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2026

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CHALMERS
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

BEYOND GENERATIONS
a social housing community

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ABSTRACT

Beyond Generations is a thesis that explores how architectural design, such as spatial organisation and the layout of shared spaces, can foster social interaction and a sense of community across multiple age groups. This is investigated through intergenerational housing, in a context where age segregation is becoming increasingly common. The thesis responds to societal challenges such as loneliness and isolation, age segregation and ageism, a shortage of affordable housing for young people and families and the growing need for alternative housing models for an ageing population.

Grounded in theories of social sustainability and intergenerational practice, the project combines literature studies, semi-structured interviews and reference analyses with iterative design methods. The design process involves sketching, study visits and site analysis to develop spatial strategies that balance private and communal life, identifying architectural elements that foster social interaction.

The project results in a housing proposal in Gothenburg, Gamlestaden, that promotes well-being, belonging and everyday encounters between generations, while working to counteract loneliness. Shared environments and spatial organisation are thus strategically integrated into the complex to encourage daily social interaction between residents and strengthen the sense of community among neighbours, while maintaining possibilities for privacy and allowing residents to choose their level of engagement.

This is achieved through the concept of a social corner, which concentrates circulation and shared functions within the building around a node, creating focal points for interaction through permeability between shared spaces. As well as by the implementation of transition zones located at the thresholds between the different degrees of privacy, creating a gradual shift from communal to private as you move through the building.

The project thus contributes to the discussion on socially sustainable housing by proposing architectural strategies that support intergenerational relationships and social interaction in everyday communal life.

STUDENT BACKGROUND

Bachelor’s degree	<i>2020-2023</i>
Architecture & civil engineering	
Chalmers University of Technology	
Master’s degree (MSc)	<i>2023-2024</i>
Architecture & Urban design	<i>2025-2026</i>
Chalmers University of Technology	
<i>Studios</i>	
<i>Healthcare architecture 1</i>	<i>HT 23</i>
<i>Residential healthcare</i>	<i>VT 24</i>
<i>Housing inventions 2</i>	<i>HT 25</i>

My name is Linnéa Björkstöm, an architecture student passionate about human-centered and socially conscious design, particularly housing and health-care architecture. Having worked in an elderly care home and also in home care, I have seen firsthand the importance of environments that foster dignity and social connection. My personal experience with my grandmother, who is mentally alert but isolated in a care facility, has deeply shaped my drive to create spaces that combat loneliness and enhance well-being.



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INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the thesis. It presents the problem statement, outlines the purpose and objectives and defines the research question and its delimitations. Furthermore, it explains the methodology and clarifies the terminology used throughout the thesis.

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

This master’s thesis positions itself within the urgent societal context of demographic change, housing shortages, and growing social segregation. In many parts of the world, including Sweden, age segregation is becoming increasingly pronounced: seniors often live in isolation, young people face barriers entering the housing market, and families struggle to find affordable and suitable homes. These patterns contribute to loneliness and social isolation as well as housing insecurity ranging from youth to seniors and a lack of intergenerational contact that can reinforce stereotypes and ageism.

The thesis takes on these challenges through the lens of social sustainability, exploring how architecture can actively foster interaction, community, and well-being across generations. By investigat-

ing intergenerational housing as a typology, the project contributes to a more integrated vision of housing that seeks to bridge divides between age groups, counteract isolation, and address gaps in housing accessibility.

The knowledge gap this thesis addresses lies in the underdeveloped architectural strategies for intergenerational housing in a Swedish context. While there is significant discussion about elderly housing and youth housing separately, there is little exploration of how these groups, along with families, might coexist in thoughtfully designed environments. The project seeks to test how spatial configurations, focusing shared facilities, and outdoor spaces can contribute to an inclusive sense of community and reduced loneliness for people of all ages.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how architecture can promote social interaction and a sense of community in an intergenerational housing complex. It addresses the issue of unwanted isolation in our society and promotes social integration across generations. The thesis also raises the issue of the current housing market, with a shortage of affordable housing for young adults and families, as well as the need for new housing typologies for the growing elderly population. Furthermore, the thesis aims to contribute to the discussion of how intergenerational housing can enhance quality of life in contemporary society by creating natural meeting places that encourage social interaction and foster a sense of community.

OBJECTIVES

This thesis explores a housing proposal in an urban Swedish context that combines a diverse range of housing typologies, including student apartments, senior housing, single-parent apartments, complemented by family townhouses. By bringing together residents of different ages and life stages within the same environment, the project aims to encourage everyday encounters and strengthen social connections across generations. The proposal seeks to create a balanced living environment in which private homes are complemented by shared spaces that foster interaction, mutual support, and a sense of belonging. At the same time, the thesis investigates how a diverse housing mix can contribute to a more inclusive and socially sustainable community.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can architecture support social interaction in intergenerational housing?

How can spatial configurations form shared environments that foster community, contribute to reduced loneliness and enhanced well-being across generations?

DELIMITATIONS

The thesis will not give detailed descriptions on the economical or political aspects behind the policies of Sweden’s current housing situation. The chosen approach will instead contribute to a focus on the architectural and social values in designing intergenerational housing. Nor will the focus be on building construction, rather spatial qualities and concepts.

METHOD

This thesis combines literature review, reference project analysis, semi-structured interviews and site analysis with an iterative design process. The methods aim to explore how spatial organisation and shared environments can support social interaction and sense of community in intergenerational housing.

Literature review

Relevant literature was reviewed to contextualise the project within discussions on loneliness, intergenerational interaction, social infrastructure and architecture as a spatial framework for promoting everyday encounters.

The review formulated key concepts such as social interaction, sense of community, well-being as well as identified relevant spatial aspects for the architectural investigation.

Design exploration

The architectural design developed through iterative sketching of spatial configurations, as well as interior and exterior environments. Different configurations of housing units, communal areas and transition zones were explored to study how spatial relationships can influence opportunities for interaction and community.

Design decisions were continuously adjusted in relation to design strategies, formed by research and architectural investigations.

Site analysis

The site was analysed through repeated visits, mapping and contextual studies. Particular attention was given to pedestrian movement, access to surrounding functions and the relationship to neighbourhood infrastructure. The aim was to situate the project within its broader urban social setting.

Reference projects & study visits

Selected cohousing and intergenerational housing projects were studied through site visits and analysis.

The focus was on spatial organisation, including shared facilities, transitions between private and communal areas and daily patterns. Acting as a tool to identify design strategies for the design proposal.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during study visits to intergenerational and cohousing projects. The conversations mainly focused on everyday use of common areas, experience of belonging and the balance between private and communal life. Ultimately leading to insights about spatial configurations and program development.

RESEARCH

This chapter presents the background and theoretical framework of the thesis. It discusses age segregation and ageism, isolation and loneliness, demographic change, intergenerational practices, and integrated living as the foundation of the study. The theoretical framework is then structured around the themes of social infrastructure, community, sense of home, and the relationship between architecture and social interaction.

BACKGROUND

Age segregation & ageism

The literature on age segregation reflects different perspectives regarding the young and old, seldom combining an interest in both groups. Hagestad & Uhlenberg (2005) further claims that publications talking about youth often emphasize the cost of separation, while the elderly perspective emphasize the benefits of, particularly residential, separation. It is further demonstrated how institutional age segregation is embedded in the design and implementation of welfare systems, including housing, care and leisure. Spatial age segregation is then also identified as occurring when spaces are not shared by individuals of different ages, thereby limiting opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Within this framework, three spatial contexts with varying degrees of privacy are identified, *the household*, *the neighbourhood* and *the location*, which are described as particularly relevant for enabling cross-age interaction. Extreme forms of residential age segregation are found in intentionally age-segregated housing, including nursing homes, retirement housing and assisted living facilities for the elderly, as well as student housing for young adults in higher education. Age is likewise used as an organising principle for recreational activities, resulting in these taking place in separate locations for different age groups (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005).

Age segregation matters because it limits individuals from meaningful opportunities to meet, interact and transcend “us versus them” distinctions. It is further noted that we are at a critical intersection between age segregation and ageism, where not only individuals late in life are targets. As cited by the authors, ageist behavior emerges from stereotypes, prejudices and stigmatization. In contrast, age-differentiated behaviours may be appropriate when grounded in an informed understanding of human development and age-related differences. From this perspective, there are significant biological and life course differences between generations. It is therefore neither realistic nor useful to suggest that age should always be irrelevant. Then, ageist behavior, such as overwhelming, is something both young and old suffer from. This

can foster spiraling helplessness, especially for the frail and old in institutions that have a harder time turning down help than the young. Further, it is argued that spatial proximity that fosters the possibility for interaction, familiarity and knowledge exchange across age groups is foundational for bonds to be built. Arrangements such as spatial and institutional separation maintain or increase ageism, which in turn sustains separation, creating a self-reinforcing cycle mediated by the structure and functioning of social networks (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005).

Changes in living arrangements over the past century have substantially reduced levels of intense cross-age interaction, as declining family size and the disappearance of three-generation households have limited age diversity within children’s and adolescents’ everyday living environments. While children and youth today may still have access to broader and more age-heterogeneous kin networks, it is suggested that the family now represents the only truly age-integrated social institution in contemporary Western societies. However, it is emphasised that it is unrealistic to expect families alone to sustain cross-age contact. Importantly, early insights into the relationship between age segregation and ageism are shown to emerge from family contexts (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005).

There is broad agreement that *sustained familiarity* across social categories is one of the most effective means of reducing prejudice, stigma and discrimination, although some research suggests that stereotypes may also be reduced through educational interventions aimed at suppressing them (Pettigrew, 1998). On this basis, Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005) argue that stable, long-term interactions in age-heterogeneous settings are crucial for counteracting ageism, with time identified as a critical dimension of the interaction process. In addition, they identify four qualitative aspects of social interaction as particularly important in reducing ageism: *social identity*, *perspective taking*, *mindfulness* and *affective ties*.

Isolation & loneliness

Loneliness and social isolation are widespread societal challenges in Sweden and occur in several age groups, with a particularly high incidence among young adults and the elderly population. Loneliness is defined as a subjective and negative experience that occurs when an individual's social relations do not correspond to the desired degree of closeness, continuity and familiarity, and can take social, emotional or existential forms (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2024). National data shows that approximately 18-20 percent of the population aged 16 and older report feelings of loneliness sometimes, often or always. The incidence is particularly high among young adults aged 16-29, where around 30 percent report loneliness. As well as among people over 85, where around 24 percent report the same (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2025).

Among older individuals, especially those over 75, involuntary loneliness is often linked to life events and changed life circumstances, such as loss of partner or friends, shrinking social networks, disabilities and reduced opportunities for social participation. Combined, these factors increase the risk of both physical and mental illness, where loneliness is associated with depression, anxiety and reduced quality of life for all individuals (Socialstyrelsen, 2022; Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2024).

Demographic change

Demographic development in Gothenburg and Sweden is characterized by an increasingly ageing population in combination with a relative decline in younger age groups. According to Gothenburg's population forecast ranging from 2020-2050, the city's population is expected to grow, with the most pronounced increase occurring among the oldest age groups. During the forecast period, the number of residents aged 85 and above is projected to more than double, while the lower birth rates contribute to increasing generational imbalance (Göteborgs stad, 2025).

In parallel with this development, household structures and establishment patterns in the housing market are changing. In the Gothenburg region, approximately one quarter of young adults aged 20-27 continue to live in their family home,

Simultaneously, research shows that loneliness is not only related to actual social isolation or living alone, but can also occur in the presence of others. Especially in environments where close and trusting relationships are lacking, or the opportunity to feel a sense of home and belonging in the everyday environment (Steno, 2023).

Studies of senior housing further show that communal areas attended to counteract loneliness, in some cases might enhance feelings of isolation. This especially occurs when there is an institutional feel or when the residents have a limited influence over the design or usage of the room. Loneliness should therefore be understood as a relational and spatially conditioned phenomenon, shaped by the interaction between the individual, social relationships and the physical living environment, rather than as a purely individual problem (Steno, 2023; Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2024).

Another aspect of loneliness in modern society relates to the increasing amount of time spent at home. Particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has become more prevalent, resulting in reduced social interactions (Zahnw, 2024).

despite a stated desire to move, which reflects limited access to affordable housing for this group (Hyresgästföreningen, 2025).

Ebner (2012) describes this demographic shift to have dual cause, where an increasing number of older adults corresponds with a decreasing number of younger people. As a result, many old people will be alone in the future, without younger family members caring for them, while simultaneously aspiring to maintain self-determined and independent lives for as long as possible. In parallel, the increasing proportion of single-parent and single-person households also places new demands on the socio-cultural context of the home and the residential area, which underlines the need to understand housing development as part of a larger neighborhood perspective (Ebner, 2012).

Intergenerational practice

Among housing providers, there is a growing interest in incorporating intergenerational programs into residential environments. Intergenerational practice entails purposeful and mutually beneficial activities that foster understanding and respect between generations, thereby contributing to social sustainability (Henkin et al., 2017).

In the preceding decades, the term intergenerational has been used to describe a growing social movement aimed at bridging generational divides through cultural exchange and reciprocal support. Early initiatives focused on creating opportunities for younger and older individuals to engage for mutual benefit, often enhancing participants' self-esteem and motivation. These programs emphasize reciprocal learning, where older adults pass on values, culture, and life skills, while younger participants gain a deeper appreciation of aging and increased self-confidence (Newman, 1997).

Globally, intergenerational programs have become a common strategy to counteract age segregation and promote social cohesion. Research highlights that neutral settings, balanced group sizes and ensuring equal status among participants from different age groups is fundamental to achieving

successful outcomes and facilitating meaningful interaction (Drury et al., 2017).

Intergenerational interactions and friendships, whether direct or indirect, play a significant role in reducing ageism. Direct contact, face to face, can easily happen in daily life such as living and working environments (Gentile, 2017).

Sustained and positive contact between generations has been shown to reduce prejudice and foster friendships. Such outcomes are best achieved through regular interaction in shared living environments, which can serve as a platform for intergenerational connection. Encounters that promote cooperation, shared goals, and mutual learning further enhance the quality of these interactions and foster social inclusion by mitigating stereotypes and anxiety about aging among younger individuals (Drury et al., 2017).

The quality of intergenerational engagement is more important than its frequency, as meaningful exchanges uplift older adults and help younger people develop more balanced and empathetic perceptions of aging (Gentile, 2017).

Integrated living

While intergenerational living often is presented as a response to age segregation, it could be argued that socially oriented housing should not be reduced to housing for specific groups or themes. In the discussion of integrated living, it is suggested that such models risk reinforcing social separation rather than addressing underlying structural conditions, thus criticizing the growing tendency toward theme-based residential developments. Instead, integrated living is understood as a broader social position that actively takes a stand against exclusion by consciously mixing various

household types, life situations and abilities within the same residential environment. From this perspective, integration is not limited by age, but also includes a wider range of social differences that shape everyday life, such as family structures, mobility and care needs. It is further emphasised that everyday proximity and shared environments are essential for meaningful social interaction, creating a wider understanding that aligns with critiques against age segregated housing models (Ebner, 2012).

THEORY

Social infrastructure

Zahnow (2024) describes social infrastructure as neighbourhood facilities and physical environments that meet residents' social needs, create opportunities for everyday encounters and contribute to social cohesion. These environments function as local meeting points that support a sense of community and belonging. The research synthesised by Zahnow shows that proximity to social infrastructure is positively associated with subjective well-being, as it enables recurring social interactions that over time strengthen social cohesion and feelings of belonging. Furthermore, the study

emphasises that social infrastructure facilitates communal life by allowing people to encounter familiar faces and engage in incidental contact in the course of daily activities. In this context, ordinary places such as shops and cafés are shown to support *subjective well-being* by enabling passive social interactions that foster a sense of belonging and social cohesion. Overall, Zahnow's study provides empirical support for the importance of urban planning and design that enable and maintain social infrastructure in close proximity to residential areas.

Community

The concept of community is described by Hillery (1955) as containing three essential components: *a specific place, common ties* and *social interaction*. Building on this understanding, Mahmoudi Farahani (2016) conceptualises community as a place-based phenomenon grounded in everyday social relations, rather than in close or intimate bonds. The sense of community is then referred to as feelings of belonging, reassurance and emotional connection to a place and its residents. Neighbouring, in turn, describes interactions and the everyday practices that occur between people living in proximity, typically characterized by brief exchanges

and mutual awareness rather than strong social ties. It is further suggested that a sense of community, community attachment and neighbouring relationships are associated with increased feelings of safety and security, higher residential satisfaction, stronger community identity, greater civic participation and improved mental health and well-being. These forms of interactions are often enabled by spatial proximity and shared everyday environments, which over time contribute to place-based experiences of belonging, safety and residential satisfaction (Mahmoudi Farahani, 2016).

Sense of home

The concept of sense of home can be understood as a relational and spatial phenomenon shaped by everyday practices and individuals' ability to appropriate, control and identify with their living environment, rather than as a psychological state. Research shows that a home does not arise through spatial presence per se, but through an ongoing process of appropriation, where residents make a place their own through recurring actions, personal objects and spatial choices (Van Steenwinkel et al., 2012). Steno (2023) emphasises in studies of senior housing that the sense of home and belonging is crucial in the everyday usage of both

private and communal areas, as well as to which extent residents participate in social contexts. The lack of opportunity for appropriation, through for example institutional environments or limited influence over the physical environment, could instead enhance feelings of isolation despite physical proximity to others (Steno, 2023). Through this perspective, the sense of home functions as a mediating link between architecture and social interaction, where a fundamental experience of security and belonging is essential for meaningful and voluntary social contact.

Architecture & social interaction

In residential environments, social interaction often arises from everyday activities and repeated, informal encounters in shared spaces. Gehl (2011) emphasizes that the frequency of social contact, such as exchanged greetings and developed conversations, among neighbors is closely linked to the amount of time spent outdoors. He argues that these encounters can be supported by architecture through shaping the conditions under which daily life unfolds, particularly by the design of semi-private transition zones between the access street and the dwelling.

Research further shows that the built environment can function as an active support for social interactions through the way spatial structures organize everyday encounters. Gehl (2011) describes how social activities emerge in what he terms "life between buildings", where architectural elements such as entrances, balconies, porches and shared circulation paths facing communal areas enhance the probability of spontaneous social interactions between residents. In particular, Gehl emphasises the importance of a hierarchy of spaces, from private dwellings to semi-private and communal areas, where these in-between spaces enable short stays, everyday movement, and unplanned social contacts that may develop into more established relationships over time. Elements such as entrance areas, small seating opportunities, and sheltered spaces oriented toward common paths can encourage residents to linger, observe and engage with their surroundings, thereby fostering "life between buildings" (Gehl, 2011).

Bouma et al. (2010) support this through studies of cohousing environments, concluding that communal areas and shared communication zones, such as corridors and stairwells, play a crucial role in social interaction, especially when providing transparency and clear transitions between private and semi-private. These alleged "buffer" or transition zones contribute to frequent, passive interactions, such as greetings and brief conversations, which in turn can build trust and potentially lead to friendships and active social interactions (Bouma et al., 2010; Abu-Gazze, 1999). Furthermore, Bouma et al. demonstrate that centrally placed and easily accessible communal spaces that are flexible in use to a higher degree support active social activi-

ties, compared to those located far from communication zones with lacking visual connections.

Gehl (2011) further highlights the importance of proximity and movement patterns, suggesting that not only physical length influences acceptable walking distances in everyday life. Spatial sequencing, by dividing routes into shorter segments, is perceived as more manageable and inviting by making the distance seem shorter than the actual length. Walking distances for all supply facilities needed in everyday life should ideally be reached within 500 metres (Gehl, 2011; Ebner, 2012).

However, Ebner (2012) introduces an important theoretical limitation, that architecture should be understood as the spatial background for human interaction, rather than as a mechanism that automatically produces social relations. Ebner argues that while the built environment can encourage or hinder interaction, architecture can never generate social networks in itself. This reinforces the view that architecture operates by shaping conditions for encounter, co-presence and proximity, rather than determining social behavior. Within this perspective, Gehl (2011) and Ebner conceptualise architecture as an enabling framework for everyday life, where visibility, accessibility and spatial organisation influence the probability of social interaction, without determining its outcome.

Taken together, the literature frames architecture as a spatial framework that shapes the conditions under which everyday encounters may occur, rather than as a determinant of social relations. Residential environments can increase the probability of repeated, informal interactions that form the groundwork for social contact, through visibility, accessibility, spatial hierarchy and carefully designed in-between spaces, while recognising that such interactions cannot be predetermined and depend on social practices and individual engagement.

"[Architecture] is the background and space of human interaction, which can be encouraged or prevented by what is built, but never has the automatic result of generating a social network per se." (Ebner, 2012, p.12)

REFERENCE PROJECTS

This chapter examines the reference projects that have informed the thesis. It presents key insights gained from study visits to Tinggården, Jystrup Savværk, Skråningen I–II, and SällBo.

The selected reference projects provide insight into how intergenerational living can support everyday social interaction and a sense of community. The projects were selected for their clear ambition to foster shared living environments where residents can interact naturally through everyday activities and shared spaces.

Vandkunsten’s projects were selected because of the firm’s well-established work with social sustainability, community building and the role of architecture in supporting everyday life. The architects themselves refer back to earlier projects, such as Tinggården, in more recent developments, which further reinforces their relevance. Although all of the projects strongly emphasize socially oriented housing, they differ in scale and design, providing a broader perspective as reference projects.

SällBo was selected because of its program and tenure model. It is the closest precedent project specifically focused on intergenerational living and is therefore highly relevant. The project provides insights into how intergenerational interaction can function in practice, what is required to maintain these relationships over time and how the organisational structure should operate. It also offers insights into different target groups and how this type of housing complex evolves over time.

During study visits to Vandkunsten’s projects, conversations with several residents, as well as an interview with Dragana Curovic at SällBo, revealed that spontaneous encounters were a common and appreciated part of everyday life. Residents described a strong sense of social support within the community and expressed a desire to remain in the neighbourhood over time, often moving between units as their life situations changed. This suggests that the spatial and social structure of these environments supports long-term belonging and continuity.

A recurring spatial quality observed across the projects is the presence of transition zones between private and shared spaces. These zones create opportunities for informal encounters while still allowing residents to choose their level of engagement, highlighting the importance of balancing openness and interaction with the possibility for privacy.

Study visitis

Tinggården	2026-02-15
Jystrup Savværk	2026-02-13
Skråningen I-II	2026-02-15
SällBo	2026-03-24

All reference projects were visited and unless otherwise stated, the source material is based on verbal interactions with residents.

TINGGÅRDEN

Building data

Architect: Vandkunsten

Program: Non-profit housing & community houses

Location: Herfølge, Denmark

Date: 1971-1978

Units: 78 homes, 1 community house, 6 family units with a family house each

Tinggården has served as the model for low-rise, high-density residential architecture in Denmark since it was built in the 70's, where all homes have access to their social community as well as to the surrounding landscape. This non-profit housing experiment has proved to be very successful in using architecture as a vehicle for reinstating the residents' democracy in the local community, with its open-plan and facade compositions. The individual homes are relatively small, 78 m² on average, however even families with children find that they have sufficient space due to the 10 % communal areas and houses. (Vandkunsten, 2026)

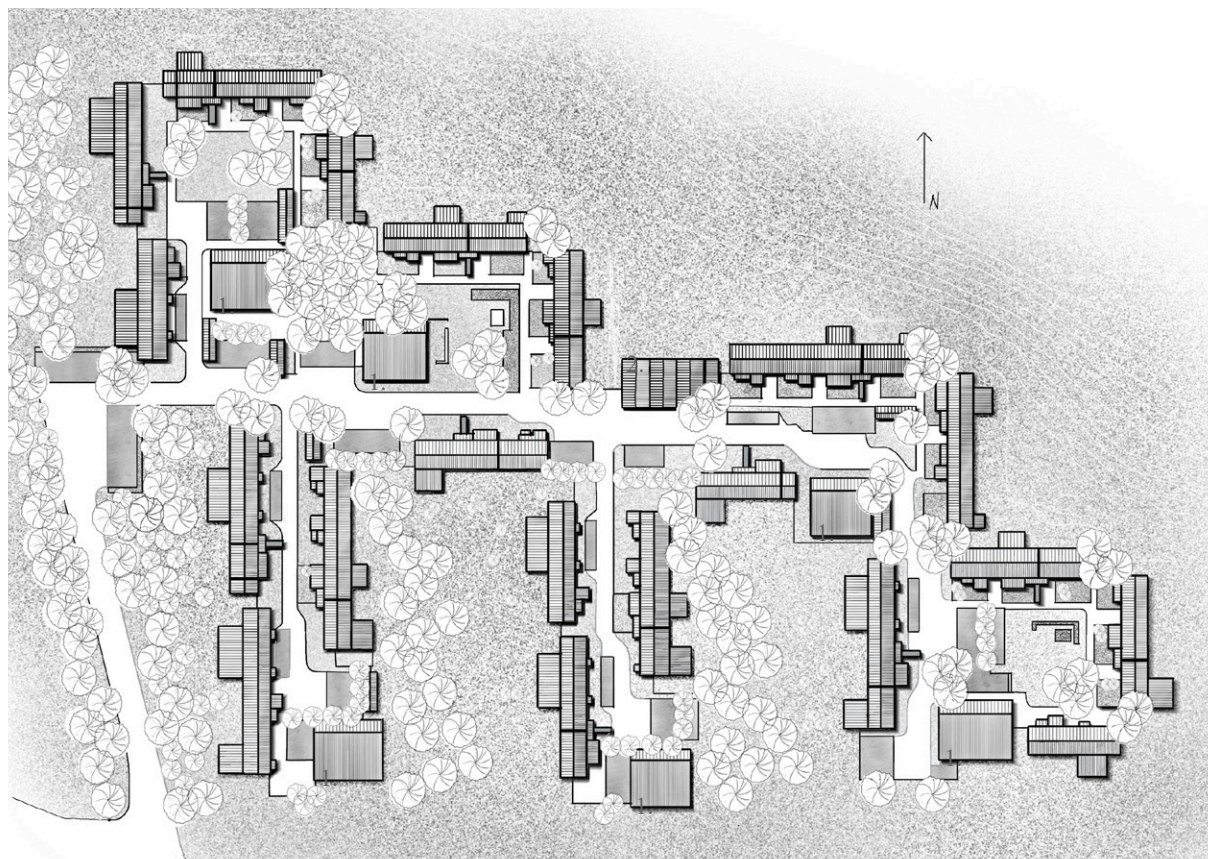


Figure 1: Redrawn from drawing by Vandkunsten architects.

Tinggården is organised in smaller family groups through a clear block structure, each cluster containing two communal spaces: an outdoor square and an indoor family house. Originally, all cooking was intended to take place in the family house, which meant that the individual dwellings lacked kitchens, as the idea was that residents would share daily meals. Today, this has changed, all dwellings now have their own kitchen and the family house is mainly used for shared dinners once a month, as well as for laundry and gatherings with family and friends.

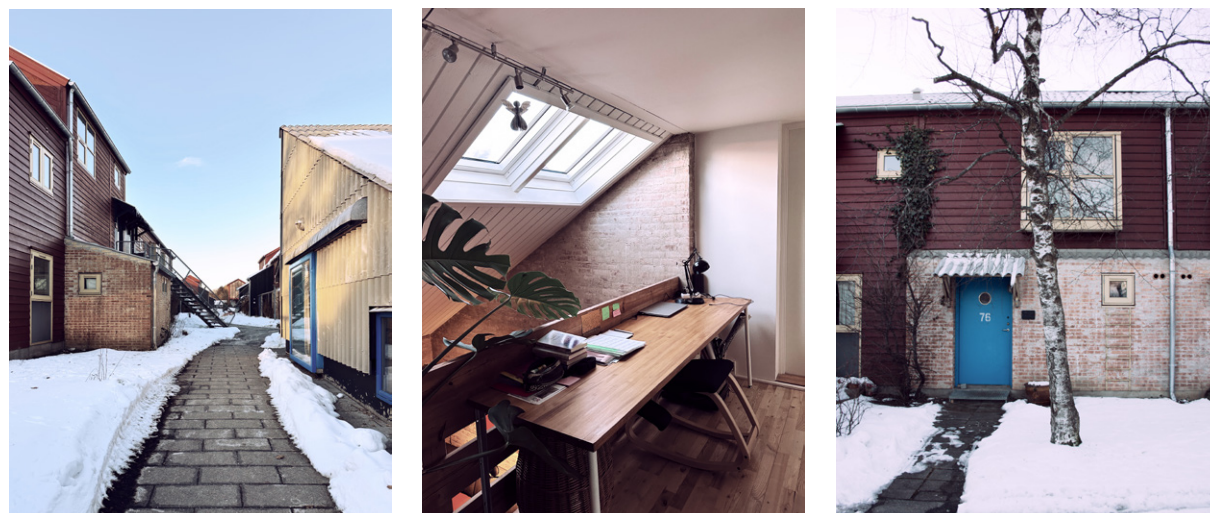
Residents describe a strong sense of neighbourliness and emphasize that many deliberately move to Tinggården for the community, which is reflected on their level of engagement. Children are said to always have playmates and there is a strong culture of mutual support among neighbours. The significant difference in sense of belonging compared to more conventional neighbourhoods is something that is highlighted by the residents.

The multifunctional design of the familyhouses, where cooking, laundry and socializing takes place in one open space, creates opportunities for informal and spontaneous social interactions in everyday life. The dwellings are varying in size, with the largest one being around 100 m², with double height open-plan kitchen and living areas. A staircase from the living room leads to a landing with a skylight, bringing daylight down to a desk. This place is described by the residents as the best place in the home. At the same time, the downstairs social area is described as relatively dark despite the generous spatial volume, and the wish for larger skylights is expressed.

As rental units, exterior changes require permission, but interior modifications are allowed. The high ceilings have enabled residents to build lofts for storage and sleeping, a valuable adaptation given the limited floor area. The upstairs rooms are also flexible and can change ownership between households according to residents' needs.

Finally, residents repeatedly emphasize that life is better together. The family groups regularly organize shared gatherings and the family house also functions as semi-independent spaces for older children to spend time with friends.





Tinggården is a strong example of how different scales can be integrated throughout a project. The block structure creates smaller communities within the larger community, allowing more intimate relationships to develop among neighbours within each block. In this way, the family houses function as social anchors at the smaller scale, while the community house serves as the social anchor at the larger scale.

The project also works carefully with the human scale by lowering the rooflines through extruded building volumes. This creates furnishable niches and fosters a more intimate, human-scale interaction with the architecture.

1. Family House

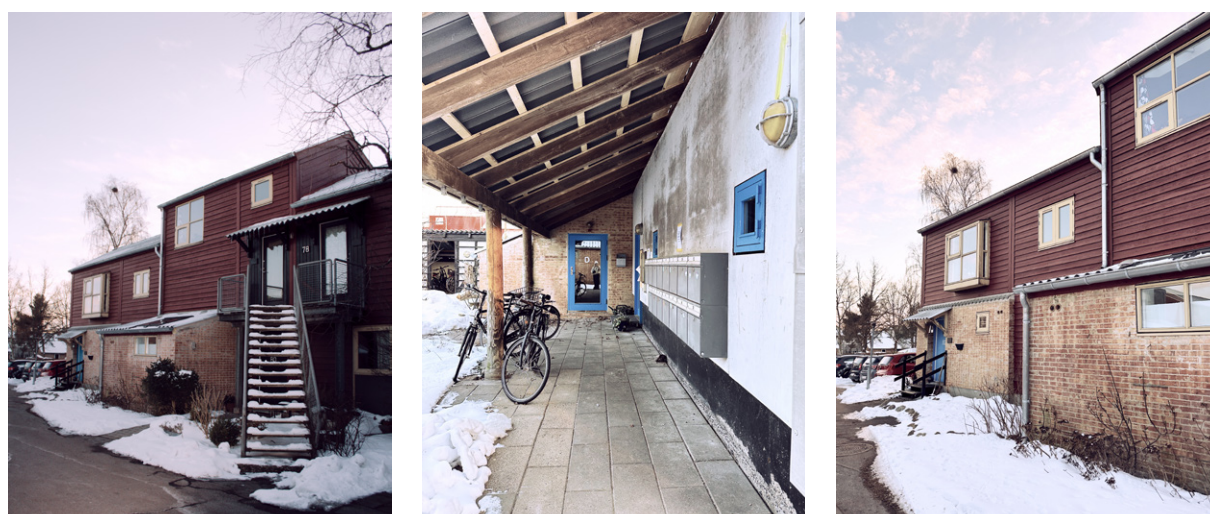


Figure 2: One block, structure. No scale. Drawing by Vandkunsten architects.

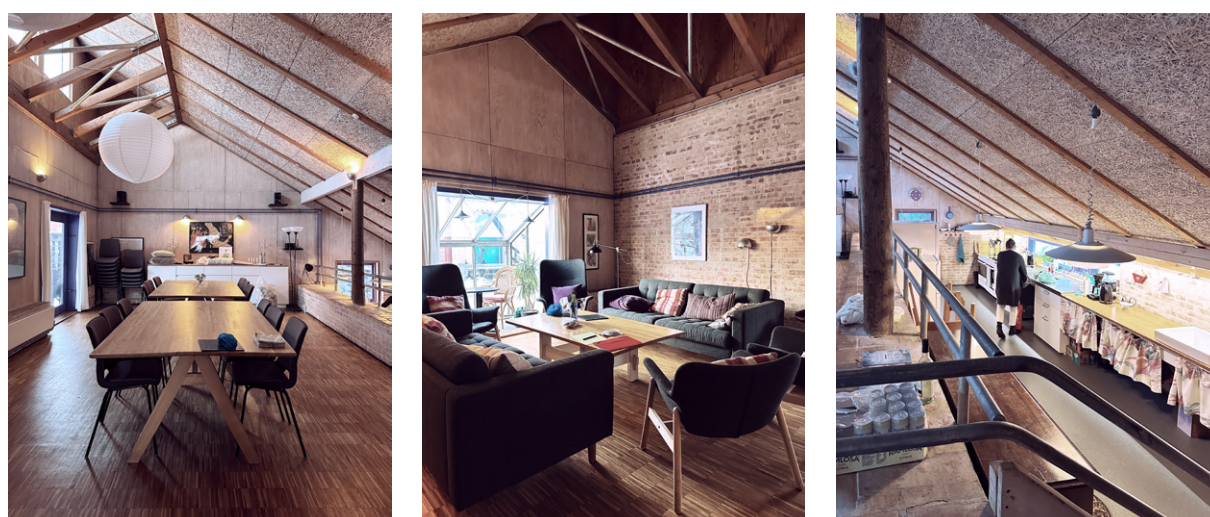


Figure 3: One block, facade. No scale. Drawing by Vandkunsten architects.

Pictures from study visit. Authors own.

JYSTRUP SAVVÆRK

Building data

Architect: Vandkunsten
Program: Community housing
Location: Jystrup, Denmark
Built: 1982-1984
Area: 2915 m²
Units: 21

This experimental cohousing project was built in close dialogue with its residents, on the site of a former sawmill, conceived as one big house. 40% of the total floor area is communal, where private and shared spaces are allowed to expand or contract as needed. The project includes various shared spaces and housing types. An interior street, covered by a large glass roof, forms the heart of the communal space, while the multi-level design ensures generous daylight access to all dwellings. (Vandkunsten, 2026)

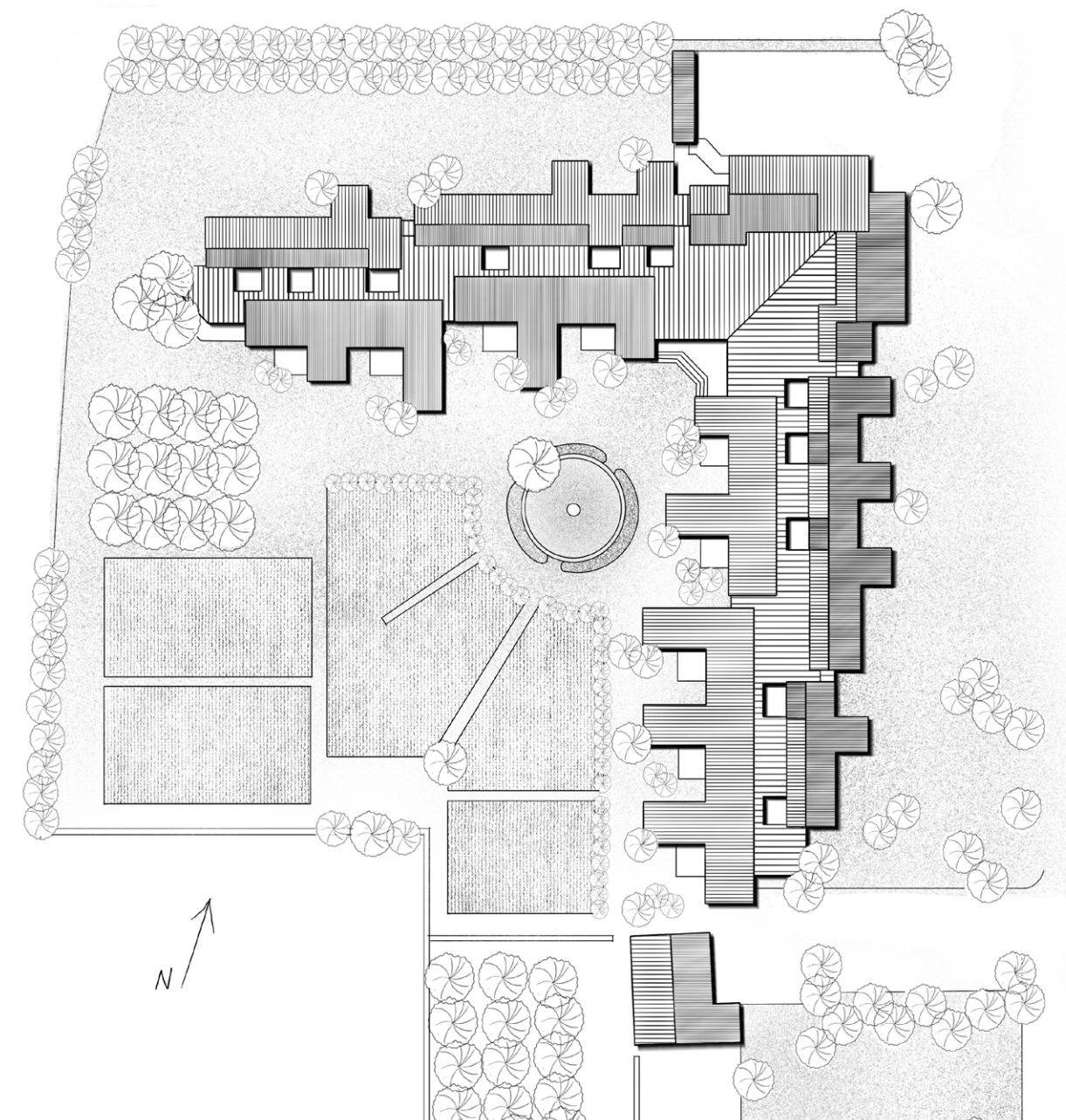


Figure 4: Redrawn from drawing by Vandkunsten architects.

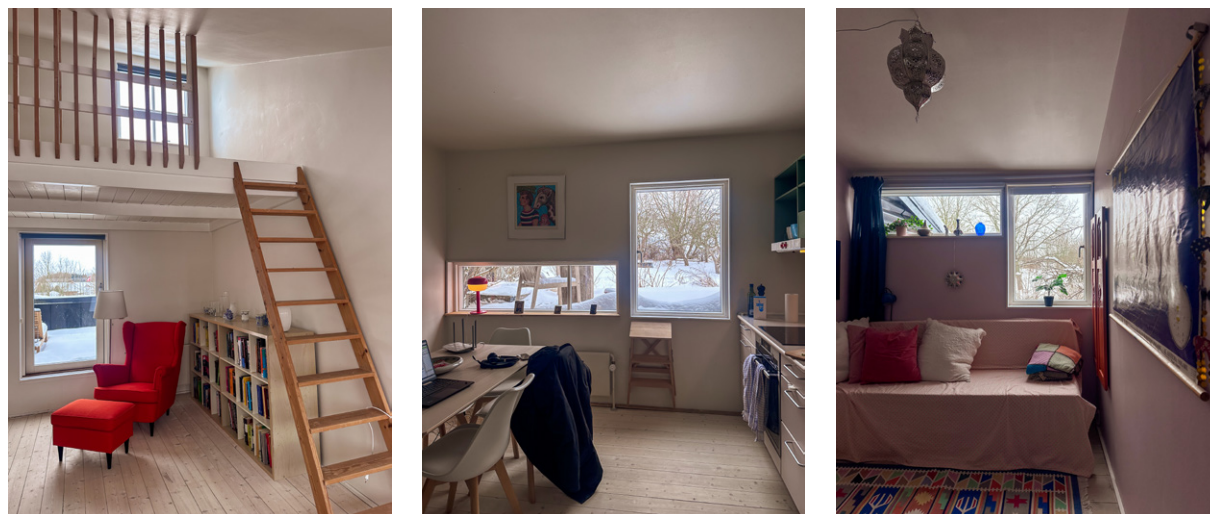
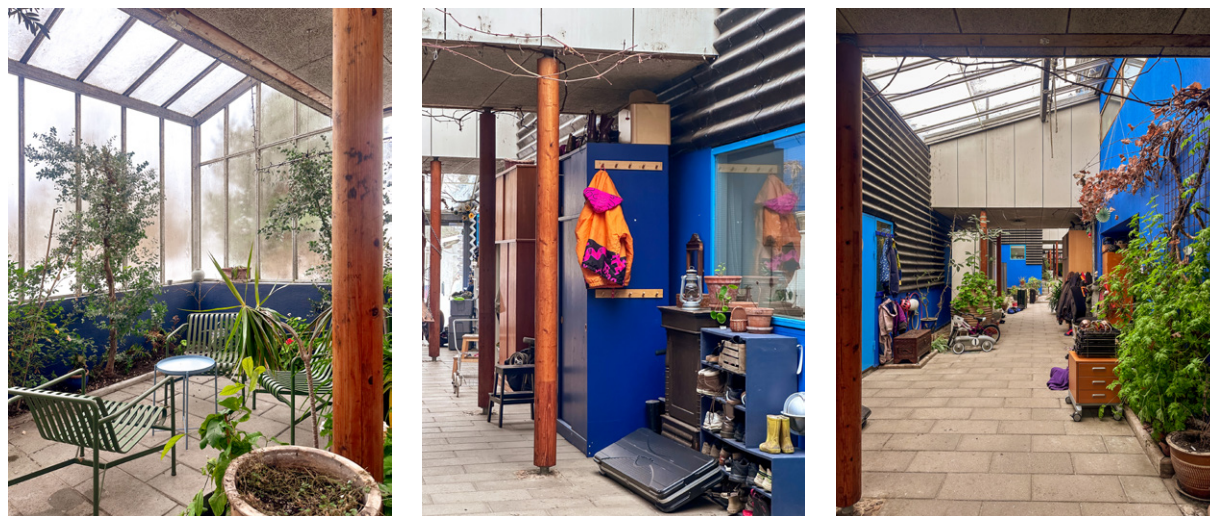
Jystrup Savværk, also called the “slipper community”, is organised around two communal corridors connected by a common area, in the corner of the building. This corridor functions as the social core of the building, acting as a transition zone between private to communal life. Internal windows connect the corridor to the apartments, allowing residents to have visual connection between private and communal spaces. This visual permeability is described as crucial to the sense of community. Rather than being perceived as intrusive, the transparency is regarded as a way to initiate contact, if you do not feel like socialising the blinds can simply be closed. This visual connection lowers the threshold for spontaneous interactions and everyday encounters. Apartment doors are typically left unlocked, reflecting on a strong sense of mutual trust. Walking through the corridor frequently results in informal conversations, and knocking on a neighbour’s door upon noticing they are home always leads to a welcoming response.

Characterised by its saw-shaped roofline, the architecture enables for bright and generously perceived interiors. The apartments vary in size, ranging from approximately 50 m² to 80 m² or more. It is common for residents to move between apartments within the complex as their living situation changes. Most apartments have their own private patio, which, due to the building’s geometry, is perceived as clearly defined and personal. This combination of private seclusion and collective proximity creates a flexible living structure.

The transition zones are used both socially and practically. Personal belongings and furniture are placed in the corridor outside the apartments, partly due to limited storage within the units, and partly as an extension of private space. During the warmer months, a sandpit is filled in the middle of the corridor and it is very common for children to run around and play while the adults socialise nearby.

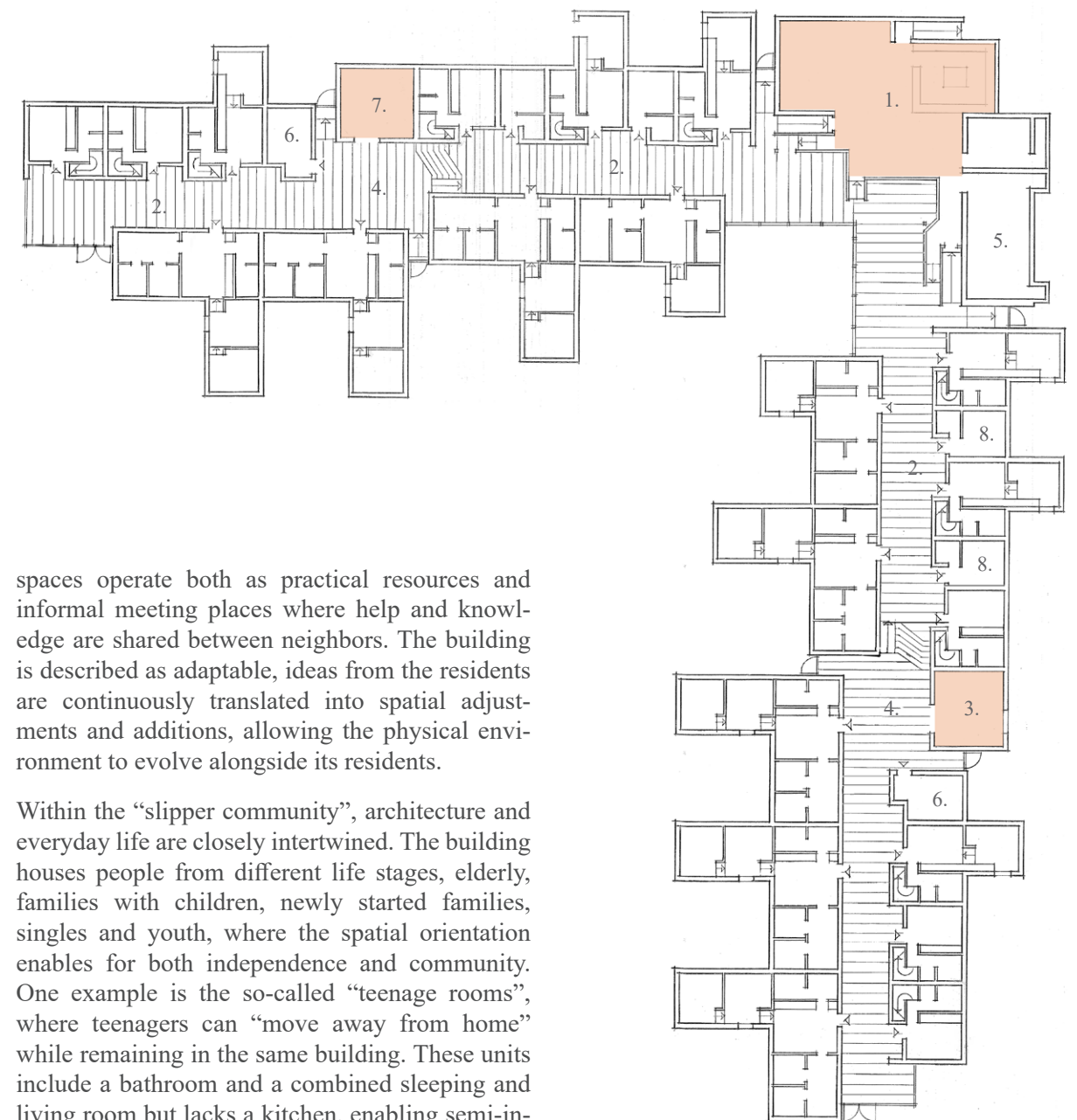
The sense of community is further strengthened through organised social activities. Every day of the week, except for Saturdays, the residents share dinners in the common room, acting as recurring social hubs in everyday life. Additional shared facilities, such as a sewing room and workshop, are frequently used and highly appreciated. These





Pictures from study visit. Authors own.

Figure 5: Ground floor. No scale. Drawing by Vandkunsten architects.



spaces operate both as practical resources and informal meeting places where help and knowledge are shared between neighbors. The building is described as adaptable, ideas from the residents are continuously translated into spatial adjustments and additions, allowing the physical environment to evolve alongside its residents.

Within the “slipper community”, architecture and everyday life are closely intertwined. The building houses people from different life stages, elderly, families with children, newly started families, singles and youth, where the spatial orientation enables for both independence and community. One example is the so-called “teenage rooms”, where teenagers can “move away from home” while remaining in the same building. These units include a bathroom and a combined sleeping and living room but lacks a kitchen, enabling semi-independence while maintaining participation in the shared meal structure.

An older resident expressed deep gratitude for having chosen this form of living rather than living alone, particularly valuing the daily presence of children. A recurring sentiment during the visit was that life is better together. Community is not manifested through large-scale architectural gestures, but through everyday practices, visual proximity, and a spatial configuration that supports both spontaneous and planned social interaction.

Shared facilities

1. Common area
2. Covered street
3. Wood workshop
4. Interior sandboxes
5. Storage room
6. Laundry room
7. Craft & sewing room
8. Supplementary room

SKRÅNINGEN I-II

Building data

Architect: Vandkunsten

Program: Housing and community

Location: Lejre, Denmark

Date: 2015-2019

Units: 52 households

The Skråningen I-II communities were constructed with the ambition of creating a series of modern co-housing villages characterised by extensive shared facilities and a strong sense of community. The cohousing concept allows for numerous variations on a common theme, where different spatial unit configurations function as architectural tools for providing variation in the village and flexibility for its residents.

The building depth is limited to 7.5 metres, enabling a generous influx of daylight into the dwellings. The concept consists of small, compact living units with small front gardens. A range of

unit configurations satisfy different needs: from the compact micro-units, intended for students, single-parent households, or senior residences, to the largest town house of 125 m², offering sufficient space for multiple play rooms and nurseries.

All dwellings have direct access to the shared garden, which functions both as a rainwater collector and as a connection to the community house. In total, 12% of the built floor area is allocated to shared spaces, including large community house per neighborhood and several smaller facilities distributed throughout the development. (Vandkunsten, 2026)

1. Community house

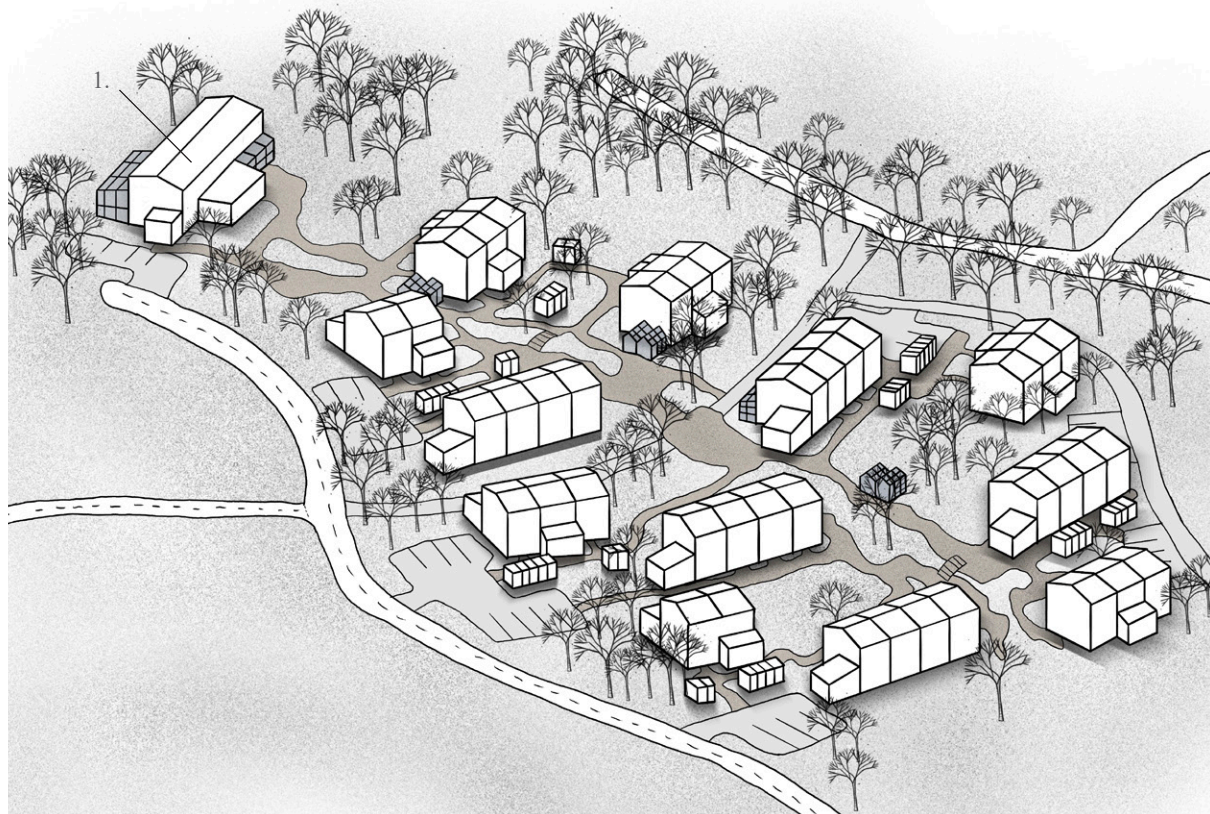


Figure 6: Redrawn from drawing by Vandkunsten architects.

Skråningen represents a relatively large and complex cohousing community, accommodating approximately 150 residents across a wide range of ages and life situations. The development includes varying housing types, from smaller apartments around 40 m² to larger row-houses up to 120 m². A mid-size dwelling of 93 m², for example, was organised with a sleeping alcove for the adults and two rooms of 7 m² each for the children. The internal layout varies between units, as the dwellings are designed to be adaptable and responsive to changing household needs.

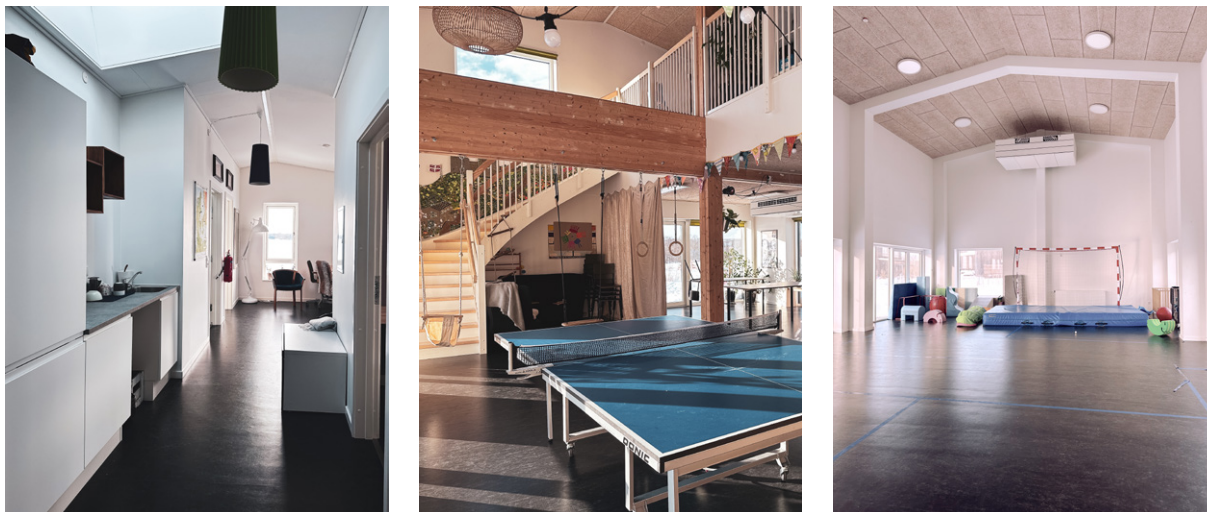
The private units are relatively compact and therefore require careful spatial planning in order to function flexibly. In the former example, the social areas were prioritised within the layout, arranged to allow parallel and multifunctional use. One recurring challenge associated with compact living is the lack of storage. Storage is constrained both within the dwelling and in the small external storage units of only 2 m², which are often perceived as insufficient. Regardless of dwelling size, all households have direct access to a private garden of 12 m². This uniform allocation establishes a clearly defined and democratic structure of private outdoor space.

The shared outdoor environment is structured by small bridges crossing integrated rainwater management systems and small paths, creating a distinct spatial rhythm between the buildings.

The ownership model combines individual and collective responsibility. Dwellings are privately owned, while facades, roofs, entrance doors and windows are collectively maintained. The shell of the building was designed by Vandkunsten, but most of the communal areas, including the shared kitchen and livingroom, have been shaped by the residents to fit their specific needs. This creates a spatial framework that is continuously inhabited, adapted and reinterpreted by those who live there.

At the same time, the combination of shared ownership and a large number of residents makes evolving and making changes a challenge. Decisions require collective agreement, which can be time consuming, particularly when financial matters are involved. The need for smaller sub-groups within the community has been suggested to ease certain processes of governance and spatial responsibil-





Pictures from study visit. Authors own.

ity. If a group of residents wishes to establish, for example, a fitness room, equipment is purchased by them individually, but the room remains accessible to all. The challenge is then that evolution lies in the hands of individuals.

Despite these challenges, Skråningen accommodates communal rooms supporting a range of activities, including children's play, yoga, hobby and music room. A shared office space is frequently used, particularly by residents working from home. Adjacent, guest rooms double as meeting rooms. Facilities for different age groups are integrated into the spatial structure, a dedicated room for children to play and hang out already exists. There are plans to establish a room for teenagers where they can gather independently, to get away from digital environments and socialise without direct adult supervision.

The development contains a single community house per neighborhood, which influences how social life is organised. A nearby project is mentioned as having a stronger sense of community due to multiple communal houses within smaller groups. In Skråningen, the sense of community is strongest among immediate neighbours in the individual housing row, while it is difficult to maintain close relationships across the entire community. Approximately ten older residents are highlighted to have formed a more distinct sub-community and there are a number of single-parent households, particularly mothers, that can get support from the community while experiencing participation in collective responsibilities demanding.

Shared dinners are organised four days per week. Meals can either be eaten in the communal house or taken home. For households whose children have moved out, these dinners function as particularly important social anchors. Many residents describe an increased need for community when children leave home. At the same time, families with children constitute a visible and active presence in daily life. Informal activities emerge frequently, such as adults cooking or baking together with children in the communal kitchen.

The interior materiality varies between communal spaces. In one community house, the wooden interior is described as contributing to a warm and homely atmosphere, often described as an extended living room rather than an institutional gathering space. The other community house is perceived as more institutional, partly due to its large, open and initially unfurnished room, lacking clearly defined functions. There is an absence of spatial subdivision that has made furnishing and appropriation more challenging, affecting the sense of home.

Residents emphasise that living in cohousing requires less than commonly assumed. While the model demands engagement and participation in shared responsibilities, the social benefits are described as outweighing the required effort. One example comes from a resident previously living in a larger, more isolated home where the shift toward smaller private units combined with shared facilities has resulted in a larger social contact network and reduced loneliness. At the same time, community is not self-generating, it depends on sustained involvement, energy and willingness to participate in collective life.

1. Community house



Figure 7: Landscape section. No scale. Drawing by Vandkunsten architects.

SÄLLBo

Building data

Developer: Helsingborgshem
Program: Sheltered Housing (70+), young adults (18-25), and young immigrants (18-25)
Location: Fredriksdal, Helsingborg
Period: 2015-current
Area: 4300 m²
Units: 51 apartments

SällBo was initiated as an innovative social housing project aimed at bridging the gap between newly arrived refugees and the elderly population in the area. The building is an old nursery home and was later transformed to the concept it is today, with much of the original architecture preserved to keep down the costs.

There are three main target groups and all residents are interviewed before moving into the complex. When an apartment becomes available, it is listed to those who fit the target group and then a person who seems to fit in the community is selected. The

goal with SällBo is to have a broad mix of people and there is therefore no typical stereotype that moves in, but rather a community that embraces diversity.

The residents have significant influence over the building, with shared responsibility for common spaces, monthly mandatory meetings, and a social contract to ensure social interaction between residents. (D.Curovic, personal communication, Mars 24, 2026)

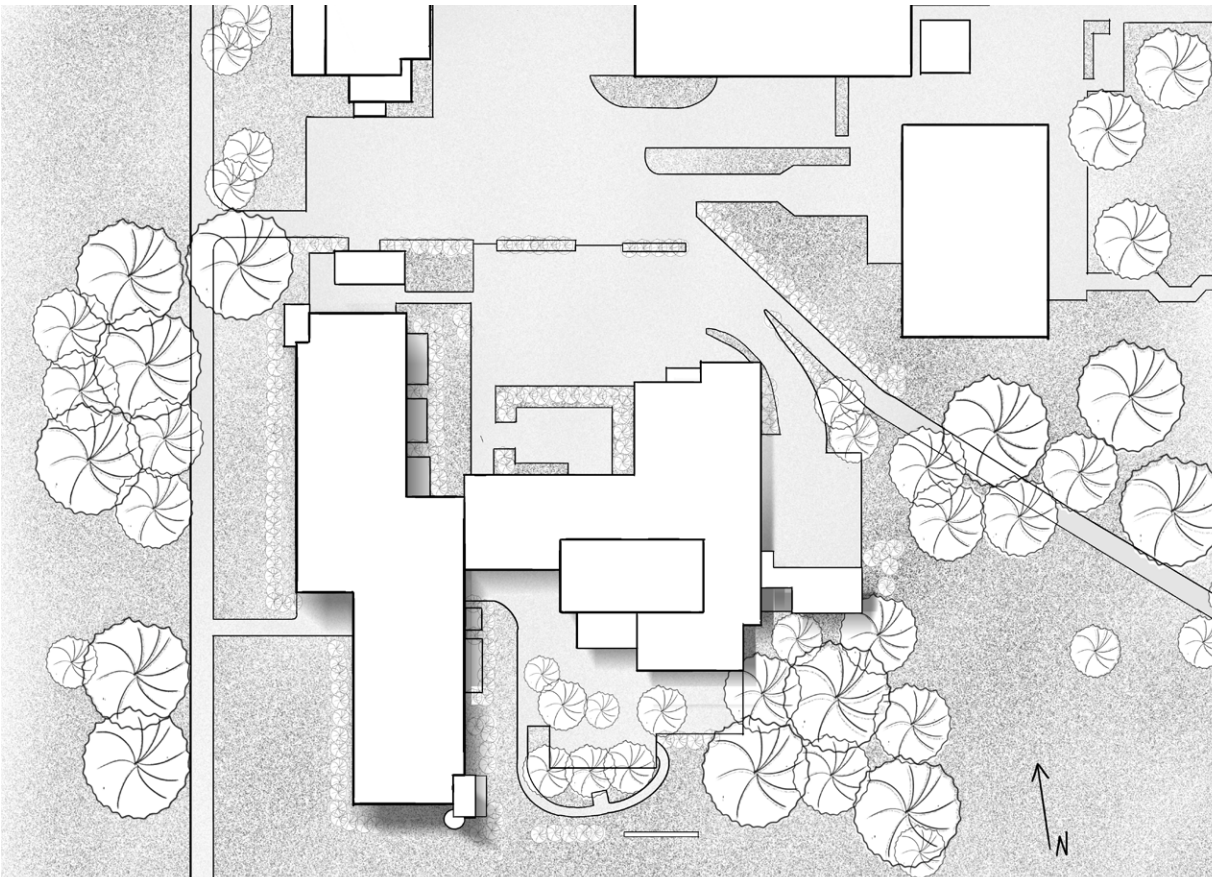


Figure 8: Traced from Google maps.

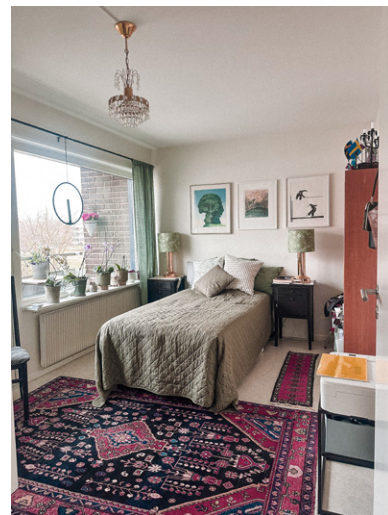
Intergenerational contact is described as a central part of the housing concept during an interview with Dragana Curovic, project manager for SällBo. Older residents often seek contact with the younger ones who in return receive support, a sense of security and being seen. A lot of young people experience loneliness despite social networks, studies or work, which according to Curovic is linked to today's performance oriented society and social media. At SällBo people are accepted as they are, one example includes two medical students. While studying in the library late at night, an older neighbour would occasionally bring them hot chocolate. A small gesture that created the feeling that someone cared and noticed them.

The older residents have also described great social and emotional benefits from the accommodation. Many had previously felt lonely despite family and social relationships. At SällBo they get the feeling of being needed and a sense of purpose in everyday life. Curovic describes how, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the elderly helped younger residents with language, studies and everyday tasks. Resulting in significantly faster language development compared to other accommodations.

A recurring theme is that loneliness is not necessarily about being physically alone, rather about lacking belonging and meaningful connection. This is clearly expressed in a quote from a resident "I have never been more alone but felt less lonely than when I moved to SällBo" which describes how the housing concept allows for solitude without the feeling of being alone, since there is always someone available behind the next door.

SällBo has also resulted in unexpected health benefits. Curovic explains how the need for home care and mobility services has remained very low despite many residents being over 80 years old. A specific example concerns an elderly woman who moved in with mobility issues, using an electric wheelchair. Shortly after moving in, Curovic spotted her almost running around with her laundry basket. When asked what had happened, she replied "I don't know, but I feel so good", a result of feeling needed, seen and included in a social context according to Curovic.





Pictures from study visit. Authors own.

The communal rooms are described as crucial for creating spontaneous meetings between generations, both large and smaller social places are spread out on each floor. The larger dining and common room are used for shared activities such as movie nights, games, music, dinners and celebrations. While outdoor areas such as the garden and terrace are frequently used for barbecues and communal meals. At the same time, the smaller rooms allow for more informal and everyday interactions.

Curovic highlights that the rooms adjacent to the elevator halls and natural passages are the most frequently used, because of their placement. The lobby is described as the building's most important social space because people spontaneously gather there as soon as someone sits down. Curovic emphasizes the difference between these open and visible spaces and the more secluded rooms, where one needs an active intention to enter.

There are shared kitchens on every floor that also function as important meeting places. They are not only used for cooking but also for social interaction between neighbours and guests. There are rules that reinforce collective living, such as permission to host parties and ensuring that outsiders do not move freely in the building, creating both safety and a sense of shared responsibility according to Curovic.

Another aspect highlighted as important by Curovic is the newly implemented presence of children in the building. Although children can be perceived as disturbing, the children at SällBo have instead become a shared engagement. They have become a natural part of the social life, the elderly residents actively engage with them and almost fight about who gets to do so. This, among other things, is described by Curovic as something that breaks down social barriers and creates understanding between people who otherwise would have never met.



Figure 9: Ground floor. No scale. Drawing by Helsingborgs Stad.

PROCESS

This chapter explores the design process of the thesis, beginning with a synthesis of the research and reference project studies. The main findings are then translated into design strategies. The chapter continues with a site analysis and an examination of the existing site programme, followed by an explanation of the project’s programme development.

SYNTHESIS

The design process has been iterative between findings from research, site visits and analysis of reference projects. These studies and observations have together highlighted the importance of spatial organisation, shared everyday environments and informal social interaction in supporting a sense of belonging and durable social sustainability.

Research on social infrastructure demonstrates that ordinary shared places, such as cafés, workshops and communal everyday environments, support subjective well-being by enabling for incidental encounters and passive social interaction in daily life. These forms of low-intensity contact contribute to social cohesion and a sense of belonging, which highlights the importance of integrating social infrastructure in close proximity to residential areas. Mahmoudi Farahani (2016) argues further that a sense of community, community attachment and neighbouring relationships are strongly connected to increased feelings of safety, residential satisfaction and mental well-being. These forms of social interaction are enabled through spatial proximity and shared everyday environments, where repeated encounters over time contribute to place-based experiences of belonging.

The importance of belonging and appropriation was further reinforced through Steno’s (2023) discussion of loneliness as both a social and spatial condition. Steno emphasises that the possibility to appropriate both private and communal environments is crucial in developing a sense of home and belonging, while institutional environments and limited influence over the physical setting may instead reinforce feelings of isolation despite physical proximity to others. This became particularly relevant in relation to the ambition of avoiding institutional spatial qualities within the project and instead creating environments that could feel collectively owned and personally meaningful for residents.

These findings were strongly reflected during the study visits. Conversations with residents in several projects revealed that spontaneous encounters formed an appreciated and important part of everyday life. Residents described strong forms of mutual social support and expressed a desire to remain within the communities over time, often moving between apartments as their life situations changed. This suggested that the spatial and social

organisation of these environments supported long-term belonging, continuity and attachment to place.

The visit to Sällbo particularly demonstrated how intergenerational living could counteract experiences of loneliness through everyday cooperation and informal care. Older residents had described how they felt respected, seen and needed within the community, while younger residents that had expressed appreciation for having people around them who listened without judgement or pressure. Relating to the example of how an older resident brought hot chocolate to medical students studying late at night and the woman with limited mobility that gradually regained both physical movement and confidence through participation in the everyday communal life. These observations have reinforced the importance of creating environments where people are not only socially present, but where they also feel needed and able to contribute to others.

The study visits also highlighted the significance of visibility and spatial placement in enabling spontaneous interaction. At Sällbo, shared spaces located directly adjacent to circulation paths and elevator halls were used significantly more than other activity rooms, largely because residents could easily observe when someone was present. Similarly, the lobby emerged as the most socially active space in the building due to its position along everyday movement patterns, where residents constantly passed through and unintentionally encountered one another. These observations closely align with Gehl’s (2011) description of “life between buildings”, where social activities emerge through everyday movement, visual contact and opportunities for short informal stays.

Gehl (2011) further argues that the frequency of social interaction between neighbours is closely linked to the amount of time people spend outdoors and within shared environments. He emphasises the importance of transition zones between private and communal life, where entrances, porches, balconies and circulation paths facing shared spaces create opportunities for passive contact, greetings and spontaneous encounters that may gradually develop into more established social relationships. The project therefore works consciously with semi-private transition zones facing the courtyard

and shared paths, where residents access storage spaces, workshops, gym functions and shared facilities through the communal environment. The seating niches along circulation paths, together with the shared wintergarden, extends the possibility for social life outdoors during larger parts of the year as well as supports informal everyday encounters.

The importance of visual permeability and transition spaces was further reinforced by the reference project Jystrup Savværk. Here, the communal corridor acted as the social core of the building and functioned as a transition zone between private apartments and communal life. Internal windows between apartments and circulation spaces created visual connections that enabled residents to observe activity before choosing to engage socially. Rather than being perceived as intrusive, this transparency lowered the threshold for spontaneous interaction while still allowing privacy through installing blinds. Residents described how passing through the corridor frequently resulted in informal conversations and how visual contact often initiated social interaction. Personal furniture and belongings placed outside the apartments further extended private life into the communal environment, contributing to a stronger sense of appropriation and belonging.

These observations directly informed the design of the project's "social corners", where circulation, communal functions and meeting spaces are concentrated around building corners rather than arranged along long institutional corridors. This strategy was partly inspired by Jystrup Savværk, but also by Gehl's (2011) concept of spatial sequencing, where routes divided into shorter spatial segments are perceived as more manageable and inviting than long linear movement paths. By breaking down circulation into smaller spatial experiences with visibility between shared functions, the design seeks to increase opportunities for spontaneous encounters while simultaneously reducing institutional spatial qualities.

Bouma et al. (2010) similarly emphasise the importance of shared communication zones such as corridors and stairwells in supporting social interaction, particularly when these spaces combine transparency with clear transitions between private and semi-private areas. The authors further

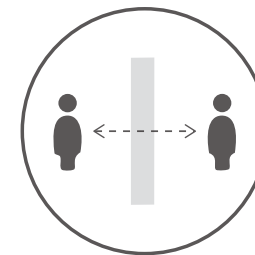
argue that centrally located and flexible communal spaces support active social interaction to a greater extent than spaces disconnected from movement patterns or lacking visual connection. These findings strengthened the decision to locate communal functions directly adjacent to circulation spaces and facing the courtyard, where everyday movement naturally increases the probability of interaction.

The reference projects also highlighted the importance of scale in relation to community formation. While Tinggården and Skråningen demonstrated the possibilities of larger cohousing environments, the study visits also revealed challenges related to maintaining social cohesion within large communities. At Skråningen, residents described how the strongest sense of community existed primarily among immediate neighbours within smaller housing rows, while the larger shared community house lacked a comparable sense of belonging. This reinforced the importance of creating smaller identifiable social groups within the larger structure. Tinggården's "family house" principle therefore became an important reference in the development of the project's "family groups", where each floor contains a shared communal room intended primarily for the residents living on that level. These spaces are intended to function as smaller-scale shared homes that residents can appropriate and shape collectively over time, rather than relying solely on large central communal functions.

Altogether, both research findings and reference projects consistently demonstrated that architecture alone cannot determine social relationships, but that visibility, accessibility, spatial organisation and shared everyday environments significantly influence the probability of social interaction and a durable sense of community. As described by both Gehl (2011) and Ebner (2012), architecture functions as an enabling framework for everyday life, where spatial conditions can support encounters, participation and belonging without prescribing social outcomes.

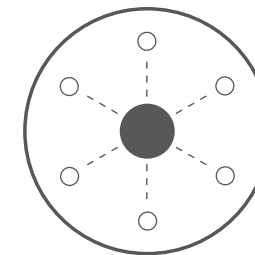
DESIGN STRATEGIES

The design strategies are based on both research and studies of reference projects, which together identified key spatial and architectural principles implemented throughout the design proposal. These strategies translate theoretical insights into practical design solutions that support social interaction, a sense of belonging, and community.



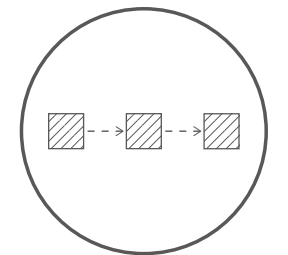
Visual permeability

Visual connections between spaces enables for opportunities for spontaneous social interaction.



Central communication

Shared spaces are located at the core of circulation, ensuring easy access, visibility and frequent encounters.



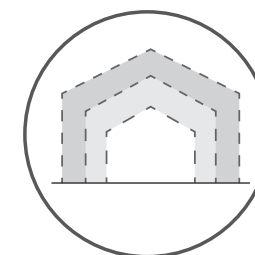
Spatial sequencing

Routes are divided into shorter, manageable distances, making them more inviting.



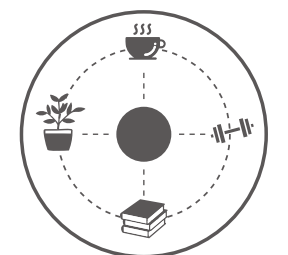
Family groups

Creates smaller groups within the larger community to support appropriation, a sense of home and belonging.



Transition zones

A clear hierarchy of spaces creates gradual move from private to communal, offering choice and opportunities for spontaneous interaction.



Social infrastructure

Integrating everyday amenities and shared functions within the community supports daily life, social interaction and a sense of belonging.

SITE ANALYSIS

The site was carefully selected with key community functions in mind to support residents’ everyday lives. High priority was given to strong connections and proximity to public transport, as well as walking distance to a grocery store, in order to enable an active and independent lifestyle for all residents. Additional considerations included access to healthcare services and the presence of schools and preschools within walking distance.

1. Site	
2. Public transport	200 m
3. Supermarket	300 m
4. Pharmacy	300 m
5. Healthcare center	400 m
6. Primary school	550 m
7. Preschool	850 m



Figure 10: Map over Gamlestaden with the site mapped out. © Lantmäteriet, CC BY 4.0



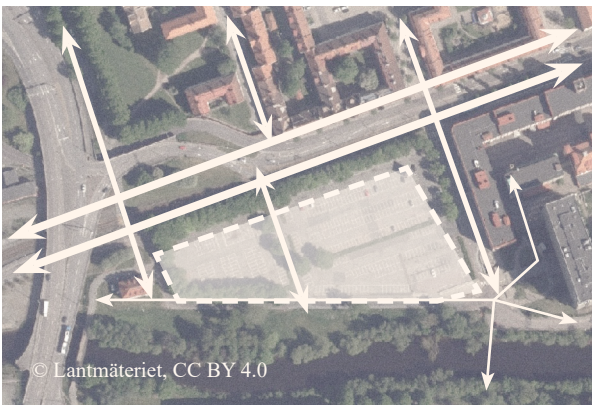
Views

Visual connections that should be preserved includes sightlines toward key landmarks within the district, such as Nya Kulan and HK3, as well as framed views toward surrounding green areas. Preserving these visual connections is essential to reinforce and sustain the spatial identity and character of the site.



Paths

The existing circulation is defined by the main pedestrian route connecting Gamlestadstorg to Nya Kulan, running alongside the site. A new and upgraded connection extends from Holländareplatsen in the north toward Strömmensberg in the south, where a bridge is currently under construction to reduce barriers and improve accessibility to Gamlestaden from the south. A green path along Säveån is also envisioned.



Space syntax

The space syntax analysis illustrates the current spatial conditions of the area in relation to movement patterns. It identifies where there is potential to establish more vibrant urban streets versus calmer routes. Routes are ranked hierarchically: the thicker the line, the higher the movement intensity. Consequently, the path along Artillerigatan emerges as most suitable for a lively urban street with retail and services.



Public space

Hard-surfaced public spaces are located outside HK3, which is currently under development, as well as within the existing public square at Holländareplatsen and along Brahegatan. Potential park spaces to be developed within the current green areas are marked in green, highlighting the importance of the surrounding landscape in the broader context, where neighbourhood-scale nature parks are envisioned.

SITE DEVELOPMENT

The site, Kv. Abborren, is framed by a diverse mix of architectural styles, ranging from three-story landshövdingehus to the forthcoming 18-story high HK3 brutalist structure. Dominating the ensemble, the old factory building, Nya Kulan, rises proudly with its five stories of distinctive brickwork, serving as a visual anchor and a key reference point that shapes the character and identity of the surrounding area.

The area is considered a key node in north-eastern Gothenburg and forms a central part of the city's industrial heritage. A mixed city with approximately 80% of the built environment consisting of housing, complemented by functions such as retail, offices, education, culture and leisure activities are envisioned in the development. Such functional mix enables for a robust social structure as well as contributes to a vibrant and inclusive urban area (Göteborgs Stad, 2006).

An active urban environment is encouraged by locating retail and public functions at ground level, with housing and offices above. This enables small-scale commercial streets, particularly along Artellerigatan between Nya Kulan and Gamlestadstads Torg, where local shops, restaurants and cafés can serve both residents and act as destination points for external visitors. Parking is primarily planned to be provided through parking garages, supplemented by smaller parking facilities. The proposed parking ratio is approximately 27 spots per 1000 sqm retail area and 0.5–0.6 spaces per residential dwelling. (Göteborgs Stad, 2006).

Kv. Abborren is considered particularly important for achieving a dense and vibrant urban environment and is therefore proposed for redevelopment, replacing the existing surface parking with parking garages, underground garages and street parking (Göteborgs Stad, 2006).

New development should both strengthen and evolve the identity of the site, while also providing new architectural expressions. A building height of around five floors is considered appropriate in relation to Nya Kulan, and can contribute to a dense urban structure with active streets. At the same time, connections to Sävåns river are to be improved through new pedestrian paths and a park by the water, where attractive destinations, viewpoints and other meeting places, can address the current lack of outdoor meeting places in the area (Göteborgs Stad, 2006).

At the same time, the connection to the southern side of the river will be strengthened through a new bridge connecting to Brahegatan, thereby improving accessibility to Gamlestaden and overall connectivity within the area. The bridge forms part of several ongoing infrastructural interventions currently being developed in Gamlestaden, aimed at reducing physical barriers and improving mobility as the district continues to grow, transform and densify (Göteborgs Stad, 2024). As a result, Brahegatan is expected to become a more integrated and active part of the urban public realm.



Pictures from site visits. Authors own.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The project combines student housing with senior apartments, single-parent units, and family town-houses to create a socially and generationally diverse living environment. Among the student apartments, 25 percent is accessible (Boverket, 2025) and all other apartments have extended accessibility measures to be inclusive for people with reduced mobility. The circulation flows are carefully structured to promote social interaction through strategically positioned communication and transition zones, where transparency enhances visual connection and opportunities for social interaction.

In-between spaces are integrated within these circulation zones to encourage spontaneous encounters and short stays. A clear spatial hierarchy is

established between private, semi-private, and communal areas. The communal areas are flexible, centrally located, and easily accessible, positioned in the corner of the building to function as a social anchor.

Entrances, balconies, porches, and shared circulation paths are oriented towards the communal areas, increasing the likelihood of everyday interaction. These elements align in the social corner that vertically connects all shared spaces, extending to shared balconies on the upper floors and a private courtyard on the ground floor. Creating a layered transition zone between the building and the shared courtyard, reinforcing the relationship between private dwellings and communal life.

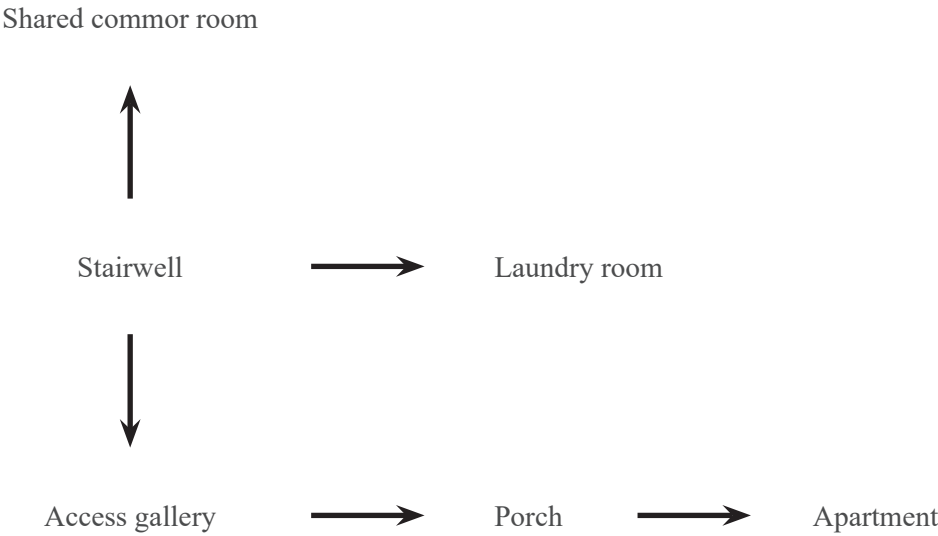
Design proposal

To further develop and detail the proposal, one of the residential volumes within the block structure has been selected for closer investigation. The overall block follows a consistent organisational principle in which apartments are primarily oriented towards the south or west to maximise daylight conditions. As a result of the corridor-based layout and the ambition to maintain economic efficiency, the access galleries are mainly positioned towards the north or east. These galleries therefore function primarily as circulation spaces rather than areas intended for longer stays. In this context, the entrance porch acts as an intermediate zone that can accommodate additional storage or outdoor seating, depending on the residents’ needs and the spatial conditions available.

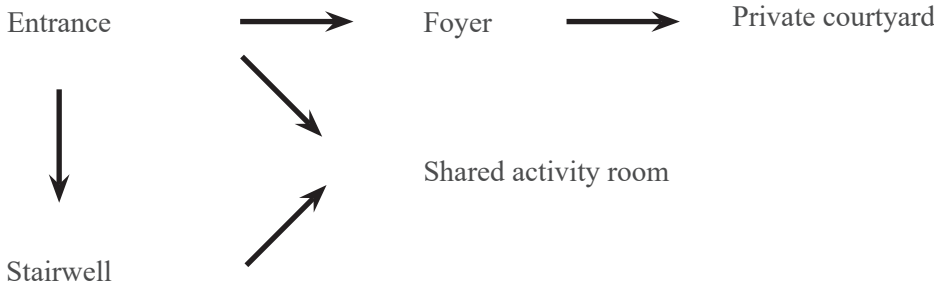
The residential volume located in the north-eastern part of the site was selected for further development due to its strategic position where the new proposal meets Nya Kulan, an important landmark within the area. The location is also well suited for commercial functions on the ground floor, as the main pedestrian route connecting Gamlestads Torg and Nya Kulan passes directly adjacent to the site.

Further development of the project would benefit from a more detailed investigation of all building volumes, particularly the design of the ground floor and its relationship to both the surrounding neighbourhood and the private courtyard. It would also be relevant to further explore the rowhouses, especially how their thresholds and transition zones meet the courtyard, as well as how the front gardens extend domestic life into the public realm.

General floor



Entrance floor



THE DESIGN PROJECT

This chapter presents the design project. It outlines the programme, the site, and the final design proposal centred around the concept of the social corner. The project is communicated through written explanations, diagrams, drawings, and renderings.

PROGRAM

The distribution of the apartments is managed by the tenants' association, whose board conducts interviews with new residents. A rental agreement is then established with the property owner, along with an additional contract between the association and the tenant, in which the tenant commits to participating in the tasks decided by the association and adhering to the shared values and principles.

Each apartment is designated for a specific target group to which it is tied. There are student apartments, senior apartments and apartments for single parents, as well as the special case of co-living apartments, which have a more flexible target group. All apartments except the student apartments have enhanced accessibility requirements and are therefore adapted for people with mobility impairments. Twenty-five percent of the student apartments are accessible, in accordance with Boverket's (2025) new regulations. The senior apartments require residents to be at least 65 years old and physically capable of contributing to the community.

Every new resident must meet the requirements of the target group at the time of moving in, but they are not forced to move out if their life situation changes, with the exception of students. Students are offered lower rent in exchange for participating more extensively in the tasks determined by the association. This may include, for example, preparing shared meals and cleaning the communal areas.

In addition to the mandatory tasks in cooking and cleaning teams, participation in other working groups is encouraged, such as maintenance groups, outdoor environment groups, activity groups, and other groups determined by the association. All residents must be members of the association, and the board holds monthly meetings that residents may attend voluntarily.

Form of grant: Rental property, individual contracts with the property owner.

Statistics - Neighbourhood

Apartments

Student:	39 units
Student large:	10 units
Senior:	25 units
Co-live:	10 units
Single-parent:	14 units

Total: 98 units

Rowhouses: 6 units

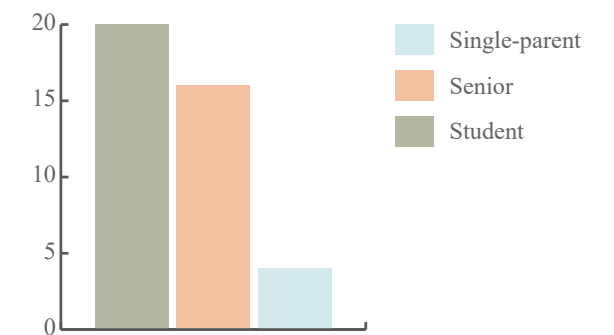
Shared facilities

Family rooms:	11 rooms
Foyer:	3 rooms
Activity rooms:	3 rooms

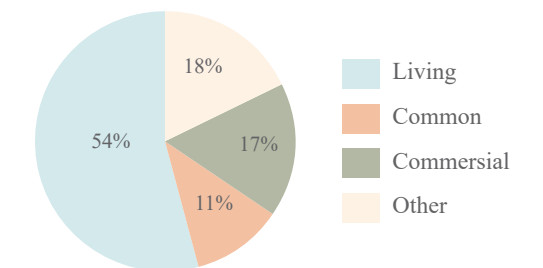
Other facilities:

- Gym
- Workshop
- Co-working/Library
- Bicycle storage
- Movie room

Statistics - Project building



Target group distribution



Area distribution

SITE

Context

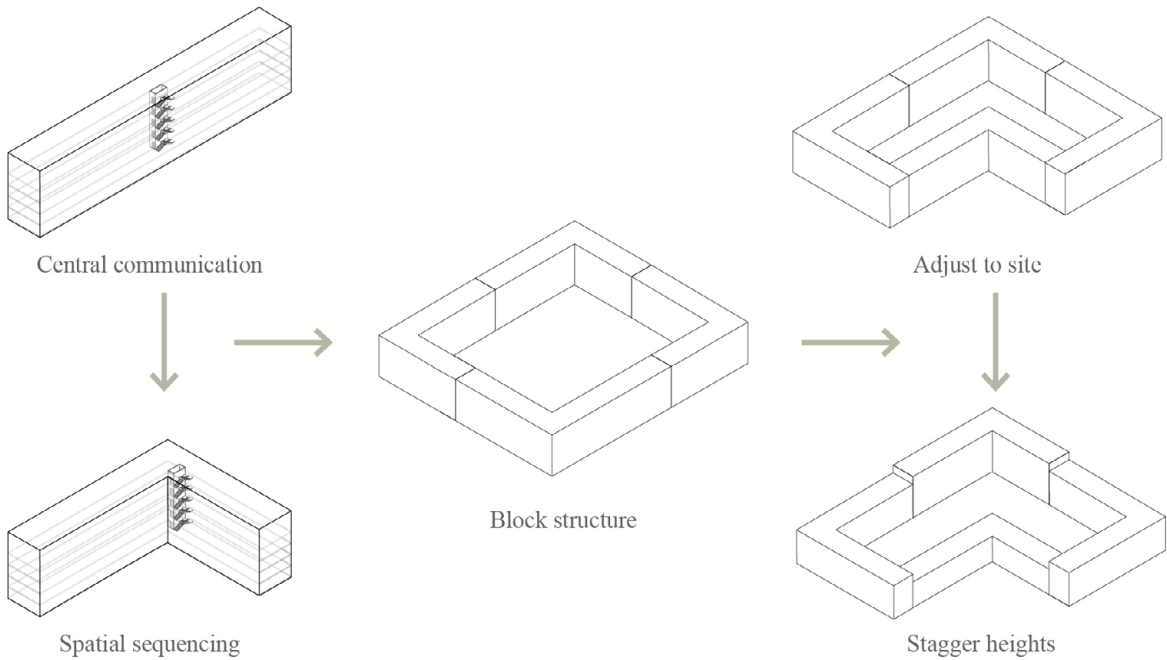
Gamlestaden in Gothenburg, Sweden, is an area where historic buildings and new developments coexist within the evolving urban fabric. The site is situated in an interesting context with extensive development plans, in and around the area. The surrounding neighbourhood consists primarily of conventional housing, complemented by a range of nearby public functions.

This context therefore provides a suitable setting for exploring an intergenerational housing typology. Such models remain relatively uncommon in Sweden, where residential environments often are organised around specific life stages. The project therefore investigates how this typology could contribute to reducing spatial and social barriers between generations within both the neighbourhood and the broader urban setting.

Structure

The courtyard structure was developed through both research and site visit observations. Gehl (2011) emphasises that social interaction among neighbours is closely connected to time spent outdoors and to the possibility of informal encounters in shared environments. The enclosed courtyard therefore became both a response to the surrounding urban structure and a strategy for creating a

protected shared environment that residents can collectively identify with and appropriate as their own. The courtyard combines spaces for different forms of activity and different age groups, including play areas, seating niches, planter boxes, boules courts and the communal wintergarden, allowing different interests and generations to coexist within the same shared environment.



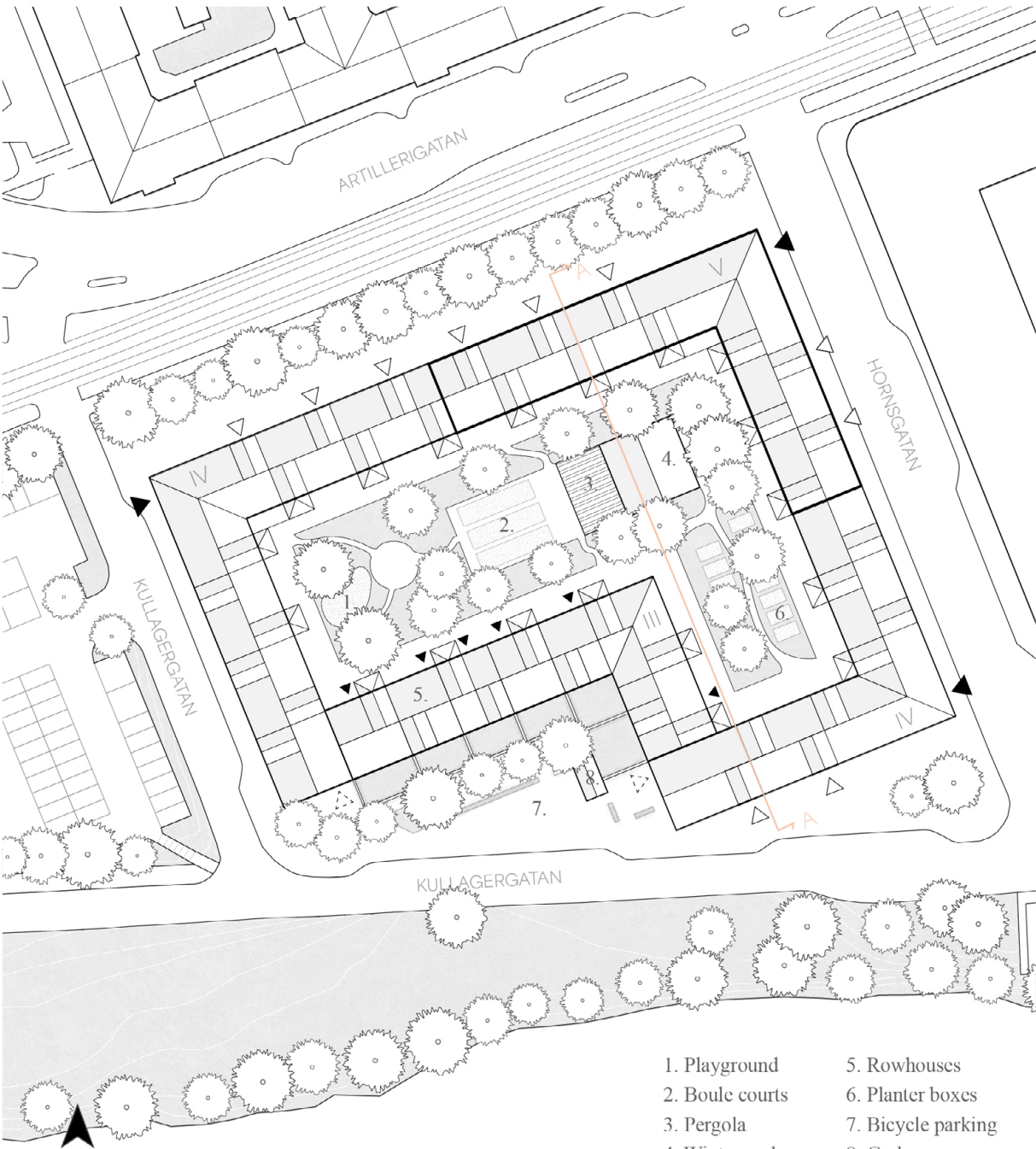
DESIGN PROPOSAL

Site plan

1:1000

The L-shaped courtyard organisation creates different spatial zones with varying levels of activity and calmness. One part of the courtyard is characterised by movement, play and social activity, while another contains quieter seating areas and a community garden. The common wintergarden acts as a central meeting point between these

zones and supports activity throughout different seasons. Along the courtyard facade, a hardscaped circulation zone combined with recessed seating niches creates opportunities for short stays and passive interaction while simultaneously reducing the perceived scale of the courtyard to a more human scale.



Site section A-A

1:500



Along Artillerigatan, public functions are placed on the ground floor to contribute to a more vibrant urban environment. In contrast, the inner courtyard is designed as a private social space for the residents. The courtyard is intended to encourage meetings and everyday interaction, with its spatial design maintaining a sense of enclosure and belonging. Due to the height difference, apartments can be placed on the first floor facing S ve n, while commercial spaces are located on the level below facing the street.

The varying building heights allow for generous daylight conditions in the courtyard throughout the year, while the trees and the pergola structure provide shade during the summer months. Recessed seating niches creates sheltered patios around the courtyard, encouraging short stays and informal interaction along the facades. The apartment storage areas are reached directly from the courtyard, further activating the area by generating movement throughout the day.

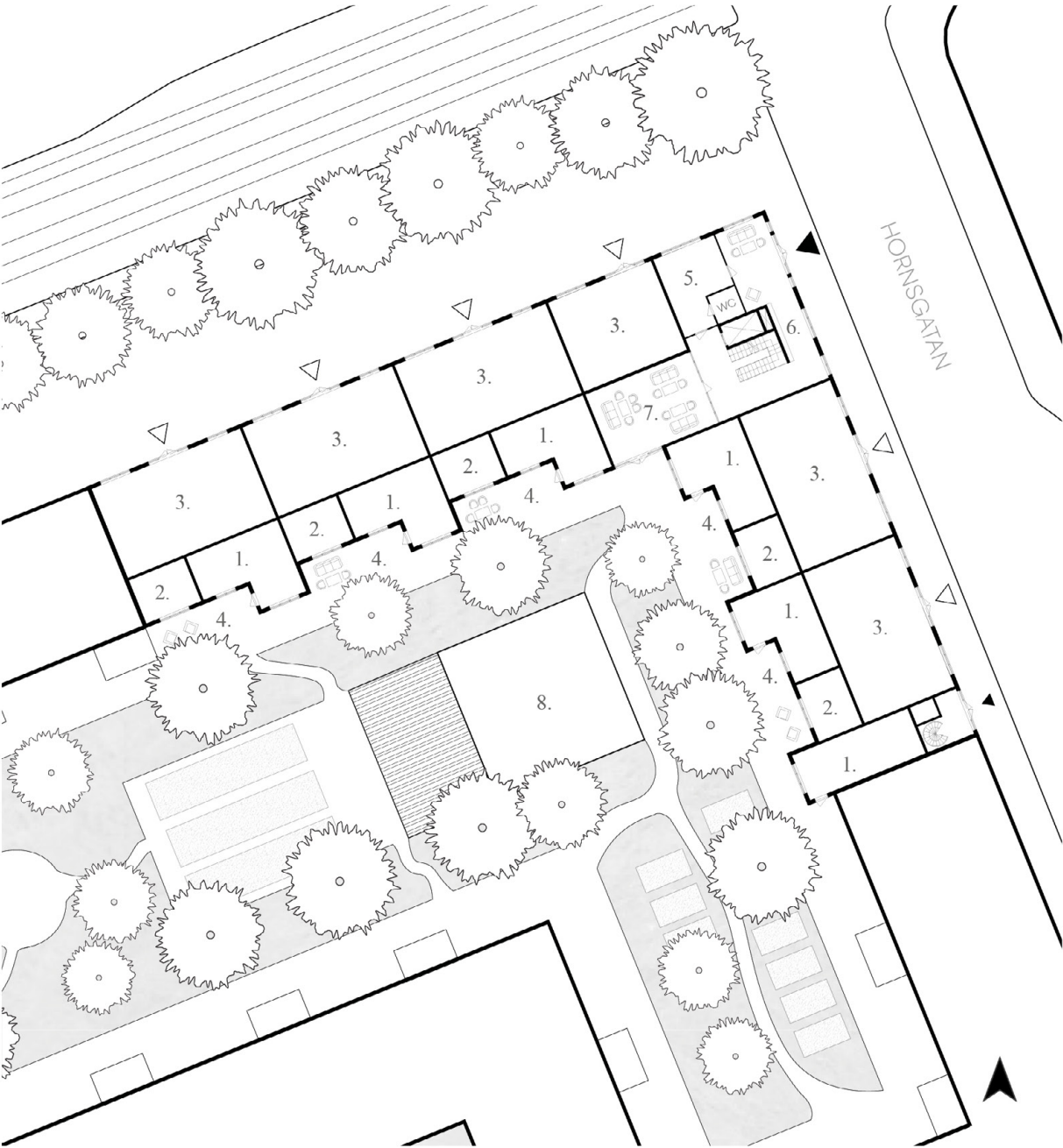


Ground floor

1:500

The residential entrances are placed at the corners of each building volume, making vertical movement a clear organizational principle throughout the project. Social interaction is encouraged by structuring circulation paths and sightlines to enable spontaneous encounters. Permeability between the circulation spaces, the activity room, and the foyer leading out to the winter garden further supports social interaction between residents.

- 1. Storage
- 2. Staff room
- 3. Commercial
- 4. Seating niche
- 5. Activity room
- 6. Mailboxes
- 7. Foyer
- 8. Wintergarden



North facade

1:500



East facade

1:500



South facade

1:500



The facade composition takes inspiration from the built environment, introducing a more contemporary architectural expression. It reinterprets the characteristic landshövdingehus typology, incorporating its distinctive facade with a brick base and lighter top levels in timber. The composition is further developed through incorporating modern glass sections in the form of wintergardens leading out to balconies, adding spatial variation while strengthening the relationship between interior and exterior spaces.

The timber facade consists of painted wood shingles that reinterpret the brick pattern of the base level, creating a cohesive expression across the facade. A clear rhythmic structure defines the

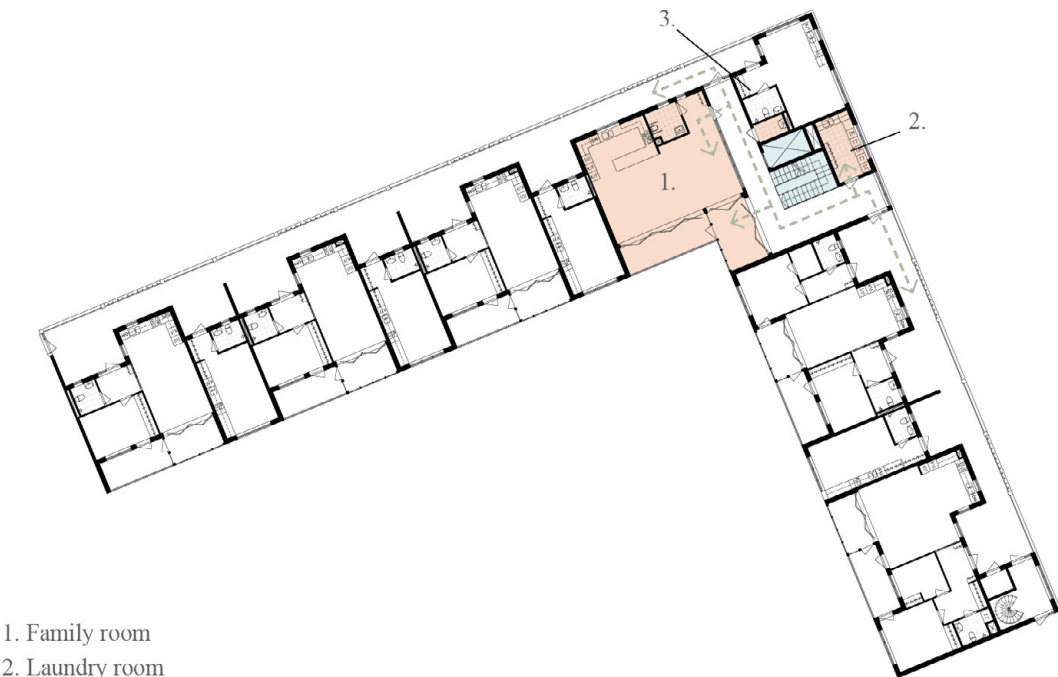
facades and is continued down into the brick plinth to strengthen the overall composition.

The verticality of the facades is emphasized through elements inspired by bay windows that also create a more dynamic roofline. This reflects the architectural language of the surrounding context while reinterpreting it in a more contemporary way. These elements, which differ slightly between the access-gallery facade and the courtyard facade, is what ties together the two facade compositions.

Without these vertical ribs, the access-gallery facade would be dominated by horizontality. The ribs also highlight the entrances to the commercial spaces below, drawing attention to them and making navigation easier for visitors.

Apartment layout

1:500



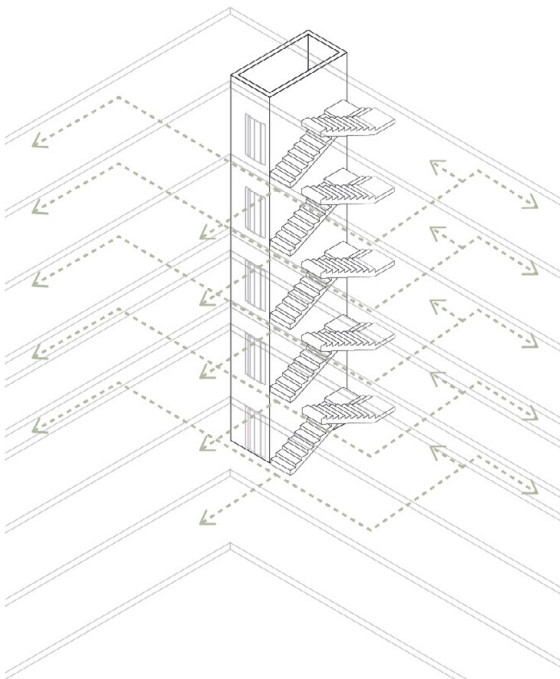
- 1. Family room
- 2. Laundry room
- 3. Cleaning closet

Shared facilities

Vertical communication

The concept of the social corner organises the building around a node, where shared functions and vertical circulation are concentrated. By positioning stairs and elevators in direct visual connection to the common spaces, everyday movement through the building becomes closely linked to social activity.

When arriving at each floor via stairs or elevator, one has immediate visual contact with the common room through a glazed wall. This transparency makes the social areas visible within everyday movements and increases the potential for spontaneous encounters and social interaction between residents.



Core communication

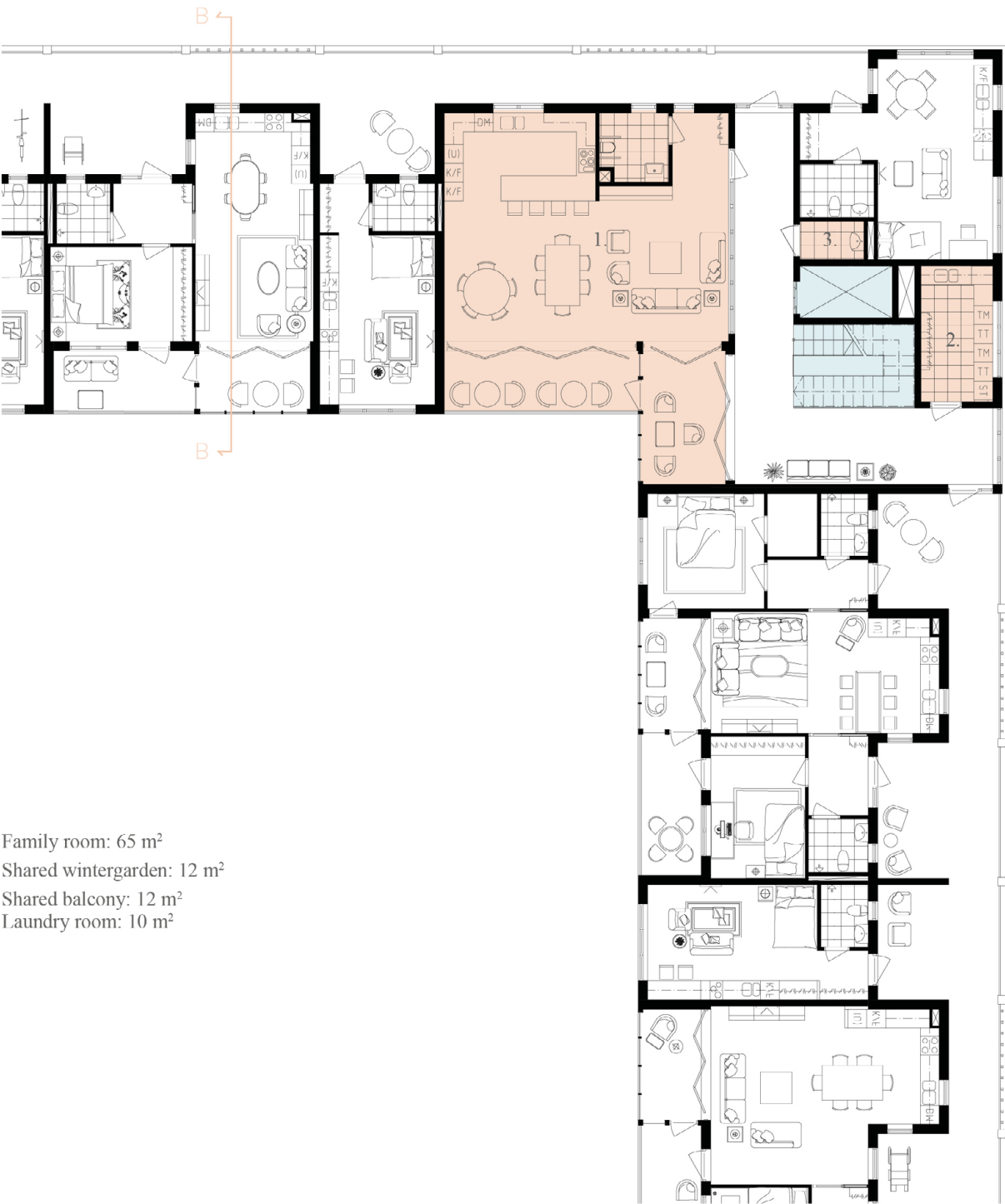


Common room



- 1. Family room
- 2. Laundry room
- 3. Cleaning closet

Shared facilities
Vertical communication



Family room: 65 m²
Shared wintergarden: 12 m²
Shared balcony: 12 m²
Laundry room: 10 m²

The family room is intended to act as the social anchor for each floor, creating a shared environment that residents collectively can make their own. It contains an open communal kitchen that can be used both for shared meals and everyday activities. For example, since the students do not have private dishwashers in their apartments, the shared kitchen provides a reason for daily use and regular interaction among residents.

The space is designed with a flexible and open layout that can accommodate a variety of uses. Sliding glass doors can be opened to extend the room, strengthening the connection to the outdoors and the private courtyard. Multiple sliding doors also allow the family room, a smaller shared winter garden and the corridor to be connected into one larger space for community events and gatherings.

The smaller shared wintergarden can be used for growing herbs and plants for the communal kitchen, while also functioning as a place to sit during the colder months of the year.

Like the family room, each floor also includes a shared laundry room. This space is located adjacent to the vertical circulation core to encourage movement through the area and create opportunities for spontaneous social interaction.

Transition zones are integrated at several spatial scales throughout the project. At the neighbourhood scale, these zones emerge in the meeting between the street and the building, creating intermediate spaces where people can pause, linger, and interact informally.

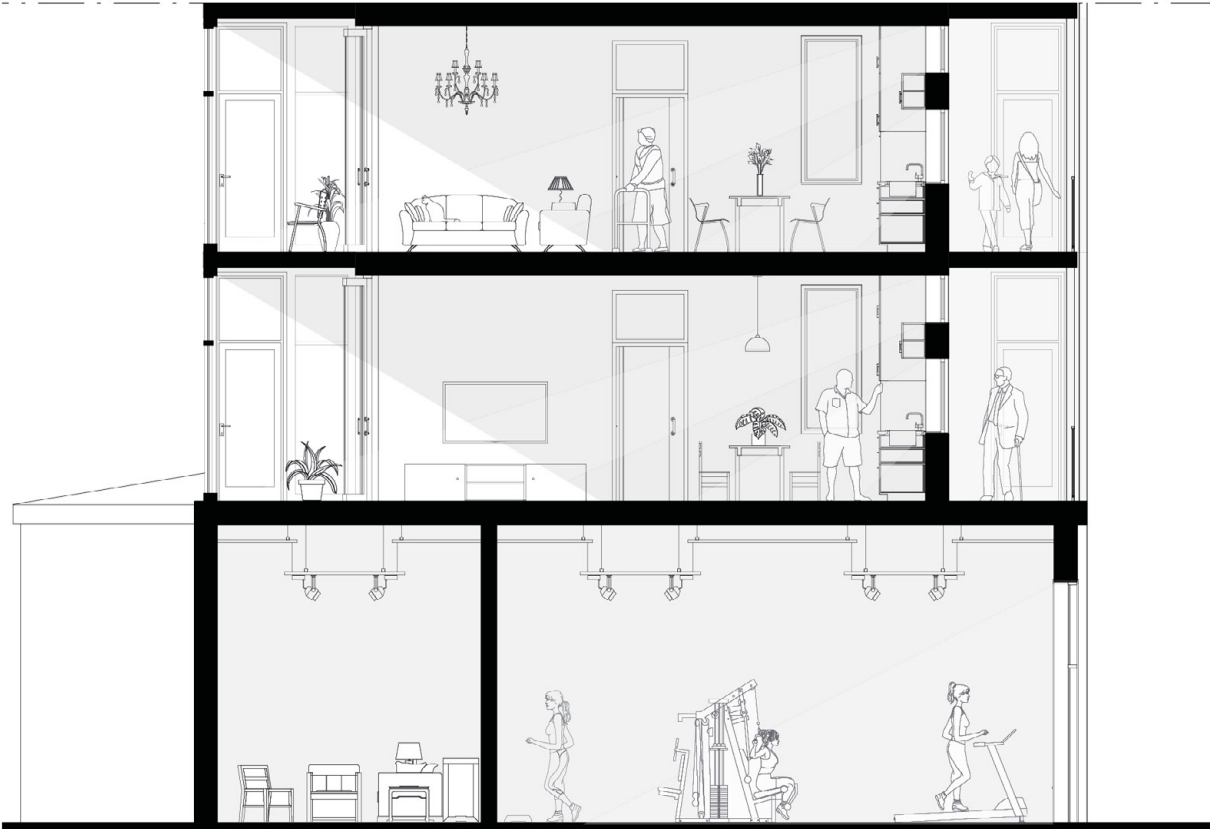
At the dwelling scale, transition zones take the form of semi-private entrance areas outside the apartments. These spaces enable brief everyday encounters between neighbours while also serving practical functions, such as potential storage for outdoor clothing, strollers, wheelchairs, and walkers.

The kitchen windows are positioned to reduce thresholds for interaction, similar to the approach used in Jystrup Savværk, making it possible to notice and greet neighbours while passing by. The generous ceiling height also allows for windows along the roofline, ensuring sufficient daylight in the narrow social spaces within the apartments.

A second transition zone within the apartment is the wintergarden, which acts as an intermediate layer between indoors and outdoors. This space connects to the transition zones on the ground floor, reinforcing the gradual transition between interior and exterior environments throughout the building.

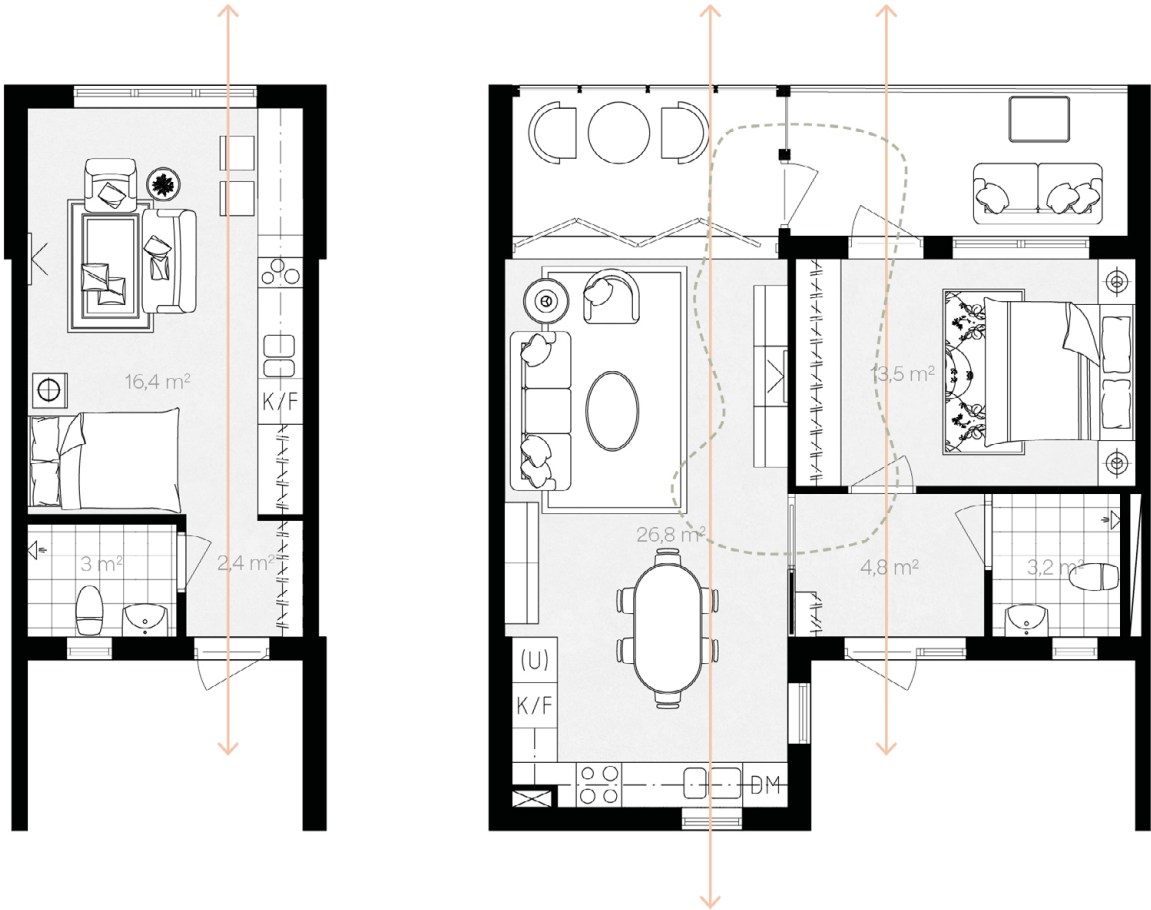
Section B-B

1:100



Student apartment
Senior apartment

1:100



Apartment: 26 m²
Entrance zone: 8 m²

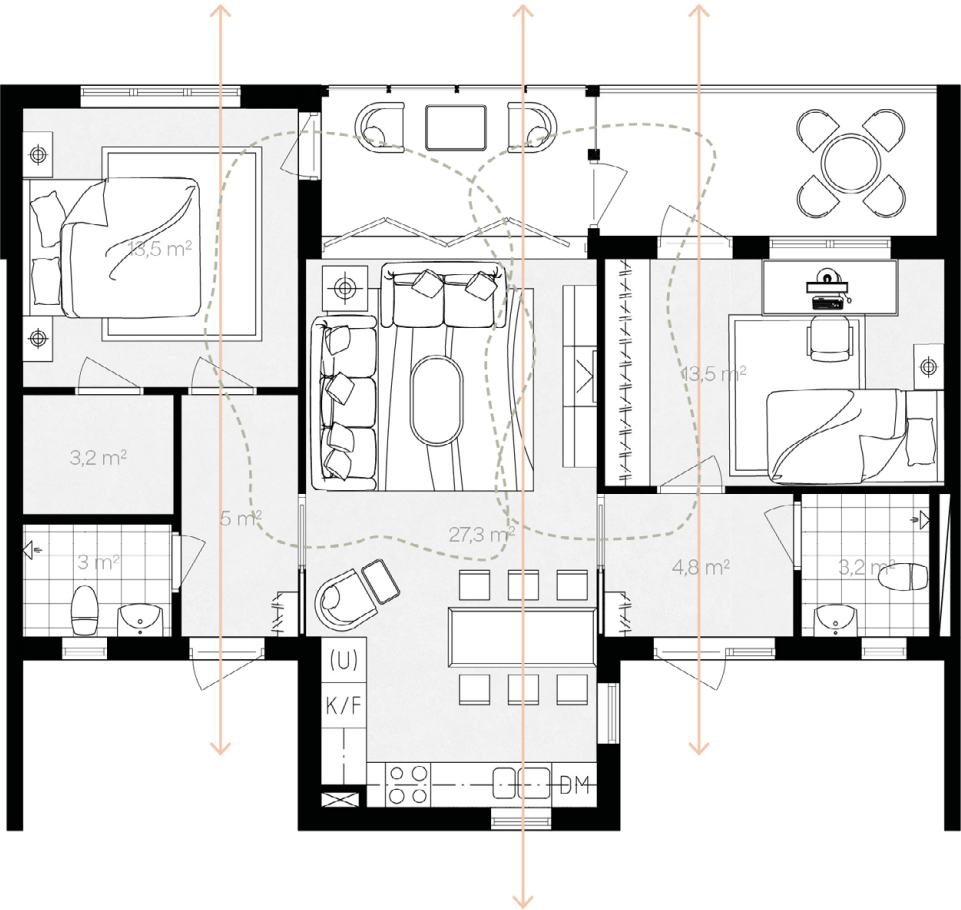
Apartment: 48 m²
Entrance zone: 10 m²
Wintergarden: 7 m²
Balcony: 9 m²

A consistent principle throughout the apartments is the presence of clear sightlines, creating visual connections between rooms as well as between interior and exterior spaces. This enables contact between neighbours while also enhancing the overall sense of spaciousness. Most apartments are organized to allow circular movement between interior spaces, transition zones, and the outdoor environment. The only exception is the student apartments, where this spatial loop is absent.

All apartments include a semi-private entrance zone leading into the home. The floor plans are designed to support parallel use, allowing social spaces to function simultaneously yet independently. Bedrooms are positioned so they can be accessed without passing through or disrupting ongoing social activities.

Co-live apartment

1:100



Apartment: 76 m²
Entrance zone: 18 m²
Wintergarden: 7 m²
Balcony: 9 m²

The wintergarden functions as an extension of the living room. Sliding glass sections allow the space to open up, expanding the apartment's social area and strengthening the connection to the outdoors.

The student and senior apartment can also be combined by removing a dividing wall, creating a two-bedroom co-live apartment and introducing flexibility within the housing structure.

All apartments, except the student units, are designed with enhanced accessibility dimensions to accommodate residents with reduced mobility. The rooms are generally proportioned to remain flexible and adaptable to a variety of household types and family constellations.

Student apartment

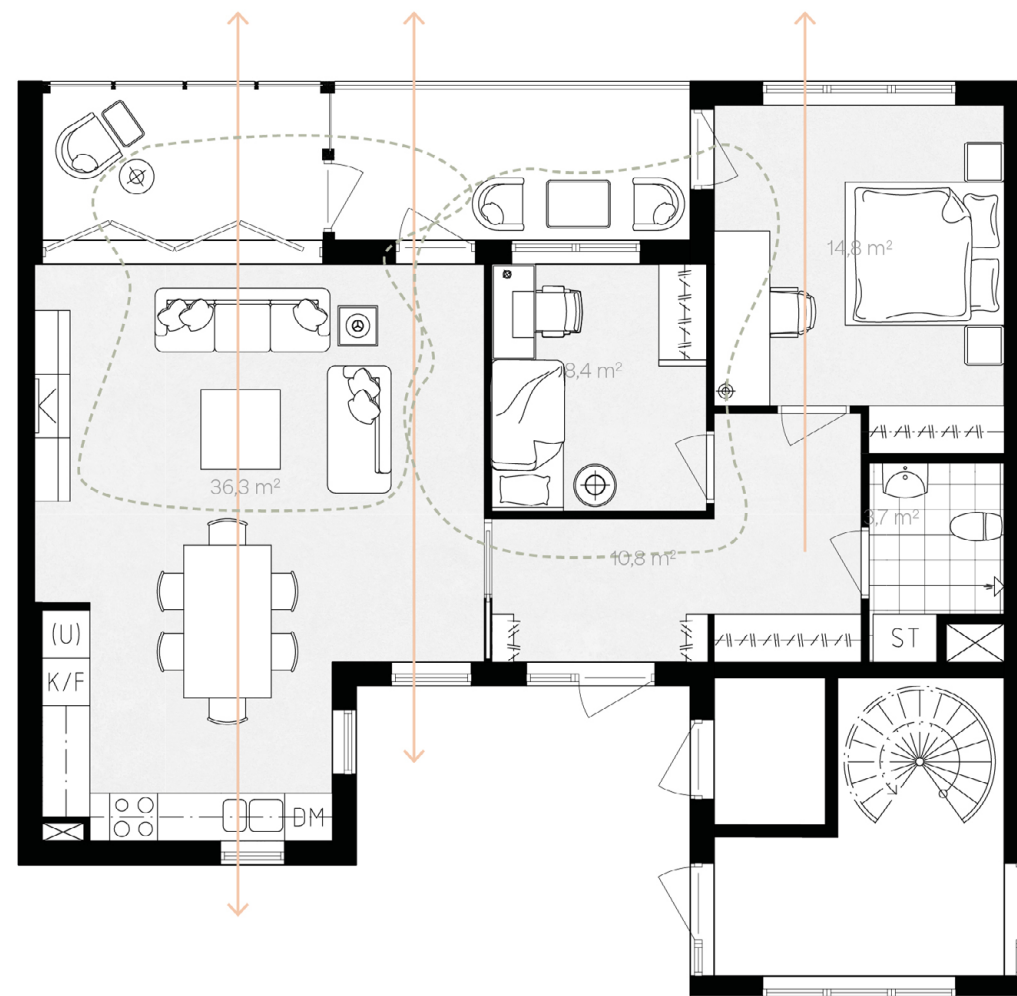


Senior apartment



Single-parent apartment

1:100

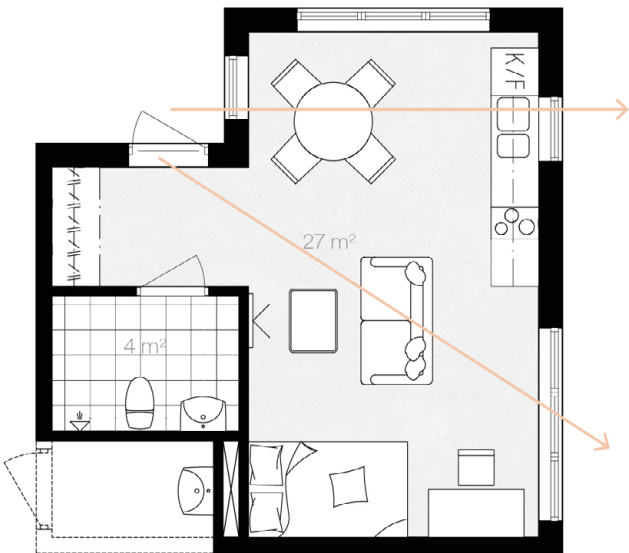


Apartment: 76 m²
Entrance zone: 10 m²
Wintergarden: 7 m²
Balcony: 9 m²

The single-parent unit follows the same principles as the other apartments, with clear sightlines throughout the home and support for parallel use. It features a slightly larger living area that connects the social spaces to both the balcony and the wintergarden. The apartment also allows for either a smaller social space with two double bedrooms or a more open living arrangement, creating flexibility within the housing structure. Positioned at the ends of the access galleries, the unit is connected to the emergency exits, which also function as bridges between the different housing communities, enabling movement between the building volumes.

Student apartment
Accessible

1:100



Apartment: 32 m²
Entrance zone: 3 m²

There is one accessible student apartment on each floor. This apartment is positioned at the corner of the building and is slightly larger than the regular student apartment.

Kitchen table view

The kitchen layout creates some distance from the access gallery, while the window facing it allows for voluntary social contact. In addition, the high clerestory window increases the amount of natural daylight entering the space. The dishwashers are raised from the floor to facilitate easier loading and unloading for elderly people and individuals with reduced mobility.



Shared wintergarden

A shared winter garden connects all family groups through a communal space designed for year-round activities, such as social gatherings and the cultivation of plants, herbs and fruit. Open and accessible to everyone, it links the courtyard's cultivation area with its activity space, bringing the two together into one cohesive environment.



REFLECTIONS

This chapter reflects on the final project and the themes explored throughout the thesis. It discusses the relationship between architecture, social interaction, and community within intergenerational housing, as well as reflections on the design process and the role of architecture as a living framework shaped by its inhabitants.

At the end of the day, social interaction is and will always be a choice. Architecture can be a tool to support its frequency, but it can never be an absolute solution to force social contact. This thesis has therefore explored how this tool can be used to promote social interaction and sense of community within intergenerational housing environments, through a combination of literature review, reference studies and design explorations. The project investigated how spatial configurations, shared environments and transition zones can influence everyday encounters and promote social interaction between residents of different ages. The findings align with research suggesting that spatial proximity, permeability and shared environments increase opportunities for spontaneous interaction.

Modern society is becoming increasingly isolated. People are spending more time at home, working remotely and it is becoming rare to encounter someone on public transport who is not absorbed in their phone or wearing headphones, making genuine human connection difficult. Today, we spend much of our time online. Although digital interaction may have increased over recent decades, meaningful human connection may simultaneously be declining. Exploring possibilities to strengthen human connection within the housing environment thus becomes increasingly important. Even though there are still generations that are not part of this lifestyle, it is important to look ahead and consider where we are heading.

In this case, the project responds through an intergenerational housing community, although the principles resulting from this thesis can, as I see it, be implemented in many different ways. Whether through a more conventional housing complex with expanded social areas or something as simple as a coffee room in an office building, such spaces may still foster social interaction and a sense of community. Ultimately, the thesis shows that relatively simple spatial interventions may have significant social impact, fostering well-being and reducing loneliness.

In a context where different age groups are increasingly socially separated, spatial strategies that support everyday encounters may contribute to more inclusive and socially integrated living environments. This thesis thus contributes to the discourse with a spatial strategy where shared

functions are concentrated in social corners, creating focal points for interaction within the building through permeability. Together with a sequence of transition zones between private and communal spaces, this spatial organisation aims to support both spontaneous encounters and the possibility of privacy, allowing residents to choose their level of engagement.

A simple analogy can be found in the informal paths created across green areas, revealing how people naturally choose the easiest route. In the same way, relatively simple spatial solutions can lower the threshold for social engagement, creating opportunities for connection and interaction in everyday life. While architecture alone cannot determine social behaviour, the project demonstrates how spatial organisation can create supportive conditions for intergenerational interaction and a sense of community.

Further studies could explore the whole community block, expanding from investigating only one building volume, working more extensively on the ground floor and its connection to both the private courtyard and the surrounding neighbourhood. It would also be interesting to investigate how the spatial strategies perform in other contexts, such as the former example of an office building, even though it is outside of the scope of this thesis.

Going into this thesis work, I knew that my passion for architecture somewhat stems from my belief that the human experience lies at the centre of all design. At the end of the day, everything comes down to that: how we experience space, how we are able to use it, and how we actually use it, which almost never fully corresponds. I suppose I am only at the beginning of understanding the latter, the actual use of space, something I began to gain insight into during my study visits. In this case, they became evidence of architecture as a living, evolving organism, something that can be both durable and fluid at the same time.

Although I have gained a great deal of knowledge throughout this thesis, the most valuable insight has been the understanding that architecture is never static, it is continuously shaped by the people who inhabit it.

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This chapter presents the bibliography and source material used throughout the thesis, including written references, multimedia sources and figures. It also explains the use of AI tools in supporting the readability and language refinement of the text.

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MULTIMEDIA & FIGURES

Figure 1-7: Vandkunsten Architects. (2026). *Unpublished architectural drawings provided via personal communication*, published with permission.

Figure 8: Google. (2026). *Gamlestaden, Gothenburg, Sweden* [Google Maps]. Retrived February 5th, 2026, from: <https://maps.google.com/>

Figure 9: Helsingborg stad. (2019). *Relationshandling, spanaren 1. Helsingborg stad*, bygglovsarkivet.

Figure 10: Lantmäteriet. (2025). *Map data over Gamlestaden, Gothenburg* [Map]. Retrived October 21th, 2025, from: <https://minkarta.lantmateriet.se/>

All images belong to the author if not stated otherwise.

AI USE IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the execution of this work, the author has used ChatGPT in order to improve readability, evaluate content and translate certain sections of self-written text from Swedish to English. After using this tool, the author has reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

BEYOND GENERATIONS
a social housing community

Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Healthcare & Housing Architecture