

Vart jag mig i världen vänder

ALSIKE MONASTIC VILLAGE

Joakim Sätterman

Master Thesis at Chalmers Architecture

Göteborg 2016



CHALMERS

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PROLOGUE

During the summer 2015 I listened to a podcast episode of the Radio Show *Sommar*.¹ The host of the episode was Sister Karin of Alsike and during the show she presented glimpses of the daily life at Alsike Convent, where she and the other sisters are helping refugees in search of a sanctuary.

Ending the programme Sister Karin gave a vision of the future. After nearly 40 years of working with welcoming asylum seekers the Sisters did not plan to retire, instead they are dreaming of developing into a Monastic Village.

I had heard about Alsike a few years earlier (from a relative that was volunteering there) but from listening to the radio show an idea for a master thesis started to grow. During the summer and fall of 2015 the topic of migration grew ever more important and by getting in contact with Alsike and presenting a proposal for their Monastic Village I would have a unique glimpse into a life-long work with migration hospitality.

This thesis is the result of that idea, hopefully it can also present a feasible outcome of the visions of the Sisters.

A special thanks to:

Alsike for all the inspiration and to **Sister Karin** for the opportunity and the trust. To **Jan-eric** and **Richert** for the help and support when it was hard to get in touch directly with the convent.

Thanks to my examiner **Ola** for guiding feedback and comment and to my tutor **Hanna** for all support and guidance throughout the process.

Thanks to **Victor** for photos and inspiration, to **Sofia** for helping with some complementing pictures and also to **Björn** and **Per** allowing me to use their photographs.

Thanks to **Hans** and **Forum** for the support, and for allowing me to be so shut off during the spring. Finally thanks to friends and family, especially to **Stina** who always is inspiring me and supports me in every way, always.

/Joakim Sätterman



The emblem for the Sisters of the Holy Spirit, as the sisters call themselves.

ABSTRACT

Since 1964 the old school building adjacent to Alsike parish church has functioned as a convent for up to three Lutheran sisters. In the tradition of monastic hospitality the convent however is home and a sanctuary for many more than them.

For nearly 40 years the sisters have been helping refugees seeking a sanctuary in their struggle with asylum authorities. The work is currently more relevant and needed than ever. Together with a small group of other volunteers the sisters have formed a vision for expanding their activities in order to form a monastic village.

The purpose of this thesis is to present a contemporary version of a monastic village. With meetings and interviews the current and future requirements of the sisters and other tenants are mapped.

The contextual connections addresses monastic references (contemporary and historical) as well as the existing cultural landscape and the convents specific work with refugee reception.

With inputs from meetings and research the thesis carries on with an initial elaboration of the site layout that then zooms further in detail on specific buildings in plan, section and models.

The final result presents a proposal of Alsike monastic village, which enables the sisters to develop their work and enhances their voice and impact on the public debate.

In addition to presenting a physical modern interpretation of the monastic typology the thesis discusses the need for the monastery/convent as an opposing voice and a sanctuary in modern society. It also showcases an alternative integration project that helps newcomers, of different backgrounds and beliefs, to establish themselves in the Swedish society.



The Vertical Hermitage - a refuge from the everyday commotion

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INTRODUCTION

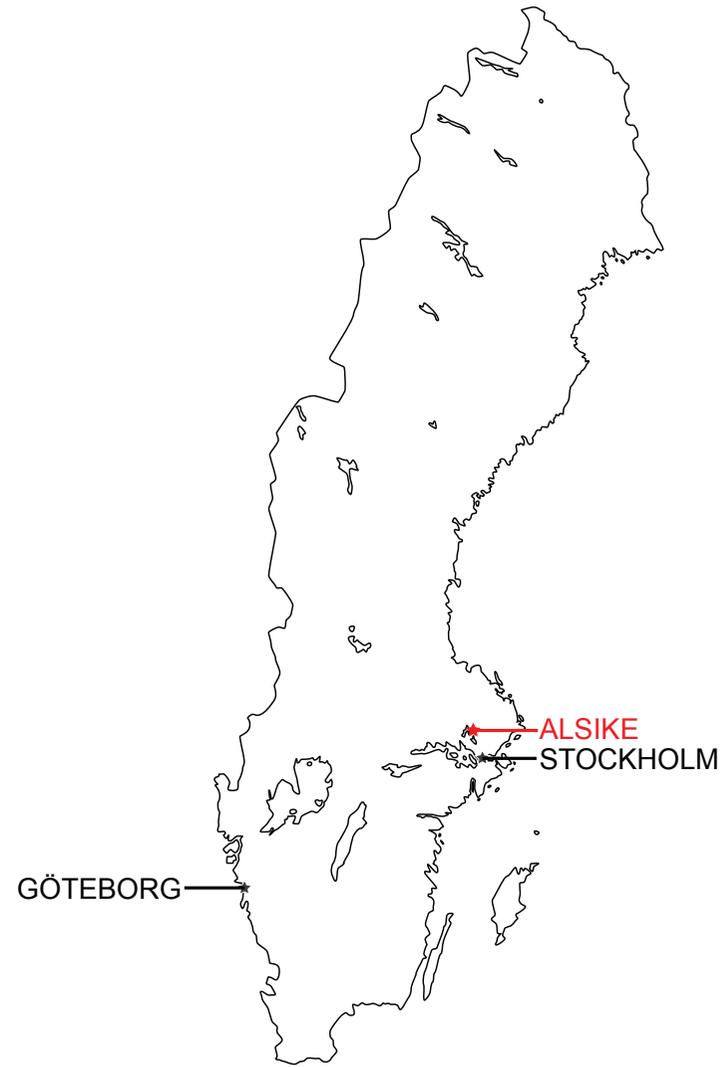
In the first centuries AD a wave of individuals left society to live as hermits in the deserts of North Africa and the Middle East. In the tradition of Christianity these were called the Desert Fathers and Mothers.

Quite ironically these desert hermits became the start for Christian monasticism, a way of community living that through history has taken forms both within existing societies and by creating entire societies of their own, often in different ways challenging the behaviours also of the general community.

This thesis is, in a sense, about community living. More specifically it addresses community in a contemporary monastic setting.

Like the desert hermits our society of today in many ways emphasizes individual independence. Historically one can argue that our modern view of the individualistic society is a rare phenomenon, that humans in most cases have lived in various forms of communities throughout history.

But what if our modern hermit lifestyles lack the need for community? What if the experiences of our individualistic deserts become the soil for various forms of community living?



A MONASTIC VILLAGE OF TODAY?

In a rural setting outside Knivsta in Uppland, Sweden, lies Alsike parish church.

For over 50 years the adjacent old school building has functioned as a Lutheran convent.

Although the convent has at the most consisted by the modest amount of three sisters (plus a couple of volunteers and aspirants) the school building and its old stable currently resides more than 50 people.

In accordance with their monastic heritage the sisters nourish the tradition of hospitality. This has resulted in an extensive work with sheltering families coming to Sweden as asylum refugees.

The work does not stop with only offering shelter for the night, the sisters takes an active role both in aiding the families with the authorities and in the national debate concerning asylum and integration.

Currently migration is a highly discussed topic and in Alsike the convent is more overcrowded than usual.

But after more than three decades working with these issues the sisters are not thinking about retiring, instead they are forming a vision for an expansion.

The dream is to build a *monastic village* in order to develop their hospitality. By making space for new groups of guests and residents (such as retreat/conference guests and student housings) they will also provide more connections between the refugees and Swedish society.

Parallel with providing conditions for a more self-sufficient lifestyle the expansion of the monastic village will strengthen the convents voice in the societal debate.

PURPOSE & OUTCOMES

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and present a contemporary version of a monastic village.

By presenting a proposal for the expansion of Alsike convent the aim is to help them to develop according to (and perhaps in addition to) their future visions of Alsike 2025.

The fact that an aim is a proposal that to a high level hopefully can be useful for the client might seem constraining for the process, since a master thesis should fully showcase my skills as an architect. However, to me it is important for an architect to have the ability to adapt to the clients needs and preferences. Hence this is not to be seen as a constraint but a design criteria and an investigation question for the thesis.

To be more specific, which would be beneficial for both the thesis and the proposal, some questions of investigation is stated.

THESIS QUESTIONS:

What can a contemporary monastic village look like?

How to deal with a client complex desires and visions forming the program?

In what ways are the site's specific preconditions used and enhanced in the project?

How can the extension deal with parallel activities and the balance between calm/enclosed and openness?

In what way should the extension relate to the historical buildings on site, and a monastic typology?

Is there room/a need for opposing sanctuaries in modern society?

Alsikes own visions for the future development started in 2009 by the sisters and a group of volunteering friends creating a vision group. Since the start the content of the vision program has varied and is still not fully fixed.

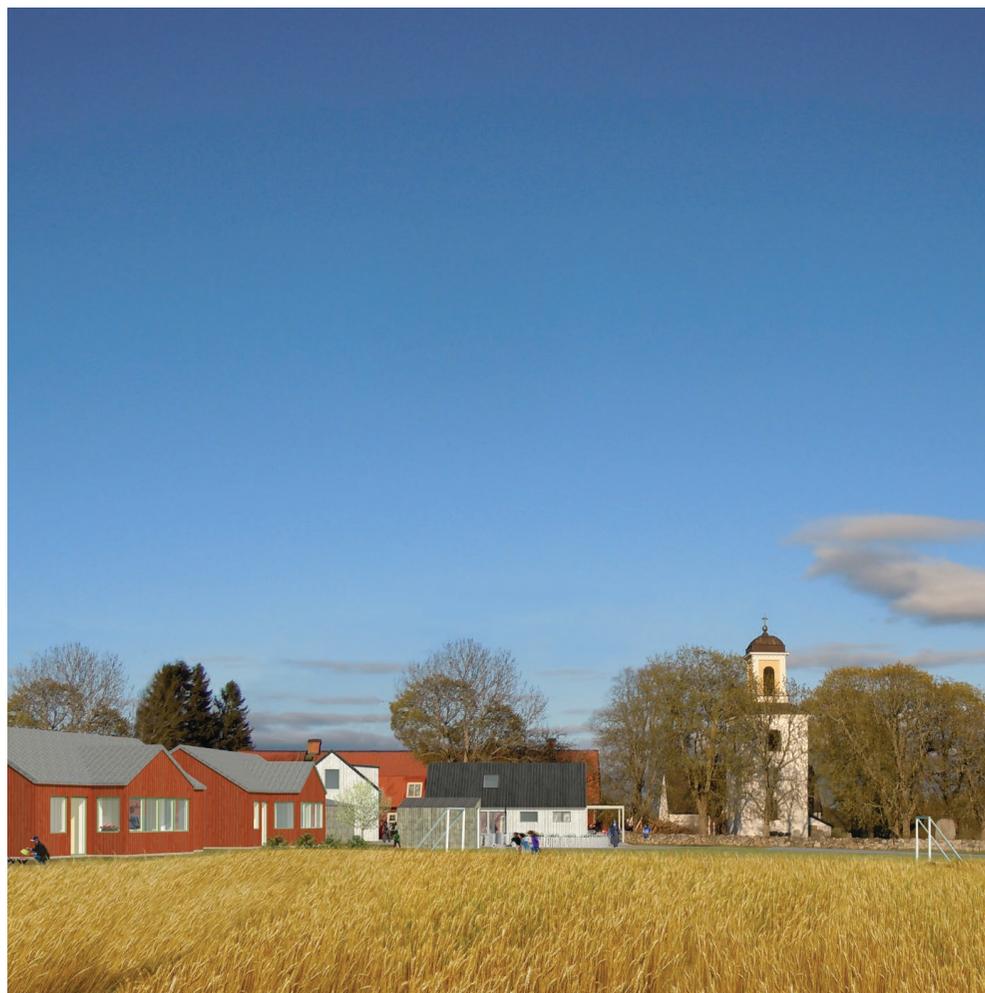
Starting from existing project plans and visions (found at different websites and documents) the current needs and thoughts are summarized by interviews on site visits. In this way an updated building program is developed which will be used in the thesis forming the proposal of the village.

The proposal of the monastic village is presented in different scales, both as a site layout and then zoomed in with plans and sections of the most important new buildings/functions in the village.

To maintain the contextual connections an introduction to Christian monasticism is presented, both its history and examples of contemporary expressions while the site visits and analysis presents the geographical context.

The following discussion evaluates the design process and the proposal. It also aims to connect to the question on modern sanctuaries:

Can the monastic village as an alternative way of living have effects on society, perhaps especially on the topic of asylum and migration?



On the hill behind the Convent and Alsike church a Monastic Village appears

BACKGROUND

GLOSSARY:

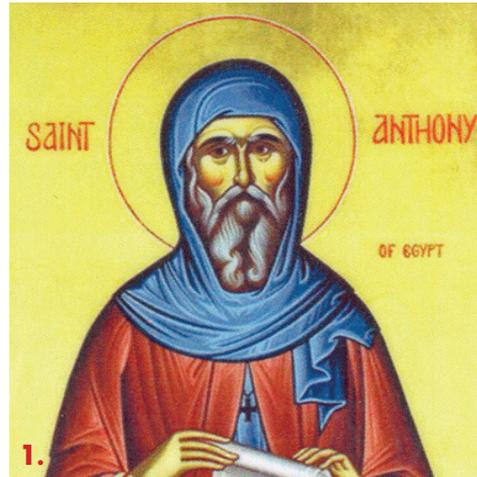
To start with a short glossary may be necessary. Worth noting is that the meaning of the words may be different in other contexts and other languages (e.g. Swedish).

Monastery: Although the term has a more general use within the Christian context the '*correct*' meaning is the domestic buildings of monks.

Convent: In comparison with above a convent is the corresponding term for nuns

Cloister: Refers to the enclosed courtyard (often with semi-covered gallery) typical to the monastic typology.

Community: Besides the general meaning (\approx *society*) the word in this context also is used for a group that chooses to live a collective lifestyle inspired by the monastics but without the full set of rules (e.g. including couples and families, not sharing a physical household etc).



2. St Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai (337-565). One of the oldest remaining monasteries, still functioning as a self-sufficient micro-society.



AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

270 AD: Abba Anthony (1.), at the age of 19, leaves a wealthy farmer life for asceticism in the Egyptian desert. Although he lives as a hermit he gets visitors and eventually followers. By the spreading of his biography the emerging concept of Christian monasticism is spread and St Anthony will be known as “the Father of all Monks”.

The constellations of hermit huts evolved into villages, often self-sufficient and enclosed by high walls for protection against persecution and bandits.

6th century: St Benedict of Nursia (3.), an Italian monk, founds his own monastic order and writes the Rule of St Benedict, monastic guidelines which will be predominant in Western Monasticism.

12th century: The monastic movement reaches Sweden with the establishment of the convent in Vreta (around year 1100). During the following decades many monasteries and convents are founded in Sweden. The monks and nuns are in the beginning often immigrants bringing new knowledge up from Europe.

14th century: A key person in Swedish monasticism is St Birgitta (4.), who founds the Bridgettine Order. Abroad she is also known as Bridget of Sweden, and until recently the only Scandinavian catholic saint.

16th century: With the reformation monasticism is banned in Sweden and all convents and monasteries are shut down. Some catholic monastic activities are permitted again in the 18th and 19th century but the prohibition against monasteries was legally abandoned first in the 1950's.

20th century: A renewed interest for monasticism occurs within Evangelical Lutheran churches. As a result of this Alsike convent becomes the first convent within the Church of Sweden in 1954.

Today there are about 20 formal monasteries/convents in Sweden, plus several communities. The monasteries/convents are mainly Catholic or Evangelical Lutheran.



CONTEMPORARY REFERENCES

Within the monastic typology today there is a wide variation between traditional convents and monasteries and new forms within the historical heritage. For the sake of Alsike it might be beneficial to present both modern new-built traditional convents/monasteries and examples of alternative currents.

Many of the most renowned newly built monasteries and convents are Catholic. Within the international architecture scene two examples are *Le Tourette* (1960) by Le Corbusier (5.) and *Ronchamp Tomorrow* (2011) by Renzo Piano (6.) (adjacent to the Corbusier church).

Two Scandinavian examples are Mariavall Convent (1991) in Skåne, Sweden by the dutch architect/monk Hans van der Laan (7.) and the Norwegian Tautra Mary convent (2006) by Jensen & Skodvin (8.).

Common for all four examples is a minimalistic raw design, in Tautra with interiors in untreated wood and concrete floor and in the other three more extensively expressed in raw, smooth concrete.

All four projects have a quite institutional scale and three of the projects (except Ronchamp Tomorrow) are designed with traditional cloister environments (enclosed courtyards).

The examples above represent new interpretations of the traditional building typology but, as I will go more into, there are different reasons why this cannot be directly implemented in Alsikes specific context. To give a better understanding of Alsikes context two other examples are presented.

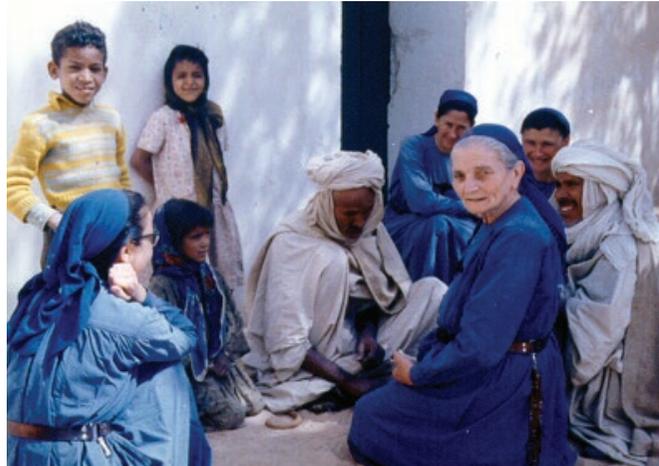
Little Sisters of Jesus

The Little Sisters of Jesus is an example that often is mentioned by the sister of Alsike themselves, as an example of a contemporary monastic lifestyle.

Like the original monastic movement the Little Sisters of Jesus was founded in the Sahara desert in 1939, by the French sister Magdeleine.

In Sahara she lived with a nomad tribe and when the order spread to other areas the sisters continued to live in small communities identifying themselves with the struggles of excluded minorities. They dress in blue (often denim) in identification with the workers and are today about 1300 sisters represented in about 70 countries.

Instead of living in ordinary convents they live as the local conditions, it might be in a tent with the Saharan nomads, in villages with indigenous tribes or in the suburb of European cities. In the European context they are also identifying themselves with the lower class-workers by often taking factory works.



New Monastics - The Simple Way

In the 1990's a movement emerged in the US called New Monasticism or the New Monastic. Common for the movement was an intention to live a collective lifestyle inspired by the early church and monasticism. Similar to the Little Sisters this often is carried out in low-class excluded areas (*"Relocating without gentrifying"*).



Shane Claiborne in front of the shared green house.

A front figure for the movement is Shane Claiborne and his community the Simple Way.

The Simple Way was founded in Kensington in North Philadelphia, a slum area with abandoned houses due to financial regression. Since then it has expanded to a small "village community" reclaiming the neighborhood and helping its fellow citizens out of homelessness, addictions and poverty.

The *community* consists of both men and women, singles and families living in close proximity. The main focus is on the local community, which includes topics such as urban farming (local self-sufficiency), co-housing, shared economy etc. Beside this the Simple Way also raises awareness on topics as racism, economical injustice and pacifism.

Networking within the New Monastics is coordinated with internet-based knowledge sharing (*Communityofcommunities.info*).

A Swedish, much smaller, version of this can be found with similar structures (*kommuniteter.se*). A local example in Gothenburg is the community Oikos in Hammarkullen, with members living in proximity following a monastic weekly rhythm and involved in local projects on topics as integration and nonviolence.



Kyrkviken
(part of Lake Ekoln, connected with Lake Mälaren)

INTRODUCING ALSIKE CONVENT

Alsike convent is situated outside of Knivsta in Uppland, Sweden. Although its rural setting the convent has less than 20 km to Uppsala (Sweden's fourth city) and about 50 km to central Stockholm.

Established in 1955 by Sr Marianne and Sr Ella the convent was the first convent/monastery within the Church of Sweden (Evangelical Lutheran) since the reformation in the 16th century, when monasticism where banished in Sweden.

After a start-up period first in Stockholm and then Uppsala (where the sisters worked with "student social activities" running a dorm) the convent moved to Alsike in 1964. Since then the Alsike convent resides in the 19th-century school building adjacent to Alsike parish church, that has its oldest parts dated back to the 13th century.

In the 1980's Marianne and Ella were joined by Sr Karin. Currently the Sisters of the Holy Spirit consist of Sr Marianne, 91, and Sr Karin, 58, (Ella passed away in January 2016) plus two younger aspirants. Besides them the convent community also consists of more than 50 asylum refugees (mainly families) living at the convent.

For nearly 40 years the Sisters have been helping refused refugees seeking a sanctuary in their struggle with asylum authorities. By taking refused immigrants as sanctuary guests, aiding them in their trials and raising awareness for their stories Alsike has become a renowned voice in the Swedish migration and asylum debate.

The convent reached international media in the 1990's when police made a raid arresting immigrants without legal papers for deportation. In the following debate the convent, as well as the archbishop of Sweden, called Alsike an Embassy of the Kingdom of God and stated that the police did not respect the unwritten rules of sanctuary peace.

Although there is no legal term in Sweden for this sanctuary peace the police and migration authorities have respected it since then, enabling Alsike to develop their migration work.

Much in due to Alsike the municipality of Knivsta was in 2009 one of the first in Sweden to allow children without residence permit access to public education, which enabled all the children of Alsike to go to ordinary school. With help from volunteering teachers Alsike also provides daily Swedish lessons for the adults.



Sr Marianne and Sr Karin in front of the convents graffiti wall, the result of a workshop by the graffiti artist, and former volunteer, Victor Egerbo in 2011.

Alsikes own visions for the future development started in 2009 when the sisters and a group of volunteering friends formed a vision group envisioning the development of Alsike Monastic Village 2025.

After a longer process the convent recently bought the adjacent land in mind by SLU, the Swedish Agricultural University. Currently dialogue is established with the municipality of Knivsta in order to update the comprehensive/detail plan for the area enabling the development.

The main task for the vision group currently is to help the sisters with finding ways to fund the construction, as all their work the Sisters have to rely on voluntary fundings for their building project.

With fundings from Leader Upplandsbygd (*European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development* and the county of Uppland) a pre-study for the village where made in 2012-2014. The pre-study focused on ecological small-scale agriculture, water treatment solutions, project management etc.

Besides the pre-study (which unfortunately has been hard to find a documented summary of) a result from the fundings was a jubilee book for the convents 50-years anniversary in Alsike 2014 ("Trohet, Vänskap, Fristad - Alsike kloster 50 år").

In 2013 building permit was granted for two wing buildings on the backside of the convent building, on ground already owned by the convent. The buildings have yet not been realized and to some extent the desired content has changed since the permit was granted, which leaves the plans for the buildings not entirely up-to-date with the current needs and requirements of the convent.

Considering the current situation, with the desired plot bought, this thesis takes a starting-point in the visions from 2009 along with sketches, the earlier permits and other pre-study material in order to state an updated program and propose a layout for the village as a whole.

CONTEXT

Buildings on site:

1. Alsike Church
2. The Convent
3. The Stable - asylum housings
4. Car-port/ Bike storage
5. Storage building for the church and cemetery.
6. Barn/storage (adjacent farm of Krusenberg)





The old school building (2.), is housing for both the sisters and some of the refugee families.

At the ground level the kitchen and dining room is located, the small chapel is found in the basement with both internal and external access.

The old stable (3.) is the main house for the refugee families and is planned to stay that also after the development of the monastic village.

At the entrance to the area a sign states: *“Alsike convent is a sanctuary for refugees in need”* (4.)







In the daily schedule (8.) shared meals are as important as the daily prayers.

The kitchen (5.), that serves all the residents, is also a lively meeting place. The same goes for the dining room (6.), which also works as common room, meeting room and, due to lack of space, also sleeping room for one family.

The chapel (7.) is used at least five times daily by the sisters and aspirants for prayer. However the schedule is not stricter than that exceptions can be made, for instance when having visitors.



PROGRAM & PRECONDITION

Three different documents from 2009-2013 have served as basis in finding a correct program for the proposal. The documents are from Alsike convents homepage (2009)², a presentation at the homepage for Alsike Monastic Village (2013)³ and the pre-study project plan (2012)⁴.

The three documents emphasize different aspects and are to some extent not entirely coherent, therefore the summarized program additionally was checked with Sr Karin on a site visit in February 2016 and by phone calls with two members of the Vision group, Jan-eric Jonsgården and Richert von Koch.

EXISTING BUILDINGS:

The old school building is refined as a convent building. By relocating other activities better conditions for calm and reflection are created. The main kitchen is kept in place and the dining room will still function as dining and meetings place while its other, temporary functions as common room, living room etc. are relocated. The chapel also keeps its location.

Besides what is mentioned above the convent building houses rooms for the sisters, aspirants, occasional convent guests as well as space for a small library and reading room.

The old stable continues to be accommodation for asylum refugees in need of support and sanctuary.

Hence the extension will not include additional refugee housing, but instead common spaces needed for the existing accommodation.

2. HelgeAndssystemstrarna (2009)

3. St Nicolai Ideella förening (2013)

4. Manktelow, M., Gustafsson, B (2012)

NEW & RELOCATED ACTIVITIES:

Retreat/Conference

Facilities for up to 6-10 short-term guests.
At least 6 small bedrooms
Shared bathroom (at least one accessible).
Smaller gathering room with kitchenette in connection to the guest rooms.

Monastic shop and Summer café

(might be two separate spaces)

Shop for selling products made on the convent, such as wool products, marmalade, tea etc.
Summer café with outdoor seating. Baking will be made in the existing kitchen but smaller facilities for making coffee is needed.

Hermitage

Two small, desolated cabins to be used for short-term single hermit retreats (one person per cabin) during the summer period. As simple as possible (outhouse, no tap water etc)

Playroom/nursery

A room for active play + storage
A room for calm play/homeworks
Bathroom (accessible) + perhaps a kitchenette.

Rooms for volunteers

2 single-bedrooms,
Shared living room, small kitchen and bathroom (Playroom and Volunteer facilities could with advantage be coordinated)

All-activity spaces (mainly for long-term residents, content and extent not entirely fixed)

Common rooms
Kitchen/kitchenette
Sewing workshop (weaving and wool processing)
Carpentry
Extra bathrooms and showers

8 small houses (housing two students each)

Approx. 25-30 m² per student.
Shared kitchen might be acceptable but individual bathrooms are required.
A house should also be possible to use by a refugee family (instead of two students)

Laundry rooms (for residents), **Garbage disposal** (for students and retreat facilities) & **Storage**

Small-scale farming

Hen house, Barn, Green house, farmland.
An intention is to start with sheep and geese on the southern biotope island placing the barn adjacent to that.
Besides farmland for self-sufficiency a dream is to have a Monastic Garden (display garden with herbs, flowers etc) and various fruit trees and bushes

General comments and wishes:

Sr Karin: Small scale buildings, avoiding to turn the convent into an institution.
Openness and opened structures, still separated functions in order to create peace and quiet areas for especially retreat guests.

The Municipality of Knivsta (according to Richert von Koch):

Respect the existing cultural environment. Additions should not be too high-rise or large scale in order too not compete with the church (tower) as the prevailing eye-catcher in the landscape



PROCESS

COFFEE, SHOES & HOSPITALITY

The first that meets you when entering the convent is shoes, lots of shoes, and jackets. By the amount of jackets in the hall you realize that it is a large household. Because it is not just two sisters and long-term guests or tenants, “All people that come here are considered as children in our family” as Sr Karin says.⁵

Beyond everyone living at Alsike there is also a large amount of visitors that come for a regular or irregular visit, a group that I had the privilege to be a part of.

Prior to and in the start of the thesis term I had two visits to Alsike, in November and February, and I realized that it is quite hard to plan the visits beforehand. People turn up without prior notice, and the coffee table can offer many unexpected meetings and conversations.

Doing a thesis it might have been easier to gain information and hard facts in an environment with “calmer” conditions. But as I see it this is one of the preconditions of Alsike, an effect of the mindset where hospitality is a lifestyle and where there always is time for welcoming a guest and offering a cup of coffee.

5. Herbertsson, Nordfjell & Jahnsen. (2010)

KEYWORD WORKSHOP

In the pre-study project plan as well as on their homepage Alsike is referring to four keywords for the development: *Integration, Small scale, Collaboration, Ecology* (own trans. of “Integration, Småskalighet, Samverkan & Ekologi”).

To better distinguish the intended values of the words I had a short interview/workshop with Sr Karin at my visit the 4th of February 2016.



Brother Birger

The same day a visit from Östanbäck monastery stopped by. Östanbäck is a Lutheran monastery in Sala (1,5h from Alsike) that has many similarities and connections with Alsike and their situation. This became beneficial for our interview that was joined by Brother Birger of Östanbäck.

Where nothing else is stated the descriptions that follows are the words of Sr Karin (translated).

INTEGRATION:

Our own experience is that an opener for newcomers to gain access to the Swedish society is to learn and to get opportunities to speak Swedish.

Through our extension more meeting opportunities with Swedes, and the language, are created.

Furthermore an important aspect is also to take advantage of all knowledge that the refugees have brought from their own culture and background, e.g. in the garden, the farming and in different handicrafts.

SMALL SCALE:

We want manageability in our work, so that it does not grow into an institution-scale. With too large-scale the risk is that it becomes impersonal and more turns into a hotel business. This is unfortunately what happened with several diocesan centres (transl. *Stiftsgårdar*) in the Church of Sweden during the 1900s.

COLLABORATION:

Collaboration and exchange of knowledge is important, while still remaining independent.

Several contacts and collaborations are already established with Knivsta Municipality (concerning school and healthcare), the agricultural university SLU, Church of Sweden, Children- & Youth Psychiatry (BUP) etc.

The administrator at the youth psychiatry has called Alsike "*the Trauma University*" for its extensive experience and good results in taking care of people with posttraumatic stress and similar cases.

ECOLOGY:

The entire project should thoughtfully concern the topic of ecology and sustainability.

On the follow-up question *Why* Br Birger fills in: It is a part of the essence of the monastic history to live in harmony with Creation. Both as a responsibility to care for the nature but also to look after it in order of gaining self-sufficiency from society.

Östanbäck has a long experience in organic vegetable farming and it shows when Birger continues speaking about the importance of Alsikes biotope islands and how the addition with sheep and gees would benefit the biological diversity.



The term *Biotope Islands* refers to the tree covered hills surrounding the area of development, where biodiversity has been kept in between areas of agricultural mono-cultures.

DESIGN CRITERIA

With a starting point in the monastic typology, and its re-appearing features, I distinguished for my own Design Criteria for Alsike.

SIMPLICITY

Connecting to the monastic mindset you often can find the notion of simplicity also interpreted in the built environment. Especially in modern examples (as previously presented) this simplicity can come off as rawness, where the old stone-built environments has been reinterpreted in smooth concrete.

However, the previous examples differs from Alsike in several ways. Besides having larger economical resources than the current situation at Alsike I do not see a simplicity here that could be interpreted into concrete minimalism. Instead the simplicity of Alsike has more of a warmth and humbleness to it. It has less to do with asceticism and eliminating distractions and more with the mindset; to create a welcoming environment. A material interpretation of the simplicity therefore better corresponds to **wood** than concrete.

Both the theme of simplicity and the choice of wood as material connects well with the small-scale impact, which in turn both is a stated wish of the convent and a feasible approach on relating to the existing buildings and the surrounding environment.

BUILDABILITY

The simplicity also connects to the construction of the village, which has to be extra considered due to the tight budget.

In Alsike there is always willing hands that can help. This makes it natural to build as much on site instead of pre-fab solutions but it also makes it important with a simple design that can be built by those with less experience in the building industry (perhaps still under supervision of professional leadership and guidance).



Modern Monastic Simplicity? Perhaps not for Alsike

ENCLOSUREMENT / OPENNESS

Another typical feature of the monastic typology is the enclosed, calmed environments such as the *cloister* courtyard.

The cloister is a way to maintain peace and calmness for contemplation, something that the sisters state that they are in lack of, both for themselves and for short-term retreat guests.

However, the enclosed courtyard might not be a solution for Alsike for many reasons. First the courtyards could interfere with the small-scale appearance but more importantly it is contradicting with the convents reputation of openness and the specific work with asylum refugees.

To me this became obvious when I saw the documentary *Förvaret*⁶, which follows staff and interns at a migrant detention center in waiting for the final verdict of possibly immediate deportation.

In the opening scene the camera sweeps over the building with its enclosed courtyard and my mind refers to a cloister. Alsike is providing a sanctuary for refugees avoiding the imminent risk of deportation, therefore all clear connections to such kind of building typology ought to be avoided.

While the extension of Alsike should enable enclosure it should not be excluding for the refugee residents. A task is therefore to find balance between enclosure and openness.



Mariavall Convent



Flen Migrant Detention Center

6. Persson & Chakraborty (2015)
eng. title *Detained*

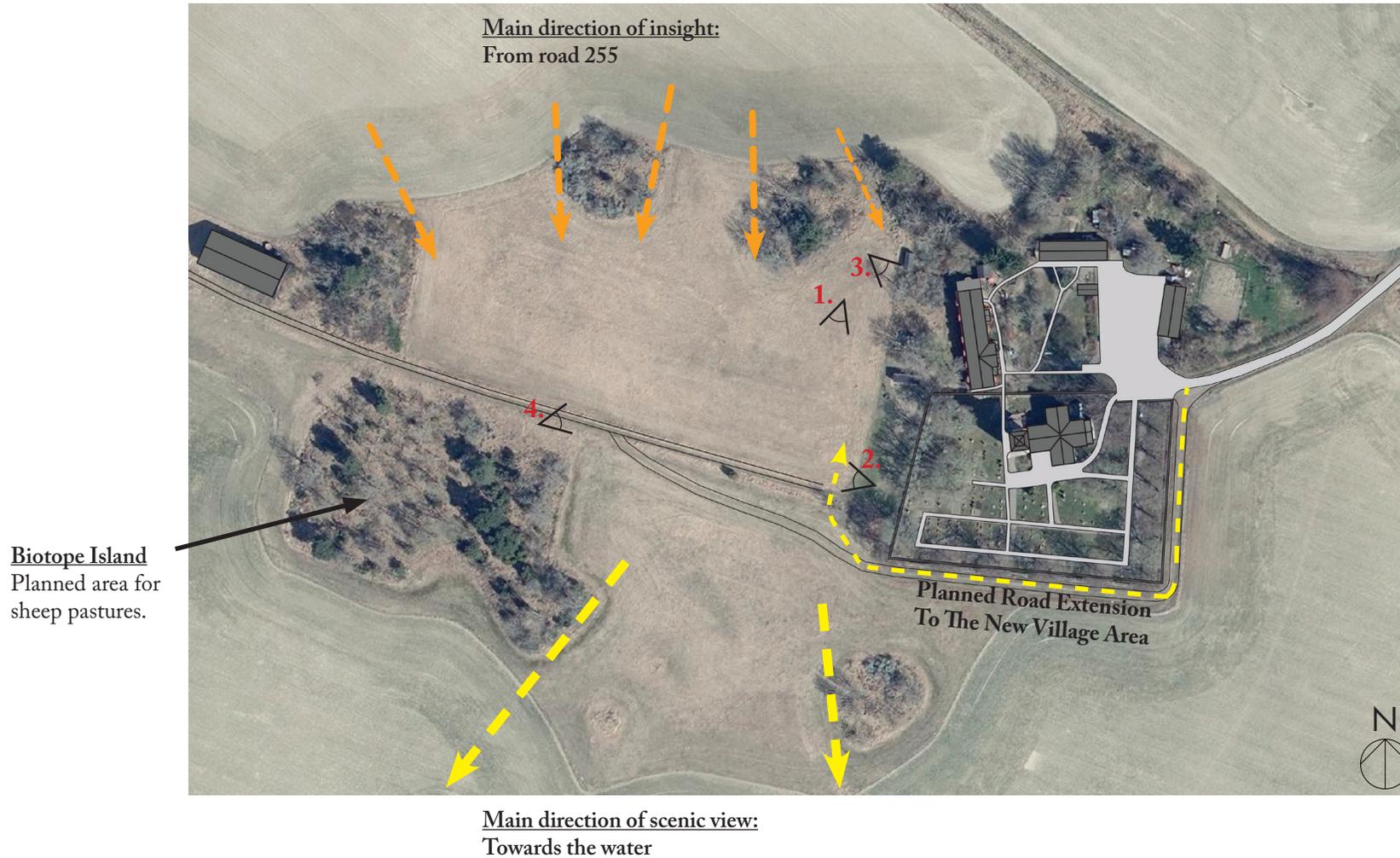
SITE ANALYSIS

The area for the extension consists mainly of an uncultivated field that is enclosed by the convent building and the cemetery wall to the east and by the biotope islands to the west and north.

The field is slightly sloping towards south and the cove.

Due to sun directions, outlooks and insight (and noise) from the road the added buildings mainly ought to be placed in the north part of the area.

Both considering their own sake and in order to avoid blocking views from the existing building.





1.

1: View from the convent towards Kyrkviken (see map page 16)
2: View from the convent to the old road to Krusenberg farm



3.

3 & 4: View from the area of development towards the convent and the church



2.



4.

4 SITE LAYOUT ALTERNATIVES

During the process four alternatives were sketched based on the building program but in different ways emphasizing the visions of Alsike. The alternatives were then evaluated concerning design criteria, movements and program requirements.

In a way this also was an iterative process, where the two first alternatives more clearly connected to existing sketches while the latter were more elaborating.

Placements of barn and hermitages are not altered in this phase. Intended placements of the hermitages are in southwest, out of sight on the presented plans. Green area marks planned size of farming land.

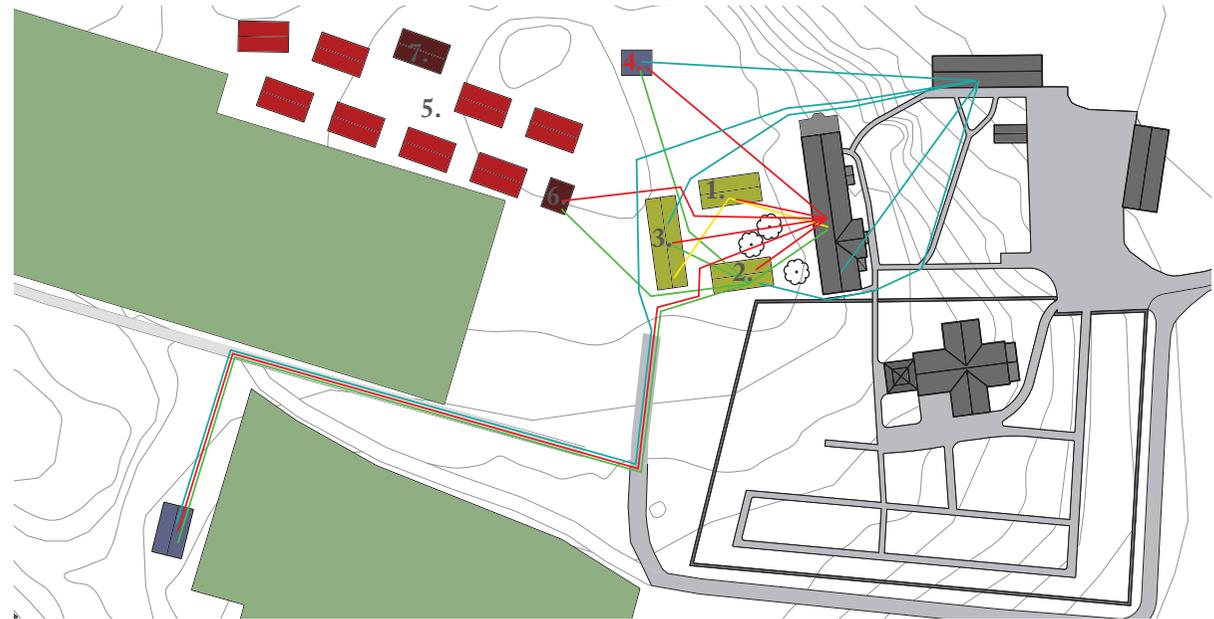
In order to keep the diagrams clearer the movement pattern of each student is not presented.

ALTERNATIVE 1

The first version takes inspiration from a sketch by Sister Marianne dated 2012⁷, with updates concerning the current building program.

There is a clear separation between the students and the convent where a yard is formed by the convent for its added activities. The calmness of the yard can be maintained by positioning of entrances to different activities, still enabling meetings between different groups.

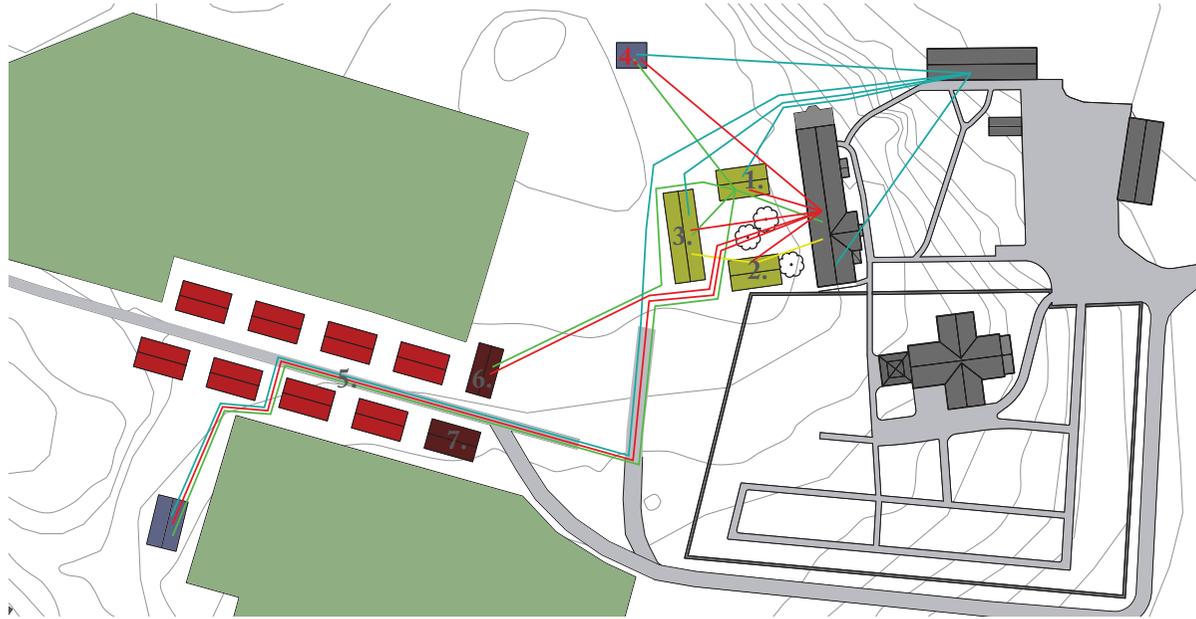
The students however have their own square, central on their street, by the laundry/common house.



Colour Schemes

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Retreat center 2. Children and volunteers 3. All-activity + shop & summer café 4. Green House/Hen house 5. Student housings 6. Garbage 7. Laundry | <p>Added Buildings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For guests, the convent and the refugee families Student Housings Farming buildings Garbage, Laundry etc. | <p>Movement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Sisters The Refugees Volunteers Guests (Retreat) |
|--|---|---|

7. Nordström, M. et al (2015)



1. Children and volunteers
2. Retreat center
3. All-activity + shop & summer café
4. Green House/Hen house
5. Student housings
6. Garbage
7. Laundry

ALTERNATIVE 2

In alternative 2 the students are even clearer detached from the convent. This version is an interpretation of the vision description dated 2009⁸, which describes a narrow village street by the old tractor path towards the neighbouring farm.

The distance between the village street and the cemetery is in order to enable guests to the convent/retreat to calmly pass the student street up to the new convent yard.

The yard is similar to the one presented in alternative 1 but as an alternation the wing building for the retreat and for the children/volunteers are switched, creating clearer proximity between the existing refugee housings and their other spaces while the retreat house gets better sun light conditions in the south of the yard.

8. HelgeAndssystrarna (2009)

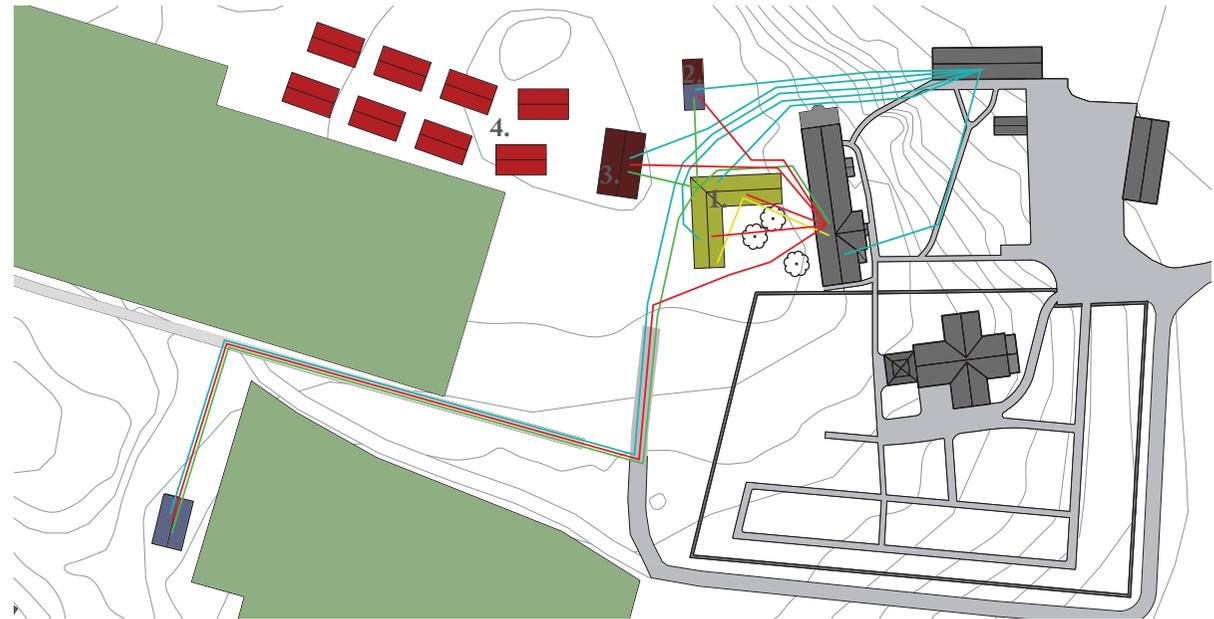
ALTERNATIVE 3

Both alternative 3 and 4 has a clear intention to better invite the students to interaction with the other long-term residents.

With this in mind alternative 3 tries to reform the sketches of alt 1. A L-shaped two-storey building replaces the three buildings around the courtyard, which gives better lighting conditions and views also from the kitchen and dining room in the existing building. The L-building contains both Retreat, Shop, Playrooms and volunteers plus some all-activity spaces.

By positioning of entrances for different functions in the L-building can be separated to its different sides. In this way the courtyard is kept calm and can be dedicated for the sisters and retreat guests, while other residents are on the north side.

In addition to the L-building an all-activity house contains shared spaces and common functions for the residents, which encourage interaction between different groups of residents.

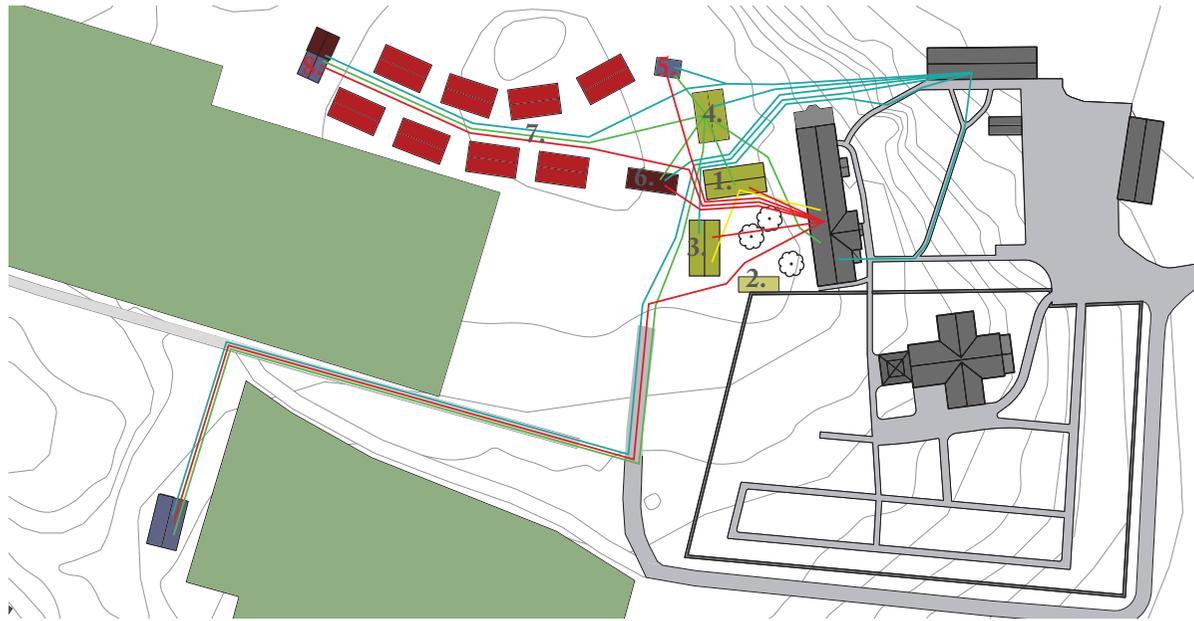


Colour Schemes

1. Convent house with Retreat center, Volunteers, Playroom, Sewing workshop and Shop/Café
2. Green House/Hen house
3. All-activity house
4. Student housing

- Added Buildings**
- For guests, the convent and the refugee families
 - Student Housings
 - Farming buildings
 - Garbage, Laundry etc.

- Movement**
- The Sisters
 - The Refugees
 - Volunteers
 - Guests (Retreat)



1. Retreat center
2. Open structure (for summer café, outdoor meetings/sermons etc)
3. All-activity (sewing) + shop & summer café
4. Children and volunteers
5. Hen house
6. Garbage and carpentry
7. Student housing
8. Green house and Laundry

ALTERNATIVE 4

The courtyard from previous versions re-appears in an interpreted form. Considering outlooks and lighting conditions, as in alternative 3, the south building of the courtyard is replaced by an open structure that gives extra shelter to activities on the yard. If alternative 3 made a clear separation between residents and guests by the building volumes alternative 4 further emphasized the openness of Alsike by aiming at avoiding excluding corners.

With the design criteria of Openness/Enclosurement in mind this became a focus on the outdoor spaces, where activities are separated but the openness remains by sightlines and in-between spaces.

The all-activity house in Alt 3 is replaced by a yard. By moving Playrooms and Volunteers from the courtyard to the new outdoor space a distinction between the two separated yards is created, one focusing on the guests while the other is dedicated to the different groups of residents.

By adding shared functions to the end of the student street the conditions for spontaneous meetings between different residents are enhanced, while giving more life and movement to the street.

DEVELOPING THE SITE PROPOSAL

In evaluating the alternatives the students got extra attention. As a long-term resident group the students could have a specific role in “integration interaction”, hence the layout should encourage this and not considering the students as merely tenants. By this criteria both Alternative 1 & 2 were left out.

Another important aspect in the evaluation was the design criteria of Openness/Enclosurement, focusing on the parallel activities and how to manage that while the openness is remained. By also considering this Alternative 4 was chosen to be the “winner”.

Alternative 4 was considered the most inviting to the students. It also deals with the need for calmness without enclosed, excluding corners, instead offering a sequence of semi-open spaces.

A developed version of alternative 4 was presented during the midterm seminar in March. Here more outdoor facilities were added: the monastic garden, parking area and a football field. However, these should be considered more as proposed placements since they were not studied into the same level of detail.

After the midterm seminar the site layout was developed and refined. Although minor changes occur the overall concept and intentions remained, which will be visible in the presentation of the Final proposal on the following pages.



1. Existing Convent building
2. Retreat House
3. Shop & Sewing workshop
4. Open Structure
5. Play House & Volunteers
6. Garbage, Storage, Carpentry
7. Hen House
8. Student Housings
9. Green House & Laundry
10. Barn
11. Hermitage
12. Monastic Garden
13. Football Field
14. Parking

SKETCHING THE BUILDINGS OF THE VILLAGE

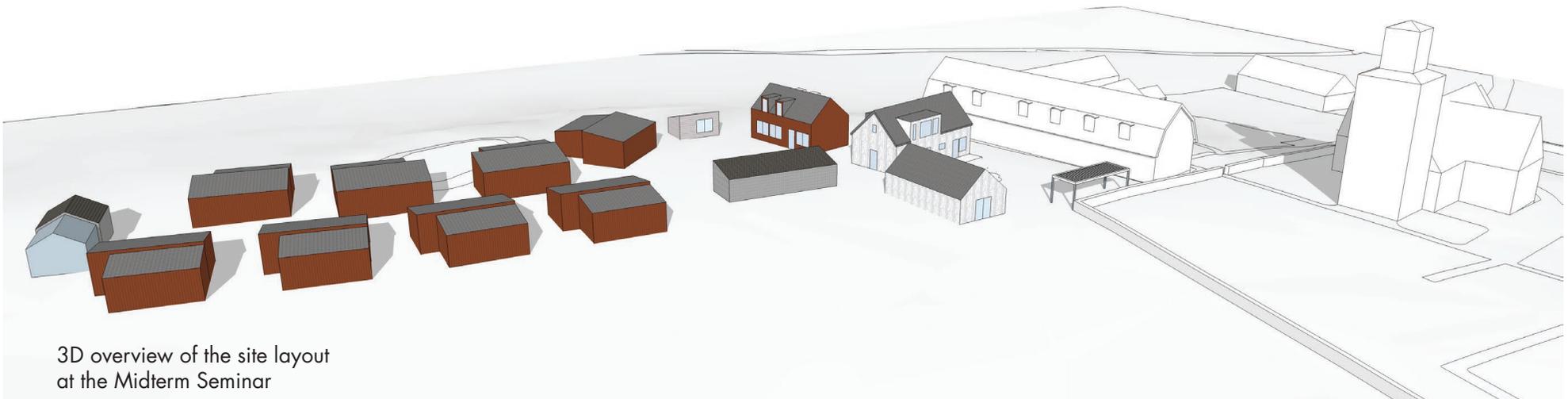
Besides the sequence of exterior spaces the village consists of a variety of different buildings that are placed concerning adequate proximities but also to create movements that encourages meetings and interaction. The added all-activity spaces, mainly for the migrant families, are divided between buildings.

In addition to presenting the overview of the entire village some buildings, or typologies, are worked on and presented more thoroughly. These are:

The Retreat House, The Shop, The Playhouse, Student houses and the two Hermitages.

Each of the buildings had their own sketching process in accordance with the program. The design of the buildings then reinforced the site layout by parameters such as sightlines and dimensions/distances concerning regulations for accessibility and fire.

In order to avoid confusion and uneven focus between process and result the sketch phase of each building is not further presented here. Instead examples will occur in the process discussion following the presentation of the final proposal, which now will be presented.



3D overview of the site layout
at the Midterm Seminar



The Monastic Village seen from the South

The village is situated behind the convent building, on the ridge of the hill overlooking the rural landscape and the cove Kyrkviken.

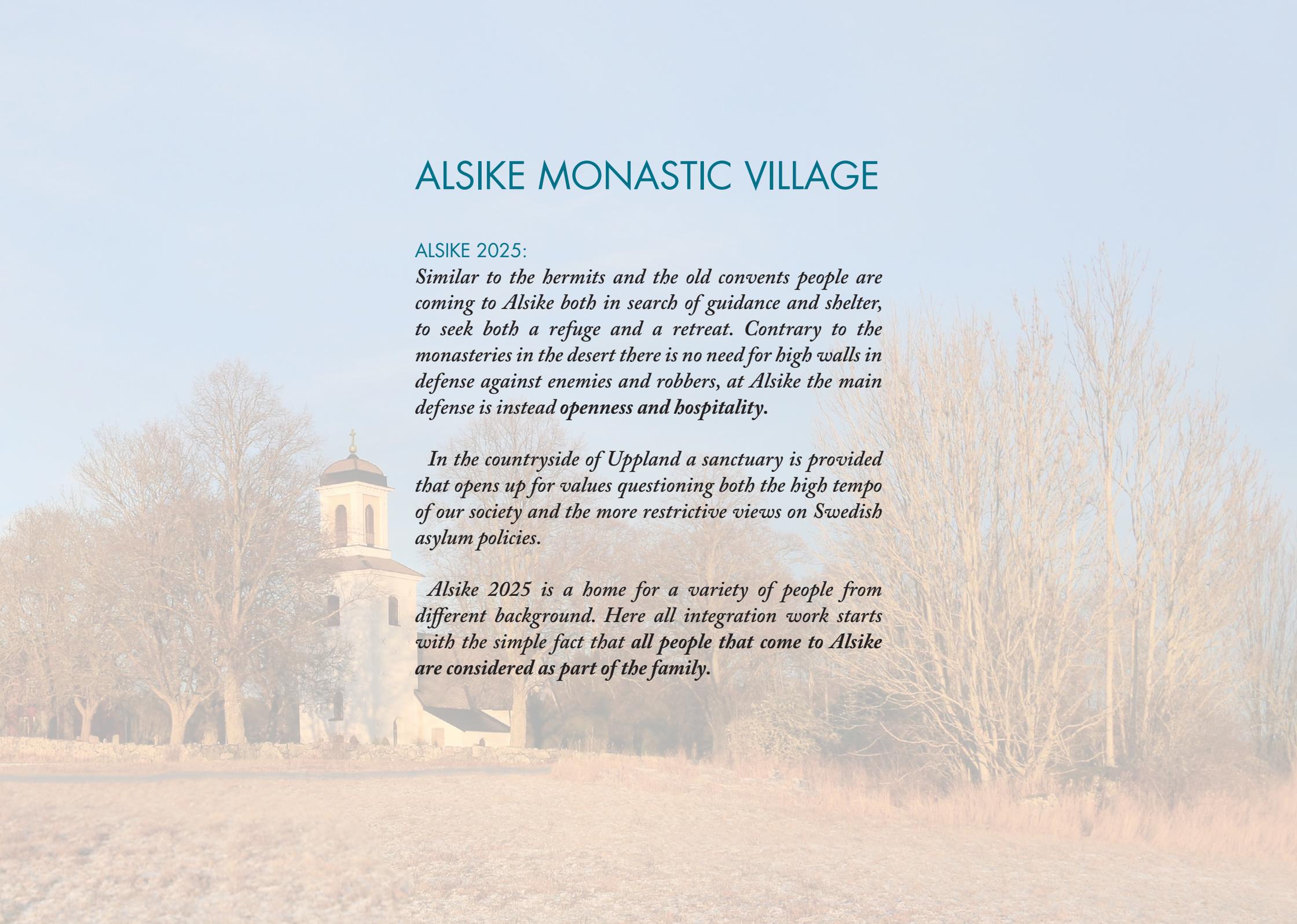
ALSIKE MONASTIC VILLAGE

ALSIKE 2025:

Similar to the hermits and the old convents people are coming to Alsike both in search of guidance and shelter, to seek both a refuge and a retreat. Contrary to the monasteries in the desert there is no need for high walls in defense against enemies and robbers, at Alsike the main defense is instead openness and hospitality.

In the countryside of Uppland a sanctuary is provided that opens up for values questioning both the high tempo of our society and the more restrictive views on Swedish asylum policies.

Alsike 2025 is a home for a variety of people from different background. Here all integration work starts with the simple fact that all people that come to Alsike are considered as part of the family.





The Student Street

The Allotments are cultural meeting points between the agricultural students and the refugee families

The Village Yard

Across the fields you find the barn with the sheep and their pastures on the forested hill. On the other side of the hill the two hermitages are located, visually detached from the village.

The Convent Courtyard

A VILLAGE OVERVIEW

The following pages present the proposal for Alsike Monastic Village. As I see it the vision of the development did not start with a grandeur dream of making the convent more famous or successful.

The sisters simply had an aspiration to in a better and more extensive way manage to do what they already are doing: to live a life of prayer and contemplation, while providing a place of hospitality to people in need.

The sisters themselves have stated that they do not want to build an institution. A major difference between an institution and a village is that an institution is founded for a specific, single purpose⁹ while a village in an extent is defined by the variety of functions and people.

The Convent is refined in its function

The existing Refugee Housing keeps its function, while shared living spaces for the families are added in the new development

⁹ 'Institution' in Collins English Dictionary, through Wordfinder Online

In order to create a village instead of an institution the adding of different functions hence is a goal per se, parallel to also dealing with solutions concerning the existing overcrowding.

This result in a proposal, and a thesis, that concerns a convent and its work with asylum reception without presenting the living quarters for either the sisters or the refugee families (also in accordance with the building program). Instead it presents the added new functions along with some extra facilities and spaces for the refugee families and the sisters in order to develop their everyday lives and activities.

The extension proposal consists in total of 20 buildings. By the placement of the buildings a sequence of outdoor spaces is created. The two major open spaces are the Convent Courtyard, mainly serving short-term guests, and the Village Yard, which more focus on the residents.

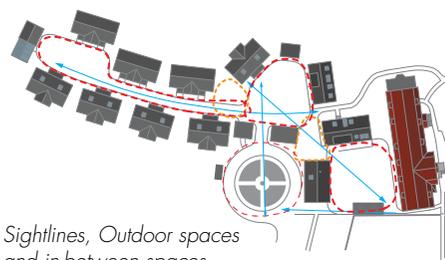
Attached to the Village Yard is the Student Street with its eight buildings containing 16 apartments. At the end of the street a shared green house is located in connection with the students' laundry facilities, which then becomes a destination and meeting point for different groups of residents.

Across the fields the barn is located by the larger biotope island. On its backside the two hermitages are located.



Site Layout (1:1000)

1. Existing Convent building
2. Existing Refugee housing
3. Retreat House
4. Shop & Sewing workshop
5. Open Structure
6. Playhouse & Volunteers
7. Hen House
8. Carpentry & Storage
9. Garbage
- 10a. Student Housings type 1
- 10b. Student Housings type 2
11. Green House & Laundry
12. Barn
- 13a. Hermitage - Horizontal
- 13b. Hermitage - Vertical
14. Monastic Garden
15. Playing Field
16. Parking
- A. Convent Courtyard
- B. Village Yard
- C. Student Street



*Sightlines, Outdoor spaces
and in-between spaces*

OUTDOOR SPACES

To deal with parallel activities the village is formed around multiple open spaces. In this way a guest seeking calmness does not feel as a trespasser, the refugee children do not have to keep calm to not disturb a retreat and a student does not feel imposed to take part of the convent activities.

At the same time sightlines and in-between spaces triggers curiosity that invites to meetings and interaction between groups.

While the borders of the Convent Courtyard are well defined the distinction between the Village yard and the Student street is more blended (in form and functions). The Students as long-term residents are an important group for the “integration interaction”, the diminishing of the visual boundaries is a gesture to encourage this.

The placement of allotments in the space in-between the Village yard and the Student street might be extra appealing to the students from the agricultural university, a meeting point to share knowledge with people from other parts of the world.

Another cultural meeting point is the Monastic Garden. Besides that it also serves guests for recreation purposes, the residents with herbs etc.

The form is typical in monastic display gardens, here it also works as an undercover turning zone for the garbage truck and the mailman.

MATERIALITY & COLOURS

The primary choice of building material is wood, as earlier mentioned a natural choice to connect both to the existing built environment and the notion of warm simplicity.

The convent courtyard, with its more public appearance, connects in colouring to the church, with white façades and a tarred wooden roof (simplified from a shingle roof to a plank roof).

The buildings that contain more permanent tenants have façades in Falun Red while the outhouses have a more untreated, grey-turned appearance. As a transition between the two yards, and a mixture of functions, the Playhouse takes the form and the roofing material of the Retreat House while the façade colouring is Falun Red instead of white.

The existing green accent colour from the window framings reoccur at windows and doors in the extension, so also the yellow colour from the convent entrance and at wooden detailing on the church.





THE CONVENT COURTYARD

One of the main parts of the extension concerns the Retreat topic. Retreat can be explained as a miniature version of the monastic life, where you as a visitor are invited to take part of the daily prayers and meetings while in between you are given time for personal reflection and contemplation apart from the commotion of everyday life.

Not seldom the retreats are kept quiet, meaning that the participants are silent except for when participating in the daily prayers or in personal counseling with a retreat leader. A retreat can be a single-day event or a longer period but often it is within the weekend format.

Alsike usually offers one-day retreats on a quarterly basis but the last years this has not been possible due to lack of time and space. With the extension better conditions are provided both for one-day retreats as well as longer, but also for other kinds of conference activities.

The Courtyard is defined by the Convent building in the east, the Retreat House and the Shop in the north and west and the cemetery wall in the south. By the cemetery wall a pergola is positioned, which is used both for the summer café and occasionally as scenery/altar at open-air meetings on the courtyard.

The shape of the courtyard is a result of the existing directions of the convent and the cemetery wall where the Retreat house connects orthogonally to the convent and the shop connects to an extension of the direction axis of the wall.

While the more formal approach of the courtyard is defined by its surrounding functions the calmness is enhanced by the choice of groundcover material. When entering the yard gravel pathways are replaced by wood chippings.

One of the old trees on site is kept and stands central in the courtyard. For the visitor the tree brings perspectives, it reminds you as a human of your scale in time and space.

Materials and colouring enhances the formal approach by connecting to the colouring of the parish church but the choice of wood paneling (*lockläktspanel* ≈ boards and batten siding) also coheres with the Convent building.

The height of the two-storey building (the Retreat House) is visually decreased by the roof panels vertical extension, which lowers the conceived base of the roof to the same height as the Convent building and the Shop.

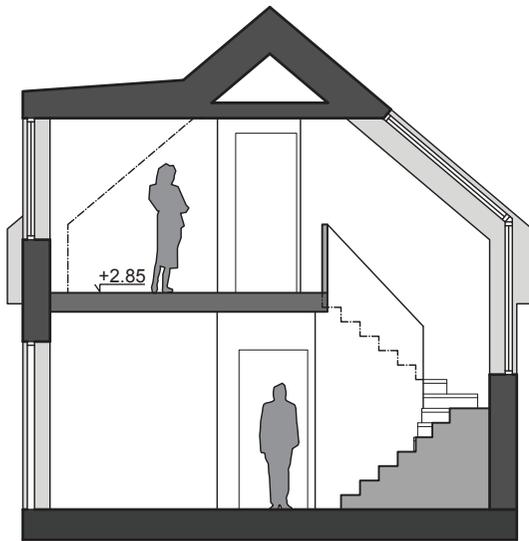
Opposite page:
The Convent Courtyard seen from
the south corner of the Convent

From the enclosed calm environment sightlines triggers the curiosity and opens up for interaction with people and activities in the other outdoor spaces.

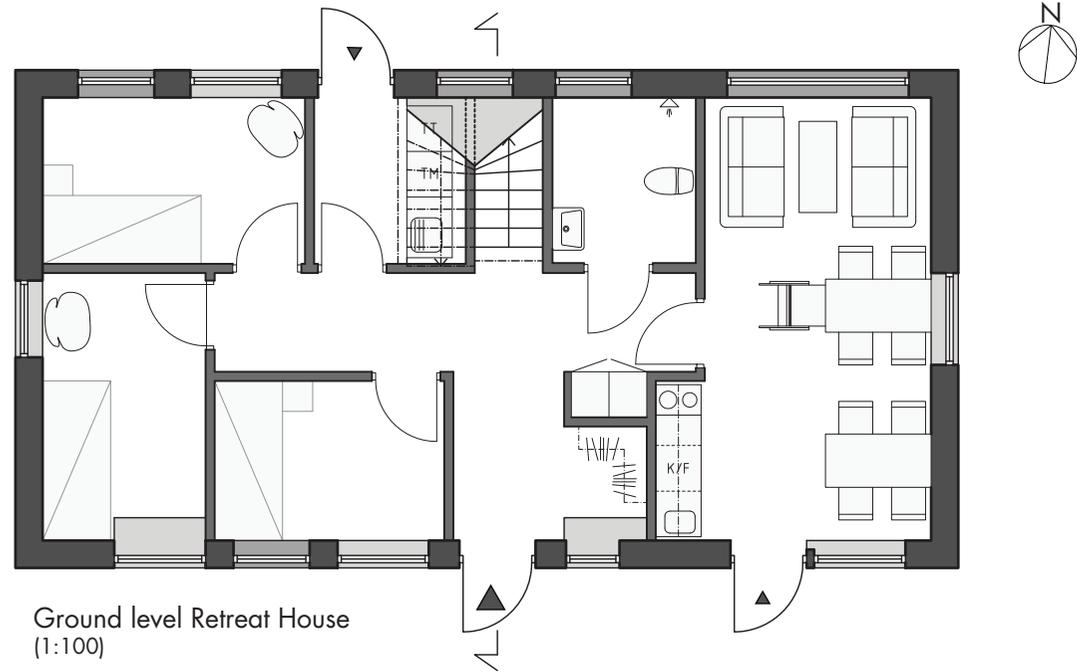
THE RETREAT HOUSE

The Retreat house as a building is dedicated to welcoming short-term guests. The building has seven bedrooms for 1-2 persons each distributed on two levels. On the ground level the larger meeting room is located, which at the occasion of a smaller conferences enables meetings detached from the everyday life of the convent house. On the upper level a small “sitting room corner” can be used either as a library or for personal counseling and discussions.

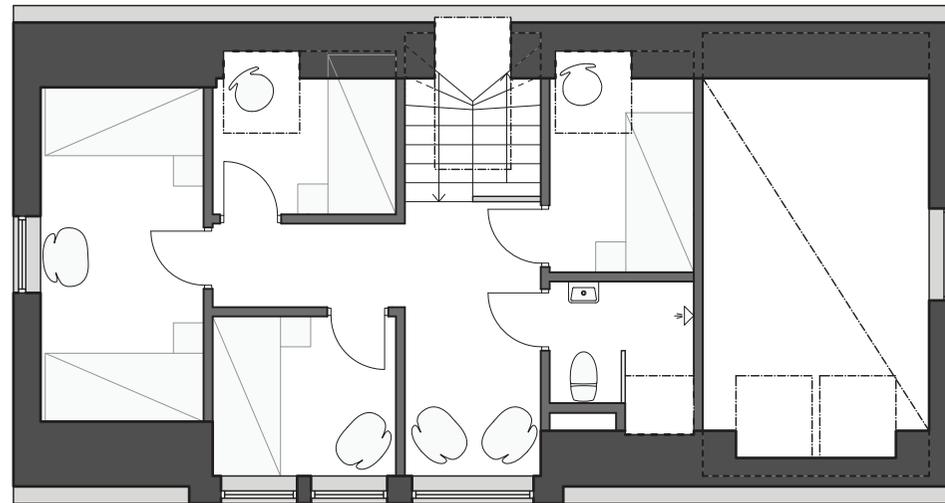
Due to the positioning of the students' laundry facilities an extra laundry room is provided, to be used by the sisters and the volunteers.



Section
(1:100)



Ground level Retreat House
(1:100)



Upper level Retreat House
(1:100)

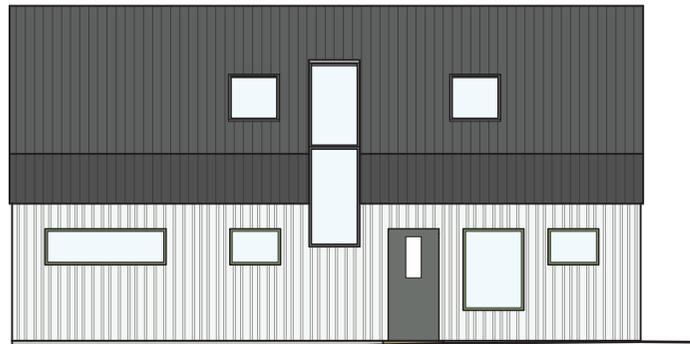
Area: Totally 106 m² (69+37)



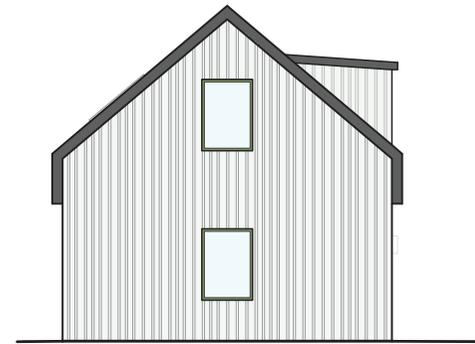
Elevation towards south (towards courtyard)
(1:150)



Elevation towards east



Elevation towards north



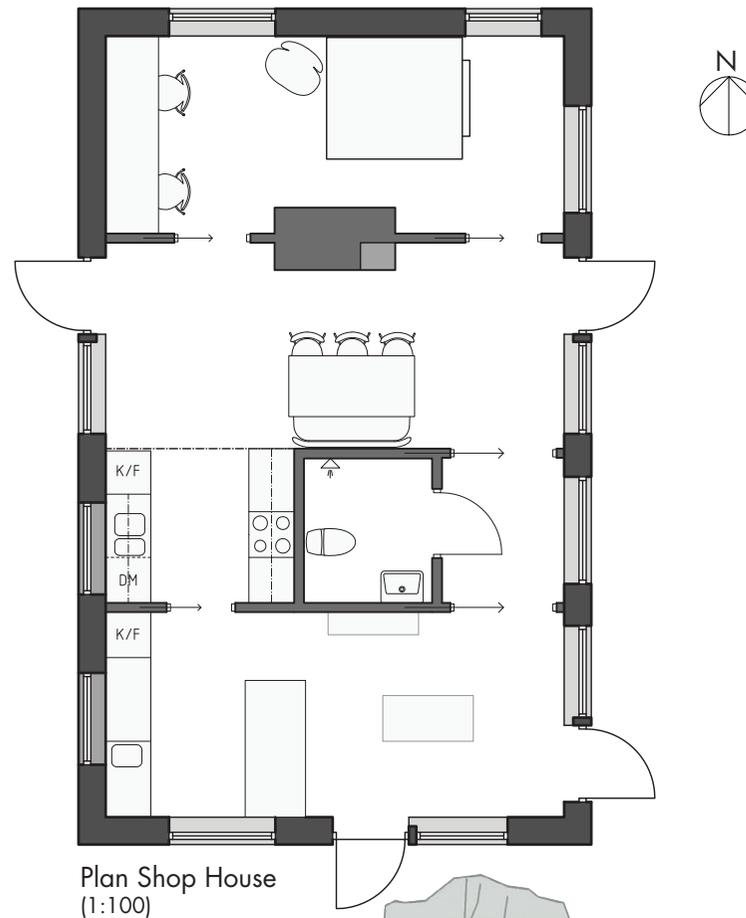
Elevation towards west

THE SHOP

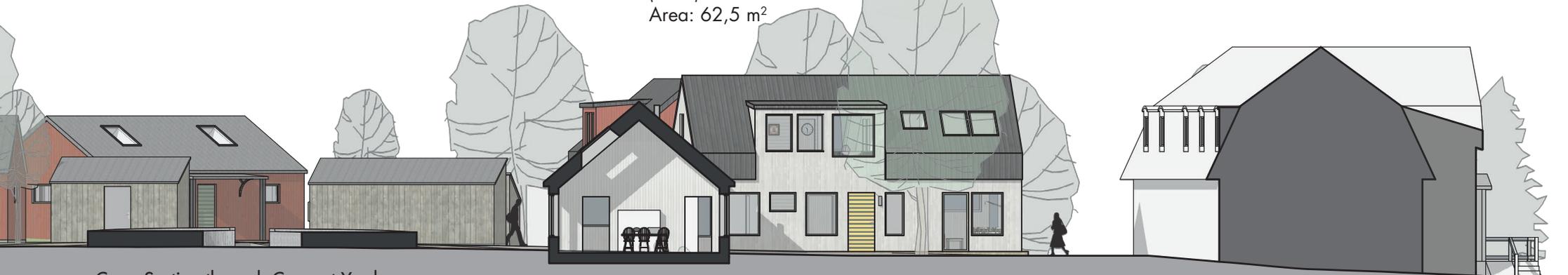
The shop is selling goods grown and manufactured at the convent; *fika* for the summer café as well as handicraft, marmalades, tea blends from the monastic garden etc.

Since the adults of the refugee families often are restrained from applying for jobs (due to the lack of asylum visas) the shop and the manufacturing also are beneficial as a sort of occupational therapy. In addition it provides opportunities to meet Swedes and practice the language.

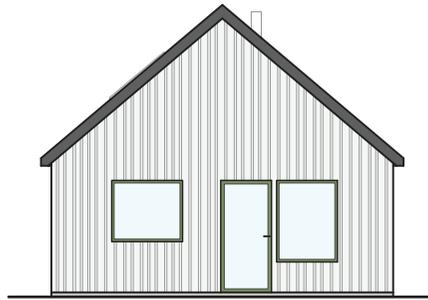
A sewing workshop (with weaving loom) is located in the north part of the building, in proximity to the Village Yard. The in-between space is a flexible area dedicated to the families, a meeting spot by the open fireplaces that also holds a brick oven. Perhaps the space by occasional rain weather also can become indoor seating for the café, creating meetings between visitors and tenants working in the sewing workshop.



Plan Shop House
(1:100)
Area: 62,5 m²



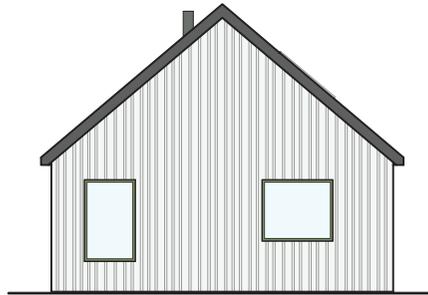
Cross Section through Convent Yard
(1:200)



Elevation towards south
(1:150)



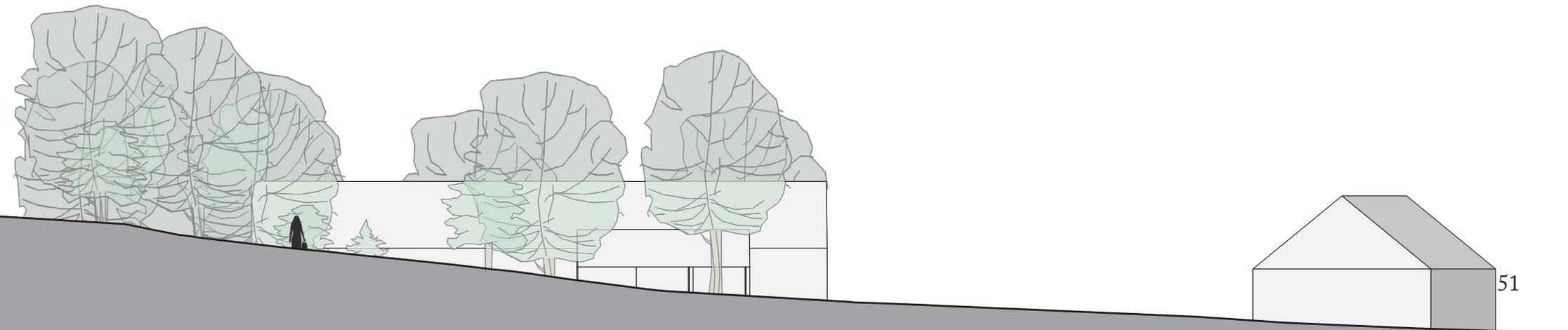
Elevation towards east (towards courtyard)



Elevation towards north



Elevation towards west



THE VILLAGE YARD & THE PLAYHOUSE

The village yard opens up for meetings between different categories of residents. The yard itself is used as an outdoor extension of both the Playhouse and the carpentry.

If the Shop building had a focus on the adults of the refugee families the Playhouse are focusing especially on the children. “Play is probably the best therapy a child can get” – Sr Karin states.¹⁰

At the Playhouse the children are provided with spaces for both lively and calm play, as well as support with homework. The combined living room and kitchen is spacious enough to work as a larger gathering space for the families.

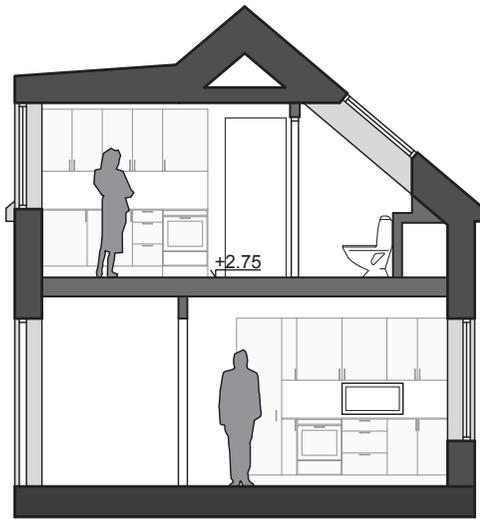
The upper level of the playhouse contains rooms for the volunteers. Volunteers come as extra support for the Sisters and are often staying about 6 months. Besides aiding the Sisters in the daily duties a special focus generally is the children.

Often the children of the refugee families do not want to burden the parents with their own dealing with previous experiences and therefore the volunteers and the Sisters are crucial as extra support.¹¹ Although the staircase to the volunteers physically can be closed of, the door in most cases is open for the children to come up if they need to talk, have help with homework or just hang around.

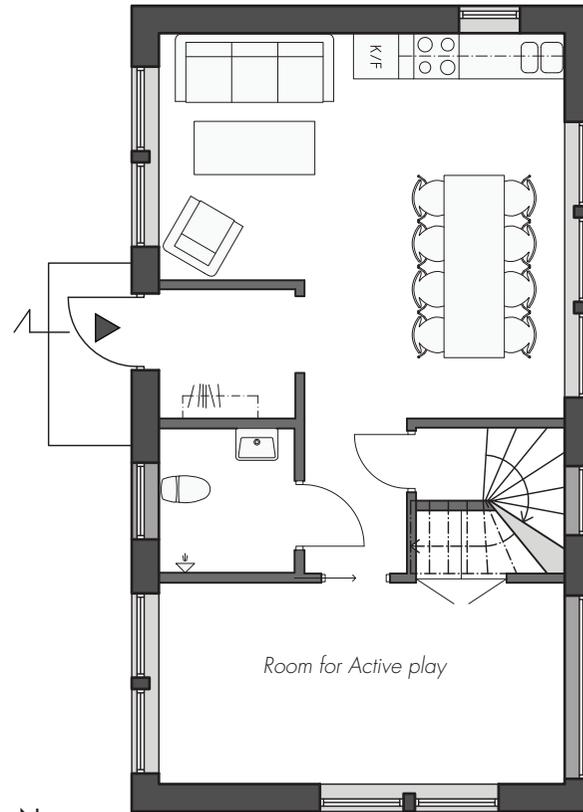
10. Sveriges Utbildningsradio AB. (2012)

11. Herbertsson, Nordfjell & Jahnson. (2010)





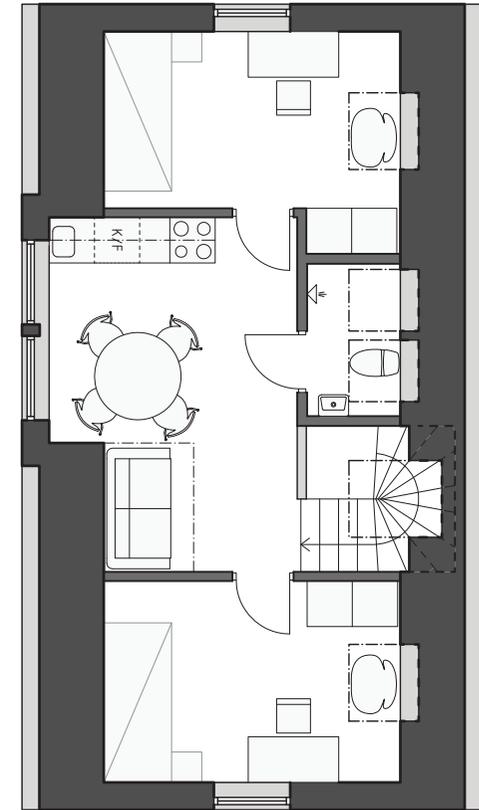
Section
(1:100)



Ground level Playhouse (1:100)

Children and common spaces

Area: Totally 90,5 m² (53,2+37,3)



Upper level Playhouse (1:100)

Rooms for the volunteers

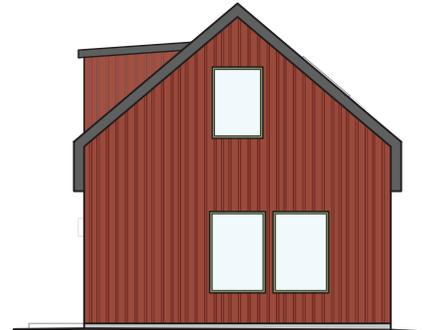
Opposite page:
The Village Yard seen from
the porch of the closest housing.

The Yard is an extension of the surrounding indoor environments and flows into smaller semi-spaces, such as on the way towards the Courtyard but also towards the Student street (out of sight).

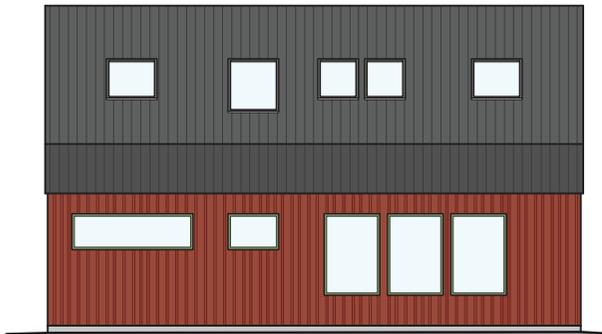
The newly planted tree central in the yard will grow and eventually define the space such as the old tree in the courtyard.



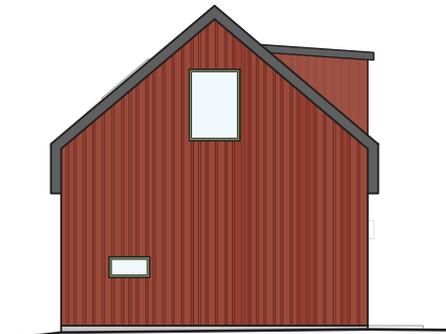
Elevation towards west (towards Village yard)
(1:150)



Elevation towards south



Elevation towards east



Elevation towards north



Interior View of the Playhouse
The living room has visual connections both down towards the refugee housing (to the right, outside of picture) and to the yard.



THE STUDENT STREET

Following the preconditions for the student houses (small two-apartment houses with about 25-30 m² per student, possibly shared kitchen) resulted in a proposal concept consisting of small houses where the shared kitchen is positioned in a glazed veranda.

The kitchens are large enough to be a social space, both for the students sharing and for a refugee family. Generally the kitchen is placed facing south, both for light conditions and the view.

Considering the kitchens' sun conditions the housings are divided into **two alternations** where the houses north of the student street has the kitchens facing the street. In this way all private rooms are facing a calmer side while the kitchens facing the street gives variety and life to the outdoor space.

The alternation that has the kitchen on the backside it called **Type 1** while the one with the kitchen towards the street is called **Type 2**.

The Student street is an extension of the Village yard, interaction with other residents is encouraged but more private outdoor spaces are also provided. Though the borders between the Village yard and the student street are diminished there still is a contrast between the yard space and the narrow street, giving more intimacy and privacy to the street.

Student House Type 1 occurs at five occasions in the monastic village, the four houses south of the student street and the house directly facing the Village Yard. The reason to choose Type 1 at the Village Yard is both that privacy is more required for the kitchen (comparing to the student street the Village Yard is more populated) and for the proximity to the Playhouse, which indicates this as the housing most likely to be used for a refugee family.

Type 2 is represented in the three houses north of the street. They are displaced in order to get an outlook from the kitchens in between the houses on opposite side of the street. Due to the orientation and sun conditions the students in Type 2 has a private outdoor space facing the street.

Considering students from the nearby agricultural university SLU the access to outdoor spaces would be an appealing asset at Alsike, comparing to the regular student housing. It is likely that the future landscape architects, gardeners and other students will contribute in forming the outdoor spaces of the monastic village. A start in promoting this might be the addition of pallet collars, which in combination with access to tools opens up for their creativity.



1. Student House Type 1
 2. Student House Type 2
- Outdoor private space

Opposite page:

The Student Street towards the Green House

The semi-private kitchens gives life to the street. The zoning of the outdoor space is carried out by added vegetation and changes of materials.

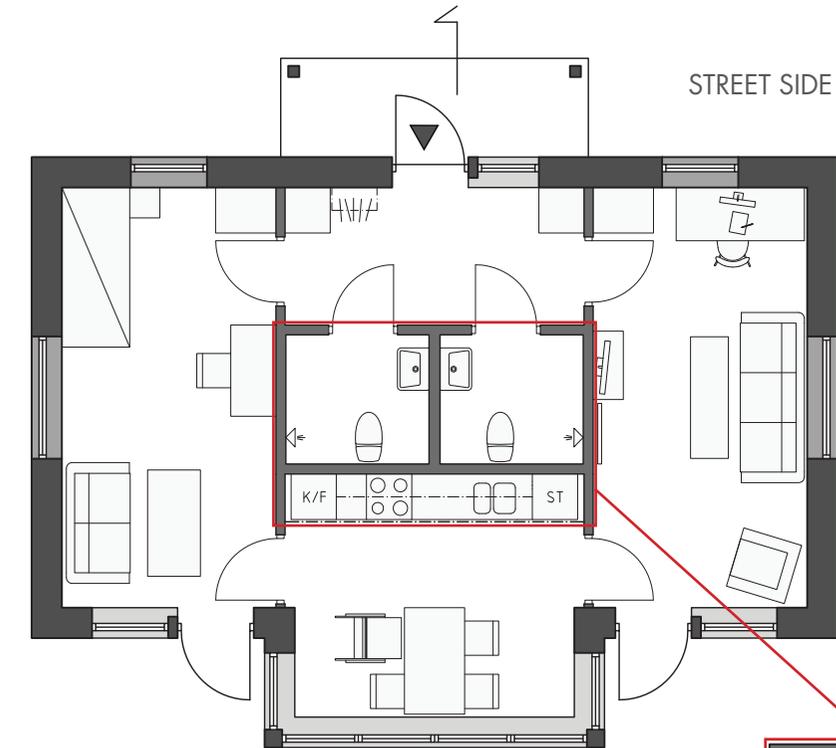
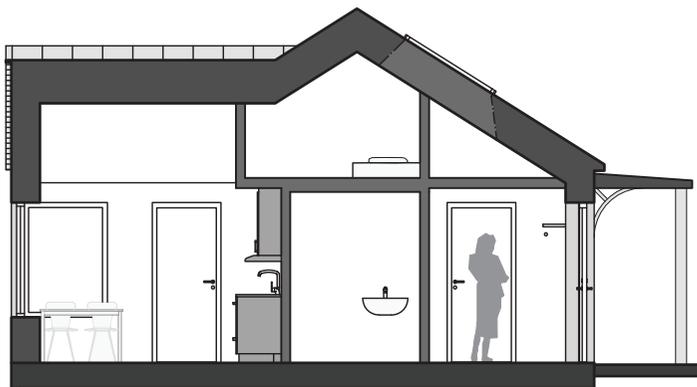
The wood chippings from the Convent courtyard re-occures by the entrances, giving the same tactile differentiation.

STUDENT HOUSE TYPE 1

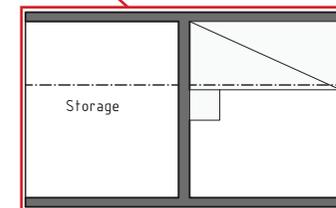
Student House Type 1 has the kitchen facing the private side. A shared middle section creates a clear distinction between the two private rooms while the shared entrance also enables circulation. This implies that Type 1 also is the alternative most suitable to be used by a family.

The compartment above the toilets is divided into two small lofts, which are reached from either apartment. These can be used both as sleeping lofts or extra storage space. In the scenario where a student goes home during summer breaks the loft might be a long-term storage while the apartment can be rented out to summer guests at the convent.

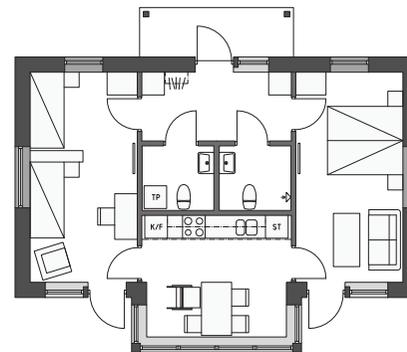
In the alternative furnishing the house is divided in a children room and a parents/living room. If placing children “bedrooms” in the lofts other variations are possible.



Plan Student House Type 1 (1:100)
59,9 m² total
15,5 m² separate room (+ WC), 12,2 m² shared kitchen



Loft

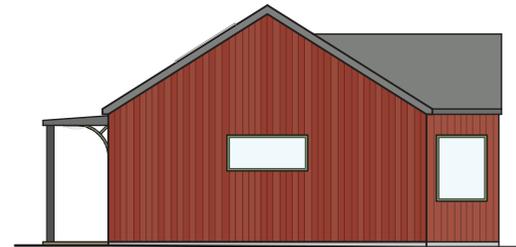


Alternative Furnishing (family setting)
(1:200)

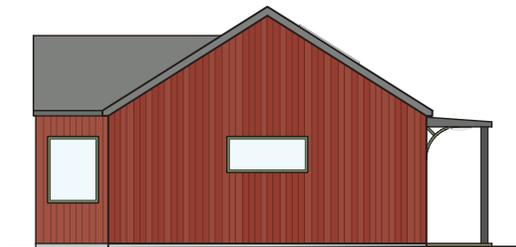
Section
(1:100)



Entrance Elevation (towards the street)
(1:150)



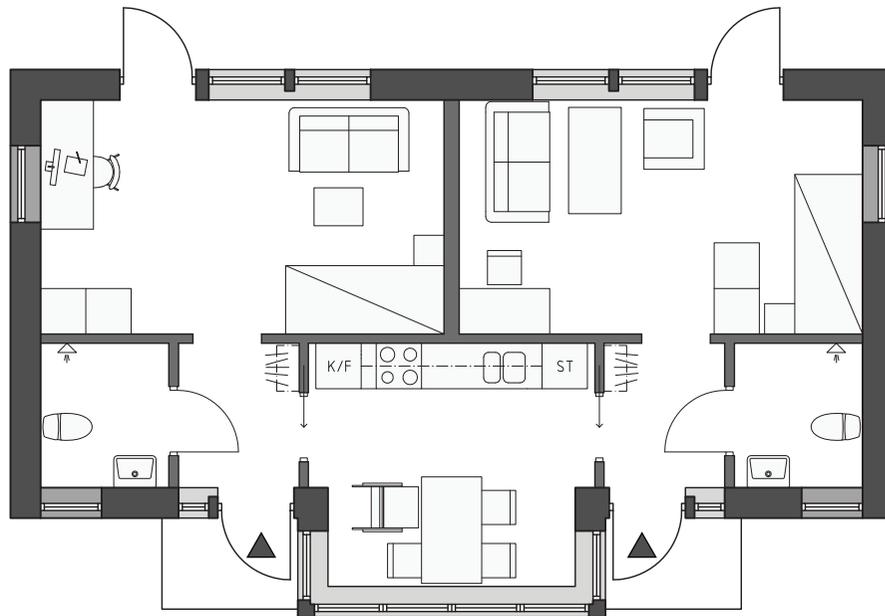
Backside Elevation (calm side)



STUDENT HOUSE TYPE 2

Student House Type 2 represents the three houses north of the Student Street. The kitchen gets a more public position towards the street, which enhances its function as a social shared space.

The apartments have separate entrance situations and the rooms positioned entirely towards the backside. By not having the wardrobes fixed alternative furnishings are enabled which makes the rooms possible to be divided.

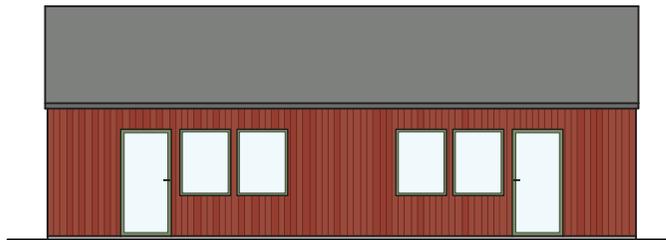


Plan Student House Type 2 (1:100)
59,8 m² total
16,5 m² separate room (+ WC), 11,3 m² shared kitchen

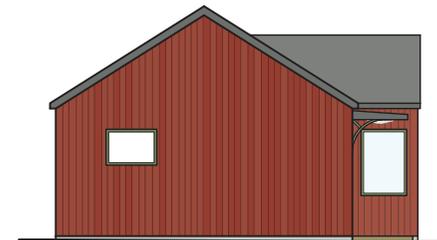
STREET SIDE



Entrance Elevation (towards the street)
(1:150)



Backside Elevation (calm side)



THE HERMITAGES

While the Retreat can be seen as a miniature version of the monastic life the hermitage provides it in its most condensed form. The purpose is to provide an opportunity for time in solitude. While the retreat is something you in a sense are doing as a group the hermit retreat is more strictly personal; a time for contemplation, prayer and to be alone (with God).

At Alsike the intention is to build two hermitages to be used mainly during the summer period by both the sisters and guests. Here monastic simplicity can be pushed to the limit of basic needs, while still keeping asceticism as a choice of free will.

Due to the topography the proposed placement of the hermitages are at the south side of the large biotope island, out of sight from the convent and with a clear view towards the cove.

The proposal has two kinds of hermitages that differs and complements each other. The theme is the two axes of the cross, horizontality versus verticality. The horizontal hermitage is focusing on the direction of the landscape, outlooking the cove, while the vertical hermitage follows the direction of the trees, looking towards the sky.

The façade panel is untreated wood and the roofs are covered with sedum in order to blend in with the surrounding nature.



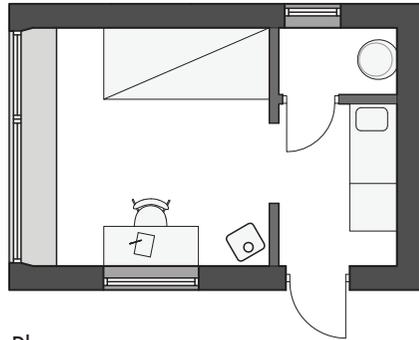


None of the hermitages have neither electricity nor tap water. When in use water is brought from the convent. For cooking a portable stove (*Trangia* or similar) can be used and the hermitages are also equipped with a smaller cast iron stove. Space for all the basic needs is minimized by the entrance, this to enable the hermit space as free from distractions as possible. At the entrance you find a small storage, sink and space for the portable stove. The small toilet contains a composting toilet (“*mulltoa*”).

In the **horizontal hermitage** the hermit space contains a bed, the iron stove, a writing desk and a large window overlooking the cove. The window sill is extended in order to be able to use as seating, below there is also space for books and firewood.

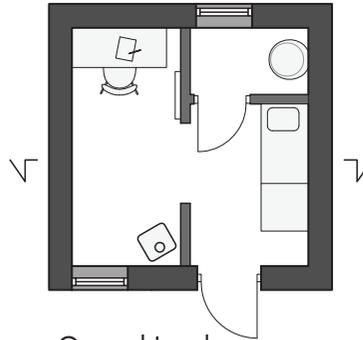
The **vertical hermitage** is divided into two levels. The windows on the entrance level are minimized leading the eyes (and the mind) upwards to the roof window and the sky beyond. The entrance level contains the stove and a writing desk, on the upper level you find the bed. Due to the sloping roof, and roof light, the upper level is also provided with a panorama view over the landscape.

HORIZONTAL HERMITAGE

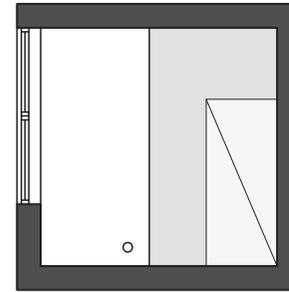


Plan
(1:100)
Area: 13,8 m²

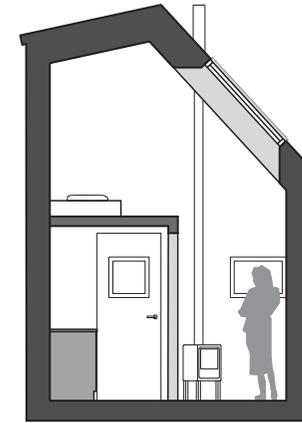
VERTICAL HERMITAGE



Ground Level
(1:100)



Upper Level



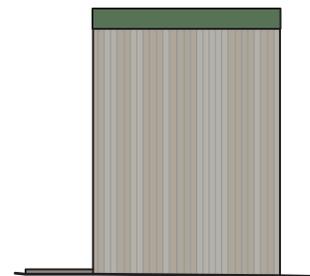
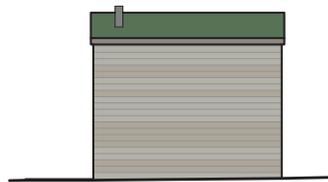
Section
(1:100)
Area: Totally 13,8 m² (9,0+4,8)



Elevations
(1:150)



Elevations
(1:150)





Interior View of the Horizontal Hermitage
Outlooking the cove, an afternoon in early spring



The Monastic Village seen from the West

DISCUSSION

When I started studying Architecture & Engineering I was drawn to the profession, and the education, by the mixture of the tectonic, aesthetic and societal aspects that are combined in architecture. During my education I see a development in all these aspects but one topic that I did not realize the importance of when starting, and which has come to interest me more, is the societal aspects of architecture.

To me architecture starts with the needs of people (as well as nature and other species) and the main focus should always be here. At the same time it is inspiring to see how architecture can form our lives and how it can be a tool for societal change.

From this point of view I want to discuss my master thesis. The discussion will concern the evaluation of my process and the resulting proposal, but with the societal aspect in mind I also want to address Alsike as a phenomenon and its impacts on society.

PROCESS & RESULTS

DELIMITATION

Throughout the design process there has been a struggle with delimitations. In order to have a concrete building project a physical stakeholder has been crucial, avoiding to put effort on *inventing* a project for my Master Thesis. This also aligns with my perception of user-focused design.

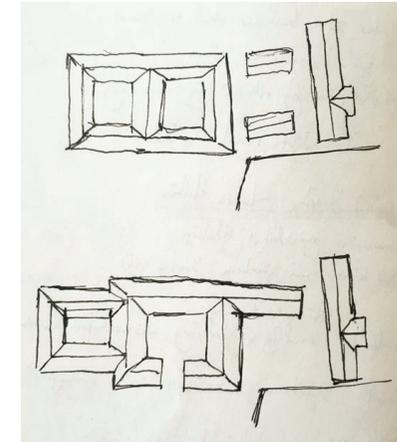
However, the client might be seen as a part of why delimitations was a struggle. Although I have not felt any pressure from them my aim has been to present an as buildable proposal as possible. Early in my process I made sketches that were more inspired by the cloister typology. If the result had turned out more like that (fewer but larger buildings) it might have been easier to present more in detail. Yet since the village layout was a result of the design process it could not be delimited in advance and I am glad that I prioritized the outcome of the Design Criteria.

Another area that perhaps could have been delimited is the pre-studies. I did reading on asylum policies, contemporary monasticism and currents connected to this. Later on I realized the extent was larger than what was appropriate, concerning space and time, to present. As a counter-argument it is hard to distinguish what turned out useful not.

I think a lot of the reading helped me to perceive the mindset of Alsike, which was crucial for the design criteria. An example is an anthology on Christian anarchism¹² where one of the authors had been a volunteer at Alsike and another one is the leader of the earlier mentioned community *Oikos*.

A third option could have been to delimit the number of buildings closer presented. For a long period I had difficulties with the student housing, to find a design that worked in different orientations and also resulted in an appealing student street. The striving to find *one* solution was solved first when I realized that it should be divided into two versions (by adding Type 2). Again: only one alternative perhaps would have been possible to present further in detail but for the sake of the proposal as a whole the result was better.

Coming from Architecture & Engineering it would of course been desirable to go more into detail on presenting thoughts on detailing, constructions and energy solutions. But to conclude I think this was a good field to delimit, in order to more focus on Alsike in specific.



Early cloister sketches

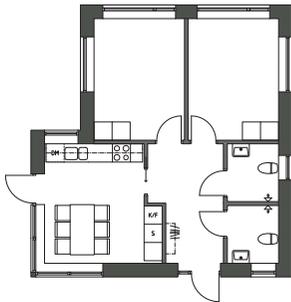
12. Lundqvist, Lundström et al (2013)

DESIGN PROCESS AND ITS OUTCOME

Speaking of delimitations I realize I cannot present a full review of the process on all buildings. Instead some of the crossroads of the process are.



Student House alternative at the midterm.



On deciding the village layout I did several sketches in between alternative 3 & 4 (see p.35), where the choice was between some larger multi-purpose buildings or spreading the activities in several smaller ones. The final decision was based on the play between openness and enclosure. A corner (as in a L-shaped building) can be seen as cozy and protecting but also threatening, as a place to be trapped into or excluded from. With the smaller buildings I could work more with the spaces in between, which I think was the difference between designing a village and a small institution.

When the layout was decided a task was to diminish the scale of the two-storey buildings. Looking at the form of the roof I wanted to avoid copying the existing Mansard roof, which would have risked being a pastiche. Instead the result was an interpretation that dealt with both the volume height and the connection to existing buildings in a good way.

As earlier mentioned there were some struggles with the student housings and in retrospect I can see that perhaps it was given too much time. Again I was afraid to do a pastiche or something too traditional, which led me to try lots of variations. The fact is that Type 1 was basically my first sketch on the student housing. To settle with the first sketch might not been desirable but the traditional appearance of it felt in the end as the natural solution, where the other versions was forced and unnatural.

To summarize; can the proposal as a whole be considered to be too traditional to be a *contemporary* version of a monastic village?

I admit that the appearance in some extent might seem traditional, but the prime contemporary feature is still the functions of the village. Alsike carries on an old monastic heritages but they also deal with current issues and take part in the societal debate.

The built environment presents the contemporary expressions by answering to the current needs. Hence the traditional features, in result of relating to the historical/cultural context, should not be considered as problematic.

In fact, to propose a strictly modernistic design might have been the pastiche solution, in that case the pastiche of the self-absorbed Architect.

CONTEMPORARY SANCTUARIES?

In November 1993 the Swedish police did a controversial raid at Alsike, which was followed by a debate that reached international media attention. The sisters themselves called Alsike a sanctuary and an Embassy of the Kingdom of God.¹³ The use of the term embassy implied that Alsike as a sanctuary should be seen as detached from Swedish jurisdiction.

In historical meaning a sanctuary was a place where fugitives could seek refuge from prosecution, occasionally in order to appeal against a judgment. As the power of the church was appropriated by the State in the 16th century the means to function as a sanctuary might have diminished.

But is there a need for contemporary sanctuaries in modern society?

To start with I do not think that the Sisters at Alsike have any deliberate intentions of breaking the law, they only have principals that forces them to. One of their mottos is “The Love of Christ forces us”,¹⁴ which has resulted in prioritizing hospitality to refugees in search of asylum higher than strictly following the law.

In order for society to develop there has to be space for those who question the prevailing order and mindset, for those who follow their ethical

conviction stronger than current laws. It might be in a form such as Alsike or more obvious kinds of civil disobedience. Even though it might be hard to define a legalized version (perhaps that should be counterproductive) I believe there is a need for such activities, for contemporary sanctuaries.

The refugee families that come to Alsike are invited into a quite unusual household. The way the sisters live, in simplicity and community of property, can be considered as rather sustainable. Their mindset, and a tight budget, has made collaborate consumption a natural solution, the aim of self-sufficiency makes them resilient and the care of Creation carries a genuine intention of an ecological lifestyle.

There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child, at Alsike you can find this true. I think a reason why the integration works at Alsike is the hospitality, which is a characteristic far too rare in our individualistic society.

Perhaps it is all of us, not them, that are the hermits of our time? Perhaps Alsike, and others living more in community, are like oases in the desert. As the hermits in the desert I believe that we also are in need of community, let's hope that our deserts can sprout once again.

13. Sveriges Radio (2009)

14. Nordström, M. et al (2015)

CONCLUSIONS

After the end of the thesis period I will pay Alsike another visit in order to present my final proposal. Perhaps the real conclusions can be made firstly then.

But to shortly summarize it has been an unusual spring term for me. At least in the start of my thesis period I had the opportunity to get a sense of the contemplative mindset, to read books of interest and gain understanding and inspiration for the subject. In the ordinary pace of life there is not much time for longer periods like that, which might be a reason why there is a demand for activities and occasions such as a Retreat nowadays.

The delimitations of the project has been a topic that occurred during the process but looking at the final proposal I am satisfied with the result as well as the extent to which I have presented it. I think the proposal both showcases me as an architect, my skills and interests, and presents Alsike and a solution suitable for their development. Having said that I believe in a user-focused design of course I see it as important for my own well-being to have fun and develop during the process, which I also can say that I have done here.

To me Alsike has been an inspiration in many ways, their warm hospitality to everyone, their devotion in welcoming refugees and their devotion to a life in community etc. My hope is that this thesis and the proposal can be of some inspiration for them as well.

Thanks

Joakim Sättermann

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