

RETHINKING CURRENT TRENDS: FUTURE OF BAZAARS



ANI TSIKORIDZE

Master's Thesis 2025

Chalmers School of Architecture

Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering

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CHALMERS

ABSTRACT

In Georgia, particularly in Tbilisi, bazaars and trading culture have historically been, and continue to be, integral to the city's social and economic life. Despite their significance, there is limited research on how these markets are currently structured and managed in relation to their physical spaces. Issues surrounding bazaars remain pressing, as both state-led initiatives and private owners have attempted redevelopment efforts. However, these processes have been largely market-driven, the historical and central bazaars of the capital are at risk of demolition, with plans to replace them with shopping malls, leading to gentrification. Although this process is temporarily paused, it highlights the urgent need for alternative approaches.

Through site visits, conversations with vendors, and an investigation into governance structures, this study examined how governance and spatial organisation impact market operations. The lack

of attention to the social and cultural dimensions of these markets motivated me to explore this issue further.

This thesis analysed existing examples of spatial organisation, governance structures, and the social qualities of bazaars. Drawing from these cases, it proposed alternative strategies for transforming the existing central bazaar. The aim was to find a middle ground that accommodates the needs of stakeholders while integrating these spaces into the broader urban context. The project further explored the bazaars' role as public spaces, their cultural relevance, and their ability to adapt to modern needs and shifting consumer behaviour. It also considered their potential as inclusive public spaces. Adopting a multiscalar approach, the thesis analyses bazaars in Tbilisi from a broader urban perspective, which informs the design strategy and culminates in a building-scale intervention.

Keywords: bazaar, public space, governance, marketplace, market

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Figure 1. Part of Navtlughi bazaar
Photo by author.

INTRODUCTION

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

While working on the concept for the revitalisation of Eliava Market, I found myself deeply engaged with the complexity and layered nature of markets. It was a compelling professional challenge, but also one that left me with more questions than answers. Though purely conceptual, the project exposed how little I understood about the social and cultural dynamics of these spaces, beyond their architectural forms.

Shortly afterwards, I came across news of vendors protesting the planned closure of the Dezserter Bazaar. It was a stark reminder that these spaces are constantly under threat, whether from redevelopment pressures, policy shifts, or even suspicious fires that spark speculation about forced displacement. These stories resurface regularly, often accompanied by sudden government decisions to evict informal traders from public spaces. There's a persistent tension between survival and erasure, and it rarely ends in the vendors' favour.

But my connection to this subject isn't purely professional or observational. As a child, the bazaar was a familiar place. My mother often took me with her, and I vividly remember the colours, the chaos, and how the stalls would shift with the arrival of each new season's produce. I was always puzzled by her loyalty to one particular spice vendor, hidden deep within the market, especially when, to my eyes, all the stalls looked exactly the same. In retrospect, those memories left a lasting impression of a space shaped not just by commerce, but by trust, habit, and quiet rituals woven into the everyday.

Although I no longer visit bazaars regularly, my interest in them has only grown, not just in their visible activity, but in the intangible cultural and spatial dynamics they embody. They are more than just marketplaces, spaces where the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the city intersect. It is this richness, coupled with their vulnerable position within the current development agenda, that drives me to explore the topic further.

DELIMITATIONS

This thesis examines the social and spatial dimensions of bazaars, with a focus on their current conditions and potential for future design interventions. A design strategy was developed in response to recurring spatial and social patterns observed in bazaars within the Tbilisi context. This strategy was then tested through application to the Central Bazaar of Tbilisi, serving as one example rather than the sole basis of the research.

The scope of the thesis is intentionally limited in the following ways:

- ▶ Street vendors operating outside of formal, spatially defined market areas are excluded from the study. The focus remains on bazaars that exist within recognised and spatially bounded settings.
- ▶ The economic value or market performance of bazaars is not within the scope of this research. While economic activity is acknowledged as a backdrop, it is not analysed in detail.
- ▶ The thesis prioritises the current spatial and social conditions of bazaars and explores their future potential, rather than providing a comprehensive historical analysis of their development over time.

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Overall aim is to find alternative solutions for future development of bazaars. However, to formulate speculative solutions, first it's important to investigate unique values and qualities of bazaars that differentiate them from supermarkets. Understanding their significance will serve as the point of departure for the thesis. Bazaar's importance could be manifold, however, this project will focus on the social aspect, particularly its contributions to communities, and role as a public space. Research questions are following:

- ▶ How can the bazaars be enhanced to better serve as a public space, and in what ways can this improvement be achieved?
- ▶ What spatial strategies can balance the needs of vendors and consumers?

RELEVANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This thesis approaches sustainability through social, economic, and spatial lenses, with a particular focus on recognising and preserving the intangible qualities of bazaars, their social dynamics and public role.

It argues that bazaars support economic resilience by offering affordable goods and creating local employment, particularly for small-scale and marginalised vendors. In this way, they serve as an informal safety net for those excluded from formal labour markets.

Through a case study of Tbilisi's Central Bazaar, the thesis further proposes adaptive reuse over demolition. By retaining the building's historic function and integrating flexible community spaces, the design honours the bazaar's original purpose while strengthening its role as a contemporary social hub.



Figure 2. Flower market
Photo by author.

METHODS

To understand the context and inform my design, I used a combination of methods across city, neighbourhood, and building scales. This thesis follows a Design Through Research approach, learning from literature, existing cases, field observations, and spatial analysis to guide design decisions.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative tools, from spatial analysis to on-site observations and informal conversations with users

Spatial Analysis

All existing bazaars in Tbilisi were identified, classified, and mapped. Their distribution was analysed in relation to urban scale and street network structure. Space Syntax analysis, specifically Angular Betweenness, (Hiller and Iida 2005), was employed to measure spatial centrality and understand its correlation with the location and prominence of bazaars within the street network.

Field Observations and conversations

Bazaars were documented through site visits, photography, and spatial sketches. Informal interviews with vendors and customers provided insight into spatial practices, daily challenges, and local governance models. These direct encounters grounded the research in lived experience and revealed socio-spatial dynamics not visible through mapping alone.

Literature Review

The literature review focused on markets as public and social spaces to understand and inform my design strategy. Special emphasis was placed on the Georgian context, drawing from both academic and grey sources to identify relevant precedents and gaps in existing research.

Typological Study

Through on-site documentation, the study analysed the internal spatial organisation of various bazaars. Movement patterns and layout structures were sketched and compared to identify recurring spatial typologies and variations.



Figure 3. Regional map

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Georgia has long had historical ties to bazaars. Positioned at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, has been a key hub for markets and trade, particularly due to its strategic location along the Silk Road. This positioning attracted traders from the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe, solidifying the city's enduring connection to bazaars.

During the economic crisis of the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, informal markets became vital for the population's survival. Later, during the 2000s Georgia underwent reforms and modernization, Tbilisi saw the growth of shopping malls and supermarkets, which began to change the face of market culture. However some markets continue to thrive as a crucial point for commerce, catering to lower-income communities and informal traders.

Today, Tbilisi's markets, both formal and informal, remain essential to the city's economy, providing access to goods, employment, and serving

diverse socio-economic groups. It is worth noting that according to Geostat (2024), the unemployment rate in Georgia is 13.7%. The share of informally employed individuals within non-agricultural employment in cities is 25.4% (2023). Significant portion of the population is dependent on the shadow economy for income. Whereas, 15.5% of the employed are engaged in trade. This further highlights the importance of informal or formal bazaars in the context of Georgia.

However, bazaars in Georgia are in decline, particularly those occupying central urban sites, such as in Tbilisi. The threat is real, driven by rising land values, private ownership of market spaces, and profit-driven redevelopment agendas. While vendors have not disappeared, many are being displaced and forced to find alternative locations for trade, contributing to the visible increase in street vending. The general trend is for traditional bazaars to be converted into shopping malls, with small vendors replaced by chain stores.



Figure 4. Dry bridge market
Photo by author.

RESEARCH

SOCIALITY IN BAZAARS

(SOCIAL/CULTURAL QUALITY, BAZAAR AS A PUBLIC SPACE)

One of the defining qualities of the bazaar is its inherently social character, the relationships it fosters between vendors, between vendors and customers, and even among customers themselves. Markets serve as spaces for everyday social interaction, whether through a brief glance, a casual conversation, or simple mutual recognition. These small, informal exchanges create what Watson (2009) refers to as "rubbing along", incidental, everyday encounters that contribute to the bazaar's identity as a truly public space. Watson (2009) highlights physical layout as a primary driver for rubbing along and lists top contributors: The informality of market trading, The openness of market space, The proximity of stalls to one another and no strict rules or barriers that prevent people from freely coming and going.

During slow hours it's common for vendors to compete in backgammon, or share meals together. Close proximity of stalls also allows vendors to look after their stalls and at the same time chat or play with neighboring vendors. Overall, it contributes to a strong sense of place, fostering a relaxed and inviting atmosphere.

INCLUSIVITY

Vendors in bazaars usually come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The majority of them are self-employed. Among the employed, the most are women, including economically vulnerable individuals, single mothers, internally

displaced persons, ethnic minorities and labor migrants (social justice center, 2024). Vendors from Dezerter bazaar emphasize that over the years they have created solidarity and support practice for one another, which is valuable for them both emotionally and economically (Social Justice Center, 2024). Watson (2009) refers to it as "inclusive sociality" - social inclusion and care for others. As Khutsishvili (2012) points out, Bazaars were the major sites for establishing harmonious contacts among representatives of diverse ethnocultural groups; even during war or conflict, they were usually peaceful gathering points. This adds another internal quality of bazaars, inclusivity which is naturally occurring derived from diverse backgrounds of vendors.

However, while the vendor base reflect a certain degree of diversity, the current user group of agricultural bazaars has become comparatively narrow. These spaces are now primarily visited by older adults and the elderly, who rely on them for affordability and out of long-established habit. Although this underscores the bazaar's role as a socially accessible space, it simultaneously reveals a gap, the broader urban population, particularly younger, are largely absent. This shift suggests the need for a more intentional reintroduction of inclusivity, one that responds to changing urban dynamics and repositions the bazaar as a space relevant to a wider demographic.



Figure 5. Borjomi bazaar
Photo by author.

INDIVIDUALITY AND SELF-EXPRESSION AS A STRATEGY FOR ATTRACTING CUSTOMERS

One very important and unique quality of bazaars that one hardly can meet in predictable and structured malls or supermarkets, is individual self-expression of vendors, which is a way to attract customers. This adds on the bazaar's multifaceted character. Even though bazaars are mainly privately owned and governed, inside bazaars there is a degree of informality, fewer regulations, that allows self-expression of vendors. Unlike chain stores, vendors in bazaars are self-employed, business owners rather than employees. This contributes to a sense of ownership and sometimes their stalls are an extension of their identity which further adds on the diverse nature of bazaars.

In my observations of vendors in Tbilisi bazaars, I have noted that many of them use their "freedom" to express personal or political identity. This self-expression goes beyond mere commerce and is often a tool to connect with specific customer groups, especially in a context of political polarisation. For example, a vendor at Gldani Bazaar openly displayed handwritten verses from beloved Georgian poets on the window of their booth, along with a bouquet of daffodils. Reflecting on sorrow, compassion, humility and life's hardship. One can tell it's a special corner, representing a personal or emotional aspect of

the vendor's identity, shared openly with others.

On the other hand, in the entrance of the Borjomi farmers market, a whiteboard on the wall behind vendors informs us about their political stance "Toward Europe". This could be to attract customers, connect or even spark discussion.

This resonates with Watson's (2009) research which reveals the market's significance as social space across four dimensions, and one of them is theatricality/performance, which includes playful speech acts from vendors to attract customers. However, in case of Gldani and Borjomi bazaars, marketplace performance is not limited to speech but extends into the curation of space and visual messaging, and more importantly is a way of self-expression.

Theory and examples from Tbilisi bazaars demonstrate how these places go beyond commerce, and invite customers to connect, communicate and primarily to sell their products. These strategies influence customer engagement. To maintain quality it's important to identify what allows it primarily diversity of vendors and level of informality, that leaves space for creativity.

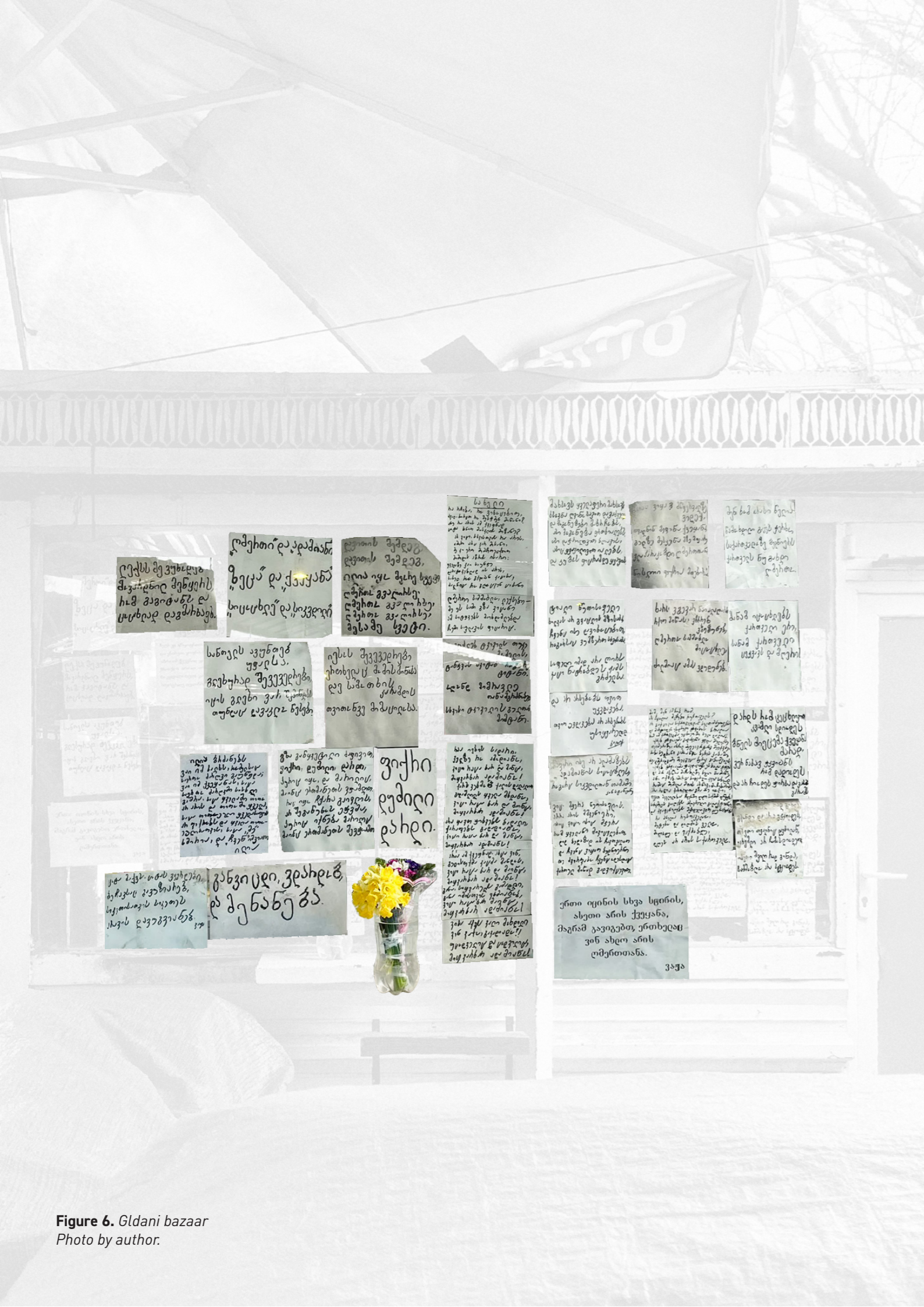


Figure 6. Gldani bazaar
Photo by author.

*“If sorrow, like fire, sends its smoke,
the world will sink into eternal night.
You won’t find a wise man who walks,
without mourning life’s trials and plight.”*

Galaktion Tabidze

*“Who has ever paid their debt?
Whom should I call noble, grand?
Sinless, sinful—all the same,
Still, I love you, humankind.”*

Galaktion Tabidze

*“I call a poem a raging landslide
it will sweep you away and bury you alive”*

Titsian Tabidze

*“I have little, yet I am content with what I have,
I will share with those in need,
And for kindness, I’ll return kindness,
Never will I delay it for another.”*

Vazha

*“A candle I light for the Lord,
a peasant’s prayer upon my lips.
He knows my heart, He knows my soul—
will pardon me for broken rites.”*

Vazha



Figure 7. Adjacent to dezerter bazaar
Photo by author

GOVERNANCE OF BAZAARS

HOW OWNERSHIP STRUCTURES SHAPE DECISION-MAKING

Before the Rose Revolution (2003), petty trade in Georgia was largely informal and untaxed. However, a major shift occurred in 2006, when vending without a permit from City Hall was officially outlawed. This policy change led to the widespread privatisation of markets, altering the way they were owned and governed (Rekhviashvili, 2015).

Today, 96% of markets in Georgia are privately owned (National Statistics Office of Georgia [Geostat], 2024). Most operate under limited liability companies (LLCs) or individual entrepreneurs, including major markets such as Dezerter Bazaar, Gldani Market, and Navtlughi. As a result, vendors in these markets are subject to the decisions of private owners, with little control over their working conditions or future. Dezerter Bazaar, the city's historic central market, is

currently subject to demolition. The owners plan to replace the existing structures with regional malls, having already secured permits from City Hall.

In contrast, Eliava Market has a fragmented ownership structure, with multiple private owners controlling plots ranging from 50 to 13,000 square metres. This decentralised governance system means that authorities must negotiate with various stakeholders before initiating redevelopment, allowing vendors to retain some influence.

While decentralised ownership hinders rapid transformation, it also protects existing stakeholders, which is particularly relevant in Georgia's rapidly urbanising context.



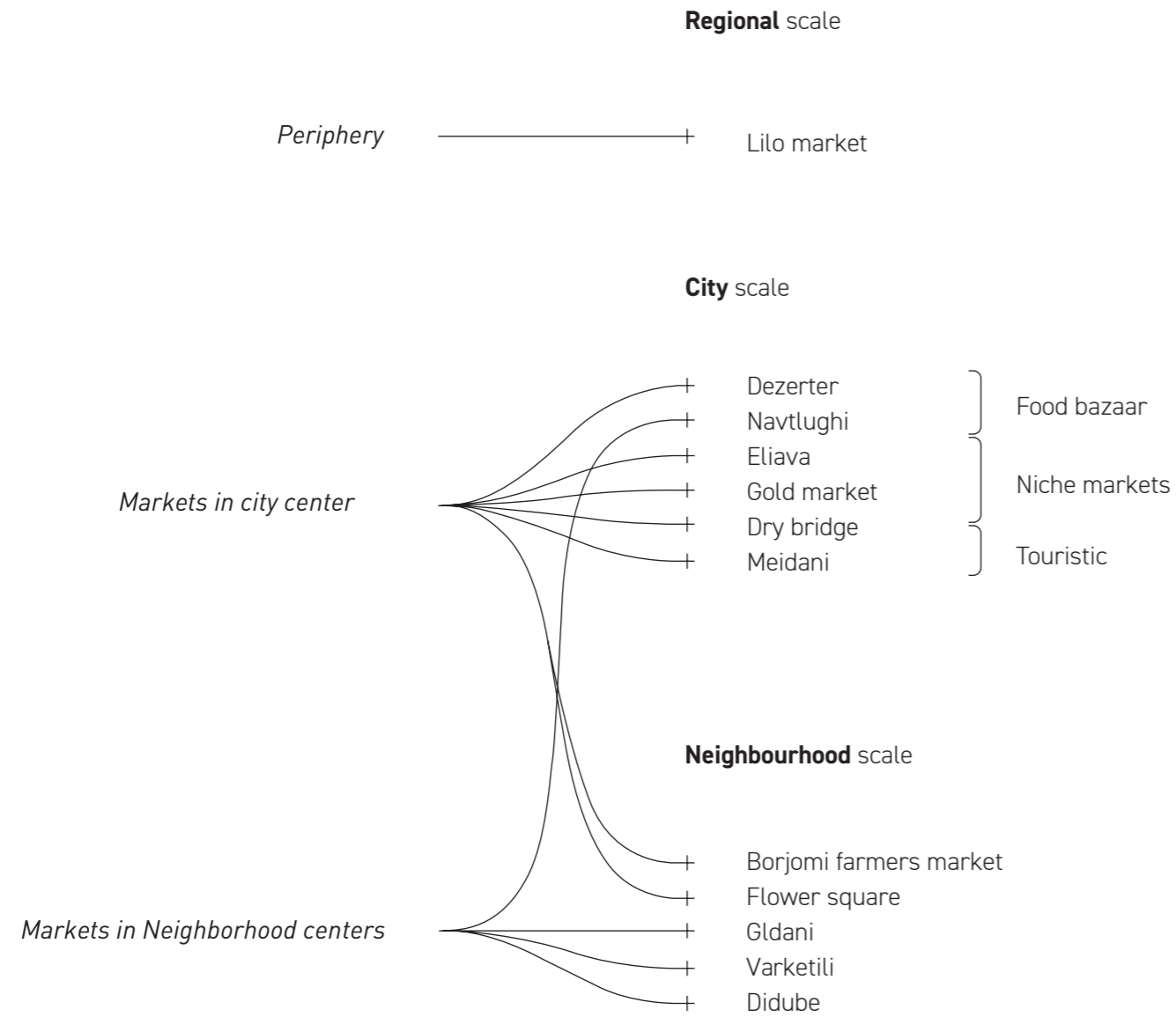
Figure 8. Gldani bazaar - Farmers market
Photo by author.

GENERAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF BAZAARS

Across different market types, governance structures follow a similar pattern. Market owners hire an administration primarily responsible for collecting rent from vendors. This system applies regardless of the market's physical form, whether it is a permanent building, semi-sheltered bazaars or open-air marketplaces without infrastructure (Borjomi's farmer's market). In all cases, vendors pay a daily or monthly fee. However, maintenance is often neglected, suggesting that upkeep costs remain minimal.

BAZAARS WITHOUT FEES: GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED CASES

Some markets operate without vendor fees, with the state even providing infrastructure. This occurs primarily in public parks. For example, as part of neighbourhood rehabilitation, the government built flower pavilions in the existing flower market, in the Orbeliani square. Vendors secured spaces in the new pavilion rent-free for ten years. Another case followed rehabilitation of Dedaena park. Infrastructure was developed for the adjacent Dry Bridge Market, an open-air market selling antiques, collectibles, artworks, and books.



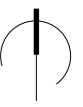
CLASSIFYING BAZAARS: SCALE, LOCATION, AND URBAN INTEGRATION IN TBILISI

To understand the character of bazaars in Tbilisi, I began by analysing them through classification. I categorised the bazaars based on their scale and location. Classification by scale refers to the geographical reach each market serves whether they attract customers from across the city, from a local neighbourhood, or even from different regions. Based on this, I identified three scale categories: regional, city, and neighbourhood.

By examining the locations of these bazaars in relation to their scale, certain patterns emerged. City-scale bazaars are typically located in the city centre, while neighbourhood bazaars tend to be situated in local neighbourhood hubs. Regional-scale markets, on the other hand, are often

found on the outskirts.

However, while these trends generally hold, there are notable exceptions. For instance, the positioning of Navtlughi, a city-scale bazaar, appears to be influenced more by its strategic connectivity to the eastern regions of the country than by its centrality within Tbilisi. As a result, it is located in a neighbourhood centre rather than in the city centre. This location facilitates more efficient distribution for farmers and suppliers. It highlights that, in some cases, the location of a bazaar is shaped less by its position within the urban fabric and more by its integration into broader regional networks.



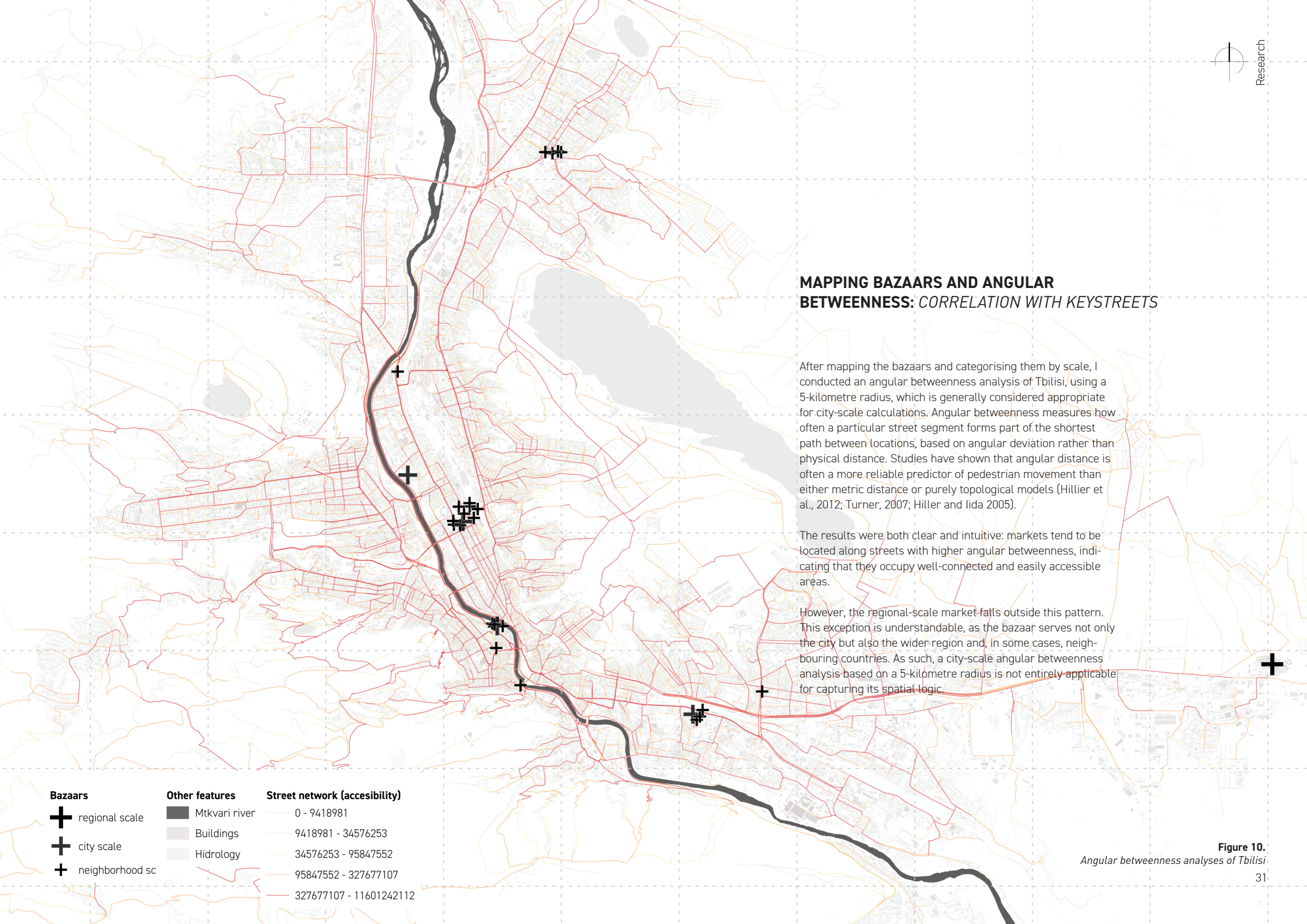
- Bazaars**
- ⊕ city scale
 - ⊕ neighborhood scale

- Zones**
- Residential zone
 - Mixed-use zone

- Other features**
- Mtkvari river
 - Buildings

0 1km

Figure 9. Bazaars in Tbilisi



MAPPING BAZAARS AND ANGULAR BETWEENNESS: CORRELATION WITH KEYSTREETS

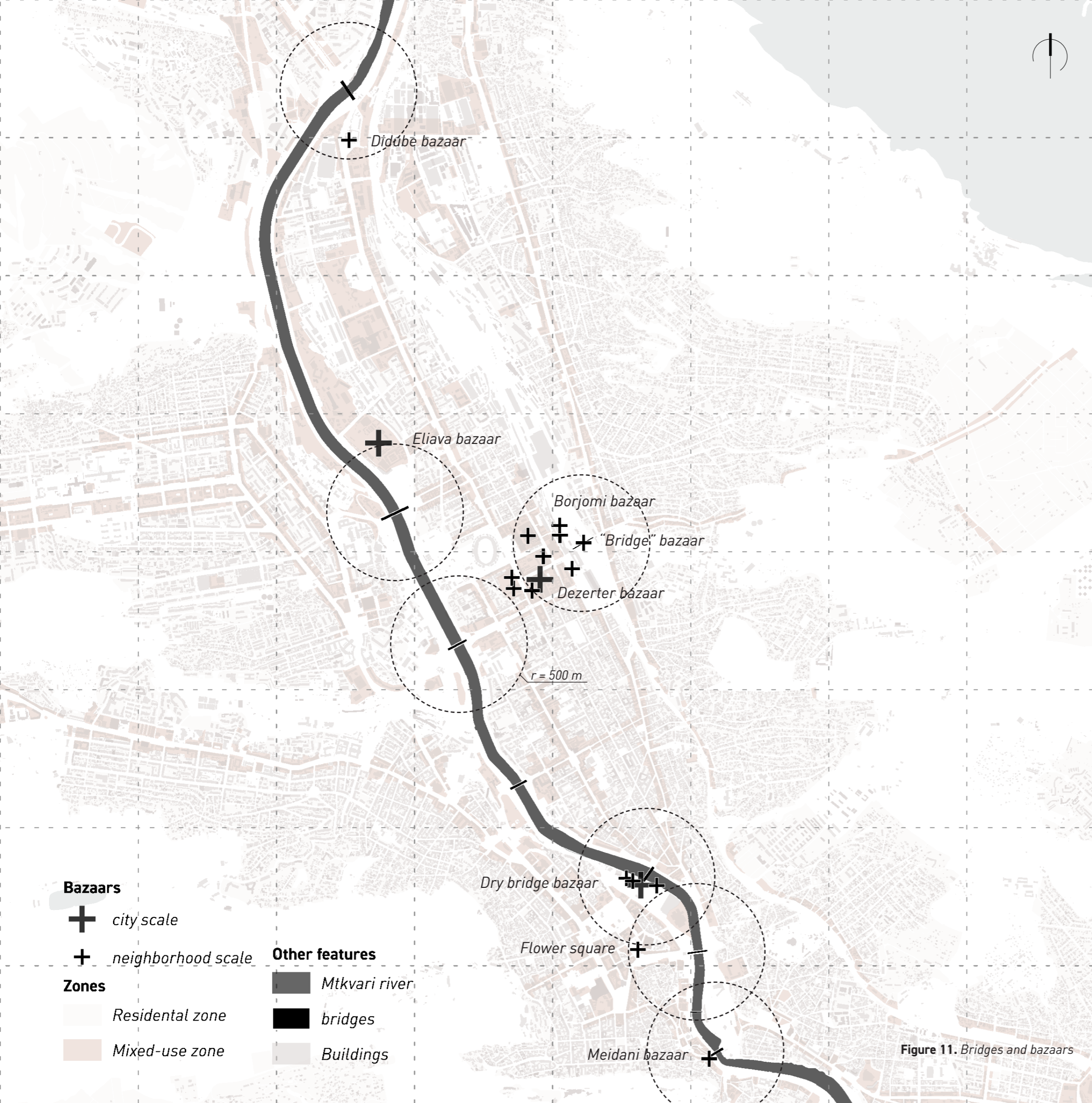
After mapping the bazaars and categorising them by scale, I conducted an angular betweenness analysis of Tbilisi, using a 5-kilometre radius, which is generally considered appropriate for city-scale calculations. Angular betweenness measures how often a particular street segment forms part of the shortest path between locations, based on angular deviation rather than physical distance. Studies have shown that angular distance is often a more reliable predictor of pedestrian movement than either metric distance or purely topological models (Hillier et al., 2012; Turner, 2007; Hillier and Iida 2005).

The results were both clear and intuitive: markets tend to be located along streets with higher angular betweenness, indicating that they occupy well-connected and easily accessible areas.

However, the regional-scale market falls outside this pattern. This exception is understandable, as the bazaar serves not only the city but also the wider region and, in some cases, neighbouring countries. As such, a city-scale angular betweenness analysis based on a 5-kilometre radius is not entirely applicable for capturing its spatial logic.

- | Bazaars | Other features | Street network (accessibility) |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + regional scale + city scale + neighborhood sc | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mtkvari river Buildings Hidrology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 - 9418981 9418981 - 34576253 34576253 - 95847552 95847552 - 327677107 327677107 - 11601242112 |

Figure 10.
Angular betweenness analyses of Tbilisi



CLUSTERING EFFECT

One notable pattern that emerges from mapping the bazaars is the clustering effect. Bazaars often tend to cluster together, and this grouping typically follows functional themes. For instance, a food bazaar may be situated near clothing markets, vintage shops, or flower stalls. This creates dynamic areas with a diverse range of offerings.

These clusters or bazaar often lead to spillover effects, impacting the surrounding area. For example, they can encourage the emergence of new businesses, cafés, or informal spaces nearby.

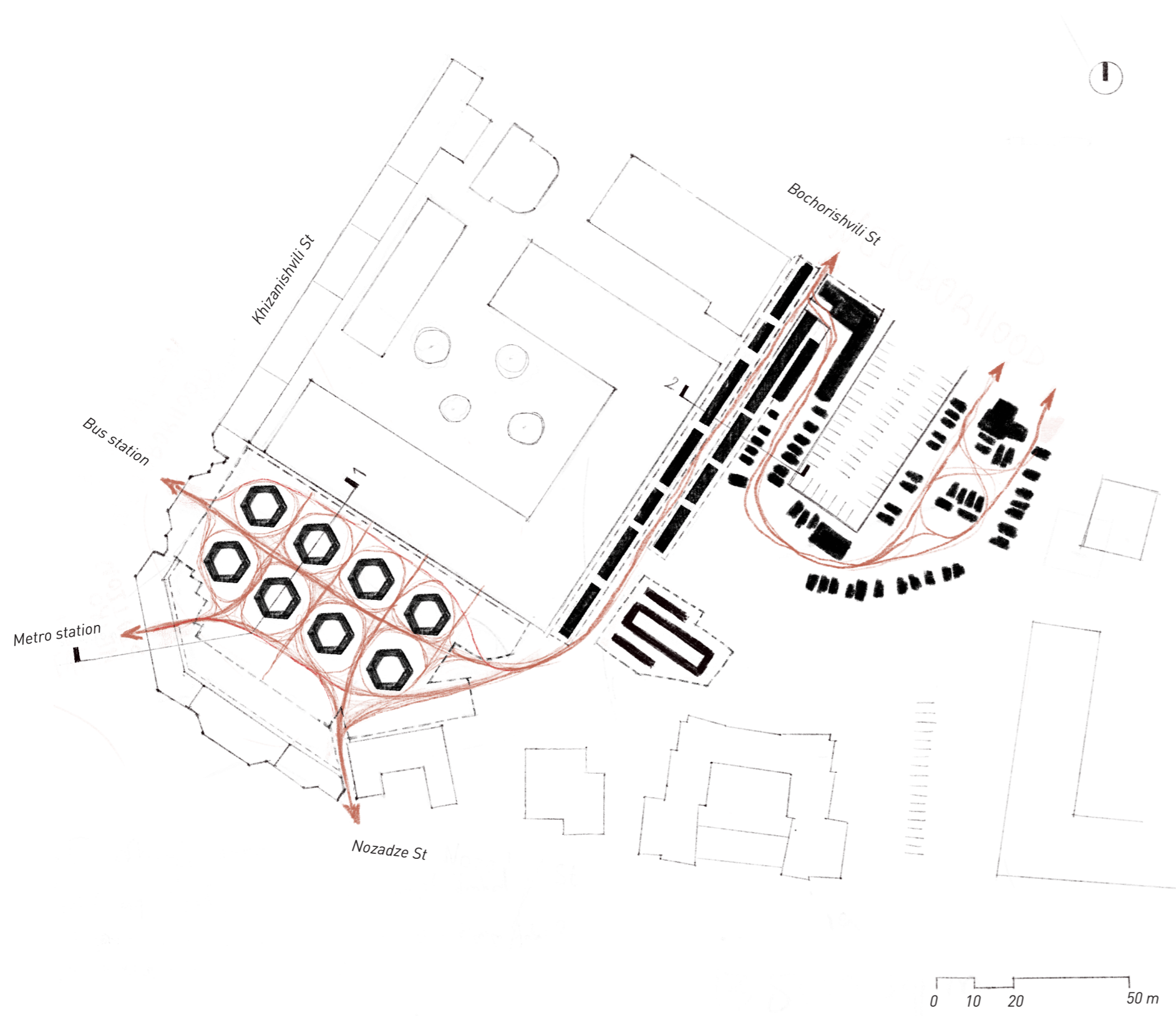
As vibrant public spaces, bazaars also trigger a multiplier effect: their presence attracts more people, increasing foot traffic, which in turn fuels further activity. Initially, high-footfall central locations may have been the key drivers for the establishment of bazaars. However, now the function of the bazaar itself becomes the magnet, drawing even more visitors and reinforcing its significance within the urban environment.

CORRELATION BETWEEN BRIDGES AND BAZAARS

Another interesting pattern observed is the correlation between bazaars and their proximity to bridges, particularly in the city centre. Many bazaars are located near or even directly on bridges, which is understandable, given that Tbilisi is divided by the river into left and right banks. Bridges serve as critical connection points, facilitating movement between these areas and creating zones with high foot traffic.

From a spatial analysis perspective, this correlation underscores how urban infrastructure shapes the placement of markets. Bazaars are strategically positioned in locations with high accessibility, benefiting from the constant flow of people across the city.

Figure 11. Bridges and bazaars



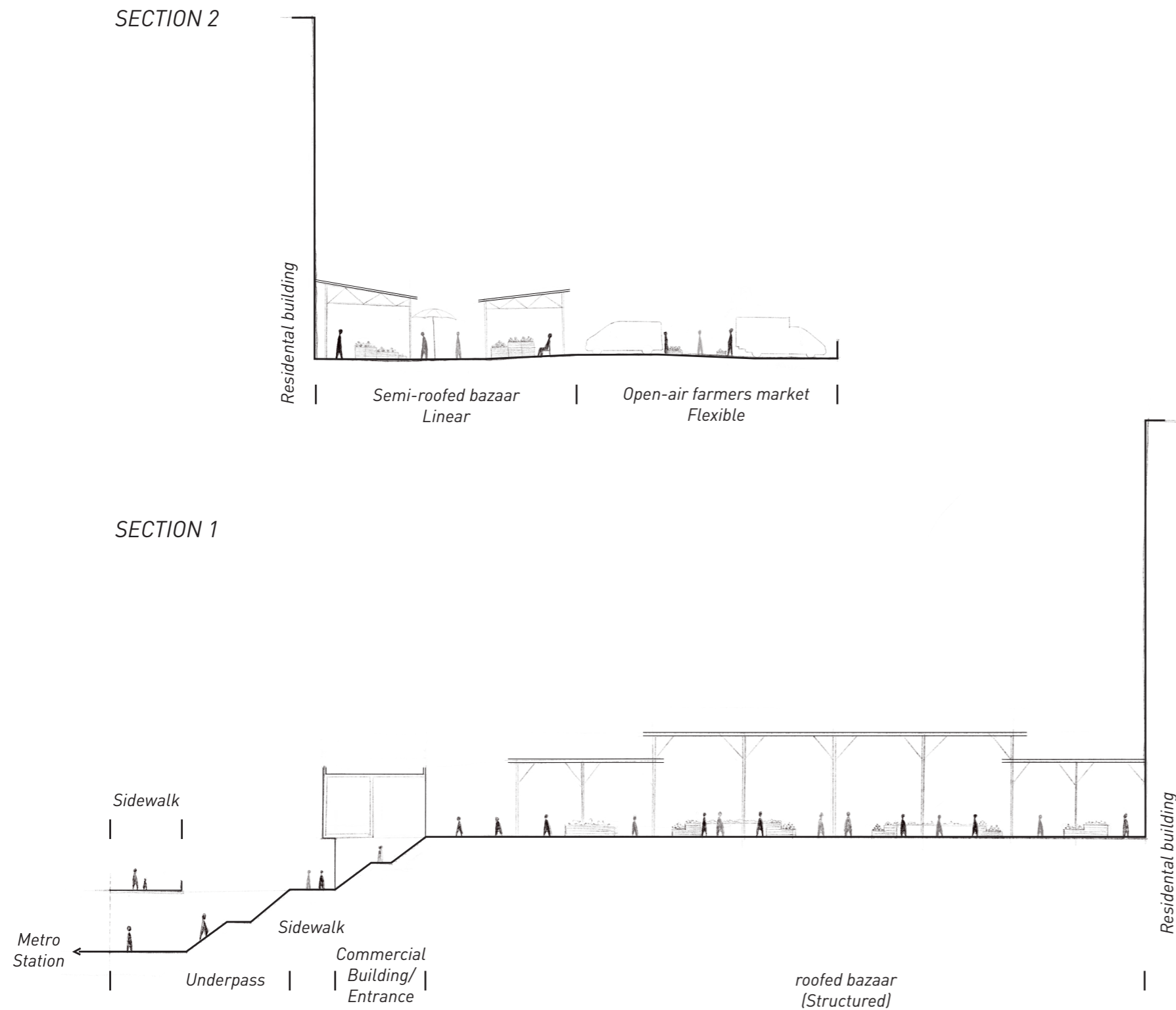
FIELD WORK AND OBSERVATIONS
CASE OF GLDANI BAZAAR

To analyse spatial organisation, I visited and sketched four bazaars at both the city and neighbourhood scale. As a case study, I focused on Gldani Bazaar, a neighbourhood-scale food market located in the heart of the neighbourhood and part of a larger cluster. This market offers a clear example of various layout types, which are also found in other bazaars. In this case, three distinct types of market clusters can be identified: grid, linear and irregular grid.

CONTEXT

While Gldani was built as a micro rayon, a sleeping district during the Soviet Union, now it is one of the highly populated, self-sufficient entity. The centre of the district is around the metro station, which is also the most accessible area. The main bazaar of the area is in the centre and can be approached directly from the metro station. It is referred to as a neighbourhood-scale market, as it is mainly used by residents of the neighbourhood.

Figure 12. *Gldani bazaar plan*
 34



GOVERNANCE

The market is privately owned, and vendors/farmers pay rent daily, either for a stall or for space/right to sell their goods in the bazaar. Rent is negotiated based on the length of the occupied space.

SPATIAL ORGANISATION

The perimeter of Gldani Bazaar is defined by commercial buildings, which help enclose the area. The Bazaar consists of three different types of commercial spaces. The first one is permanent, fully sheltered market with grid-type spatial organisation. The second space is linear, street-like, with two rows of stalls on each side and is semi-sheltered. And the third one is a farmers market, a large open space, dedicated to farmers and is open for three days a week, from Friday to Sunday. This progression from structured, covered spaces to more informal, open spaces reflects the different market functions and how they cater to various types of vendors and customers.

Figure 13. Gldani bazaar sections

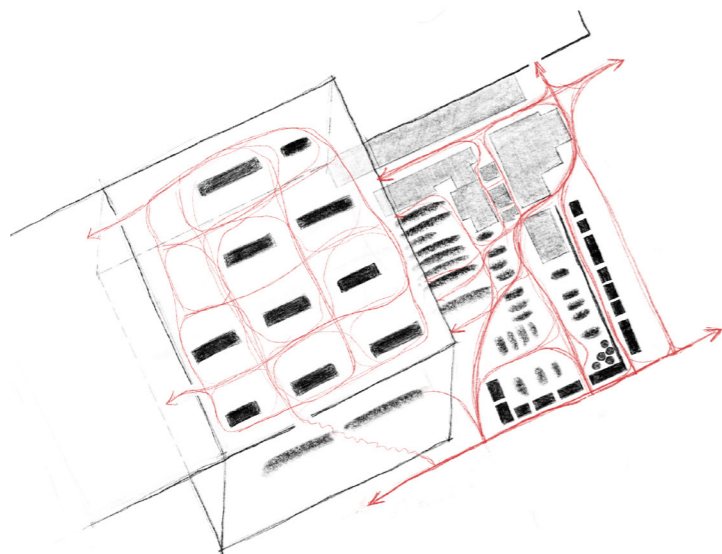


Figure 14. Dezerter bazaar

DEZERTER BAZAAR

CONTEXT

Dezerter Market is the city's central bazaar and functions as a city-scale market, attracting customers from across Tbilisi. It offers a diverse range of goods, including products from different regions of Georgia as well as neighbouring countries. The surrounding district is densely packed with retail activity, with commerce extending beyond the main market building. Vendors can be found in the parking areas, on sidewalks, and even on the opposite side of the street.

The market itself accommodates wholesale and retail trade, featuring both local and international goods. Its spatial layout includes dedicated parking for trailers, open spaces for produce trucks, and manually assembled stalls, creating a dynamic and flexible trading environment.

On the ground floor, stalls line the perimeter of the sidewalk, allowing vendors to benefit from foot traffic. This set-up also enables passers-by, who may not intend to enter the bazaar, to conveniently pick up some fruit, vegetables, or other goods on the go.

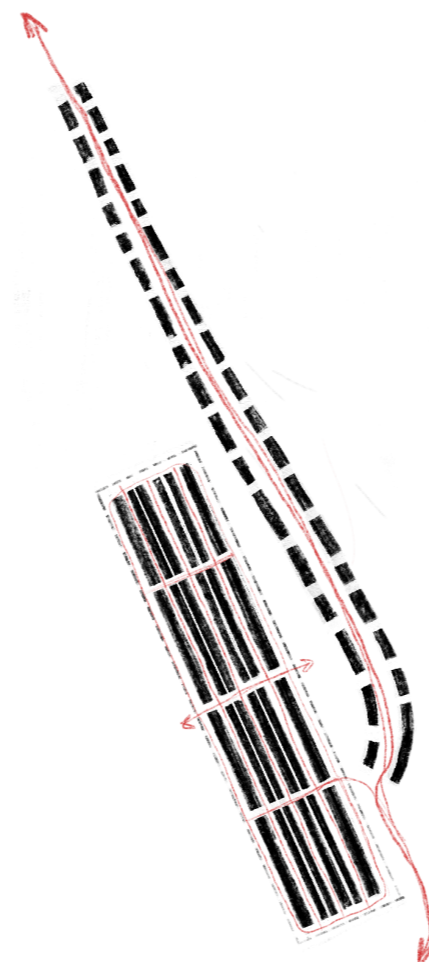


Figure 15. Borjomi bazar

BORJOMI FARMERS BAZAAR

CONTEXT AND GOVERNANCE

Borjomi Farmer Market is located near Station Square, in the same district as the dezerter (central) bazaar. Even though the district is central and easily accessible, the placement of this market is quite remote. From one side it has a railway, which acts like a dead end, and from the opposite side, it is bordered by the backside of the buildings. It's an exclusively farmers market and operates from Friday to Sunday.

The plot has a private owner, and the fee collector collects fees daily from the vendors. In this particular case, without providing any infrastructure. Rent is based on the length of the occupied space.

Market is linear, with two long continuous sets of stalls on both sides. Next to it is located grid-like mixed market of food and clothes.

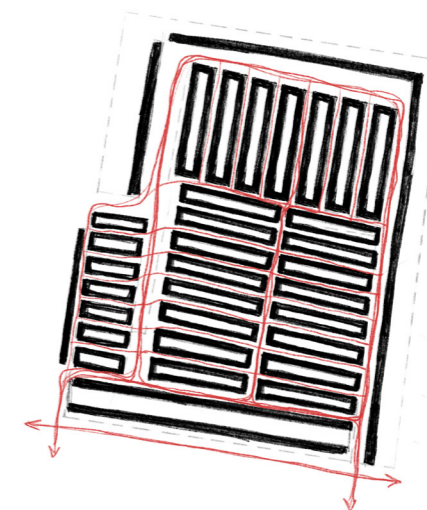


Figure 16. Navtlughi bazaar

NAVTLUGHI BAZAAR

CONTEXT

Navtlughi Market is located in the Samgori district, the most populous area of the city. It sits along a major transit road of international significance, connecting Tbilisi to the eastern Kakheti region and extending to the Azerbaijani border. The market benefits from its proximity to key transportation hubs, including a metro station, railway station, and bus terminal.

The market's spatial organisation follows a grid-like layout, but, as in other bazaars, commercial activity extends beyond the main market. Nearby, smaller retail spots are arranged in a more linear pattern, adapting to the surrounding urban fabric.

DESIGN STRATEGY

WHAT?

TO PROMOTE RUBBING ALONG AND TO BOOST SOCIALITY

ENHANCE INCLUSIVITY

FOSTER A SENSE OF SECURITY AND OWNERSHIP

LEGIBILITY

WHY?

rubbing along is sparked by high copresence that happens in bazaars. It is coexistence/comingling of many different individuals that supports easy sociality: a glance, mutual recognition, conversation, casual encounters. Enhances public/social aspect of bazaars and stimulates trade (primary function)

- diversity invites inclusive sociality
 - diversity in terms of typology/zoning invites
 - diverse customers leaves space for self-expression
 To take advantage of location and ensure dynamic atmosphere where regardless of social background or age, everyone can find engaging activity.

because of a short term or no contracts there is a lack of job security, consequently lack of sense of ownership and care (of space)

To make navigation through space more intuitive and easy. This is particularly helpful for elderly, that need legible environments to navigate safely, but also women with small kids, that need to have a good overview of the space.

- stimulates trade
 - to extend staying via socializing in markets

HOW?

LOCATION

- location that has high connectivity
- Are located in the city/neighborhood center
- Have good connection/close proximity to metro/bus/railway station
- High visibility

SPATIAL LAYOUT

- The openness of market space
- The proximity of stalls to one other
- Possibility to enter and leave market freely (without barriers)

FUNCTIONS

- Propose place for eat and drink
- Proposing sitting areas
- propose variety of stalls/attractive-looking or unusual items

- different scale/length of stalls/booth
- diverse zoning/products
- leave space for informality - design from structured to unstructured spaces, allowing room for informal activities and spontaneous interactions
- offering services or activities tailored to the different times of the day and the preferences of diverse socio-economic groups.
- utilize bazaar as a recreational space outside of working hours

Through governance model that provides contracts for vendors, with fixed prices. Long term placement of vendors also helps creating long-term ties to the neighborhood and the local community.

- clear zones
- clear paths to orientate
- clear and several possibilities to enter
- Good visibility of overall space
- Hierarchy of paths/circulation pause without blocking pathways

DESIGN PROPOSAL

SITE MOTIVATION

My motivation to work with the Dezerteer Bazaar site stems from several key factors. Foremost, the building is currently under threat of demolition, with approved plans in place to replace it with a shopping mall. Although the process is presently on hold, the proposal leads towards gentrification and the loss of the bazaar's historically embedded function. This scenario motivated me to take an action by exploring and proposing an alternative future for the site, one that preserves its social and cultural role while addressing its spatial potential to be an economically viable and popular market.

Currently, the building and its surrounding area are underutilised but highly adaptable. Its open

layout offers inherent flexibility, presenting an opportunity for minimal yet impactful interventions. These could extend the building's lifespan and functionality without imposing significant environmental or social disruption. Additionally, architectural features such as the existing roof structure and the interplay of natural light are underexploited elements that could be enhanced.

Ultimately, my goal is to propose an alternative scenario for the site, one that resists the homogeneous shopping mall redevelopment narrative, and instead reimagines the site based on the design strategy outlined in this thesis.

APPTOACH TO INTERVENTION

Since I chose to work with an existing building by adapting it to various contemporary needs, I approached it through the metaphor of "breccia," as conceptualised by Bartolini (2014). The analogy of brecciation suggests that a transformation project does not necessarily reveal a chronological sequence of elements. Instead, it is perceived as a unified entity (Plevoets and Van Cleempoel, 2019).

In line with this, I adopted *aemulatio* as a strategy for adaptive reuse. Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2019) describe this approach as taking what is existing, hidden or lost and giving it renewed presence through reinterpretation. My intention is not to emphasise a distinction between the host building and the intervention. Rather, the goal is to identify and highlight the latent qualities of the building, while introducing

new ones that enhance its ability to serve its primary function and accommodate new uses. The building itself is relatively new, constructed in 2013, and replaced an old Soviet-era structure. While it is not a historic building in its own right, the function and historical significance of the site remain important. Therefore, my aim is not to create a bold contrast or showcase layers between the new and the relatively new, but rather to reinforce continuity, both visually and functionally.

The existing structure is highly fragmented; circulation is unintuitive, and access to different levels or market zones lacks clarity. A major focus of the intervention is thus to improve spatial legibility and continuity across the site.



Figure 17.
Dezerter Bazaar in Tbilisi.
Source: *Tbilisi Local Guide*, (n.d.)

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Dezerter Bazaar began as an informal space for commerce. The etymology of its name stems from the 1920s, when soldiers who had deserted the war sold their own equipment there. Over time, it evolved into the largest agrarian bazaars in the city, though the name remained unchanged.

The first building on the site was constructed in the 1960s, during the Soviet era in Georgia. In 2007, under President Saakashvili's administration, Dezerter Bazaar was closed and demolished, alongside other traditional markets, as part of the government's campaign against what were labelled "old-fashioned bazaars" (Khutishvili, 2009). This move reflected the neoliberal and ostensibly pro-Western political agenda of

the time, prioritising modernisation narratives over ongoing needs of locals .

The demolition sparked public protests, and in the aftermath, street vendors occupied the surrounding area. Eventually, in 2012, a new structure was erected on the site, one that still stands today. The official reasoning behind the decision to rebuild after six years of vacancy was never clearly articulated, but it can reasonably be attributed to persistent public demand. Currently, the existing building remains in use, although it is poorly maintained. The cycle appears to be repeating, but if a new shopping mall is constructed on the site, the transformation may become irreversible.



~1920 **Figure 18.**
Dezserter Bazaar.
Source: *National Library of Georgia (n.d.).*



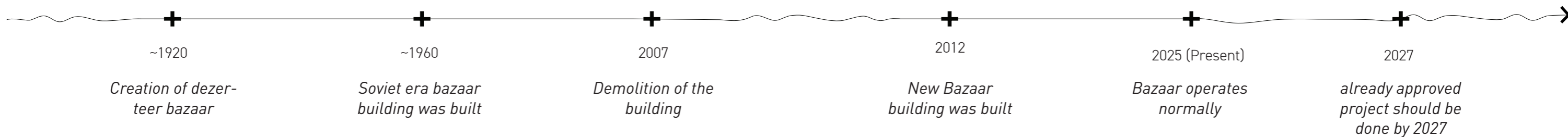
~1960 **Figure 19.**
Dezserter Bazaar
Source: *Unknown (n.d.), Madloba.*



2027 **Figure 21.**
Proposed redevelopment of Dezserter Bazaar.
Source: *bm.ge (2024).*



2025 **Figure 20.**
Dezserter Bazaar currently.
Photo by author.





CONTEXT AND SITE

Dezerter Bazaar occupies a central location in the Station Square district, making it easily accessible by train, metro, and bus. The building itself is situated at the corner of interconnected streets. This district is not only highly accessible but also commercially vibrant, with a diverse range of retail options, from shopping malls and clothing bazaars to large vintage underground markets. Street vendors and agrarian markets further contribute to the area's lively commercial activity.

Within a 500-metre radius of Dezerter Bazaar, there are five other locations where similar market activity takes place, creating trade clusters. Two of these are directly adjacent to Dezerter Bazaar. Given this proximity, the way in which the bazaar connects with these surrounding markets is crucial for fostering synergy and mutual economic benefit.

Figure 22.
Context of dezerter bazaar

CONTEXTUAL SITE PLAN



Figure 23. Site plan



— Pedestrian flow
 [Red outline] Site border
 [Black outline] Adjacent bazaars borders
 * Borders are illustrative and do not represent exact boundaries

DESIGN INTERVENTION

The existing building comprises a covered bazaar, an open-air market, offices and parking areas located both at the front and back of the building. The ground floor also accommodates freight truck parking.

In the proposed design, the covered bazaar is retained, while the back section of the building is transformed into a farmers' market, operational on weekends. During weekdays, this area, with added greenery and seating, is intended to function as a pocket park, offering a quiet communal space for the neighbourhood.

A key intervention in the proposal is the introduction of a new public square at the front of the building. The square will function as an open-air market, additionally featuring active facades on two sides. It will host a variety of retail units and provide a

vibrant public space with seating areas, catering to the local community, visitors to the bazaar, and casual passers-by.

An additional intermediate floor has been introduced between the ground level (0.00) and the first floor (+7.00). This level incorporates a semi-open food court alongside service functions such as parking and storage areas.

By introducing complementary uses, such as a food court, shops, and rest areas the intervention aims to diversify the user base and encourage longer stays. These additions facilitate interactions and reinforce the bazaar's role as a vibrant public space.

Lastly, a ramp has been integrated into the design, connecting all the aforementioned public spaces and ensuring seamless accessibility across the site.

ELEVATION

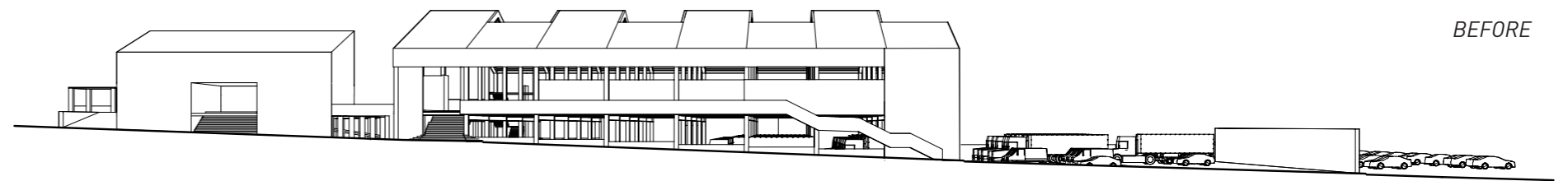
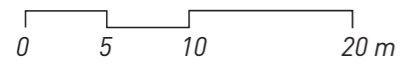
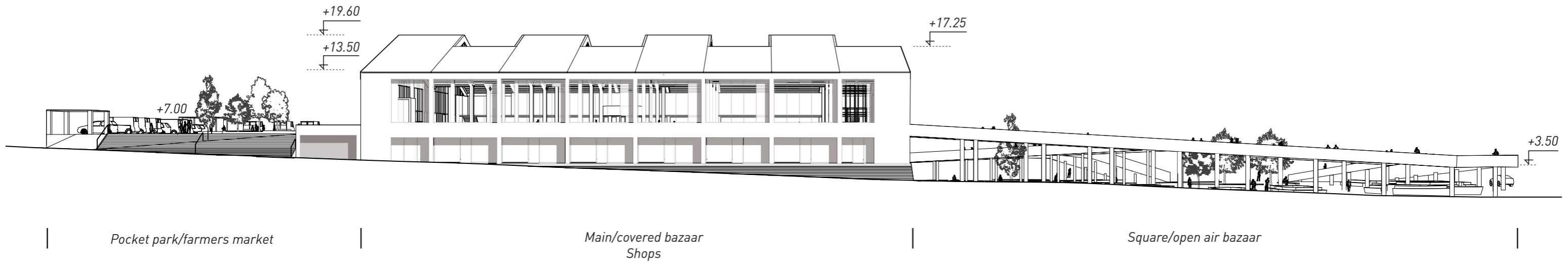


Figure 24. Elevation

BIRD-EYE VIEW

Design proposal

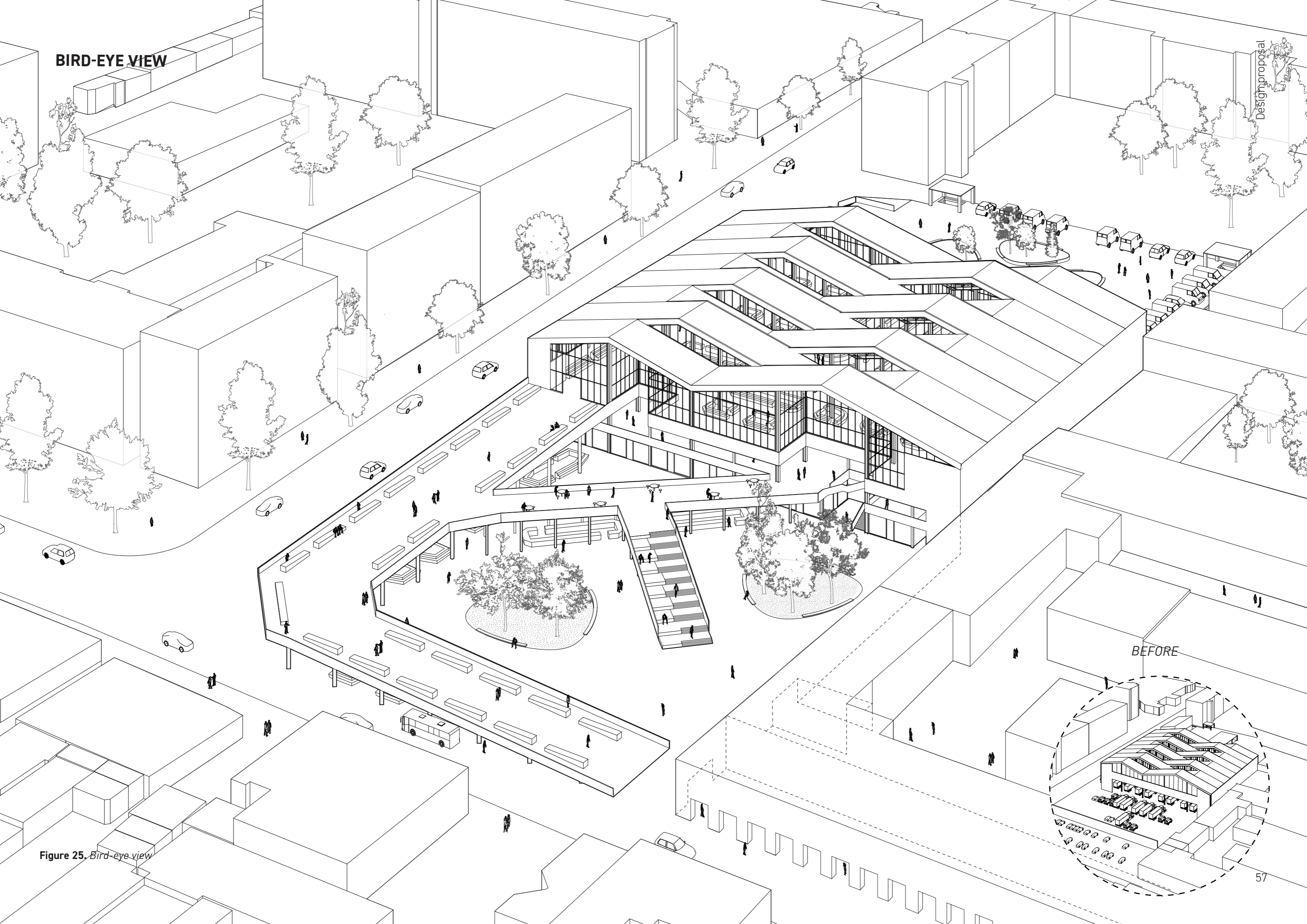


Figure 25. Bird-eye view

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Design proposal

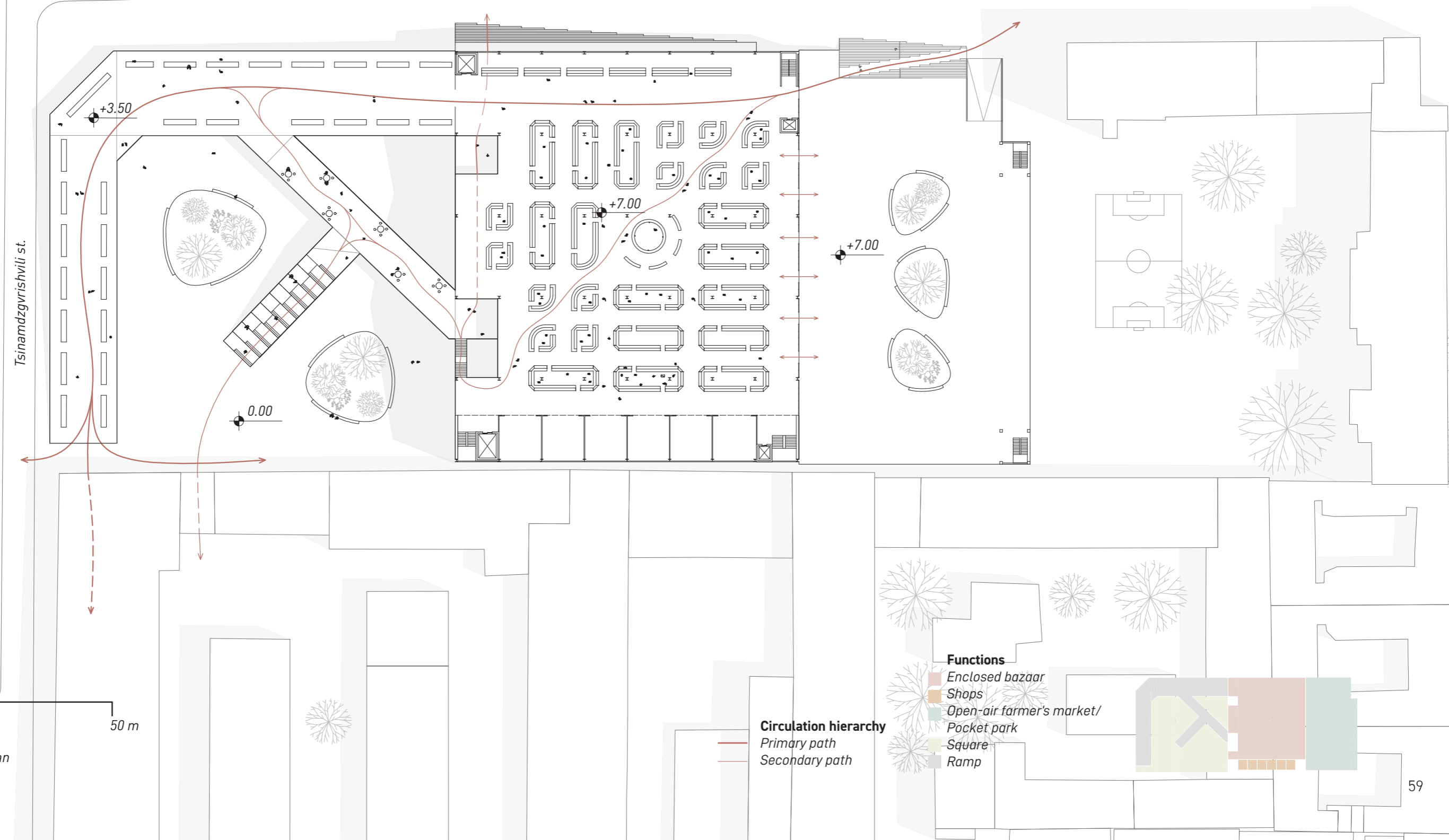


Figure 26. Second floor plan

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

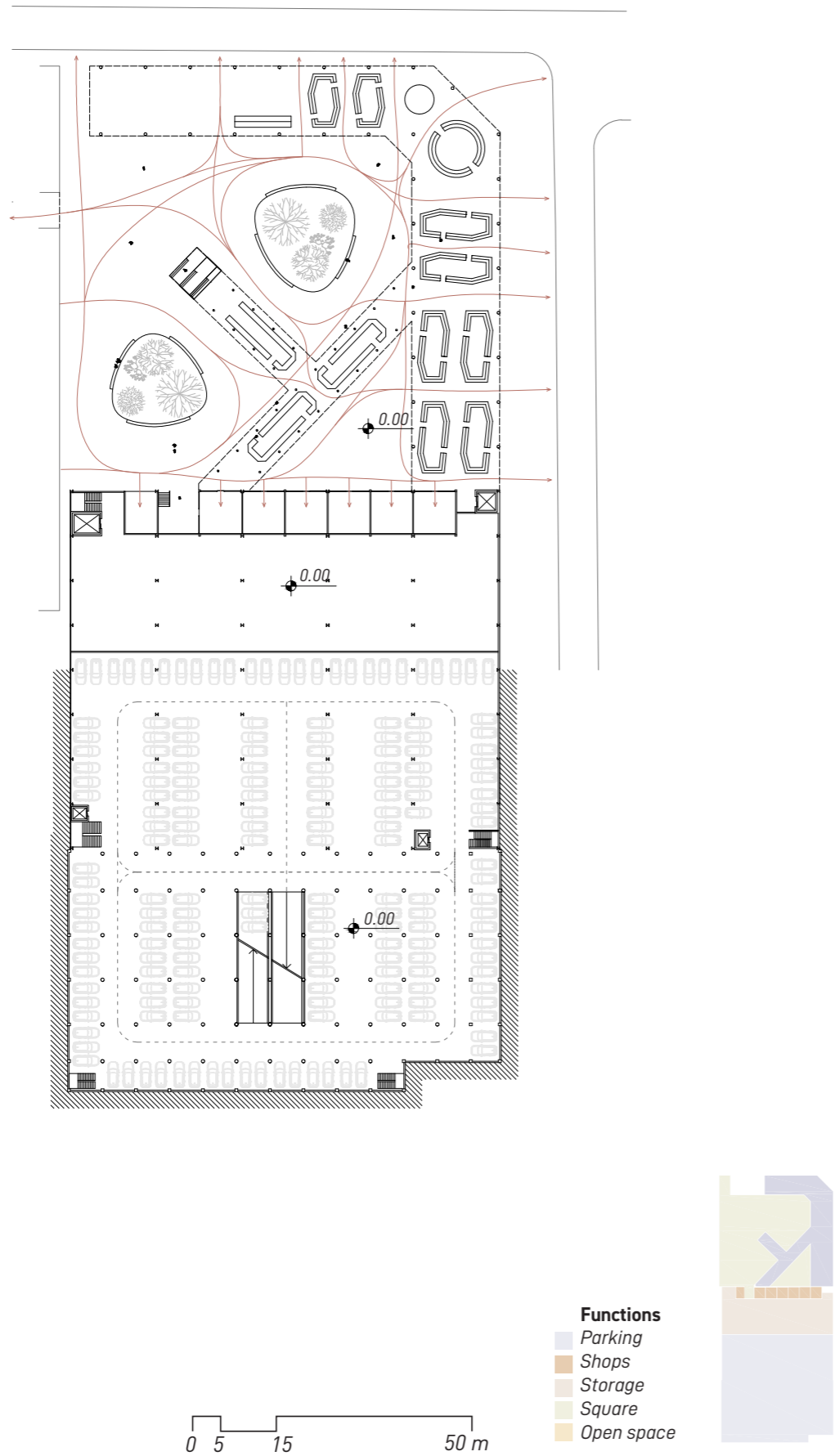


Figure 27. ground floor plan

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

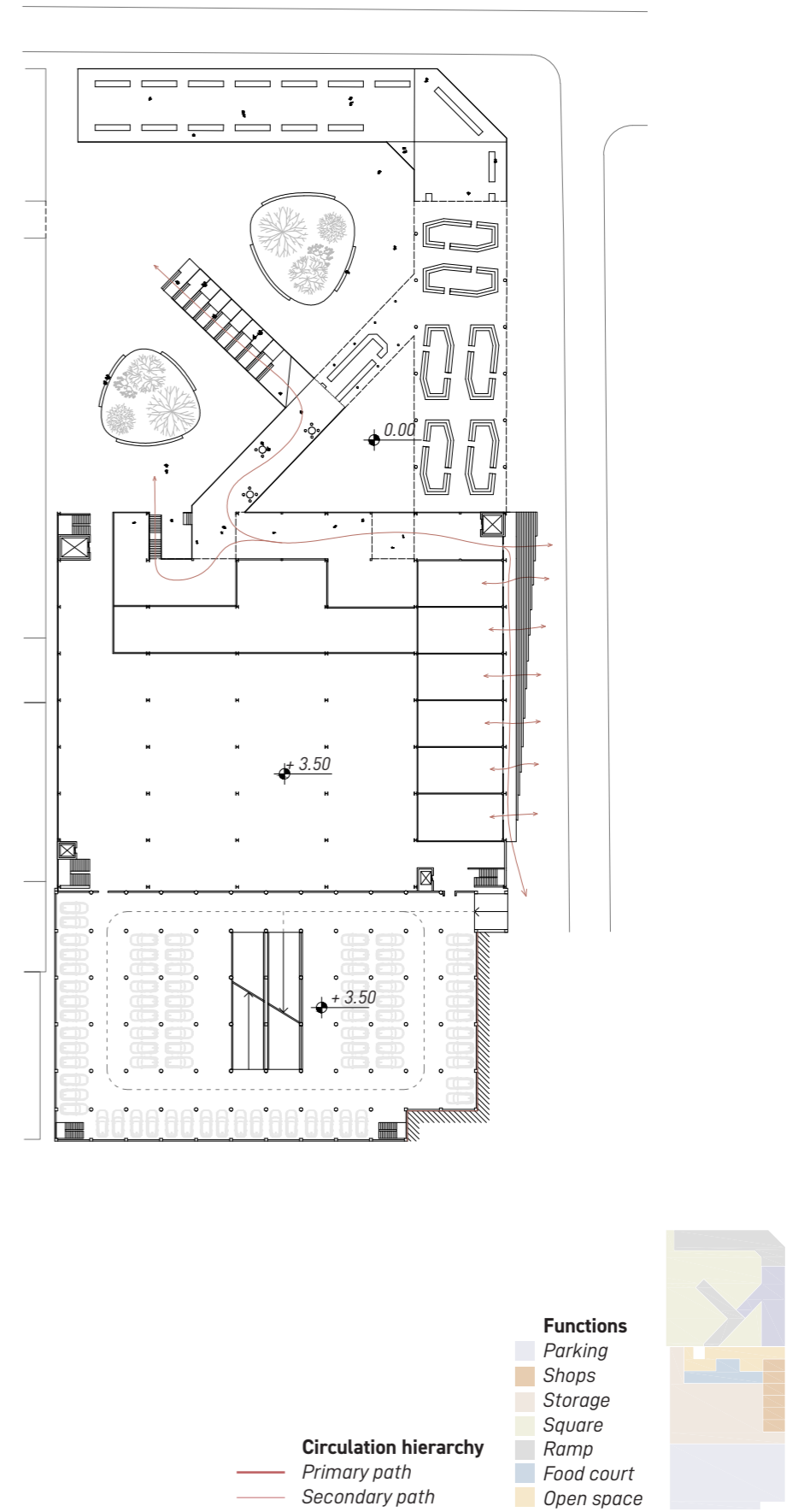


Figure 28. First floor plan

RAMPS / LEGIBILITY

To enhance the legibility and intuitive navigation of the existing building, I introduced a ramp that establishes a seamless connection between four key public spaces: the pocket park/farmers' market (operational on weekends), the enclosed permanent bazaar, square/open-air bazaar, and the food court.

The ramp serves multiple functions beyond circulation, it forms a shelter for the ground-floor open-air bazaar, while its upper surface hosts further stalls and resting areas, activating the ramp as a functional extension of the marketplace.

For greater spatial legibility, I proposed a hierarchy of movement paths. In the main bazaar hall the primary route is straightforward, leading directly to exterior areas, while secondary routes create diagonal connections. These diagonals weave through the stalls and connect to the food court level via stairs.

Additionally, the ramp integrates with the existing bus stop on Tsinamdzgvishvili Street, further enhancing connectivity.

CLEARING THE PARKING AREA

Previously, the ground floor of the building was used as a parking area for freight trucks, specifically large vehicles transporting goods from neighbouring countries such as Turkey. In line with contemporary urban planning principles aimed at removing heavy vehicle traffic from city centres, this function has been removed. The change reduces congestion and pollution while contributing to the broader shift towards a more human-centred urban environment.

The freed-up space has now been reallocated to activate the building's facades, facing both the square and the street. The adjacent bazaar facade has also been enlivened, as the square in front has been pedestrianised and equipped with shaded areas and seating. This intervention enhances the vibrancy and diversity of both retail and recreational activity in the area.

Furthermore, the removal of the truck parking and the generous 7-metre ground floor height enabled the insertion of an additional level. As a result, the building is now accessible from Abastumani Street, activating the facade with new shop units on that side. A food court and a semi-open public space overlooking the square were also introduced on the same level. Additionally, a substantial service area was incorporated, accommodating both storage and parking functions.

CUTS

Cuts were introduced on the second floor to improve both visual and physical connectivity between levels. These voids enable new stair connections and allow more natural light into the food court area, creating larger and spatially accentuated public zones. As a result, the building's front facade becomes more dynamic and expressive.

REVEALING THE BUILDING

Valuable architectural feature of the building is its roof, composed of a series of pitched elements. The staggered roofline allows natural light to filter in through skylights, an interior quality that previously went unnoticed from the outside.

To expose this inner quality, I stripped the building of its original facade and introduced a glazed envelope. This transparency makes the roof structure, and the life inside, visible from the street. Additionally, I removed an auxiliary structure that had a concealed facade from the Abastumani Street side. This intervention makes the building more open and inviting, turning the internal spatial richness into a public-facing asset.

OPENNESS

The main square and the ramp serve as key elements that enhance openness and make the market inviting, and invite engagement, seamlessly integrating the flow of street movement into the bazaar. To further improve accessibility and reinforce the welcoming character of the intervention, I introduced a stair spanning the length of the building. The removal of the auxiliary structure allowed this staircase to become a prominent architectural feature. The openness, along with interior visibility, enhances the building's attractiveness.

The open space in the back of the sheltered bazaar acts as a pocket park for local residents and visitors. On weekends, this space transforms into a farmers' market, offering a platform for regional producers to sell directly to the public. Added greenery and seating areas provide shade and places to rest, the remainder is left to be organised by the farmers themselves.



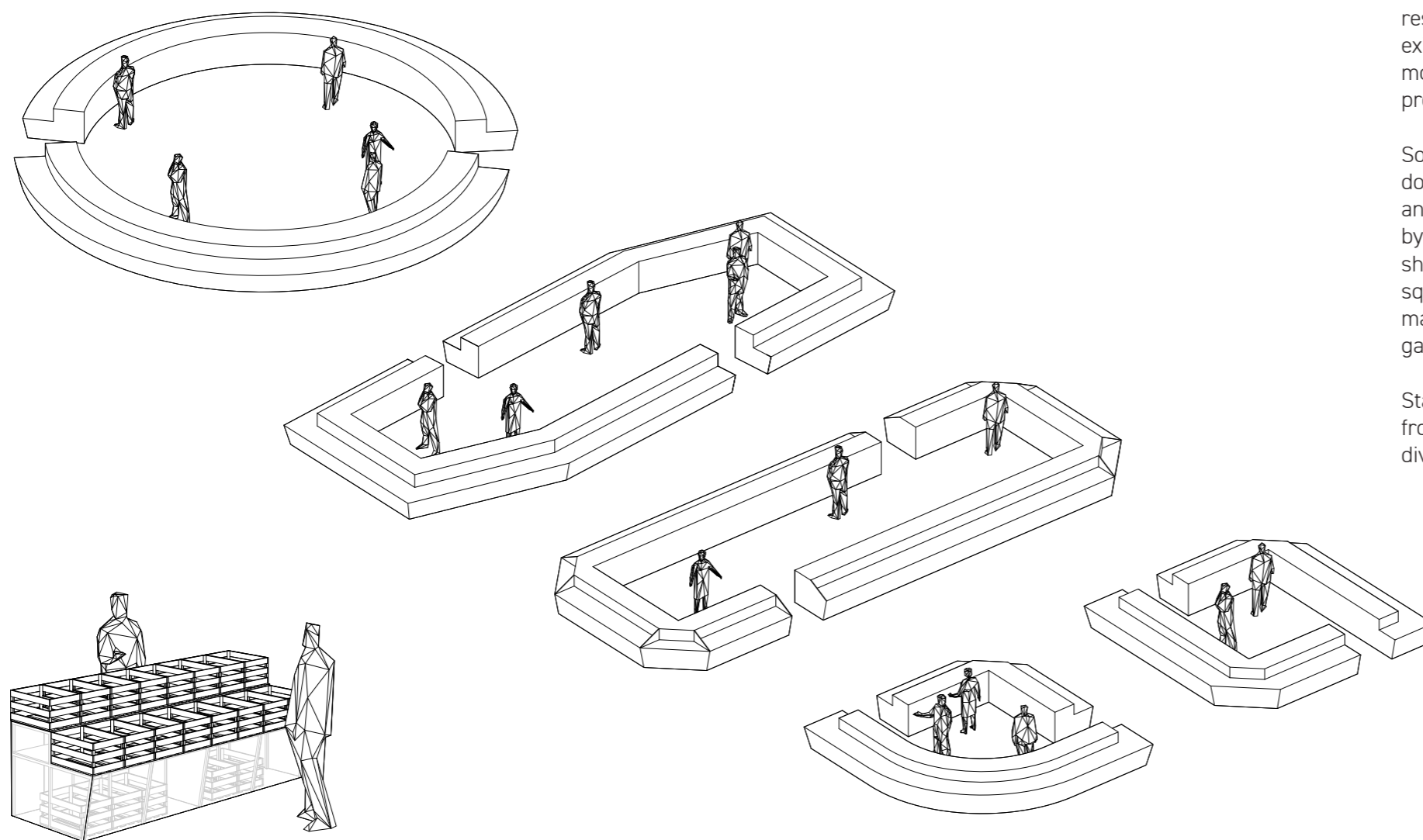
Figure 29. Interior of Dezerter bazaar



Figure 30. Front square



Figure 31. *View from Abastumani street*



STALLS

The layout of the stalls along the perimeter of the square responds to the informal spatial logic established by existing vendors, an intuitive reaction to pedestrian movement and demand. This organic arrangement is preserved and refined.

Some stalls facing the sidewalk are dimensioned to double as seating areas when the market is closed. Their angled corners of stalls are designed to guide passers-by into the square, drawing them towards the adjacent shops, bazaar spaces, and shaded seating zones. The square is conceived as an active space beyond the market's operational hours, functioning as a communal gathering area.

Stalls vary in size, accommodating a range of vendors, from individuals to larger groups, ensuring flexibility and diversity in use.

Figure 31. Stall types

DUSCUSSION/CONCLUSSION

This thesis explored the spatial and social role of bazaars in the context of Tbilisi, Georgia. It further investigated strategies to enhance their function as public spaces and reimagine them in ways that better serve customers and vendors, while introducing new layers of recreational and civic use to benefit the wider community. One of the key findings is that bazaars are highly intuitive spaces, shaped by informal spatial logic. Historically, they have served as places of commerce and socialisation. Their location is a major factor in their success, whether on a regional scale, such as along historic trade routes like the Silk Road, or at a neighbourhood level, embedded in the everyday fabric of urban life. Bazaars typically emerge spontaneously and endure over time, unless forcibly disrupted. They benefit significantly from high foot traffic, with the most commercially viable spots usually located along sidewalks and open-access points. This is often paired with extended working hours. During my fieldwork in and around the Dezerter Bazaar at various times of day, I observed how such dynamics contributed to its vitality. The bazaar acts as a strong attractor, generating additional footfall and creating a lively environment. It also has a spillover effect on its surroundings, often attracting related trades and services, resulting in clusters of similar economic activity.

For instance, the Eliava Market, a building materials market is surrounded by services tailored to its clientele, such as workshops for cutting materials or car repair garages. These emerge in response to specific demands generated by the bazaar. Similarly, around the Dezerter Bazaar, informal food vendors and so-called 'tea or coffee ladies' circulate, offering lunch and refreshments to stallholders. These mobile services enhance the social and economic

micro-ecology of the space.

THE BAZAAR AS A SOCIAL SPACE

The social function of bazaars is one of their most essential qualities. They operate as "third places", spaces for casual encounters and informal socialising outside of home and work. Conversations, interactions, and bargaining all form part of this social dynamic. Bargaining, in particular, acts as a kind of social game: a playful contest between vendor and customer, where skill and intuition can lead to the best deal. In this way, the bazaar becomes a space where practical social skills are exercised and developed.

Vendors also contribute actively to the social atmosphere through their efforts to attract and engage customers. These everyday interactions form part of the cultural identity of the market, further enriching its value as a shared public space.

NAVIGATING INFORMALITY IN DESIGN

A central challenge in this project was maintaining a level of informality that allows space for both spatial and social expression. The intention was to avoid over-designing the space, and instead to strike balance, drawing from theoretical frameworks and case studies while allowing the organic, adaptive qualities of informality to persist.

This presented dilemma: can informality be preserved, or even designed for? Should this be approached spatially, by deliberately leaving certain areas open and undefined? Or should it be encouraged through policy and governance mechanisms that invite self-expression and unregulated use? Can informality ever truly be planned, or is it only possible through the

absence of control?

Rather than attempt to resolve this completely, I chose to engage with the tension. I introduced elements such as greenery and shaded resting areas that serve multiple functions: offering comfort during quieter periods and supporting the weekend farmers' market by acting as informal extensions of activity. Crucially, I left parts of the space open-ended, allowing them to evolve over time in response to the habits and needs of those who use them.

DESIGN INTERVENTIONS

Recognising the importance of location in attracting users, one of my key design goals was to subtly guide passers-by into the market, making the space more open, transparent, and inviting. A gently sloped ramp (ramp-stairs) from Abastumani street was proposed to create a natural flow towards the entrance, using spatial cues rather than explicit signage to 'nudge' movement.

Another priority was ensuring connectivity between adjacent bazaars, so that they could support one another economically and socially. The proposed ramp enables smoother circulation, offering a less strenuous and more direct alternative to stairs or elevators. This route can also function as an extension of the pedestrian network, allowing passers-by to use it instead of the pavement, encouraging incidental interaction with the market as they pass through. The ramp also connects directly to the arcade of the adjacent building, enhancing spatial integration. It defines the square without enclosing it, offering a transparent, human-scaled structure that provides both shelter and visibility.

By introducing complementary uses, such as a food court, shops, and rest areas along an accessible route, the intervention aims to diver-

sify the user base and encourage longer visits. These additions foster inclusivity and sociability, promoting encounters and supporting the idea of the market as a truly public space.

In this way, the design directly addresses the core research question: How can the bazaar be enhanced to better serve as a public space, and in what ways can this improvement be achieved?

REFLECTIONS ON STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

While the design focuses primarily on spatial and social enhancements, especially from the customer's perspective, it also has indirect benefits for vendors by increasing footfall and vibrancy. However, deeper structural issues remain unresolved.

The future of such markets depends heavily on political will, ownership models, and broader economic agendas. especially, centrally located bazaars are at risk of displacement or redevelopment due to the rising value of urban land. Private ownership and profit-driven motives pose a threat to their long-term persistence. This sense of precarity impacts not only livelihoods but also the quality of space. Even in century-old markets like the Dezerter Bazaar, this uncertainty creates a feeling of temporariness, hindering long-term investment and stewardship.

Future research could focus on exploring governance models that balance state support with private sector involvement, with the aim of securing the longevity of markets. Particularly in countries like Georgia, where political and economic conditions are in flux, it is essential to understand how these markets can continue to serve public needs without being erased by speculative development.

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AI

AI was used in this thesis for grammar, language refinement and translation. However, all analytical insights, critical thinking, and final content were developed independently by the author.