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is it.

Creating Affordable,
Self-Managed,
Communal Housing
in Existing Buildings

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Summer 2026

Chalmers School of
Architecture
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Architecture &
Civil Engineering

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If You Are Looking for Affordable Housing, **This Is It.**

Transforming existing buildings into affordable, self-managed communal housing for woman escaping patriarchal control and violence.

How can communal, self-managed housing in existing buildings through the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* offer women a safe space after fleeing intimate partner violence and coercive control, while providing a radical alternative to the profit-driven housing market?

A comprehensive analysis, demonstrating how to establish, finance and design a cooperative housing group with the support of the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* (a German cooperative network for collectively owned, non-profit housing), covering organizational procedures, key stakeholders, and strategies for permanently removing such a project from the speculative housing market.



CHALMERS
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Master's Thesis Summer 2026
Chalmers School of Architecture
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Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability
Building Design and Transformation for Sustainability
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The term 'women' is used in this work as a political term, but encompasses all people who are oppressed by patriarchy.

This project is dedicated to
all women,
all trans people,
all intersex and non-binary people,
as well as agender people.



Figure 1: Photograph of a protest poster from International Women's Day 2026. Note. Source: author's own photography, 2026.

ABS-TRACT

This master's thesis investigates how affordable housing can be created for women fleeing domestic violence. Financial insecurity often leads women to remain within abusive or violent relationships. This work examines whether affordable, self-organized housing, developed as a cooperative building group with the support of the Mietshäuser Syndikat, can provide a sustainable and accessible solution for women without initial capital seeking safe, permanent housing.

The research combines a theoretical analysis and architectural design. Karl Marx's work and Elinor Ostrom's commons theory provide the theoretical framework for analyzing the structural conditions of collective ownership, non-speculative property models and solidary-based financing. Particular attention is given to organizational structures and financing mechanisms of the Mietshäuser Syndikat explaining the association formation, governance structures and funding strategies.

On this basis, a realistic architectural concept is designed for an existing building in Bremen, a city characterized by active solidarity. The site at Bismarckstraße 14, a former organic market, vacant since 2019 and now at

risk of decay, is economically advantageous for this purpose. The one and a half storey structure currently does not integrate well into the streetscape, but by adding additional floors, new housing can be created while improving the building's relationship to the urban context. This communal living project for women represents a mode of cohabitation that is sustainable from ecological, financial, and social perspectives, enabling women to support one another and to establish a new everyday life. The quiet but central neighborhood provides ideal conditions for creating a safe and supportive environment for women.

The design demonstrates that a successful implementation requires not only a strong organizational structure and external support, to enable the realization of the housing project within a reasonable time, but also a sensitive architectural design. The concept balances privacy and social interaction in order to support women in different phases of healing and with different personal needs. The thesis therefore contributes a realistic architectural and organizational framework for solidarity-based housing initiatives aimed at vulnerable groups.

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MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN **ARCHI-
TECTURE**
FROM
BREMEN
BORN IN 2000



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GLOS- SARY

Mietshäuser Syndikat:

The Mietshäuser Syndikat originating in the 1980s from the German housing occupation movement has existed in its current form since 1992. It is a cooperative network that, by 2022, encompassed around 170 self-managed housing projects with approximately 4,500 residents (Hölzl, 2022).

Building Group:

Baugruppe is a German term and means building group. A group of people comes together without a property developer to realize a building project. It enables collaborative and cost-efficient construction by sharing the land and construction costs. However, this requires that all decisions concerning the construction project be made collectively. It has many advantages, but also requires a certain willingness to compromise, and conflicts within the group must be managed well (DWDS dictionary, 2024).

Solidarity Supermarket:

A cooperative supermarket model that goes by different names. In Berlin, for example, it is known as SuperCoop. A model in which the supermarket is owned by its members. The market itself has only a few full

time employees, and members can shop there at low prices if they work in the supermarket based on the cooperative requirements, often 3-4 hours each month. Members can decide when they work, but in order to shop, they must complete these hours. The idea behind these supermarkets is that everyone helps out and everyone benefits (SuperCoop Berlin, 2026).

Gentrification:

"Gentrification is a process of neighborhood change where higher-income and higher-educated residents move into a historically marginalized neighborhood, housing costs rise, and the neighborhood is physically transformed through new higher-end construction and building upgrades, resulting in the displacement of vulnerable residents and changes to the neighborhood's cultural character." (Oxford Learner's dictionaries, n.d.).

Investification:

Very wealthy people invest their money in apartments, which leads to entire cities changing. The difference to gentrification is that living in these properties is secondary. Most of the time, these apartments stand empty. It's all about the investment that has been made. Initially, this involved new

buildings that investors constructed in city centers, but now it has also spread to older buildings, which are modernized, sold, and then, unlike in gentrification, left empty. It could be argued that this approach destroys living space, even though more real estate is being created (Daniel Fuhrhop, 2020).

Women's shelter:

In German: Frauenhaus. They are protected accommodations for women and their children who are affected by violence. These accommodations are usually anonymous, so that no one knows where the affected persons are located. It is a safe space that exists to help overcome the consequences of violence and develop non-violent perspectives on life. The capacity of women's shelters is limited, and they are usually a short-term refuge, often used for going into hiding so women can avoid being found by their violent partners. (Frauenhaus Koordinierung eV, 2026).



Figure 2: A shop window that draws attention to patriarchal issues. Note. Source: author's own photography, 2026.

AIM

The aim of this project is to design and provide genuinely affordable housing, to determine whether the Mietshäuser Syndikat offers a solution for women who have to flee domestic violence, and to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the network for this target group.

The aim is to design a safe haven that serves as a long-term solution.

A home that can be self-managed through a well-thought-out organisational structure.

A home for women and children that takes their needs into account.

A place that, for once, has not been designed according to standards geared towards men.

A space that consciously centers women, reflecting the ways in which urban environments often fail to accommodate their needs.

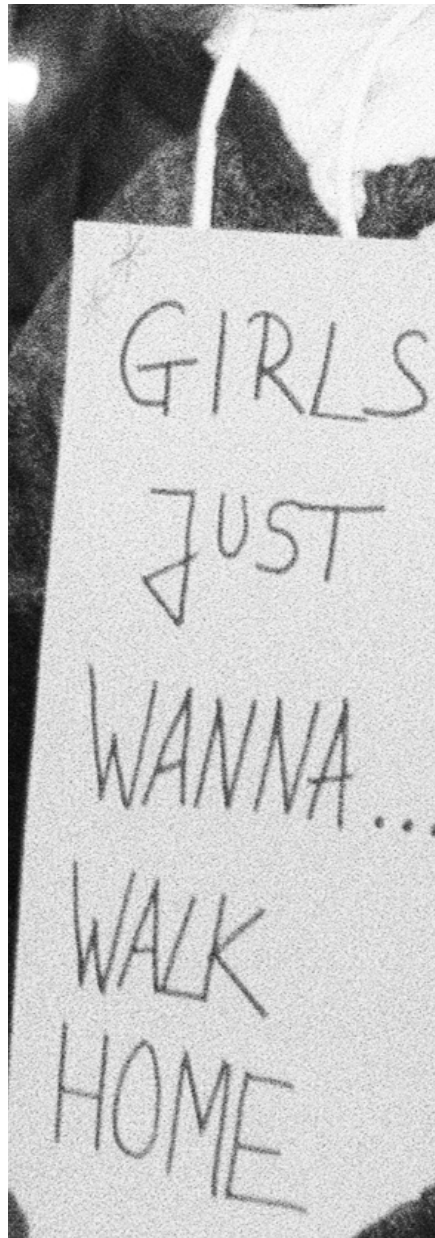


Figure 3: Protest poster for International Women's Day 2024. Note. Source: author's own photography, 2024.

PROBLEM DESCRIP- TION

Studies show that the housing crisis in major German cities is becoming increasingly acute. There is a shortage of around two million affordable homes in Germany (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 2018). This statement suggests that there is an overall lack of housing. This suggestion is misleading. What is lacking is affordable housing, not living space itself. Daniel Fuhrhop (2020) talks in his book "Verbietet das Bauen" (Prohibit Building), that we have enough flats, talking especially about Germany. We even had a building boom in 2018. Between 1992 and 2018, Germany gained around two million new inhabitants. For that, we would have needed around one million new flats. But the reality was that seven million new flats were built. That is six million more than needed. At the same time, flats are being demolished and an accurate number is hard to give. This does not specifically refer to a lack of flats, but rather to a lack of affordable living space (Daniel Fuhrhop, 2020). Considering gentrification in cities, rents are rising faster than incomes, and the speculative housing market is increasingly displacing smaller landlords and less profit-oriented housing models (August & Walks, 2018). The trend is also moving from

gentrification to investification. This means that rich people have to invest their money, which is leading to a radical change in cities. Flats are already considered a commodity, but investing in flats turns them into financial products. A profit through increase in property value is expected, and whether the flats are rented out is secondary. Housing is not only being built for residents, but also for investors. Of course, this displaces people from neighbourhoods who can no longer afford housing. Daniel Fuhrhop (2020) describes that a prominent argument for gentrification is that neighbourhoods are upgraded through redevelopment and new construction creates housing that may be created for the wealthy, but this frees up space in the existing stock for people with lower incomes. But how he justifies, this is a fallacy. People with less money are simply displaced, and in the end there is a surplus of luxury flats and a shortage of affordable housing. New construction is considered unecological, but at the same time a quick and consistent solution to the housing shortage. This argument can also be refuted. Fuhrhop's counterargument is that new construction for the wealthy does not create space for poorer households

and is also a product of investification (Daniel Fuhrhop, 2020). From this, we can conclude that new construction does not solve the problem, but simply increases disparity. New housing therefore serves investors rather than residents.

What is important now is a change in the housing market. How can all these empty flats for profit generation be used properly and, even more important, how can they disappear from the speculative housing market? And this is where this work and the Mietshäuser Syndikat comes in. What if housing could be built by cooperatives of owners even without means for investment? And at the same time, contribute to stabilizing the housing market by replacing profit focused models of investment housing.

This could mean that housing could become more affordable. A solution that seems so simple, but is not implemented in our capitalist society because it is profit that drives us, not humanity. At the same time,

the number of women who have to flee domestic violence is not decreasing but rather increasing. There is a lack of shelters and long-term solutions. Women's shelters are important emergency accommodations, but they only offer short-term protection, and even these places are far too few in numbers (Tagesschau, 2024). When leaving an abusive or violent relationship, women often lack financial security, which leads many to remain within these systems (Eriksson & Ulmestig, 2021). When women leave abusive relationships, they are often "forcibly relocated" and feel unstable in their housing situation. In general, domestic violence, or as it is called in the article referred to: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), is a major driver of instability. Those affected also often

“Stopping investment means dedicating housing to living again, eliminating speculative vacancies and banning second or third homes. That is why expropriation can take pressure off the housing market and make new construction unnecessary”

(Daniel Fuhrhop, 2020, p. 69, own translation).

experience homelessness. Even in cases where they have a roof over their heads, it feels like displacement and alienation. Routines and order are destroyed, existential fears arise, and one loses one's pla-

ce of refuge. Julia Woodhall-Melnik et al. (2016) explain that a house is only a physical place, but a home should fulfill emotional needs. IPV turns the home into a place of oppression. In the same article, women are asked when they felt at home again, and they talk about a permanent living situation, which leads to a sense of arrival and is so essential when wanting to start a new and stable life (Julia Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2016). Therefore, short-term solutions cannot alleviate the situation. Instead, long-term and comfortable housing must be available.

This double crisis of economic pressure and partner violence shows that conventional housing models are neither socially nor ecologically sustainable.

As architects we often act as service providers for the market and, in doing so, unintentionally support the speculative housing system. Above a certain project size, 20-30% of the planned apartments must be social housing, but these expire after 20 years, depending on the region and regulations, and the apartments can be rented out as desired (Daniel Fuhrhop, 2020). This means that many social housing units also disappear from the housing market again.

With this project, I want to shift architecture towards a social practice that creates space for emancipation and commons. This may represent a shift from architects as service providers to social facilitators, which empowers architects to bring change by shaping cooperative these projects and stepping back from the capitalist housing market.

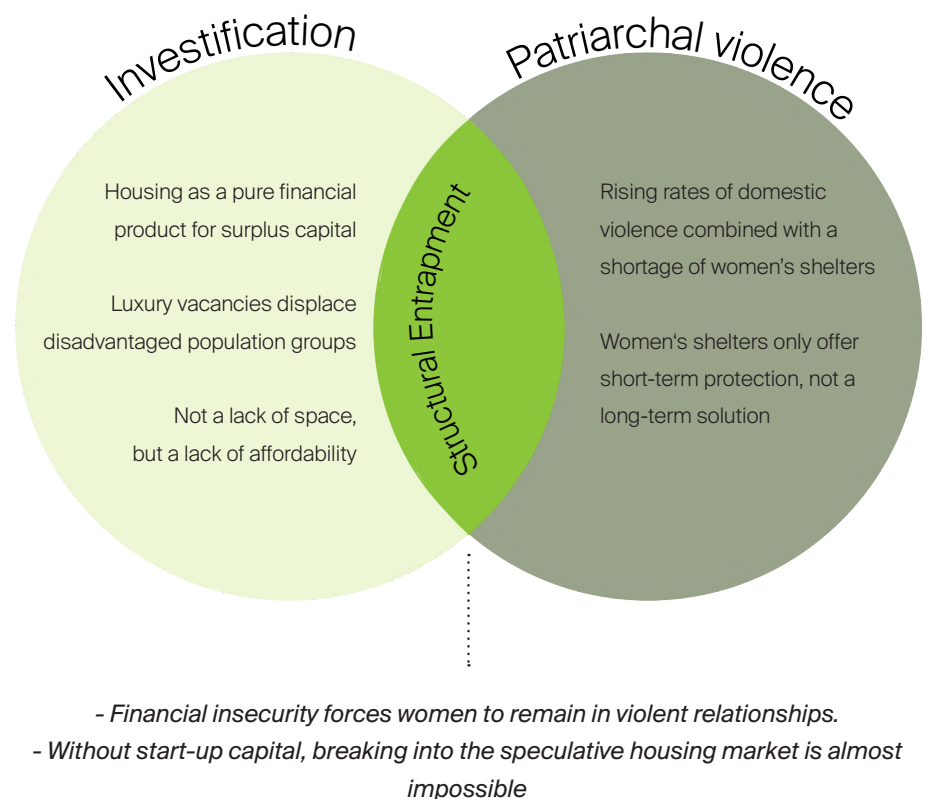


Figure 4: Diagram to illustrate the problem description. Note. Source: author's own diagram, 2026.

DELI- MITATI- ONS

This is a single proposal, others are needed. Difficulties arise regarding the safety of the women.

The design should **not be seen as a women's shelter**, but as a project to **help women start their own lives**, supporting and protecting each other. Apart from architectural tools relating to safety, it cannot be approached in the same way as in a women's shelter. That is not the aim of this project. It is more about **addressing women's financial hardship**. Furthermore, with the help of the **sociocracy organisational model**, an attempt is made to create a solution for the project's organisation. Nevertheless, the criticism remains that women who are fleeing intimate partner violence and coercive control do not have the **time or resources for such a project**. I can only provide solutions including **time planning**, but this criticism highlights the part of the system I criticise. Our capitalist system organises **care and survival work** so that women do not have time to shape their own living conditions. This project aims to make the **structural reality visible** and show ways in which self-management can still be possible when **collective structures and solidarity networks** emerge. Nevertheless, I am aware that reality

cannot always function according to the ideal I am presenting. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that there are also criticisms of the Mietshäuser Syndikat. Lina Hurlin (2018) discusses the **challenges of scalability** and whether the Syndikat should be seen as a niche solution or if it could gain **systemic relevance**. Questions are raised about whether this form of building is **subcultural** and thus primarily accessible to the educated middle class, but also whether the Mietshäuser Syndikat takes on responsibilities of the welfare state, thereby indirectly supporting the state and a neoliberal policy of withdrawal (Horlitz, 2013, as cited in Hurlin, 2018). It is also debated whether the collective ownership generated through the Syndikat truly represents the **ultimate solution**. While it combats speculation, it still creates **property that excludes others**. I will certainly keep these questions in mind, but due to time constraints, I am unable to explore this issue in detail or propose solutions. I find Lina Hurlin's points valid. Nevertheless, I believe that through the Syndikat, we can **expand a form of collaborative building that puts non-profit housing on the right track** (Hurlin, 2018).

MET- HODS

LITERATURE

Literature research lays the foundation for the work. Papers on the Mietshäuser Syndikat are included, the legal situation is researched, and previous researchers' findings are compiled. With the help of these combined sources, the thesis guidelines are then developed: the analysis on how non-profit housing can be created.

RELATION- SCAPES

Relationscapes are diagrams that map stakeholders precisely, their tasks and the connections between them, in order to see exactly which actors are needed in such a project. This will be applied for the organizational structures of sociocracy.

RESEARCH FOR DESIGN

INTERVIEWS

Visiting a housing project that was realized with the help of the Mietshäuser Syndikat opened my eyes to other perspectives. Processes were described that made the theory more realistic and tangible for me in this work. It highlighted problems, but also provided possible solutions, and became an important method.

SITE VISIT

Through Site Visits, the project gained more realistic relevance, through conversations, photographs, and confirmation of plans as well as research in local libraries and archives.

ARCHITECTURAL STORYTELLING

The story that emerges for the design and a specific group of actors make the project more tangible, connect it and turn it into a more personal matter. By including the names of all residents in the organisational models, the project can be made more tangible and easier to understand

DRAWINGS

A large number of plans and drawings are necessary to understand the design. Site plans, floor plans, elevations, sections and perspectives are essential for understanding the project.

RESEARCH BY DESIGN

DESIGN

The draft should then combine the research section and show what is possible and what a possible implementation could look like. It can also be seen as a kind of experiment in which the previously developed manual is tested to see whether such a concept is feasible in an existing building.

MODEL- MAKING

Models are helpful in clarifying the design, making it more visible and easier to understand. A model of the surroundings can be helpful in understanding the context, a model of the property can help to clarify the dimensions and scope of the project, and sectional models, for example of a single room, can enhance the understanding of the space.

KARL MARX

Karl Marx is one of the central authors when it comes to capitalism and its origins. He addresses several key points that closely relate to the problem of ownership in the housing market.

Marx defines capitalism as a system of goods production in which profit is created through the exploitation of human labor. But when it comes to housing and land, it is not a product of human labour. It is a product of nature, a finite resource that someone owns. The owner has a monopoly on this part of the earth, and anyone who wishes to live there must pay what is known as ground rent. The owner receives no money for performing any service, but solely on the grounds that they own the land and grant permission for its use (Marx, 1894).

Connections to today's housing crisis can be found not only in Marx's own writings. Authors such as David Harvey build directly on his work. Harvey (2010) describes how capitalism constantly produces surplus capital that needs to be reinvested. Real estate, in this context, functions like a sponge that absorbs this excess capital. This idea closely relates to Daniel Fuhrhopp's concept of "investification", where housing is treated

primarily as an investment rather than a place to live. In this process, the use of housing becomes secondary, and its function as a commodity for generating profit comes to the forefront (Fuhrhopp, 2020).

At the same time, it is important to note that ground rent and land ownership did not originate with capitalism. Forms of land-based rent already existed in pre-capitalist systems, particularly under feudalism. What distinguishes capitalism is not the existence of land rent itself, but the way it is integrated into a system of capital accumulation and market exchange (Marx, 1894).

A key distinction in Marx's theory is between use-value and exchange-value. The use-value of land lies in its natural properties and in its necessity for all human activity. In contrast, exchange-value relates to its price on the market. In *Capital* (1867), Marx explains that the value of a commodity is determined by the labour time required for its production. Following this logic, land itself has no value in this sense, since it is not produced by labour. Nevertheless, land clearly has a price. Marx describes this as an "irrational" form of price, as it assigns value to something that has not been produced.

Under capitalism, this price is based on what is known as capitalised ground rent. Buying land does not mean acquiring a produced good, but rather the right to derive future income from it. This is calculated by treating expected rent as if it were interest on capital. For example, if a plot generates €200 per year and the interest rate is 5%, it can be sold for €4,000 (Marx, 1894). The price of land therefore reflects not its production, but the owner's ability to extract income from others. In this sense, land ownership allows individuals to claim a share of collectively produced wealth without contributing to its creation.

Because land is limited and privately owned, this creates a structural monopoly. Owners can control access and demand payment for the use of something that is fundamentally necessary.

This becomes clearer when looking at Marx's broader framework of circulation. In pre-capitalist systems, exchange often follows the formula commodity–money–commodity (C–M–C), where goods are sold in order to obtain other goods for use. In capitalism, this shifts to money–commodity–more money (M–C–M'), where the goal is the accumulation of capital (Marx, 1894). Within this lo-

gic, housing is no longer primarily valued for its use, but as an asset.

But housing should always

be regarded as an essential commodity for survival, as it is enshrined in human rights as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, which problematizes the treatment of housing primarily as an asset. (United Nations, 1948, Art. 25).

This dynamic is particularly visible in the housing crisis. Rising rents are not necessarily linked to improvements in housing itself, but to the increasing ability to extract value from a location (Marx, 1894). In this sense, ownership becomes a powerful instrument.

Marx (1894) describes land ownership as a form of monopoly that allows exclusion. He distinguishes between land as such and land improved by capital, which he refers to as "terre-capital". Ownership enables actors to withhold land until it becomes profitable to use or sell it. This can be directly linked to what Fuhrhopp (2020) describes as investification: housing is bought, not necessarily to be lived in, but to generate returns over time.

“One part of society thus exacts tribute from another for the permission to inhabit the earth...” (Marx, 1894, p. 508)

A central issue in the housing crisis is displacement. Harvey describes this as "accumulation by dispossession", where people are displaced as space is reorganised for more profitable uses (Harvey, 2010). This connects back to Marx's class analysis. Different actors within the housing market attempt to secure a share of value. Landowners benefit from rising land values without active contribution, for example through urban development or improved infrastructure. Tenants, on the other hand, must allocate an increasing share of their income to rent. Financial actors, such as banks, play an additional role by providing capital and transforming future rent into financial assets. Through mortgages, they gain claims on future income streams, effectively converting expected rent into what Marx describes as fictitious capital (Marx, 1894).

In this context, the housing market becomes a mechanism for the redistribution of wealth. Ultimately, both rent and interest are paid out of income, which means that the main burden falls on tenants (Karl Marx, 1894).

Despite the historical distance, Marx's analysis remains relevant. Gentrification can be understood as a continuation of these dynamics.

Existing housing is either demolished or upgraded in order to generate higher profits. Affordable neighborhoods are limited, which leads to an intense competition for housing (OECD, n.d).

David Harvey (2010) expands Karl Marx's analysis by translating it into an urban and contemporary context. He addresses the role of the state and its legal structures, arguing that they reinforce capitalism by protecting property rights. At the same time, the development of the welfare state can be understood as a response to the social consequences of capitalism, introducing rights and protections intended to mitigate its most severe effects (Esping-Andersen, 1998). Even measures such as rent control or social housing may ease symptoms, but they do not challenge the underlying logic of ownership (Harvey, 2010).

What I found particularly valuable in Harvey's work is his clarification that Marx did not want chaos or total collectivism. Harvey uses Marx's writings to open the path toward an alternative social order that allows for a move away from capitalism. While collective ownership and the abolition of private property are discussed, this primarily refers to property that creates extreme power imbalances and result in

having the power to buy people. The focus lies on collective management of essential resources. The goal is a cooperative, solidarity-based economy that does not rely on profit as its main driving force (Harvey, 2010). This approach closely aligns with the core principles of the Mietshäuser Syndikat. Marx's theories provide a strong foundation for questioning a profit-driven housing market and for supporting alternative initiatives.

ELINOR OSTROM

Elinor Ostrom's commons theory challenged the neoliberal assumption that shared resources will be destroyed over time, leading to over-use and depletion. Works such as Hardin's (1968) "The Tragedy of the Commons" argue, for example, that individuals are incapable of changing their situation unless an external authority intervenes, and also point out that when resources are shared, people will always think of their own well-being first (Hardin, 1968 in Ostrom, 1990). But Ostrom (1990) says that communities can successfully self-organize through cooperation, trust, and rules. That is why she invented the eight design principles to refute the theses. These principles will be translated to the project and its organisation and rules. That is why these points are set out as house rules, which are typical of a housing project in Germany. They lay down rules for communal living and, in a typical housing project, can be found displayed in the hallway.

“Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules.” (Ostrom, 1990, p. 90)

1) Clearly defined boundaries:

The community determines who has access to the resource and what exactly is shared.

2) Congruence with local conditions:

Rules for use must be adapted to the specific local context and type of resource.

3) Collective-choice arrangements:

Users of the resource participate in creating and modifying the rules.

4) Monitoring:

Resource use is observed, often by the users themselves, to ensure compliance.

5) Graduated sanctions:

Rule violations are addressed through proportionate and context-sensitive responses.

6) Conflict-resolution mechanisms:

Accessible and fair processes are needed to resolve disputes.

7) Minimal recognition of rights to organize: External authorities must acknowledge and not interfere with the community's right to self-govern.

8) Nested enterprises:

Larger systems require multiple, interconnected levels of organization. (Ostrom, 1990)

ELINOR OSTROM

HOUSE RULES

The housing project is based on collective organisation, mutual responsibility and the shared use of living space. The aim of these house rules is to ensure a safe, stable and sustainable community life. The following rules structure the community life and planning of the group. The rules are based on Elinor Ostrom's theory of the commons but were applied by the author from her principles to the rules themselves.

§1 Definition of the community and resources

- (1) The house community independently defines who is part of the project.
- (2) The admission of new residents is decided through a collective decision-making process.
- (3) The building is divided into private and communal areas.
- (4) Communal resources are available exclusively to residents and invited guests.

§2 Use and contribution in relation to local conditions

- (1) The use of communal resources is not necessarily proportional to residents' individual contributions, as contributions are based on residents' individual abilities and capacities, and decisions are made by consensus.

For example, a mother who works 40 hours a week and then looks after her children has the same right to use the communal garden as everyone else, even if she is less able to contribute to its upkeep. In the case of persistent injustices, this can be discussed in a plenary meeting.

- (2) The scope and nature of the use, as well as the contributions, shall be determined jointly and reviewed on a regular basis. For example, cleaning days may be scheduled which are considered binding unless there is a valid reason for absence on the scheduled date.

§3 Co-determination and adaptability of the rules

- (1) All residents have the right to participate in decision-making processes. Plenary meetings are held at fixed, regular intervals. Extraordinary meetings are also welcome. The necessary arrangements can be made via the communication channels.
- (2) Rules and organisational structures are developed jointly and can be adapted. The project is organised using the sociocracy model. Meetings in the planning groups are organised by mutual agreement.
- (3) Decision-making processes take place within transparent and accountable structures.

§4 Collective responsibility and mutual consideration

- (1) Compliance with the agreed rules is the responsibility of all residents.
- (2) The community works together to ensure the responsible use of resources and harmonious coexistence.
- (3) Reminders are given respectfully and in the interests of the community.

§5 Dealing with breaches of the rules

- (1) Breaches of the rules will first be discussed and resolved together.
- (2) Sanctions are not intended as punishment, but to maintain a safe and stable community environment. Serious breaches of the rules may lead to consequences, including expulsion in exceptional cases, as the safety and well-being of all residents remain the highest priority.
- (3) There are no set penalties, but in the event of persistent misconduct, the group will discuss possible consequences.

§6 Conflict resolution

- (1) Conflicts are dealt with openly and in a structured manner.
- (2) Regular meetings and appropriate discussion formats are available for this purpose.
- (3) All parties involved have the right to

be heard.

- (4) The aim is to find a fair and sustainable solution whilst preserving the community.
- (5) There is always time during plenary sessions to discuss conflicts. If the matter cannot be resolved within the larger group, the issue can be discussed in a smaller group in order to find a solution.

§7 Self-organisation and rule-making

- (1) The house community develops its own rules independently.
- (2) These serve to protect the safety and well-being of the residents.
- (3) The rules developed collectively are binding.
- (4) External interference in the internal organisation shall be limited to what is strictly necessary. The women's shelter organisation has the right to intervene, but should only do so in an emergency.

§8 Multi-level organisation of the project

- (1) The project is organised across several interconnected levels.
- (2) There are smaller working groups for different areas of responsibility.
- (3) Overarching decisions are taken in plenary sessions.
- (4) The various levels work together in a coordinated manner to ensure the project functions effectively.

MIETS- HÄUSER SYNDIKAT

The Mietshäuser Syndikat originated in the 1980s from the German housing occupation movement and has existed in its current form since 1992. It is a cooperative network that, by 2022, encompassed around 170 self-managed housing projects with approximately 4,500 residents.

The concept focuses on supporting building groups in the acquisition of properties. The entire model is based on three core principles: collective ownership, self-management, and solidarity between projects (Hözl, 2022).

Each project is organized as a limited liability company (GmbH) consisting of two shareholders: the local residents' association and the Mietshäuser Syndikat as the overarching organization. This structure allows the group to apply for loans even if the individual members would not be considered creditworthy (Theuerl, 2013). The building group retains 51% of the voting rights, which grants it full decision-making power regarding all matters within the building. However, the Syndikat holds a veto right in two specific cases: the sale of the property and its misuse for speculative purposes (Hözl, 2022). This ensures that the property can never re-enter the speculative real estate market.

The underlying philosophy aligns with

degrowth principles, in which quality of life is not defined by individual ownership. Each new group is supported by experienced members from previous projects, and the network operates largely on a voluntary basis, emphasizing mutual

support. Rents within these projects are low, as they are calculated only to cover loan repayments. Even after the loans have been repaid, residents continue to contribute to a solidarity fund, which helps finance new projects. In this sense, the network represents institutionalized solidarity and a shared belief that housing should not be treated as a commodity for profit.

The Syndikat also facilitates private loans from supporters who wish to invest their money ethically, allowing groups to replace the private capital usually required by banks. A financial plan ensures that rent levels cover all expenses (Hurlin, 2018). Beyond financial support, the network promotes knowledge exchange through meetings, information sharing, and the development of a strong collective identity (Hözl, 2022).

An advantage of the financing not being provided by members of the building group is that the capital is

„Häuser denen, die drin wohnen“

“Housing for those who live in it”¹

¹ A political slogan of the squatters' movement, particularly prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s.

neutralized and never owned by any individual. Investments by members would contradict the principles of the Mietshäuser Syndikat and are neither mandatory nor, for the reasons mentioned above, desirable (Theuerl, 2013).

In summary, the Mietshäuser Syndikat can be described in one sentence, as Theuerl formulates in his guide:

“Many houses should belong to many people”

(Theuerl, 2013, p. 12, own translation).

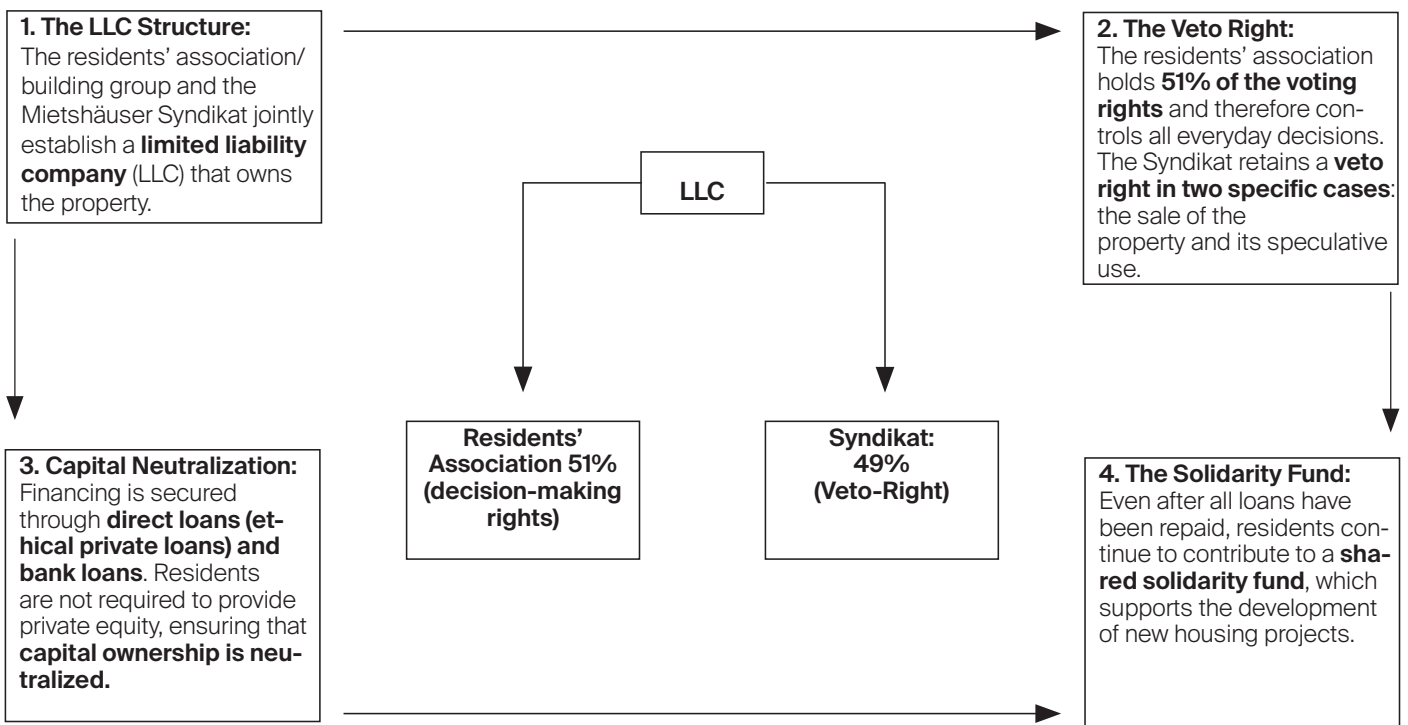


Figure 5: Diagram to understand the Mietshäuser Syndikat. Note. Source: author's own diagram based on Theuerl (2013).

NEEDS & VALUES

When needs and values are discussed here, these are those that are necessary for the housing project to function. As Julia Woodhall-Melnik et al. (2016) have already mentioned, opportunities for long-term prospects are required. This is also the basis for this work, which aims to further develop the principle of women's shelters and create long-term housing situations. Therefore, in this particular case, the organization must be approached a little differently. Projects of this size can sometimes take up to 8 years before residents can move in (Residents of the Mosaik Housing Project, personal communication, February 18, 2026). And this period is simply too long for women in precarious situations. That is why the project is being initiated by a private sponsor. The organizational structure remains the same, only the people responsible change. Social workers and allies are involved in the process, but the apartments are then rented to women in need who are involved in the housing process.

Security:

The values that should be paramount in this project are stability, dignity, and a sense of belonging. In this context, communal housing must offer an alternative to patriarchal housing models. By this I mean models designed

for a stereotypical family, so that the woman can carry out her household duties, and the property owners are usually men. The apartments to be planned should function as spatial framework for protection and empowerment. By this I mean that the architecture should create a feeling of security and a supportive living environment. The Design addresses this by linking private rooms to communal areas, creating a place of retreat, but still allowing residents to be aware of each other and not feel alone. This way, everyone should feel as safe as possible.

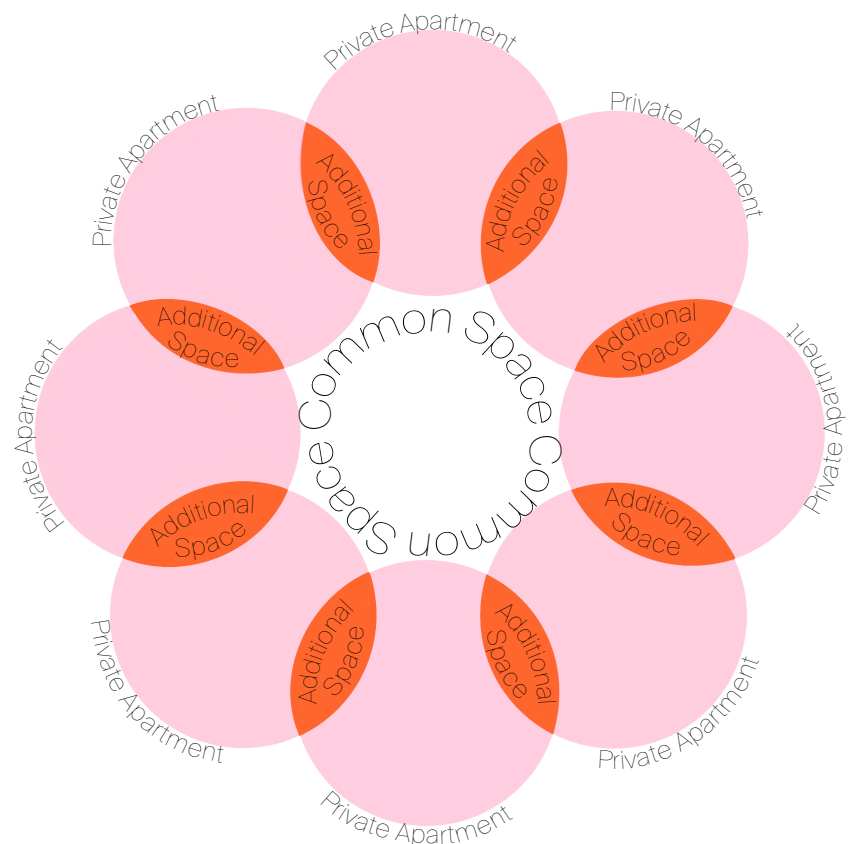


Figure 6: *Diagram to Needs and Values.*
Note. Source: author's own diagram, 2026.

Another aspect of creating safety for women is a Solidarity supermarket on the groundfloor. Not only for financial reasons, but also to prevent people from peering into the flats, which only start on the first floor then. (Socialnämnd Sydväst, 2024). Participation in the supermarket establishes a system of shared responsibilities and because the access to the supermarket requires involvement, the space becomes semi-public rather than anonymous. This is where Elinor Ostrom's theory comes in. Ostrom highlights how collective governance structures can foster trust and collective responsibilities, rather than exploiting them in the short term (Ostrom, 1990). In this context, participation contributes to increased security within the residential community. Familiarity among users and the shared responsibility for maintaining the project foster a sense of collective ownership, which in turn encourages responsible behaviour and strengthens the social cohesion of the group.

Making decisions/setting rules:

What is also needed are clear visitor rules. The exact arrangements are made by the group it-self; it is not possible to plan every detail. People are different and have different needs. According to residents of the

Mosaik Housing Project (personal communication, February 18, 2026), decisions can be made by consensus within the group, which has led to good results in this project. Plenary meetings should be held at least every two weeks, and when important decisions need to be made, it makes sense to schedule a meeting dedicated exclusively to that topic. In this case, that means scheduling a meeting solely to discuss the project's visitor rules. Are men allowed in the house, and if so, are they allowed to stay overnight? How are situations handled when someone feels uncomfortable with the presence of men in the house? The well-being of the women is the focus here, but it must be decided by the group. According to residents of the Mosaik Housing Project (personal communication, February 18, 2026), it sometimes makes sense to bring in a mediator to help facilitate the meeting. In most cases, it is sufficient to have a neutral person present.

Problem solving and conflicts:

The same applies to conflicts. Mediators can accompany heated discussions when situations become tense. It can also make sense to meet in smaller groups to discuss problems. Larger group settings can make it difficult to address sensitive

issues openly, particularly when the person concerned is present. Smaller group discussions are not intended to isolate individuals, but can create a context in which concerns and conflicts may be articulated more openly. Afterwards, the people involved in the conflict can talk to each other. They may also involve someone else from the group to defuse the situation. (Residents of the Mosaik Housing Project, personal communication, February 18, 2026) It is clear that problems will arise and that it is important to know how to deal with them. In relation to this case, the organization that initiated the project can also provide support.

Conclusion:

The points outlined are not solely intended to provide a safety net. This living arrangement is also about mutual support, as it creates a support system that is essential for healing. Something that is often lacking in abusive relationships, and mutual cooperation is indispensable to make this project a realistic possibility.

SOCIO- CRACY

Sociocracy is an organisational model that is used, for example, in housing projects such as this one. The principle of sociocracy is based on four core principles. The consent principle states that decisions are approved when no one has a serious objection related to the common goals. This should lead to a consent-based decision in which all members, as shown in the adjacent circular diagram, are treated equally (Soziokratie Zentrum Deutschland, 2021). Furthermore, there is the circle principle, which connects the organisational structure in a circular form. This allows goals to be achieved more effectively, as it creates a continuous and seamless structure. Each circle can make its own decisions and is therefore more independent, since decisions, implementation, and results can be made and adjusted continuously and more quickly. In addition, there is a double linking principle. All leadership positions are held by two people. The circle leader and a delegated person represent the interests of the entire circle. The task of the delegated person is to bring the interests of the working circle into the higher circle so that they are considered during decision making. Both are full members in both circles. Hierarchies should

be avoided! By having two people represent the circle, the transparent flow of information is facilitated, and the interests of all members are kept in view. This helps to prevent role conflicts at the intersections of the circles (Soziokratie Zentrum Deutschland, 2021).

The last principle is open election. Roles and responsibilities are assigned through an open election, which is a consent-based decision relating to people. This process values the strengths of the responsible persons, which plays an important role in the model. Good arguments are at the center of the decision, and people who might not have been considered at first also have the opportunity to take on important tasks. (Soziokratie Zentrum Deutschland, 2021) So to explain it on the model. The two responsables (as illustrated in figure 7 on the following page) for the limited liability company are Sybille and Zahrah. They will meet the responsables from the other groups to discuss but should always make decisions for the whole group. Which means that they enter the meetings with the interests of Eleni and Dalia in mind. Together they share the tasks. As the housing project develops and is implemented, the tasks will be handed over to

the residents. In this case, Sybille will remain one of the people in charge, but Zarah, Eleni, and Dalia will hand over their organizational tasks to Ama, Klara, and Isi as soon as they move into the housing project. In this model, there are two Sociocracy relationships because the project will be planned with the help of a women's shelter organization. Social workers and allies help to invent the project, so that the apartments can be rented out promptly and the residents do not have to wait years for the project to be completed. This means that a little outside help is needed, but then it should be taken over by the residents, leading to self-management. This project is about a strong community and the women are helping each other.

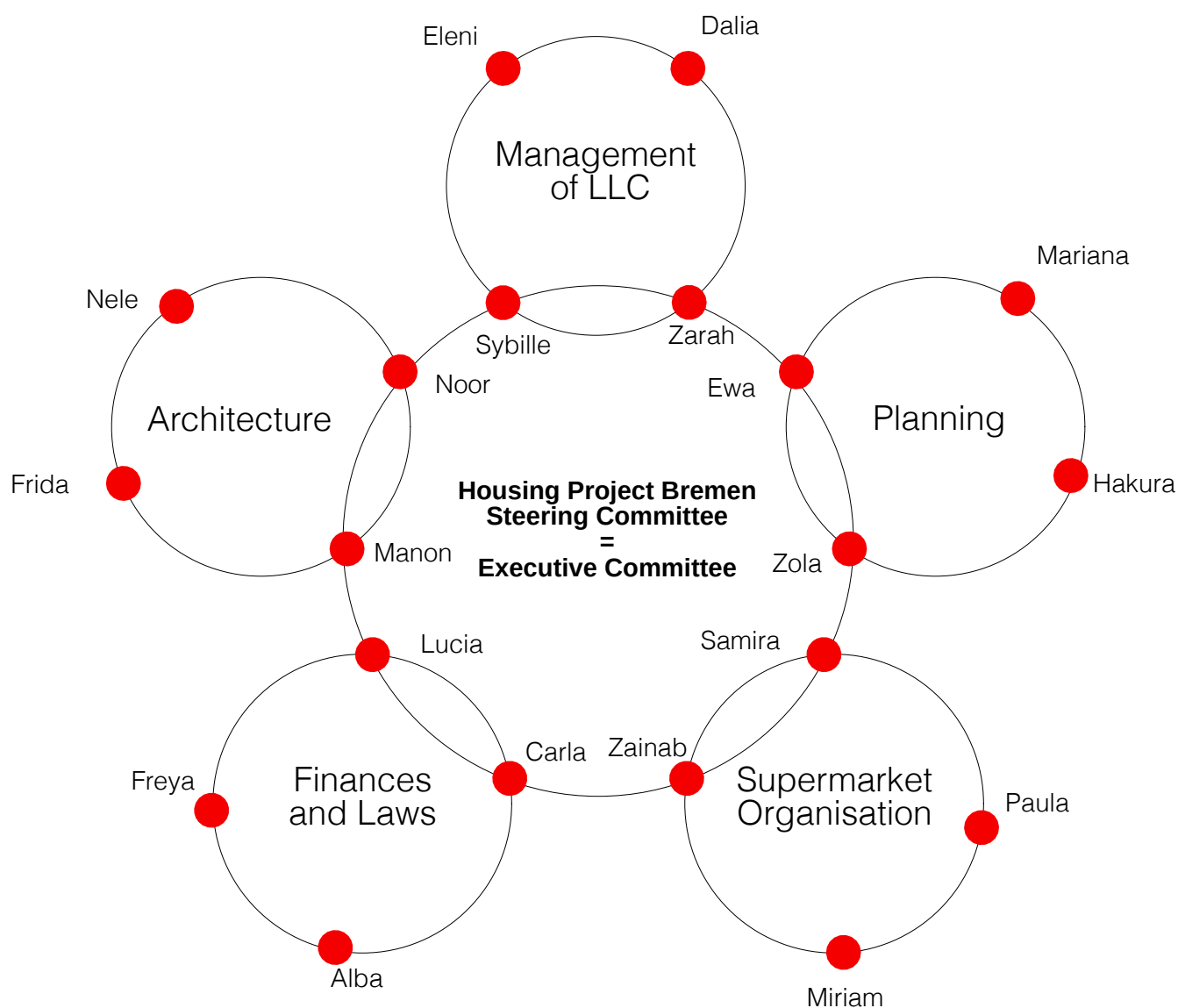
Suitability:

Why is this model a good choice for this project? First of all, it is practical that each circle is responsible for itself and relatively independent from the rest of the group. This means that every circle can plan its own time, and during the open elections of representatives, the availability of individuals can be taken into account. Not everyone has the same amount of time or capacity. For this reason, allies and social workers are

also integrated and they will start the process of the housing project. In the end, the residents will take over the tasks, and no one has more or less to say than others, which supports this organisational model. Moreover, as explained earlier, the model also supports the different needs of the women. There are various areas of focus in which each woman can contribute her own interests, background, and prior knowledge. Because two women from each circle act as representatives, not everyone has to participate in every meeting. The housing project can therefore develop even if not everyone has time to meet every day.

RELATION SCAPES

The residents are gradually taking on



The planning process begins with social workers hired by an organisation to enable residents to move in as quickly as possible.

Figure 7: Organisational structure. Note. Source: author's own diagram based on Soziokratie Zentrum Deutschland, (2021).

Residents

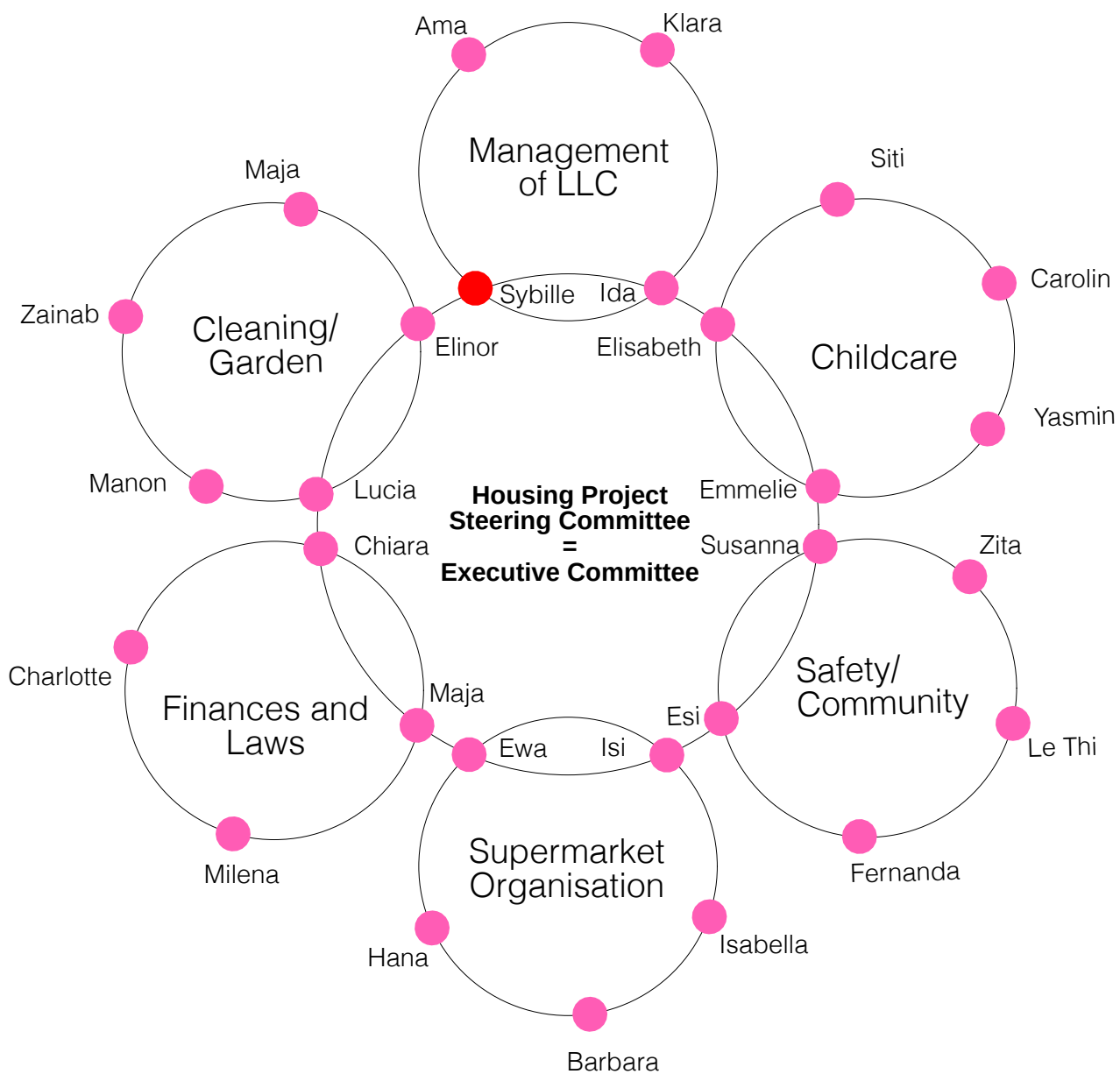


Social Workers/ Allies



Names are made up for Story-Telling reasons

the tasks and adapting them



The housing project is intended to be self-managed, which is why the residents are gradually taking over the tasks of the social workers and the tasks will adapt from planning to maintenance.

RELATION SCAPES

How the Sociocracy model

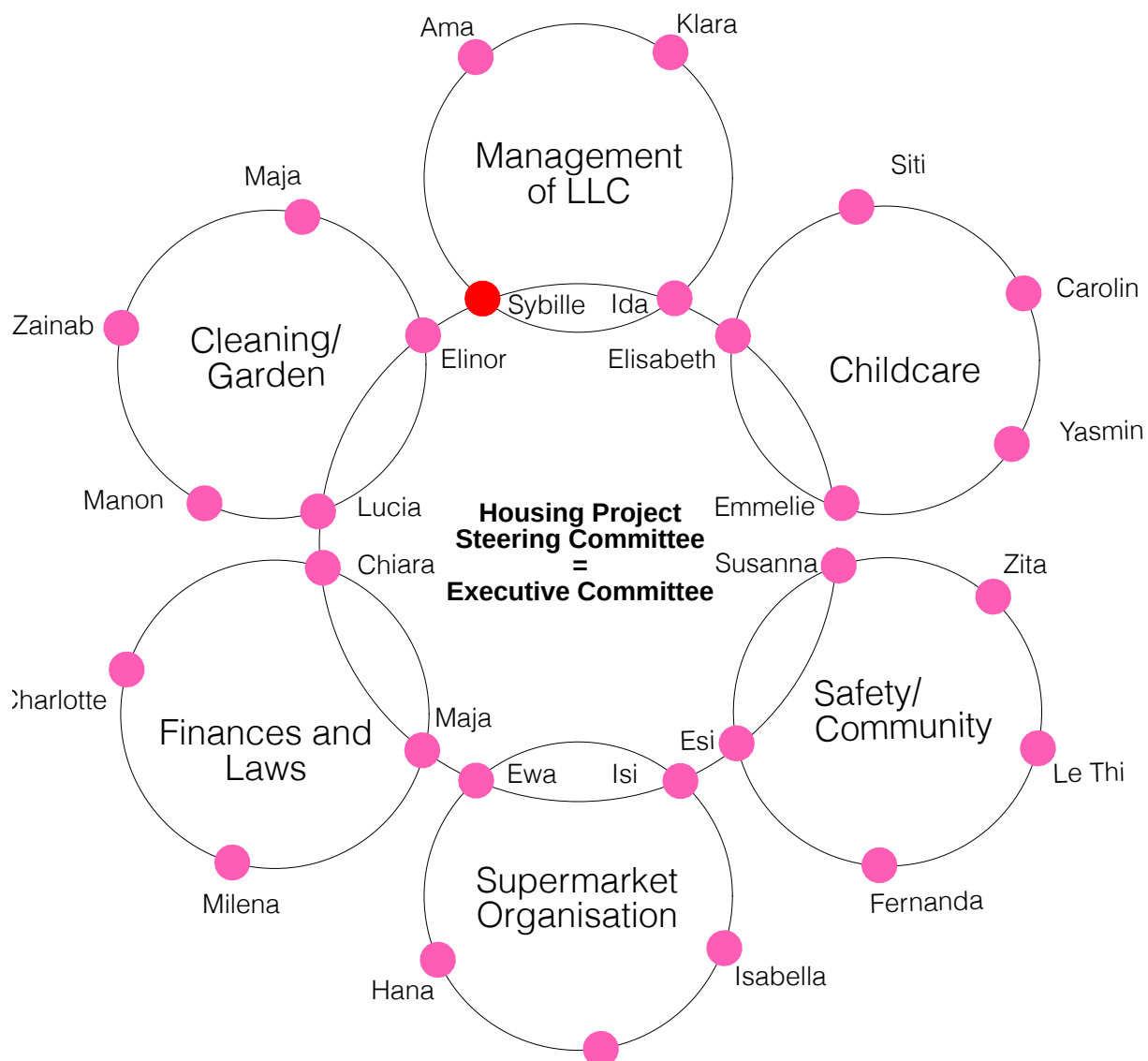


Figure 8: Organisational+ housing structure. Note. Source: author's own diagram based on Soziokratie Zentrum Deutschland, (2021).

Residents



Teenagers



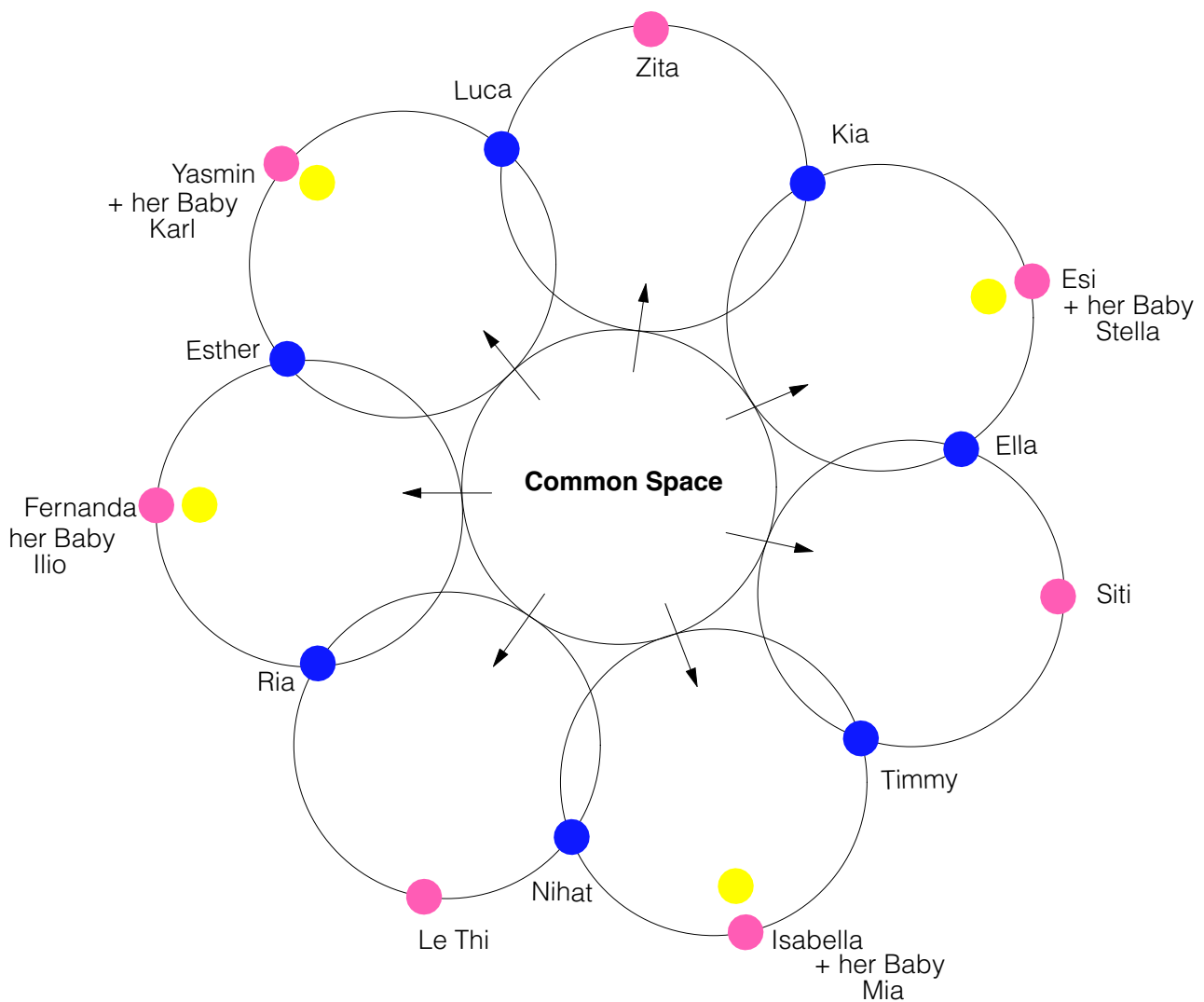
Babies/ Toddlers



Names are made up for Story-Telling reasons

informs the Apartments

Who lives in the apartments on one floor



The organisational model can also be applied to the floor plans of the flats and informs this relationshipscape of how to live together. The circles represent the flats and the people living in them. Residents may live alone, with a child, or even with up to two teenagers, as these can be accommodated in the additional rooms.

FINAN- CING

In simplified terms, the Mietshäuser Syndikat can be described as a model that enables the purchase of property without individual equity. This chapter explains how the financing works, where the financial resources come from, and what advantages this model offers compared to conventional forms of property ownership.

Daniel Fuhrhop (2020) describes the phenomenon that, as a builder, one often does not fully see the costs one is committing to. It is not only the price of the property. There are also notary fees, taxes, and additional levies. In addition, financial institutions, such as banks, have an interest in construction projects because they generate profit through loans. Our economic system is structured around capitalist principles, and within this system, taking on debt is often presented as reasonable or even necessary. Building society savings contracts, for example, can tie individuals to the industry for decades. Many people believe that they can buy a sense of security through owning their own home. However, Fuhrhop argues that real estate can also make people less mobile. Hardly any property is suitable for an entire lifetime. In old age, houses often have to be converted at great expense or are sold due to insufficient funds for

elderly care (Fuhrhop, 2020).

Against this background, the Miets-häuser Syndikat can offer a way of avoiding lifelong individual debt while still benefiting from access to housing. By founding a limited liability company (LLC), liability rests with the housing community rather than with individuals. This legal structure makes it possible to obtain a bank loan even if the members would not be considered creditworthy on their own. Unlike many cooperatives, financial investment is not a prerequisite for moving into a Syndikat project and would even contradict its principles (Theuerl, 2013).

However, working with a conventional bank is only one part of the financing structure. The Mietshäuser Syndikat is a voluntary organization that, due to its long history, has developed a large network and considerable expertise. Projects can be financed through direct loans, which can replace the equity capital that conventional banks usually require in order to grant a loan. Direct loans are private loans from supporters or from people who want to invest their money in an ethical way (Hurlin, 2018).

A financial plan ensures that rents are calculated so that all costs are covered. Because no profit has to be generated, rents remain below

market rate. Each project decides independently how the total rent is distributed, whether equally, according to income, per capita, or on a solidarity basis. Even if projects become debt-free, they continue to pay a solidarity contribution into a common fund, the solidarity fund. This fund can then be used to finance new projects. The Syndikat therefore provides not only expertise but also concrete financial resources (Hurlin, 2018).

When receiving direct loans from supporters, it can make sense to distribute them through a so-called ring exchange. This means that large lenders do not provide their entire loan to a single project but divide it among several projects. In this way, the dependence on one wealthy individual is reduced, and the financial risk is minimized if that person withdraws their support (Theuerl, 2013). For example, if someone wants to support a housing project with €100,000 and the project has only smaller direct loans, it would become highly dependent on that one contribution. It therefore makes sense to divide the €100,000 among several projects, so that, for example, ten projects receive €10,000 each. In this case, each project receives several smaller loans instead of one dominant loan. This type of financing is only feasible

within a network of this size.

In addition, direct loans can be structured flexibly in terms of interest rates and duration so that they are beneficial for both sides. In his guide, Theuerl (2013) emphasizes that a clear advantage of the Syndikat compared to other housing communities is the creation of a comprehensive solidarity network between participating groups and also between projects and their supporters.

In addition to other funding mechanisms, foundations may provide financial support. The Swiss Edith Maryon Foundation, for example, supports initiatives that promote solidarity-based housing and community-oriented projects (Theuerl, 2013). The foundation purchases the property or land and then grants the heritable building right to the house community. The foundation can organize itself through the ground rent. This means that the foundation owns the land, but the house company has the right to build on it. Such inheritance contracts are usually concluded for 66 or 99 years. The syndicate's prohibition on selling does not necessarily apply here, because either a foundation is used at the beginning of the project as start-up aid to reduce costs, or a foundation steps in during emergency situations to

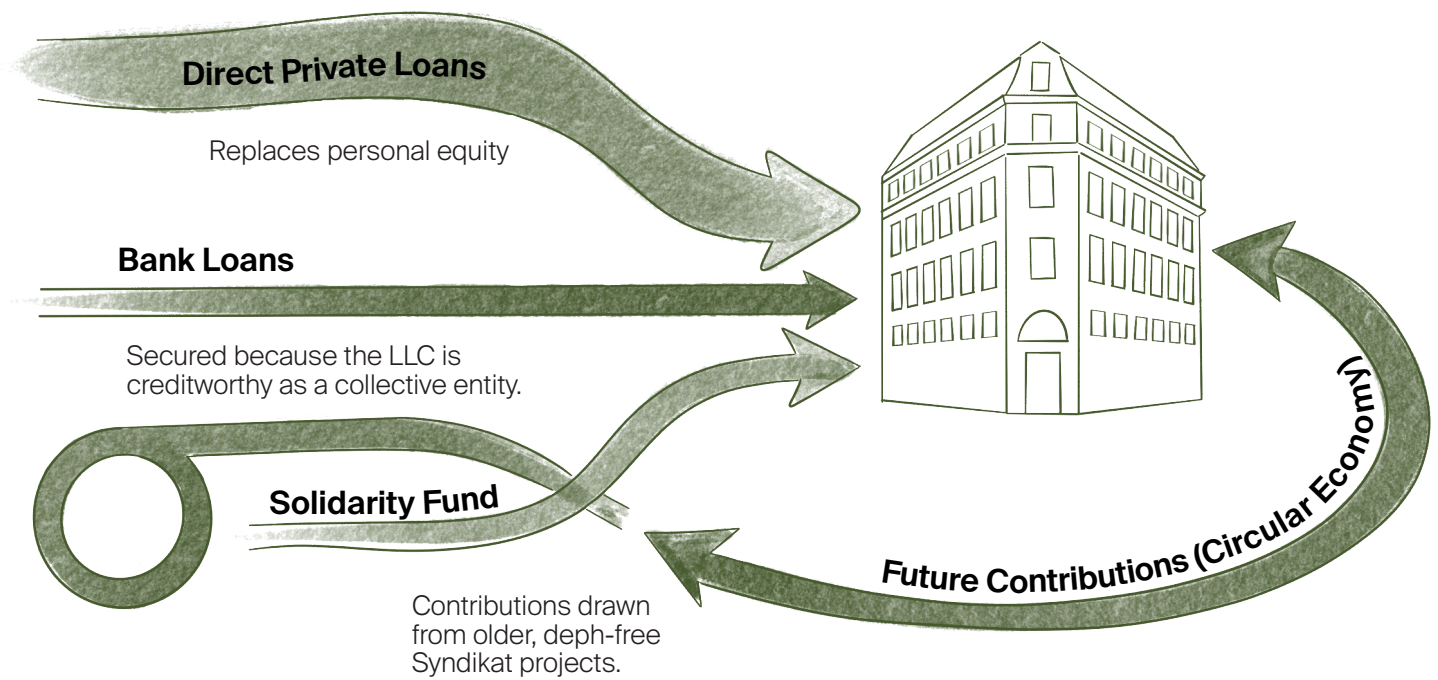
rescue a project in crisis. Neither option is about profit, which is why the Mietshäuser Syndikat agrees to a sale, but usually only of the land, not the house (Theuerl, 2013).

Subsidies can also be obtained from banks. If you can demonstrate to the banks that the project is economically viable, you may be able to obtain promotional loans. Subsidies for solar panels or special loans for social projects are possible. In his guide, Theurl (2013) explains that it can be worthwhile to combine financing from different sources. Even if you save energy through renovations or build social housing, you can apply for promotional loans. It is worth checking out these options.

Another source of income can be commercial rentals. Within the framework of cooperation with the Mietshäuser Syndikat, any commercial use must be compatible with the project's underlying principles. Profit generation is not intended as the primary objective. Instead, the use should contribute to the collective benefit of the project. In one residential project in Leipzig, for instance, the ground floor was rented to an alternative collective practice that shares the cooperative's values, ensuring that the project's ethos remains in-

tact (Klinge10, 2024). In this particular project, the ground floor is to be rented to a solidarity supermarket. This is also not intended to generate profit, but to create a supermarket that belongs to everyone and at the same time creates jobs, community, and security (SuperCoop Berlin, 2026).

In summary, it can be said that financing mainly comes from solidarity funds. However, these are sometimes insufficient, in which case bank loans can also be used. Then, you are not solely liable, but rather jointly liable with the LLC and not as a private individual. The solidarity funds can thus replace the LLC's equity capital and make the house community creditworthy. Sometimes there is no additional financing available, such as subsidies or assistance from foundations, but this must be researched and applied for, on an individual basis. In a housing community, there are different groups responsible for different areas. This means that there is a specific group of co-creators who specialize in finances.



By utilizing collective liability and a ring- exchange of direct loans, residents don't need individual wealth. The capital is neutralized.

Figure 9: Illustration for financing. Note. Source: author's own diagram based on Theuerl (2013).

SITE SELEC- TION



Figure 10: Bismarckstraße 14. Note. Source: author's own photography, 2025.

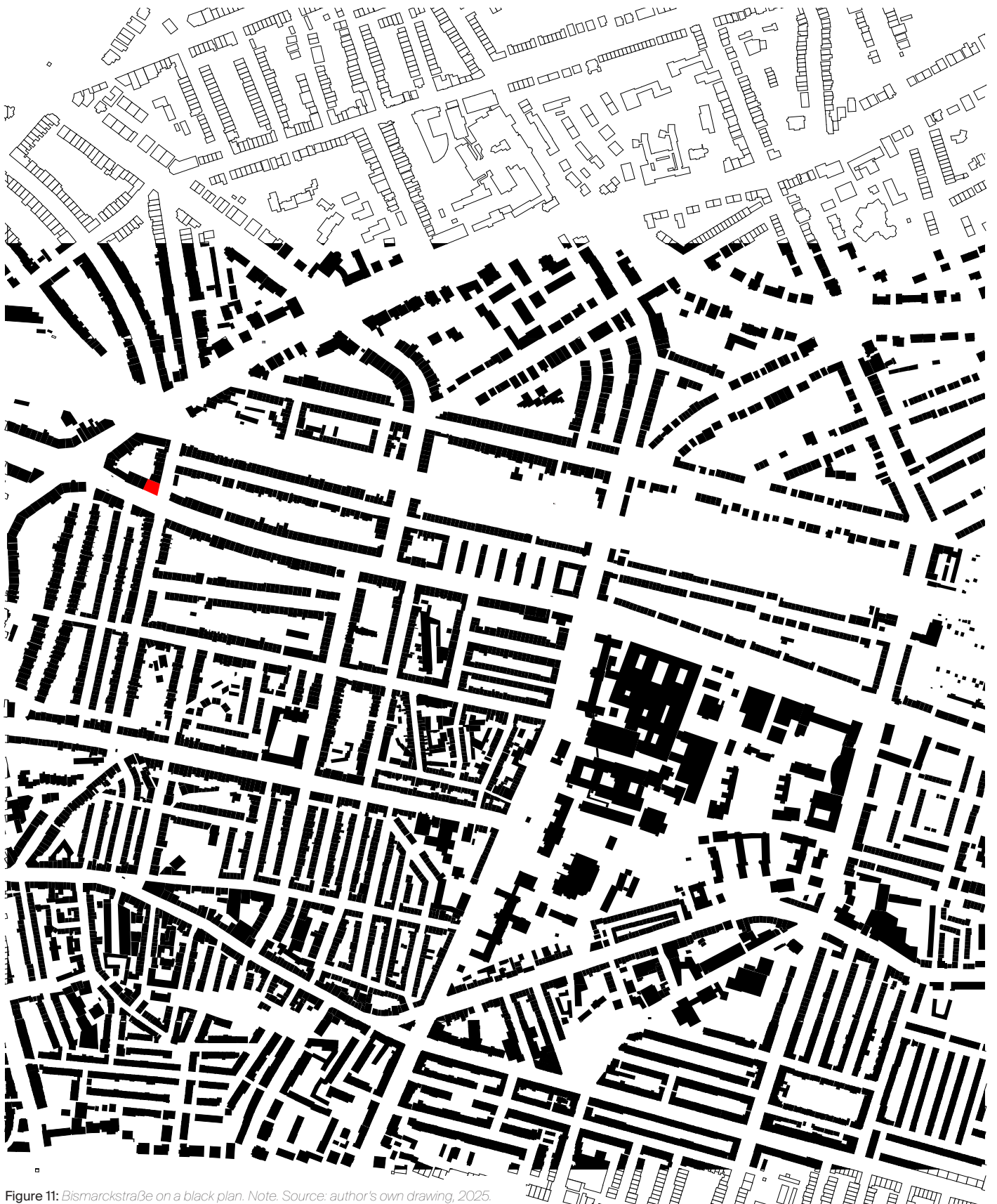
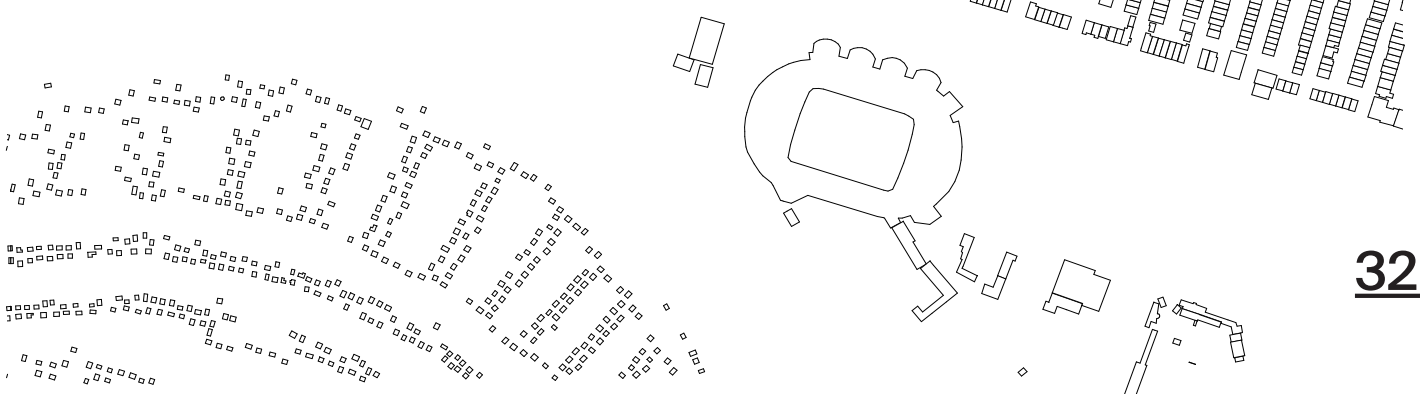


Figure 11: Bismarckstraße on a black plan. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2025.



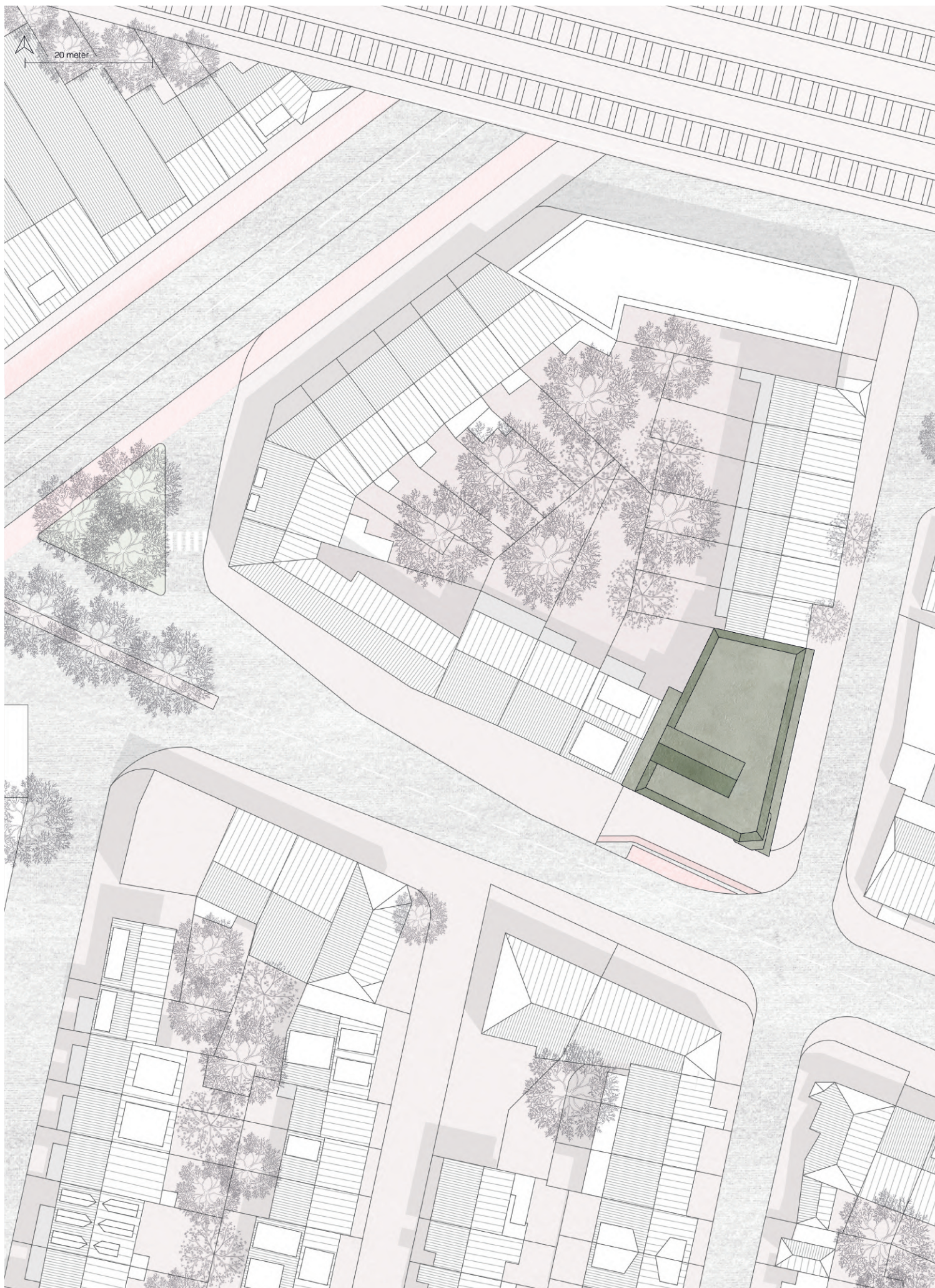
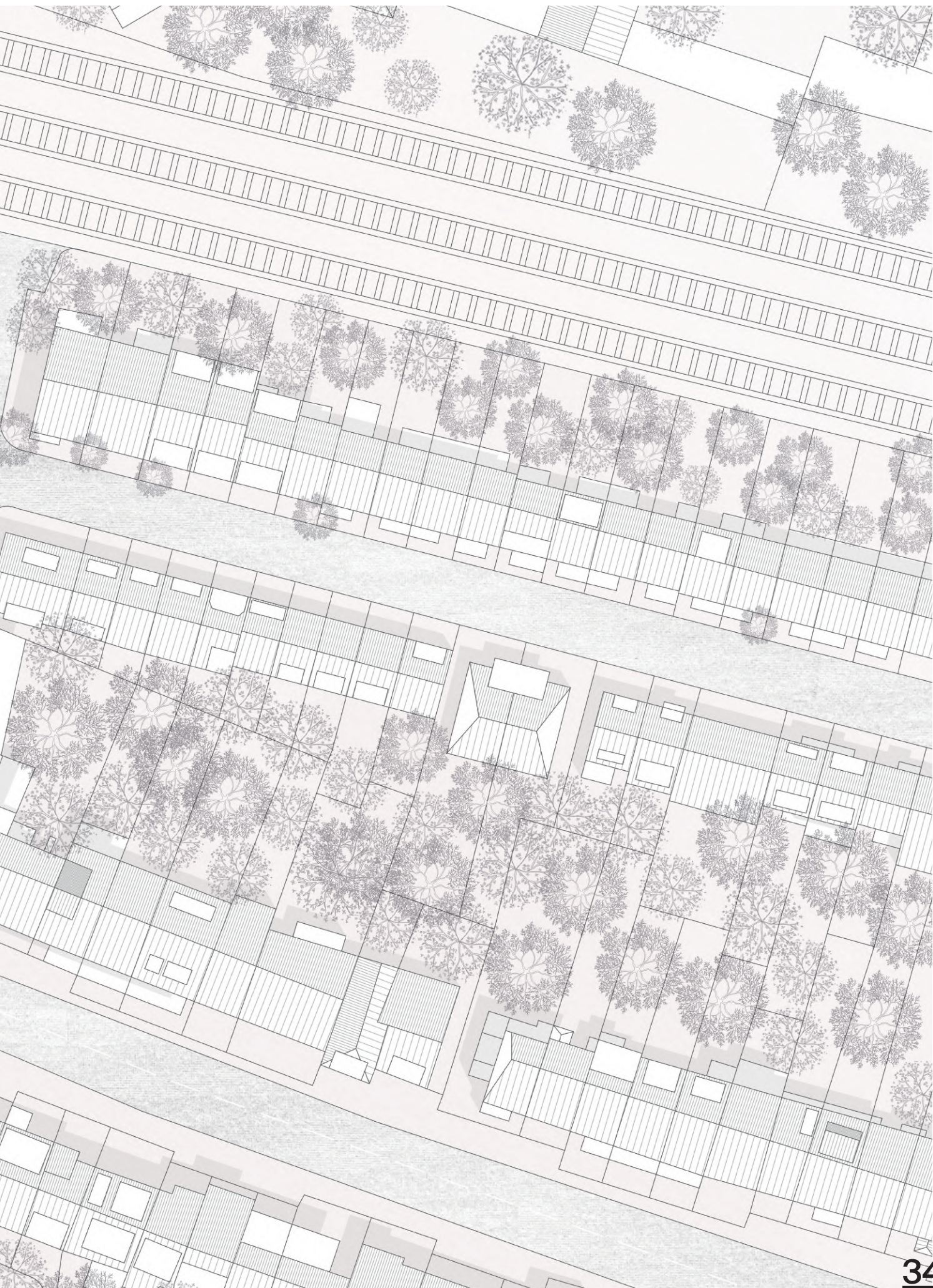


Figure 12: Bismarckstraße 14, Siteplan. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



CLASSI- FICATION OF THE SITE

Bismarckstraße in Bremen is a long street located in the district of the so called eastern suburb, an urban area known for its alternative and solidarity-based culture as well as its advantageous location. While it is not part of the actual city center, it is still very central and for many residents, the "real" centrum (author's field notes, 2025).

The building itself has a distinct character and stands out among the surrounding residential buildings, which are predominantly constructed in the typical Bremen row-house style. The Bismarckstraße has a familiar and almost intimate atmosphere, shaped by former single-family houses that have been converted into smaller residential units, resulting in a diverse mix of inhabitants (author's field notes, 2025).

In many ways, the Bismarckstraße can almost be perceived as a neighborhood in its own way. It is widely known among Bremen residents and plays a significant role in everyday life for many. Due to the presence of families and young shared living communities, the street has a highly personal character (author's field notes, 2025). During a visit in December 2025, I found a small bicycle basket attached to a front

fence, containing oyster mushrooms, pretzels, and freshly baked bread, neatly packaged as Christmas gifts. A handwritten note read "Do you only take, or do you also give?" For me, this was an invitation to reflect on whether I truly needed these goods and what I might give back to others in return. The fact that no one took everything at once suggested a shared sense of humility and appreciation. This is the type of community I associate with Bismarckstraße, and it is exactly why this location is well suited for a safe housing project for women. People care for one another and actively contribute to collective well-being, creating an atmosphere that is almost village like.

CURRENT CONDI- TION

The property has been vacant since 2019. The owner, who operates a supermarket chain widely represented in Bremen, opened an organic grocery store at this location in 2006 and closed it again after thirteen years. In an article from 2025, the *Weser-Kurier*, the local daily newspaper, referred to the building as an "eyesore," a characterization later confirmed by statements from the owner himself (Jürgen Hinrichs, 2025). The development of the property reflects precisely what Daniel Fuhrhopp describes in his book "Verbietet das Bauen". Vacant buildings tend to attract sprayers and vermin, which clearly describes the current condition of the site (Daniel Fuhrhopp, 2020). A construction fence was installed after the store's closure to prevent vandalism but judging by the extensive graffiti and traces of consumption, this measure has been slightly ineffective. In my view, however, the building is not an eyesore at all. Rather, it can be understood as a kind of monument to vacancy. Until 2010, it was not illegal in the Netherlands to occupy a building if it had been vacant for more than a year. Occupiers were legally tolerated, making eviction difficult for owners (Fuhrhopp). It was precisely from such occupation movements in the

1980s that the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* emerged. Seen in this context, the building appears particularly suitable for this project. The graffiti can be interpreted as a reminder of the years in which the building stood unused, reinforcing Fuhrhopp's argument that vacancy inevitably attracts appropriation.

After the *Weser-Kurier* labeled the former Aleco organic market an eyesore, the owner publicly announced plans for a new construction on the site. This sparked a broader debate around demolition versus preservation. What are the reasons for constructing a new building? Especially when discussing the issue of housing surplus? Would these new apartments have been truly affordable? Based on the visualizations published by the newspaper, it appears more likely that luxury housing would have been developed, contributing to gentrification or investification real estate dynamics. Due to unstated reasons, likely related to protests from local residents, these plans were ultimately suspended (Jürgen Hinrichs, 2025). As a result, the supermarket building remains unchanged and continues to stand vacant. What must be emphasized here is that responsibility for the property lies solely with the owner, and the building's deterioration is a direct consequence of inaction.

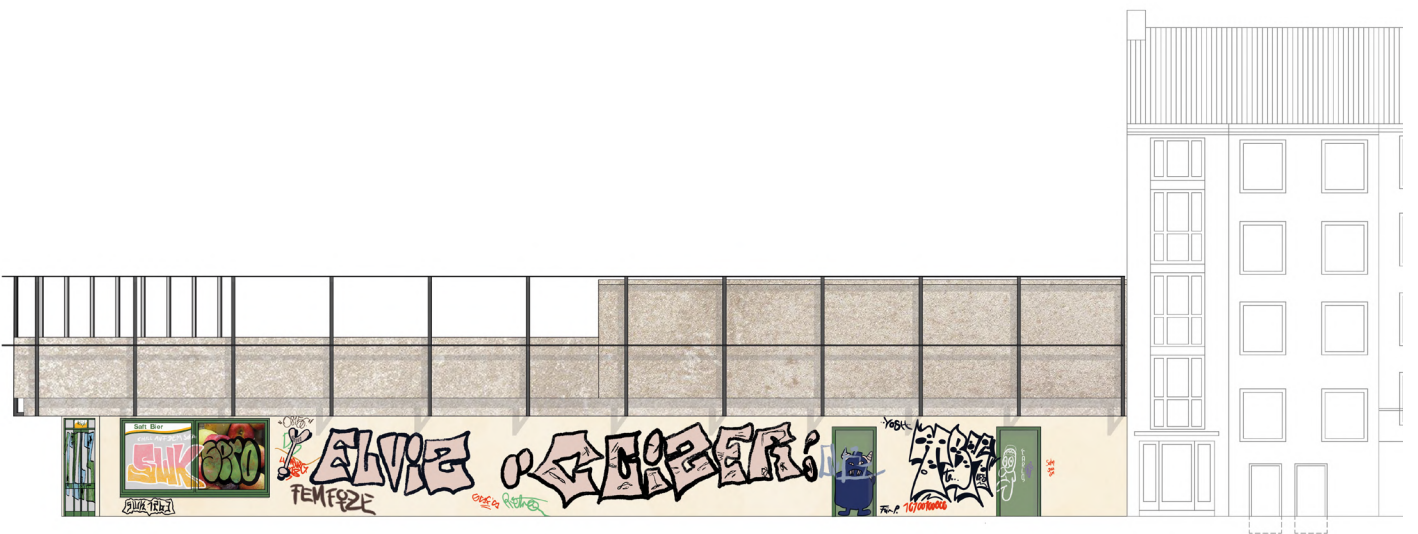


Figure 13-15: Elevations and Section. Note. Source: author's own drawings, 2026.

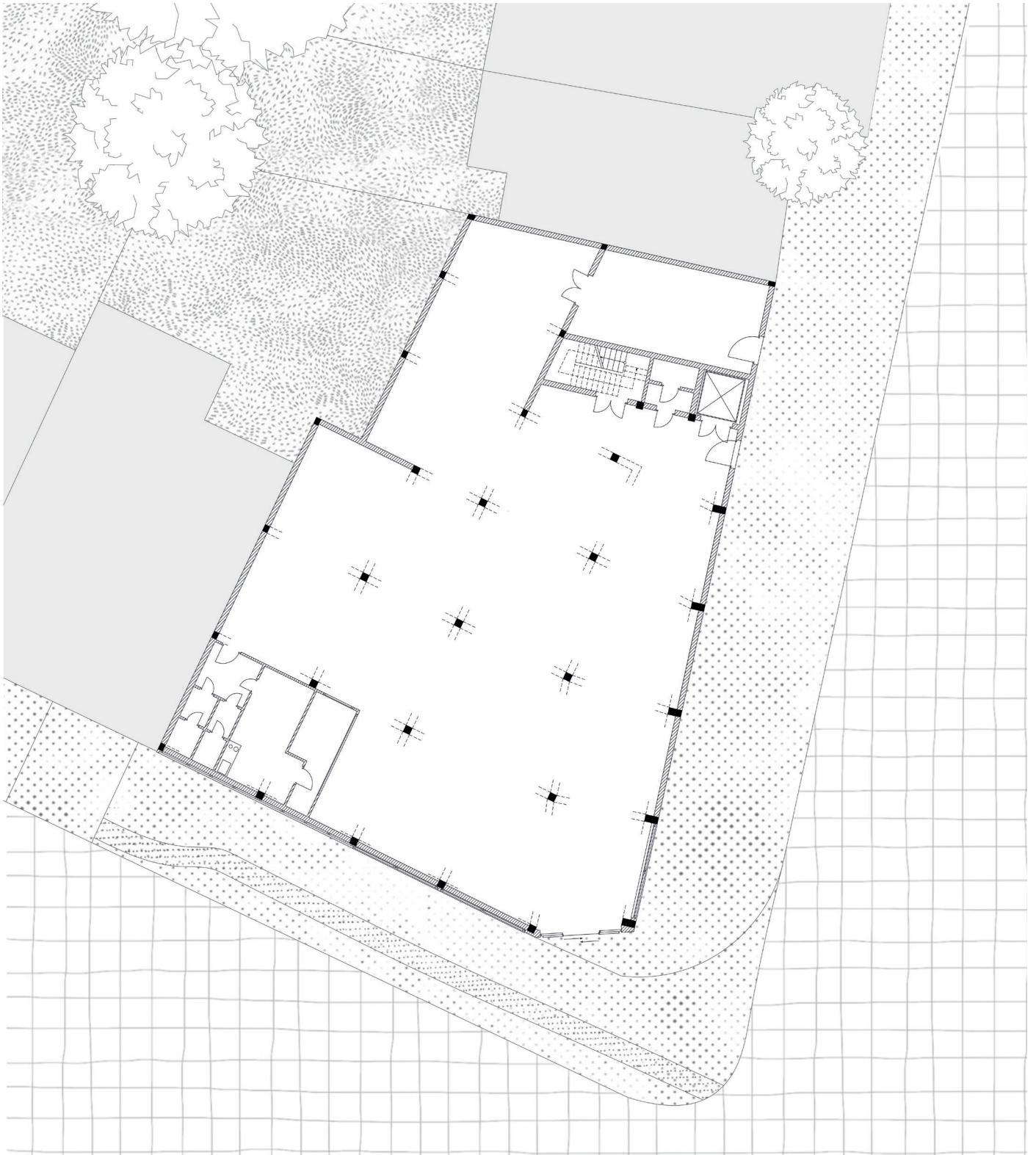


Figure 16: Floorplan Groundfloor. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

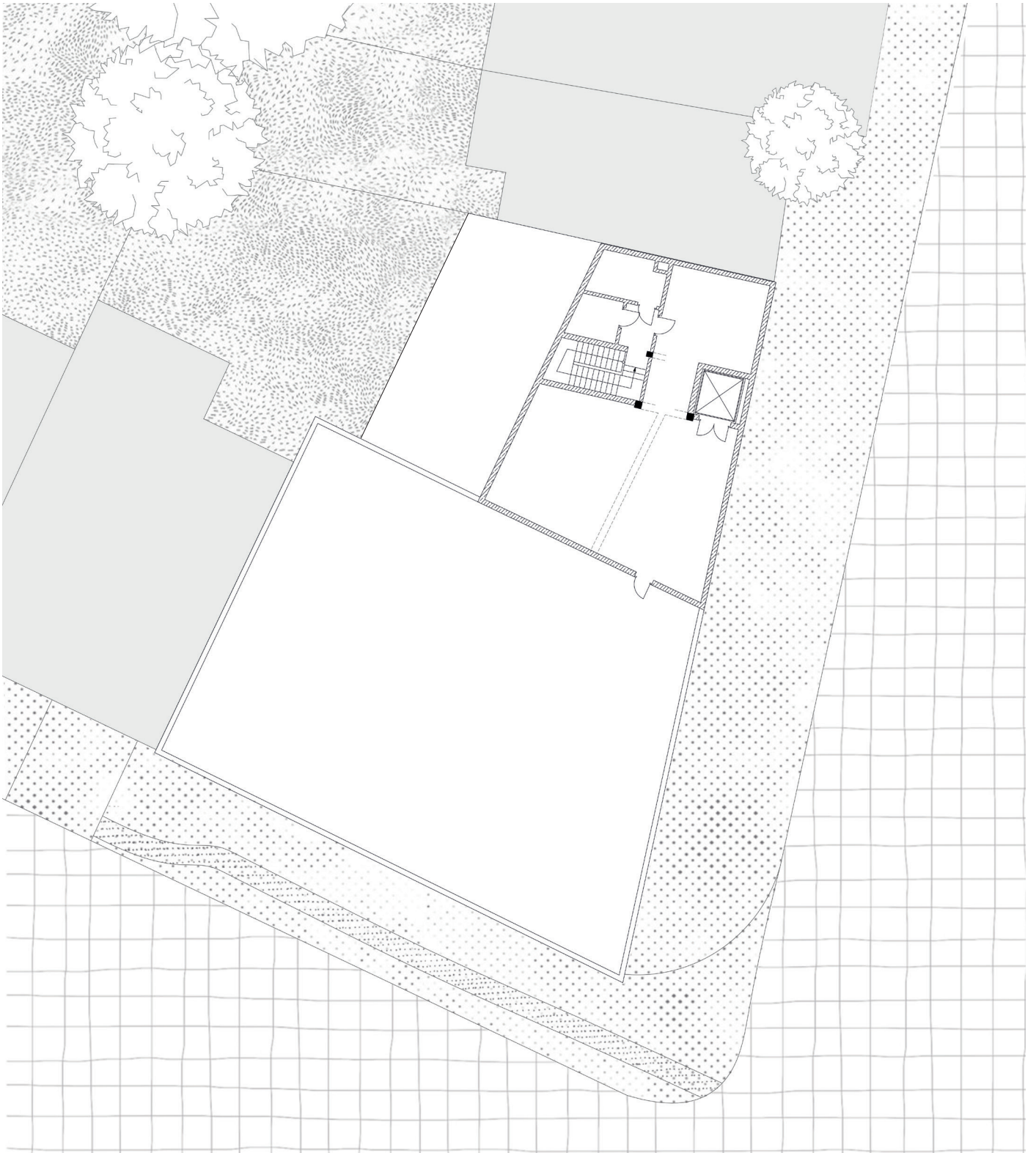


Figure 17: Floorplan 1st Floor. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

HIS- TORY

Beyond its current condition, the project is also highly relevant from a historical perspective. During the final years of the Second World War, a high-rise bunker was constructed on the site now occupied by the supermarket. The bunker was never completed, and today only its foundation remains. While this removes a visible reminder of wartime architecture, the existing foundation provides strong structural conditions for vertical extension (City of Bremen, 1973). Moreover, the significance of the project extends beyond the building itself. Bismarckstraße holds substantial historical and political importance. The nearby AfA housing estate, built as a modern residential settlement for the working class, and demonstrations held on this street as early as May 1st, 1947, underscore its long association with social justice and labor movements (Benjamin Piel, 2018; Linneke, 1931). Stretching approximately 2.2 kilometers, Bismarckstraße has long been considered one of Bremen's key traffic connections and has historically stood for workingclass identity and social equity.

Original use of the building:

In the 1970s, a new commercial building with a self-service store was constructed on the former bunker site. The ground floor accommodated a retail space of approximately 490 square meters, including office and sanitary facilities. The upper floor, accessible via stairwell or elevator, covered only a fraction of the ground-floor area and was used for storage. The remaining upperfloor area was designed as an outdoor parking deck, intended to be accessed by a ramp. Construction of the parking deck, however, was halted shortly after work began due to protests from nearby residents who opposed overlooking the parking area from their apartments. Although the ramp remained until the current owner acquired the property, the roof was never used for parking. When the organic market opened in 2006, the building was renovated, though changes remained minimal due to its continued commercial use. The ramp was removed, and doors, windows, and minor interior layouts were adjusted (Current Owner of the Property, personal communication, January 05, 2026).

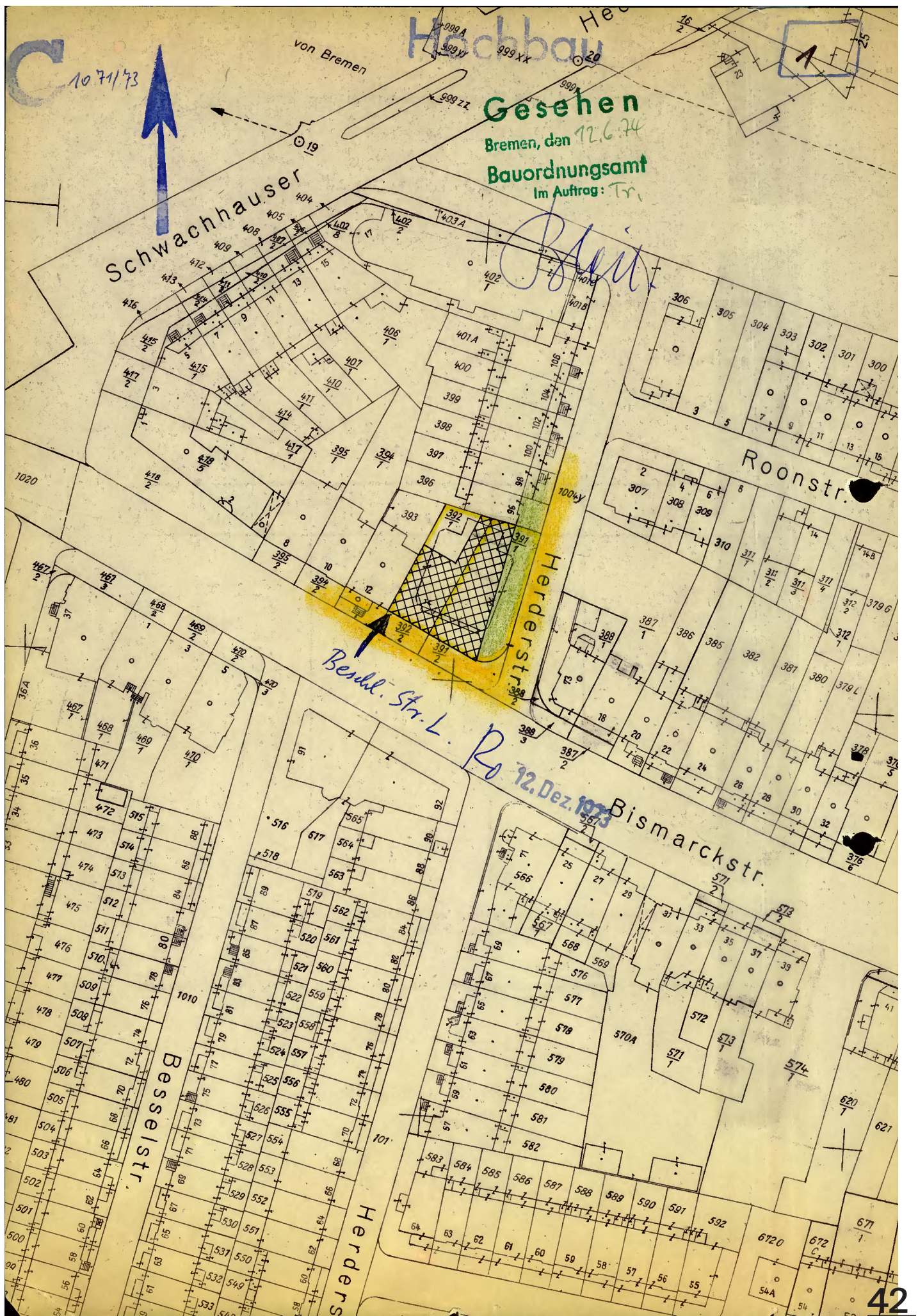


Figure 18: Siteplan. Note. Source: City of Bremen, 1973, used with permission.

SUIT- ABILITY

The building possesses considerable spatial and structural potential. Its clear and simple construction allows for efficient planning, featuring a large hall with a column-grid, which leads to an easily comprehensible load-bearing system, minimizing demolition requirements and creating ideal conditions for flexible floor plan organization. The existing bunker foundation and the roof's original design for a parking deck make vertical extension particularly feasible. Since the existing ceiling is 20 cm reinforced concrete, further supported by a fairly dense grid of columns, it can be assumed that the ceiling was designed and built for the car park deck. Economically, working with the existing structure offers clear advantages. Many materials and structural elements are already in place, reducing costs and allowing components such as the former parking deck and bunker foundation to finally realize their full potential. At the same time, the permanent removal of the building from the speculative real estate market supports long-term housing accessibility and affordability, as discussed in the *Atlas of Commoning* (2018). In this sense, the project embodies many defining characteristics of adaptive reuse.

In conclusion, the property is highly suitable for the proposed project. Its alignment with the history of Bremen and the street itself, as well as the site's legacy as a protective space through the history of having a bunker there, reinforce its social significance. So, this place was always meant to be a safe space for people. The financial advantages of reusing a vacant building, an active and engaged neighborhood, and the favorable structural conditions for vertical extension all contribute to its strong potential. Together, these factors form a solid foundation for the realization of a socially sustainable housing project.

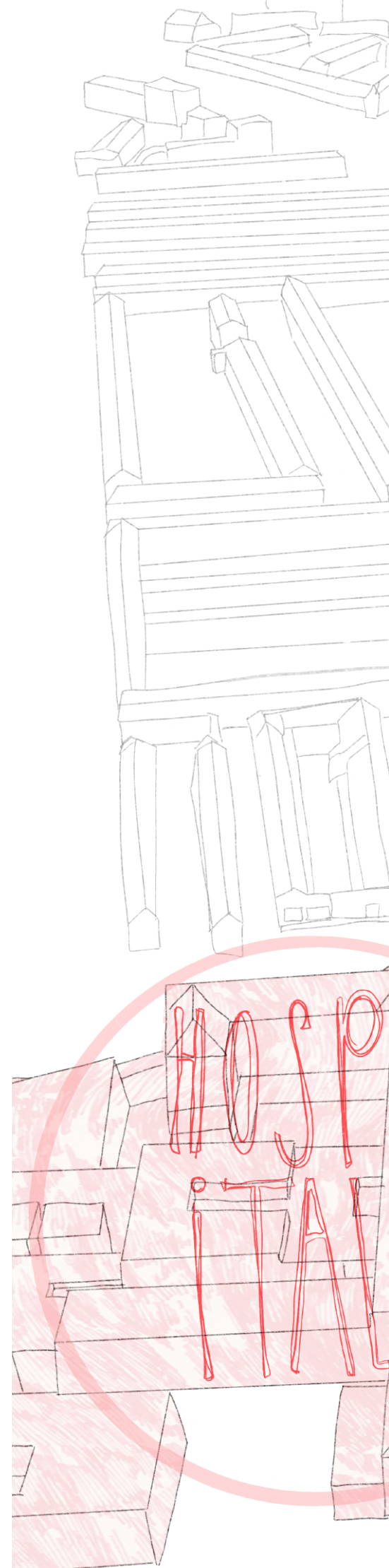
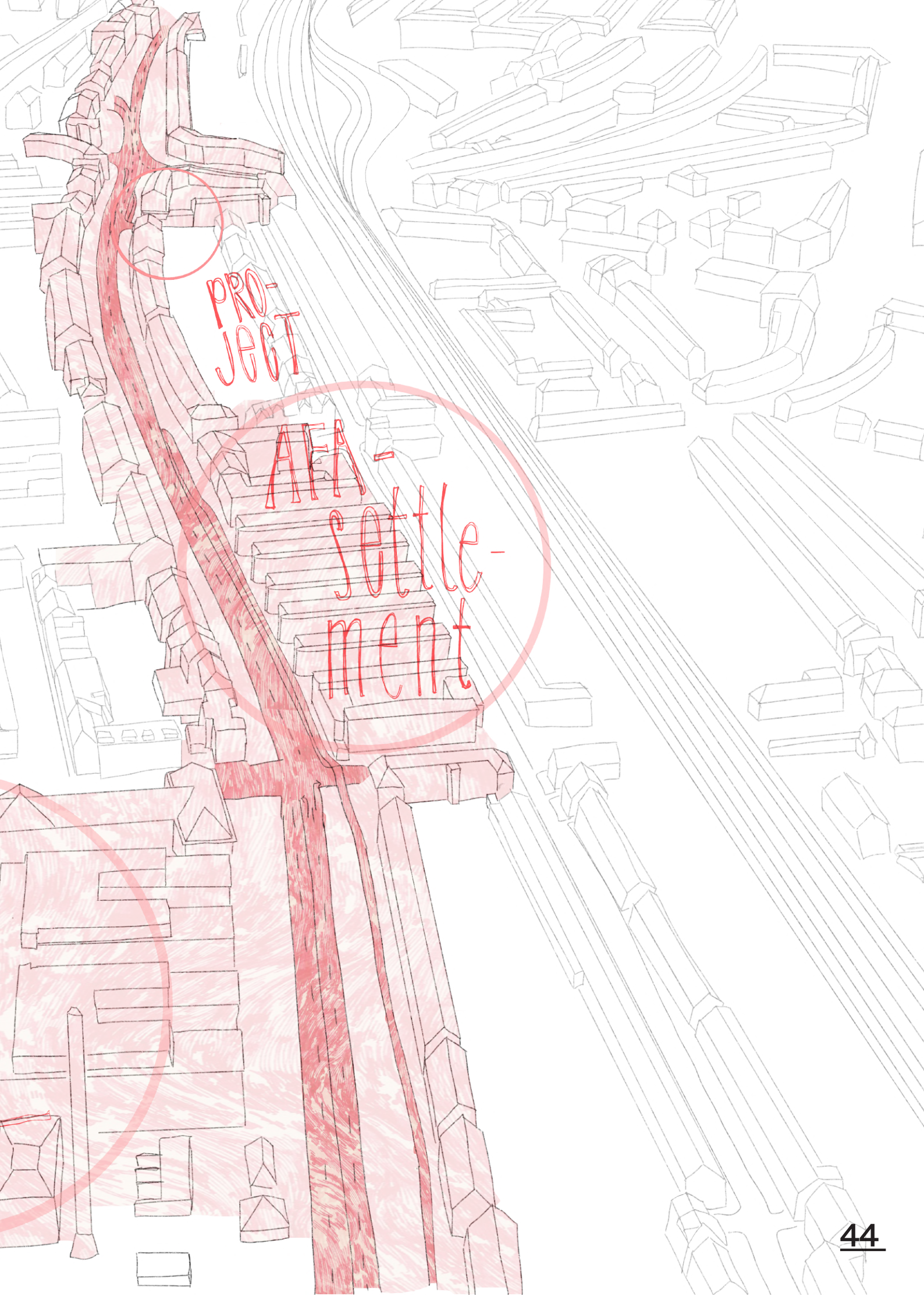


Figure 19: Perspective of Bismarckstraße. Note.
Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



DESIGN

The design comprises a community supermarket on the ground floor, followed by four floors of flats and a rooftop garden. The supermarket is intended to foster a sense of community and create jobs, but should also be seen as a security measure and a means of financing the project. Above this are four floors of flats. Seven flats per floor, 28 flats in total. The flats are connected by an extra room as well as a balcony. Each flat is private and for individual use, but must be able to adapt to different living situations, which is why the flats can be extended using the connecting room. This allows a child to move into the extra room. If there are two children, both extra rooms, to the left and right of the flat, can be used. The only decision to be made is which of the flats can use which extra room. The balcony can always be used and accessed by both apartments. In addition to the flats, each floor has a communal area that extends across the interior of the floor plan. A large communal hall that either adjoins a communal kitchen and serves as a spacious living room, or a children's area that can be used for day care. In addition, each floor has a further separate communal room, which can be used as an office

for the LLC, a youth club, a cinema, an activity room with a climbing wall, or a gym. On the rooftop is a garden with a large greenhouse that can be used for self sufficiency. The outdoor area features raised beds, a wooden terrace and a children's playground, as well as recreational activities such as table tennis. The aim is to create another communal space that takes place outdoors. Thanks to a trellis, which acts as a 2.7-metre-high safety barrier, mothers can let their children play there without worry. The exterior facade is clad in board-and-batten panelling, and the concrete of the original building has been retained. The same applies to as much of the graffiti as possible, which is intended to serve as a reminder of the period when the building stood empty and must be preserved.

DAY-LIGHT STUDIES

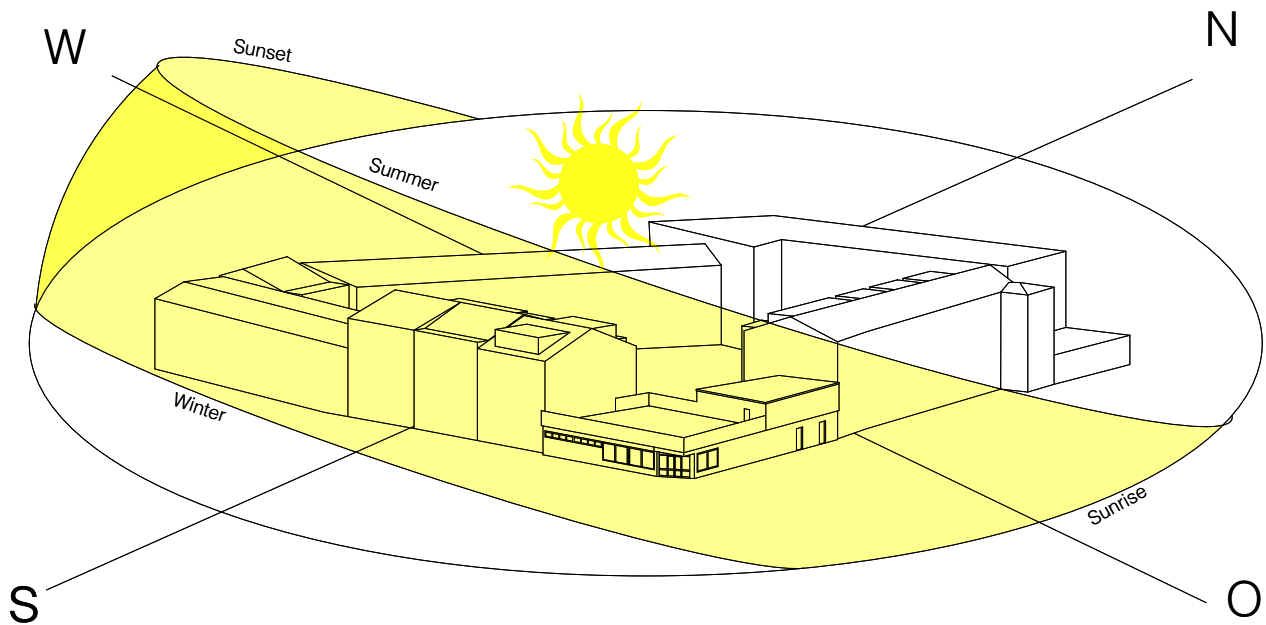
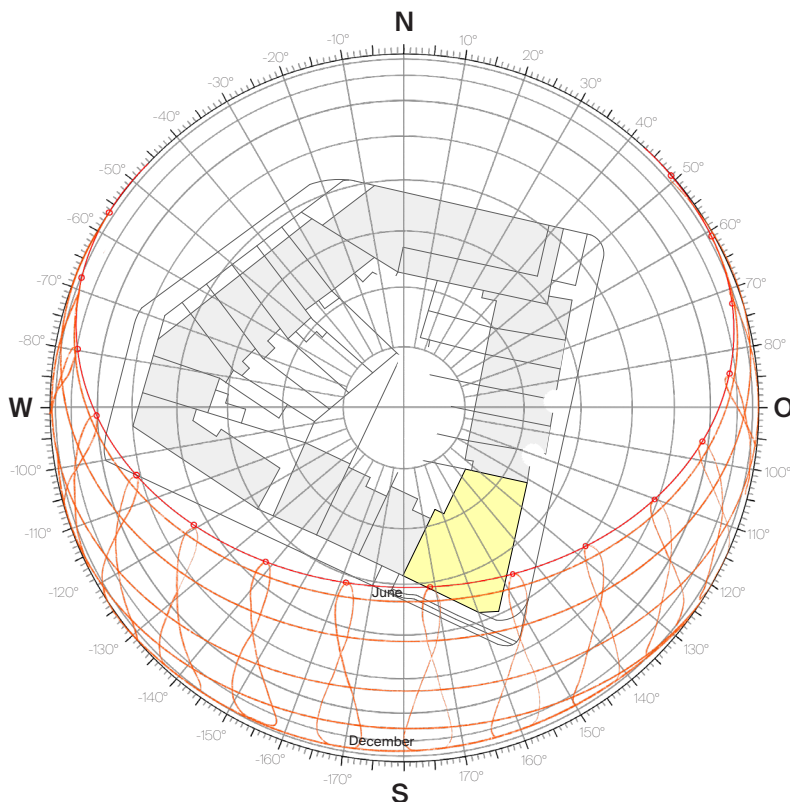


Figure 20: 3D Sunpath Diagram. Note. Source: author's own illustration generated with Andrew Marsh, 2026.



The street facade faces south. The building has a considerable depth and in order to avoid excessively dark interior spaces, the footprint is not fully built out. Instead, a two meter wide strip is left open between the existing building and the neighboring structure along Bismarckstraße. This allows the stairwell to receive natural daylight and creates a narrow open space between the buildings, which is even exposed to sunlight in the evening.

Figure 21: 2D Sunpath Diagram. Note. Source: author's own illustration generated with Andrew Marsh, 2026.

SUPER-MARKET

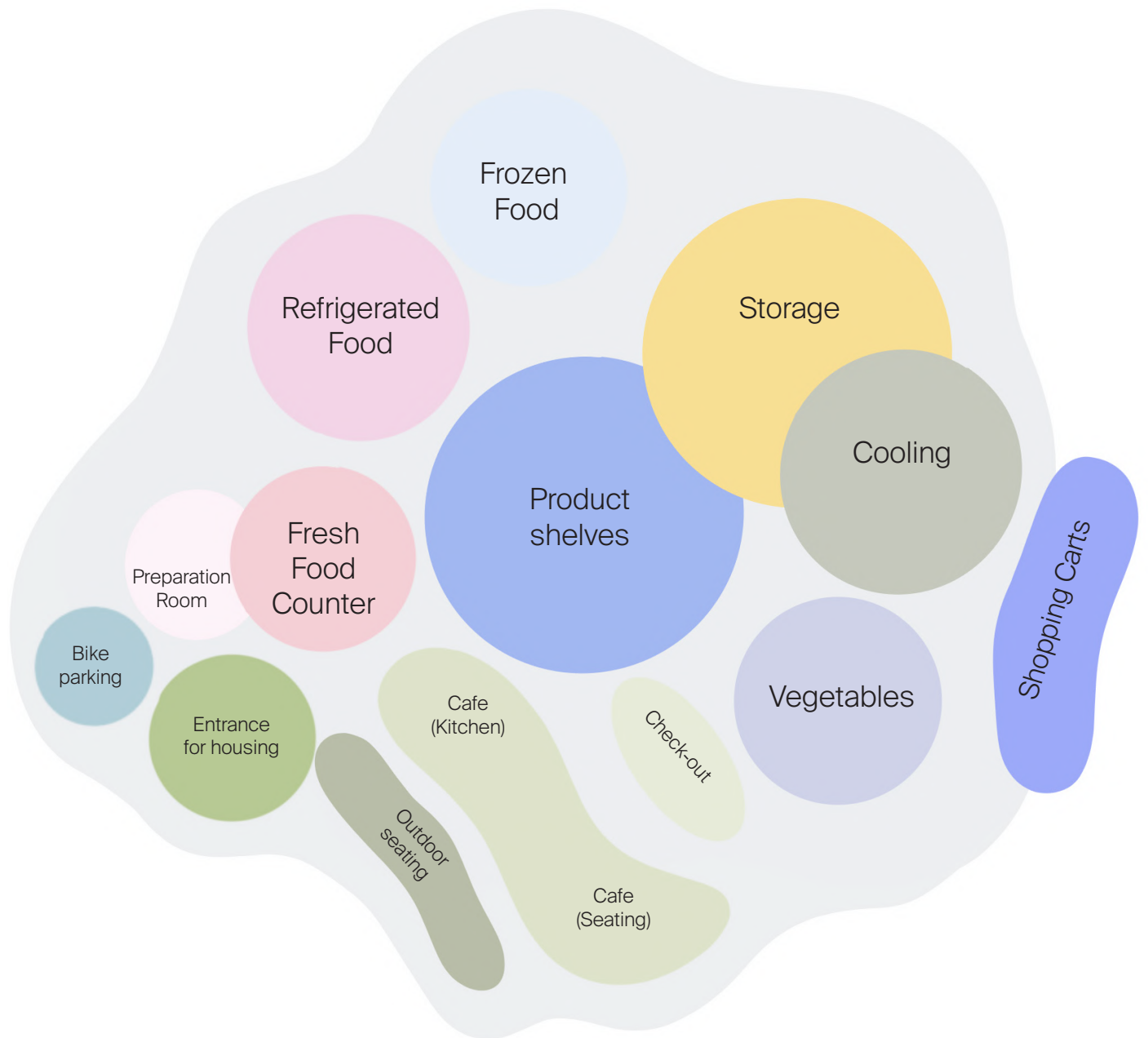


Figure 22: Supermarket's program. Note. Source: author's own illustration, 2026.

HOU- SING

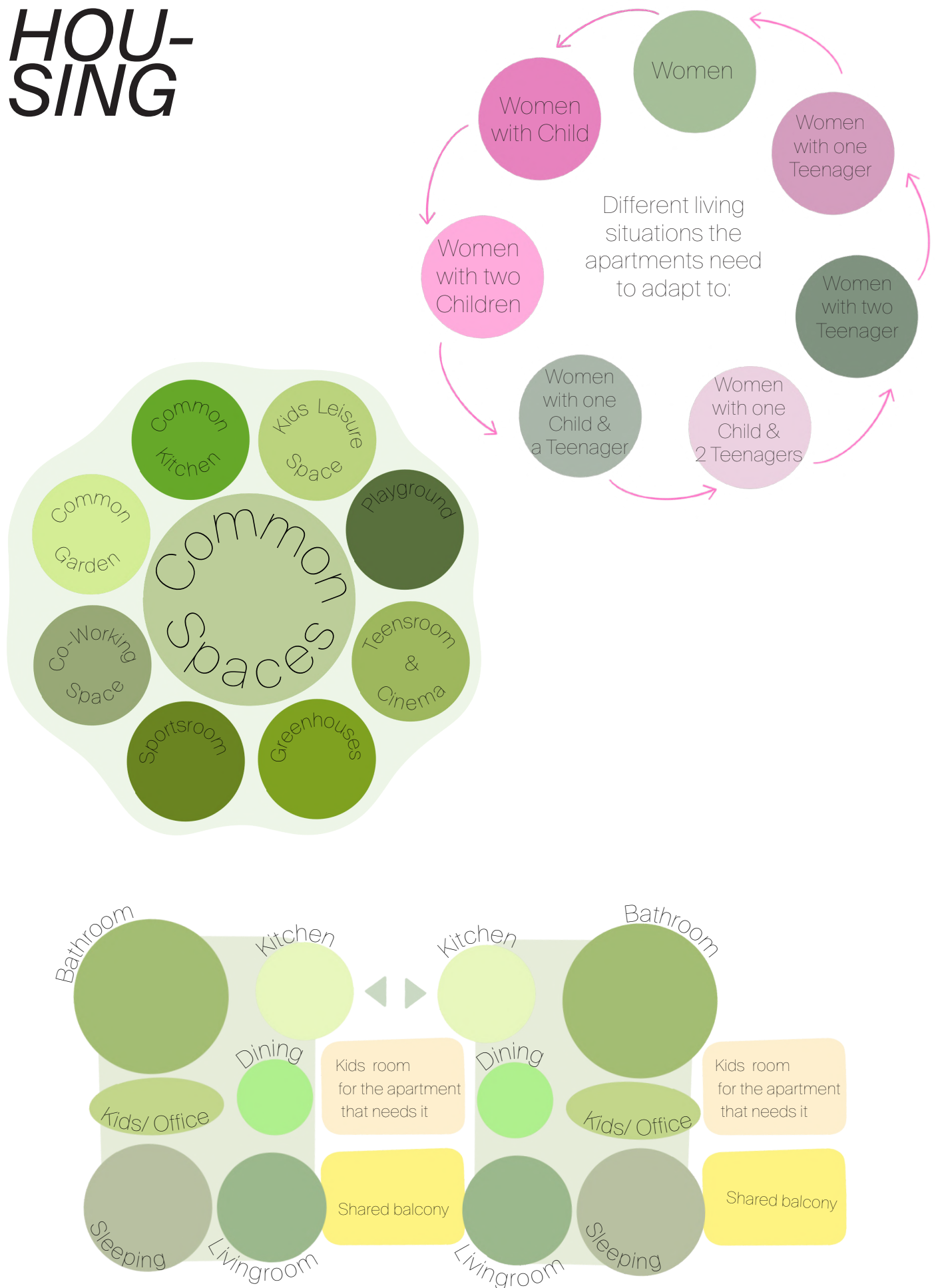


Figure 23: Housing program. Note. Source: author's own illustration, 2026.

SIZES

Supermarket 490 m²

Entrance	20 m ²
Toilets	4 m ²
Total Storage	55 m ²
Refrigerated storage	18 m ²
Fresh Food Counter	5,5 m
Preperation Room	10 m ²
Refrigerated Food	27 m
Frozen Food	14,5 m
Vegetables	Shelf with 2 boards: 11 m
Product Shelves	47m
Check-out Stations	2
Shopping Carts	85-100

Apartments 40 m²

Kitchen	7 m ²
Bathroom	5,7 m ²
Living	14 m ²
Sleeping	10 m ²
Office/ Space for young child	3,5 m ²
Additional kids room	6 m ²
Shared balcony	4,6 m ²

Figure 24: Function Sizes. Note. Source: author's own illustration, 2026.

ADDRESS

The creation of a clear address is a central aspect of architectural design processes and requires careful conceptual consideration. In this project, the question of the degree of public visibility of this address also arises. Among other things, the decision concerns the visibility of names on doorbells, the recognisability of the building as a residential project and the visual permeability of the entrance area.

This design deliberately opts for an open and identifiable address. The decisive factor here is the long-term nature of the residential project. It is not short-term or temporary accommodation, but permanently designed flats that are intended to offer women a stable home. Accordingly, the

building is designed as a place of everyday living, a place where mail is received, friends and family come to visit, and a sense of belonging can develop.

The architectural design therefore aims to avoid anonymity and invisibility and instead enable community and identification. At the same time, it must be taken into account that security issues are of particular im-

portance in this project. However, these are not primarily addressed through spatial isolation, but through structural and technical measures, such as secure glass or suitable access systems.

Against this background, an address that is visible from the street is created so that the building appears as an inviting and clearly identifiable place of residence.



Figure 25: Illustration of the entrance. Note. Source: author's own illustration, 2026.

DESIGN STRATEGIES



A sense of a safe home

It is important that the planned project has a residential feel. Green spaces that can be used by the community are important, but privacy is just as important. Private flats where people feel safe. The entrance to one's own flat should convey the feeling of a private home. Security can be provided, for example, by a security door and a peephole



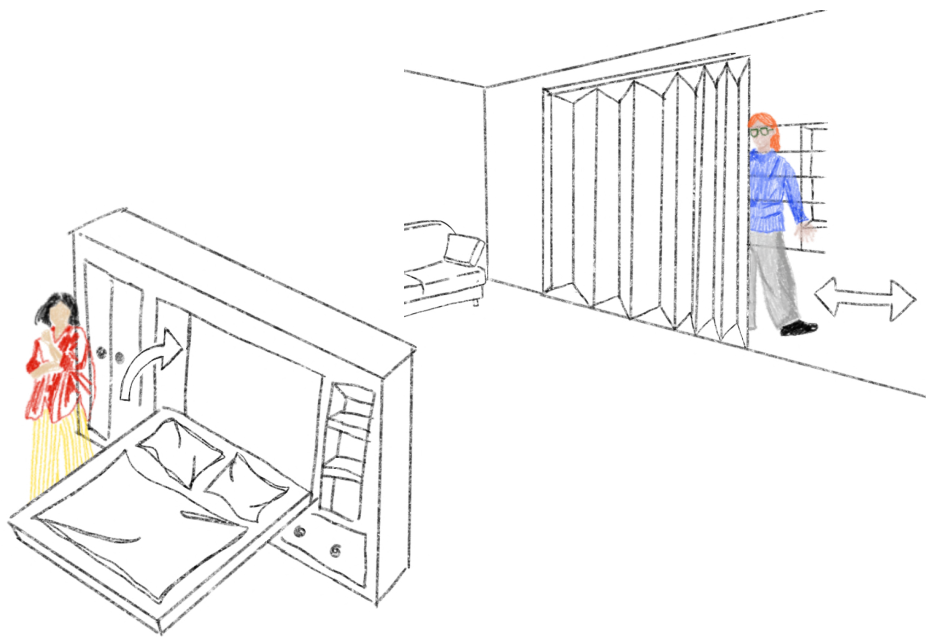
No Apartments on the Groundfloor

To prevent people, particularly men, from knocking on windows or peering inside, no flats are planned for the ground floor. That is why, in this project in particular, a supermarket is situated on the ground floor



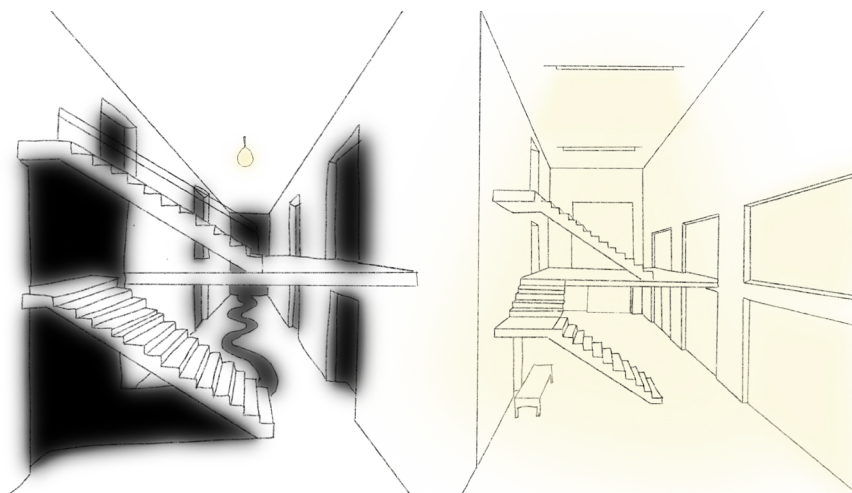
Strategic lighting for indoor and outdoor use

Dark areas should be minimised to deter crime and enhance a sense of security. For the interior lighting in communal areas and corridors, dimmable, permanently installed ceiling lights are recommended, as well as motion sensors for corridors and outdoor areas.



Smart and adaptive room solutions

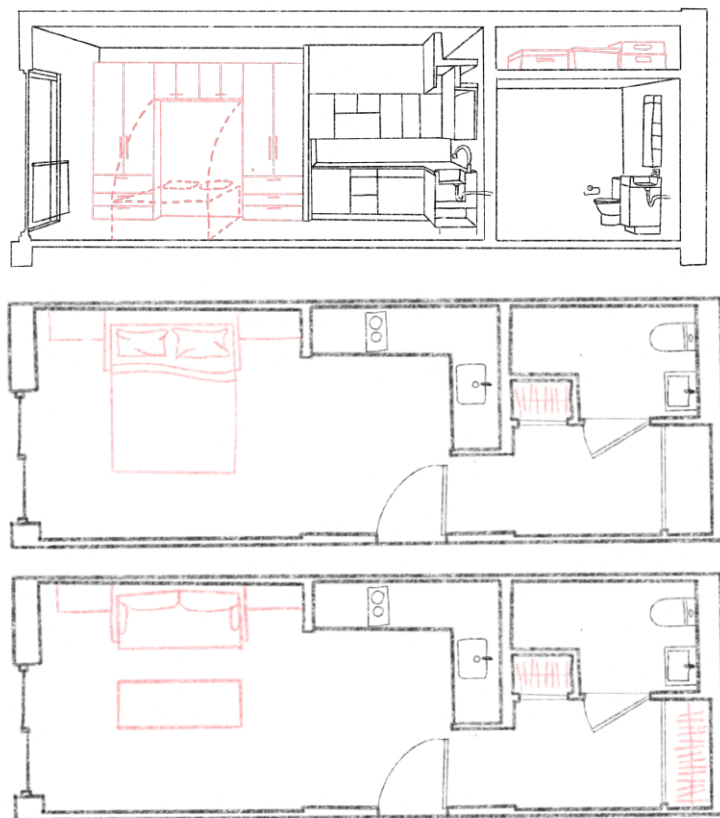
The aim here is to design small flats that still offer the highest possible quality, so that as many flats as possible can be accommodated. Furthermore, the rooms must be able to adapt to different living situations, which is why a flexible floor plan is advantageous.



Avoiding blind spots and dark corners

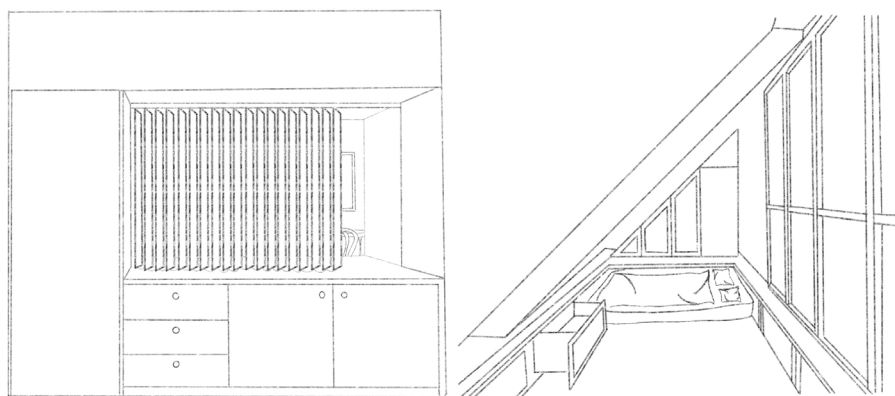
For example, blind spots can quickly form under staircases, which can lead to the creation of spaces that instil fear. Wide corridors and stairwells with good visibility should be planned.

CASE STUDIES



Built-in furniture is an interesting option. It could free up more space in the living area, especially if you have children. Rooms can thus serve multiple purposes. They can be used as bedrooms on a permanent basis, but also as a guest room or simply to reconfigure the space in the evenings.

Figure 27: Illustration for Case Study Carmel Place, New York. Note. Source: author's own illustration based on nARCHITECTS



Two ways to make the most of your space. The partition creates separate areas whilst maintaining an open-plan layout, allowing you to maintain visual connections throughout the home. For example, if you live with children.

Figure 28: Illustration Case Study for smart room solutions. Note. Source: author's own illustration parts are based on Architecture studio Azab, Bilbao

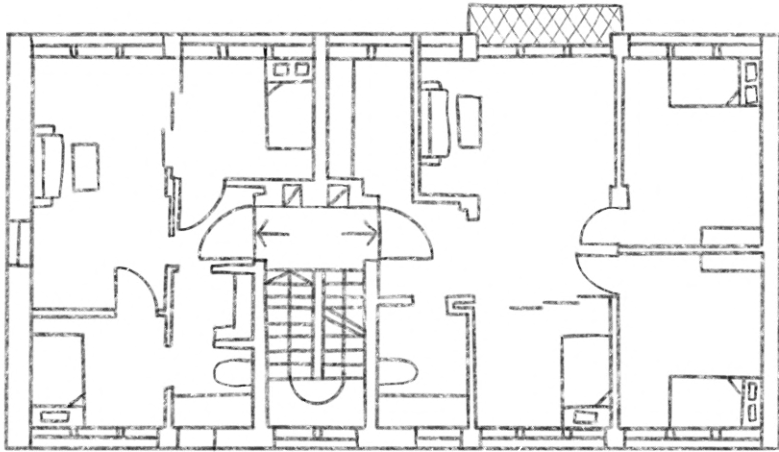
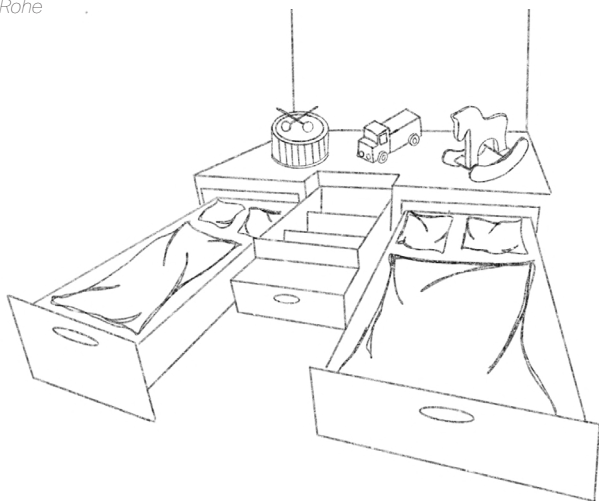


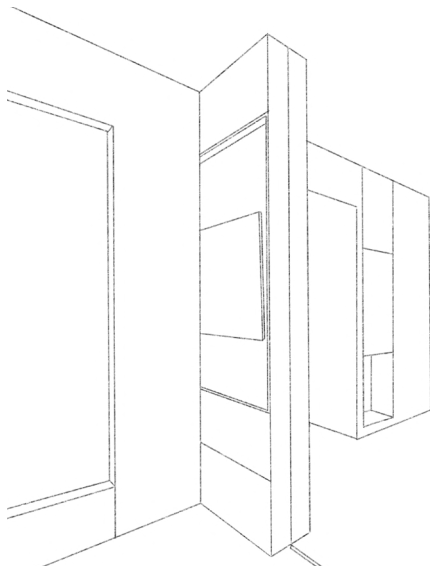
Figure 29: Illustration for Case Study Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart. Note. Source: author's own illustration based on Mies van der Rohe

Mies van der Rohe's floor plan works well and has a very open layout. In the context of this project, this means that visual contact between mother and child can be maintained more easily. They can be in different rooms and still be aware of each other's presence



A great way to ensure there's enough space in the children's bedroom for them to play during the day and sleep at night.

Figure 30: Illustration of smart furniture concept. Note. Author's own illustration inspired by various online references.



Wide sliding walls work well for connecting flats, thereby creating a kind of modular layout. Flats can be joined together or separated as required. This means you can have two small living rooms or one large one. This sliding feature makes that perfectly possible.

Figure 31: Illustration of smart furniture concept. Note. Author's own illustration inspired by various online references.

FLOOR-PLANS



Figure 32: Floorplan Groundfloor, Supermarket. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



Figure 33: 1st floor, Living. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



Figure 34: 2nd floor, Living. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



Figure 35: 3rd floor, Living. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



Figure 36: 4th floor, Living. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

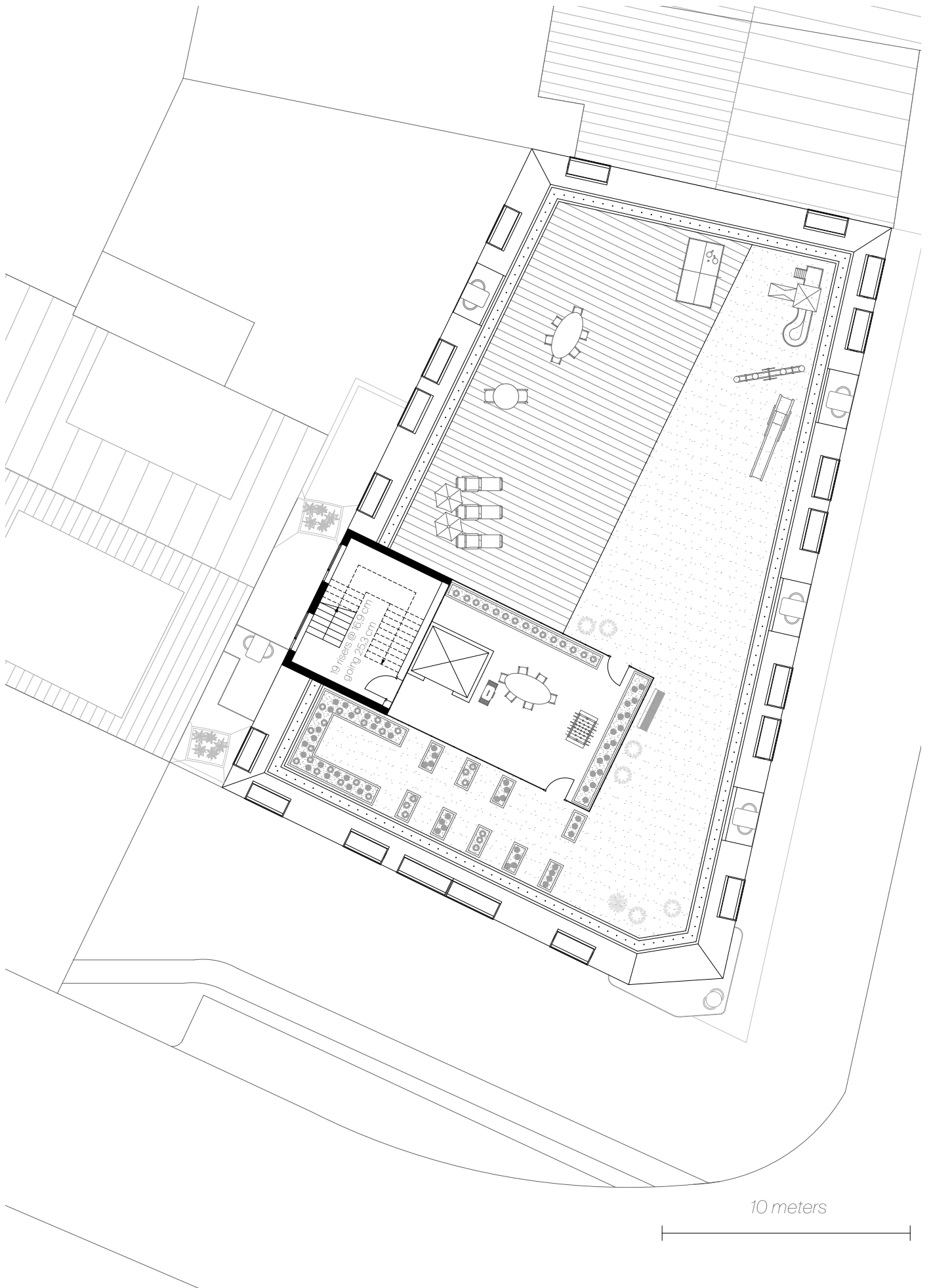


Figure 37: Rooftop garden floorplan. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

SEC- TIONS



10 meters

Figure 38: Section AA. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



Figure 39: Section BB. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

ELEVA- TIONS



10 meters

Figure 40: South Elevation. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



10 meters

Figure 41: West Elevation. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



Figure 42: East Elevation. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

ZOOM IN

Scale: 1:50

The floor plan shows how the flat is laid out when only the main apartment is used without any need for the extra rooms. To explain this using the diagram from the sociocracy model as an example (Figure 7), this would be a flat in which, for example, Zita would live alone.

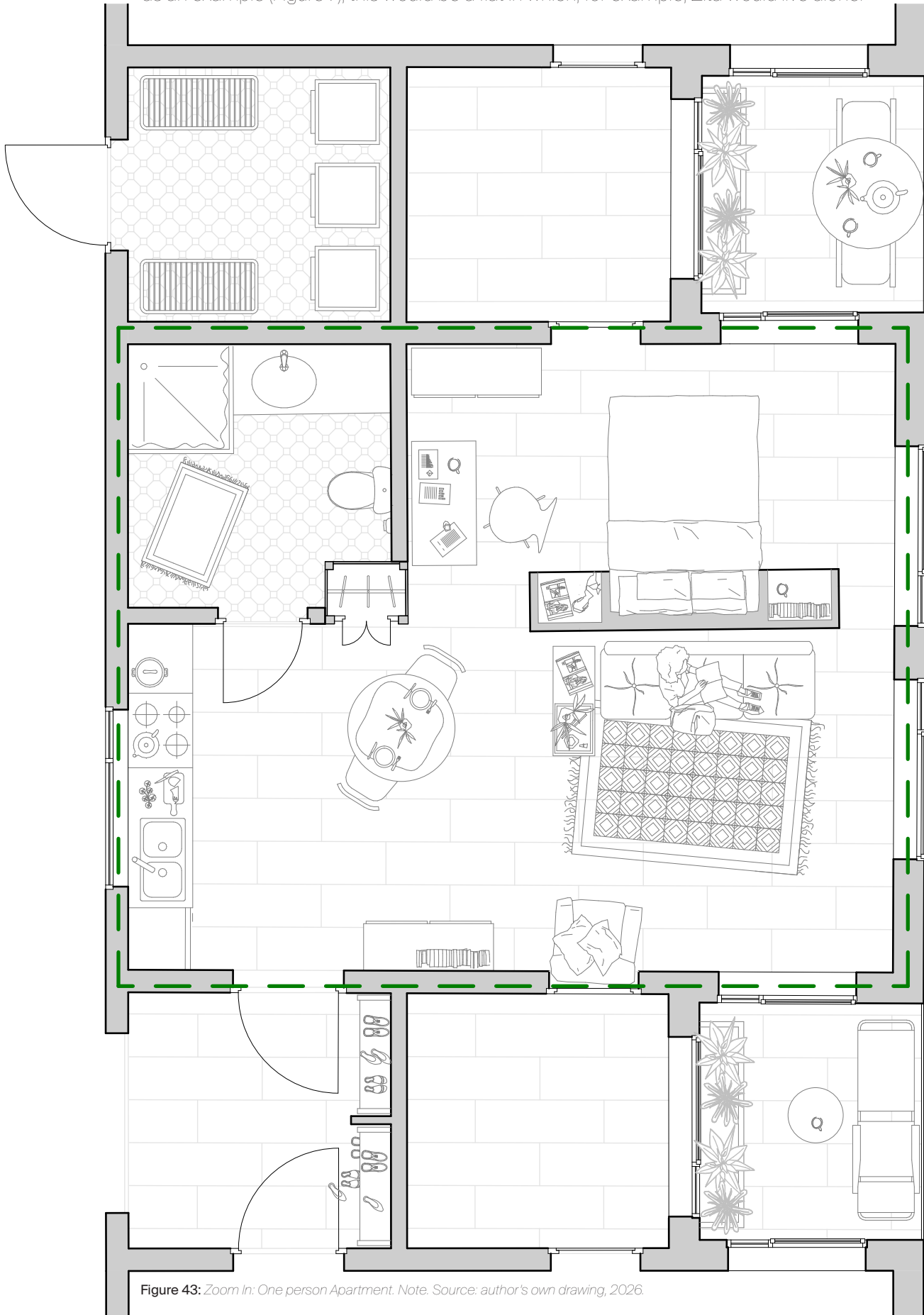


Figure 43: Zoom In: One person Apartment. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

Scale: 1:50

The floor plan shows how the flat is laid out when one extra room is added. A mother living there with an older child who needs their own room and a baby. To explain this using the diagram from the sociocracy model as an example (Figure 7), this would be a flat in which, for example, Esi, her baby Stella and her teenage child Kia live in.

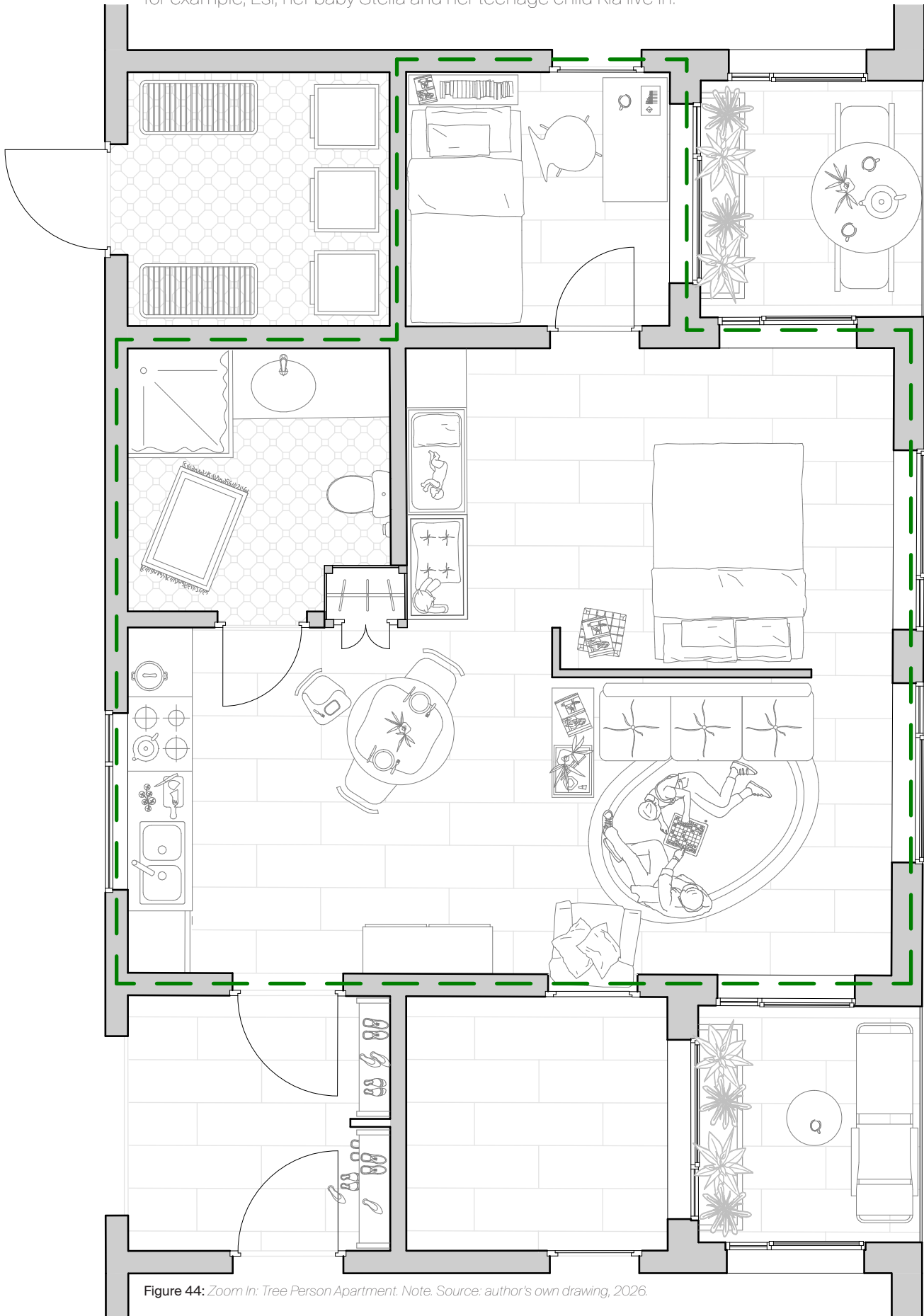


Figure 44: Zoom In: Tree Person Apartment. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

Scale: 1:50

The floor plan shows how the flat is laid out when two extra rooms are added. A mother living there with two older children who need their own rooms and the baby sleeps near its mother, in the living area. To explain this using the diagram from the sociocracy model (Figure 7), this would be a flat in which, for example, Isabella, her baby Mia and her two teenage children Timmy and Nihat live in.

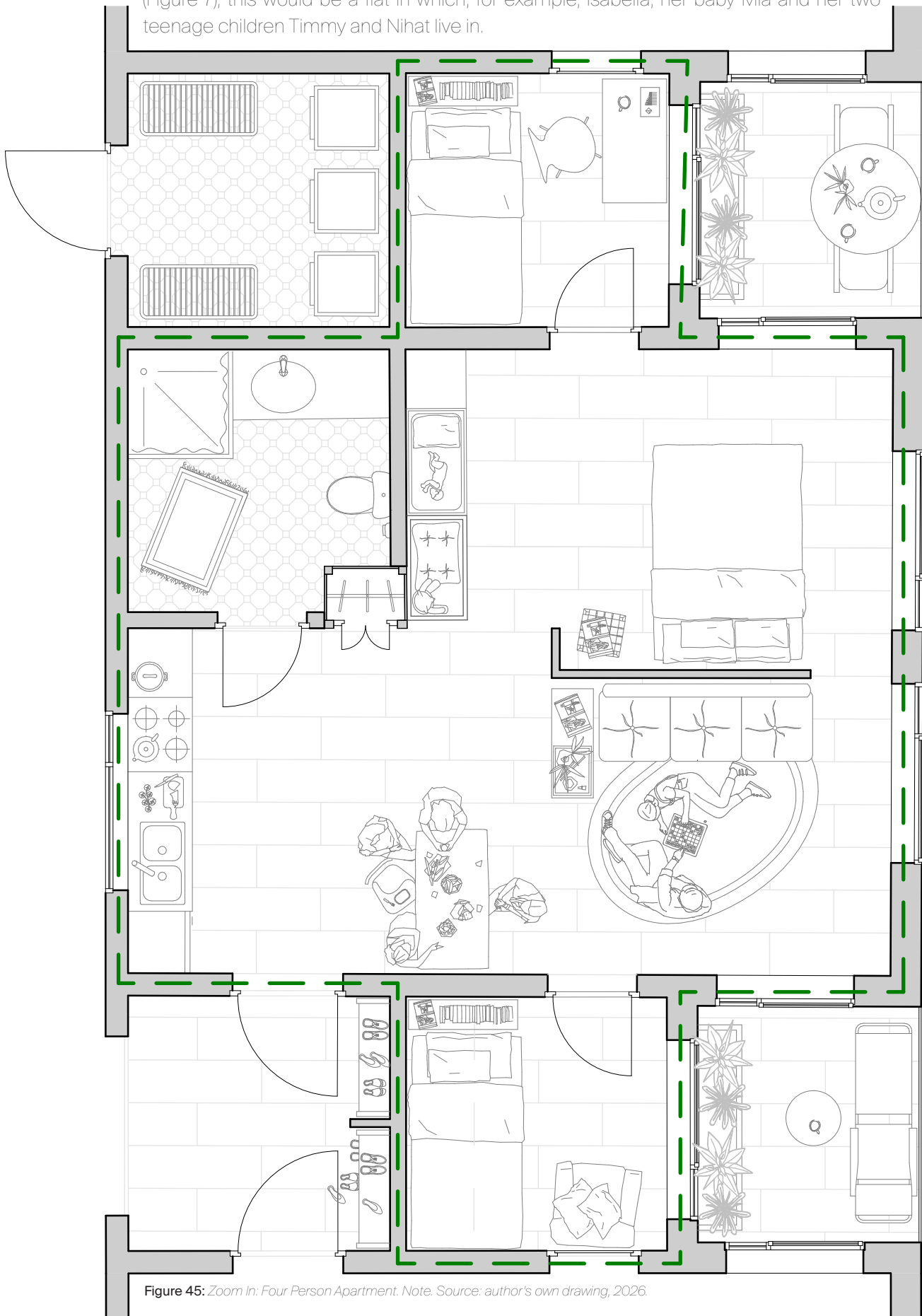


Figure 45: Zoom In: Four Person Apartment. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.

PER- SPECTIVE



Figure 46: Perspective of the living area. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



PER- SPECTIVE



Figure 47: Perspective of the entrance and kitchen. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



PER- SPECTIVE



Figure 48: Perspective of the common area. Note: Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



PER- SPECTIVE



Figure 49: Perspective of the building. Note. Source: author's own drawing, 2026.



DISKUS- SION

Striking a balance between adaptive reuse, the design task of creating safe living spaces, and the theoretical framework is a central challenge of this thesis, which seeks to answer the question of whether affordable, self-organized housing, developed as a cooperative building group with the support of the Mietshäuser Syndikat, can provide a sustainable and accessible solution for women without initial capital seeking safe, permanent housing.

It was particularly during the theoretical research that several issues became apparent, specifically relating to adaptations of the sociocracy model and the complexity of the planning processes. Discussions with realised projects by the Mietschäuser Syndikat revealed that such construction processes can take many years and, particularly in the specific case of this thesis, are dependent on external support. Due to the methodology employed in this study, which included interviews, site visits, literature reviews and research, it was possible to investigate and analyse the precise sequences. The Relationscape was indispensable for understanding the process and is directly linked to Elinor Ostrom's Commons Theory. Her design prin-

ciples complement the sociocracy model by examining communal use, concrete rules were developed that can be applied to real housing projects in the form of house rules. The sociocracy model supports this by creating clear structures within the group and enabling an even distribution of responsibility. Overall, the eight design principles prove to be readily transferable, although their application must be adapted to the specific project, as one of the principles itself highlights. Particularly relevant in this context is Principle 7, which emphasises the recognition of self-governance by external actors. In this project, this can be applied to the role of the women's shelter organisation, which initiates the process but must respect the community's autonomy. Another Theory, Karl Marx's writings, were the driving force behind engaging with this project in the first place and laid the foundation for addressing the issues of our profit-driven housing market. At the same time, the design made it clear that certain design decisions are crucial to whether the project can work for the target group. Of particular relevance here is the commercial use of the ground floor. This serves not only as a security strategy, by avoiding ground-

floor flats, but also plays a key role in financing the project. The community based structure designed to foster communal living also lay the foundation for the project's success, just as the adaptable floor plans cater to different lifestyles. This means that the apartment does not only suit a woman living alone, but also with a toddler or up to two older children, who can be accommodated in the additional rooms between the flats. This ensures everyone has their own private space, and moving out is not necessarily required if space in the main flat becomes too tight. These were key insights for making long-term living in this building a reality.

It has become clear through the development of the project that the organisational models, housing rules and design strategies are not only used to ensure that the project functions and can be built cost-effectively, but also that it is important to develop such housing projects in order to create support systems that are of great importance in enabling a transition to an independently organised life following experiences of violence. The work on this project demonstrates that such a housing project is both sensible and realistic.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The reason I chose this topic is, I suppose, largely down to my frustration with urban development that is, quite simply, predominantly male-oriented. Many aspects of the built environment, from flat layouts and staircase dimensions to kitchen fittings, operating and reaching heights, sanitary planning and transport infrastructure, are based on standardised average values that have historically been shaped by male norms. These structures are by no means a thing of the past. Rather, they continue to shape everyday life to this day.

Even from my perspective as a young woman who is likely very privileged and grew up in a protected family home feel the impact of this every day. This leads me to believe that our built environment needs to be fundamentally transformed, and as an architect, I feel a sense of responsibility in this regard. With this work, I wish to draw attention to this and propose a design concept for what a space might look like that, for once, has been planned exclusively for women and their needs.

Furthermore, the choice of location for the project stems from my connection to Bremen, which I would describe as the place that feels

most like home. Bismarckstraße, in particular, has always been a hub for me. My friends, my family and my friends' families all live mainly in this part of the city and have ensured that this neighbourhood feels like growing up in a village, even though it's in a big city. That's why I can say from personal experience that this district stands for solidarity and a sense of community.

In my personal reflection, I would also like to clarify once again that the term 'women' is used in this work as a political term, but encompasses all people who are oppressed by patriarchy. This project is dedicated to all women, all trans people, all intersex and non-binary people, as well as agender people. This project is intended to exclude men, just as we are excluded by them in urban spaces on a daily basis.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover:

Illustration of my title for affordable housing.

Illustration created by Solveig-Veronika Schönweitz, 2023. Reproduced with permission.

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Archive Plans:

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AI APPENDIX

In this thesis, artificial Intelligence was used for the following purposes:

- It was used assisting in the translation and clarification of complex theoretical texts.
- It was used to find relevant references.
- It was used to review written paragraphs for grammatical correctness and linguistic clarity.
- It was used to provide concise factual information on design- and space related questions.

These prompts were used:

"Check the grammar."

"Find reference projects for smart room solutions."

"Find reference projects for women-only housing projects."

"Find reference projects of realised housing projects within the Mietshäuser Syndikat."

"Can you simplify the following paragraph (of a theoretical text)?"

"How wide is a standard front door in Germany?" (example)

The primary tool was Open AI and for summarizing difficult texts, notebook lm was used. AI tools were not used to generate texts in this thesis and all outputs were critically reviewed. The responsibility for the final content lies with the author.

How I used Visoid for the perspective:

The following prompt was used:

ARCHIVE DRAWINGS

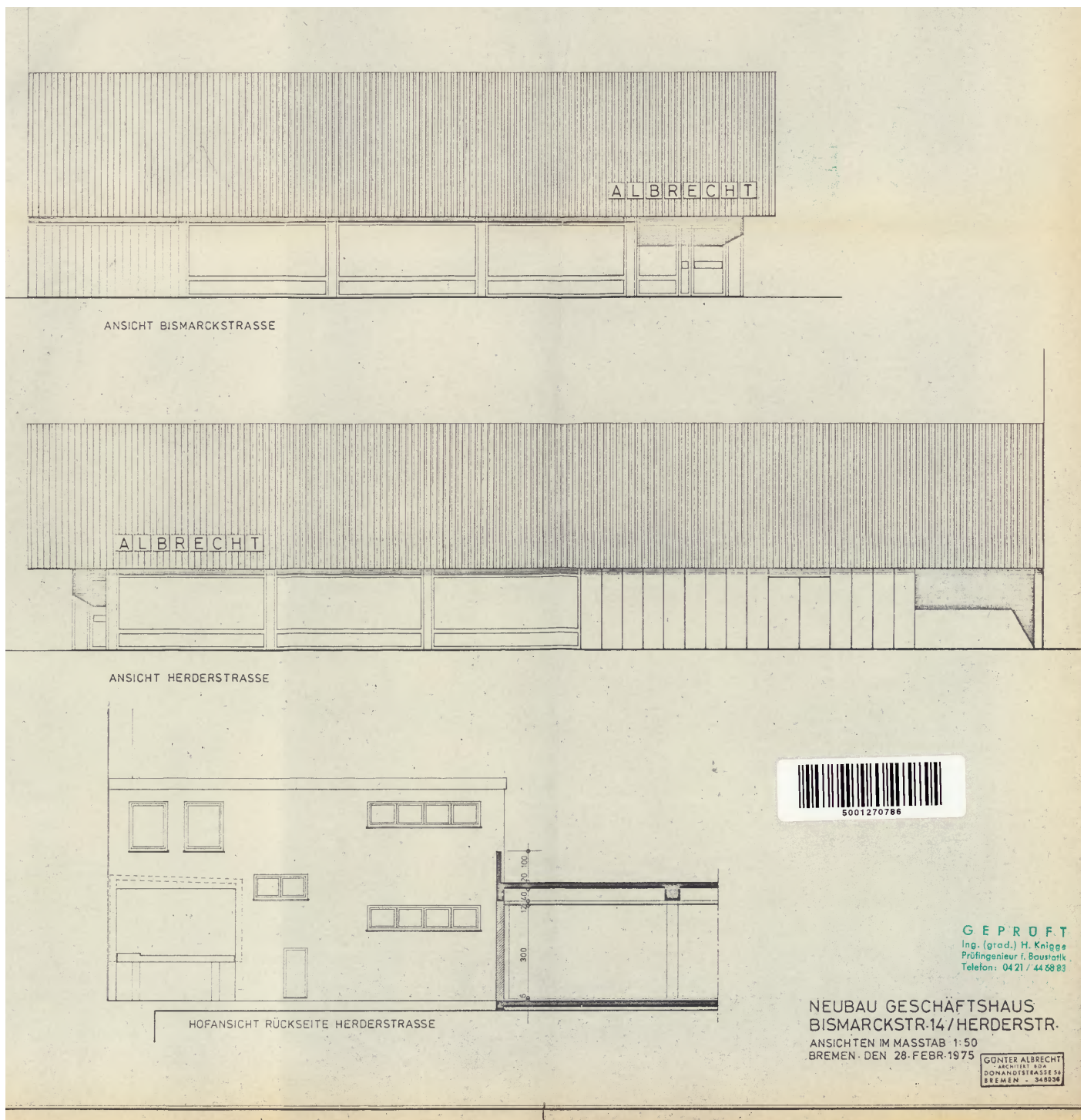


Figure 50: Elevations. Note. Source: City of Bremen, 1973, used with permission.

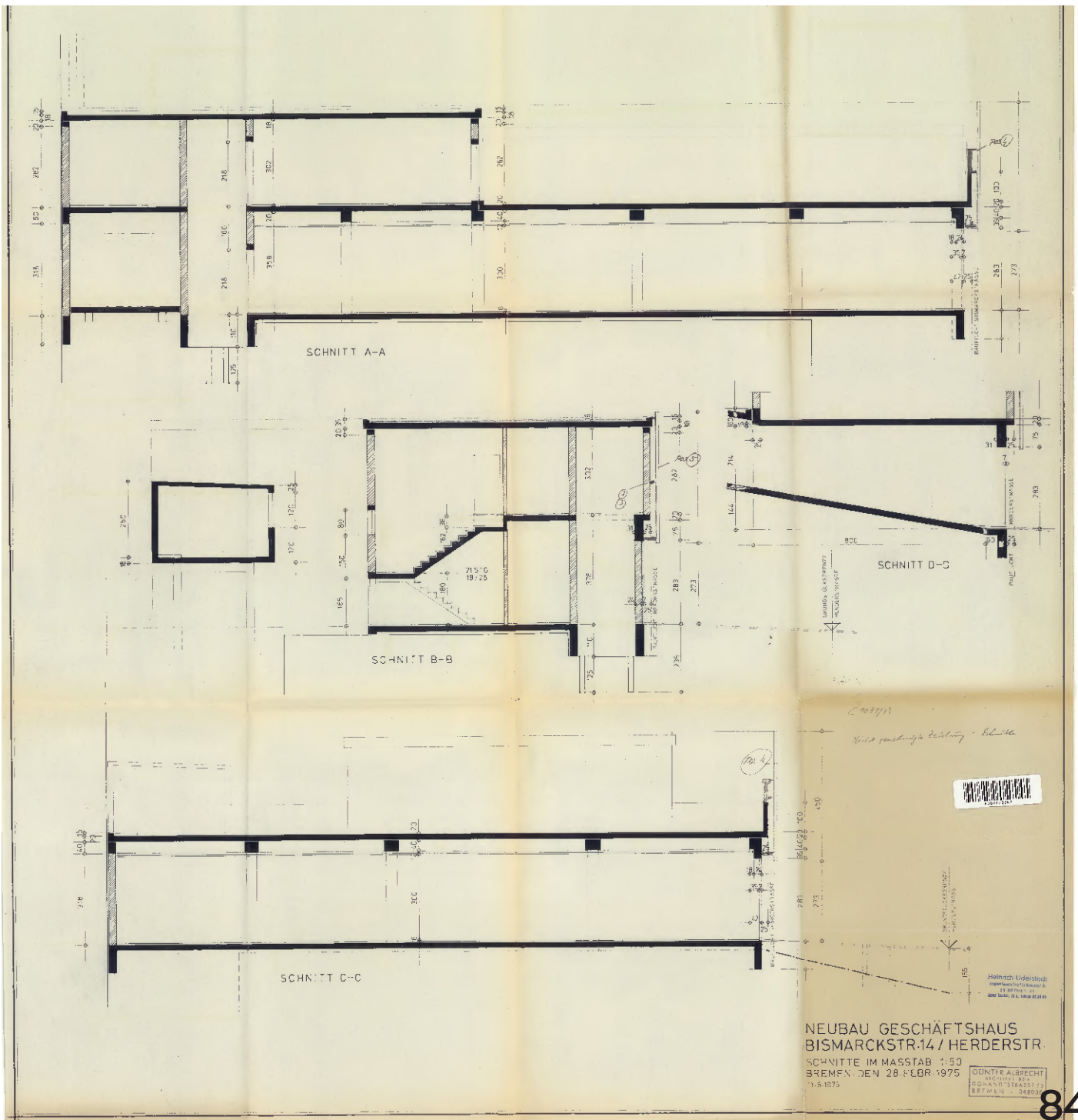


Figure 51: Sections. Note. Source: City of Bremen, 1973, used with permission.

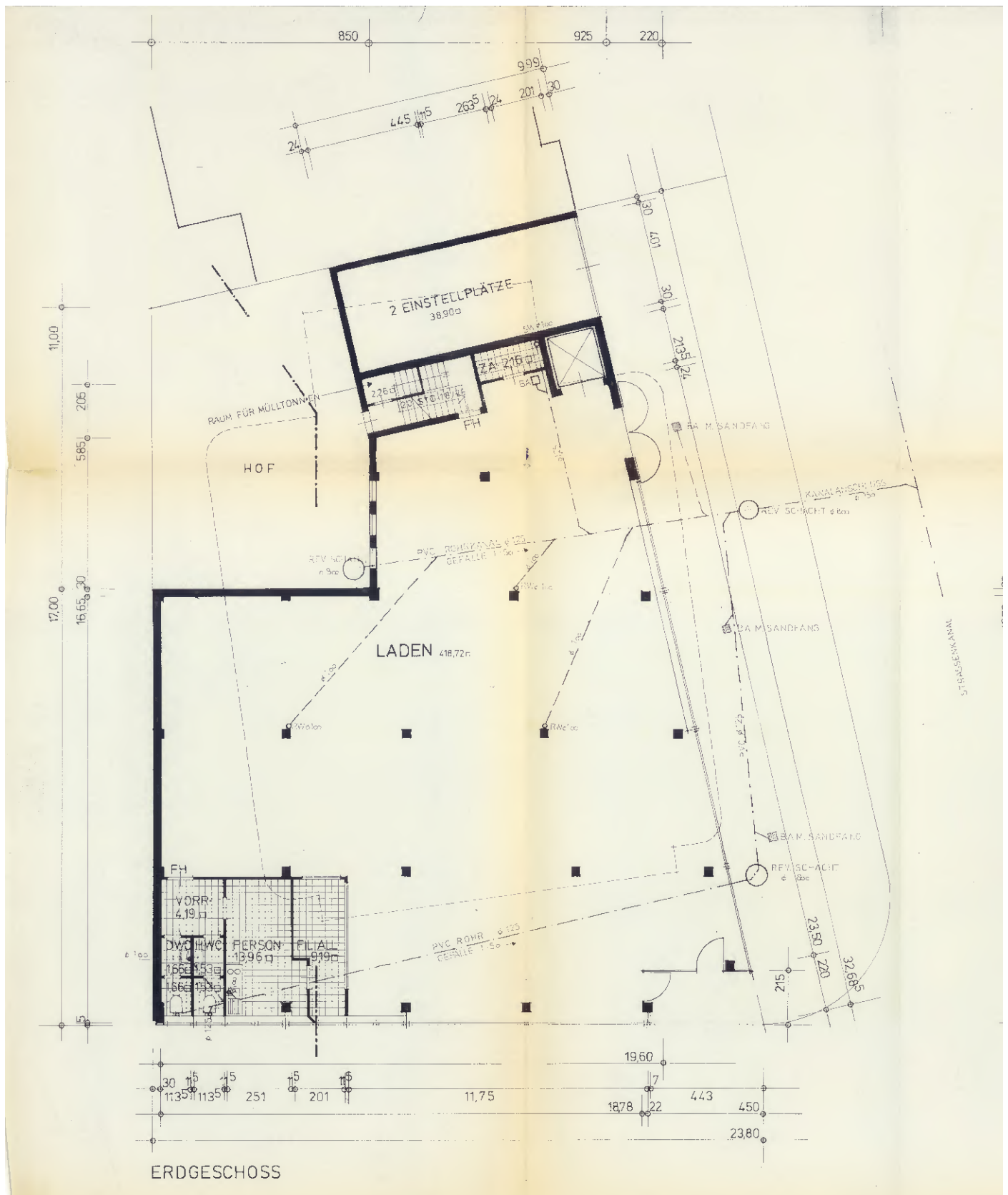


Figure 52: Floorplan Groundfloor. Note. Source: City of Bremen, 1973, used with permission.

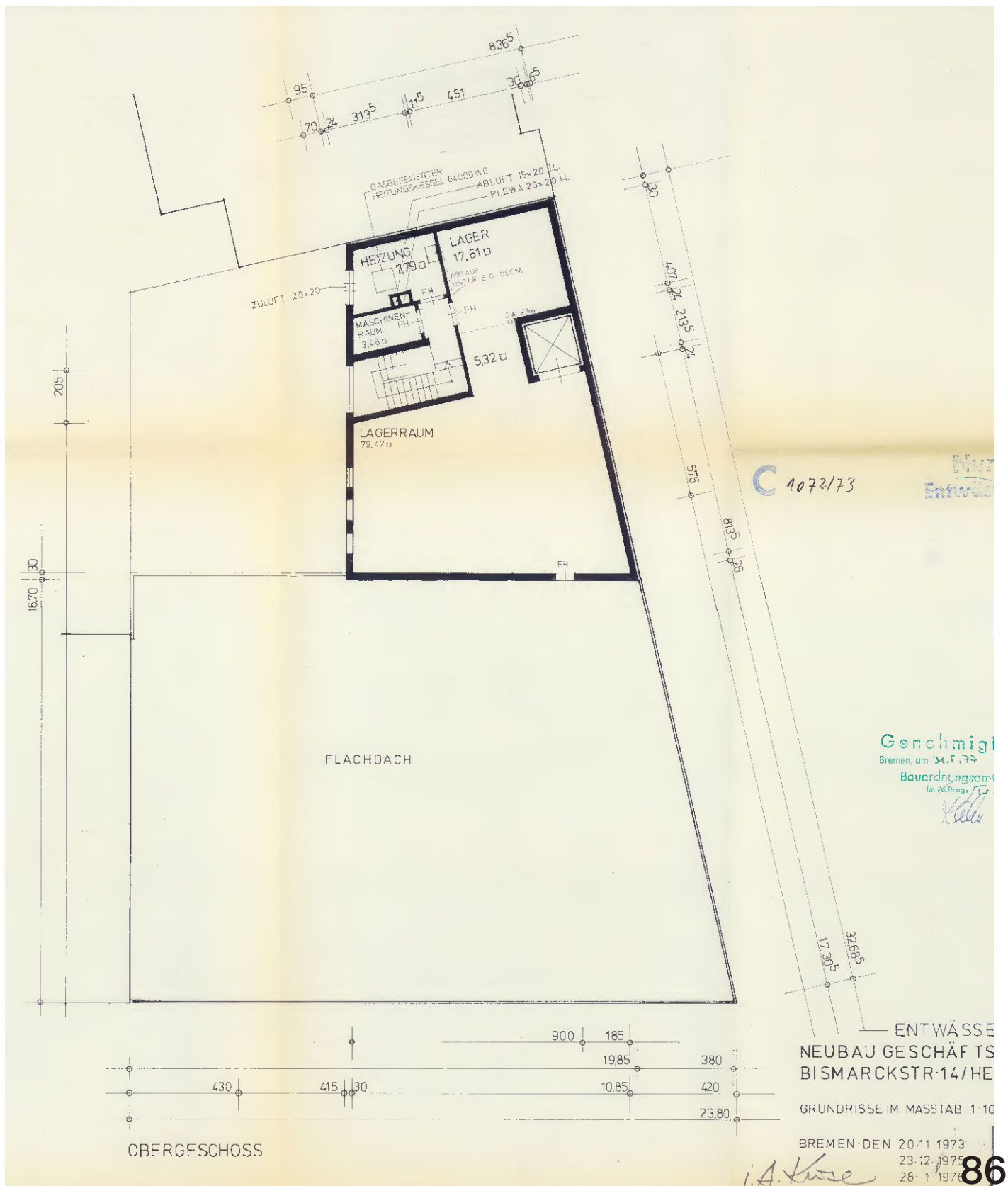


Figure 53: Floorplan 1st Floor. Note. Source: City of Bremen, 1973, used with permission.

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Hochbau

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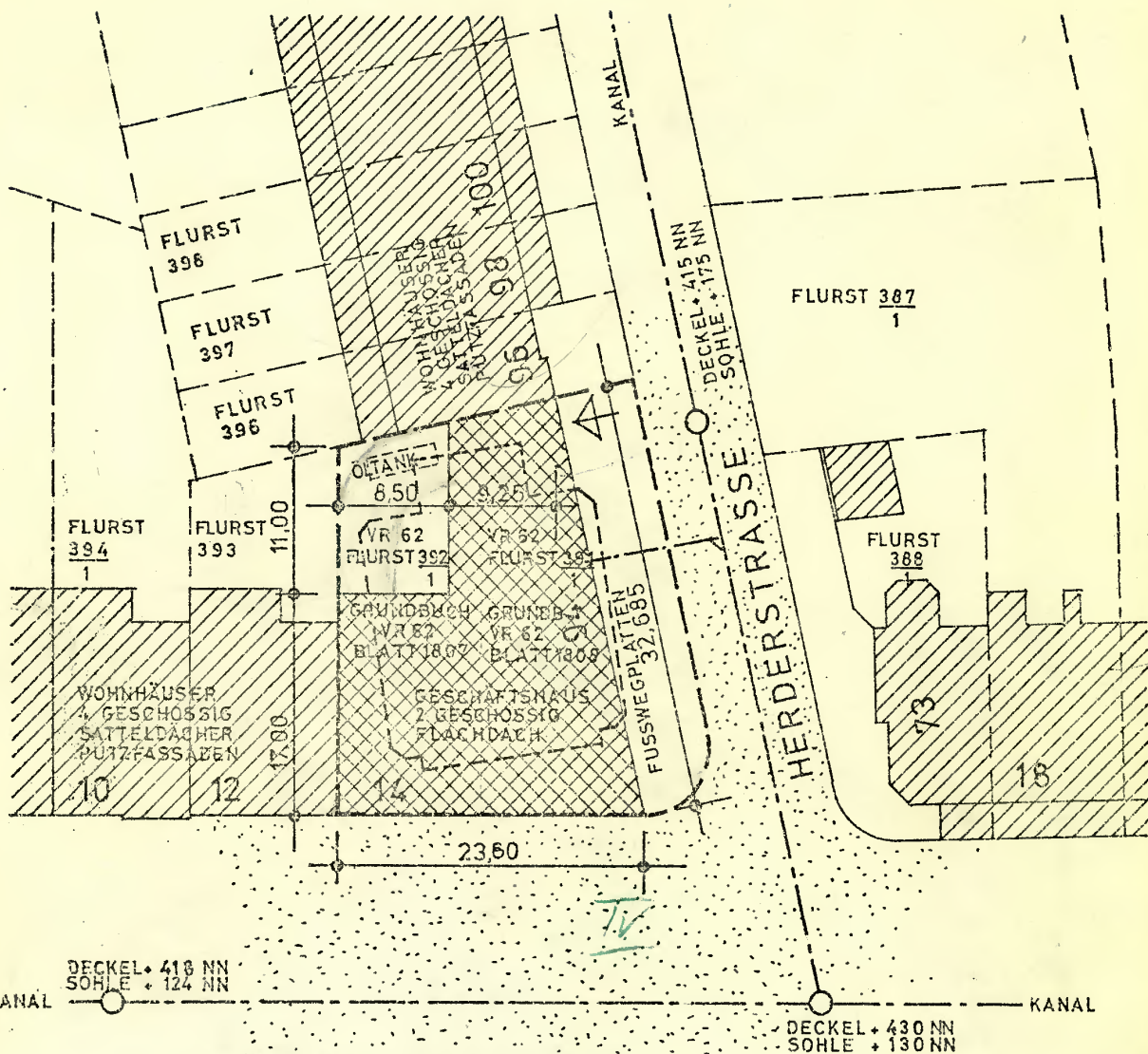


Figure 54: Property plan. Note. Source: City of Bremen, 1973, used with permission.

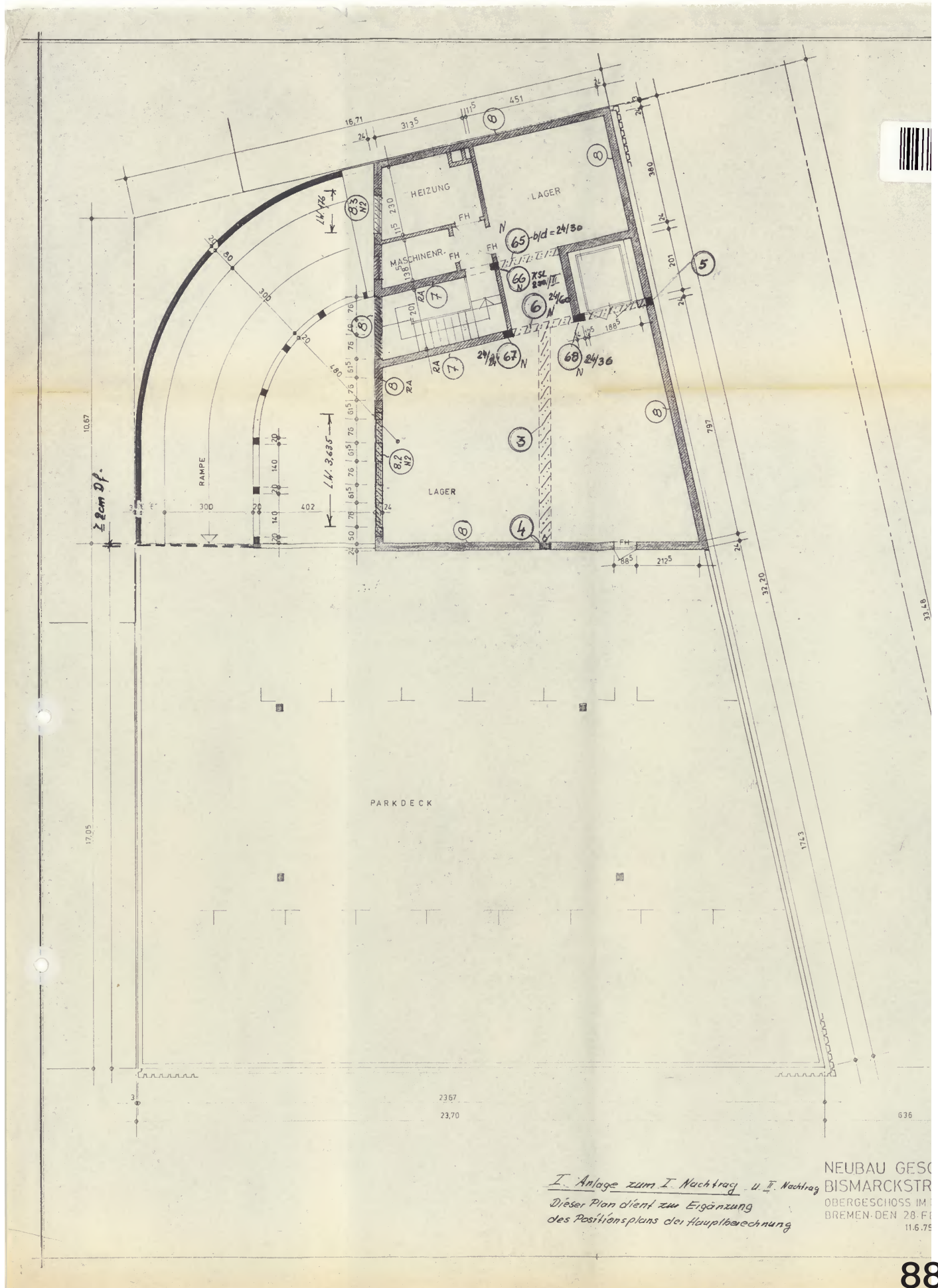


Figure 55: Floorplan of the ramp to the old parking deck. Note. Source: City of Bremen, 1973, used with permission.

