



Investigating new ways of 'making' heritage

The Case of the Adaptive Reuse of the Majestic Cinema

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate creative and inclusive ways of ‘making’ heritage beyond the conventional ones and highlight the social value of heritage and community integration in it. The thesis will be rooted in the notions of collective memory, identity, intangibility, and sense of place, and aims to answer questions about what preservation means and who it serves. Moreover, the intention is to shift perspective and view heritage as an experience and preservation as an act of care, as alternatives to the demolition of physical spaces that are related to culture. All these matters will be investigated through the Adaptive reuse of the Majestic Cinema into the Majestic Cultural Hub, a historic art-deco venue in Stone Town, Zanzibar. This is a broader initiative which the thesis will be part of, aiming to facilitate and promote this transition.

The restoration project follows a people-centred approach to heritage that means involving the various communities related to heritage for long-term conservation and management of the building to secure its future sustainability. Given this view, the thesis aims to explore the types of inclusive design strategies and the ways in which they can contribute to the preservation of living heritage alongside a formal restoration process. Moreover, the main methodological tools that the thesis deploys are participatory design and grounded field research. In the framework of the preservation of a historical building, the thesis follows a multistakeholder approach and attempts to map memories, experiences and relationships, seeking to transform this data into architecture. An architecture that will activate the space with empathy and respect for both the residents and the built heritage. Ultimately, two design strategies were developed, which endeavor to link tangible and intangible heritage; a wall mural based on the cinema’s history and the conceptual design of an open terrace which aspires to be an inclusive public space. A great case study for this dynamic approach to heritage is Stone Town, where heritage and historical buildings play an important part of the city’s identity.

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Problem Description

The context; Stone Town

Stone Town is quite a unique city for the African Context. It is famous for its Arabic and Indian-influenced buildings made of coral stone and narrow alleys and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000 (Fischer, 2012). For all the above-mentioned reasons, touristic activities are quite developed and boost the economy of the city. However, at heritage places that appear to be successful visitor attractions, the question needs to be asked if other communities, such as local residents, are still allowed to enjoy their heritage as it was originally intended and if they derive benefits from it (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015, p.4). A great case study for this task is Stone Town, where heritage and historical buildings play an important part of the city's identity.

Heritage and Culture under threat

At this moment, it's very clear that historical buildings face difficulties in terms of maintenance and economic sustainability. That's the reason why the state had to find solutions, like renting the monuments to big real estate companies that have the means to restore and invest in the future function of the buildings. As a result, many significant historical buildings are turned into boutique hotels. The issue that arises in this case is not just the accessibility of the public in a historical monument. In these places there are a lot of cultural activities going on, like music, artifacts workshops, even large festivals. The two larger festivals of the island, and big touristic attractions, Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) and Zauti za Busara (the biggest music

festival in East Africa) took place in one such monument, and now they have been evicted. All in all, the anchors of heritage are under threat and the question emerges: how can you preserve heritage under threat?

Community and Gentrification

Moreover, tourism creates a lot of pressure on the city in various ways. Firstly, a lot of people sell their houses in Stone Town, and they move to the modern part of the city. The houses are quite old and a typical Zanzibari family doesn't have the means to maintain them. At the same time, now that tourism is flourishing, a house in Stone Town can be quite profitable for a real estate agency. Moreover, another issue that accompanies the reduction of the community, is the reduction of public open spaces. Stone Town is quite small, dense and limited, it cannot expand, so the more visitors they come, the more space they need.

The overall challenges and the role of Majestic Cultural Hub

All in all, Stone Town faces challenges regarding her community, her public space, her tangible and intangible heritage and her cultural activities. From that point of view, the rehabilitation of a historical building that has been considered empty for the last 20 years is quite important. This is a great opportunity, not only for the historical built environment, but also for culture, heritage and the community. On the one hand, the new use of the building aspires to invite all the cultural communities that are now 'homeless' and meet their needs. On the other hand, it aspires to involve the various communities in this dialogue, because it's the only way this initiative will achieve in the long term. This thesis is going to focus exactly on that part.

People-centred and Living approach to heritage

The living heritage approach is embedded in the formal restoration process and in this thesis, as well. According to the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015) these approaches are not just increasing participation within a management system, but rather addressing a core component of heritage management – the people who are connected to heritage – and ensuring that it is an integral element of conserving that heritage. Firstly, part of this approach is that heritage is considered as dynamic enough to play an active role in communities and bring benefits to people. Moreover, it includes the Living Heritage Approach, where the use of heritage by its associated community plays a vital role in the continuity of community connections

(as expressed both in terms of tangible and intangible heritage) and the communities' responsibility to maintain their heritage by traditional or established means. The living heritage is characterized by the ongoing use of heritage by its associated community for the purpose for which it was originally created.

Larger project: deliveries, approaches and the thesis role

This thesis is part of a larger real-world project that is a multi-stakeholder effort. Specifically, the project is about the adaptive reuse of the Majestic Cinema, a historic art-deco venue, into the Majestic Cultural Hub in Stone Town, Zanzibar. The delivery of this project includes, aside from the rehabilitation of the building, the creation of a program related to culture and the aspiration for the Cultural Hub to serve as a community space (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024). This project follows a people-centred approach to heritage that means involving the various communities related to heritage for long-term conservation and management of the building to secure its future sustainability without depending on donations and funding and risking the conservation effort. The thesis' main focus will be around social sustainability and community interaction, with the objective of developing design strategies based on empathy and deep respect for the local communities and the heritage built environment.

I Introduction

Research Question & Objectives

How can inclusive design approaches and strategies preserve living heritage alongside a formal restoration process?

Aim

This research aims to investigate how the adaptive reuse design can integrate and promote Zanzibar's tangible and intangible cultural heritage as well as the community's identity, ensuring the hub becomes a living space for local traditions.

Objective

The main objective and the design outcome, is to develop design strategies that will try to connect the past, current, and future social usage of the Majestic Temporary Hub. This goal will be achieved by activating the space, facilitating the community's interaction with the space, now and in the future. The design strategies will be based on the data collected by participatory methods that will promote the idea of living heritage and eventually the restoration efforts.

Methods

The main methodological tools that the thesis employs are participatory design and grounded field research. In the framework of the preservation of a historical building, the thesis follows a multistakeholder approach and attempts to map memories, experiences and relationships seeking to transform this data into architecture.

Delimitations

Several factors helped narrow the scope of the design outcome. First, the focus is exclusively on the Majestic Cinema rather than other heritage sites or a broader urban approach, as the building itself provided sufficient equipment. Second, a key decision was to ensure the thesis proposes actions that can be implemented during or after the restoration. Third, the focus shifted toward the social aspect of heritage rather than the purely technical or architectural phases of restoration. Ultimately, this framework will allow the architectural team to integrate social inclusion strategies directly into the building's final design.

Limitations

The main limitations for the development of the design strategies were two, that it overlapped with the Ramadan period and the installation of the scaffolding. Firstly, Ramadan is the most important religious and cultural event of the year, and it refers to a 4-week period of fasting during the daytime. It was at the end of the third week of the field-study, so in the middle of the design process and the cultural activities or workshops had to pose at the Temporary Hub, because they weren't allowed during the Holy month. Secondly, the initial construction phase started the same period and it could be potentially disruptive while conducting workshops because of the noise and the dust. However, this is the project's greatest strength, and its primary challenge, is its nature as a 'work in progress.'

Thesis' Structure

This report is divided into five sections. The first section is the introduction, and it sets the basis of this thesis; the main purpose, the theoretical framework and the discourse. The second part describes the context, and it contains information about both the Stone Town and the cinema. Furthermore, the third part refers to the methodology, and it includes all the participatory and conventional tools used during this thesis along with their main outcomes. The fourth section presents the developed design strategies, while the fifth section includes conclusions and reflections regarding the process. This structure doesn't necessarily reflect the chronological evolution of the thesis, since many processes overlapped. Rather, this arrangement was chosen to enhance the clarity and the coherence of the text.

Relevance for sustainable development



Utilizing community involvement in heritage preservation to deliver profound social benefits. By involving residents directly, the initiative cultivates a strong sense of ownership and empowerment within the community, ensuring local accountability for long-term sustainability. This localized effort directly contributes to Target 11.4, which calls for strengthened efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

Focusing development efforts on a vulnerable community, aligning with Target 10.9 to encourage financial flows toward areas of greatest need, particularly African countries. By generating economic opportunity and fostering community empowerment, the project serves as a practical model for development.

Creating mechanisms for sustainable community income and robust job creation. Focused on the management of local heritage, this strategy simultaneously promotes beneficial and sustainable cultural tourism (Target 8.9), ensuring that all economic activity contributes to sustainable economic growth (Target 8.1).

This thesis is deeply interconnected to the notions of collective memory, identity, intangibility, and sense of place. The driving principle of this process is that heritage is not a static object that should be preserved just for educational reasons, but is a process that we develop, adapt and evolve as human beings collectively. First and foremost, we ‘make’ heritage, and then we are responsible for its preservation. Nevertheless, the conventional heritage approach typically focuses on the physical conservation of heritage sites according to strict professional criteria rather than lived experiences (Smith, 2006). This material-oriented perspective, while effective at safeguarding countless heritage treasures, frequently marginalizes the communities whose contemporary identities are linked to this heritage, even if it’s part of their everyday life.

The architectural profession has played a great role in the predominance of material over intangible heritage, as it belongs to the core of experts regarding conservation. However, most architects value preserving or transforming old buildings rather than tearing them down. Beyond mere architectural aesthetics, architects broadly recognize the importance of maintenance. Whether through historical importance, communal value, or a connection to significant events, these buildings are often saved to honor their broader social context (Garcia&Frankowski, 2023). Nonetheless, it is increasingly common

for architects to focus on the embodied experience as well as the tangible heritage. This thesis will follow this approach, investigating the transformative reconceptualization of what preservation means and who it serves.

An anthropocentric approach to heritage focuses on communities, whether those are communities of place (those who live within or near to heritage), communities of interest (those who feel a connection to or are interested in heritage) or communities of practice (those who work with heritage) (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015, p.3). The main advantage of this approach is that the communities’ collective knowledge often outlasts formal political or professional structures. Strong communities foster well-being and social inclusion, which directly benefits the heritage sites they engage with. Unlike conventional methods that treat heritage as “frozen” or isolated (Smith, 2006), a people-centered approach views it as a dynamic social asset. The dynamism of heritage lies in its utility; active social engagement ensures a building’s longevity. This “living heritage” is defined by continuous evolution, where change is accepted as part of the site’s nature. Consequently, its relevance to contemporary community life ensures that it remains both a cultural asset and a source of modern benefit. Heritage shouldn’t just consume resources for conservation; it has the potential to play an active role in society to remain relevant. Ultimately, if heritage provides tangible value to people, the public is far more likely to support and safeguard its future (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015).

CULTURAL HERITAGE & COMMUNITY RELATION

Why is it important?

In her book *Uses of Heritage*, Laurajane Smith (Smith, 2006) argues that for heritage to be truly inclusive and multicultural, we should view it as a social and cultural process rather than a mere collection of objects. While physical sites and buildings are undoubtedly important, they do not represent the entirety of heritage. On the contrary, heritage is the actual activity of remembering—a cultural process that takes place at these locations to help us understand and navigate our lives. Beyond that, Smith points out that while physical landmarks are useful tools for this process, they are not always essential to it. She emphasizes that “heritage had to be experienced for it to be heritage” (Smith, 2006), it isn’t something static or “frozen in time,” as the traditional conservation view has imposed. Ultimately, instead of simply preserving the past, heritage is a living process that carries forward old meanings while constantly generating new ones.

The above-mentioned perspectives serve as the guiding theoretical framework of the entire thesis. The design outcome aspires to bring forward the cultural processes of the past, present and future in Majestic and engage the community in the activity of remembering.

Heritage as Relations.

Another theory that follows a similar approach even if it’s not merely about heritage is *Caring Architecture* (Tronto, 2019). This notion indicates a conceptual shift from an object-centric approach to a relational one. Specifically, from the focus on the buildings or models to the ongoing processes, the relationships among buildings, people, and the environment. Furthermore, *Caring Architecture* calls for a change in architectural priorities towards repair, preservation, and shared responsibilities for the planet. Based on the above-mentioned arguments, heritage can be seen as an experience and preservation as an act of care, as alternatives to the demolition of physical spaces that are related to the collective memory.

Caring architecture as a theoretical framework is deployed in this thesis due to the fact that it doesn’t focus on the outcome, the building, the design etc., but on the processes that lead to this outcome. The relationships that take place inside this building and how we can create architecture to facilitate these relationships and social exchanges and this is exactly what this thesis aspires to do. *Caring architecture* doesn’t guide only the thesis outcome, but also the methods, the process.

OTHER WAYS OF 'MAKING' HERITAGE CRITICALLY

Culture in post-colonial context

Unfortunately, the effects of colonialism have persisted after independence in several cases, including cultural heritage. One of these effects is that newly designed planning systems don't take into account the local culture (Hammami, 2012) and the built environment is Westernized, without roots in the native cultural identity and social context. The problem stems from the fact that in postcolonial societies, culture is integrated into planning differently than in Western ones. This is largely because many African nations adopted or kept the planning systems of their colonial rulers, or else imported other foreign models without ensuring their suitability for the local context (Watson 2003). To put it in other words, planning systems have not undergone decolonization despite the spaces being declared independent of colonialism. The post-colonial conditionality seeks to repair and overcome these issues, which have been rooted so deep in post-independence societies. In this particular case, it promotes reclaiming the incorporation of local culture into urban planning and, as an extent, in architecture generally. For this to happen, the role of planners, architects and knowledge in general should be critically redefined in the post-colonial planning system to integrate culture.

In the framework of this thesis, not to take into consideration the post-colonial theories in a place like Zanzibar, where so many different civilizations have passed would result in a weakening of the thesis. The goal is to align the design strategies with the conditionality of post-colonialism, drawing from the intelligence of Stone Town, the precolonial foundations of Stone Town and into restoration architecture.

Redefining Heritage

The conventional, western-oriented heritage approach can be characterized as object-centric, but also as top-down. Specifically, heritage and related policies are frequently employed by the state apparatus to create a national identity. From this point of view, the state is a central stakeholder in heritage making. By redefining heritage, the focus shifts to a bottom-up approach with multiple stakeholders (Blanc & Bridonneau, 2016). For example, in the case of living heritage communities of place, interest and practice are involved (see booklet, p.9). This approach expands the possibilities of heritage not just in building national identity, but in acting as means of local development. To conclude, redefining heritage directs the attention from a national or global scale to the local lived realities. Yasmeen Lari, the first female architect of Pakistan, seems to be a great example of reclaiming cultural heritage. To begin with, at the start

of her career, she focused on Pakistan's cultural heritage, specifically highlighting overlooked vernacular traditions and everyday urban structures (Berlingieri et al., 2021, p.34). By insisting that these forms be formally recognized, she took a critical first step toward redefining the traditional boundaries of what is considered heritage in the region. Later in her career, she focused on other ways of 'making' heritage beyond the preservation of physical traces (Krasny, 2023).

'Making Heritage'

There are more and more examples which prove that collective memory can be built up through processes that create social and cultural meaning, such as exhibitions, festivals, digital archives and many more. For instance, Lari initiated the Karavan Pakistan, a heritage festival, which is a tool to make a claim to civic presence in public and to promote peace (Krasny, 2023, p. 86). Another example, by Yasmeen Lari, is the preservation of Lahore Fort, when she arranged for students to be able to participate in the cleaning of it, as part of public heritage education and to strengthen the material understanding of the structure (Krasny, 2023, p. 79). Last but not least, she played a key role in the Sindh Cultural Heritage Preservation Act (SCHPA) (Krasny, 2023, p.19). This is a crucial point: in many post-colonial regions, heritage law is either unchanged from the colonial era or a newly adopted Western framework that ignores local context. All in all, her interest

is not in heritage as an object but in heritage as living knowledge meaningful to people's livelihoods.

The thesis will follow as a guiding principle this approach and will attempt to draw inspiration from all the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks to put it into a design, an action. An action that will take into consideration the living culture and its meanings. This is the larger umbrella: what conventional heritage does, why is it problematic, how to redefine it by using all the previous theories and how to put the elements together to make heritage in an active way.

Brief historical context

Unguja Island & Zanzibar Town

This project will be in Stone Town, part of Zanzibar Town, the capital of the Unguja Island, in Zanzibar Archipelago, Tanzania. Zanzibar Town was established in the 10th-11th century, as a typical Swahili fishing village. However, the majority of the existing buildings were constructed in the 19th century and there are few buildings remaining from earlier times (Sheriff & Jafferji, 1998).

The Zanzibar Town consists of the Stone Town and the Ng'ambo. Stone Town is famous for its Arabic and Indian-influenced buildings made of coral stone and narrow alleys and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000 (Fischer, 2012). The city retained its distinctive Swahili urban character through Swahili houses built around mosques, merchants, palaces, markets and barazas, and in a bustling creative and collective outdoor life. While Ng'ambo, literally means 'The Other Side', is the larger, more functional area next to Stone Town, separated by Creek Road, featuring broader streets, newer buildings, markets, and daily life for most residents.

Zanzibar's main source of income is tourism because of its unique biodiversity, rich history, and beautiful landscapes. Another major source of income is agriculture, especially spice exports like cloves, nutmeg, and seaweed. People who live in rural areas are engaged in farming and fishing (NDF & UNEP, 2014). Historically, infusions of people from mainland Africa, the Middle East, Arab and the Indian subcontinent have influenced the culture of the island. It was a key trading hub in the

Indian Ocean, and played a significant role in the global spice, ivory, and slave trade (Britannica, 2025). During the 19th century, Zanzibar City was the most important and populated city on the Swahili Coast and the main port for the slave trade with the Middle East. Zanzibar Town lost its leading position only after the emergence and growth of the new colonial capitals of East Africa at the turn of the 20th century (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024).

Define the Colonial Period

In the framework of this thesis, the colonial period refers to British rule, even though there were not the first colonial power in the region. Undoubtedly, the Arab culture was the most influential for the island from a cultural and urban perspective. Nevertheless, the Arab culture has been fully integrated and homogenized in Zanzibari society. Before them, the Portuguese were there, who built military fortifications (Sheriff & Jafferji, 1998) rather than develop city plans and affect the urban structure. However, the sovereignty of the British establishes a new era for Zanzibar socially and architecturally. Furthermore, the strategic importance of Zanzibar as the most developed and largest city in the region drastically changed after the island was turned into a British Protectorate. This may explain the thin and fragmented British administration on the island or why they retained the Sultan as a figure-head (Folkers & Perzyna, 2019).

The impact of colonialism

The consequences for the cultural aspect may not have been detrimental, but they weren't minor. The British introduced orientalism in architecture and segregation in urban planning, both of which survived until today (Folkers & Perzyna, 2019).

To begin with, Swahili architecture avoids decorative elements in the facades, as well as Omani architecture, which is characterized as geometric and plain. This was seen as an aesthetic disadvantage by the British, who introduced exaggerated oriental elements such as arches and domes. A central figure in this implementation was the British architect John Huston Sinclair, who combined European with Arab and Indian elements, creating his own architectural style known as "Saracenism" (Sheriff & Jafferji, 1998). Sinclair designed a number of public and private buildings and his influence remained strong in architecture and urban planning even after his departure from Zanzibar.

Moreover, Stone Town and Ng'ambo were growing organically as one city until the British imposed racial segregation in urban planning, which created a dual city. On the one hand, Stone Town as a political and economic center drawing all the investments. On the other hand, the native 'quarters', a disorganized, unsanitized slum with huts. This division and marginalization has led to different policies and funding until today and is confirmed by the designation of Stone Town as the sole UNESCO World Heritage site on the island (Chaouni & Khemet, 2025). Remarkably, the exact

border described for the World Heritage site follows the same ethno-social segregation line as the 1923 Lanchester Plan (Chaouni & Khemet, 2025, p.124). This is one of the two masterplans which were drafted during the British Protectorate existence and, apart from the racial segregation, it included an upgrading plan for the waterfront, a traffic scheme with a number of strategic roads and the design of a European quarter (Folkers & Perzyna, 2019, p.44). In this last intervention, it was proposed the replacement of the Swahili huts in Vuga with administrative quarters for European citizens executed in a garden suburb manner. To conclude, the colonial administration's view of public space focused on widening main roads, adding orientalist elements to the seafront and creating garden suburbs.

Many of these proposals were implemented with a lasting impact on the area, while many more were never realized. The most impactful ones are racial segregation, the formalization of the creek into a canal and the European quarter. Specifically, a creek separated the elite in Stone Town from the less privileged in Ng'ambo; this creek was filled to create Creek Road (Azumah, n.d.). The Majestic Cinema is located in Vuga, which is situated on the outskirts of Stone Town, enclosed by Creek Road to the west, in the region which was designed as a European quarter. As a result, today the area is dominated by institutional and public buildings and recreational land use (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024).

II Context

Unguja Island

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1503

Portugese Empire

1698

Omani Sultanate

1890

British Protectorate

1964

Independence - The Zanzibar Revolution

Colonial Past



unesco

World Heritage site

Stown Town
of Zanzibar



Unguja
Zanzibar Island



Pemba
Island

Yemen

Persia

India

Swahili Coast

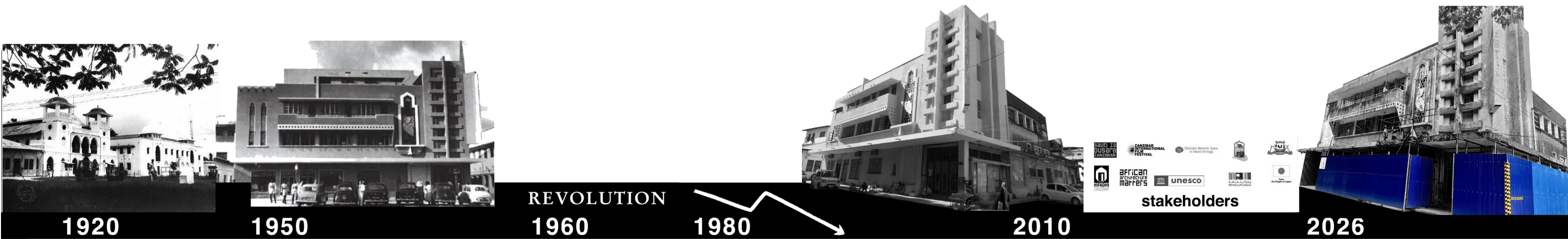
Mozambique

Dar es Salaam
the capital of Tanzania

Zanzibar Town



1. Majestic Cinema
2. The last open slave market
3. Stone Town
4. NG'Ambo
5. The Creek Road



1920

The Royal Cinema

A luxurious cinema that was designed by J.H. Sinclair, a Scot, who was the official city planner. He designed important buildings such as the Post Office and the Peace Memorial Museum in Zanzibar (Sheriff & Jafferji, 1998, p.84). It was built in a Saracenic style as a grandest public building in Zanzibar Town, seating 900 people, including box seats and a balcony. Over the years, cinema-going became a key pastime on the island (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024, p.33).

1955

The Majestic Cinema

An Art Deco building that was designed by the local architect Dayalji Pitamber Sachania. Cinema buildings were also used for concerts, theater performances, readings and political events until the late 1950s. Such buildings are witnesses to a modern architectural movement largely implemented independently of the colonial powers (Fischer, 2012, p.22).

1954

The Fire

The old cinema went down in flames. The owner, Zanzibar Theatre Ltd., commissioned a new building on the same site, now called the Majestic Cinema (Fischer, 2012, p.21)

1964

The Zanzibar Revolution

the People's Republic of Zanzibar was formed in January 1964 and in the same year transformed into the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, then the United Republic of Tanzania. The Majestic Cinema was nationalized in 1964 (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024, p.34).

1980

The Decline

The gradual decline of cinema in Zanzibar started in the late 1980s following Tanzania's economic downturn. In addition to housing the cinema, the building also accommodated various establishments over the years: a restaurant selling popcorn and snacks, the offices of Air Tanzania, the Flamingo bar, and reportedly a second-floor hotel. Today, of the three cinemas that once operated in Zanzibar, only the Majestic Cinema remains in its original use. (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024, p.33).

2015-2023

The Majestic Cultural Hub

The adaptive re-use is a collective grassroots effort by multiple stakeholders. The first attempts started in 2018, when the team was looking for potential funding and formulated the proposal. In November 2023 Hifadhi Zanzibar Ltd. signed a Public Private Partnership agreement with the Government of Zanzibar with the aim to take over the building and realize Majestic Culture Hub, together with Zanzibar's leading cultural organizations Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), Busara Promotions and Reclaim Women Space. The project is funded by Unesco, the Japanese fund in Trust of Unesco and the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Saudi Arabia.

2024-2026

The Future

Project realization begins in 2026 with scaffolding installation and comprehensive concrete repairs. Simultaneously, technical drawings for the building's extension and internal adaptations will be finalized.

Majestic Cinema Timeline

Fig1. The Royal Cinema, Capital Art Studio ©

Fig2. Opening Day for the Majestic Cinema, Capital Art Studio ©

Fig3. South-East Elevation of Majestic Cinema, The Entrance, by Berend Van der Lans

Fig4. Majestic Cinema, Current Sate of the construction

Context - Cinema History

The Case of Zanzibar

Going to the cinema was a remarkably popular pastime in Zanzibar; even though it was viewed as an expensive luxury, it served as a powerful symbol of modern urbanity and progress. In the era following the abolition of slavery, the cinema was regarded as a strategic investment in social and cultural integration. As a result they evolved into vital socio-cultural hubs, acting as inclusive community spaces (Reinwald, 2014).

Cinema culture

The enduring popularity of cinema in Zanzibar was driven, in part, by a scarcity of other social and cultural venues. These theaters offered a rare communal ground where people of diverse ethnicities, genders, and ages could converge. Beyond entertainment, film served as a catalyst for public debate, a driver of fashion, and an educational window into the wider world. Consequently, movie-going was embraced as a holistic experience rather than a singular activity. This cultural importance was mirrored in the architecture itself, as cinema halls were often grandiose structures that stood as landmarks within their neighborhoods (Reinwald, 2014). Today, this legacy is celebrated through the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), which has established the island as a center for East African cinema. At the core of this history is the Majestic Cinema—a physical testament to the vibrant culture that has shaped the social imagination of Zanzibar for generations.

Stories about Majestic Cinema

There are various stories around the cinema culture that capture the spirit of those years, especially around Majestic.

For instance, the social hierarchy of Zanzibar was visible in the seating and in the entrance. There was a different entrance for Europeans and Indians (the south elevation) and another one for the locals (east elevation), (see the booklet, p.26). As a result, they were paying different prices for tickets, and they had different seats. The elite sat in the steep balcony, while the “ground floor” was for the masses. Yet, despite this physical divide, they all shared the same experience.

Another interesting fact is that Majestic Cinema had special film screenings or specific days for different social groups. For example, there was a children’s program during weekends in the mornings, in which the cinema would screen cartoons. There was also the Zanana show, a show for women only, and Family Sundays. Last but not least, the most popular special day was the ‘One shilling go-round’ day. These usually took place on Saturdays and Sundays and meant that each seat in the cinema costed one schilling regardless of its location in the hall.

These narratives were sourced from the organization’s archives during the curation of the exhibition (see booklet, p.32).

Important figures of Majestic: Mr Marashi.

The Majestic Cinema was privately owned and then it was nationalised after the Revolution and after two decades it began to fall into gradual disrepair, and the late 1980s marked a sharp decline in visitors. In combination with the fact that after the nationalisation no maintenance plan was followed, it was the beginning of the end for cinemas in Zanzibar.

The revolutionary government assigned to Abdulhussein Marashi the management of the cinema and he passed this position to his son in 1982. Mr Marashi is a central figure in the survival of the Majestic Cinema. As the manager, kept the cinema alive for the past four decades by playing movies for small group of loyal movie fans. He also owned restaurant at the rare building. He passed away recently, but his name will always be connected to the cinema history. The other two cinema buildings of Zanzibar from that period, have turned into offices and shopping center.

Important figures of Majestic: Dayalji Pitamber Sachania

Commissioned by Hassanlai Hameer Hasham after its predecessor burned down on February 8, 1954, Zanzibar’s Majestic Cinema opened on October 20, 1955, as an Art Deco landmark designed by Dayalji Pitamber Sachania (1913–1960). A Zanzibari of Indian origin whose influential career ended in a fatal road accident, Sachania bridged cultural divides through a “pluralistic” approach—symbolized by the Qur’an, Bible, and Bhagavad Gita in his office—to serve the island’s diverse communities. His work synthesized tradition and modernity, blending Art Deco’s streamlined geometric aesthetics with Indo-Arabic influences and local motifs to create a unique cosmopolitan architecture. As part of a generation of African-raised professionals from Indian, Arab, and European families, Sachania’s modern designs represented a liberation from British colonial stylistic dictates and significantly shaped the mid-20th-century landscape of Stone Town and beyond.

Revitalization – Broader Project

This thesis contributes to a broader initiative: the adaptive reuse of the Majestic Cinema into the “Majestic Cultural Hub.” Situated in Stone Town, Zanzibar, this historic Art Deco venue is currently being revitalized through a collective grassroots effort involving multiple stakeholders. The design centers on the original cinema hall, integrating modern office spaces and meeting rooms alongside public amenities such as a restaurant and café. Ultimately, this hub will serve as a venue for diverse cultural activities, informed by a detailed study of the cinema’s historical significance and its enduring impact on the city’s cultural landscape (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024).

What has already happened?

All the above-mentioned efforts had as a result a complete Conservation Management Plan in 2024, which includes an action plan outlining the key steps to be undertaken in developing the Majestic Cinema into a cultural hub. Furthermore, a technical assessment of the building has been carried out and the building permit got approved in 2025. Aside from this work, community engagement is at the core of this project. This is the reason why a pop-up information center was developed to connect the locals to the restoration process and foster a sense of ownership. This pop-up center quickly evolved into a temporary cultural hub which serves as the prologue of what will happen in the future. It is important to mention that the community of Stone Town is actively involved in the revitalization of the Majestic cinema through various cultural activities, such as film screenings, art exhibitions, reading spaces for kids and more.

What is happening now and the near future?

The next steps of this process are the first phase of the building works, the design of the second phase, and the support of the temporary cultural hub. The construction has already begun by erecting scaffolding, which will last a month in total, so it is supposed to finish beginning of April 2026. When the scaffolding is ready, the focus will be the removal of the existing dilapidated roofing sheets and the application of a new acoustic roof ceiling over the majority of the building. Alongside this part, concrete repairs internally and externally will take place. This first phase is supposed to finish by the end of 2026. The second phase includes the production of drawings regarding the extension of the building and further design adaptations to the existing cell, by adding an extra floor to the building and designing a west-side extension where there is a courtyard today.

How the thesis and the Restoration Project are related?

The focus of this thesis is to develop strategies to update the temporary hub and to bring the community to the center of this heritage transformation by activating the space. The design outcome aspires to contribute to the overall goals of the Restoration Project by developing awareness around Zanzibar’s built cultural heritage and introducing a place for meeting, interacting, and experiencing the community.

Overall, the temporary and permanent cultural hub aim to create a community-oriented and art-driven space for meetings, workshops, and performances. The vision is to create a hub for Zanzibar’s cultural actors, open the premises to the public, and foster a vibrant civic space that draws on the site’s history and tradition as a community venue. All in all, this thesis will try to contribute to that by active making heritage.

Who are behind this effort?

During the field research it was easy to identify the main actors and users of the space and to categorize them according to the Living Heritage Approach (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015, p.3). There are 3 distinct communities / stakeholders.

1. community of place:

these are the local and geographically defined groups living in or around the site, who maintain a deep connection to their environment. In this case is the neighbourhood and in general the residents of Stone Town

2. community of interest:

These groups may not be geographically linked but are brought together by shared passions, heritage, or identity. This category is more appropriate for the active users of the temporary hub, who are basically students and young professionals who work remotely because the space offers internet connection and the people who run the cultural activities, as musicians who deliver lessons.

3. communities of practice. These are groups defined by the shared knowledge and skills. In this case, they are people who are involved directly to the restoration process such as the leading organisation, Hifdani, the architects and the consultants or are involved directly to the management plan after the complement of the restoration, such as the main stakeholders and cultural NGOS, RWS, ZIFF, zaBusara.

Activities in the temporary Hub.



Fig5. Children’s Reading Club



Fig6. Film Screening



Fig7. Poster inside the Majestic Cinema



Fig8. Majestic Cinema interior



Fig9. The Cinema Hall



Fig12. Dayalji Pitamber Sachania
The Architect



Fig13. Group photo at the entrance of the Cinema



Fug14. Putting up Posters in the Majestic Cinema



Fig10. Old film reels

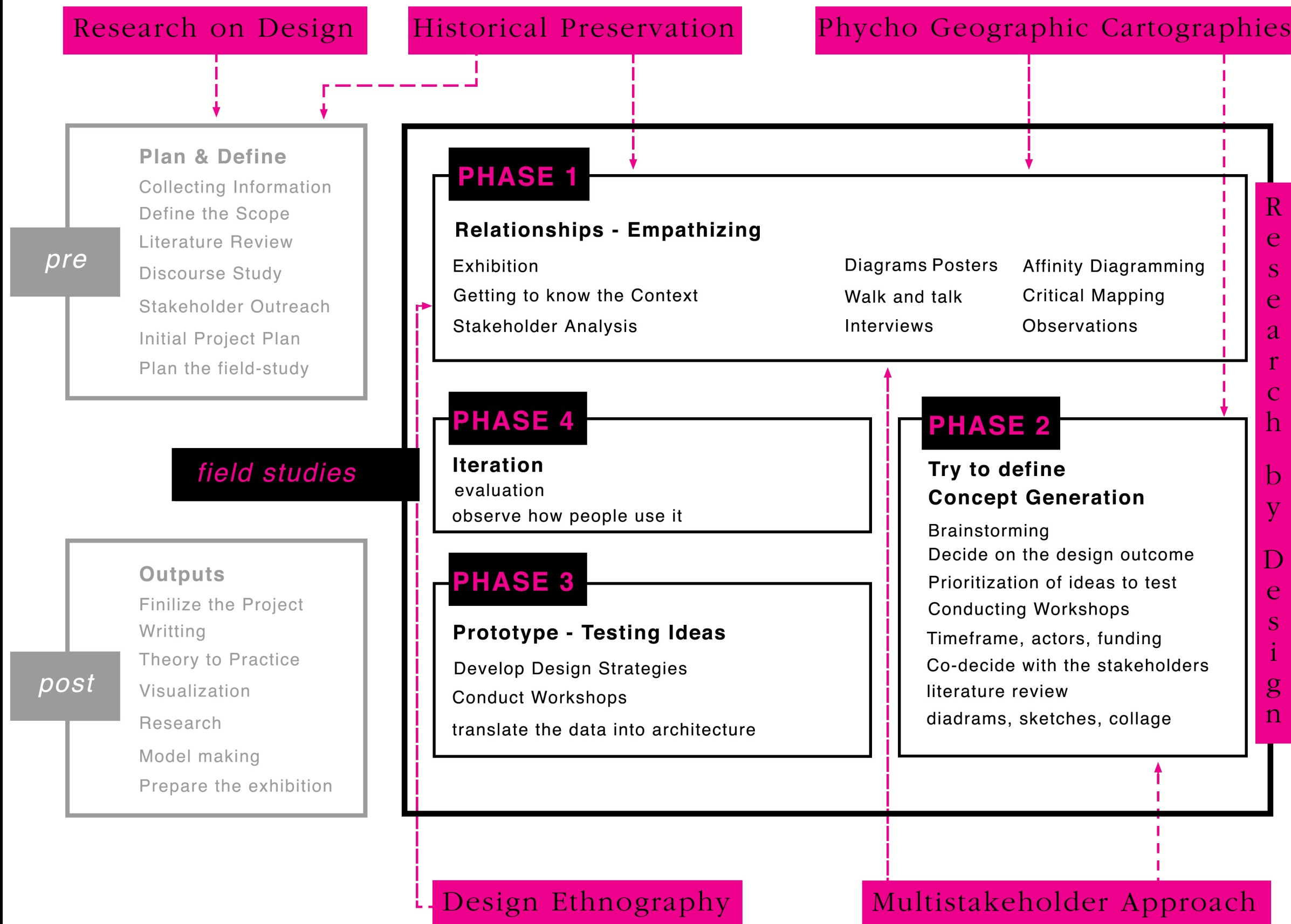


Fig11. The projecting room



Fig.15 Majestic Cinema scaffolding

Thesis' Process Diagram



In the previous section, the scope of the thesis, the theoretical framework and also important information about the context and the broader restoration effort were presented.

The following section is dedicated to the methodology, which is based on participatory design and ground field research.

The ground field research is a qualitative methodology which aims to build theory from the bottom up and is based on real-world settings (Charmaz, 2004).

Participatory design allows the people affected by a project to be part of the decisions that are made during the different phases of the process and shifts the logic from "designing for" to "designing with" (Tovivich, 2009).

- Pre-field:** Weeks 04-05
- Phase 1:** Weeks 06-07
- Phase 2:** Weeks 08-09
- Midterm:** Weeks 10–11
- Phase 3:** Weeks 12-15
- Phase 4:** Week 16
- Post-field:** Weeks 17-20

III Methods

Research by Design

Research by design is the kind of research in which the process of designing, and the practical experience, plays a crucial role in research, not only as inputs to be observed, but also as the actual methods and outcomes of the research itself. (Verbeke, 2013). The research process hinges on studio creation, which includes generating a range of visual and spatial outputs like sketches, maps, drawings, collages, 3D models, and physical constructs.

Phycho Geographic Cartographies

This approach, rooted in the work of situationists, planners and artists, reinterprets a place through personal experiences and relationships. It focuses on the psychological experience of a context, defining the city through memory, desire, and movement, as opposed to its utilitarian functions. (Frankowski & Garcia, 2023).

Conditions

Historical Preservation

Historic preservation focuses on the long-term stewardship of culturally significant sites, structures, and landscapes. Because these projects intersect with history, economics, and technology, they require a highly collaborative approach involving diverse experts and stakeholders.

Design Ethnography

Design ethnography is a broad approach encompassing several research methods, focused on a comprehensive and empathic understanding of the users, their lives, their language, and the context of their artifacts and behaviours. Various sampling methods can be employed to gather genuine experiences from participants, including diary and photo studies, cultural probes, contextual inquiry, and adapted forms of participant observation. (Hanington & Martin, 2019)

Research on Design

Research on design is the kind of research that goes deep into a specific architectural example or period or even an architect. It revolves around gathering historical information to explore various theoretical perspectives, including social, cultural, political, and aesthetic dimensions (Frayling, 1993). In this case, it was utilized to study Tropical Modernism, the architectural movement to which the building belongs.

Multistakeholders Approach

It's a bottom-up approach that attempts to involve all the affected groups in a design process; clients, communities, regulators, etc., in different stages of the process. The goal is to balance competing needs and interests and scores to better project outcomes.

The ethnographic approach

The first action was to get involved in the context and the routine of the building. I took keys and opened the place, staying there the whole day working and observing, interacting with the other users. They were usually students or young professionals working remotely. As the day passed during evening, the atmosphere was changing with cultural activities like music lessons. This was a more ethnographic approach to getting to know the context.

The Exhibition

The second action was to organize an exhibition for a formal visit by UNESCO. This was helpful because producing posters about the history of the cinema and its current state assisted the stakeholder analysis and general understanding of the context.

Walk and Talk

The aim of this tool is to understand the spatial arrangement of the place, its physical condition and the activity systems (Architecture Sans Frontières, n.d.). It was very useful to understand the space, the building and the future transformations and gain some very interesting historical details.

Mapping

Important information was collected from all the previous steps for the mapping, either by daily commuting to the site or through interviews and literature studies. The aim was to map according to relationships, feelings and everyday life, taking inspiration from the Phycho Geographic Cartographies.

Memory Mapping Workshop

Memory mapping, within the framework of cultural heritage, refers to a bottom-up tool that invites the community to link physical sites with intangible memories and stories, individually or collectively. It can be seen as a documentation technique for preservation, in which the collected data is oral stories and everyday routines. (Schofield et al., 2020)

Interviews

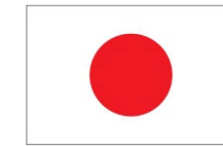
After the exhibition and the observations, the next step was to talk to the active users about how they imagined the place and the improvements they would like. It is also important to mention that I attended many meetings with the main stakeholders and that was a useful source of information.

Stakeholder Analysis



The Organizations

Supported by:



From the People of Japan



وزارة الثقافة
Ministry of Culture

Public Sector:

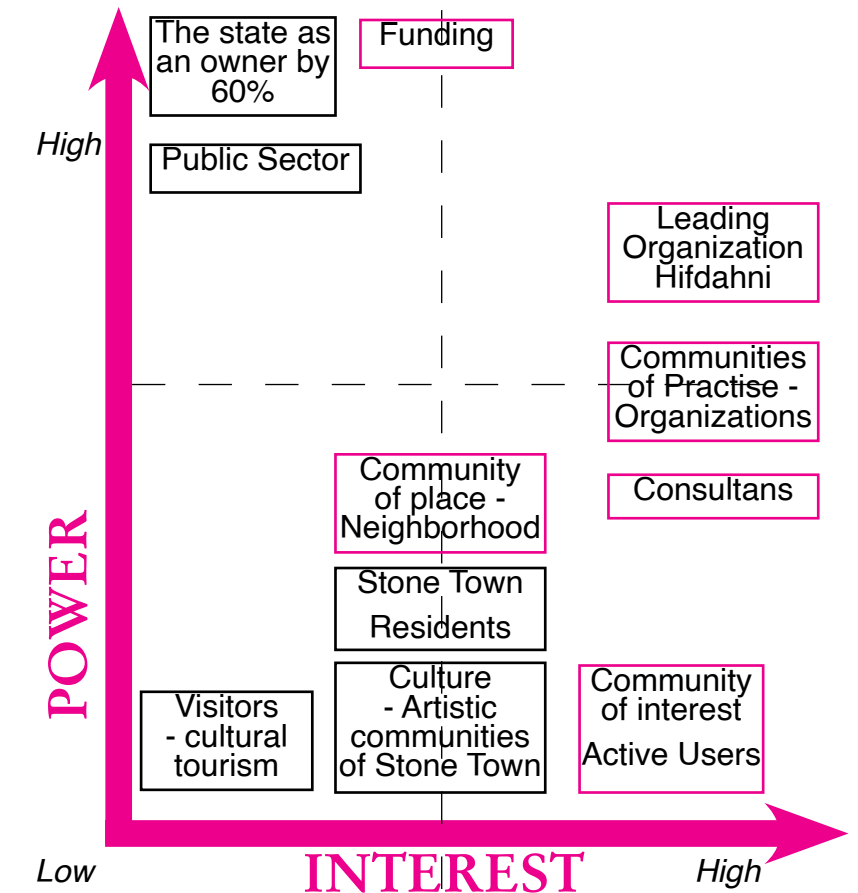


Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar.

Ministry of Tourism and Heritage

Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority (STCDA)

□ direct stakeholders
□ indirect stakeholders



An initial stakeholder mapping was conducted to identify the various actors and analyze their influence on the process, facilitating effective collaboration in subsequent stages. This mapping was made according to the Living Heritage Approach (see booklet p.25) and three categories were identified; communities of place(residents), communities of place(active users), and communities of practice (organizations, funding, public sector).

Communities of interest maintain high engagement with the space despite limited decision-making authority, while communities of place exert influence through public participation or disapproval. Within the communities of practice, power is heterogeneous: the state and donors possess the ultimate authority to facilitate or obstruct the restoration, whereas the resident organizations and the leading organization—acting as coordinator—demonstrate high interest in cultural programming but hold more localized or functional power.

This exhibition took place because of the official visit of the Japanese ambassador to the site, as the Japan Funds-in-Trust at Unesco represents one of the restoration's primary sources of funding. Although the exhibition was conceived for a temporary visit, its design was based on the concept of a long-term installation within the venue. Thereby, a visitor to the Temporary Hub would be able to be informed about the history of the cinema or its current use and status.

Unfortunately, the time was limited because the visit of the Tanzanian Unesco board and the Ambassador was planned to take place two weeks after my arrival. As a result, the time-frame was very specific and the making of certain decisions was essential for efficient time management. My responsibilities included the production of the posters (themes, graphical lay-out, printing set up) and the curation of the exhibition.

Firstly, relevant posters from a prior exhibition in a separate venue were incorporated into the current display. The themes of the existing posters were; cinema culture in Zanzibar, cinemas as community spaces, the movies played and the history of the Majestic Cinema. It was settled to use the same layout for the new posters as for the existing ones because of limited time. However, the new material would follow the logic 'less text, more images'.

Secondly, I focused on the narrative of the exhibition and on what would be complimentary for the existing material. It was decided that the main storyline would be a division into three sectors: PAST – PRESENT – FUTURE. On the first section, PAST, the prior material was included along with a poster about Mr. Marashi (see booklet, p.22). He passed away recently, 3 weeks before the exhibition, so this was a way to pay tribute to his memory. In the second section, PRESENT, posters were created about the architect, his contribution and his work, a stakeholder analysis of the current situation (see booklet, p.32) and the activities in the temporary hub (see booklet, p.24). Finally, for the FUTURE section, a printed banner (existing material) was used that illustrates in an axonometric the future proposal, along with technical drawings.

Thirdly, an important issue was the division of the space and the way to present the posters. It was agreed to construct some wooden panels, simple in their design, to hang the posters. Their dimensions were determined by the show room (temporary hub) and how this could be divided. A collaboration with a local craftsman, fundi, was required for that purpose. Last but not least, I had to take into consideration that there were active users in space, students studying or individuals participating in cultural activities. The set-up of the exhibition shouldn't be contradictory to their presence or activities.



Fig16-19. Temporary Hub - The Exhibition
The visit of the Japanese ambassador



Conclusion

The exhibition was a very useful tool because, through that, I explored at a very early stage the archives and digital folders related to the cinema's history and the future steps of the restoration. Moreover, it facilitated familiarization with the environment, the active users and the city's practical workflows, identifying the essential role of local vendors and fundis as a primary networking layer. Finally, it served its purpose by drawing the attention of visitors without disturbing the every-day routines of the Hub.

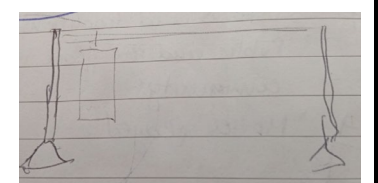


Fig.20 Wooden panels

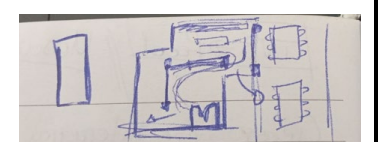
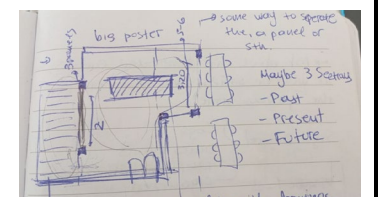
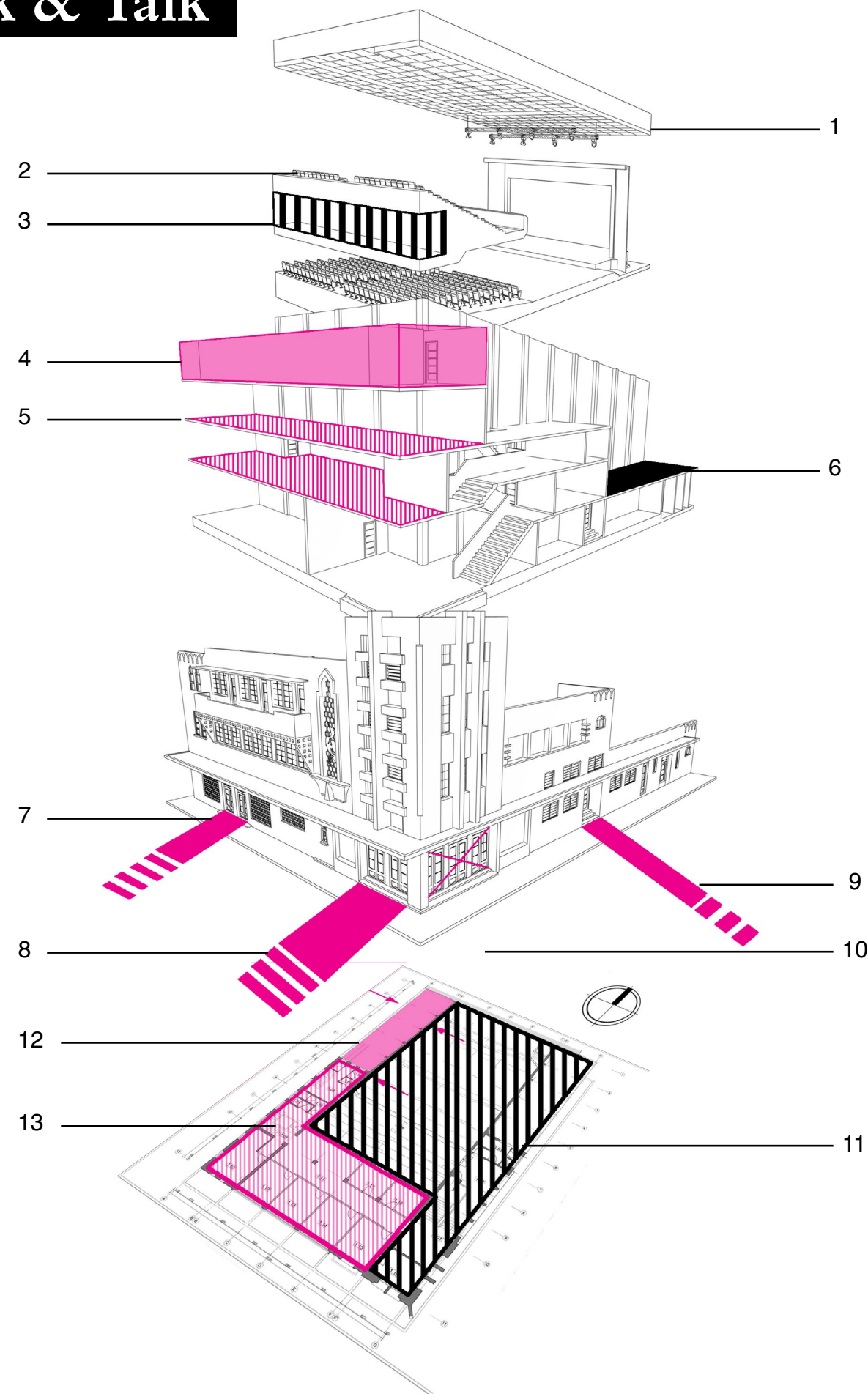


Fig21-22. Exhibition
Sketch

Walk & Talk



1. The roof is in critical condition; therefore, repairing it is the first step in securing the building.

2. The upper level had more expensive tickets, so those were the elite seats.

3. This room offers complete privacy with a separate, almost 'hidden' entrance. According to oral tradition, this was the Sultan's private seat.

4. A small projection room stands here today alongside a veranda. This open space will be enclosed during the second phase of the restoration/extension.

5. These two spaces are accessible from the west side of the building but not from the cinema hall.

6. This level is not accessible today, is a corrugated metal surface. In the second phase of the restoration the plan is to transform it to a terrace.

7. The main entrance of the Temporary Culture Hub.

8. The main entrance of the cinema. Before nationalization (1964), Europeans and Indians entered through here.

9. Secondary entrance of the cinema. Before nationalization, the local people entered through here.

10. This entrance has been closed for many years, but the plan is to reopen it after the restoration.

11. The east part of the building, with the cinema hall, and the west part of the building function almost as two separate buildings.

12. This is an open yard with access from the cinema hall and the west elevation. It will be enclosed after the restoration.

13. Entrance and circulation within the building's west link.

Conclusion

From the Walk & Talk, several interesting details about the cinema's history emerged, such as the social hierarchy reflected in the seating and the separate entrances. Secondly, the tour highlighted that although the exterior appears as a compact, single building, the interior functions as two distinct structures—the west link and the cinema hall—each with its own entrance, circulation, and access at various levels.

Thirdly, the restoration follows this internal logic. The construction strategy is "from rough to fine," beginning with the cinema hall and the roof, since these are in the worst condition. The second phase will address the west link, which remains functional today and only requires minor concrete repairs.

Finally, this activity helped clarify not only the spatial arrangement of the site but also the upcoming project phases. This is particularly important because in the next step, the concept generation, I must take into account the physical changes that will occur within the building.

Fig23. Axonometric Diagram Produced by the Hifadhi Team.

Critical Mapping

Jaws Corner and Meeting outdoor spaces:

Mazzkahs are vital to the area's intangible heritage, with Jaws Corner being the most prominent example. These outdoor spaces serve as hubs for socializing, playing board games, and eating, often surrounded by food stands and barazas. A baraza is a stone bench acting as an extension of a house—a transitional space that is neither fully private nor public. While the most famous mazzkah is Jaws Corner, located at a five-road intersection in the heart of Stone Town, smaller versions exist throughout the city, including one next to the Majestic.

Vuga Road:

Majestic Cinema is situated on Vuga Road, a primary access route connecting the modern district of N'gambo to Stone Town. While Vuga Road is busy, it is less congested than Creek Road, which serves as the boundary between the World Heritage Site and its buffer zone. Vuga Road is characterized by wide streets, open spaces, and stately architecture—a sharp contrast to the dense fabric of Stone Town. The area is dominated by institutional buildings and recreational spaces; however, a 30-second walk leads directly back into the vibrant, narrow, and noisy labyrinth of the residential quarters.

Vuga Road:

1. American Corner/ education

2. The State University of Zanzibar

3. Ben Bela Secondary School

4. Ampola Tasakhtaa Hospital

5. Dhow Countries Music Academy /former building

6. Vuga mosque

7. Second Vice President Office

Majestic Cinema

Mazzkah

Food Stands

Entrance to Stone Town

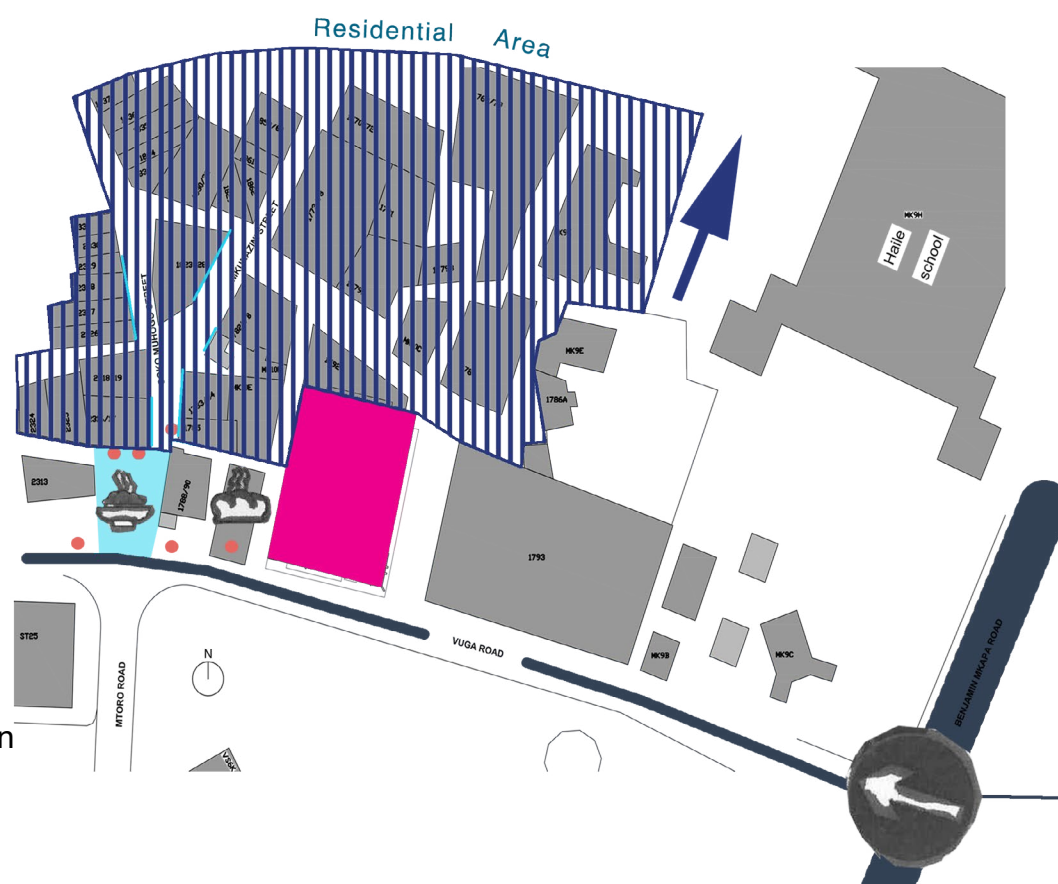
Heritage under threat

5. Dhow Countries Music Academy/former building

10. Hammam Persian Baths

9. House of Wonders

8. Old Fort



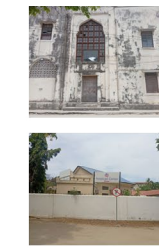
Creek Road



Vuga Road



View from residential area



Institutional Buildings



Majestic Cinema

Vuga Road

Fig24-36. Photos by personal archive



meeting space close to Majestic



Residential Area & Barazas



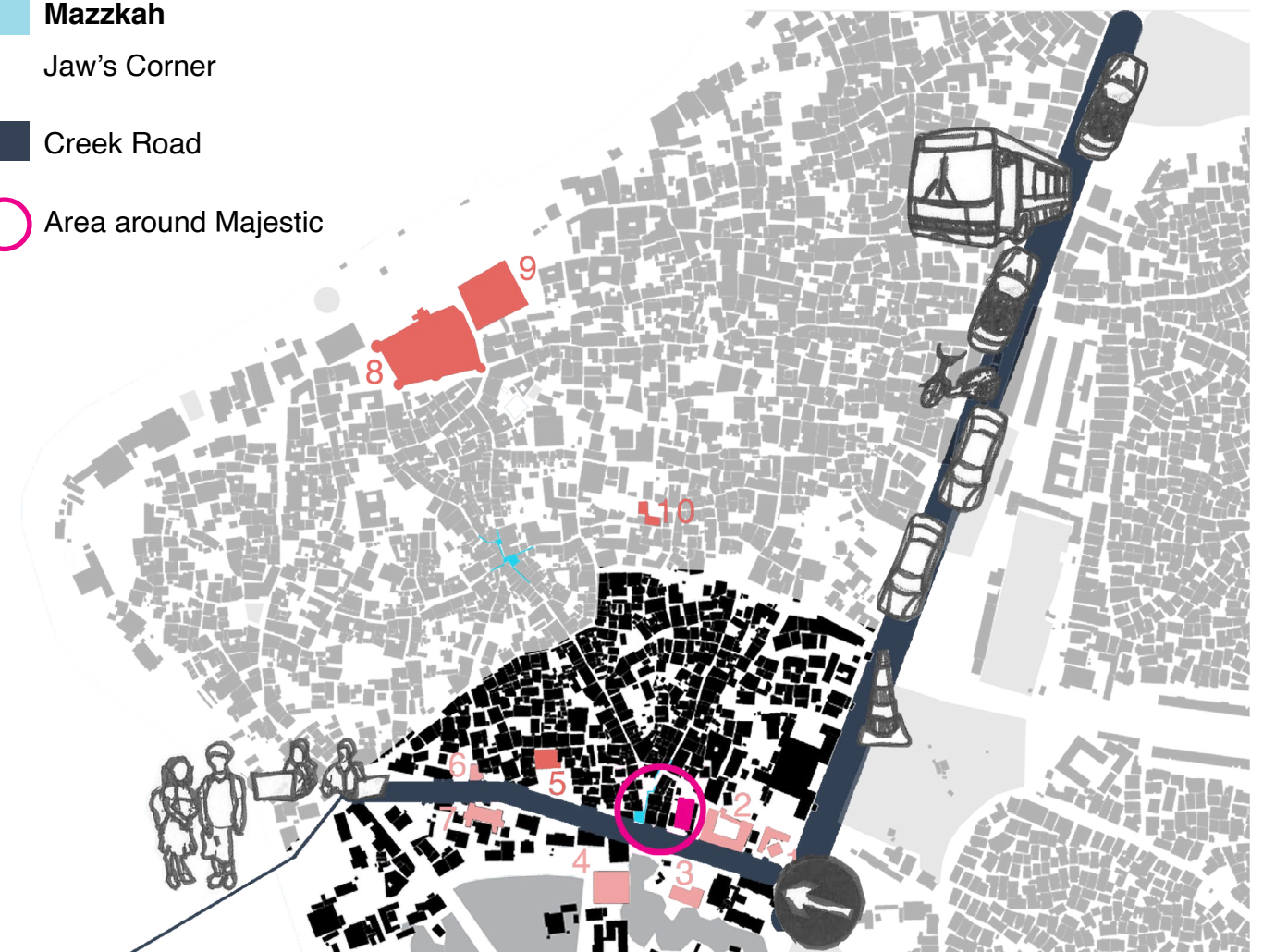
Jaws Corner

Mazzkah

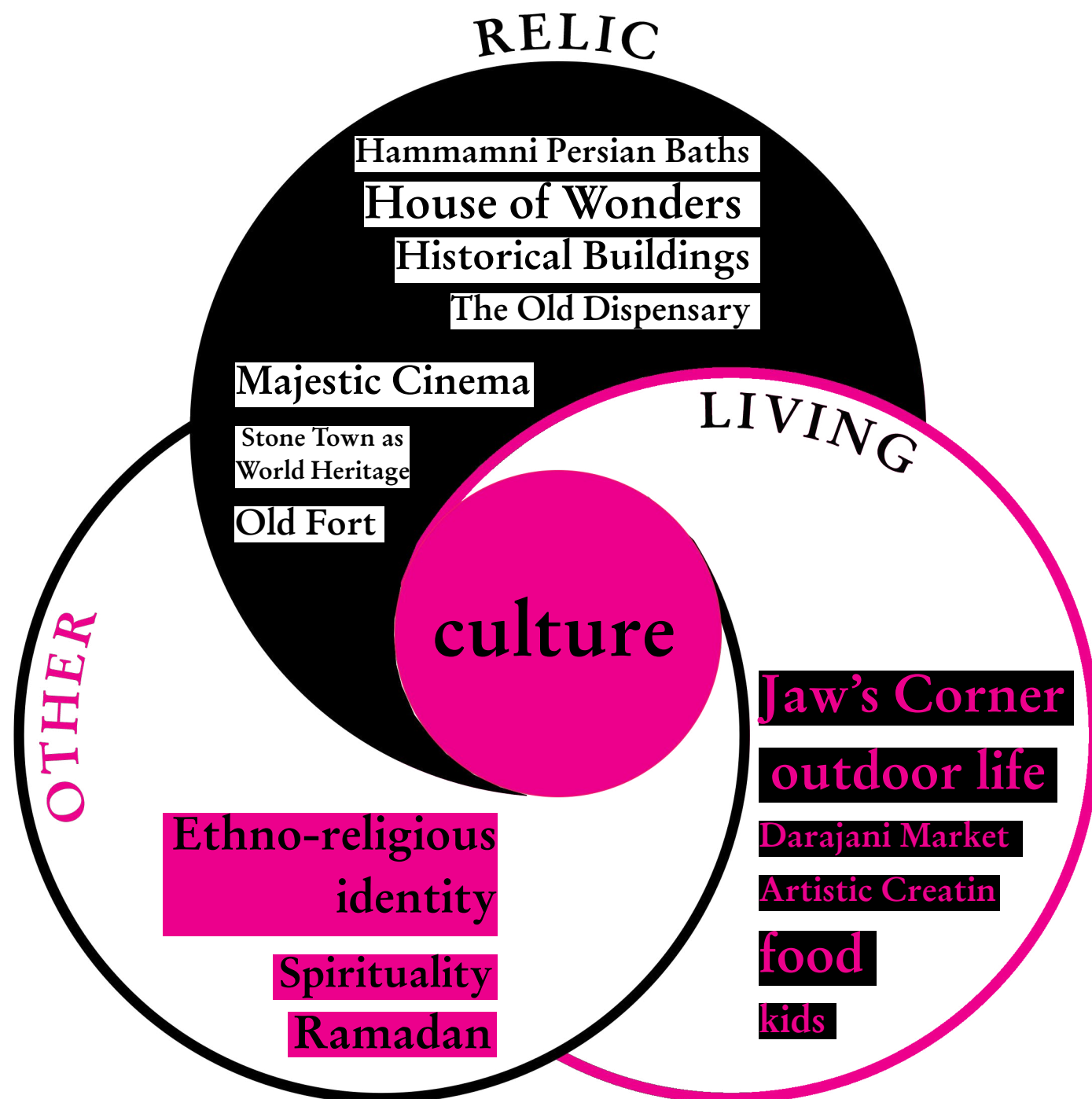
Jaw's Corner

Creek Road

Area around Majestic



Cultural Diagram



The scope

This cultural diagram attends to determine the cultural assets, pattern of usage, links and idiosyncrasies. Because all these elements construct the identity of a place along with the social context. Collecting significant cultural information is a powerful instrument to understand the locality and the special meanings of a place. This process was necessary because the future Majestic Culture Hub aspires to be a cultural space, a community space, a public space at the very end.

The structure

The main identified categories of this exploration are; relic, living, and other. The relic culture refers to cultural achievements of the past, such as various historical buildings. The second category is living culture, which refers to culture still in development, including both material and immaterial culture. It expresses the vitality of open spaces and reflects community residents' daily lives. The third category, which we refer to as "other culture", is related to the religious aspect and how it is interconnected to social life in Stone Town.

Conclusion

The following conclusions highlight how the importance of outdoor space in Stone Town is deeply intertwined with its ethno-religious context, particularly during Ramadan. Unlike tourist-heavy areas where traditions may fade, the sounds of prayer and the rigor of the fast remain central to daily life in the city; while the strictness of past years—where eating or drinking in public

could lead to legal action—has relaxed due to tourism, these cultural practices remain resilient even as gentrification erodes other social fabrics.

Regarding the relic part of culture, facing severe maintenance challenges and economic instability, many historical monuments have fallen into dilapidated condition. To address this, the state has leased these sites to large real estate firms capable of funding their restoration. However, this has resulted in many significant landmarks being repurposed into exclusive boutique hotels. Nevertheless, the issue is not only detected in historical buildings, beyond major monuments, the lack of maintenance causes daily collapses or fires in ordinary buildings. Once again, the conclusion is that heritage is under immediate threat.

The disconnectedness of the "Relic-Living-Other" is most visible in public spaces like Lebanon Square and Forodhani Gardens, which transform into packed hubs of celebration during Idd (the end of Ramadan, a celebration that lasts 3 days). Despite this vibrancy, the community faces significant displacement, with cultural organizations being evicted from historic buildings and a lack of public space leading to fewer cultural events (see booklet, p.42). This pressure directly threatens "living heritage"; where children once filled the streets of Stone Town with play, they are increasingly absent as schools close and families are forced to relocate to Ng'ambo. (see booklet, p.41-43).

Meeting with the main stakeholders

Cultural Organizations

Community of practise

Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) was represented by its director, Joseph A. Mwale, and Reclaim Women's Space in Heritage was represented by Bi Munira Said and Madina Haji, the main coordinators.

This meeting provided insight into the organizations that will occupy the building after restoration and helped clarify the broader context. The discussion covered how these organizations began, their role in the community, what they offer, and what they currently lack. The main topic of discussion was the current state of tangible and intangible heritage in Stone Town and how those two are interconnected. It also addressed the challenges facing Stone Town's culture and heritage, comparing past and present conditions to identify what is being lost and what must be preserved. Nowadays, the main challenges are related to tourism and gentrification and affect the public space, the community and the heritage aspect. An example that depicts this situation is that two 'historical schools' close to Darajani Market were demolished due to the expansion of the market. Fewer schools mean fewer kids in Stone Town and this is an essential part of culture.

Main Takeaway

Challenges:

Loss of Public Space: Open spaces, essential to daily life, are disappearing.

Declining Community: Residents are leaving for the modern part of the city because they cannot maintain their houses and choose to sell them.

Heritage Under Threat: Specific buildings are now categorized as "under threat" (referenced in the critical map), with their current state and future remaining uncertain.

Khwemah Sykes

Conservation Architect

Community of practise

Project Leader and Member of Hifadhi, the leading organization.

As the project leader, she possesses comprehensive knowledge of the entire process. The discussion covered Majestic's neighborhood and the building's past, present, and future states, including current operations and the vision for the future temporary hub.

Main Takeaway

A key takeaway from the interview was the challenge of building community awareness. While students and artists are the most active users, they are generally not from the immediate neighborhood. The goal is to involve the local community in the hub's programming before the restoration is complete. To achieve this, she suggests that interior physical arrangements are necessary—not only for function but to make the space feel more welcoming. Various ideas for this transition were brainstormed.

Saumn Abushiri

Active User

Community of interest

Young Professional, who works remotely and this the reason she uses the space.

The discussion focused on the daily routines of the community hub and provided insights into improving the space and its atmosphere. A primary focus was the diverse needs of active users; for example, some groups require privacy for meetings or lessons, while others need open desk space. Additionally, the hub must accommodate cultural activities like music. Another key point was the relationship between Stone Town residents and the immediate neighbors, specifically how they view heritage. There is a clear sense of pride in the cinema's legacy and the restoration as a symbol of identity.

Main Takeaway

Beyond the practical ideas for the hub's daily routine and interior layout, the discussion highlighted an underlying issue: a lack of distinct identity. The temporary hub requires a recognizable character—something the community can identify with, whether they visit the space or not.

Dhow Countries Music Academy

Cultural Organization

Community of interest

The organization was represented by Halda Alkanaa, the Managing Director

This interview provided insight into how cultural organizations operate in Stone Town, including the factors behind their success, methods for strengthening community bonds, and their ongoing struggles. A significant portion of the discussion focused on networking with local residents to create a sense of ownership and accountability. Interestingly, social media is primarily effective for reaching tourists rather than locals. At the local level, beyond standard advertising like flyers, radio, and TV, there is a strong focus on school outreach and educational concerts.



Fig37-39. Navigating Signs

The arrows

These arrows were installed following the eviction from the first building as a way to inform and guide the community to the new location. I was struck by their effectiveness; as a first-time visitor to Stone Town, a place that usually takes at least some weeks to be able to navigate without a phone, I found them invaluable. Even before I knew of the DCDA, I found myself following the arrows whenever I lost my way (I would usually go to Majestic, in Vuga Road). While their primary purpose was orientation, they also provided the organization with visibility and a sense of identity. Such a simple gesture is often enough to signal the existence of a cultural space to both visitors and residents alike.

Main Takeaway

The primary struggle identified is the lack of a permanent space. After 20 years in a historical building at the port, the organization was evicted. They spent another four years in a building on Vuga Road before being evicted again due to restoration issues (referenced in the critical map). Currently, they occupy a very small building in the heart of Stone Town, with equipment spread across four different storage spaces. This situation serves as clear evidence of the consequences of gentrification in Stone Town. The discussion concluded by highlighting the importance of the Majestic restoration, which is anticipated to fill this critical gap.

Martin Mhando

Filmmaker and academic

Community of interest

Mr. Mhando is the former director of ZIFF from 2006 until 2023

The conversation focused on topics like the ZIFF festival, its purpose and its activities, cinema culture in Zanzibar and the challenges for cinemas and cultural spaces, like what Majestic aspires to be. The main scope that motivates ZIFF is “How to build a festival that connects with the community”. A big part of this answer is the kids, as the future generation. In the 2nd Festival, 1992, a workshop took place inside the House of Wonders and the objective was the kids to learn the importance of films, and to get in touch with parts of the history and culture. The kids were from St’ Joseph school, another “historical” school that doesn’t exist anymore. Another way to reinforce a community-oriented festival is free entrance or at least affordable prices. The discussion came around the role of the state and different tax-relief scenarios. Moreover, it was highlighted that “Zanzibar Cinema is a social equalizer” and this should be the goal for the Majestic Cultural Hub. To achieve these, a promotion is necessary, as well as to find ways for entry free activities and events.

Main Takeaway

- importance of the kids for the community
- importance of Bollywood
- importance of affordable prices

Affinity Diagramming - Observations

Affinity diagramming is a visual method used to organize large amounts of brainstorming data, user research, or ideas into related clusters. The process emphasizes on observations from research, allowing notes to be grouped based on their conceptual alignment. Rather than using predefined categories, this method employs a bottom-up approach. It begins by clustering specific, small details into groups, which eventually give rise to general, overarching themes.

INTERIOR OF THE HUB

Observations were gathered regarding the daily routines and specific needs of active users. Additionally, the study noted differences in usage and atmosphere between the day, afternoon, and evening.

Proposed ideas for making the space more welcoming include adding a tea corner, plants and a shoe case. Activities that took place there and were popular are; film screenings and kids’s library.

KIDS

In the temporary Hub when there are kids’ activities the neighbors and in general the community are more involved

For parents is important their kids to be involved with activities that can give them skills to make a better living later in their life

PUBLIC SPACE

Local residents generally do not enter the temporary hub without a specific reason, such as an ongoing activity or prior familiarity with the space. However, after the exhibition was set up, tourists and other visitors began entering to view the panels and learn more about the project

Observations regarding open public spaces indicate that because many houses in Stone Town are small and basic, these outdoor areas are essential to daily life.

open public spaces are not only barazzas and small squares, but also terraces and “hidden” gardens

Stone Town’s growing population faces an increasingly dense historic fabric. This lack of space forces residents to either endure overcrowded conditions or relocate to the modern, expanding district of Ng’ambo.

Conclusion

Firstly, Stone Town is increasingly struggling with gentrification, where a lack of public space in a dense urban environment is pushing residents toward the “Other Side.” Secondly, by observing how people use the Temporary Hub, we’ve gathered valuable insights into local needs that can be applied throughout the entire building, not just within the Hub itself. Finally, given how vital children are to this community, it is essential to integrate more youth-oriented spaces and activities into the overall programming.

Poverty has no other language than equality

Memory Mapping Workshop

The need for this workshop came at a particular step of the process, from the concept generation phase to develop concrete design strategies. It was necessary to meet community members, the community of place, to get their insights about specific topics that emerged from the previous steps.

It is important to mention that the original structure and objectives of the workshop slightly changed for various reasons. Firstly, the participants were arriving at different stages of the process (from 9:00 to 11:00) and they were not so intrigued by some topics, for instance, cultural activities or gender inclusivity, so I decided instead of pushing for extra information to follow their interests. However, they were more than willing to talk about memories of the cinema and the public spaces in the city, which were parts of the initial structure.

The result of this workshop was to gather information from community members regarding their relationship to public spaces around Stone Town in the past and the present and to share memories and stories regarding Majestic Cinema and cinema culture in Zanzibar. These insights and memories will directly shape the design strategies of this thesis, turning community feedback into a more welcoming and inclusive space for all.

Material that was incorporated in the next design phases

Back in the days the movie posters of all 3 cinemas were hanged on an announcement board at the Darajani market. The Majestic's posters were painted, and the letters had a distinctive light blue colour.

The most popular films were cowboy movies and Bollywood movies, which they would show during the night.

A unique event in the cinema's history is a concert that took place by Miriam Makeba. A famous South African singer and activist, who, in the years following the Revolution, celebrated decolonization and the creation of the nation with the residents in Stone Town.

Regarding public spaces, they are interconnected with food and there are no officially designed playgrounds.

They shared stories about Asikiti Ruta, a baraza, where they would meet to get informed about the global news during WWII. The barazas are not only places for socializing but also updating and even educating.

What is public? It's not only the open spaces, even the Mosque is considered a public space. However, open spaces are for everyone.

Co-organizers: Reclaim Women's Space in World Heritage Sites (p.22)

This NGO is part of the broader initiation of the revitalization of the cinema. It is one of the main stakeholders that will be located in the Majestic Culture Hub. Its contribution is valuable for this thesis. Firstly, the main coordinators, Bi Munira Said and Mafina Haji, invited community members who could contribute to the discourse. It is important to mention that they already had experience in the memory mapping method and their guidance was insightful.

Number of Participants: 10-12

Duration: 3h

Conclusions

This workshop provided essential material for the next design phase, offering specific insights that can be directly integrated into the architectural proposal rather than serving as mere general context. The workshop acted as a critical bridge, reinforcing previous research while surfacing entirely new findings. Ultimately, the shift away from my initial objectives was not a setback, but a fundamental aspect of grounded field research; it prioritized responding to the reality of the site over imposing a preconceived agenda, allowing the research to evolve alongside the available material.

Collected Material and Photos

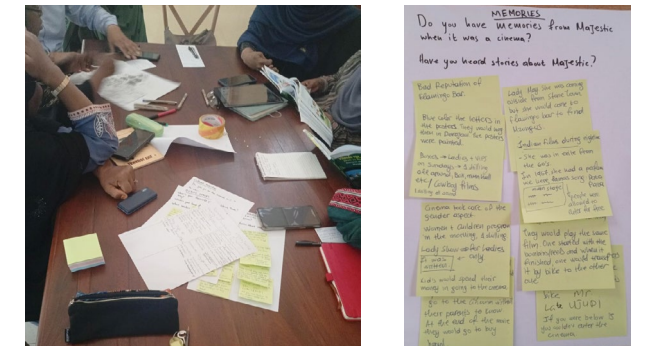


Fig40-42. During the workshop



Fig43. Posters in Darajani Market, Capital Art Studio ©

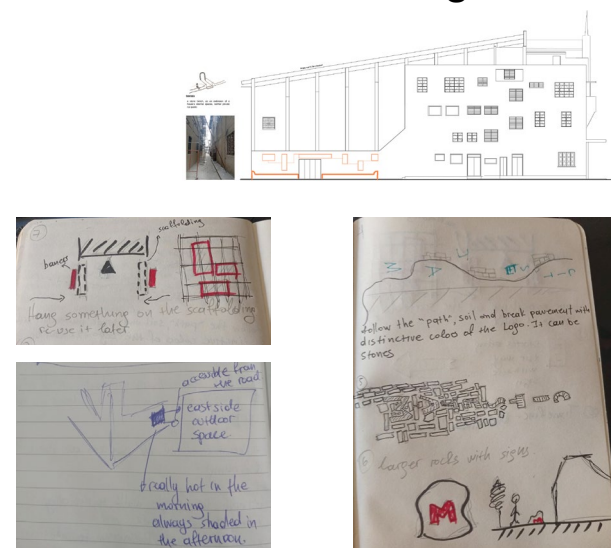
How can inclusive design approaches and strategies preserve living heritage alongside a formal restoration process?

The goal is to invite the local community by activating the space through design strategies rooted in empathy and respect for both the residents and the built heritage. The first step involved organizing the collected data to define issues beyond simple technical fixes like wiring. The majority of the material concerns the building's current and future functions, and it was required to combine different research methods to identify potential issues. There were a variety of issues identified. However, I decided to focus on two of them.

The first of them is related to issues like visibility and identity. What is important is to connect the past identity and activity of the cinema with the future function, so the residents of Stone Town will be able to relate with the project and not see it as something new and separate from their realities but as the continuation of the cinema. It doesn't matter if an individual visits the place or not or participates in the cultural activities. The point is to be recognizable by everyone, all to be aware of what is going on there. The idea is to try to create something visually attractive either at the building or the surrounding neighborhood. Brainstorming of ideas include using a distinctive color palette and logo, interior or exterior murals, or even pavement markings throughout the neighborhood to help people find and orient themselves toward the building.

The second issue is related to the lack of outdoor space in the existing building. As it has been exposed to the Method section, outdoor public life is central to the town's identity. Since the Majestic Culture Hub aspires to be a public space, a place for meeting, interacting, and experiencing the community, it was necessary to observe what actually happens in the public spaces. Based on field research, in this context, social and cultural life takes place outdoors, probably because the houses are quite small and basic. However, the public space includes a variety of spaces and not only mazzaahs, the small squares (see booklet p.36). Social interaction takes place in barazas, terraces and hidden gardens or yards as well, so there is a variety of scales. By incorporating these considerations, the second design strategy proposes an open-space intervention. Such a space is now more vital than ever, serving as a necessary counterpoint to the rapid gentrification and the reduction of public spaces in the city.

Sketches - Brainstorming



White Arkitekter

+

Planning Systems Services Ltd:

Go Down Arts Centre

Nairobi, Kenya

Beyond its role as a creative workspace, The GoDown Arts Centre serves as a vital anchor for Nairobi's community life. By fostering meaningful cross-cultural engagement and providing essential public services, the Centre has evolved into a cornerstone of the city's social fabric.

This success is rooted in a participatory design process; through workshops and digital initiatives, the Centre maintains a continuous dialogue with a diverse range of stakeholders—including artists, local businesses, schoolchildren, and city officials. This iterative approach ensures that the Centre's programming remains energized and responsive to the community's evolving needs.

A primary example of this collaborative philosophy is the Nai Ni Who ("Who is Nairobi?") festival. Co-conceived with the architectural firm White Arkitekter to stimulate discourse about the city, the festival empowers residents to curate their own neighborhoods. By mapping local talents and crafts through community-led actions, the initiative does more than celebrate culture; it builds local capacity. With guidance from The GoDown, neighborhood teams manage the festival's commercial and cultural value, ensuring long-term sustainability through shared knowledge.

As The GoDown has grown into one of East Africa's preeminent artistic hubs, its physical infrastructure has had to scale alongside its influence. The Property Redevelopment Initiative represents this growth, transforming the existing 1.6-acre site in Nairobi's Industrial Area. This project will transition the current 7,000-square-meter adaptive-reuse warehouse into a 25,000-square-meter, mixed-use cultural complex. By expanding its physical footprint, The New GoDown aims to fully realize the latent socio-economic opportunities that culture holds for the future of Nairobi.

Relevance to the thesis

The project's relevance to this thesis lies not in restoration, as it was decided to construct a new building tailored specifically to modern community needs. The primary focus is less on the formal architectural output and more on the underlying process—specifically the philosophy and programming that shaped the design. This approach closely mirrors the aspirations of the Majestic, aiming to transcend its role as a cultural venue to become a vital community space. Furthermore, initiatives like the Nai-Ni Who Festival serve as a primary inspiration, demonstrating how architectural means can effectively bridge the gap between tangible and intangible heritage.

Lina Bo Bardi: Solar do Unhao Museum of Popular Art Salvador, Brazil

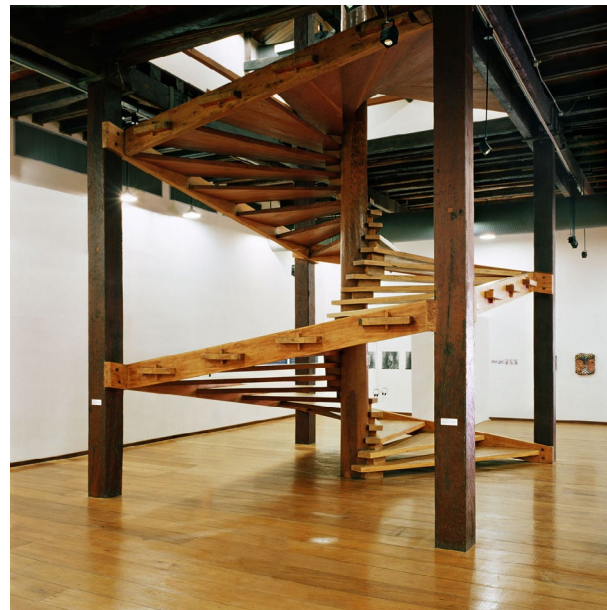


Fig44. The Helical wooden staircase
© Nelson Kon

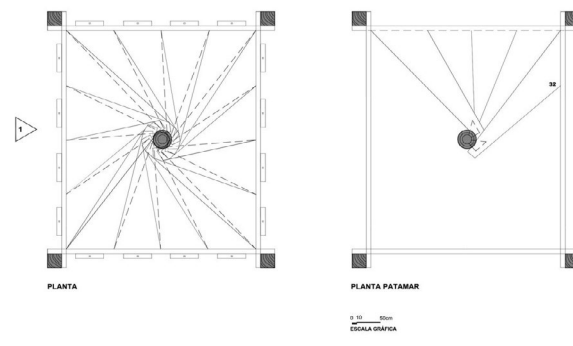


Fig45. Plan of the staircase
Draw: Edit Galote Carranza (CC BY 4.0).
Retrieved from Archdaily

This is a restoration project of a sugar mill in the port city of Salvador. The complex, originated in the 17th century, contained a residence, chapel, and slave quarters. It was restored by Lina Bo Bardi in 1959 to be transformed to the Museum of Popular Art and the Popular University. The architect designed innovative architectural elements while respecting the heritage. The most significant of those was the spiral wooden staircase as it stands like a sculpture in the middle of the room.

Relevance to the thesis

Foremost, it is an adaptive re-use project. The most intriguing part in Bo Bardi's work is how she approaches the historical building. She is in a dialogue with heritage, neither dominating over it nor mimicking it or being afraid to "touch" it. Introducing an element like this spiral staircase in a 17th century building is a bold architectural gesture that shows how the historical and the modern, the new and the old can be combined. Finally, one of the design outcomes included a staircase and the space was limited, so a spiral staircase was the only solution. This reference served as an inspiration for this staircase (see booklet, p.61).

Tatiana Bilbao Estudio: En Commun



Fig46. En Commun,
Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO ©

"En Commun" is an exhibition that took place at the Aedes Architecture Forum in Berlin. It depicts ways of coming and living together at different scales of collectivity, as well as the potent connection between public and private space, understood as platforms for social relationships. Each collage portrays a vibrant story that aims to create a dialogue with the audience.

Relevance to the thesis

Tatiana Bilbao's work, and this project in particular, served as a primary inspiration for several reasons. Her use of collage as a tool for architectural synthesis, rather than just representation, is especially compelling; her compositions often resemble posters or paintings, yet they translate seamlessly into coherent physical buildings and exhibitions. I adopted this same methodology, using collage to visualize the project's spatial results at an early stage (see booklet, p.51) with the materials available at the time. Beyond the technique, I was drawn to the project's core themes—care, collectivity, and the nuanced connections between public and private spaces—which heavily informed my own approach.

Design Strategy I: Timeline

Main Idea

The main idea is to create a mural based on the timeline developed for this booklet (see booklet p.14-15). This timeline would be expanded with nodes related to the building and cinema history, such as information about the architect, quotes from relevant figures, and significant movies or concerts that impacted the community. Another concept is to visualize stories from oral traditions. This would require collaboration with artists and painters, as well as research into old photos of the building and key figures, such as Mr. Marashi.

Objective:

The scope of this intervention is to celebrate the rich cinema culture in Zanzibar and, specifically, Majestic Cinema. Firstly, it was vital to utilize the valuable material collected through the process and especially the memory mapping in an effort to give voice to the community who shared all those meaningful stories. Secondly, bringing forward these meanings facilitates another process; to engage the residents in the act of remembering (Smith, 2006, p.65). Finally, this strategy aimed to promote the future function of Majestic Culture Hub and connect its existence to the past, the cultural activities that were taking place in Majestic Cinema.

Methods:

mapping, interviews, exhibition, and memory mapping workshop, inspiration from DCDA arrows (see booklet p.41)

Duration: 4 weeks

Group of artists:

2 leading artist, one was there for the implementation, the other one helped at the preparation
2 more artists
2 students of the leading artists

Team: S.H. Damson, K. Khalid, A. Said, K. Shaibu, H. Assa.

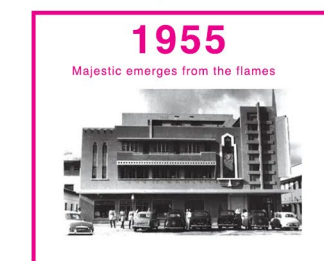
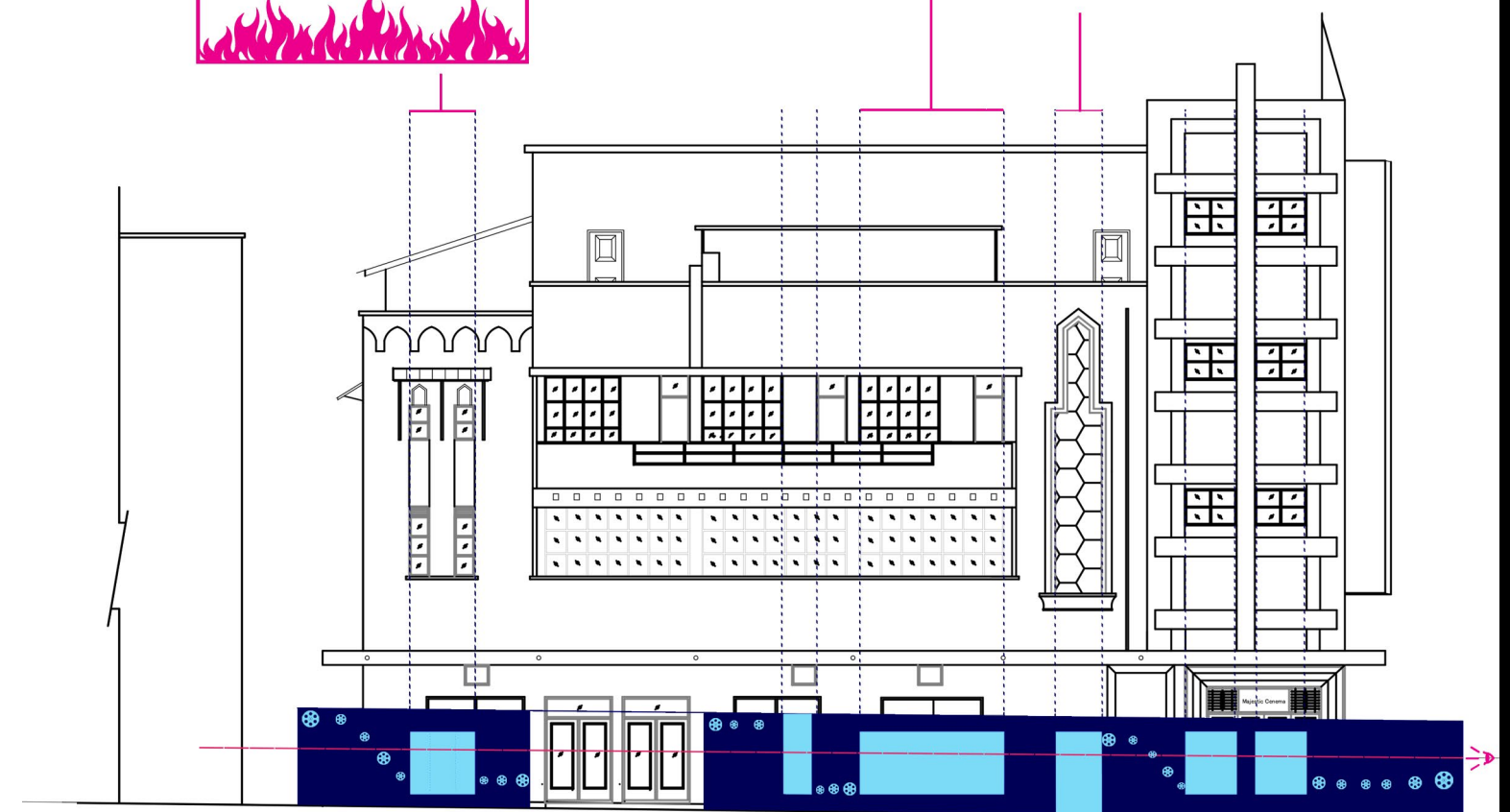
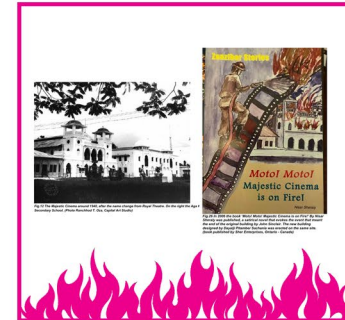
General:

Extensive discussions took place regarding the choice of surface or medium for the mural. Specifically whether to use the mambadi (conjugated metal surface) or a detachable canvas frame that could be removed during the dismantling of the scaffolding. Ultimately, the mambadi was selected as the most practical and cost-effective option, particularly given its durability against the weather. Since the scaffolding is expected to remain in place for at least a year, the frames can eventually be cut and reused once the structure is dismantled.

Results

The results received significant positive feedback and garnered noticeable attention from the wider community. Beyond the Majestic, the intervention proved to be highly eye-catching, often prompting passing drivers to stop and observe. In this sense, the project functioned as an effective form of promotion or organic advertisement, successfully fulfilling the initial objectives.

**bollywood vibe film
scenes - maybe elephants**



**cinema
will
be
back
again**



Share with the 2 leading artists material for inspiration (timeline and photos (see booklet, p.18-19, 24-25)

one more meeting to determine with the artists what themes will go to each frame, get into the cinema to get inspiration

incorporate the feedback and start organizing the budget which include the labor, materials and tools

The final budget was submitted to the Hifadhi Board

After the paints were bought, samples were made to check how it looks when it's dry

applying the background and check how much time it gets to dry

painting the drawings

designing the grid so it will be compatible with the art-deco facade and calculating the number and sizes of frames

present the idea to the project leader, contractors and the architects

multiple visits to Mlandege, the street with all the paintshops, to gather infos about the different paints, if it will be water-based, oil-based etc and to get an offer

when they approved it, we went to buy the materials and some extra equipment. The artists would work in the middle of the street and for safety reasons we needed cones and extra ladders. The contractors provided us with helmets and jackets. This equipment will be used afterwards by the construction team

preparations on the mabadi: clean it with a piece of cloth and start making the grid and putting the masking tape. This was quite challenging. Firstly, I provided them with a drawing with the correct dimensions and then we start taking the measurements. Secondly, it was quite difficult to apply the masking tape in a straight line in the corrugated surface

Process



Fig47. Making the Samples

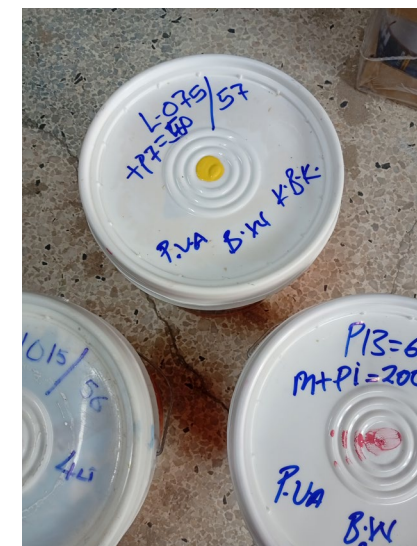


Fig48. Paints



Fig49. The ladders

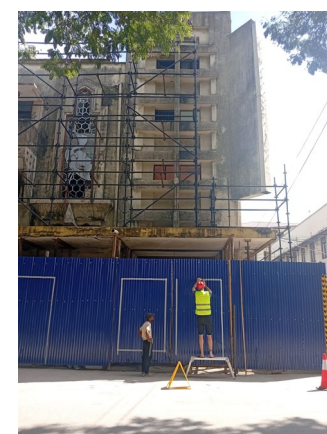


Fig50-52. Setting up the frames

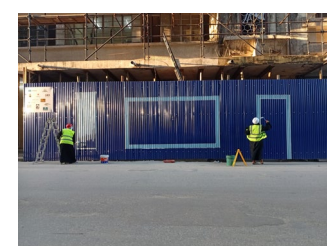
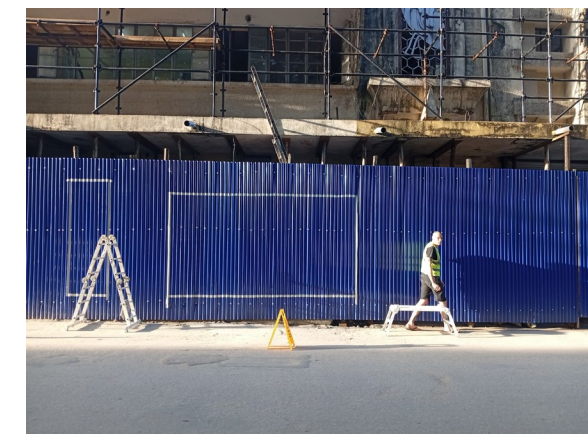


Fig53-54. Painting

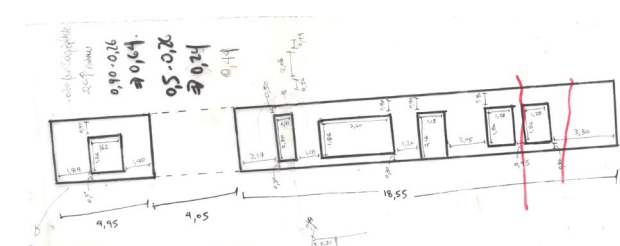


Fig55. Drawing with the measurements



Fig56-57. Final Result





Story 1

The predecessor of Majestic cinema, the Royal Cinema. It was constructed in 1920 and designed by John Sinclair, as the first cinema in Zanzibar. It was located in Vuga Road, at the exact same plot as the Majestic Cinema. It was lost to fire in 1954.

Story 2

The Majestic Cinema opened its doors on October 20, 1955, and was erected on the site of the old Cinema. The building was designed by local architect Dayalji Pitamber Sachania and commissioned by Hassanlai Hameer Hasham. It was constructed by local contractor G. Arjun Kunverji Patel & Co. Ltd.

Story 3

“Furaha Katika Majestic”. It means “Have fun in Majestic”. The objective was to honor the rich history and cultural prominence of cinema during the 50s, 60s, and 70s. The best way to do that was to represent an image that refers to Bollywood, one of the beloved genres of Zanzibari. The drawing is inspired by the film “Haathi mere Saathi”, a 1971 drama film. The movie was one of the greatest hits of its time.

Story 6

The last frame envisions the future of the cinema post-restoration. Although the initial concept included various cultural activities and architectural elements, the decision was made to concentrate solely on the cinema hall to maintain a clear narrative.

Story 4

One of the most beloved stories; the Miriam Makeba concert. Miriam Makeba was born in South Africa and in the early 60s she was exiled by the South African government because she participated in a documentary which criticized the apartheid. She moved to the United States, where her career reached new heights. “Pata pata” is one of her most popular songs. At the peak of her career during the 1960s and 70s—a period of decolonization across the African continent—she toured these newly independent nations. In this context she gave a performance in Majestic in 1967. This was pretty uncommon for the cinema, to host concerts. The event was free of charge and proved to be a resounding success.

Story 5

“Roho na Moyo”. It means “The heart and the Soul”. The objective was to pay tributes to Mr. Marashi, a figure tightly connected to the cinema’s history. For decades, following the decline of cinemas across Tanzania, Abduli emerged as a singular force in showcasing films in this historic venue. It’s important to reflect on the role that individuals like him play in the conservation and heritage of culture. Abduli exemplifies how one person can influence the preservation of cultural practices, ensuring that the arts, like cinema, continue to thrive and connect communities.

Fig58-63.Final Result

Design Strategy II: East Side Veranda

Main Idea

The second strategy introduces an outdoor space related to the building's program. This intervention can vary in scale—from a traditional baraza to activated open yard, though this would be challenging due to the current scaffolding and construction. However, it could serve as a future building extension in the project's second phase.

Objective:

The initiative envisions transforming the site into a hub for Zanzibar's cultural practitioners, reopening the premises to the public to foster a vibrant civic space rooted in the venue's legacy of community equality. Nevertheless, observations suggest that many individuals remain hesitant to enter the building due to its enclosed nature (see booklet p.43). To effectively invite the community and activate the Culture Hub, an outdoor space is essential. This approach respects local culture and identity—particularly within a post-colonial framework—by drawing upon the 'intelligence' of Stone Town's precolonial foundations and integrating these principles into the restoration process.

Methods:

walk & talk, mapping, cultural mapping, observations, interviews, and memory mapping workshop

Posotion in the building

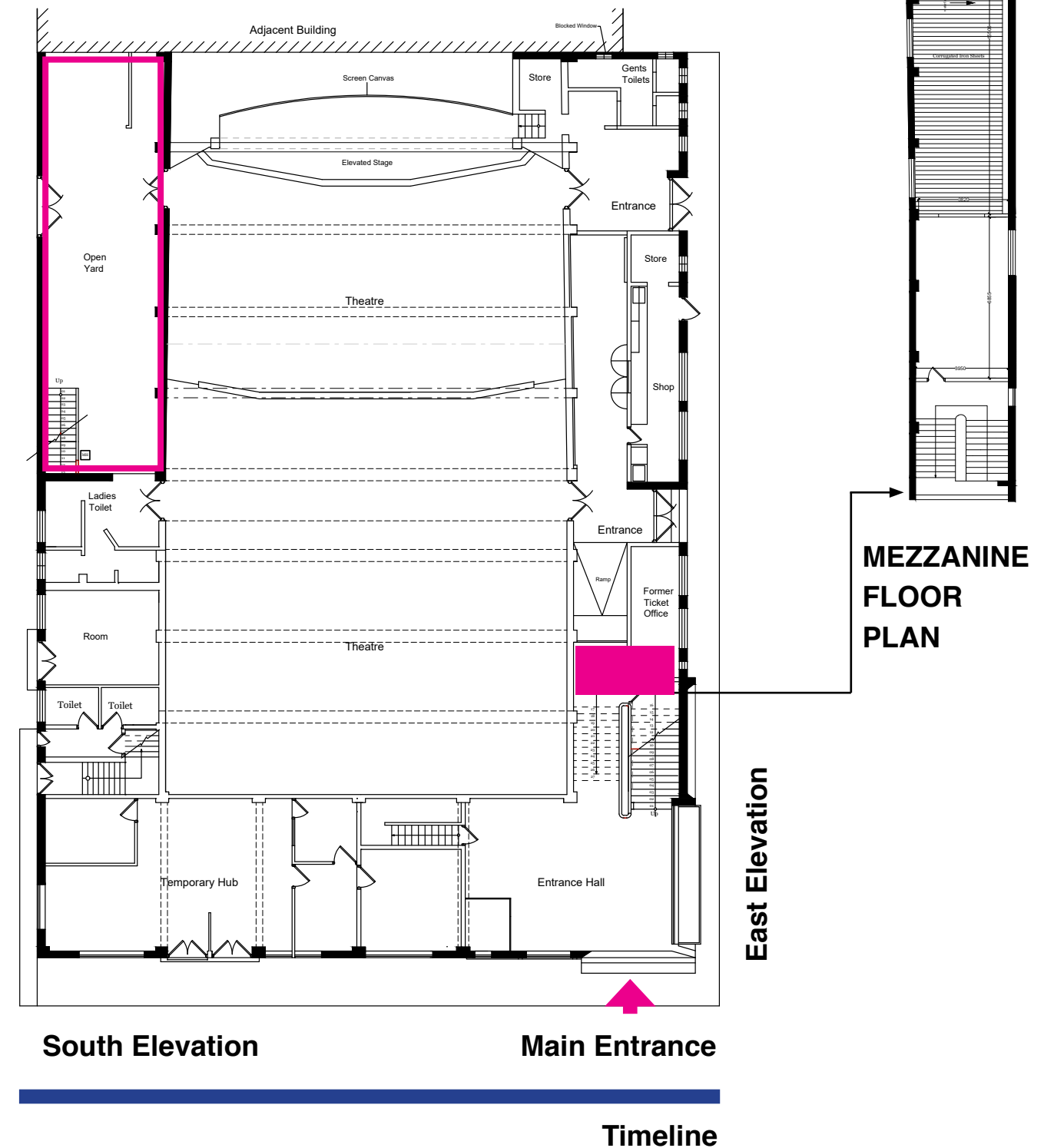
The first thing was to identify the location within the building where the design proposal could be developed. The open yard in the west part was excluded because it will be enclosed in the second phase, the extension. The terrace was excluded for the same reason. The barraza in the elevation of the building was too small for an intervention to include other functions. It would be only for sitting. So, based on the material collected, I decided to focus on the east side veranda. There is no veranda at the existing location of the building, but they plan to create one. At the moment there is a metal roof there (see booklet, p.36).



Fig64. View of the East Elevation. Position of the terrace in the building

Open Yard - West Link

It will be closed in the second phase of the restoration



General Context

Located on the first floor, the east side veranda is currently inaccessible. However, it can be reached via the mezzanine landing of the main staircase, adjacent to the existing metal roof (see booklet fig. 65, p. 62). While a ground-floor location would be more practical for this program, the building's full-plot footprint and immediate proximity to the street pavement prevent this. Nevertheless, outdoor socialization in Stone Town routinely extends beyond public squares and barazas to rooftops and "hidden" yards. These semi-private, semi-public spaces require a bit of discovery, as access is tucked away from the street and staircase. Though this first-floor veranda is physically separated from the street, establishing a strong visual connection between the two levels remains essential to honoring this local spatial tradition.

Accessibility

The main flow of both pedestrians and vehicles occurs along Vuga Road, which serves as a busy primary entry point to the city. The building's south elevation faces Vuga Road, while its east elevation is visible to those walking into the city from Creek Road. Because preserving the south and east facades is a priority—as key remnants of the building's architectural heritage, they are to be kept entirely in their original state. —the new entrance has been placed on the northeast side to intercept pedestrian traffic. Specifically, the proposal is an outdoor, L-shaped staircase. The first step begins at street level on the east side, and the stairs wrap around to the north elevation, where you enter the upper floor.

Main Target

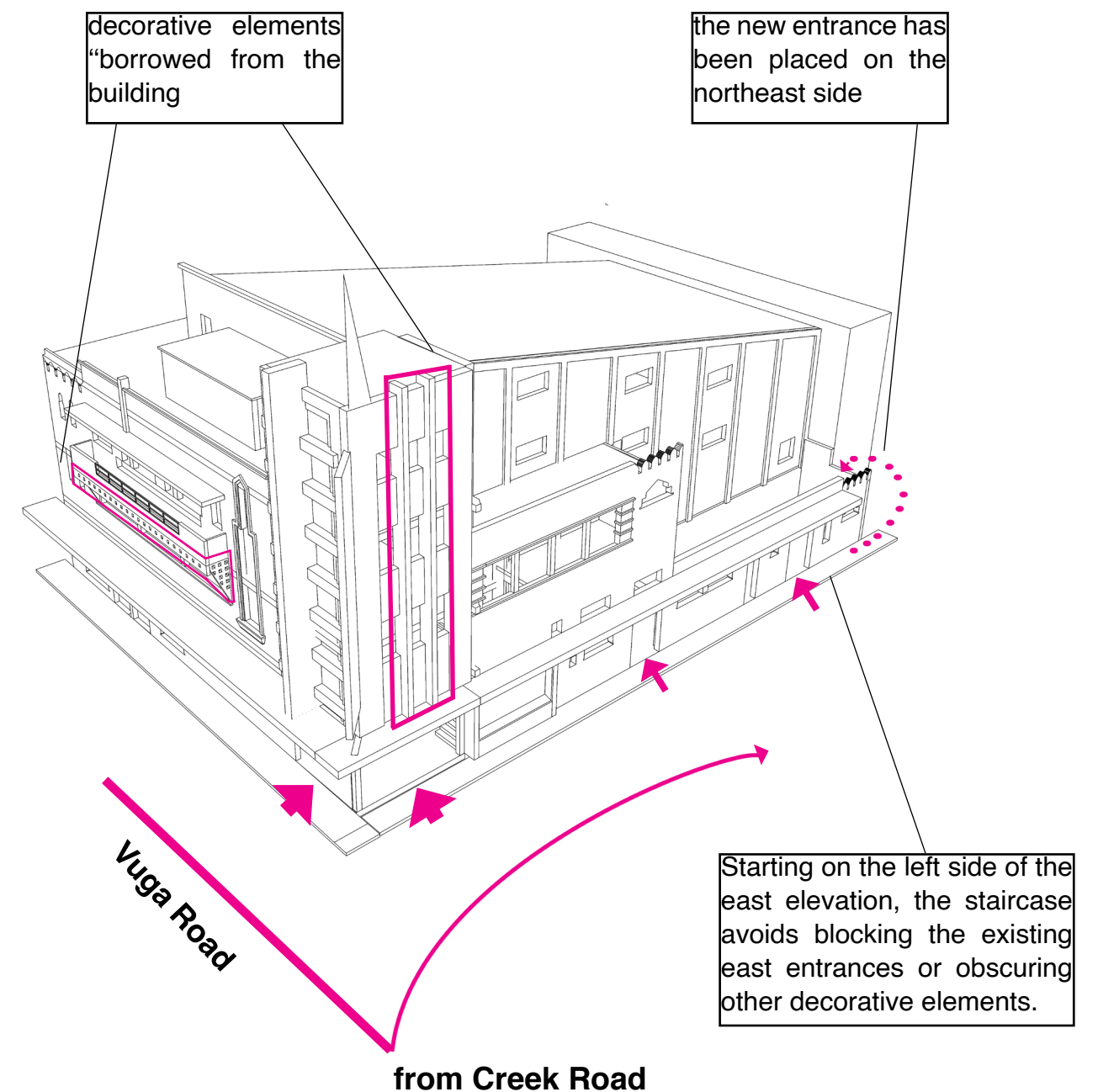
The goal is to integrate local identity into the design and activate the space for residents, encouraging greater community involvement in the building's daily cultural programming. In contemporary Stone Town—which is experiencing rapid gentrification—there is a constant risk that the terrace will cater primarily to tourists. While visitors are welcome, the local community remains our priority; the space must remain inclusive and accessible to everyone. To ensure this, the proposal introduces community-focused functions alongside the café. These programming ideas emerged directly from field research and observations at the Temporary Hub, addressing the needs of both its active users and the surrounding Majestic neighborhood.

Architectural Qualities

The Majestic Cinema is a striking example of Afro-Indian Art Deco modernism, signaling a late shift toward architectural modernity in Zanzibar. On its south and east elevations, the building features a two-story street front bracketed by corner towers, which are connected by a veranda of three Arabic pointed arches. These features, along with distinct modern elements: a horizontal rhythm established by balconies, brise-soleils, and a canopy, alongside a series of right-side windows integrated into a single, large geometric shape—are highly visible on the south and east elevations. This specific expression of modernism stood in stark contrast to the Orientalist architectural perspective favored by colonial rulers. Buildings like the Majestic Cinema bear witness to a modern

architectural movement that was largely implemented independently of colonial powers. Ultimately, the cinema exemplifies the rich diversity of historic buildings found in African cities.

The goal of this design proposal is to "borrow" these historic decorative elements and express them in a contemporary way. Rather than competing with the original structure, the new design will establish a respectful, ongoing dialogue with the building's unique heritage.



Existing Situation



Fig65. The existing conjugated metal surface

Fig66. The cantilever in the east elevation, from indoor



Fig67. The existing metal roof. View from groundfloor

Fig68. Entrance from the landing to the room.

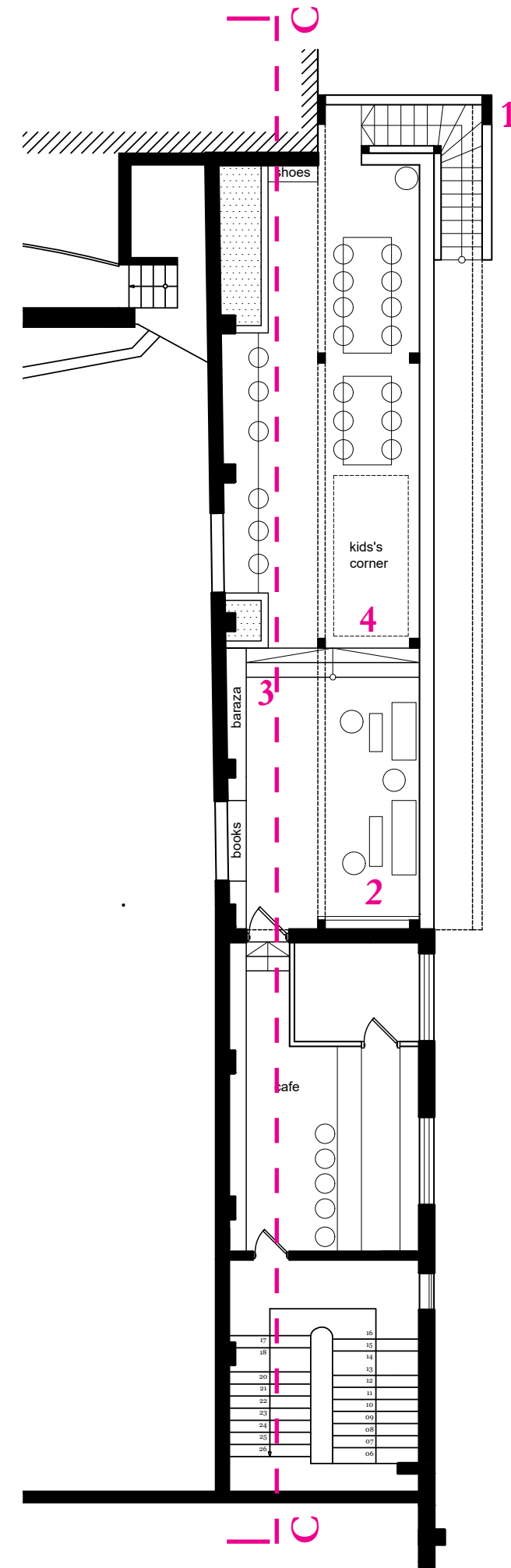


Fig69. The landing

Fig70. Decorative detail in the building

Process

- 1 Access: The primary challenge was establishing a dual-entry system from both the building interior and the street level. However, this visibility is crucial. The prioritisation is a strong visual and physical connection to make the space feel public and inviting rather than exclusive.
- 2 Form: The design integrates reclaimed decorative elements found throughout the building without lapsing into orientalism. Rather than mimicking the existing Art Deco style, the addition maintains a clear, distinctive form. This creates a contemporary dialogue with the historic structure, ensuring the new intervention is complementary yet clearly defined.
- 3 materiality: The new structure will be a combination of metal and wood.
- 4 structure: Not attached to the building. A light structure that could be dismantled.
- 5 function: To activate the terrace, it is necessary to add some appropriate functions, like a cafe. It was decided to add more functions based on the field-research (see booklet p.45).



1. This location was selected as the optimal point for a new entrance. Preserving the south and east facades is a priority, as they represent the building's most significant architectural heritage and must remain entirely unaltered.

2. Flexible space for film screening or other activities. This idea came up from the observations at the temporary hub. How they were transforming the space every time that there was another activity. One of the popular activities was film screening.

3. It was challenging to access the terrace from the building's interior because there is significant height difference. This was resolved by creating levels, (see booklet p.60).

4. The Flexible kid's corner is another element that was incorporated from the field-research. The kids play an important role in the community and it has been noticed that people are more engaged in the Hub when there are activities for kids (see booklet p.43).

PROPOSAL-FLOOR PLAN

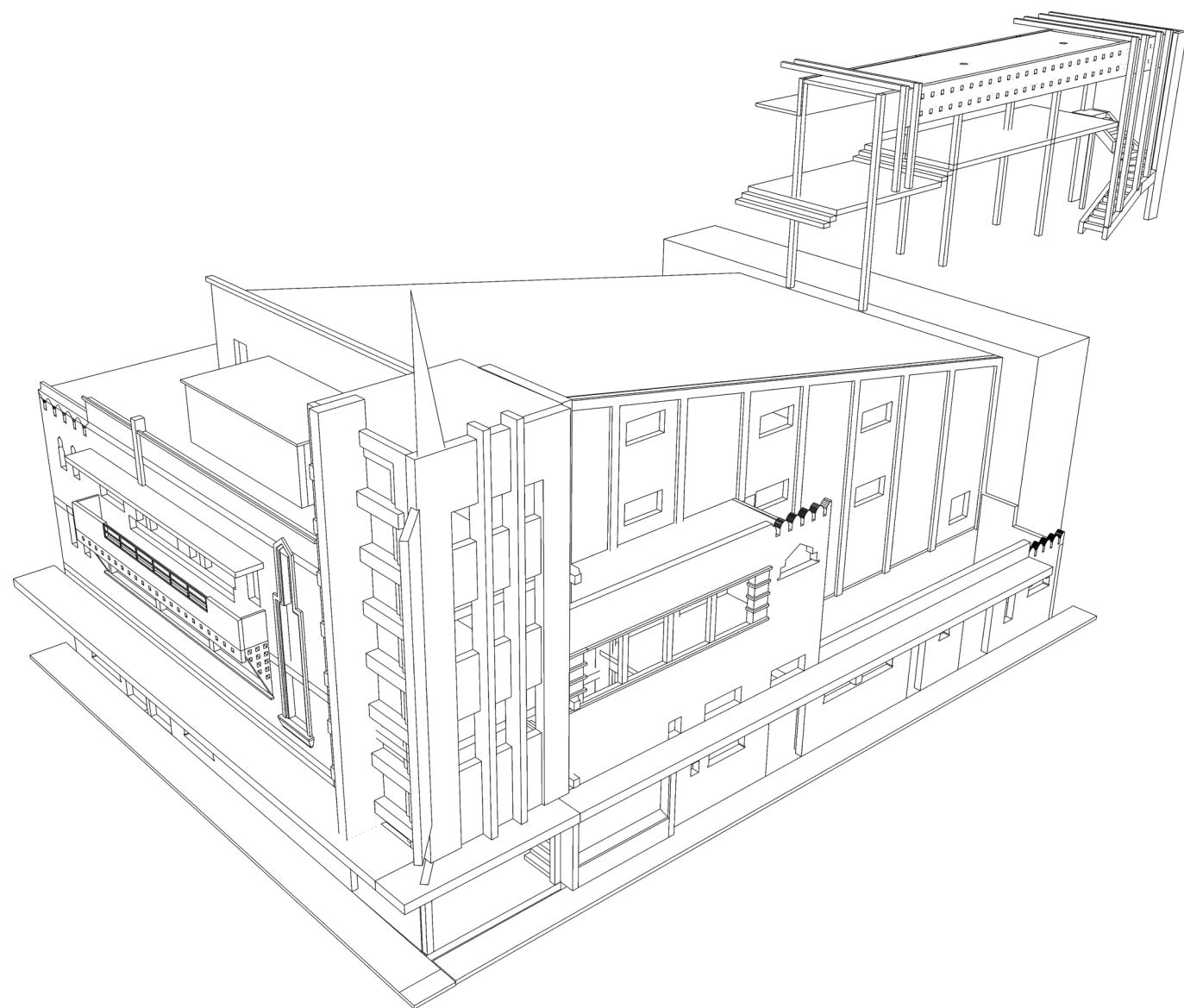
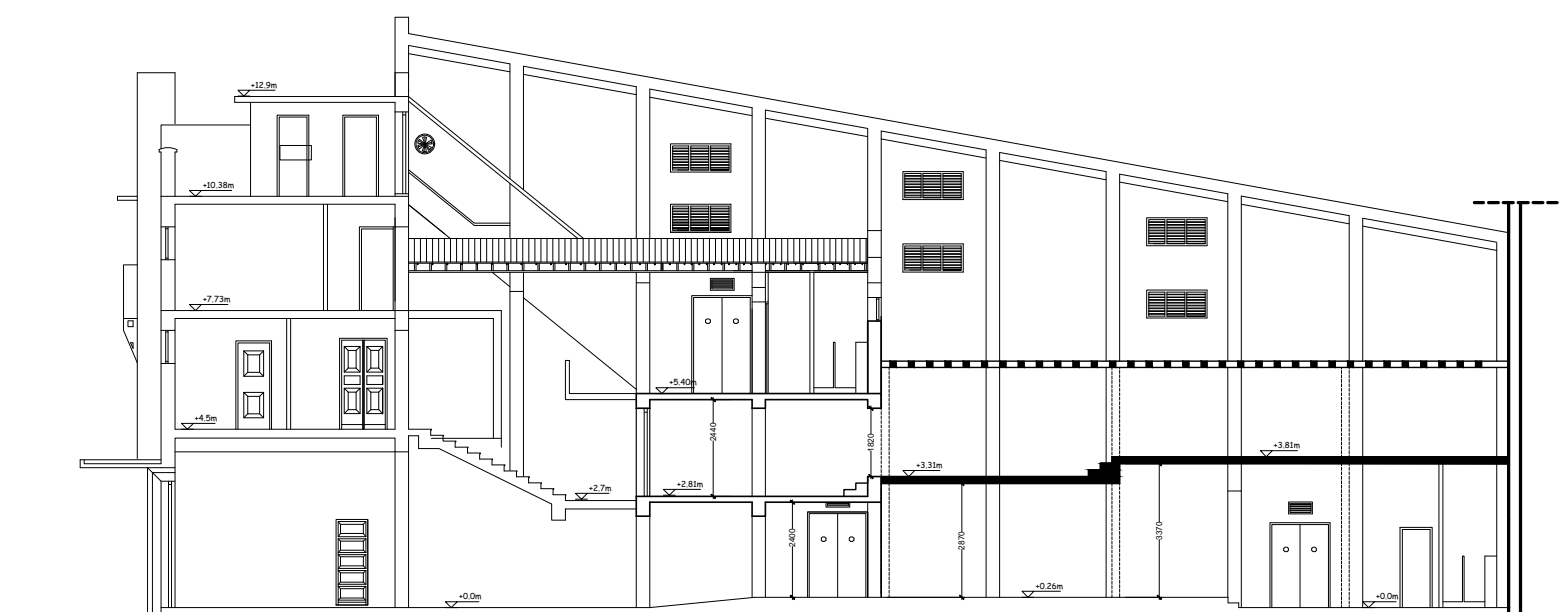


Diagram about the structure and the form of the building



SECTION C-C

The section and diagram aim to demonstrate how the addition respectfully engages with the existing building at a construction level. The section also illustrates in detail how the interior entrance was resolved through the creation of tiered levels.

The design principles of this proposal are in line with the restoration regulations/guidelines and it is confirmed by the architectural team.

Inspiration from Stone Town

For the materiality and form, I was inspired by Stone Town. There are countless small wooden additions, balconies, and terraces with a wide variety of decorative details, textures, and Indian-style influences. The Old Dispensary particularly drew my attention because the wood is painted blue, which is also seen in other local examples. This is a perfect fit for the design proposal since light blue is a symbolic color for Majestic according to the memory mapping workshop (see booklet, p.44); this is why it was also used for the timeline (see booklet, p.54).



Fig71. Old Dispensary

Fig72-74. Decorative details

Fig75-76. Habari House

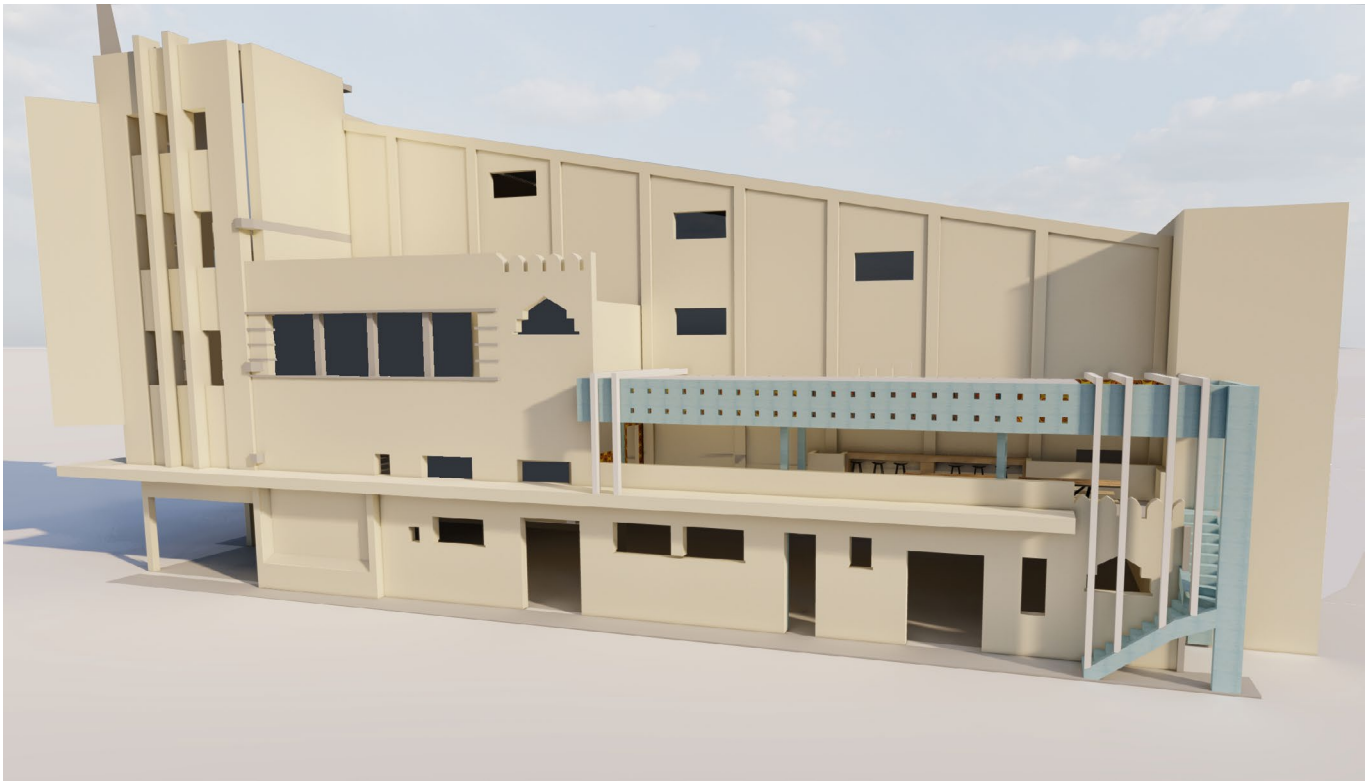


Fig77. A photorealistic visualization demonstrating the morphological integration of the addition with the existing structure



Fig78. A photorealistic visualization capturing the terrace entrance from street level, designed to evoke the atmosphere of the space.

LINK THEORIES TO THE DESIGN STRATEGIES

Overall process

The driving force for this thesis is to investigate how the community can be included and involved in the preservation of heritage, with a particular focus on living culture. The context is the Adaptive Re-use of the Majestic Cinema, so to gather information about the tangible and intangible heritage of the site and its surroundings was crucial. The next step of the process was concept generation and the formation of design strategies that answered the question:

How can inclusive design approaches and strategies preserve living heritage alongside a formal restoration process?

Firstly, the answer is that the design strategies should emphasize inviting the community and activating the space. The approach was to bring forward the meanings and memories that the community can relate to. It is very important to connect the past identity and activity of the cinema with the future function. Based on that perspective, the first design strategy is wall murals, a timeline showcasing the history of the cinema. Furthermore, the philosophy was to incorporate in the building's program elements of the local culture and identity that are traceable in the urban structures, even if it's not a matter of restoration. This was expressed by creating an open terrace in the building, as it is a vital part of the social fabric. The guiding principles of the whole process, methodology and design strategies, are empathy and respect for both the residents and the built heritage.

Design Strategy I: Timeline

The first design strategy, the timeline, focuses on the living heritage aspect of the building instead of the physical trace. This was a strategic choice to support the argument that heritage is not the site itself but the cultural processes that took place inside this building. This building is worth being preserved not only as an art-deco sample but as a reminder of the rich cinema-going culture in Stone Town. This designed strategy was developed in order to highlight the importance of the relationships among the building, the people and the built environment according to the principles of Caring Architecture.

The purpose of this intervention is to engage the members of the community with the act of remembering (Smith, 2006, p.65), so the older generations will be connected and the younger ones "educated" or informed. Furthermore, the timeline aimed to connect the past use of the building with its future function, because heritage doesn't refer only to the past. On the contrary, preserving heritage helps to highlight the important parts of the past and to give meaning to the present or future. Heritage carries meanings (Smith, 2006) and this timeline wanted to bring forward those meanings.

Design Strategy II: Terrace

The second design proposal, the east side veranda, justifies its existence by the fact that open public spaces are a vital part of the local culture (see booklet, p.36). During the British colonial period, the architects and urban planners did not take into account the local culture. Their perception of public space focused either on creating garden suburbs, like the European quarter (Van der Lans, Morel, & Perzyna, 2024), plain lawn squares that had nothing to do with barazas in labyrinth alleys or small terraces or on widening roads and expanding the traffic network. I cannot argue that the character of public spaces was lost because of colonialism. However, it is under threat now because of gentrification.

In the case of the Majestic cinema, the terrace was not part of the original building, so this is not a preservation matter. The purpose of the terrace is to infuse the character of society into the building structure and reinforce the relationship among the building, the community and the built environment, the city, following the principles of Caring Architecture. Initially, the building had an open yard, but it will be enclosed in the second phase of the restoration. It would be a huge mistake not to create an open space, because it would ignore the local identity and way of life, resulting in a weakening functionality of the building in this society.

Methods and Tools

The exhibition and the memory mapping workshop weren't part of the design outcome, but they were a necessary part of the process, directly linked to the theoretical framework of this thesis. First and foremost, those were the means of collecting stories and memories essential to engage the community members into the course of 'active remembering'. It is obvious how the important figures of the cinema or the stories regarding the relationship between the cinema and the everyday life of the residents are contributing to the above-mentioned discourse. What is not obvious is maybe why the relationship of people with public space in the past and present is relevant. What is considered a public space in this community? This exploration is essential for this thesis. Because, after all, the future Majestic Cultural Hub aspires to be a community space and the focus of this thesis is exactly that: how to engage the community.

Memory Mapping Workshop

During the workshop, various topics were discussed which didn't end up in this booklet because they are not related directly to the design outcome. However, they were important parts of the process. For instance, the community members had strong opinions and suggestions about the future plans and their position as invited guests in this workshop. Their proposal for the future plans focused on two topics.

LINK THEORIES TO THE DESIGN STRATEGIES

Firstly, the involvement of the immediate neighborhood in the project. According to them, the way to do that is to give small jobs to the neighbors, like food stands, so they will take responsibility. Secondly, they expressed their opposition against the name 'Flamingo Bar'. This was one of the first bars in the town, and it was part of the Majestic building. It was named after the flamingo in the main elevation. The intention of the restoration group is to name one of the future spaces after this bar, in an attempt to connect the future cultural hub with the intangible heritage of the building and the city in general. According to the workshop's participants, this place had a very bad reputation, and it would be a huge mistake to connect the new function with the Flamingo Bar. At this point, the question arises: who decides what heritage is? What's more, at the beginning of the workshop a 'complaint' was expressed, driven by one of the participants, but the rest followed, that "They didn't ask for or take into consideration (in the restoration process) our opinion until now. So now that you have invited us here, you should listen to us". Those facts show that the residents do care about the future of their cultural spaces, their city and their heritage after all. Maybe the problem is that no-one has asked them before.

Last but not least, at the second part of the workshop, when the main focus was around public spaces and the present or future state, the participants were referring frequently to Ng'ambo, the Other Side.

For example, one said "It will have more point to emphasize on women's visibility in the barazzas in Ng'ambo". I assume that this stems from the fact that, nowadays, the majority of the residents live there, as do the participants of the workshop. This serves as evidence that spatial segregation is still present despite the fact that the community members carry out their daily activities on both sides and that's the reason why they mentioned Ng'ambo more, even if the main topic of discussion was Stone Town.

Exhibition

The strongest points of this exhibition are its narrative and the emphasis it put in the dynamic use of space. Firstly, the storyline PAST – PRESENT – FUTURE reinforces the view that heritage is an active, dynamic process, and it's not related only to the past. By showcasing all the collected material gives us potentially the opportunity to reflect on the future and incorporate the important elements of the past. Moreover, the fact that the active users would continue their activity in the space was a catalyst for the exhibition. It forced the design to facilitate their presence spatially. Furthermore, it supports the "living heritage", as a dynamic use of space, because the dynamism of heritage lies in its utility and active social engagement. Therefore, the active users couldn't be ignored. Finally, the poster of Mr. Marashi is the most sensitive part of this exhibition. By acknowledging

his contribution is a very strong way to highlight that cultural heritage is not only the buildings, the physical traces but also the people who connected their lives with those buildings.

Redefining & 'Making' Heritage

Redefining heritage represents a bottom-up approach, in a stark contrast to the conventional top-down view (Blanc & Bridonneau, 2016). Given this view, the Revitalization Project and my thesis align and share this position as a fundamental principle in terms of multi-stakeholder and lived experience frameworks.

Firstly, there is a special focus on communities of place and interest. The existence of the Temporary Hub is to facilitate cultural and communal activities and, when it's necessary, rooms in the west part of the building are also available for meetings or workshops. In the framework of this thesis, the exhibition was the first attempt to associate with the representative communities. On the surface, it may seem that it referred to the communities of practice, but a lot of attention was brought to the fact that active users should be able to use the space after all. Furthermore, the memory mapping workshop focused on the communities of place, their relationship with the cinema and their built environment, the public space. What was happening in the past? Do they miss it? What should be left behind? Why was it lost? How to reclaim it?

From their point of view, the suggestions about the new era of the cinema was the highlight of the process. Last but not least, the timeline involved almost all the communities; communities of practice, the contractors and the Hifadhi board who fund it, and the community of interest, the artists who paint it. It is important to mention that through this action a job opportunity was created for them, so it can be seen as a local development endeavor.

Secondly, this thesis is deeply interconnected with lived experience and the local context. Design ethnography was the method that paved the way for it. By my involvement in the daily operation of the Temporary Hub and by acting as a care taker, I was able to observe and interact with all these communities, and they were able to get to know me and trust me. Another example that proves the relation to lived realities is the second design proposal, the east side veranda. It has been mentioned that it's an addition, so it's not closely related to the preservation acts, but it's an attempt to include and incorporate the local context and the urban structures by making heritage. Overall, the focus regarding heritage shifts from the national or global scale to the local lived realities, as it is stated in the theoretical framework.

Future

All four actions (exhibition, memory mapping, timeline, and east side veranda) are related to active ways of making heritage. The timeline has a special place as a prototyping process though. Most importantly, it created a socio-cultural meaning, not only for the active communities involved, but for Stone Town in general, by giving visibility, engaging the older people in the remembering act and educating the young people. Crucially, it connects the past and the future and gives heritage a new meaning, that can be something dynamic, something to anticipate for. It is also important to mention that it was important for me personally, because I didn't only study heritage, but I produced something to leave behind. Relationships and exchanges were created between me and the artists, the participants in the memory-making workshop and, in general, with the city. This means that heritage can be dynamic and active and not just an object.

Another interesting point of reflection that hasn't been analyzed in this thesis is what is culture, what is heritage and what is cultural heritage (Löfgren & Klekot, 2012?). When those two words are separate, it is "easy" to define or describe, but when they are combined it gets complicated. One might argue that the term "intangible" was invented to bridge this gap. Nevertheless, it also triggers subsequent associations in dichotomies such as material vs immaterial, past vs present or future, and permanent vs temporary. Overall, this thesis attempts to initiate a conversation about those notions and bring tangible and intangible heritage together, as concepts.

Considering the evidence, the future of Majestic looks promising. There is a clear scarcity of cultural spaces, leaving a lot of local cultural activity displaced and "homeless." Residents are eagerly awaiting the final result. Since Majestic aspires to be a public, inclusive space, it presents a mutually beneficial opportunity. However, while Majestic's individual future seems bright, the broader context cannot be ignored. The future of Stone Town is more uncertain. Gentrification is peaking, and the city suffers from a overflow of historical buildings with no clear plan or resources for their preservation and maintenance. While investment is the only way forward, the conditions of that investment matter. In this unstable environment, Majestic's strategy should be to anchor its existence in the community and everyday life rather than rely on visitors. It should serve the everyday life of the entire city, including the residents of the "Other Side," who represent the majority. Situated on the border between Stone Town and Ng'ambo, Majestic can act as a bridge, a magnet, making a small but vital attempt to reconnect these two areas into a unified network.

Future Research

The initial idea was to develop an action plan to facilitate community interaction with the conservation, that would be based on identified issues during the data collection. Two of these issues were related to the visibility/identity and the open public spaces. The rest of the issues had to do with interior arrangements in the Temporary Hub, the dynamic use of space and the gender inclusivity aspect. Those topics can serve as future research.

One idea that was discussed further was to organize needling, kanga or batik workshops, (traditional textiles and techniques) and use the produced artifacts to decorate the interior of the hub. This would be an empowering action for women, who would acquire a life skill after this workshop. This never happened because of time limitations and people's availability.

Unesco's role

According to Odiana and Ndoro (2023) Unesco has received a lot of criticism about issues that concern Africa's representation in the UNESCO's World Heritage List or the fact that the majority of listed monuments date back to the colonial period. In general, it is contradictory, on the one hand, to foster the Intangibility of Heritage and Lived Experience (Convention 2003) and, on the other hand, to apply the same evaluation criteria globally. It is like forcing the globalization of heritage and praising the local dynamics of heritage at the same time. Nevertheless, the benefits that come along with a UNESCO nomination are undeniable; international prestige, conservation aid funds, revival of heritage, tangible and intangible, even job opportunities. To be more specific, those contradictions are reflected in the case of Stone Town as well. The city gained funds and prestige, but this designation has validated and perhaps solidified the urban division that was established during the British colonial era in the island (Chaouni & Khemet, 2025, p.120).

In the case of the Adaptive Reuse of the Majestic Cinema, UNESCO gives international prestige even though its participation is disproportionate in the actual restoration effort. Unesco is basically the “pot” through which the funding is distributed. They don’t participate in any other way, like advising. My only interaction with this aspect of the project was during the exhibition and specifically the day of the Japanese Ambassador. I have to admit that this visit activated in a way some bureaucratic processes, essential for the construction work. I can’t really say that there was any controversy or conflict with my “informal” participatory process.

Reflection on the limitations

Ramadan affected the process directly, because the temporary hub couldn’t follow the same program of cultural activities as usual. However, it was unclear what type of cultural activities were allowed and what not. The lack of activities was disruptive to my procedure because it occurred right after the exhibition and at the beginning of the Concept Generation phase, when I expected to organize the collected material and conduct more workshops while I was trying to define the scope. The concept generation phase was an organic process with the people that were available, my interests and brainstorming during the Ramadan period. It wasn’t helpful, but, on the other hand, wasn’t disruptive. It helped get a better understanding of the context after all.

The construction work was an advantage after all, because the scaffolding served as a canvas to develop the timeline, a direct “window” of communication with the city. The timing was good, because the timeline’s schedule could follow the construction’s workflow. During these two weeks of fieldwork for the timeline, the workers were occupied with interior parts of the building. Otherwise, it wouldn’t work due to safety regulations. Furthermore, it came up an issue with the equipment after the artists had started the fieldwork. As a result, we had to pause the fieldwork. Fortunately, it was solved by the end of the day. All in all, it was hard to coordinate this small project, the timeline. I was the supervisor and had to communicate with the group of artists, the contractors and the “owners”. Special thanks to the contractors and the workers for all the support and the collaboration.

Challenges

The first difficulty came after the exhibition, when the care-taker announced his resignation. It was unexpected, because I assumed that he would be my main contact with the community, either for materials or networking, and it was at the beginning of the process. I replaced him for a short period, which wasn’t a big deal since I was there every day and through the process I made my own connections. After Ramadan, they found a new care taker.

The second challenge came before the timeline’s fieldwork. The artists were very enthusiastic while we were sketching and brainstorming. The problem came when they had to give an offer for their labor and were hesitant, even though they had very good relationships due to previous collaborations with the Hifadhi board, the “clients”. This led to a delay and the time-schedule was already tight. Fortunately, the response to the offer came fast, without complications and the fieldwork started.

STCDA stands for ‘Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority’. The work with the artists on site lasted 10 days. Some STCDA members came on the third day to interrupt the process. The artist had finished with the background and started the first drawings. They were complaining because those first drawings were depicting faces and a woman’s body (Miriam Makeba frame) and this is inconsistent with the religious convictions. We had to conduct a meeting to reconsider the sketches and themes. We altered the sketches that were showing faces to drawings with figures or obscured faces.

Positionality of the researcher

It is important to reflect on my own position within this context and process. I stayed for 10 weeks, despite having never visited before. Although I had some experience working in an African context, I had none in heritage or East Africa. Interestingly, because I followed an ethnographic approach and was immediately involved in the daily operations of the Temporary Hub, I was perceived as part of the restoration team. This was particularly noticeable during the memory mapping workshop, where participants treated me as a sort of representative. I found this acceptable rather than annoying. Despite the empathetic approach, I misinterpreted several elements because the ethno-religious context is so strong and I am not part of that tradition—specifically regarding the faces in murals or the activities during Ramadan. However, I was integrated well into both the local context and the restoration process. I felt some initial anxiety because my Greek background and education offer a contradictory perspective on heritage. In Greece, with its abundance of ancient monuments, heritage is often “frozen,” object-centric, and focused on “monumentality,” “greatness,” and “authenticity.” This is the complete opposite of my experience in Stone Town, and I am glad to have engaged with this different aspect of heritage.

Thesis Profile

The core themes of the Society, Justice, and Space profile—specifically the interrelationship between built environments and society, community-based practices, and the power dynamics inherent in the construction of space—form the foundation of my research. My thesis aims to engage directly with these topics by centering its research questions and theoretical framework on issues of heritage governance—asking “who decides what constitutes cultural heritage”—and investigating the broader social value of architectural projects. Furthermore, I believe the primary objective of this study—to explore methodologies that move beyond conventional heritage practices—is deeply aligned with this profile’s mission. Ultimately, I intend to apply the research methods championed by this profile while building upon the practical knowledge acquired in the design studios.

List of Studios

- ACE570 Reality Studio**

experience on field studies, cooperation with stakeholders in developing countries, challenging contexts, find adapted solutions to the problems at hand
- ACE550 Community Architecture and Urban Design**

engage students with topics of social inclusion, equity, and justice, in dialogue with local actors in stigmatized suburban contexts of Gothenburg. participatory tools and methods, emphasis on socio-cultural and socio-ecological local conditions.
- ACE450 Emergency Architecture and Resilient Design**

adaptation and transformation of spaces in consequence of ecological, social and economic crises, emergency and post-emergency resilience through design.



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Language Skills

English | level C2
University of Michigan, English Language Institute
German | level B1
Zertificat | Goethe Institute

Workshops

Fertilia in Movimento
an intercultural project of urban regeneration. Università degli di Sassari
Energy Efficient upgrade of buildings and Plaster techniques with natural materials.
TUC and Noria et Compagnie Centre de formation eco+construction.

Education

- Degree in Architecture (300ects)** 2020
Technical University of Crete (TUC). School of Architecture
final degree grade :8.18 out of 10.00
- Erasmus Semester** Feb-July 2017
Università degli Studi di Sassari
Dipartimento di Architettura, Design e Urbanistica
Sassari | Sardegna | Italy
- Thesis | Research Project** Dec 2019
Mapping Control
The designing principles of control structures in the contemporary urban space
- Diploma Thesis** Oct 2020
Conversing with the continuities and discontinuities of the Cretan Outskirts
Landscape interventions and establishment of an Education Center for promoting the Traditional Textile Art in Tzivaras
- Master’s Degree** Sept 2024 - ongoing
Chalmers University of Technology.
Architecture and planning beyond sustainability (MPDSD)
Gothenburg | Sweden
- List of Studios at MPDSD**
Community Architecture and Urban Design
Emergency Architecture and Resilient Design
Reality Studio

Work Experience

- Architectural Intern** April-June 2019
CLUB MARGINAL ARCHITEKTEN | Berlin | Germany
<https://clubmarginal.com/>
- Architect Assistant** Dec 2020-Sept 2022
Katakis Office
Chania | Crete | Greece
- Junior Architect** Jan 2023-Aug 2024
Arch+Light Office | Chania | Greece
<https://www.facebook.com/archandlightchania/>

Software Skills

- Autodesk Autocad
●● Archicad 23
●●● Sketch-up Pro-Vray
●●● Lumion
●● Rhinoceros-Vray
● Autodesk 3ds max
- Adobe Photoshop
●●● Adobe Indesign
●● Adobe Premiere
●●● Microsoft Word
●●● Power Point

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List of Figures

SDGs Icons p.9:

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Images Provided by the Capital Art Stusio:

Fig 1, Fig2, Fig 43

Images Provided by the Hifadhi's archive:

Fig 3, Fig 5-15, Fig 64-66, Fig 70.

The image for the collage on page 36

The drawings of the existing situation

The logos of the stakeholders on pages 19, 30.

Images Provided by personal archive:

Front page, Fig 4, Fig 16-22, Fig 24-42, Fig 47-63, Fig 67-69, Fig 71-76

all the diagrams, drawings and renders pp. 27-39. 51-63, 16-19.

all the images in the appendix section

Maps p.19:

<https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=9/-5.991/39.029>

World Heritage Emblem: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/emblem/>

Map p.39:

<https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=9/-5.991/39.029>

Hifadhi's archive

Collage p.52:

Sketches: Sizya H. Damson

Images: Hifadhi's Archive and Capital Art Studio

Project References:

En Commun:

Fig46: Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO. (n.d.). *En Común*. <https://tatianabilbao.com/projects/en-comun>

Lina BoBardi:

Fig44-45: ArchDaily: <https://www.archdaily.com/959306/lina-bo-bardi-and-her-helicoidal-wooden-staircase-tradition-and-modernity>

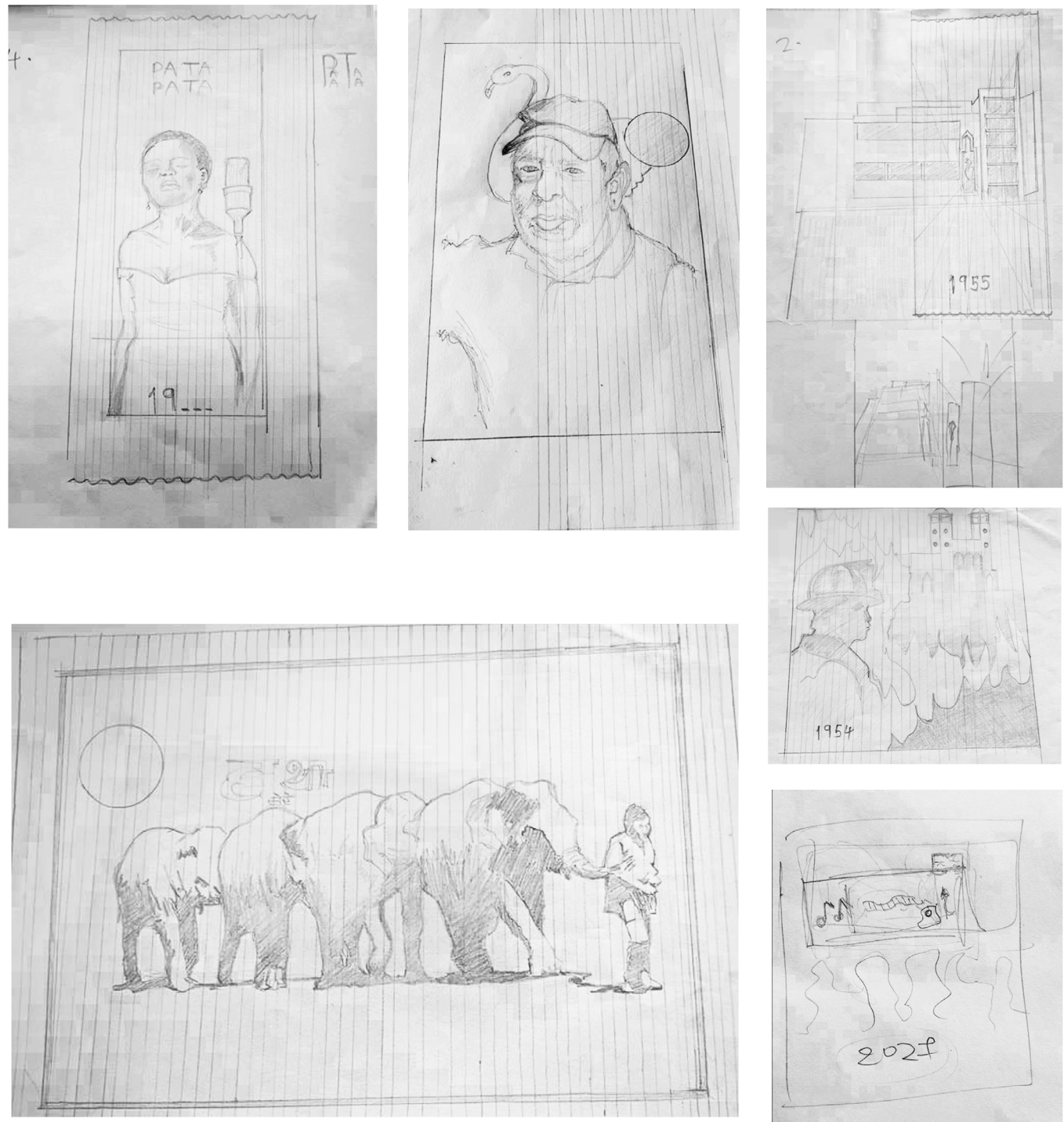
AI appendix

I have used in two cases. Firstly, for grammar correction or to find synonyms. Secondly, to assist me with the Literature List. Specifically, to give the titles in APA style 7th edition. There was no use for text generation or images and collages.

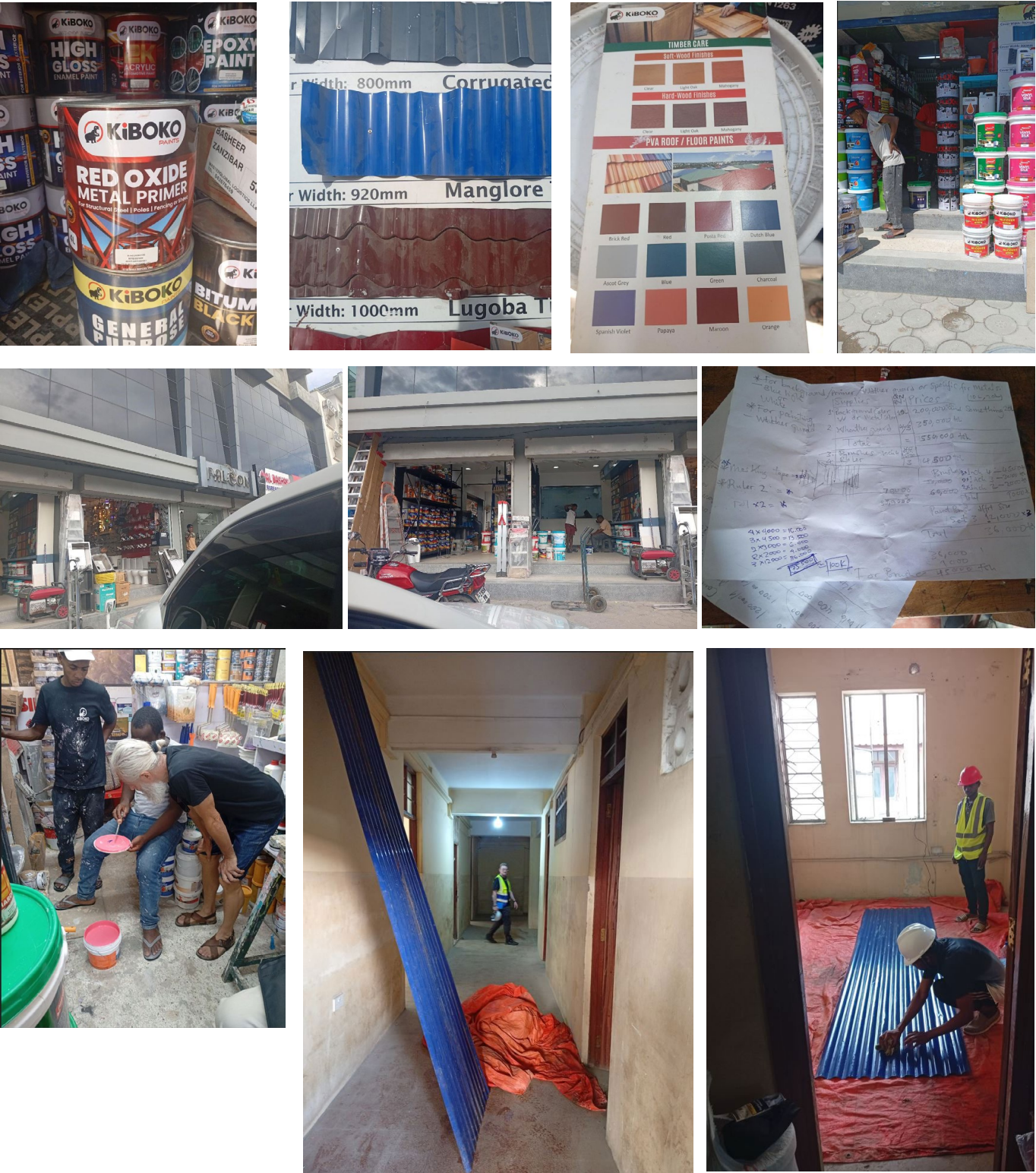
Appendix

Material from the timeline mural process

Sketching



Budget & Multiple visits to Mlandege& Samples



Frames & Painting



