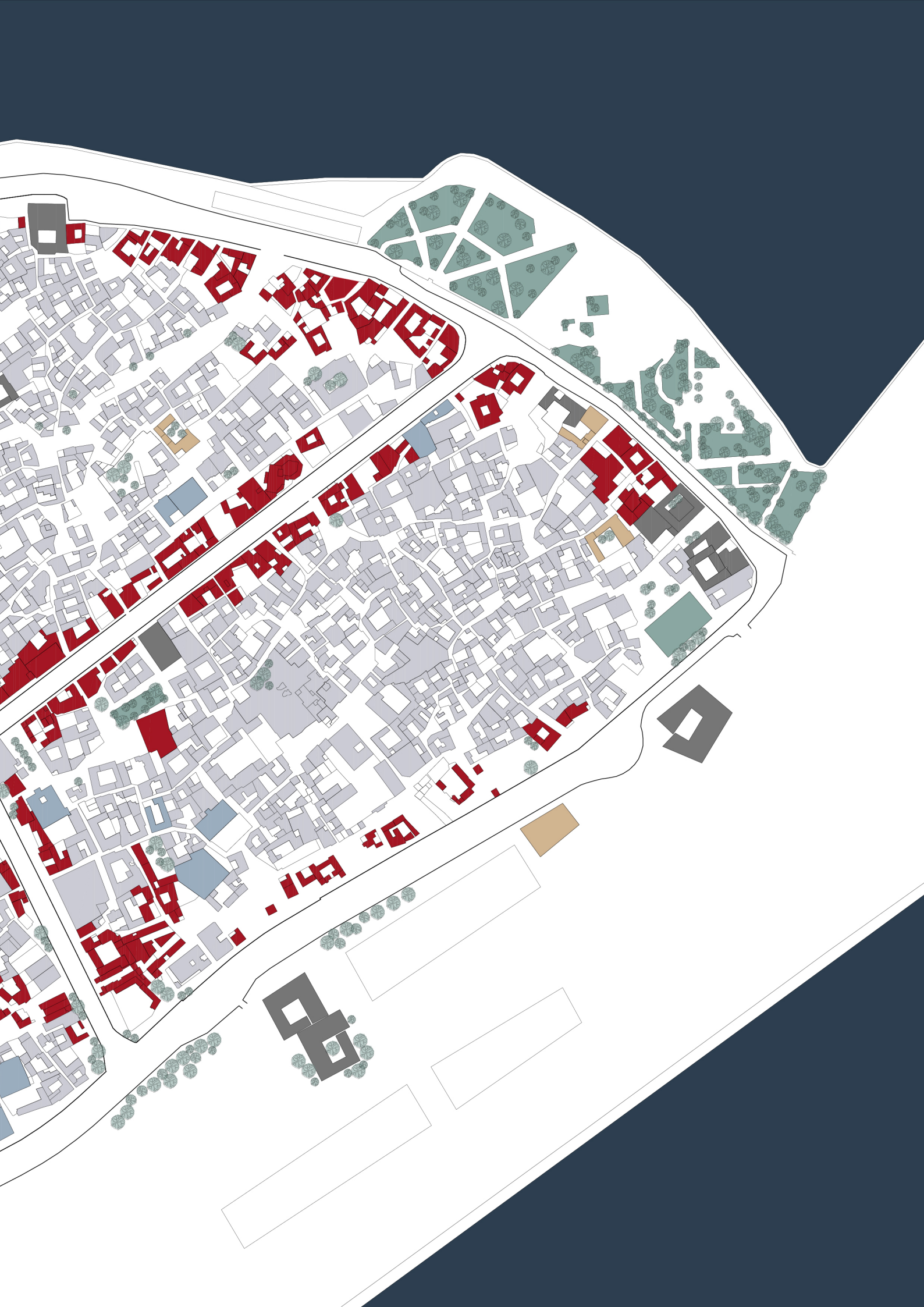
figure .9: Forms and shapes of the existing vegetation



B1

Existing Urban Fabric

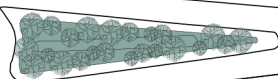
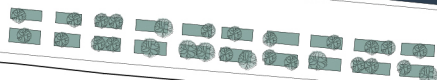
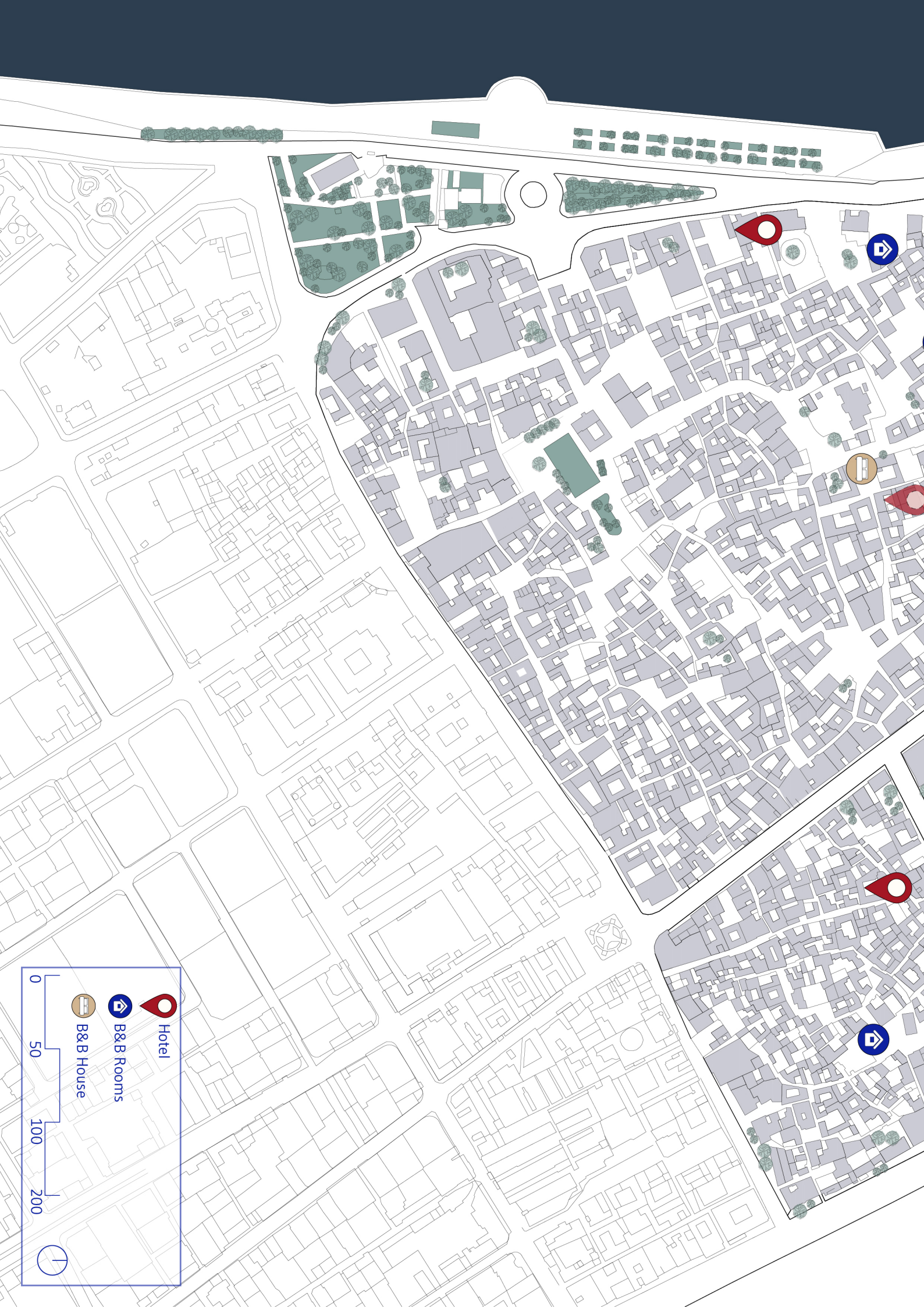






B2

Hospitality



Hotel

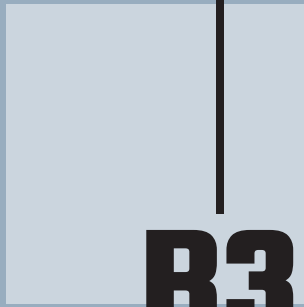
B&B Rooms

B&B House

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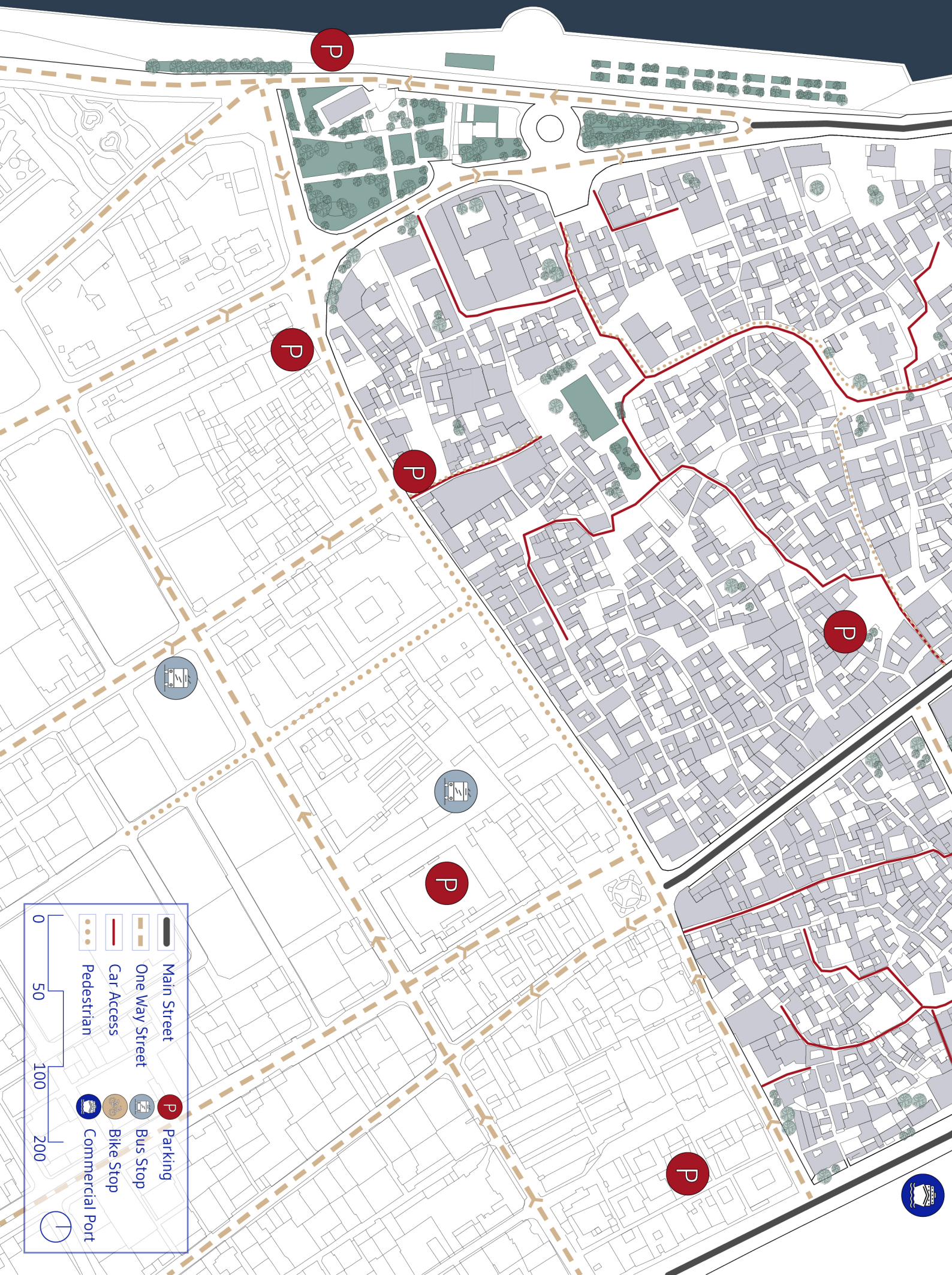


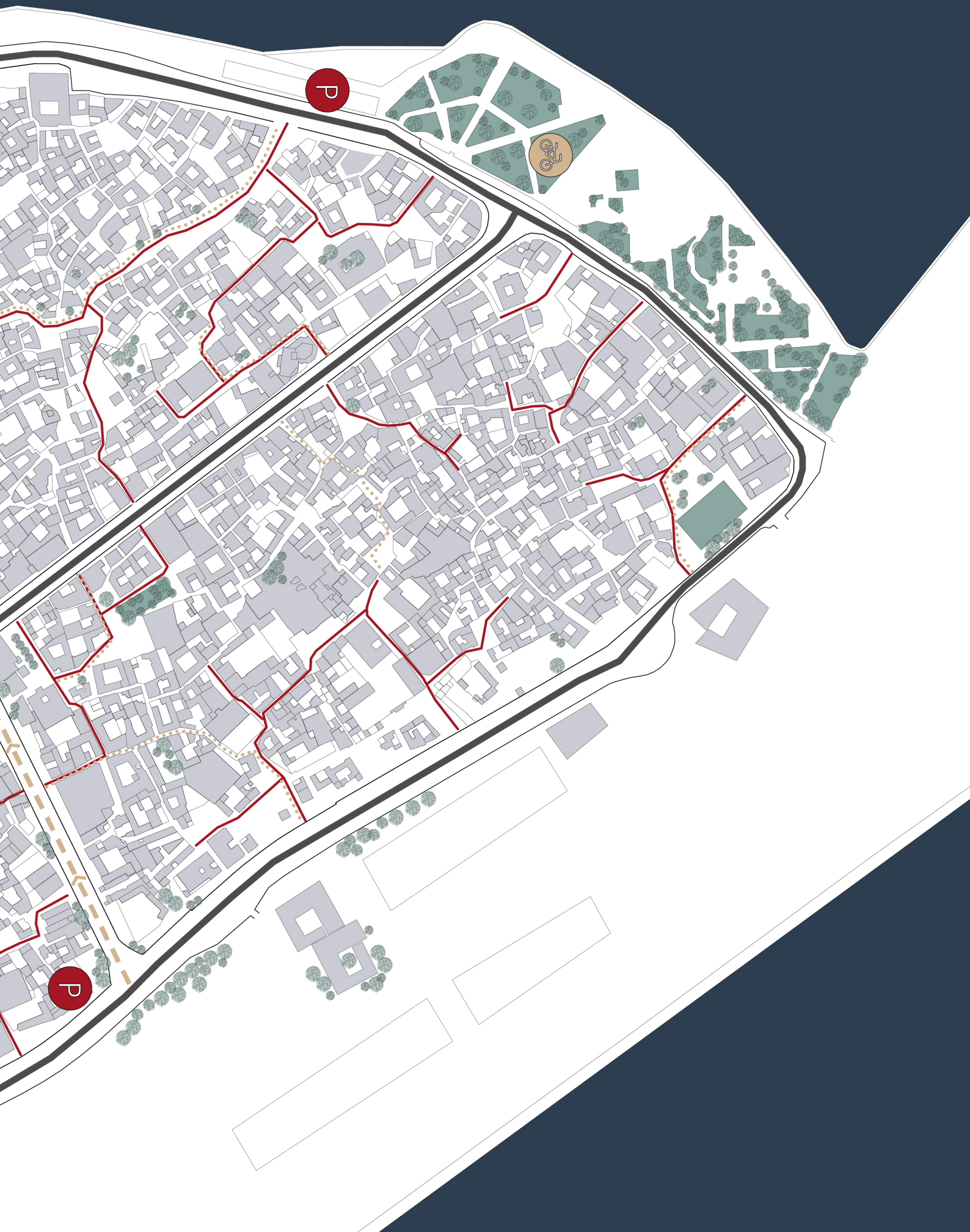




B3

Mobility



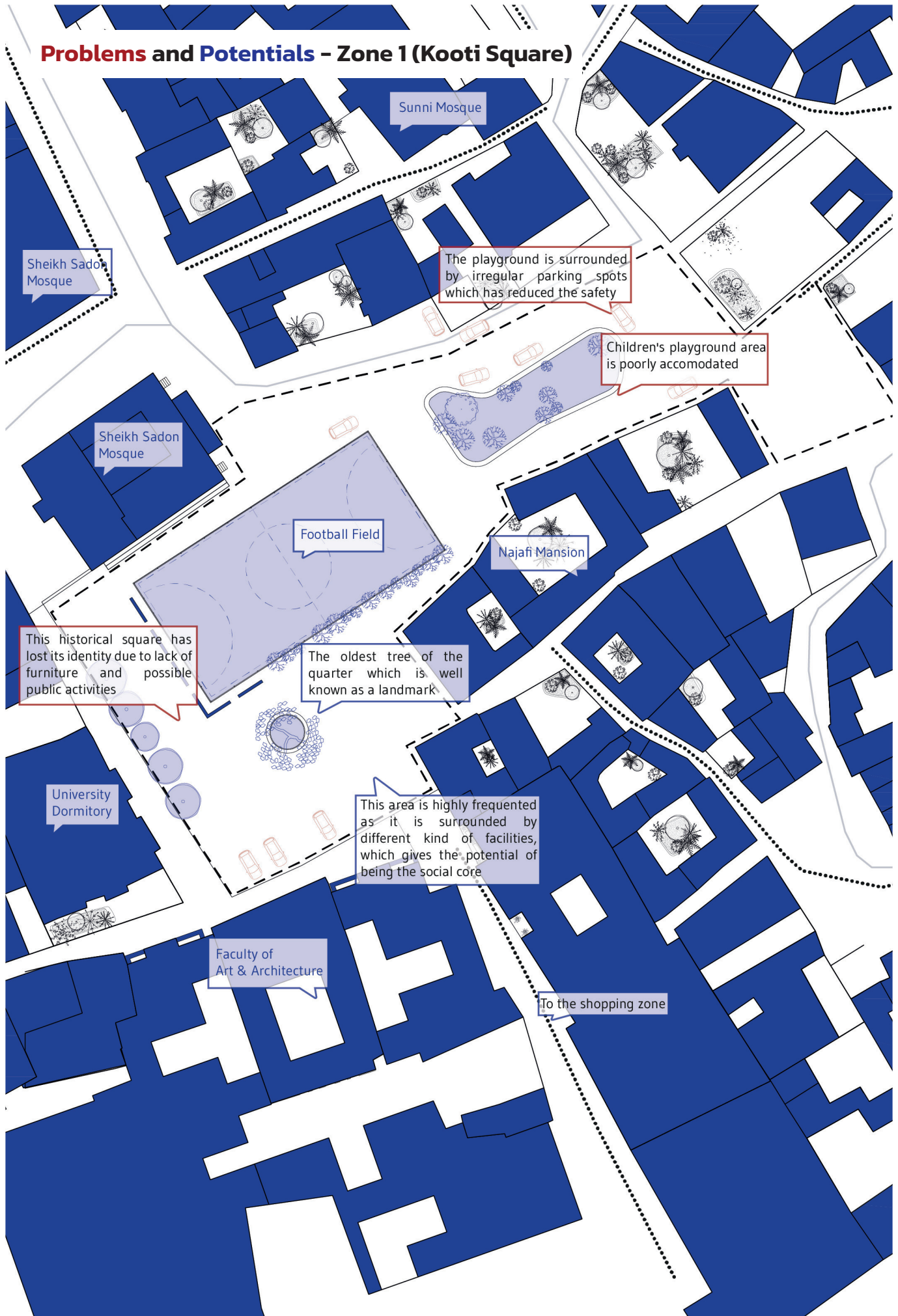


The background of the slide is a light blue map of a city street grid. A specific area in the center-right of the map is highlighted with a darker blue outline, indicating a project site. The map shows various building footprints and street layouts.

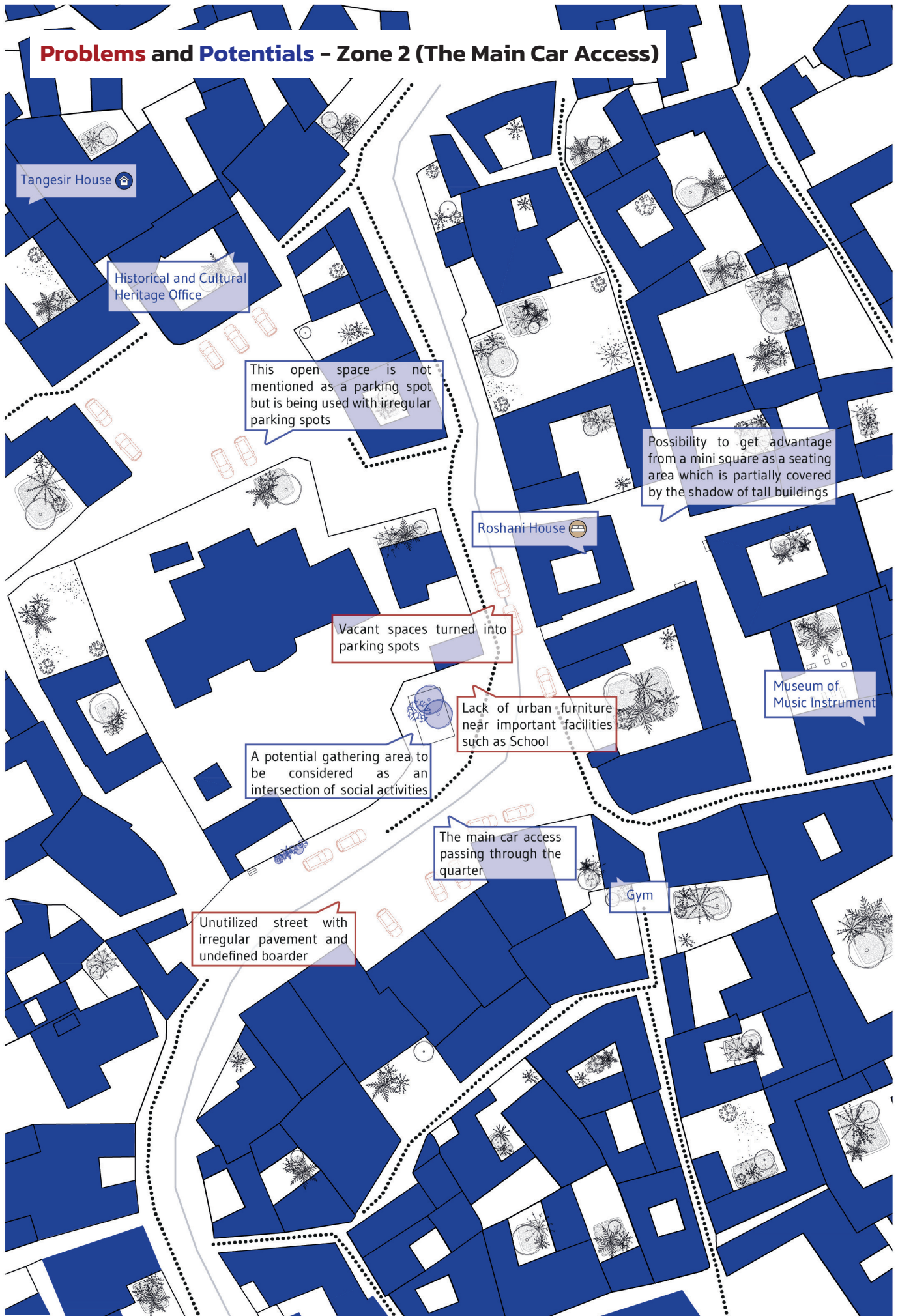
C1

The Design Process

Problems and Potentials - Zone 1 (Kooti Square)



Problems and Potentials - Zone 2 (The Main Car Access)



Problems and Potentials - Zone 3 (Vacant Space Next To Commercial Zone)



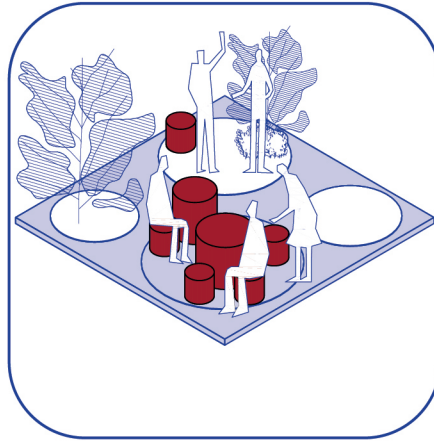
Strategies



Maintenance

Using Existing Potentials For
Creating Social Cores

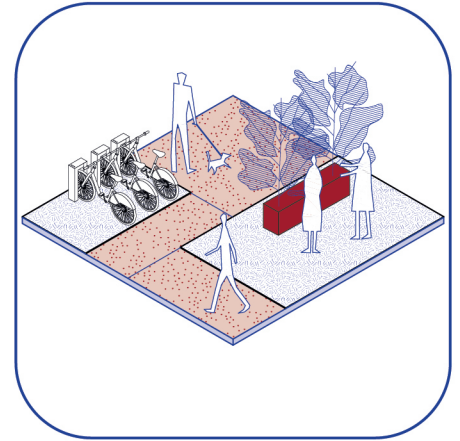
Existing Trees



Urban Furniture

A Chance For Social Interaction
And Cultural Exchange Between
Locals And Visitors

Public Activities

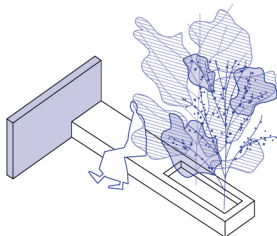


Demilitation

Giving Priority To Pedestrian Use
And Limiting Car Access

Paving And Planting

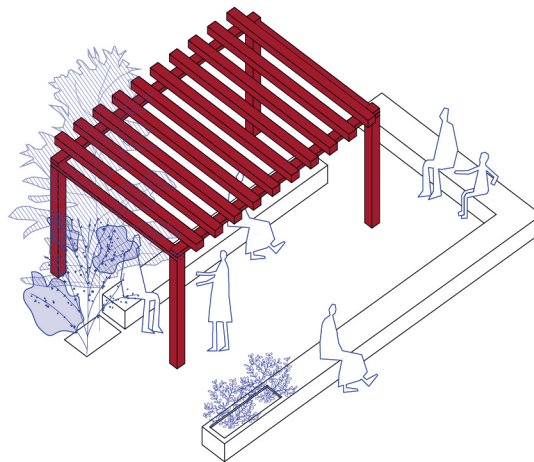
Urban Furniture



Individual

maintaining existing trees
and providing a place to seat

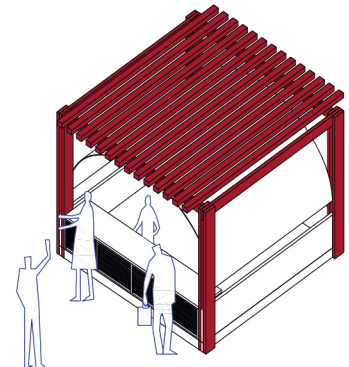
Existing Trees



Networking

using a familiar structure to introduce
a semi-open gathering area

Light and Shadow



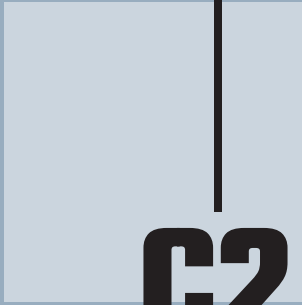
Market stall

Placing temporary wooden
structure for daily market

Self-assembly structure

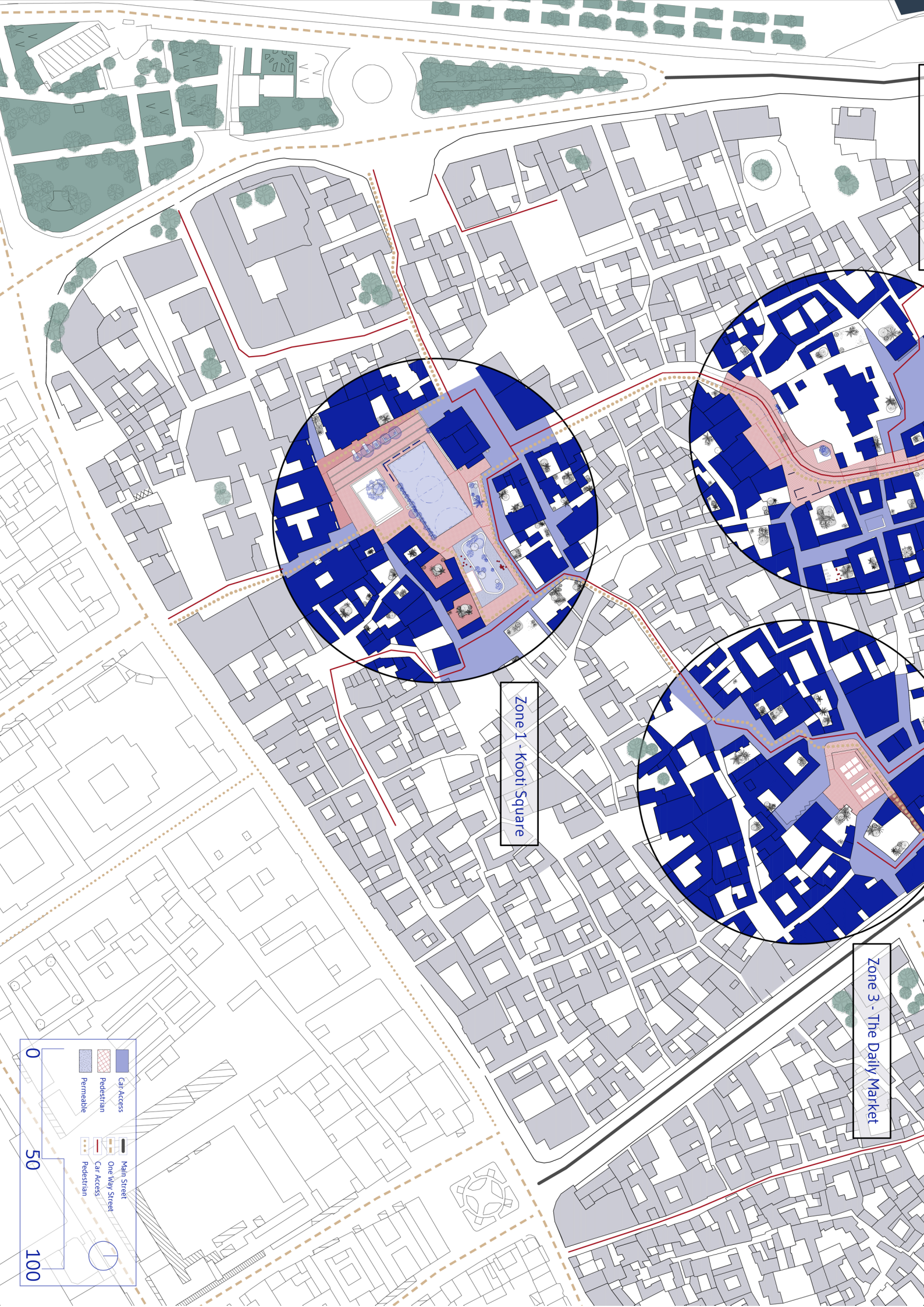
Conclusion

In-between places in the old center of Bushehr plays a multifunctional role and are more than just physical pass-ways. They are vital social cores that supports the local's daily lives between houses and mansions, not only to the residents but also to the visitors of this city which are the temporary residents. Reclaiming and revitalizing these places can transform them into vibrant social hubs. This project aims to provide a functional network in terms of reconquering public spaces that are in a state of neglect. In conclusion, this approach not only preserves the historical and cultural texture of Bushehr but also improves accessibility, social interactions and local economy.



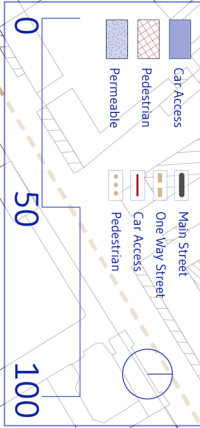
C2

Master Plan



Zone 1 - Kooiti Square

Zone 3 - The Daily Market

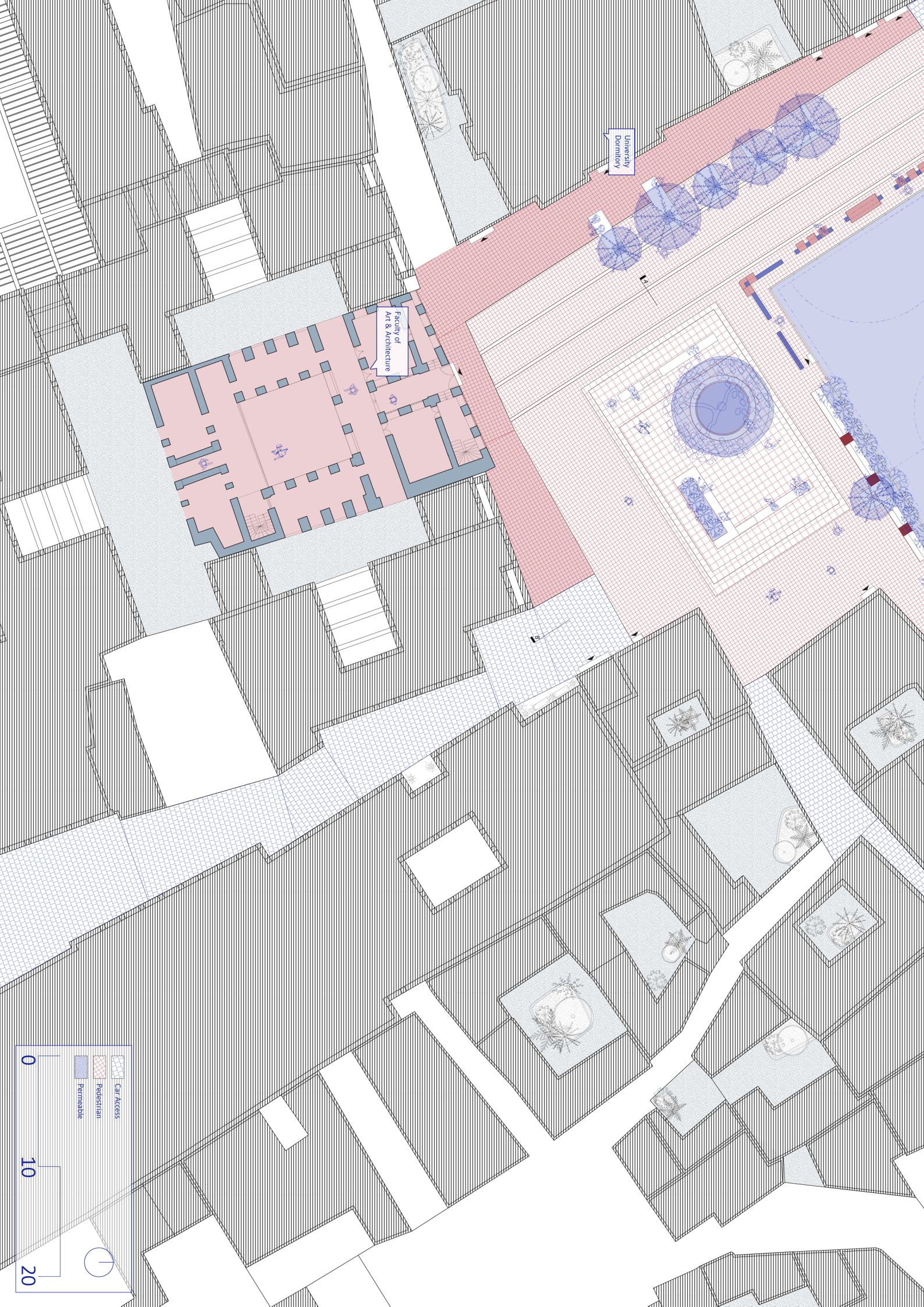






C3


Zone 1 - Kooti Square





Faculty of
Art & Architecture


University
Dormitory

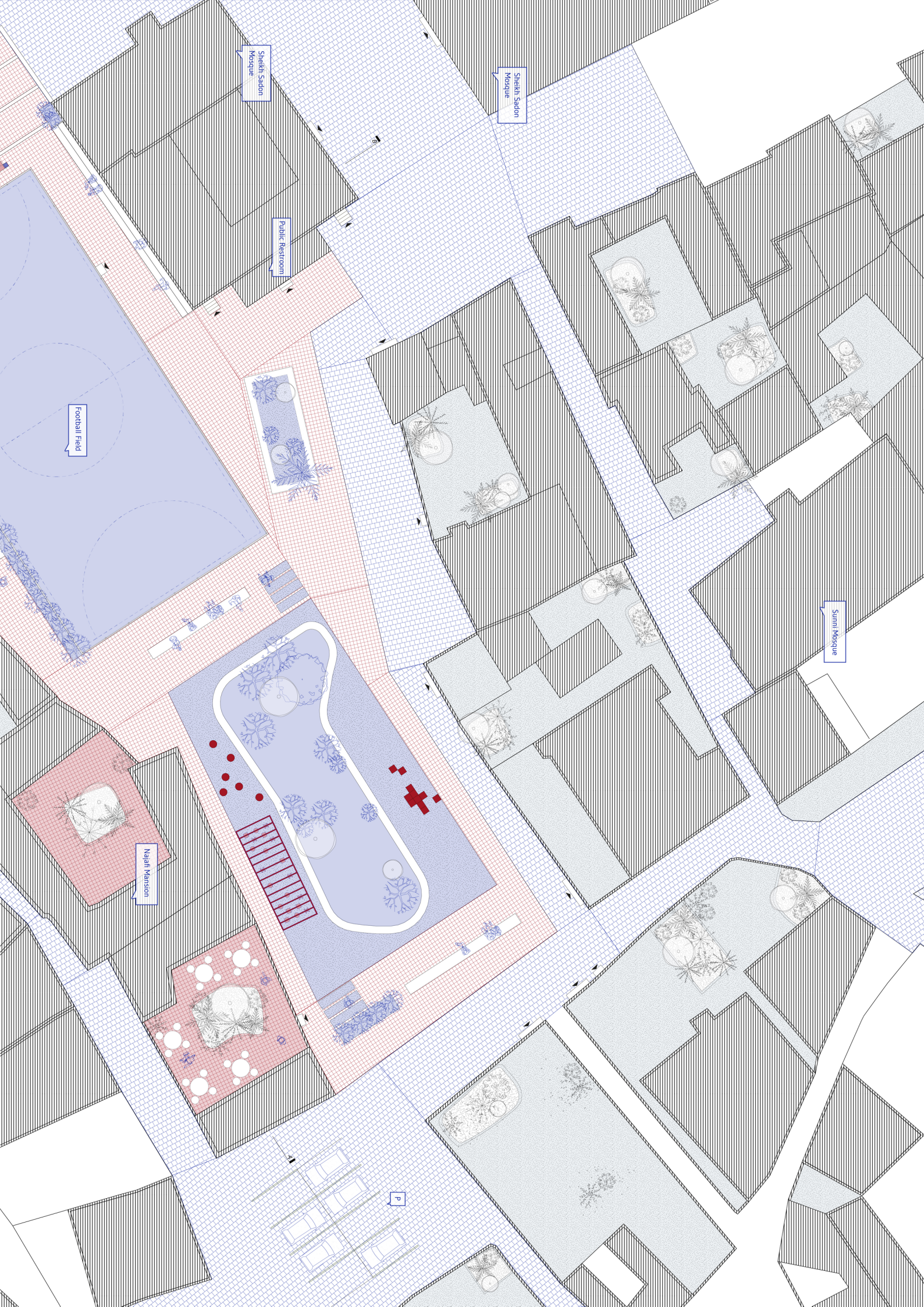
01020

 Car Access

 Pedestrian

 Permeable

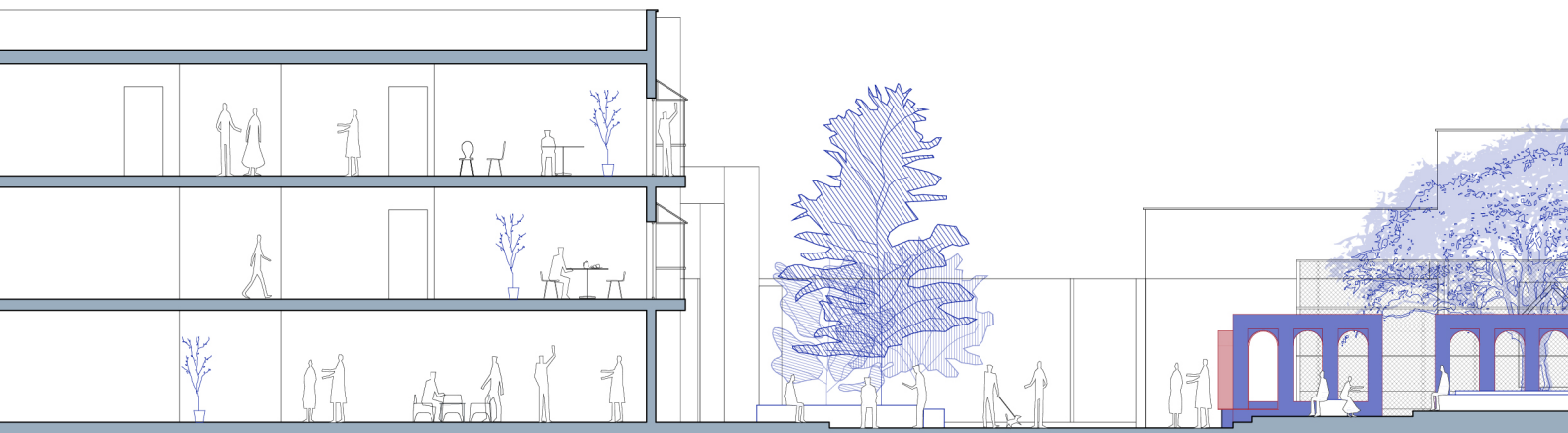




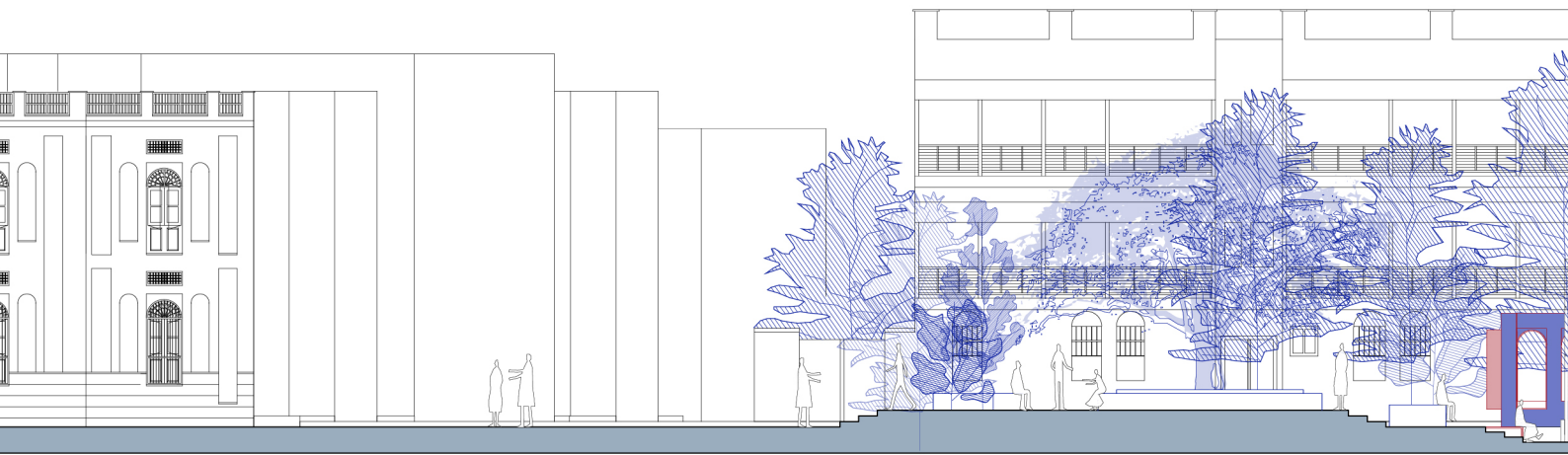


C3.1

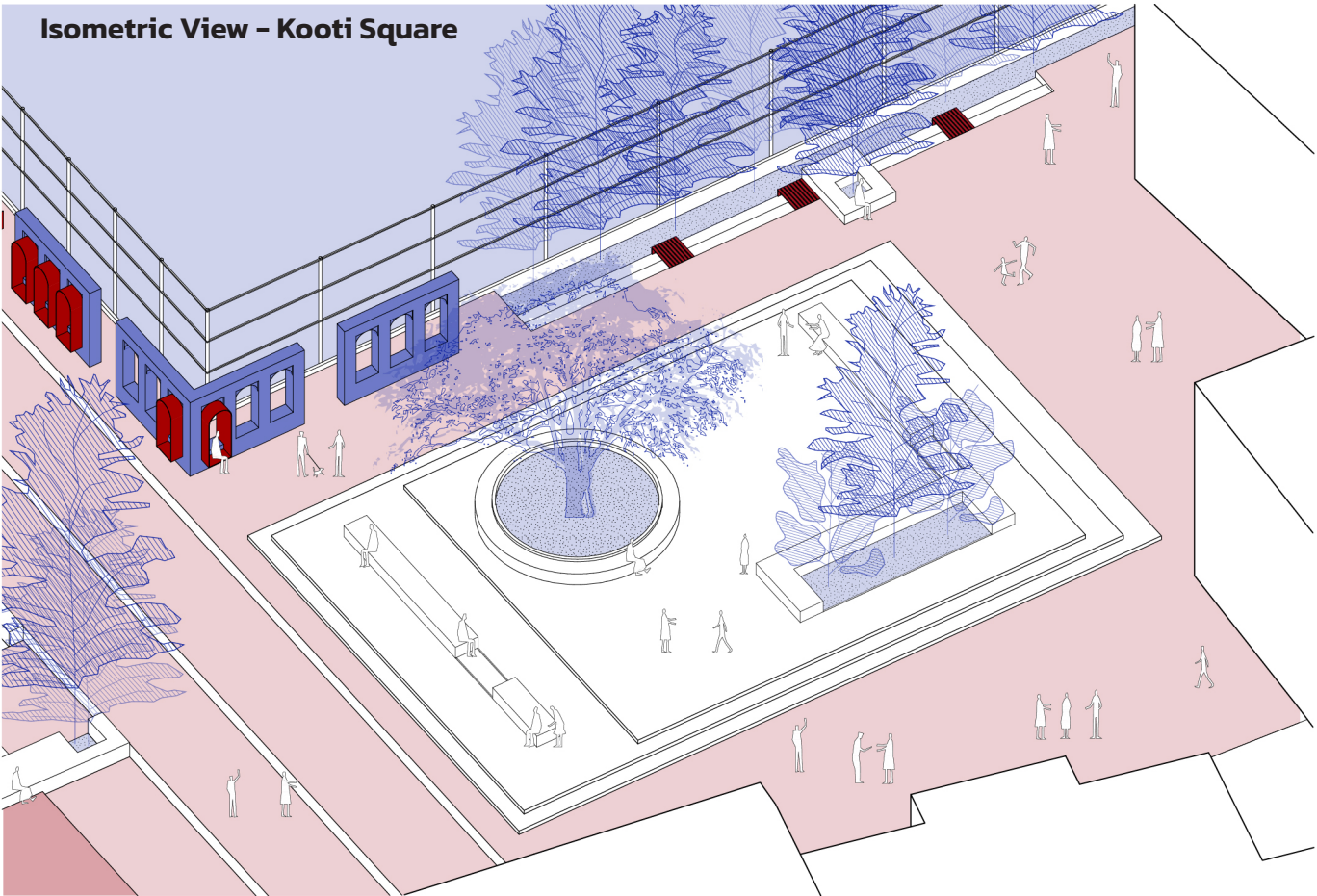
Focus On Zone 1



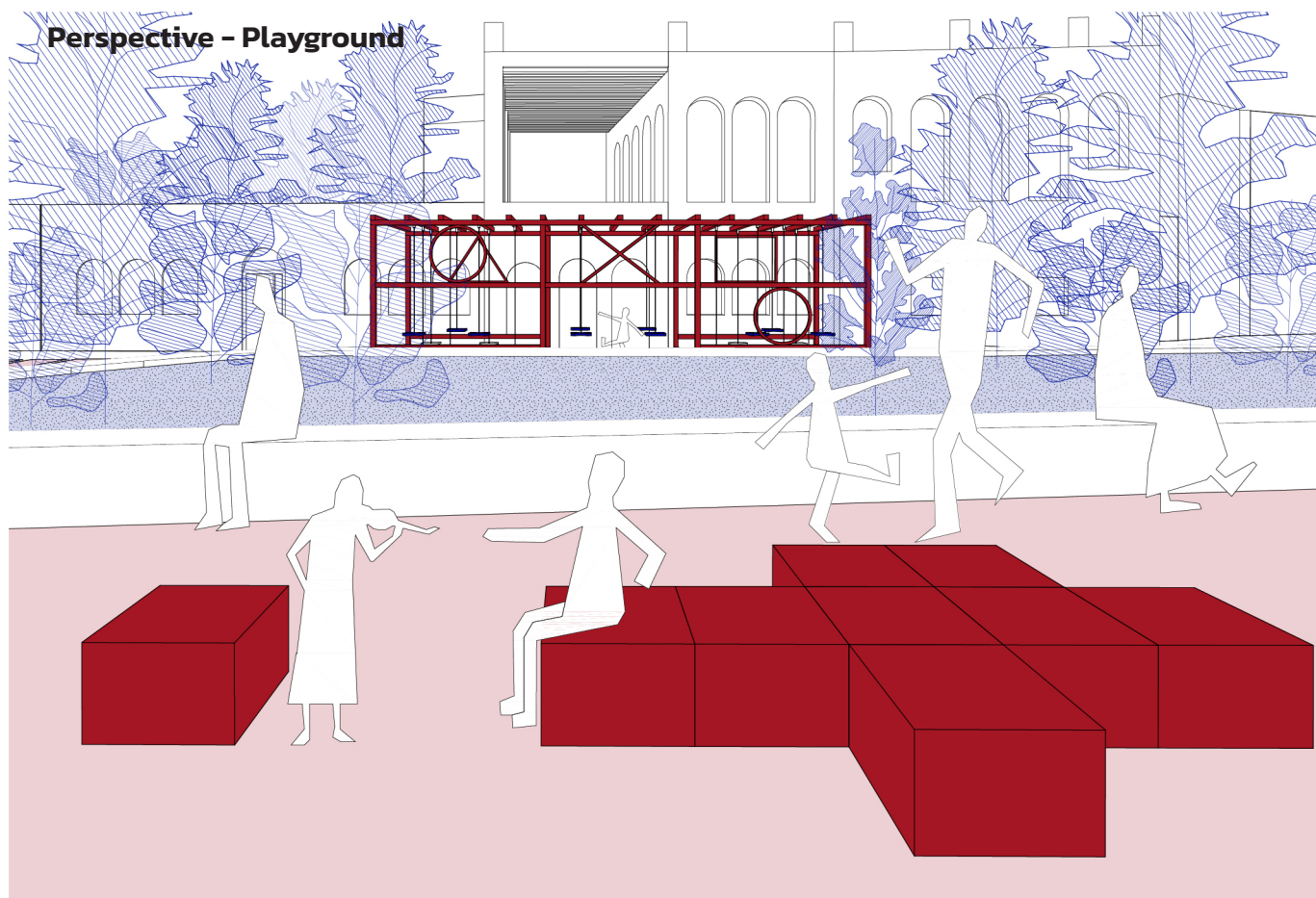
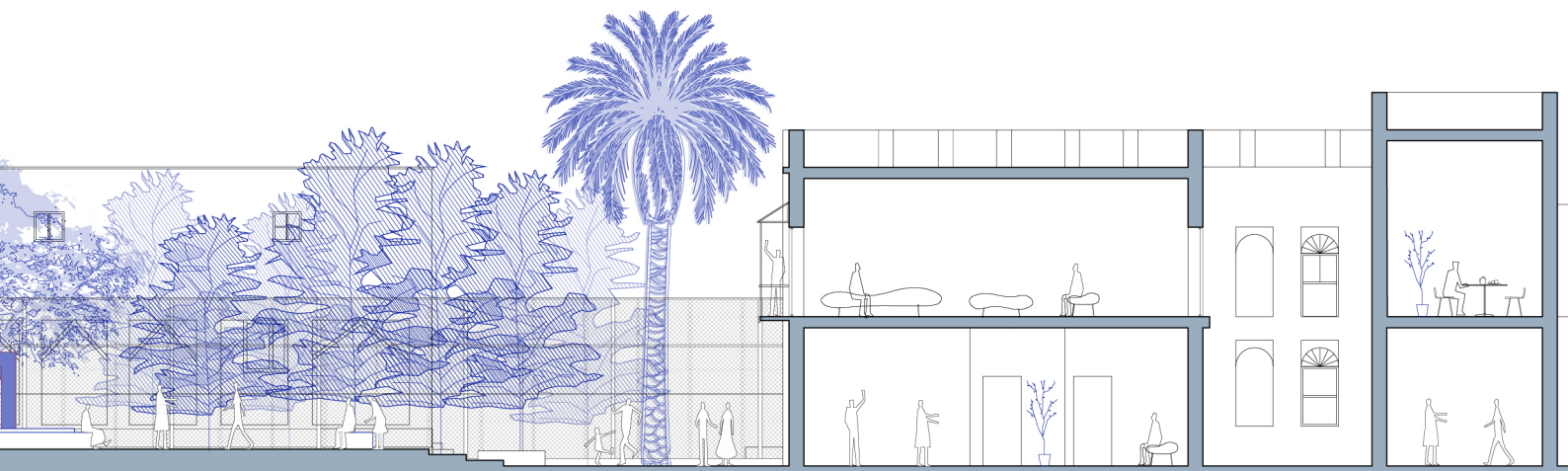
Sec A-A



Sec B-B



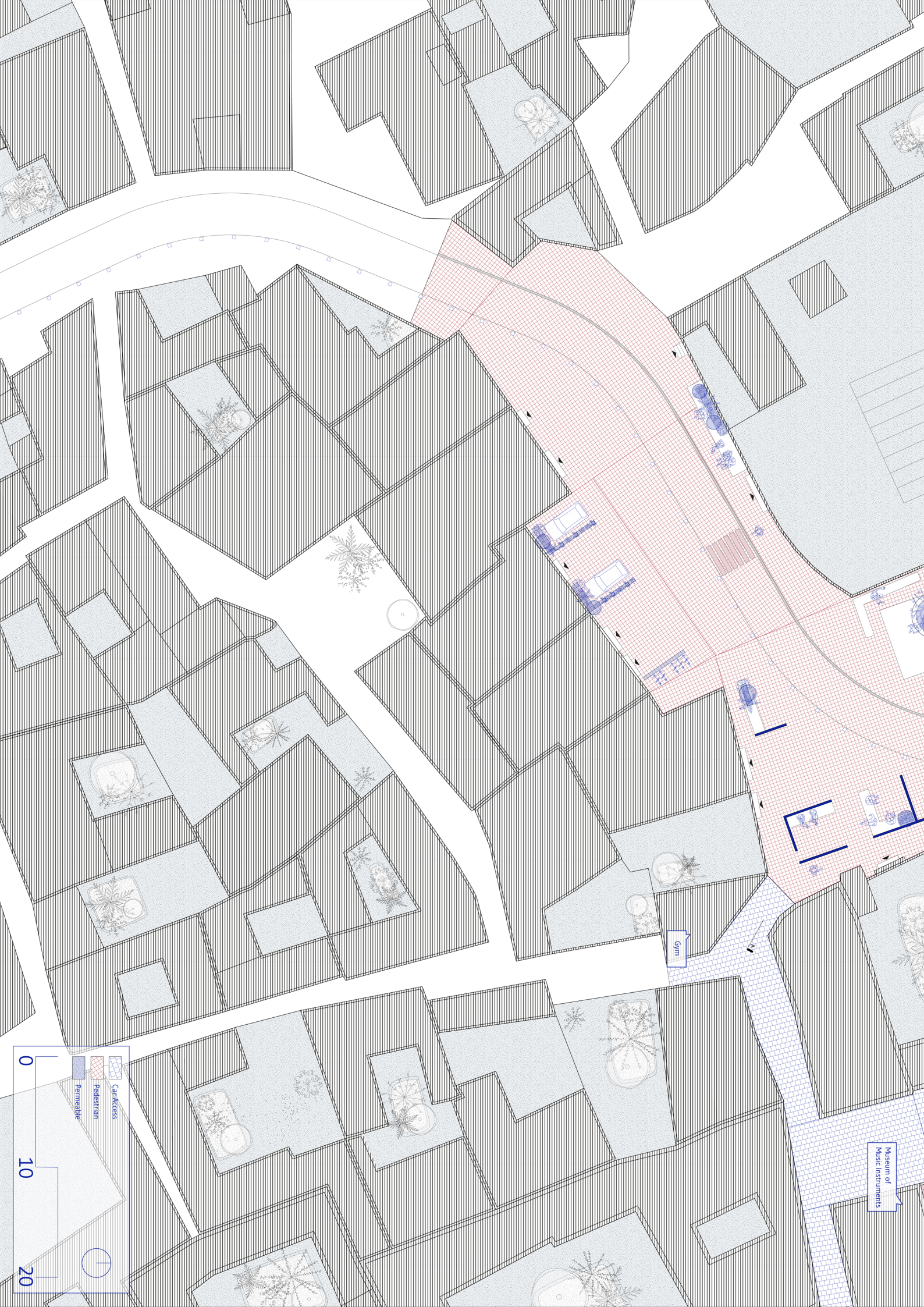
Isometric View - Kooti Square





C4

Zone 2 - The Main Car Access



Museum of
Music Instruments

Gym

0

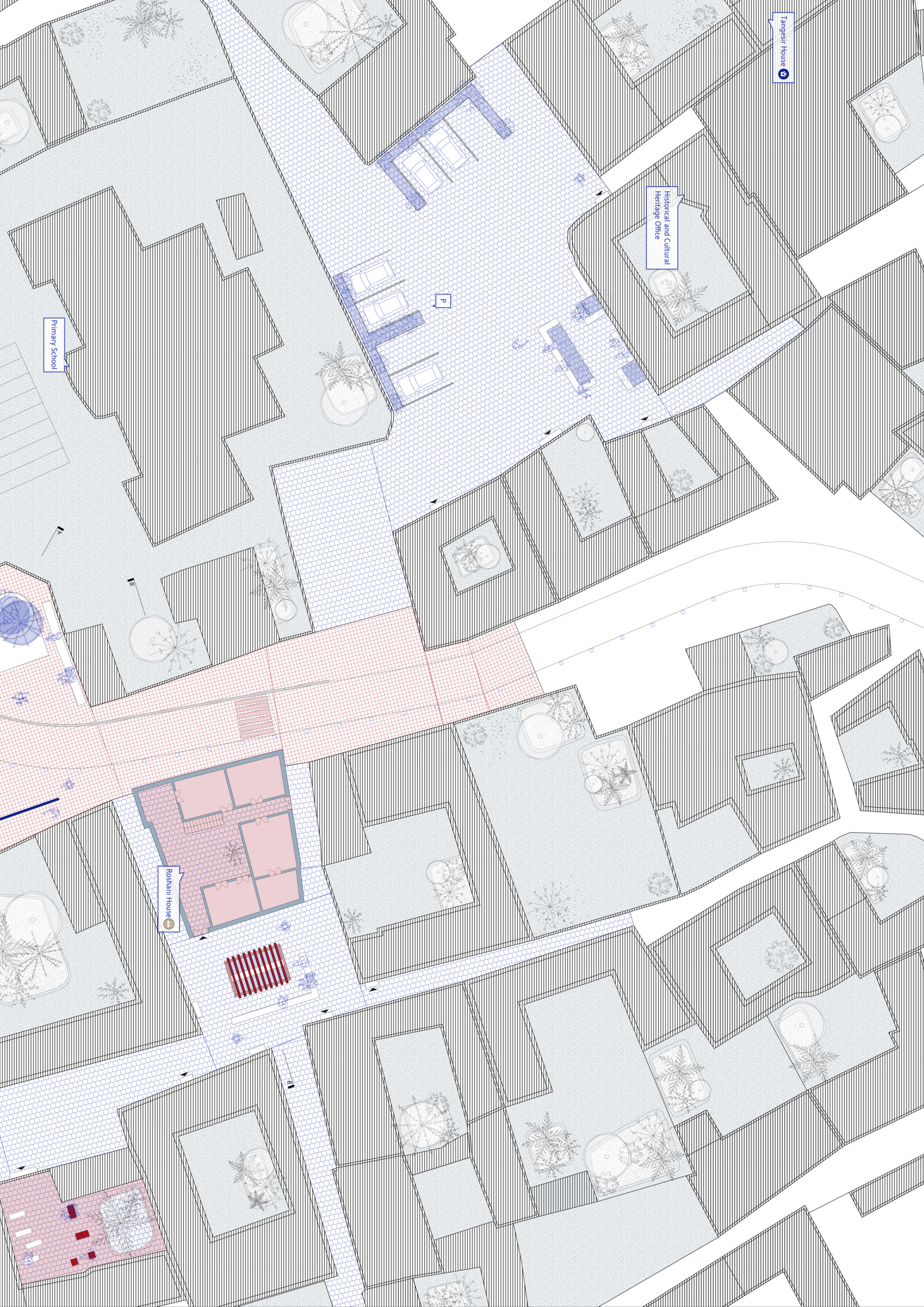
10

20

Car Access

Pedestrian

Permeable



Primary School

Roshani House

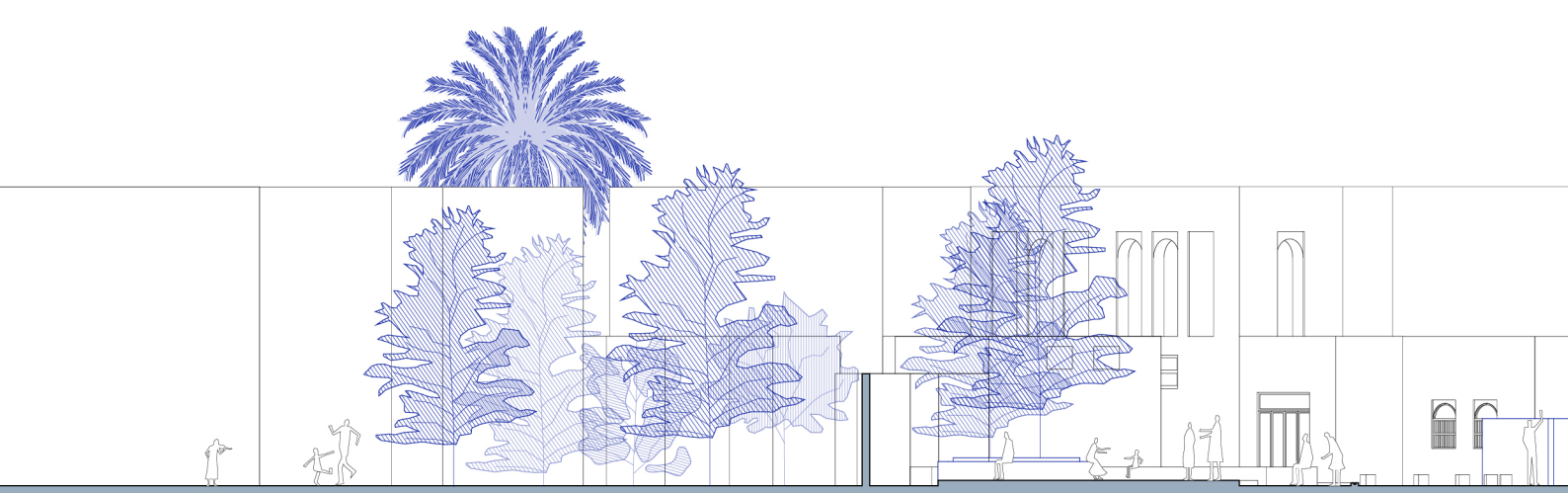
Historical and Cultural
Heritage Office

Tangerine House

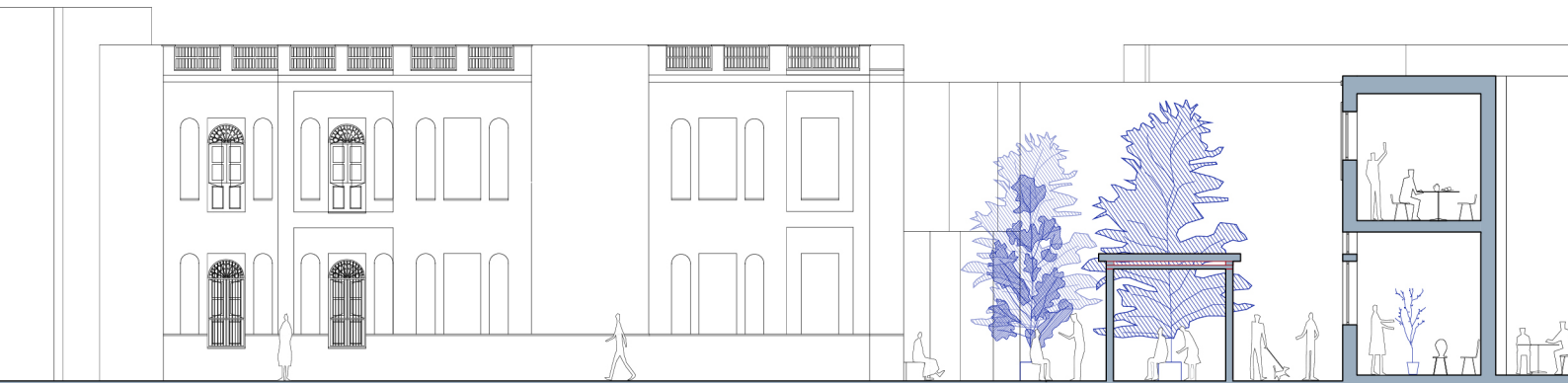


C4.1

Focus On Zone 2

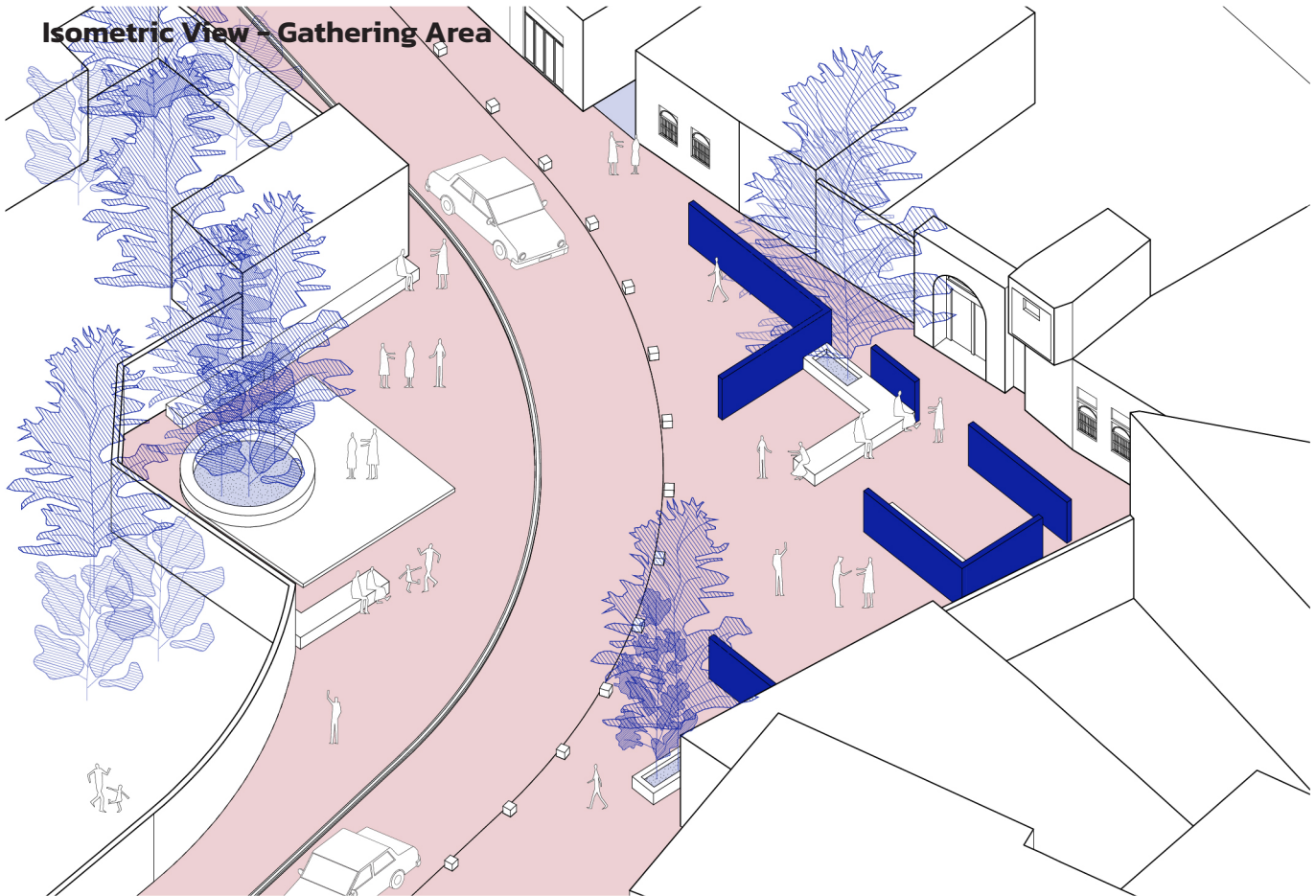


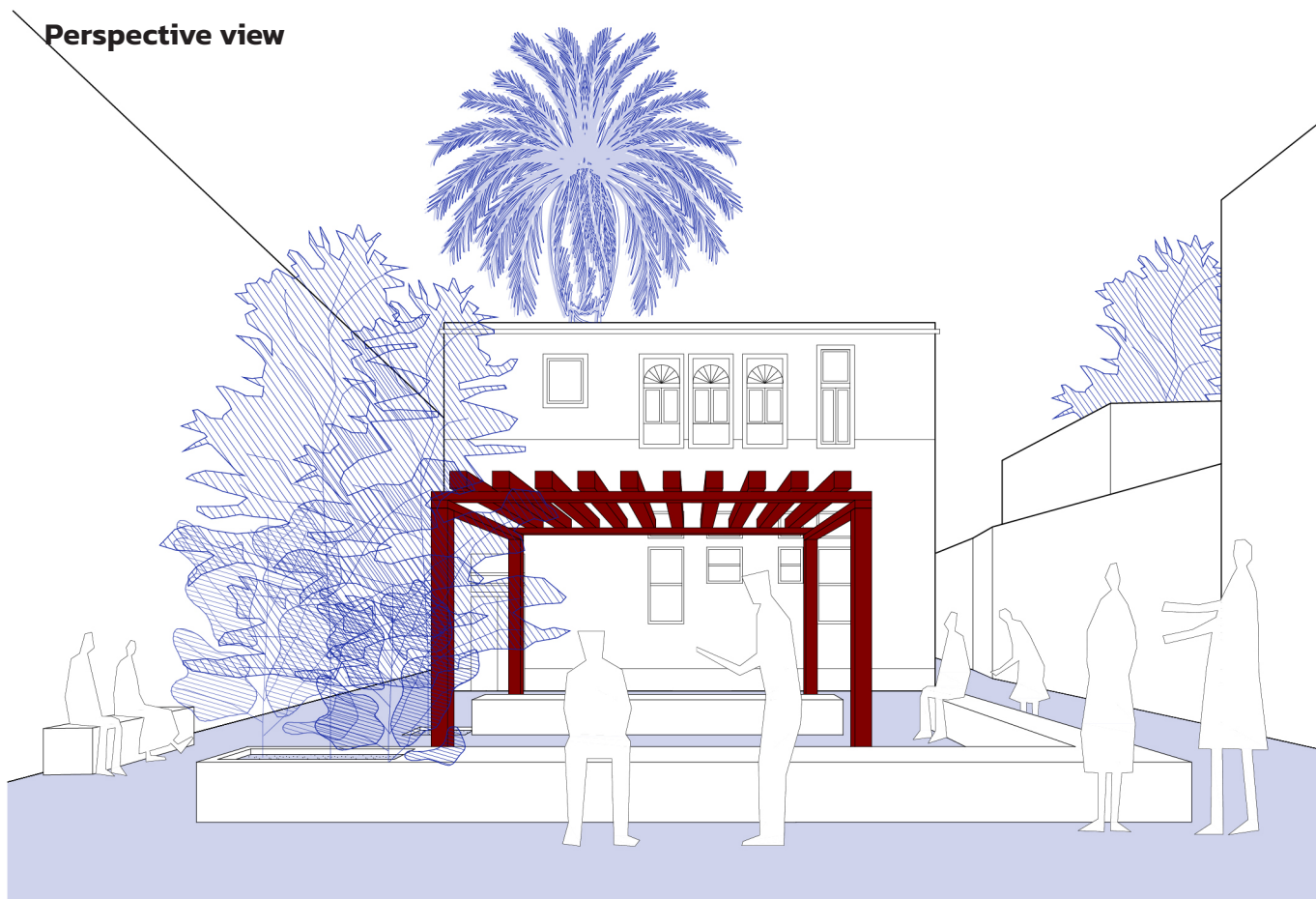
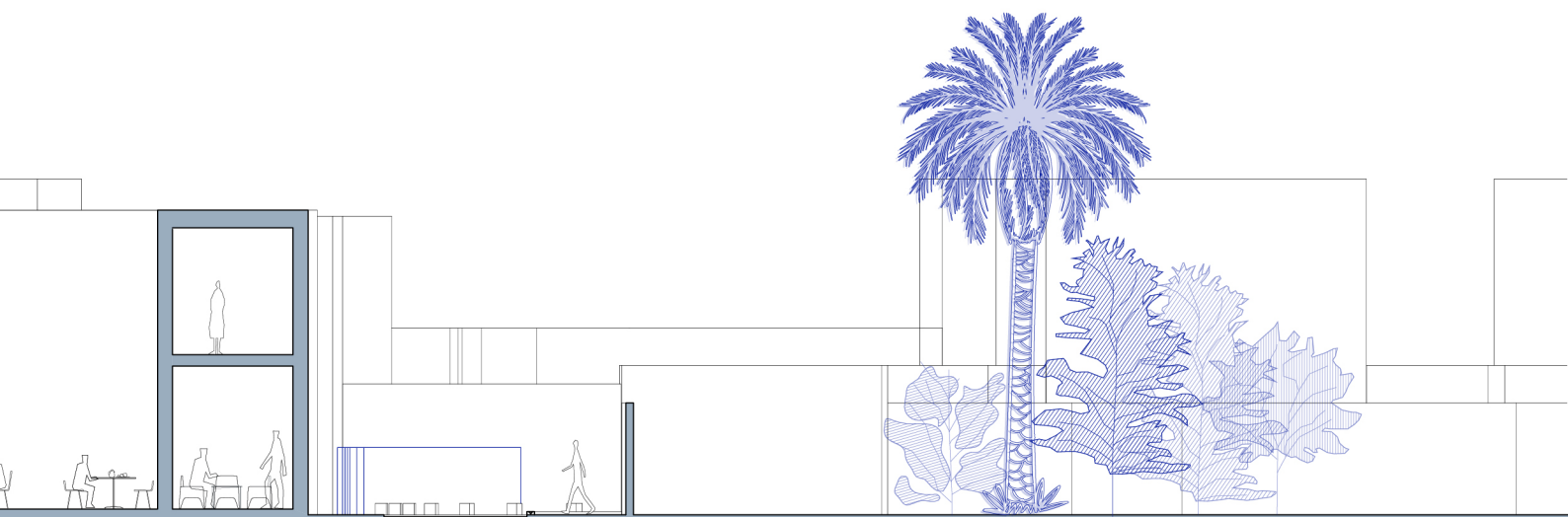
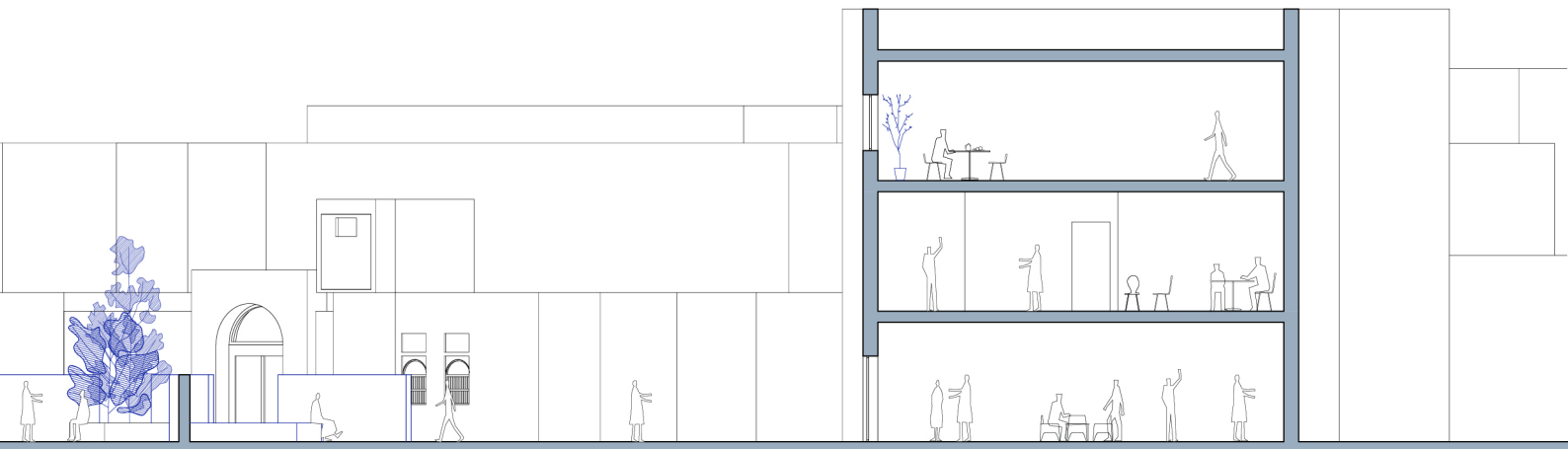
Sec A-A

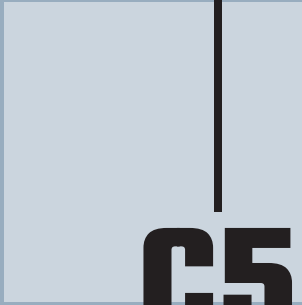


Sec B-B

Isometric View - Gathering Area

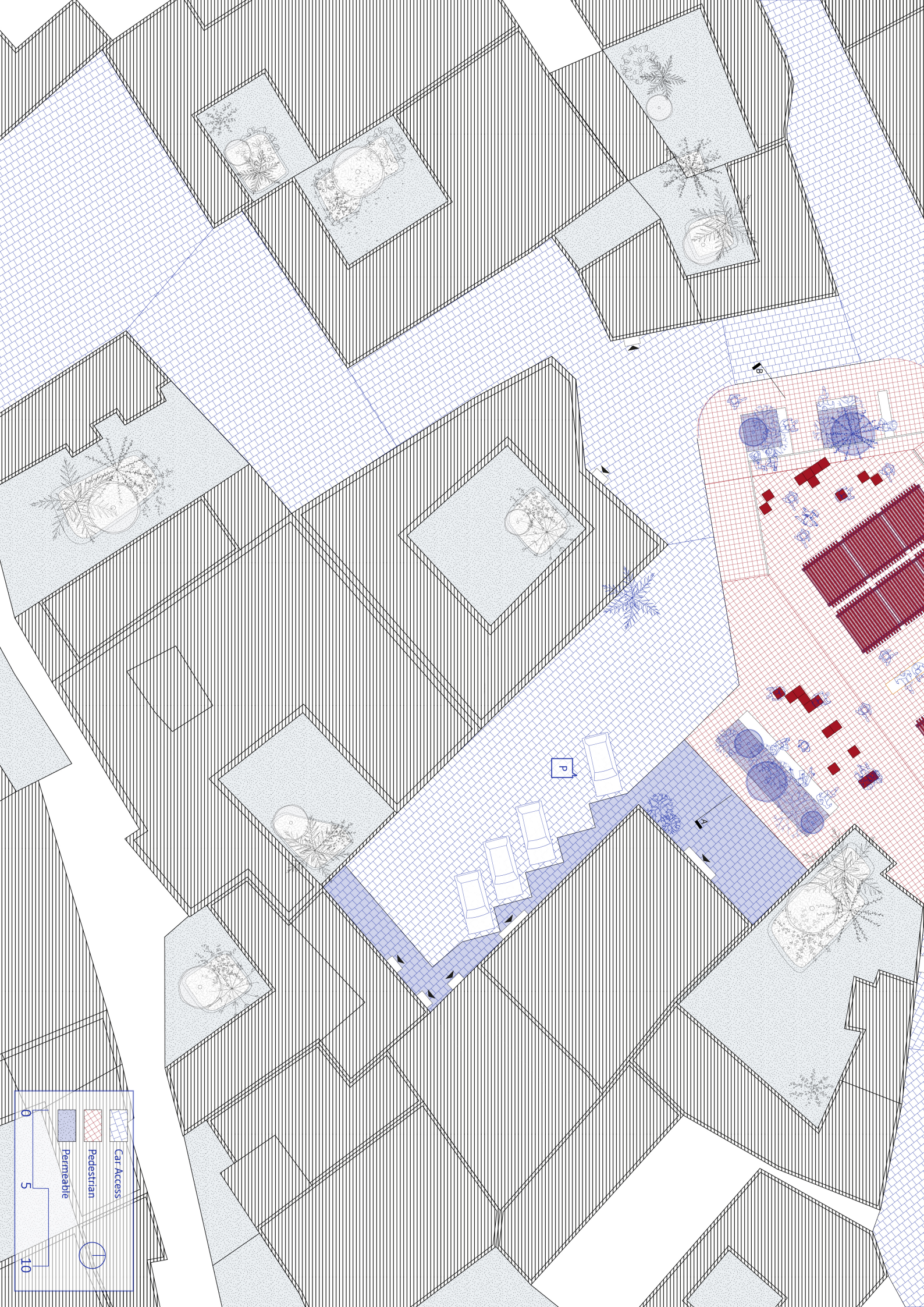






C5

Zone 3 - The Daily Market



0

5

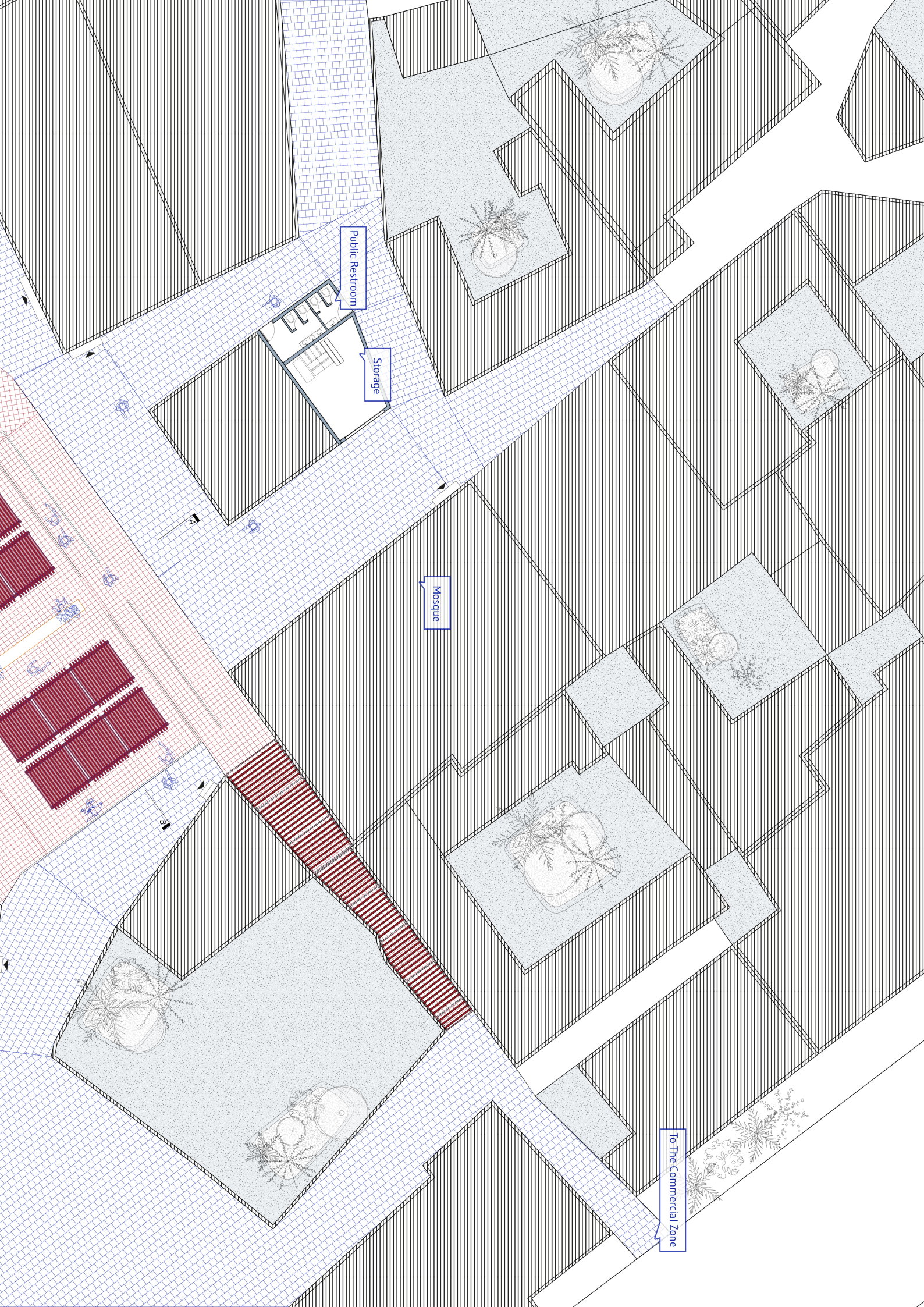
10

Car Access

Pedestrian

Permeable

P



Public Restroom

Storage

Mosque

To The Commercial Zone

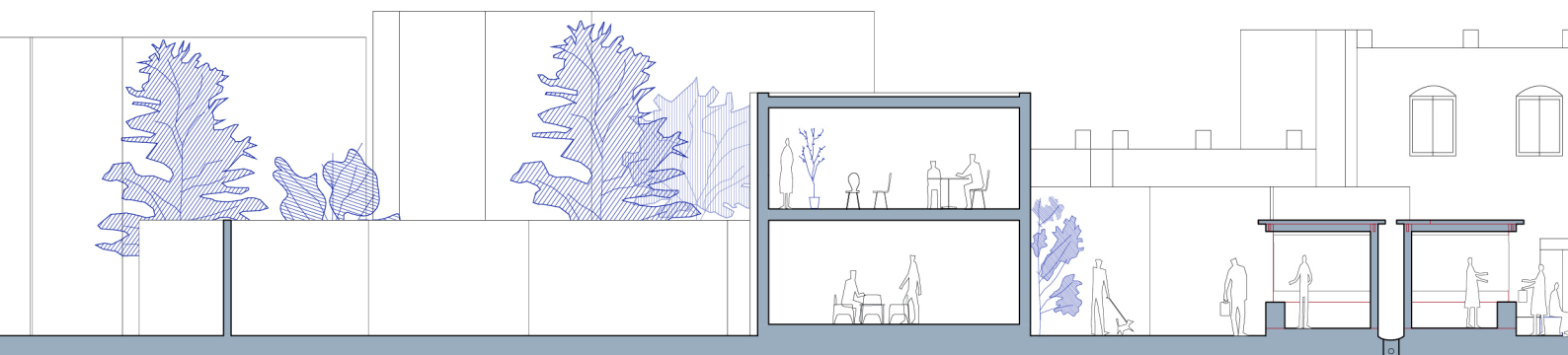


C5.1

Focus On Zone 3

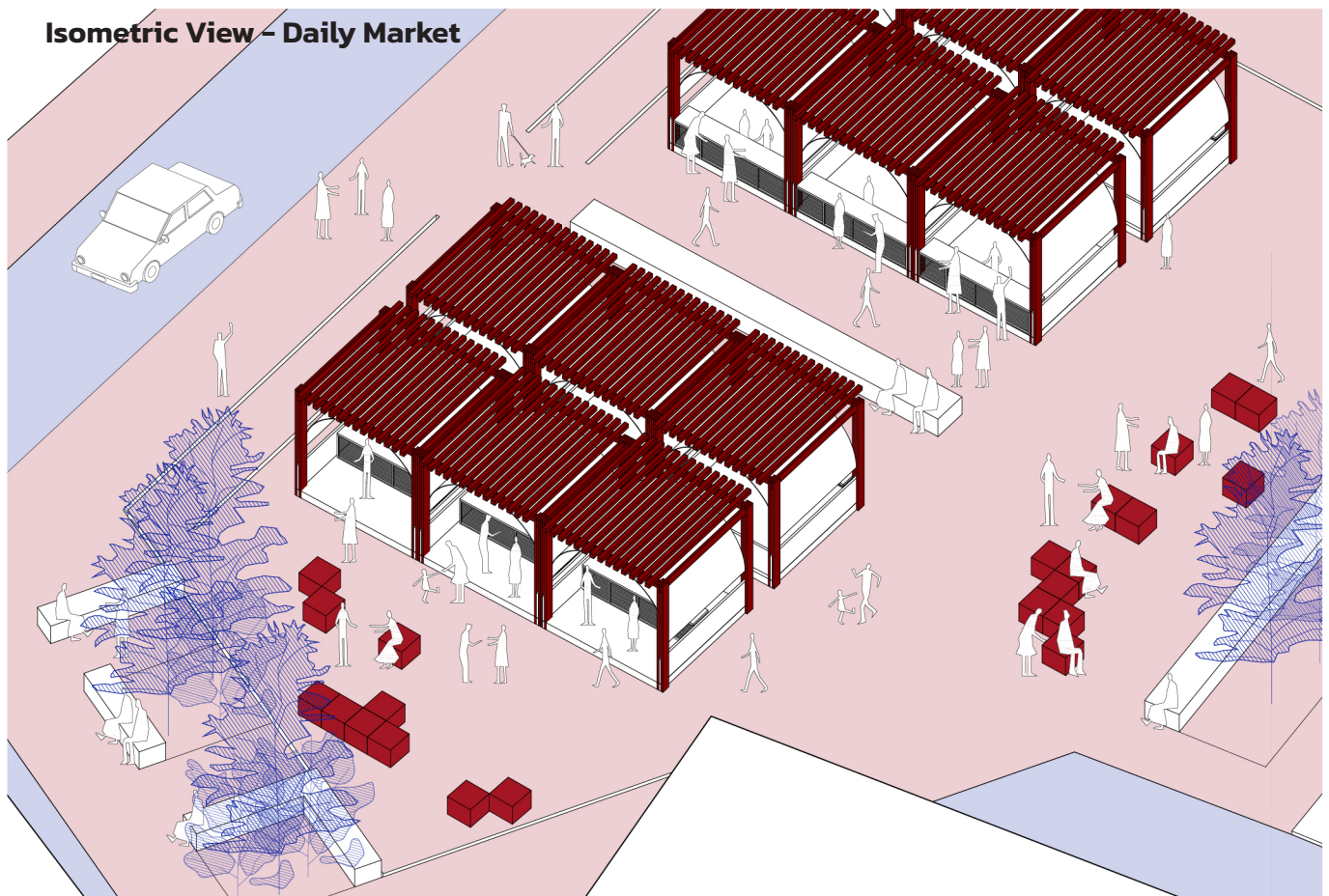


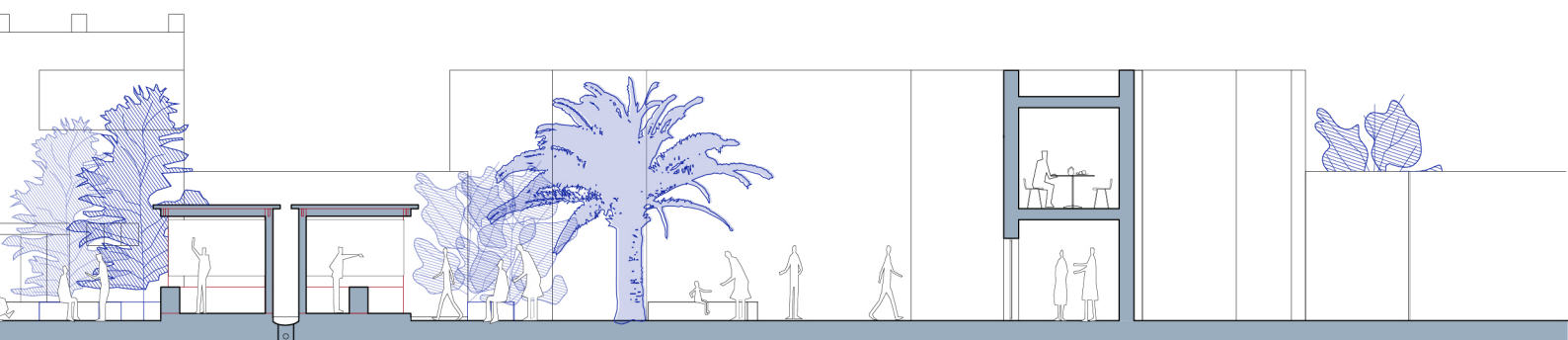
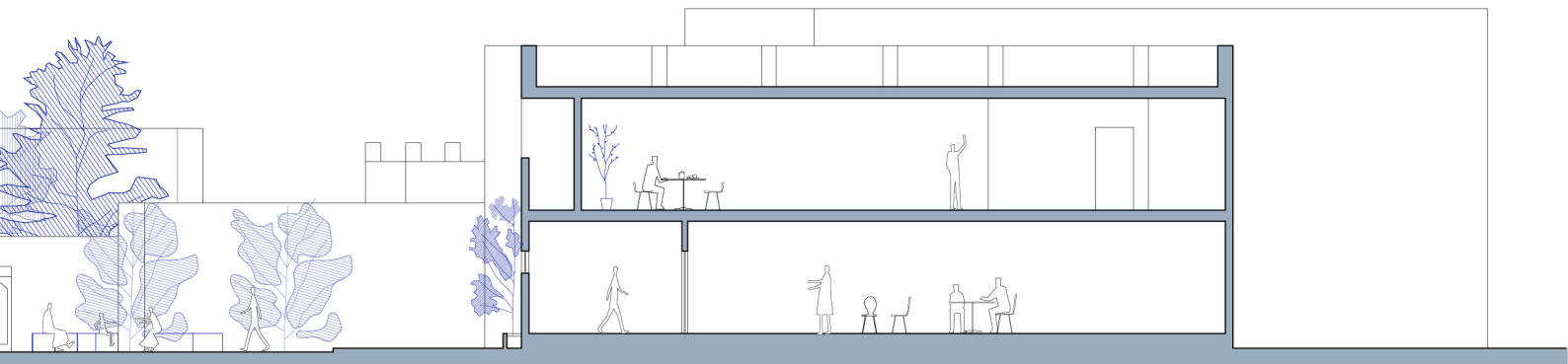
Sec A-A



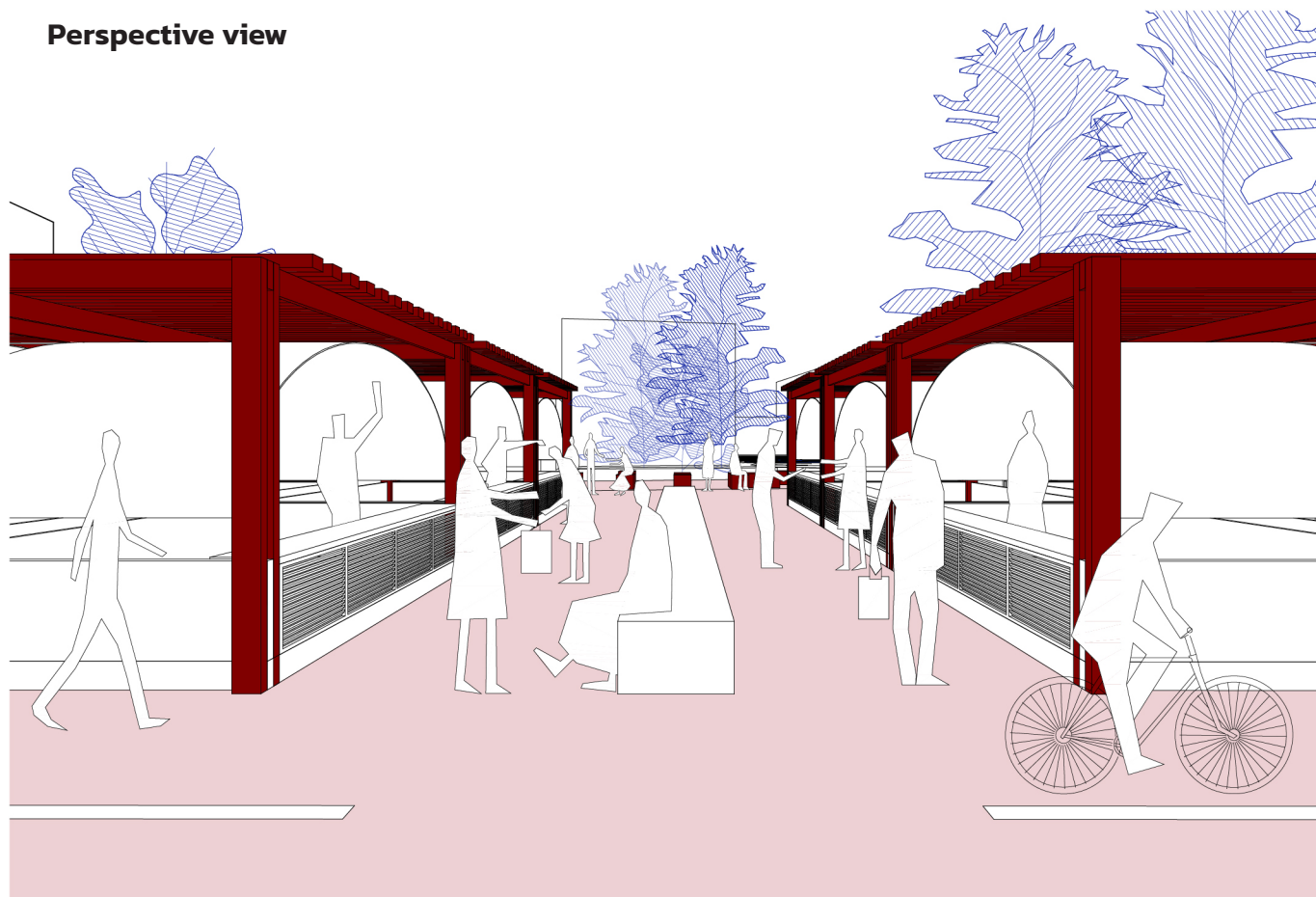
Sec B-B

Isometric View - Daily Market





Perspective view





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A special thanks to my friends and local residents of Bushehr for all the information and pictures they provided me.

For a brighter tomorrow, for a brighter Bushehr, where the blue sea meets the blue sky.

For peace.

For woman, life, freedom.



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photographs taken by Walter Mittelholzer and Albert Heim between 1924 and 1934, <https://library.ethz.ch>

Vegetation , <https://mindat.org>

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