Negotiating the Sacred Threshold

Field Notes and Spatial Responses from a High-Altitude Tibetan Pastoral Settlement



Guiling Xiao

Master's Thesis Spring 2026

Examiner: Marco Adelfio

Supervisor: Carrie Bobo

Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering

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Mentor (Global mentorship program): Carl-Adam Hellqvist

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Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support throughout the process.



Abstract

In the high-altitude pastoral regions of the Tibetan cultural area, tourism is no longer only an economic activity. It also changes how a settlement is entered, represented, and used. During my winter fieldwork, there were not many tourists in the village, but tourist-oriented buildings, signs, and routes were still clearly present. This thesis focuses on the liminal spaces between a village, a prayer/gathering building, and a sacred lake, and asks how architectural thinking at these thresholds can support negotiation between ritual practices, everyday pastoral life, and tourism-related spatial pressures.

The research uses a design-led ethnographic approach, combining participatory mapping, walking interviews, field observation, and shared storytelling. It pays particular attention to paths, gathering grounds, edges, and transitional spaces where different uses, meanings, and pressures overlap.

In the field, the study finds that these transitional spaces are shaped not only by a single element, but by the overlapping presence of sacred markers, movement routes, shared grounds, informal rules, and tourism-oriented infrastructure. During winter fieldwork, direct tourist presence in the village was limited, yet tourist-oriented buildings, signs, and routes remained clearly legible and continued to shape how the settlement was read and used. The thesis develops a Narrative Atlas to visualize these relations through maps, routes, conversations, and spatial drawings, and translates them into a set of different nodes for further spatial response.

By shifting architectural attention from sacred sites alone to liminal spaces around them, the thesis proposes a node-based and seasonal approach to working with culturally sensitive pastoral settlements. Rather than offering a fixed architectural object, it develops a light, reversible, and spatially differentiated way of negotiating between ritual practice, everyday use, and tourism-related pressure. In this way, the thesis suggests a transferable architectural framework for reading and responding to threshold conditions in places where sacred meaning, local life, and external pressures overlap.

Keywords: Sacred Landscapes; Tourism; Tibetan Pastoral Settlement; Design-Led Ethnography; Liminal Spaces

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Background

The high-altitude Tibetan cultural region in western China represents one of the most significant intersections of natural and cultural heritage. In this thesis, “Tibetan” refers to the broader Tibetan cultural region rather than to the administrative boundary of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Sacred lakes, mountain deities, Buddhist temples and seasonally inhabited pastoral settlements together form landscapes that are organised as much by spiritual cosmologies as by climatic and ecological constraints. Over centuries, pastoral families have negotiated harsh environments through mobile livelihoods and vernacular building practices, while ritual paths and taboos regulate how people move through and relate to specific sites.

Over the past few decades, however, these landscapes have been increasingly affected by processes of modernisation, infrastructural development and the rapid expansion of tourism. Tourism studies in high-mountain regions show that visitor economies can simultaneously improve income, services and connectivity while placing strong pressure on local cultures and built environments (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Research from high Himalayan settlements, for example, describes how tourism has enabled new livelihood opportunities but has also contributed to the erosion of vernacular architecture, the commodification of rituals and the weakening of local identity when development is fast and poorly regulated (Bhatta, 2023). These findings suggest that tourism should not be understood as purely positive or negative, but as a complex force reshaping everyday life, spatial practices and heritage.

Similar dynamics are now emerging in Tibetan pastoral areas in western China, where remote sacred landscapes have become more visible through infrastructure improvements and social media. In many settlements, visitor flows intersect with ritual practices, seasonal migration and everyday pastoral routines. Questions arise around cultural sustainability, environmental fragility and local agency: whose values guide spatial change, how sacred boundaries are communicated or negotiated, and in what ways shared spaces can accommodate both local residents and visitors. Yet most existing literature addresses these issues at the scale of regional development, economic impact or heritage policy, with relatively little attention to the small-scale spatial settings where interactions actually take place.

This thesis responds to that gap by focusing on the transitional spaces between village, prayer and gathering building and sacred lake in a high-altitude Tibetan pastoral winter settlement in western Sichuan. Such settlements are seasonally inhabited: families return from summer pastures in late autumn, and the winter period becomes a time of dense communal life, ritual activity and gatherings. The spatial arrangement—sacred lake, prayer and gathering building and vernacular stone-and-timber houses connected by paths and open grounds—is characteristic of many pastoral communities in the region. It is in these threshold areas that everyday movements, ritual circulations, and tourism-related spatial traces become most obvious, especially during the winter period when direct visitor presence is limited.

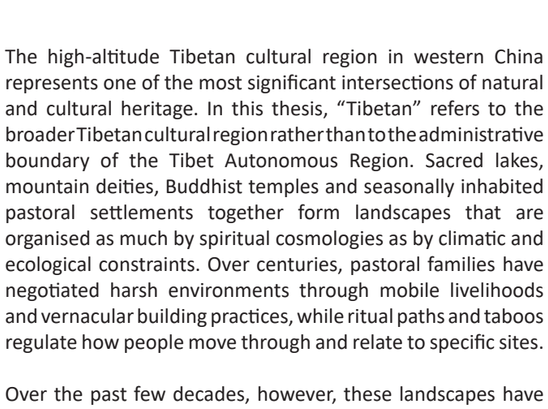


Figure 1

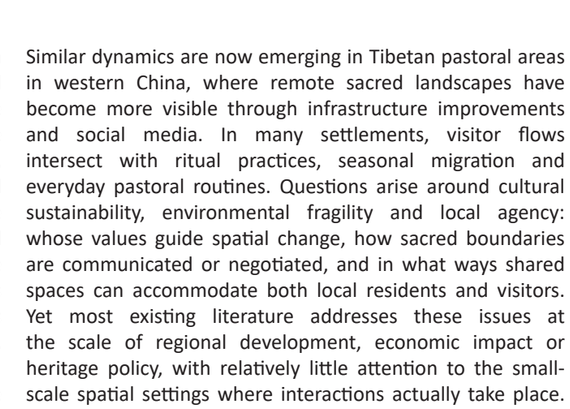


Figure 2



Figure 3: Tibetan cultural area.
Note. Adapted from Lencer, Tibetischer Kulturraum Karte 2[Map], 2008, Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0).

Despite increasing research on tourism and socio-cultural change in high-mountain regions, little attention has been given to the small-scale spatial settings where these processes actually unfold. In Tibetan pastoral settlements, the most intense overlaps between sacred practices, pastoral livelihoods and visitor activities occur not within the sacred core itself, but in the transitional spaces between village, prayer and gathering building and lake. How these liminal interfaces mediate tensions between cultural preservation, environmental fragility and tourist-driven transformation, and how they relate to questions of cultural sustainability, local agency and spatial justice, remains largely unexplored. This thesis therefore takes these village–prayer and gathering building–lake thresholds in a high-altitude Tibetan pastoral winter settlement as its main object of study, and investigates how they can be understood and carefully engaged with through an architectural, design-led ethnographic approach.

Purpose and Thesis Questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the liminal spatial conditions that emerge at the threshold between village, prayer and gathering building and sacred lake within a high-altitude Tibetan pastoral settlement. Rather than intervening directly in the sacred core, the project seeks to understand how transitional spaces, paths, edges, seasonal gathering points and everyday movement, mediate the coexistence of pastoral practices, ritual life and tourism-related spatial pressures.

Using a design-led ethnographic and participatory approach, the thesis explores how these liminal spaces are read, used, and negotiated across seasons, and how architectural thinking might support more sensitive and spatially modest forms of coexistence.

The project does not predetermine its final form at the beginning. Depending on insights from fieldwork and community collaboration, the outcome in the end takes the form of a narrative spatial atlas, a set of spatial strategies situated in several identified liminal nodes as a spatial responses. The aim is to produce a grounded understanding of how sacred landscapes can accommodate multiple narratives without compromising their cultural integrity. Through fieldwork, mapping, walking interviews, and small-scale co-creative activities, it identifies a series of liminal nodes where spatial tensions accumulate and where architectural translation becomes possible.

Rather than proposing a single architectural object, the thesis develops a light, seasonal, and culturally sensitive approach to working with threshold conditions. In this way, it asks how architectural thinking can support negotiation between sacred meaning, local life, and tourism-related pressures without disturbing the sacred core.

- Main Research Question

How can architectural thinking at the liminal spaces of a sacred Tibetan pastoral landscape support negotiation between ritual practices, everyday pastoral life, and tourism-related spatial pressures?

- Sub-questions

1. Spatial Practices and Seasonal Rhythms

What spatial practices, movements, and seasonal rhythms shape the use of paths, edges, and gathering grounds in the liminal spaces between the village, the prayer/gathering ground, and the sacred lake?

2. Sacred Thresholds and Spatial Possibilities

How do sacred boundaries, ritual rules, and everyday uses define where spatial negotiation becomes possible—and where intervention should remain absent or minimal?

3. Design Translation

How can architectural thinking translate these liminal conditions into light, seasonal, and culturally sensitive spatial responses without disturbing the sacred core?

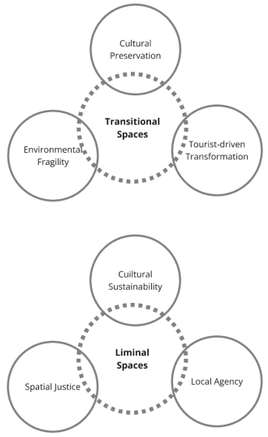


Figure 4. Key tensions surrounding village–prayer and gathering building–lake transitional spaces. The project approaches these liminal spaces as interfaces where environmental fragility, cultural preservation and tourist-driven transformation intersect with questions of cultural sustainability, local agency and spatial justice.

Methods

This thesis used a design-led ethnographic methodology to investigate how liminal spaces between village, prayer and gathering building and the sacred lakeare read, used, and negotiated by different groups across seasons. The methods are chosen to remain culturally sensitive and spatially grounded, allowing findings to emerge from field conditions rather than from predetermined design assumptions.

- Literature and Theory Review

Sacred landscapes, liminality, third space theory and vernacular construction provide the conceptual framework. These theories guide where and how to focus observations and where architectural attention might be most relevant.

- Site Reading and Spatial Observation

Through transect, behavioural mapping and visual documentation, the project examines everyday and ritual movement, seasonal rhythms and the specific points where spatial practices overlap. This helped identify the liminal nodes later developed in the atlas and design work.

- Walking Interviews

Walking with local residents allows access to embodied spatial knowledge, such as sacred boundaries, seasonal patterns and places of significance. This method uncovers meanings that are not always verbalised in formal interviews.

- Participatory Mapping

Collaborative mapping sessions using simple base maps and seasonal layers help identify important routes, gathering areas and potential tensions between local and visitor uses. These sessions revealed multiple spatial narratives and informed the differentiation of node roles.

- Small Workshops

Small co-creative workshops were used to explore acceptable forms of spatial response, especially in relation to children's play, gathering, and everyday occupation. Rather than producing a final prototype, these exercises informed the spatial logic of later node-based interventions.

- Vernacular Material Study

Observation of local stone-and-timber construction and lightweight shelter practices informed the low-impact, reversible, and materially restrained character of the design responses.

- Narrative and Visual Synthesis

Field findings were synthesised into a Narrative Atlas, combining maps, diagrams, routes, conversations, and spatial drawings to articulate threshold conditions and seasonal rhythms. This synthesis also supported the translation of field observations into node-based spatial strategies.

- Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As a researcher positioned between insider and outsider perspectives—coming from the wider Tibetan cultural region while also trained within a European architecture programme. Drawing on reflections on the "native turn" and layered nativeness (Tenzin, 2024), I used reflexive methods, including field notes, diaries, and critical self-questioning, to remain aware of how my background and institutional framing shaped what I saw, asked, and drew.

- Access, Ethics and Media Protocol

Access to ritual sites and documentation practices were mediated through local hosts and culturally appropriate consent. Restricted content was not recorded or published, and visual material was framed to avoid identification where needed. Ethical caution also shaped what could be observed, mapped, and later translated into the thesis.

Methodology

From situated field inquiry to node-based spatial translation

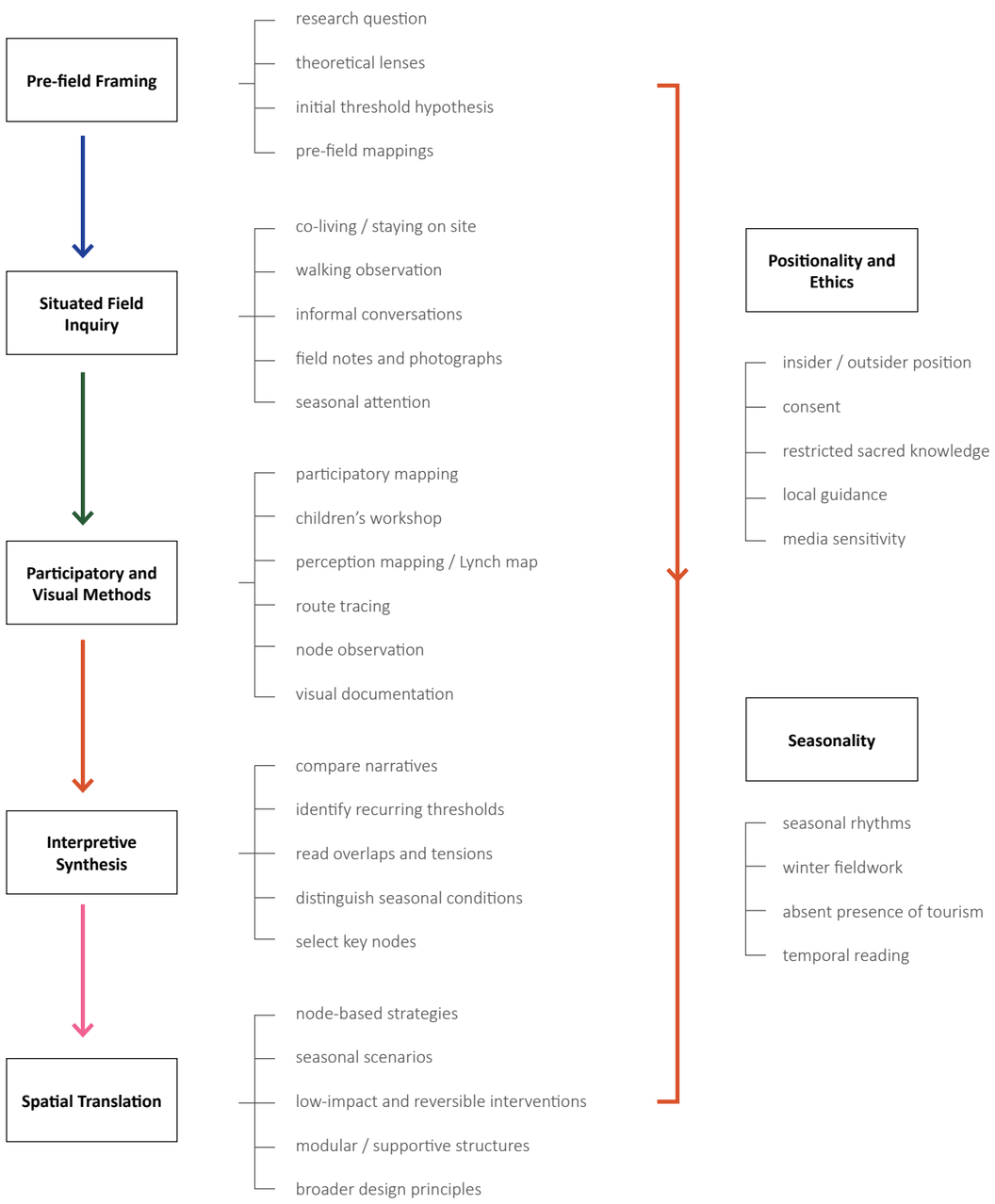


Figure 5

Theory

This thesis draws upon four interconnected bodies of theory—sacred landscapes, liminality, third-space negotiations, and vernacular/low-tech construction—to understand how spatial practices unfold at the threshold between village, prayer and gathering building and sacred lake in a Tibetan pastoral settlement. Rather than prescribing a single formal solution, these theoretical lenses provide a conceptual foundation for reading the landscape, structuring field inquiry, and informing later spatial translation.

1. Heterotopia and Sacred Landscapes

Sacred landscapes in Tibetan regions are shaped by long-standing cosmologies that link natural features—mountains, rivers, lakes—to spiritual entities and ritual practices. Sacred lakes, in particular, are governed by strict taboos that regulate proximity, access and acceptable forms of behaviour. Such sites can be understood through Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, which describes spaces that hold multiple layers of meaning and operate under different rules than ordinary social environments. (Foucault, 1986)

In the context of this project, the sacred lake and prayer and gathering building form a heterotopic core, where cultural norms, ritual authority and ecological fragility converge. These areas establish strong spatial boundaries and cannot be directly intervened in. The theoretical function of heterotopia here is to clarify where design cannot enter, and to identify the surrounding zones where spatial negotiation becomes possible.

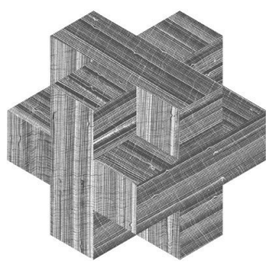


Figure 6. Heterotopia

2. Liminality and Transitional Space

The concept of liminality, first introduced by Victor Turner, describes states or spaces that are "in-between"—neither fully one thing nor another. Liminal spaces often host transitional rituals, movements and encounters that blur social categories or spatial expectations. (Turner, 1969)

In pastoral Tibetan settlements, liminality appears not just in ritual transitions but also in seasonal rhythms, migration patterns, and movement between sacred and everyday zones. The paths, edges and gathering grounds between village, prayer and gathering building and lake function as liminal thresholds where spatial practices overlap and roles shift: ritual participants, pastoral workers, returning family members, and visitors all move through these same points.

This theoretical lens provides the foundation for the project's focus on threshold spaces, making liminality the key framework through which spatial observations and interactions are interpreted.

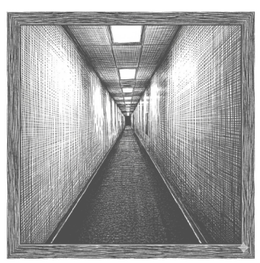


Figure 7. Liminality

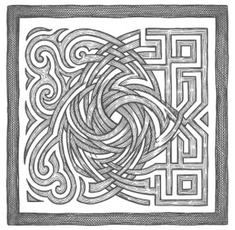


Figure 8. Third Space Theory

3. Third Space and Multi-Narrative Coexistence

Homi Bhabha's concept of Third Space describes the condition in which meanings are not fixed by a single group but are negotiated through encounters between different cultural perspectives (Bhabha, 1994). Third-space theory helps articulate how hybrid or overlapping interpretations of space emerge, especially in contexts marked by cultural multiplicity or power asymmetry.

In the study area, spatial meaning is co-produced by:

- local pastoral cosmologies and taboos,
- ritual and monastic practices,
- visitor perceptions shaped by tourism and social media,
- and the practical rhythms of seasonal habitation.

Third-space theory is therefore used to understand how these multiple narratives intersect in everyday movement corridors—not to frame the site as a site of conflict, but as a landscape where coexistence must be constantly renegotiated. This directly informs the research question of how transitional spaces support or hinder such negotiation.

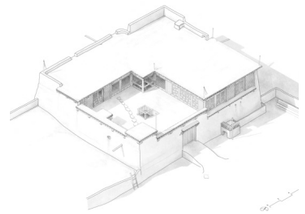


Figure 9. Vernacularity

4. Vernacular Logics and Low-Tech Co-Building

Vernacular architecture in Tibetan pastoral settlements is characterised by stone-and-timber construction, incremental growth, and mutual-aid building practices. These forms of construction embody not only ecological adaptation but also social organisation and collective memory.

The interest in low-tech and locally available materials is not directed toward producing a predetermined architectural form, but rather toward understanding:

- how local construction logics shape spatial identity,
- what forms of small-scale intervention would be culturally legible,
- and whether co-building could serve as a method of participatory engagement.

This theoretical component ensures that the resulting spatial strategies or potential prototypes remain culturally grounded, reversible and environmentally modest, consistent with the sensitivities of a sacred landscape. (Herrle & Wozniak, 2023; Hamdi, 2004)

Together, these four theory frame the project as an inquiry into how sacredness, transition, narrative multiplicity and vernacular logics interact spatially within a rapidly changing pastoral context. They guide the identification of threshold sites, the structure of fieldwork (movement, narratives, seasonal rhythms), and the interpretation of spatial practices, while also informing the later development of node-based and seasonal spatial responses.

Delimitations

This thesis is intentionally delimited in several ways to ensure cultural sensitivity, methodological clarity and feasibility within the time frame of a master's thesis.

1. No Intervention in the Sacred Core

The project does not intervene in, redesign, or propose infrastructural changes directly at the sacred lake (Sarljok Tso) or the prayer and gathering building. These areas carry strong ritual significance (Foucault, 1986; Turner, 1969), and any physical modification would be culturally inappropriate. The study instead focuses on the threshold spaces—paths, edges, and transitional nodes—between the village, prayer and gathering building and lake.

2. Not a Full Community Development Project

While the thesis employs participatory and ethnographic methods, it does not aim to act as a community development or planning intervention. The project does not attempt to solve economic, social or infrastructural challenges. The focus remains on spatial practices, narratives and liminal conditions, not on delivering long-term community programmes.

3. No Commitment to Build

Although the thesis explores spatial responses and small-scale interventions, it does not assume that a built outcome will necessarily follow. Questions of co-building, implementation, and long-term maintenance depend on local willingness, trust, environmental constraints, and cultural appropriateness. Where such conditions are not present, the thesis remains valid as a Narrative Atlas and a set of spatial strategies.

4. Limited Temporal Scope

The fieldwork period is limited to late winter / early spring, corresponding to the Chinese New Year period when residents return to the winter settlement. Seasonal rhythms are studied through interviews, diagrams and narrative reconstruction, but the research doesn't include year-round on-site observation.

5. Typological Rather Than Administrative Site Definition

Because local place names have inconsistent English transliterations and the thesis is concerned with cultural-spatial conditions rather than administrative boundaries, the site is described as a high-altitude Tibetan pastoral settlement in western Sichuan. Here, "Tibetan" refers to a broader cultural region rather than to the administrative boundary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (Herrle & Wozniak, 2023; Tenzin, 2014).

6. Not an Anthropological or Political Study

Although the project draws from anthropological concepts (liminality, rituals, sacred space), it does not attempt to produce a full anthropological or political analysis. The focus remains architectural: understanding how spatial practices and thresholds can be interpreted and translated into spatial responses.

7. Limited Stakeholder Group

The study primarily engages pastoral residents (including elders, children and returning young people), temple-related actors where appropriate, and visitors encountered on site. Government, tourism developers, and external institutions are considered only where necessary for contextual understanding.

8. Single-Site Depth Rather Than Multi-Site Comparison

This thesis prioritises an in-depth exploration of one settlement and its sacred threshold, rather than a comparative study across multiple Tibetan or pastoral villages.

Process and Structure

The thesis developed through three overlapping phases: preparation and framing, field inquiry, and post-fieldwork synthesis and spatial translation.

Preparation and Framing (Nov 2025–Jan 2026):

Literature review, theoretical grounding, site familiarisation, and the preparation of mapping tools and interview materials.

Outputs: initial base maps, research framing, fieldwork toolkit, and an early atlas template.

Field Inquiry (Feb–Apr 2026):

Design-led ethnographic fieldwork in a rural settlement in western Sichuan, including site observation, participatory mapping, walking interviews, and small-scale co-creative activities.

Outputs: field notes, mapping sets, visual documentation, node identification, and a first understanding of threshold conditions.

Post-fieldwork Synthesis and Spatial Translation (Apr–May 2026):

Analysis, narrative atlas production, node differentiation, and the development of spatial responses.

Outputs: narrative atlas drafts, node-based design translations, booklet development, and final presentation material.

Research support:

Global Mentorship Program scholarship (45,000 SEK)

covering travel, accommodation, field materials, documentation, and printing.

Timeline

From research framing to field inquiry, narrative atlas, and spatial translation (Nov–Jun).

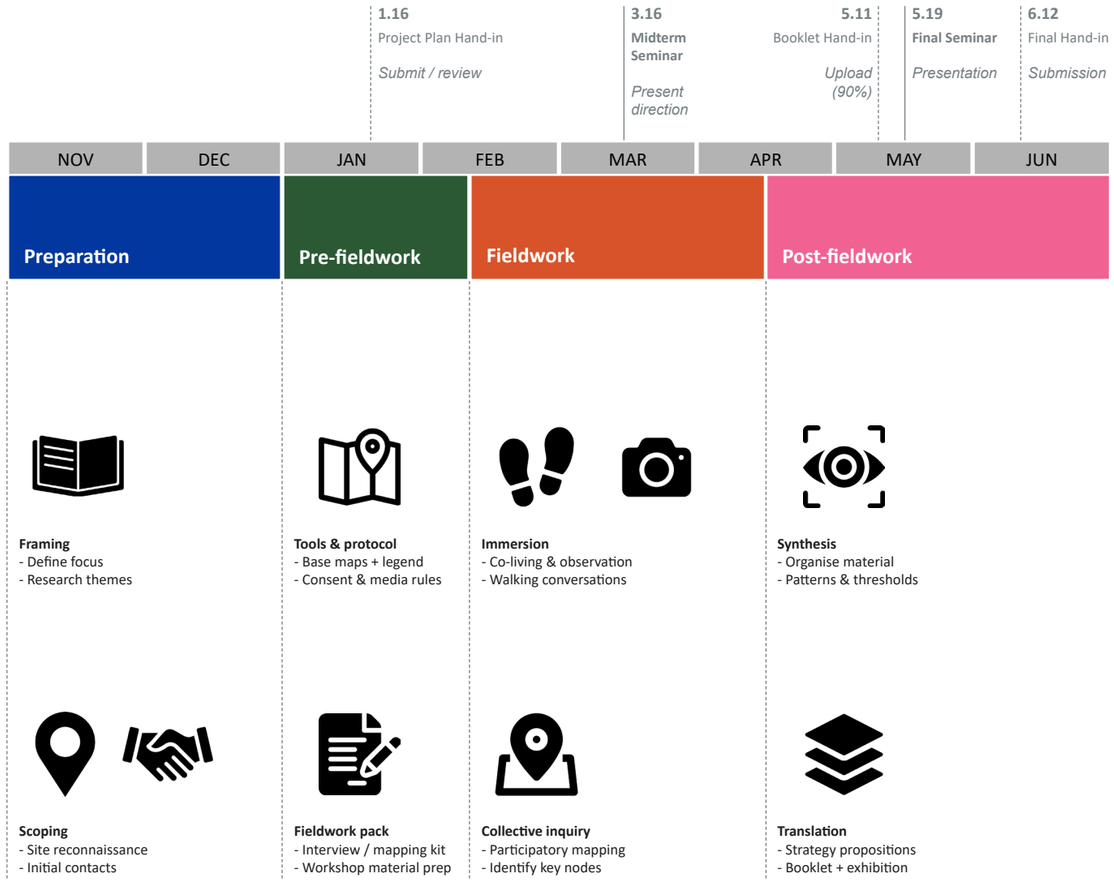


Figure 10



Throughout the project, blue, green, orange and pink are used consistently to represent sacred practices, natural slopes and vegetation, village/pastoral everyday life, and touristic presence.

Figure 11



Figure 12.

Project

This thesis uses a design-led ethnographic methodology to investigate how transitional spaces between village, prayer and gathering building and sacred lake are used and interpreted by different groups. The methods are chosen to remain culturally sensitive and to allow findings to emerge directly from the field rather than from predetermined design assumptions.

what the thesis studies

This thesis investigates the liminal spaces between the village, the prayer and gathering building, and the sacred lake in a high-altitude Tibetan pastoral settlement in western Sichuan, China. It focuses on the threshold conditions where ritual practices, everyday pastoral life, and tourism-related spatial pressures overlap, and where spatial negotiation becomes visible rather than hidden in the background (Turner, 1969; Foucault, 1986; Bhatta, 2023).

where the site is and what kind of settlement it is

The site is located around Sarjok Tso (Sa'erjiao Lake) in Jinchuan County, Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, China. It is a winter pastoral settlement where families return in aearly spring, late autumn and winter after spending summers in the high-altitude pastures. The settlement is structured through a sacred lake, prayer and gathering spaces, and a cluster of vernacular stone-and-timber houses built through mutual-aid practices. During the winter period, ritual activity, everyday movement, and communal gathering become especially legible in and around these spaces (Herrle & Wozniak, 2023; Tenzin, 2014).

why the threshold spaces matter

What drew me to this site was not only the sacred lake itself, but the spaces around it. The paths, forecourts, edges, open grounds, and informal approach routes seemed to hold different lives and meanings at once. Local routines, sacred rules, and tourism-oriented routes did not stay apart. They crossed, overlapped, and sometimes quietly disturbed each other. Rather than treating these as leftover spaces, the thesis takes them as the main field of inquiry, because this is where the tensions of the site become spatially readable (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Bhabha, 1994).

methodological openness

Methodologically, the project follows a design-led ethnographic approach that keeps the design process open in the early stages. This does not mean that the work lacks direction, but that it avoids fixing a formal solution too soon. Instead, field observation, local knowledge, participatory engagement, and later design translation are allowed to correct the initial framing. In that sense, the project begins with a question rather than a form, and lets the site gradually reshape what kind of architectural response is actually appropriate (Chipchase, 2017; Hamdi, 2004; Hamdi, 2014; Tenzin, 2024)

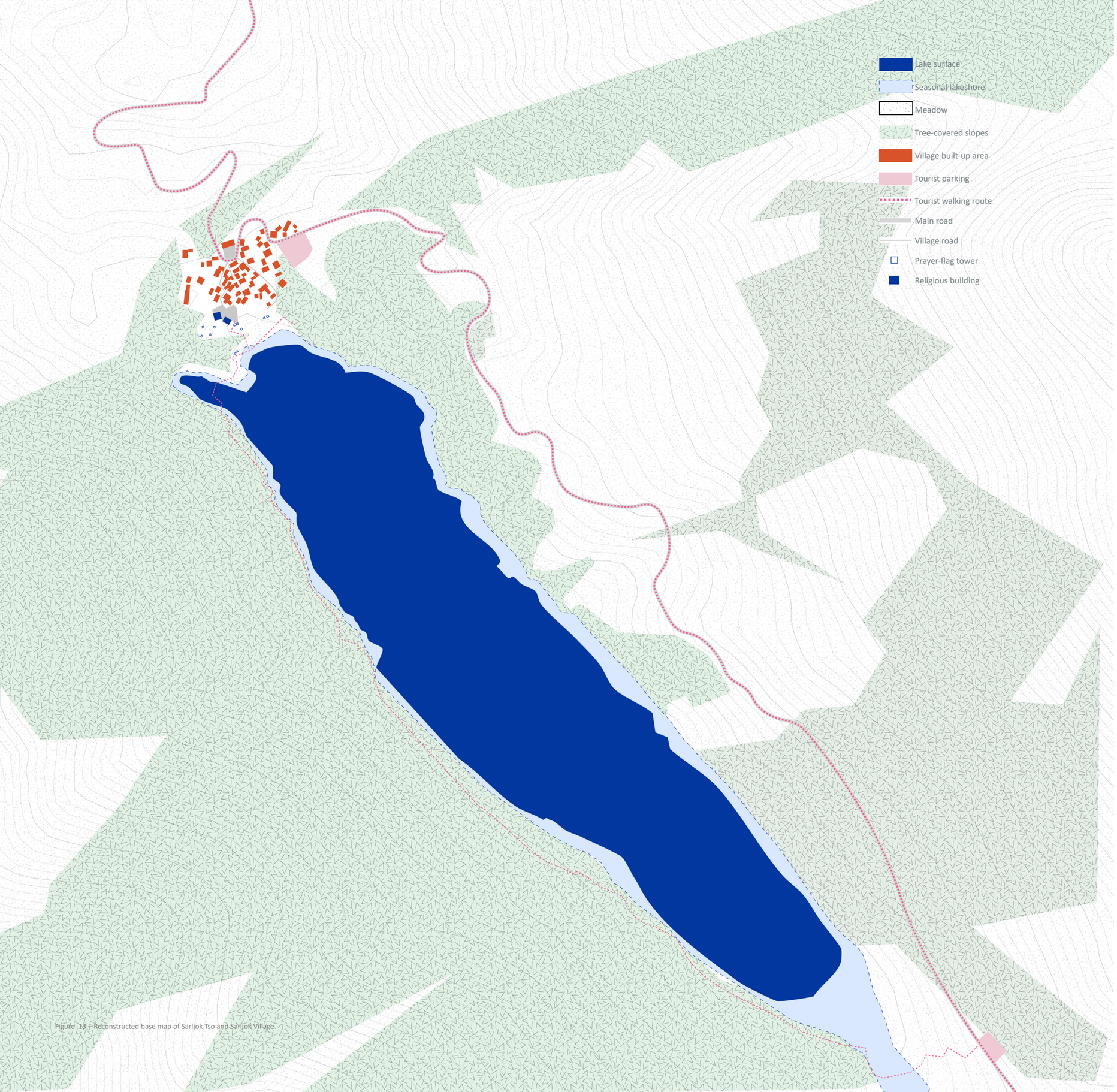


Figure. 13 – Reconstructed base map of Sarljok Tso and Sarljok Village.

The drawing is manually redrawn from satellite imagery and visitors' drone footage, indicating the sacred lake, the compact village cluster on the northern shore, access roads and paths, and the surrounding mosaic of slopes and pasture/forest land. It functions as a working cartographic ground for later analysis rather than an exact survey map, and also reminds that maps are never neutral mirrors of territory but reflect which places are considered worth measuring and representing.

Figure 10. Seasonal rhythms around Sarljok Tso and Sarljok Village

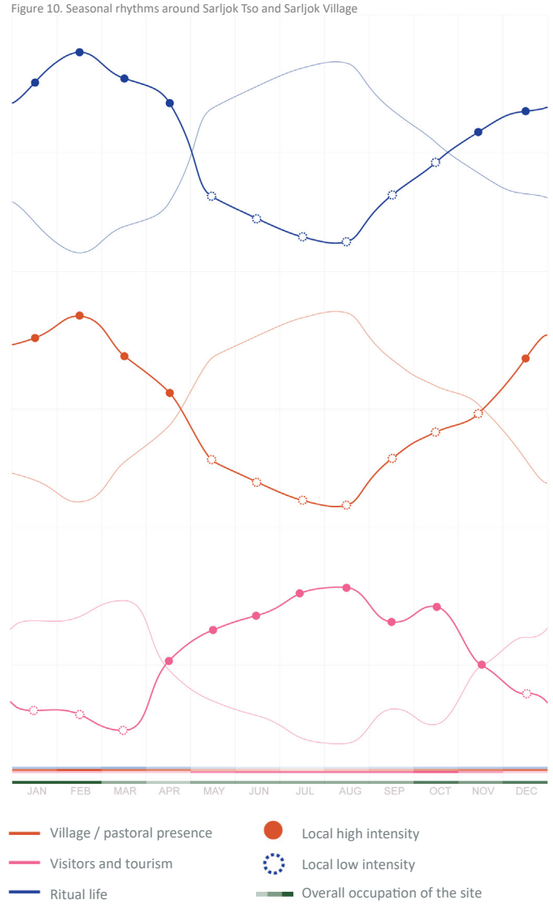


Figure 14

The diagram sketches the overlapping annual rhythms of ritual life (blue), village and pastoral presence (orange), and touristic visits (pink) around Sarljok Tso and Sarljok Village. The curves do not represent precise statistics but relative tendencies, drawn from preliminary conversations, field observation, and later reflection. It serves as a working temporal reading of the site rather than a final quantitative account.

Heterotopic Relations

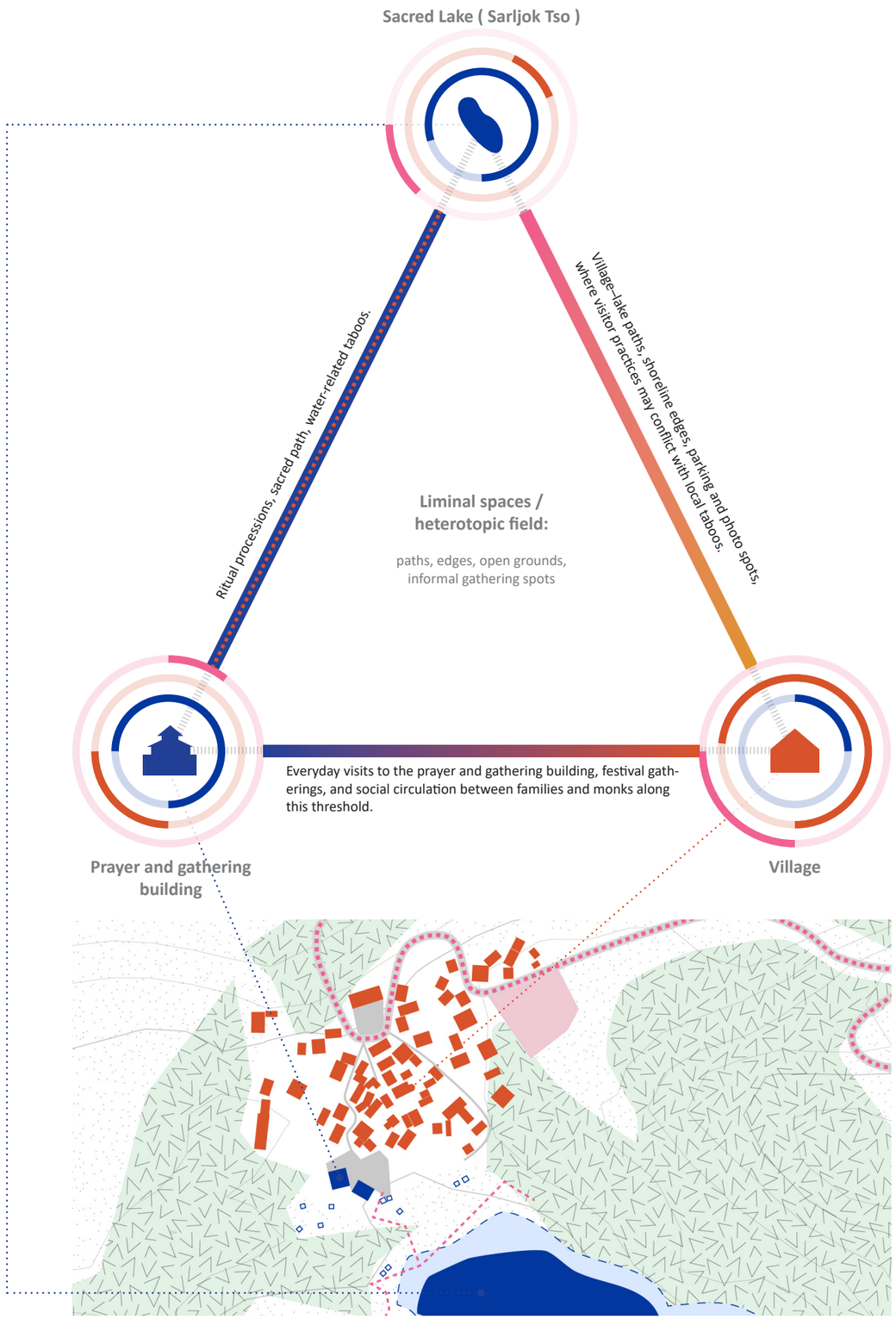


Figure 15. Heterotopic relations between lake, prayer and gathering building and village

The diagram abstracts the sacred lake, the prayer/gathering ground, and the village into a triangular field in which sacred practices, everyday pastoral life, and tourism-related presence overlap. The three edges of the triangle represent liminal spaces where these regimes are negotiated rather than fixed (Foucault, 1986; Turner, 1969).

Spatial negotiation in the site is not shaped by one homogeneous "local" perspective, but by overlapping actors positioned differently in relation to sacred rules, everyday use, tourism, and institutional influence. (Bhabha, 1994; Tenzin, 2024)

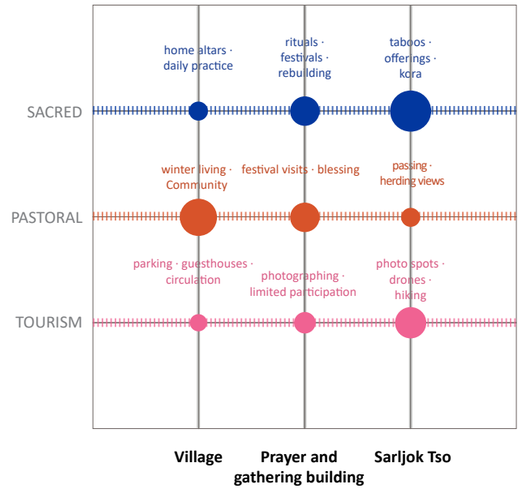


Figure 16. Heterotopic relations between lake, temple and village

Stakeholder Analysis

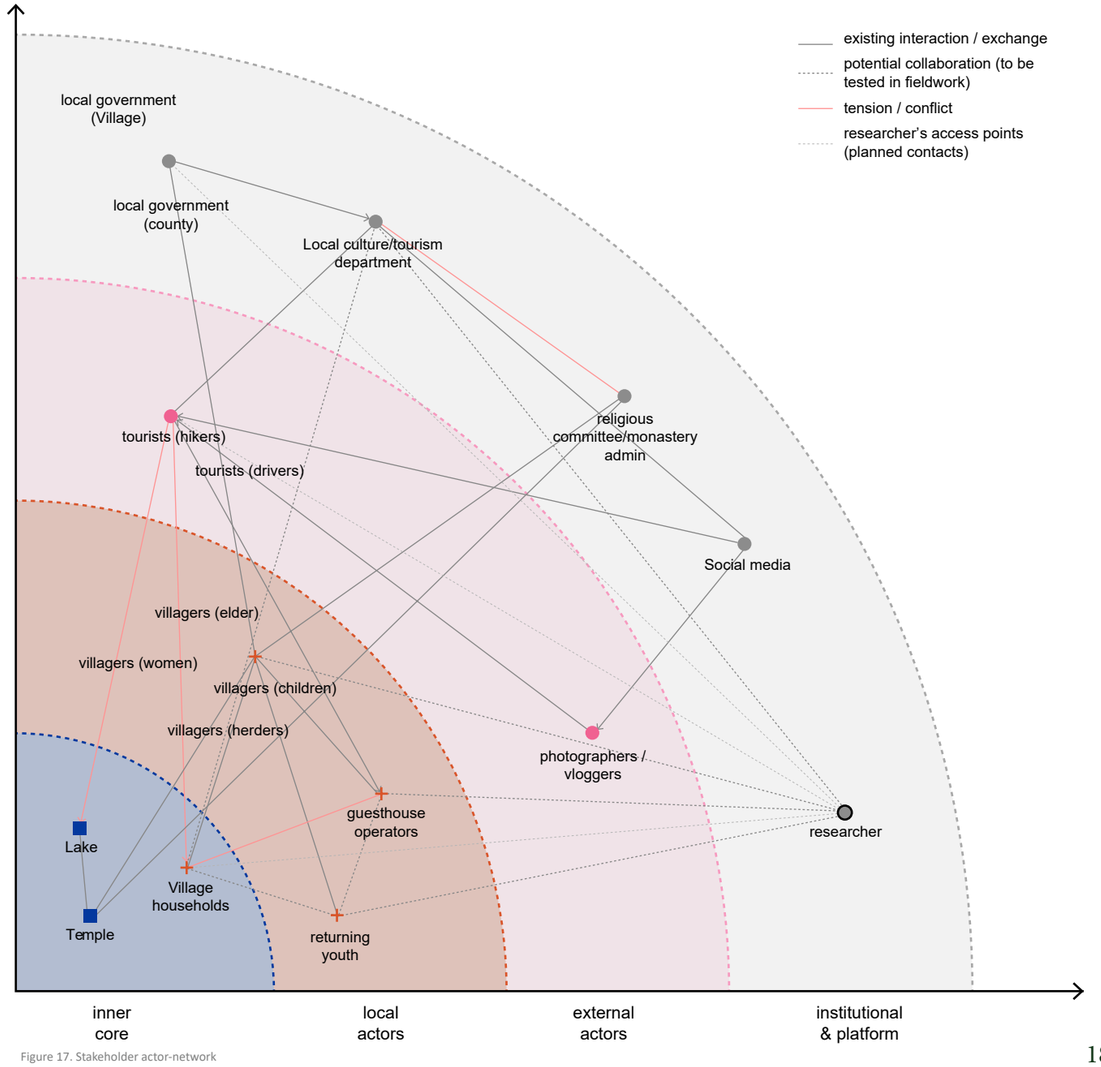


Figure 17. Stakeholder actor-network

Stakeholder–Issue Matrix

Stakeholder ↓ / Issue →	A Sacred norms & boundary	B Access & thresholds	C Arrival & circulation	D Waste & sanitation	E Economy & distribution	F Representation & platform
Religious committee / monastery admin	↑ sacred rules; ritual zones; etiquette	↓ restrict entry; define "where/when"; signage	↓ crowd control; quiet buffer; route discipline	↑ cleanliness; offering waste; ritual maintenance	↔ donations vs commerce; gatekeeping; !	↓ misuse of sacred imagery; consent; !
Village households (non-business)	↑ privacy; domestic boundary; respect	↔ tolerate passage; micro-thresholds (gates/walls); quiet hours	↔ avoid disturbance; protect lanes; shared path	↑ keep clean; limited facilities; household burden	↔ fairness; compensation; cost-of-living; !	↓ being photographed; "home ≠ attraction"; !
Guesthouse operators	↔ respect + convenience; "acceptable behavior"	↑ manage entry; direct guests; capacity	↑ route guidance; pickup/dropoff; timing	↔ keep tidy; outsource trash; service gaps	↑ monetize stay/food; local sourcing; competition	↑ marketing; reviews; aesthetic packaging; !
Returning youth	↔ tradition + new ideas; mediation role	↑ improve access (light-touch); explain rules	↑ organize flow; volunteer guiding; event timing	↑ initiatives; bins/toilets pilots; maintenance	↑ diversify income; fair share; local jobs	↑ storytelling; reframing identity; platform skills; !
Villagers (herders)	↑ sacred landscape; customary use; seasonal rhythm	↓ protect pasture; limit vehicles; path conflicts	↓ avoid disturbance; animal routes; safety	↔ animal waste norms; cleanup capacity; ?	↔ selling products; grazing rights; ?	! stereotyping risk; "authenticity" pressure; ?
Villagers (women) / (or elders)	↑ etiquette; privacy; ritual care; !	↓ protect domestic space; avoid intrusion; !	↓ noise control; keep calm routes; !	↑ hygiene; water burden; caregiving labor; !	↔ unpaid labor vs benefit; informal selling; !	! consent + image rights; "performing culture"; !
Tourists (drivers)	? awareness of norms; photo behavior; !	↑ parking access; drive-to viewpoint; convenience	↑ fast arrival; congestion; short-cutting	↔ litter risk; bins dependency; ?	↑ spend on food/rooms; ↔ leak to outside; ?	↑ check-in photos; hashtags; "must-see"; !
Tourists (hikers)	? interest in ritual vs nature; boundary learning	↑ trail access; safety info; weather	↔ slower movement; dispersed stops; ?	↔ pack-in/out; toilets need; ?	↔ small purchases; guides; ?	↑ landscape photos; low-key sharing; !
Photographers / vloggers	↓ boundary pressure; staging sacred objects; !	↑ access to "best spots"; flexible entry; ?	↑ orchestration; crowd magnet; tripods/drone; !	↔ waste from props; footprint; ?	↑ monetization; sponsorship; unequal gains; !	↑ narrative control; aesthetic filtering; consent issues; !
Local culture/ tourism department	↔ protect sacred + promote culture; !	↑ infrastructure; ↔ zoning; ticket/permit?	↑ route design; peak management; safety	↑ sanitation services; enforcement; maintenance	↑ local products; distribution rules; ↔ capture by few; !	↑ branding; "heritage" packaging; !
Local government (village/ county)	↔ regulate vs respect; policy framing; !	↑/↓ permits, road control, closures; enforcement	↑ traffic management; emergency access; zoning	↑ waste system; fines; service budget	↑ tax/revenue; ↔ compensation; redistribution; !	↑ image management; risk avoidance; official narrative; !
Social media platform / algorithm (remote actor)	sacred sensitivity; moderation gaps; !	↑ exposure = more access; viral spikes; ?	↑ sudden surges; "route copying"; crowding	? indirect impact; externalities; ?	↑ traffic monetization; attention economy; !	↑ aesthetics-first framing; trend templates; !

↑ prioritises / seeks to strengthen
↓ seeks to limit / control
↔ mixed / negotiable
? unknown (to be tested in fieldwork)
! high sensitivity / avoid assumptions

Figure 18. Stakeholder–Issue Matrix (First Hypothesis)
Negotiation map to guide interviews and field observations.

Vernacular Spatial Typologies

Type A / Type B

Two recurring house prototypes were identified from available photo evidence and local accounts, focusing on material split and vertical domestic program.

How to read this page
Prototype A/B are not "exact types", but working categories used to (1) trace material logic and (2) map everyday program vertically.

Identification criteria
- Material split: stone base + timber upper (dominant) vs. all-stone variant (minor).
- Roof & volume: compact two-storey pitched-roof house on slope.
- Program (typical): storage/sleeping below; living/cooking + family shrine above.

Threshold gradient

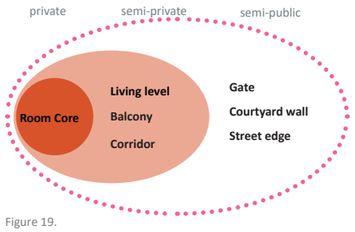


Figure 19.

Village photos (from social media posts)



Figure 20.

Tourism intersects domestic space primarily at edges (walls, gates, balconies), rather than inside private rooms.

Type A: Elevation + material split

Stone base + painted timber upper storey.

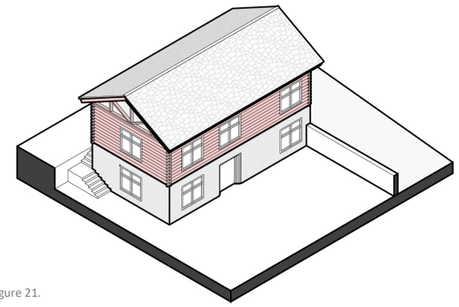


Figure 21.

Type A: Diagrammatic section

Upper floor combines living + shrine.

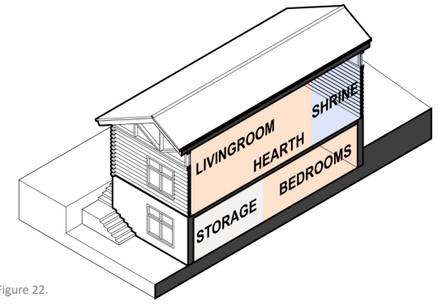


Figure 22.

Type B: Elevation + material split

All-stone variant observed in the village.

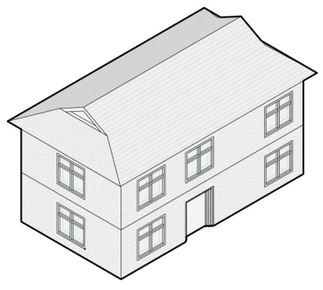


Figure 23.

Type B: Diagrammatic section

Same vertical program; envelope differs.

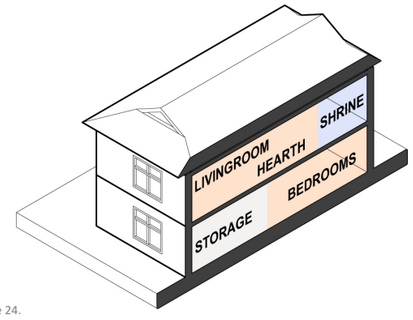


Figure 24.

Note: Diagrams are schematic due to limited interior access; to be validated during fieldwork.
Sources: online village photos (2025); field contact interview note (2025); Herrle & Wozniak (2023) for regional references.

Threshold devices

Small objects in public space shape how people enter, move, pause, and behave.
Here I group them into two layers: ritual markers and visitor-focused markers.

Ritual / Vernacular devices

Lakeshore chorten wall



Marks a sacred edge and a place to slow down. (sacred edge • pause • respect)

Prayer flag tower



Turns wind and movement into a shared sign of respect. (wind • visibility • collective ritual • node)

Prayer poles / flag corridor (flag lines)



Guides passage without blocking it—like a soft corridor. (soft boundary • guidance • flow)

Mani stones (painted stones)



A public memory surface: writing, offering, and small rituals. (inscription • offering • remembrance)

Stone cairns / stacking



A repeated action that quietly builds a boundary over time. (repetition • marking • accumulation)

Lhato / local shrine marker



A local protection point that anchors everyday belief. (protection • anchor • everyday belief)

Tourism / Visitor markers (signage + photo spots)

Gateway / arch



Creates a clear “start point” and a tourist territory. (threshold • branding • entry point)

Interpretive boards



Tells a story and sets a preferred way to read the place. (narrative • framing • instruction)

Wayfinding signposts



Funnels visitors by turning paths into a route. (routing • control • direction)

Photo slogans signs



Invites a fixed pose and a shareable image. (pose • shareability • performance)

Landmark inscription stone



Turns a view into a named spot: “here is the photo.” (naming • photo spot • claim)

View deck / railings



Frames the landscape and concentrates where people stop. (framing • stopping point • concentration)

Same landscape, two languages: ritual markers grow from local practice; visitor markers aim for quick recognition and photos.

Sources: social media screenshots; local informant account; field verification planned.

Figure 25.

Lake → Village transect

Icons mark where ritual devices and tourism devices typically appear along the approach.

How to read this page
- Blue = ritual markers
- Pink = visitor markers
- Dots ◆ ● observed micro-sites

What this reveals
- Ritual devices cluster near lake edge + slope (slow down / anchor belief).
- Visitor markers align with photo moments + route control (start / viewpoint / wayfinding).
- Same path, two logics: care & respect vs. recognition & circulation.

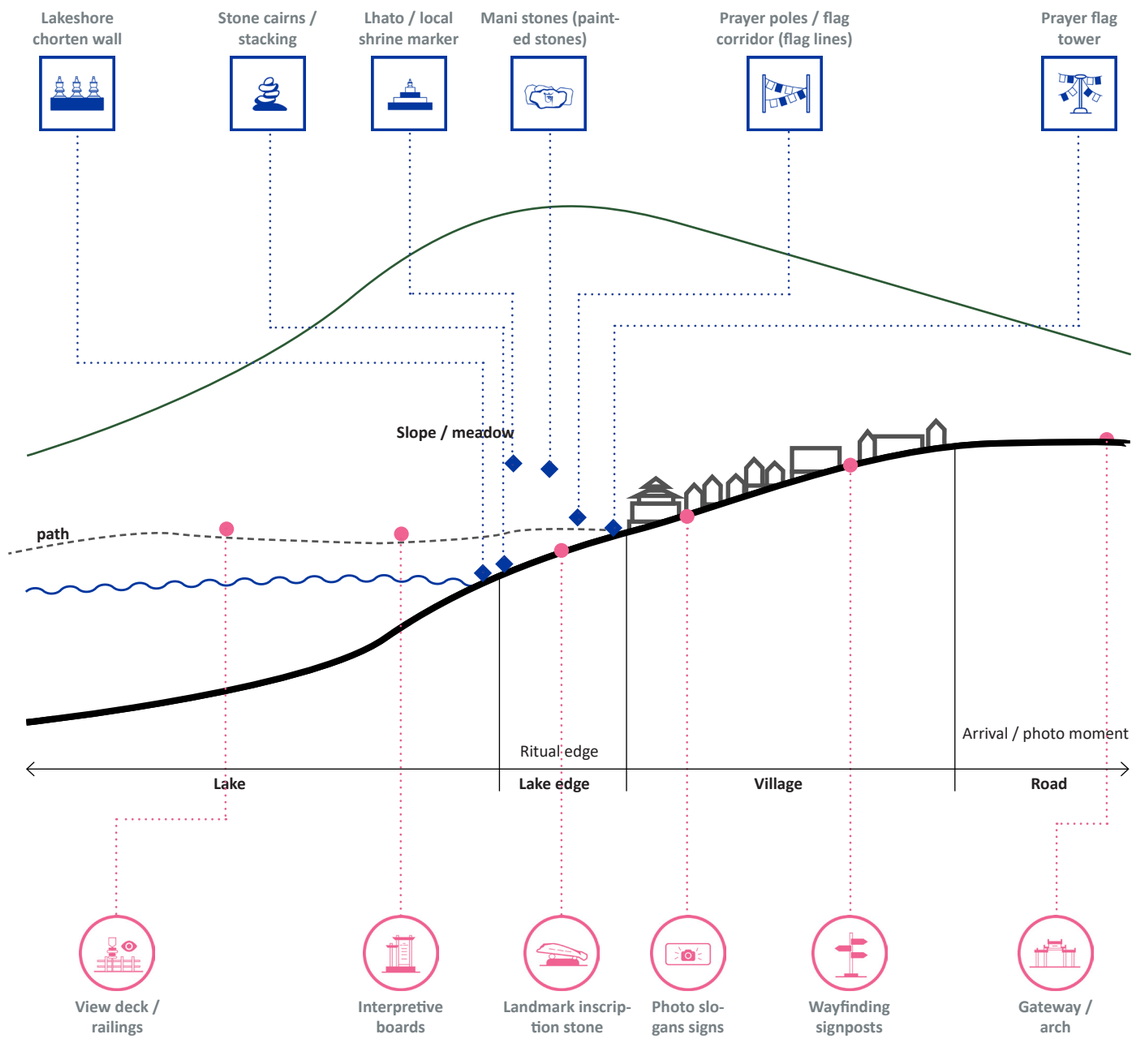


Figure 26.

Note: Icons mark where ritual devices and tourism devices typically appear along the approach.

Pre-field toolkit

Maps, lightweight participatory tools, and open-ended methods prepared before entering the field.

Mapping base

Provisional maps prepared for on-site correction and route tracing.

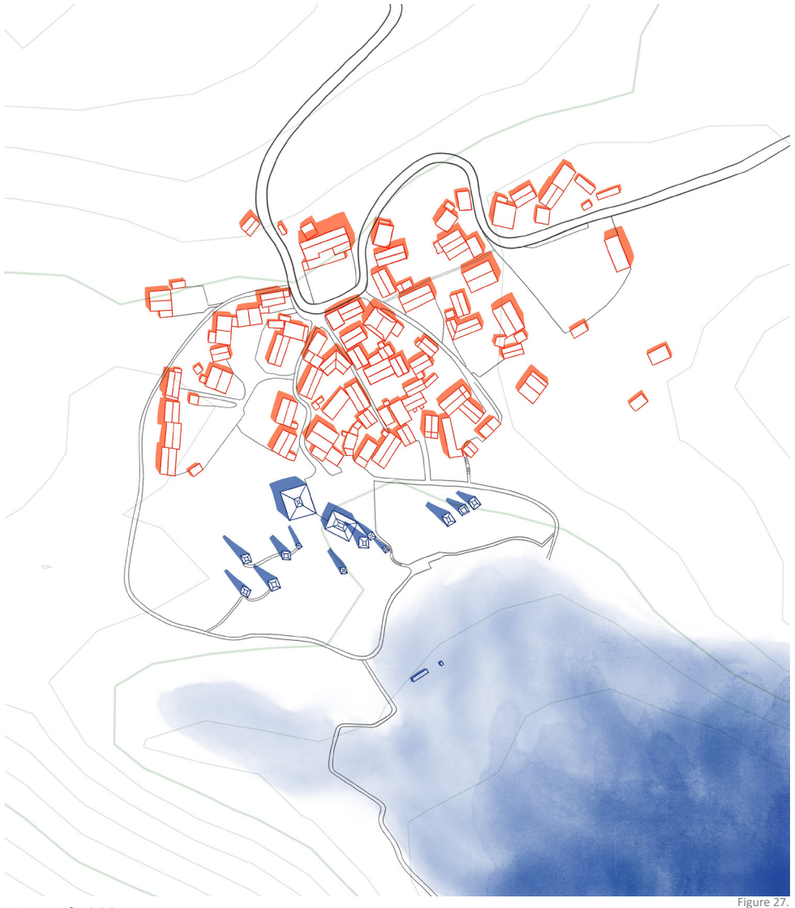


Figure 27.

v0 pre-field base maps

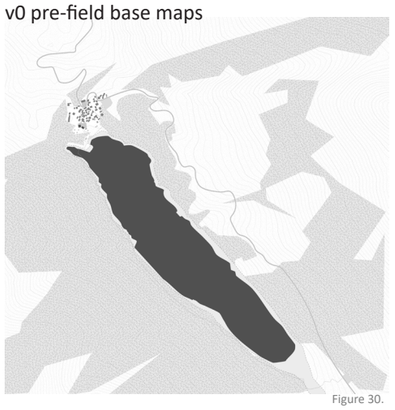


Figure 30.



Figure 31.

Participatory tools

Simple materials used for collaborative marking, quick interviews, and route overlays.



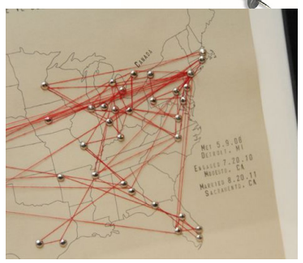


Figure 28.

Field recording & framing

Visual tools used to document traces, test assumptions.



Figure 29.



Figure 32.

Workshop framework (pre-field draft)

A provisional sequence of mapping, route tracing, problem finding, and material exploration, used as a flexible guide rather than a fixed script once on site.

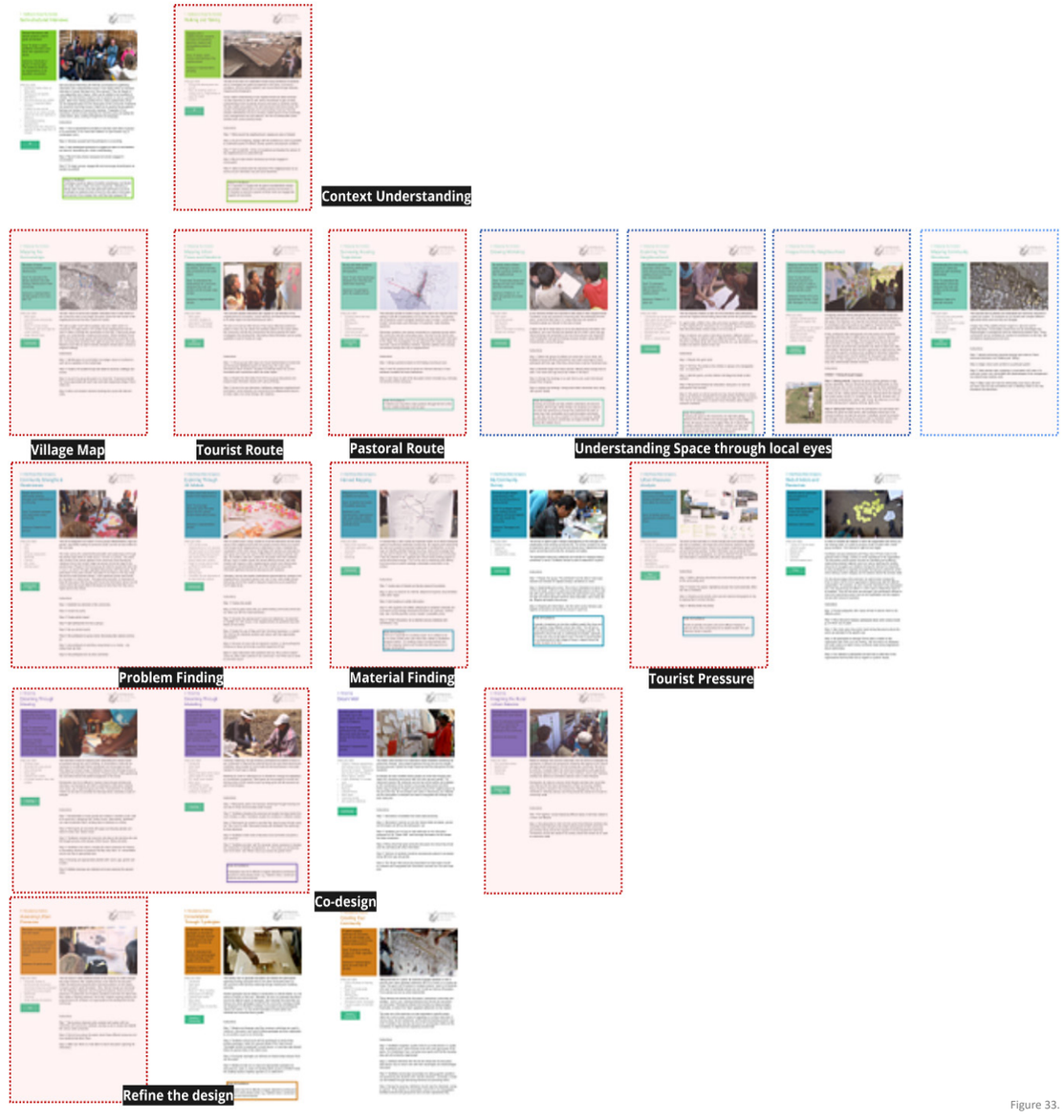


Figure 33.

Adaptation on site

Once on site, these tools were adapted to local conditions, available contacts, weather, and the rhythms of everyday life.

Mapping as Method

v1 corrected on site



Figure 34.



Walking and Map Correction

Purpose
To use the provisional map as a conversational tool for entering the village, tracing paths, and gradually correcting spatial relationships on site.

Process
The base map was printed and brought into the village for repeated correction walks. Roads, houses, edges, and landmarks were checked together with local residents and children through pointing, walking, and redrawing.

Participants / Access
Corrections were made with the help of Jiangmu, Duoji, and other residents who were familiar with the village layout. Children were particularly active in identifying houses, routes, and missing paths.



Figure 35.



Figure 38.



Figure 39.



Figure 36.

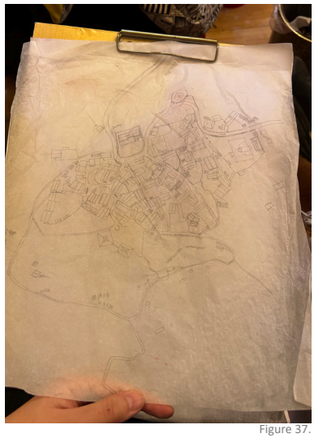


Figure 37.

Findings
The map did not function as a neutral representation, but as a shared surface where spatial memory, movement, and local corrections could emerge together. It also revealed that routes and building relations were more layered and uneven than first assumed from satellite image.

Challenges / Limits
Topographic differences, winding paths, and winter conditions made some parts of the village difficult to verify. The map remains partial and open to further correction.

Field Voices and Spatial Frictions

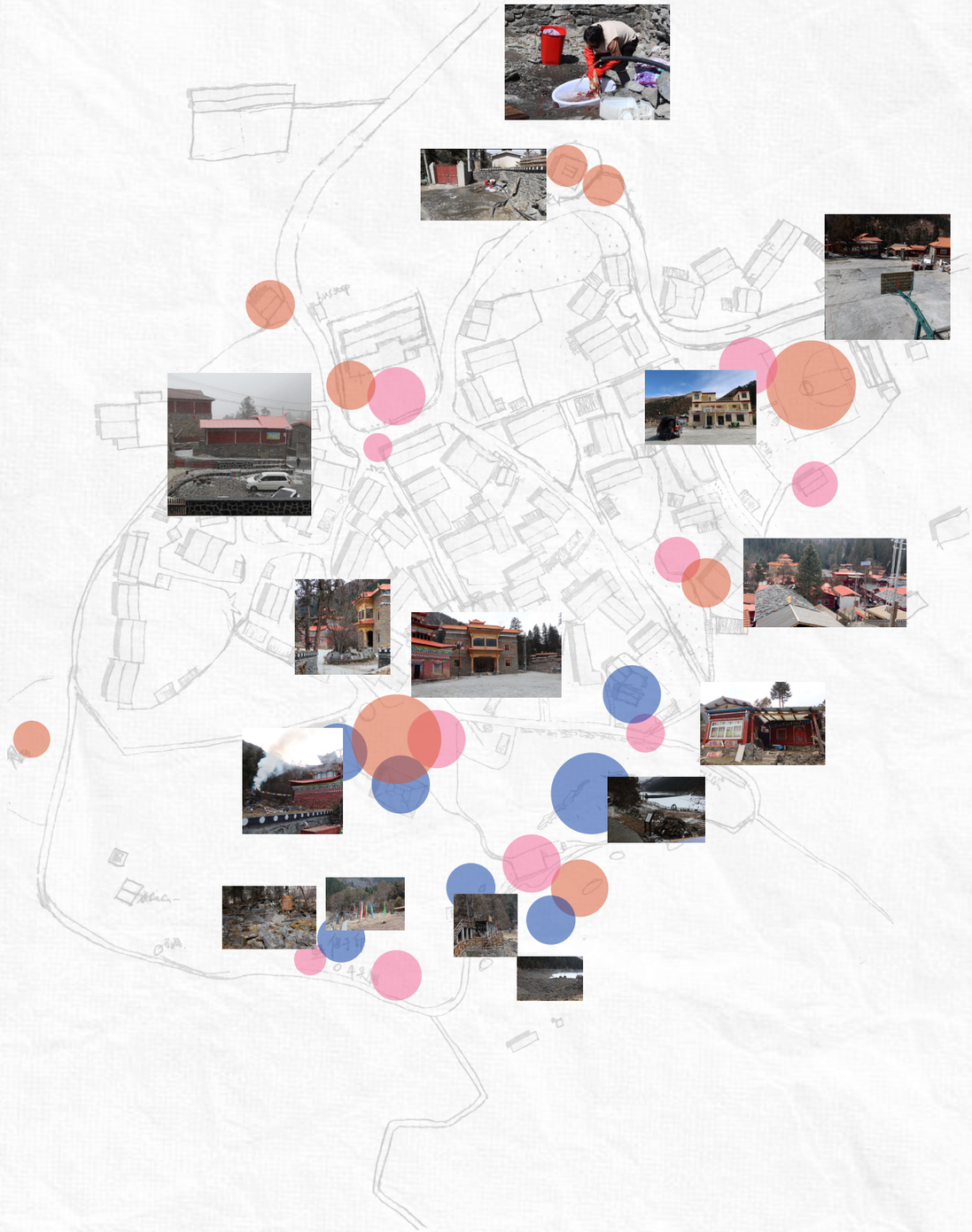


Figure 40.



Figure 41.



Water and winter care

Residents repeatedly described water shortage as one of the village's most immediate winter concerns. With frozen pipes and limited household supply, daily routines are reorganised around one single shared water point and the public dry toilet.



Figure 42.

Care for the lake

During the dry season, villagers described how trapped fish are sometimes moved from shallow water back into the main lake so that they do not die as the water reduces. This practice reveals a form of care that is neither spectacular ritual nor formal management, but an everyday ethical relation to the lake. The lake is therefore not only a scenic or sacred backdrop, but a living entity toward which practical responsibility is expressed.



Figure 43.

Sacred rules in everyday movement

Sacredness appeared less as a single ritual event than as a set of embodied rules, corrections, and interpretations embedded in everyday movement. These included the correct direction of circumambulation, warnings not to step on sacred fragments, caution around former lama-related sites, and moral readings of behaviour near the lake, such as speaking too loudly or throwing stones into the water.



Figure 44.



Youth space and the loss of commons

Children and young residents repeatedly identified the basketball ground as one of the most important places in the village. Conversations revealed that the construction of tourism-oriented facilities displaced former play areas, including small playground equipment and parts of the basketball space used by different age groups. At the same time, parking increasingly occupies the remaining court, while rooms inside the tourist center are now re-used by several kids as places to warm up, gather, and watch television.



Figure 45.



Waste and unfinished tourist infrastructures

At the time of observation, tourist-oriented use of the yak experience center and tourist center appeared limited, and most vehicles parked nearby belonged to villagers rather than visitors. Meanwhile, the newly completed yak experience center was already functioning, in practice, as a point of waste accumulation, while garbage removal depended on collective labour and improvised local arrangements. These observations suggest a gap between planned tourist-oriented programs and current winter use.

Challenges / Limits

These observations are based on informal conversations and situated encounters rather than structured interviews, and should be read as field-derived indications of spatial tension.

Movement Scripts



Figure 46.



Walking with a Local Guide

Purpose
To reconstruct how visitors are guided through the village, and how movement is structured not only by paths, but by local narration, scenic framing, and selective stops.

Process
Two visitor routes were traced together with a local child guide, who explained where he usually takes tourists, what he tells them, and why he chooses a longer loop through the village before reaching the lake.

Participants / Access
The routes were primarily reconstructed through walking with Duoji, who occasionally guides visitors in the village.

Route 1: scenic loop



Figure 47.



Figure 48.

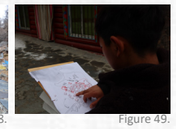


Figure 49.

Findings

- The tourist route is shaped as a narrated sequence rather than a shortest path.
- Sacred traces, scenic markers, and tourist signage are selectively woven into the route.
- Local explanation and official signage do not always align, especially around mani stones and “love” narratives.

Route 2: ritual and village tour



Figure50.

Challenges / Limits

The routes were reconstructed in the off-season and based mainly on local narration rather than direct observation of tourist groups.

tourist view

village view

sacred view

forrest view

yak center area
— village center / gathering



basketball ground
— youth significance



prayer/gathering ground
— most repeated



lakeshore
— spiritual / scenic



children youth middle-aged elders

Figure 51.



Identifying Important Places

Purpose
To identify places considered important by different age groups and to understand how value is distributed across ritual, everyday, and youth-oriented spaces.

Process
Using coloured sticky notes, residents from different age groups were asked to name or mark the most important places in the village. Their responses were then located on the working map.

Participants / Access
Participants included children, youth, middle-aged residents, and elders encountered near the prayer/ gathering area and around the village.



Figure 52.

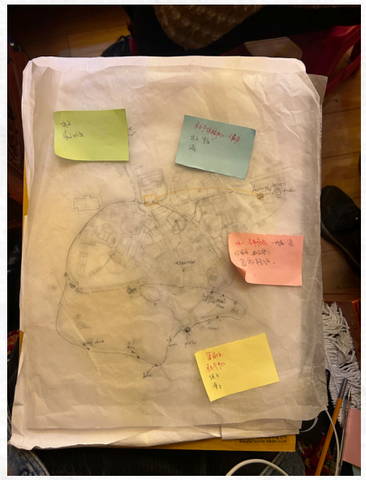


Figure 53.



Figure 54.



Figure 55.



Figure 56.



Figure 57.

Findings

The prayer ground and its forecourt were repeatedly identified as important, but other places also emerged, including the lakeshore, the yak experience center area, and the basketball ground. This suggests that importance is not defined by a single sacred core, but distributed across ritual, social, and seasonal spaces.

Challenges / Limits

Many interviews took place near the prayer building, which may have influenced the responses. The exercise therefore reveals situated perceptions rather than a neutral ranking.

Lake surface
Seasonal lakeshore
Meadow
Tree-covered slopes
Village built-up area
Tourist parking
Tourist walking route
Main road
Village road
Prayer-flag tower
Religious building

Figure 58.

Node Selection

This page uses an adapted Lynch map to compare how tourists, local residents, and ritual participants perceive the same settlement through different paths, edges, and nodes (Lynch, 1960). Rather than mapping exact movement, it shows how spatial image changes with purpose, familiarity, and use. These differences help explain why certain sites later emerged as key nodes for design translation.

For visitors, the settlement is not experienced as a fully accessible village fabric. Many house are partly enclosed by walls, steps, or domestic boundaries, which make the village read more as an edge condition than as an open field. Movement is therefore channelled along a limited route toward the lakeside and a small number of recognisable stopping points. In this map, four main nodes and two smaller nodes are marked to reflect the places where visitors most often stop, look, photograph, or reorient themselves.

For local residents, the village is read very differently. Instead of one guided route, everyday movement follows multiple small paths and informal shortcuts that cut through the settlement as a lived and connected field. The village is perceived more as a surface structured by repeated daily use. Parking areas, shared open grounds, and the water point become important nodes because they support routine activities and circulation.

For ritual activity, the main node is the prayer and gathering building, which acts as the strongest center of orientation and collective movement. At the same time, smaller ritual points also matter, including prayer-related structures and blessing markers distributed across the site. For people arriving from outside to participate in ritual events, the parking area also becomes an important threshold node, linking arrival, gathering, and transition into the ritual landscape.

Tourist perception map

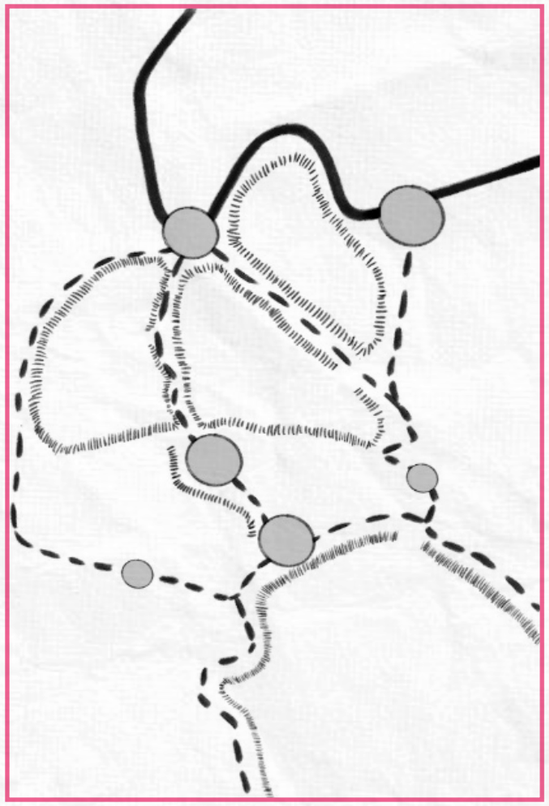


Figure 59.

Local routine perception map



Figure 60.

Ritual perception map

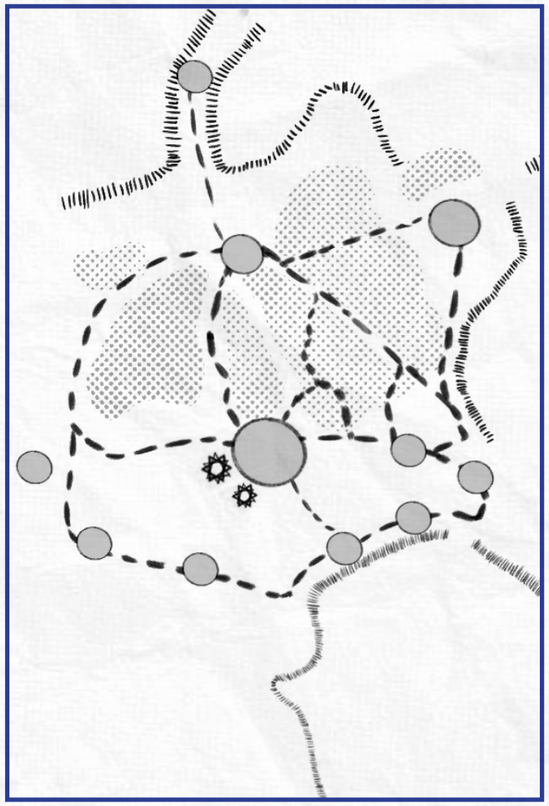
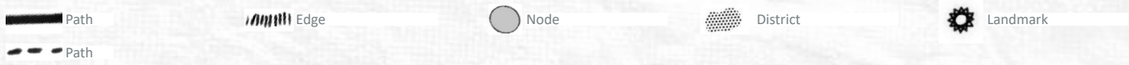


Figure 61.



Lynch Map

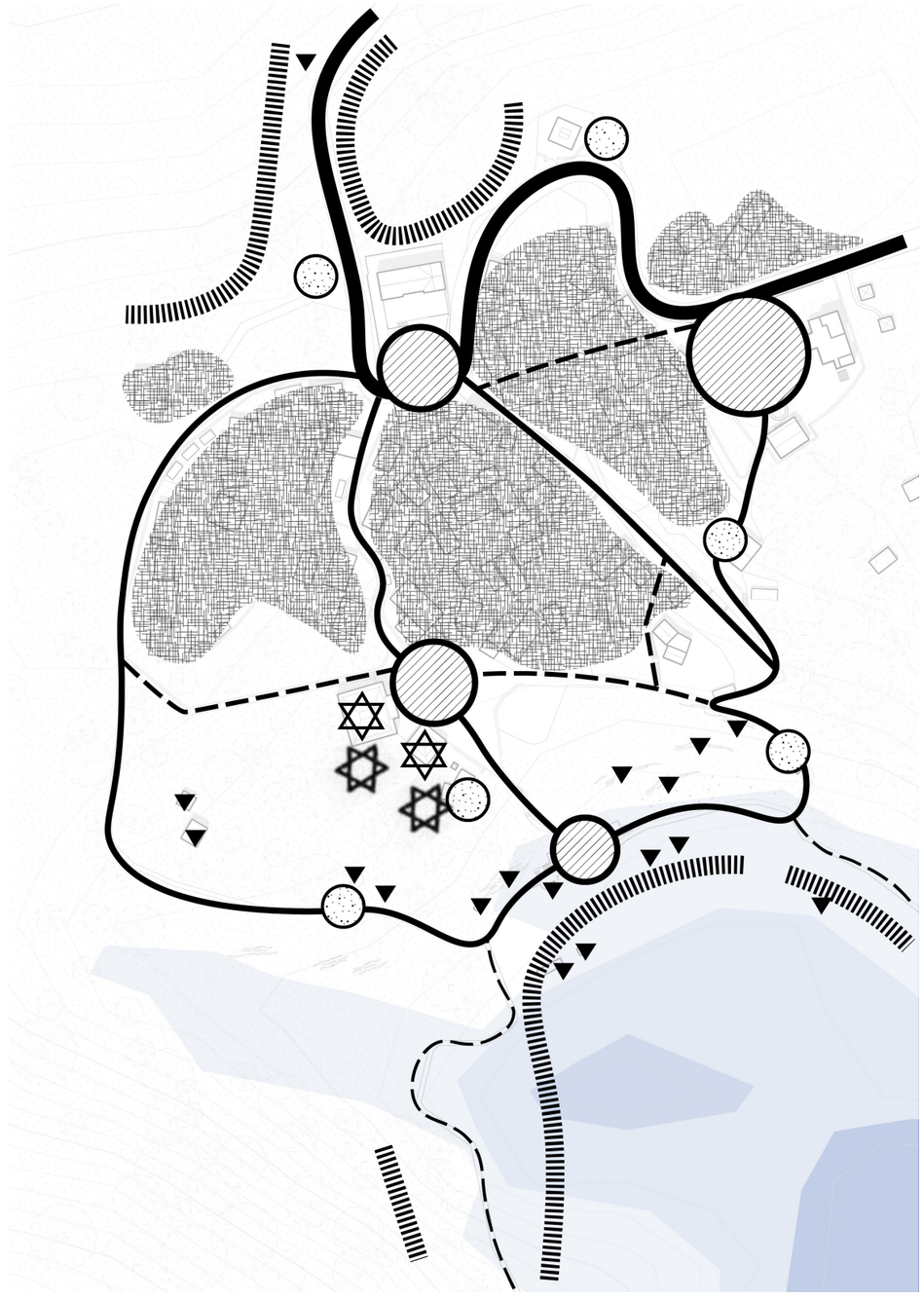


Figure 62.

Liminality Map

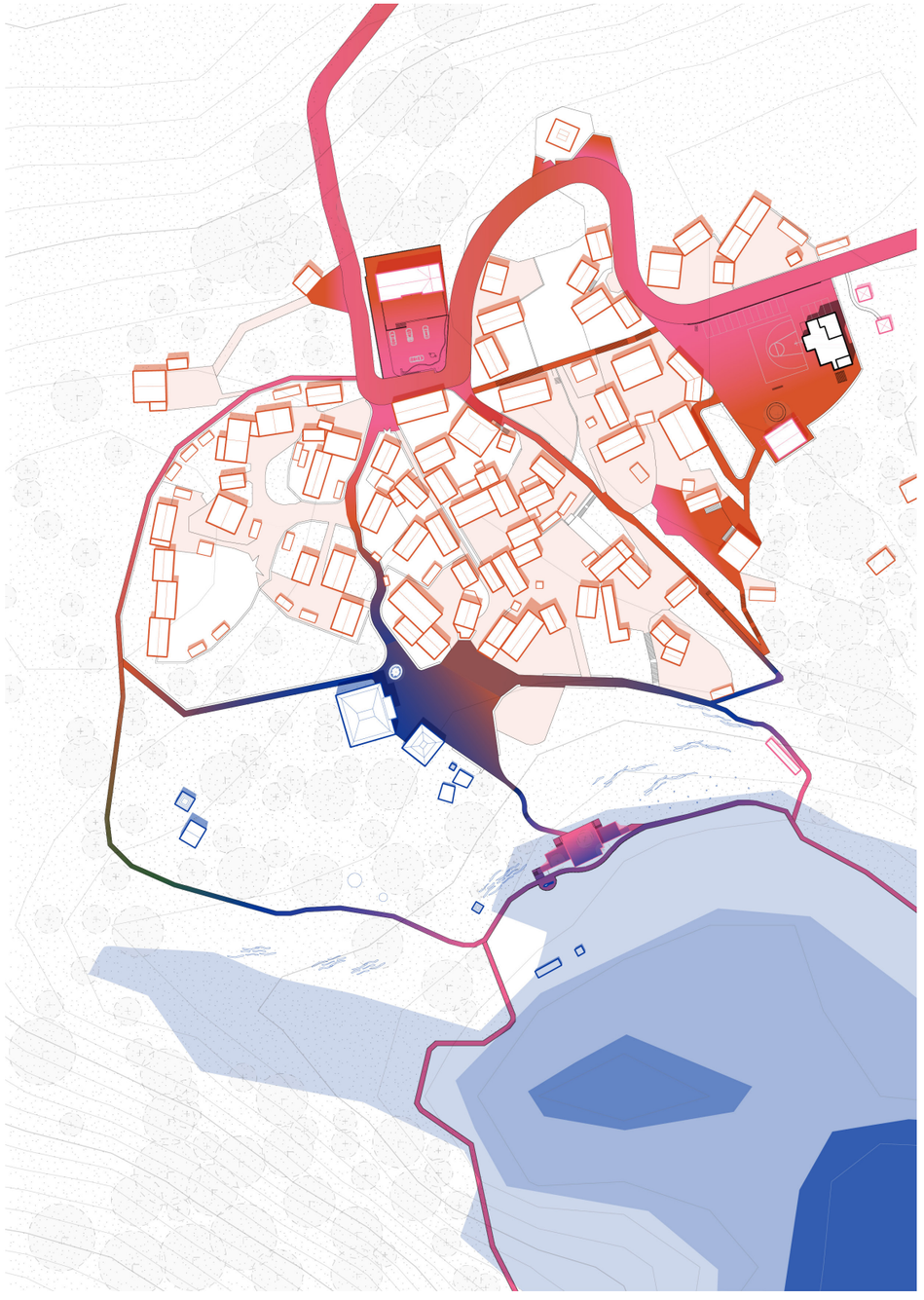


Figure 63.

From Materials to Nodes

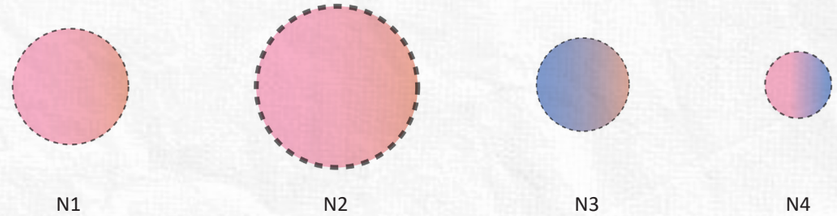
Overlaying movement, values, field frictions, and seasonal pressures to identify working nodes.



Figure 64.

Node Hierarchy and Roles

The selected nodes are not equal design sites.
They form a working hierarchy: one main seasonal commons, one secondary supporting forecourt, and two lighter sacred-threshold scenarios.



Node	Main threshold condition
N1	**Yak Experience Center** Unfinished tourist infrastructure and waste accumulation
N2	**Tourist Center and Basketball Ground** Youth space, loss of commons, and parking pressure
N3	**Prayer / Gathering Building and Forecourt** Shared ritual ground and everyday sacred use
N4	**Lakeshore and Ice Edge** Care for the lake and sacred rules in movement

Figure 65.

Node selection criteria

The nodes were selected where several layers of evidence overlapped. Priority was given to places where:

1. movement routes intersect or accumulate,
2. shared importance is repeatedly expressed,
3. behavioural or sacred rules become visible
4. winter care or infrastructural pressure is concentrated,
5. there is potential for further spatial translation through section, scenario, or small-scale intervention.

Reading of the selected nodes

The selected nodes are not fixed final sites of intervention, but working sites through which threshold conditions become legible. Together, they show that the village is organised not by a single sacred centre alone, but through overlapping regimes of movement, care, gathering, and interpretation. Some nodes are defined by winter care and infrastructural pressure, others by shared importance, youth use, or the visibility of sacred rules in everyday movement.

Towards design translation

At this stage, the nodes are understood as analytical anchors rather than resolved design sites. In the next step, each node will be further examined through sections, sequences, and small-scale spatial strategies in order to test how threshold conditions might be translated into reversible and culturally sensitive design responses.

Workshop 1 as support for seasonal design



Figure 66.



Figure 67.

people 4 Local residents
date 2026.03.11
tool Printed map, coloured threads, pins, markers.

goal
To understand seasonal movement, ritual rhythms, and changing occupation around the settlement.

instruction
Participants mapped important places, paths, and seasonal movements on an aerial image using threads and pins.

note
This workshop helped identify overlapping temporal patterns of ritual activity, pastoral return, children's presence, and tourism, supporting later node selection and design translation.

Source: Author's fieldwork (2026); Chipchase (2017); Hamdi (2004).

Seasonal mobility rythm

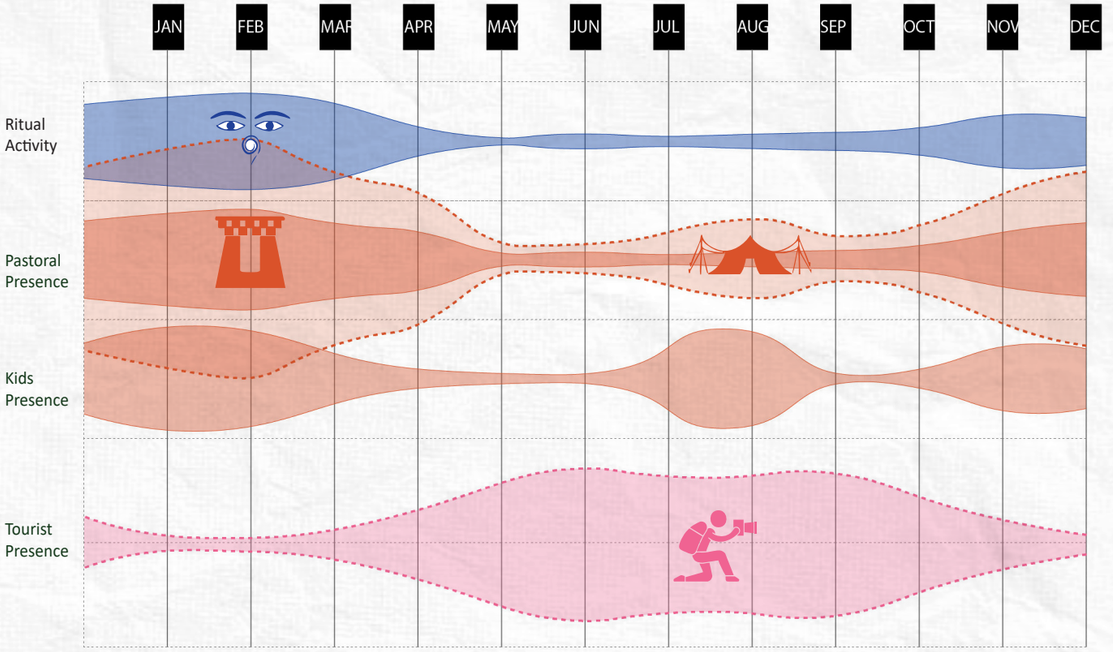


Figure 68.

Workshop 2 as support for seasonal design



Figure 69.



Figure 70.

people 20 local children
date 2026.03.13
tool Paper, coloured pens, drawing prompts, informal conversation.

goal
To understand children's activities and spatial preferences as a basis for seasonal design.
instruction
Children were asked to draw what they like to do outdoors and what kinds of spaces they enjoy using.
note
The drawings revealed recurring preferences for open ground, edges for sitting and watching, shaded places, collective centers, and spaces for ball games. These were translated into modules, shade structures, event seating, and flexible open ground.

Source: Author's workshop with local children (2026); Hamdi (2004, 2010).Source: Author's fieldwork (2026); Chipchase (2017); Hamdi (2004).

Children's spatial preference

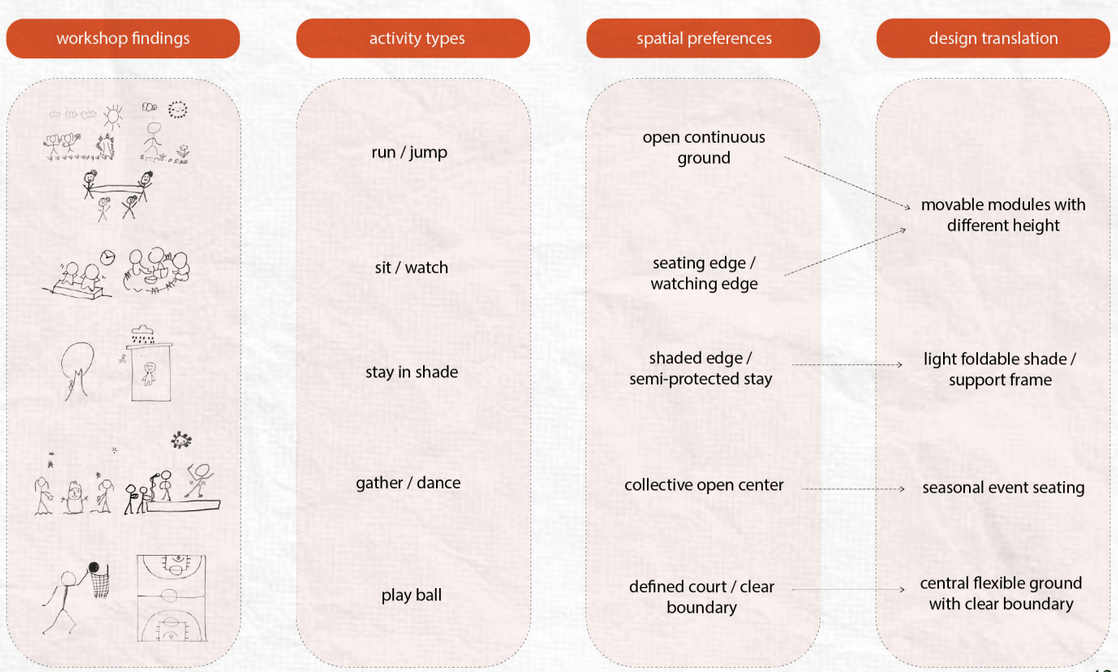


Figure 71.

Reconfigurable Module System

From workshop to module logic

Based on the workshop findings, the design responds not with fixed playground equipment, but with a reconfigurable module system that can shift under different needs.

Module family

Three module heights create different bodily relations.



Figure 72.

Type A — Low



Figure 73.

Type B — Medium



Figure 74.

Type C — High

Different Combination Forms

Through different combinations, the modules can define boundaries, support informal play, create watching edges, and form event seating.

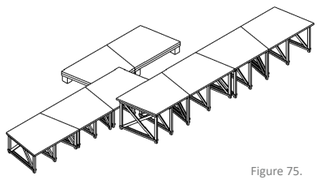


Figure 75.

Linear Edge
define court edge / prevent random parking

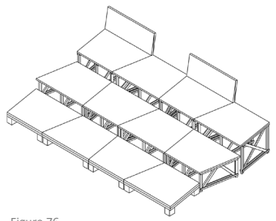


Figure 76.

Stepped Cluster
play, climb, sit together

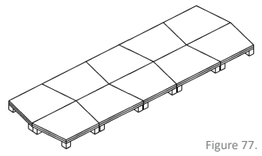


Figure 77.

Stage Platform
children go on top and perform

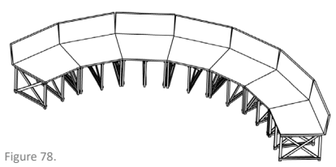


Figure 78.

Circular / Semi-circular Gathering
event seating / guozhuang watching edge

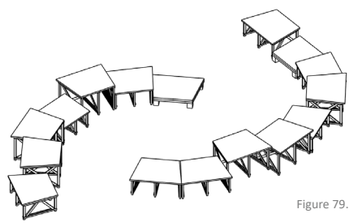


Figure 79.

Scattered Field
informal play / flexible occupation

Foldable Shade Support

A lightweight foldable frame supports a seasonal textile canopy inspired by the material language of local black tents. It provides temporary shade and a soft spatial edge, while remaining openable, foldable, and adaptable to different seasonal uses.



Figure 80.

folded

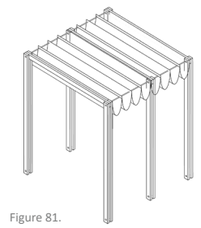


Figure 81.

half-open

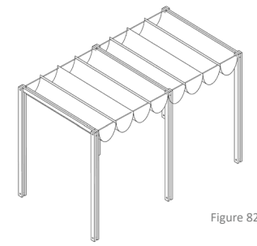


Figure 82.

open

Low-Tech Assembly

The system combines a yak-hair textile shading, hemp-rope suspension, and a local timber frame. The textile draws from the material logic of black tents traditionally used in the region, while the rope support allows a flexible adjustment of span and openness. Round wooden connectors join the timber structures and translate the logic of local construction technik into a simplified, low-tech, and reversible system.

Explosion

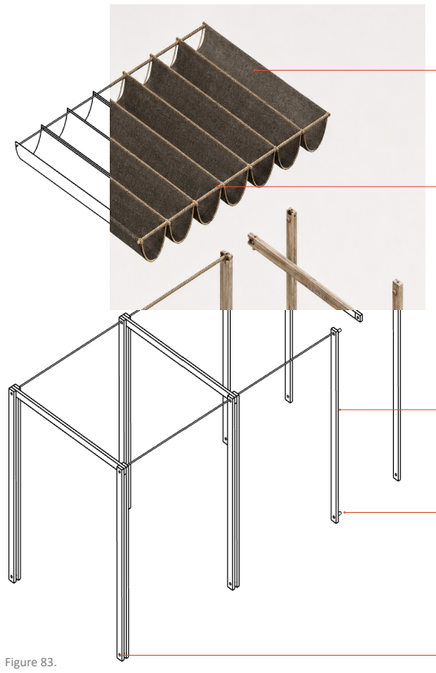


Figure 83.

Material Palette



Yak-hair textile
seasonal shade / reference to local black tents



Hemp rope
adjustable textile support / flexible span



Local timber frame
lightweight structure / locally legible construction



Low-tech timber connectors
joinery-inspired connection / demountable assembly



Simple base support
minimal ground contact

Figure 84.

Node 1 — Yak Experience Center

Parking confusion and underused public space



Figure 85.

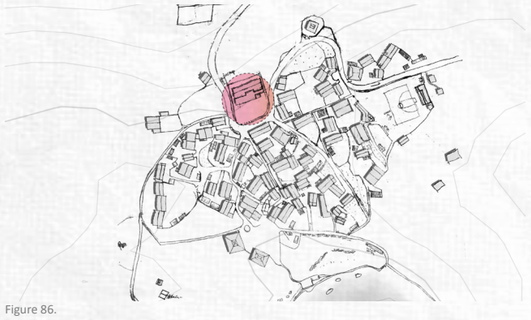


Figure 86.

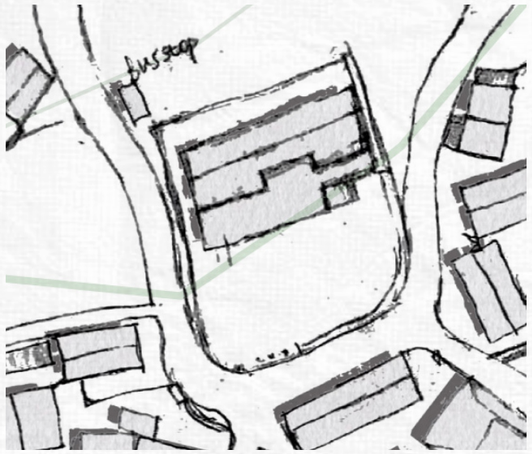


Figure 87.

Role:
a reclaimed forecourt for everyday use and light seasonal support

Users:
tourists in summer, locals in winter, normal and event use

Main activity:
rear parking + forecourt play + terrace suppor

Direction:
organized parking organized rear parking + reclaimed forecourt + activated upper terrace + seasonal convertible commons

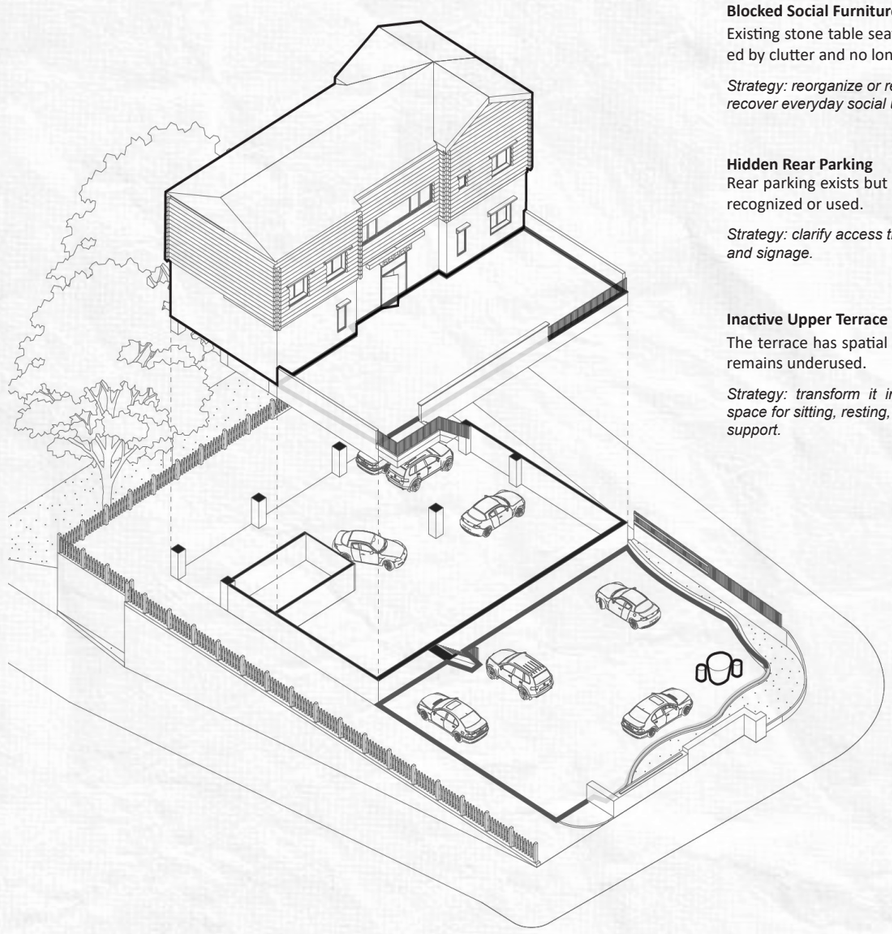


Figure 88.

Occupied Front Ground
Cars occupy the open forecourt and limit public use.

Strategy: clear the front area and return it to shared everyday use.

Blocked Social Furniture
Existing stone table seating is surrounded by clutter and no longer used.

Strategy: reorganize or relocate seating to recover everyday social use.

Hidden Rear Parking
Rear parking exists but is not clearly recognized or used.

Strategy: clarify access through markings and signage.

Inactive Upper Terrace
The terrace has spatial potential but remains underused.

Strategy: transform it into a shaded space for sitting, resting, and seasonal support.

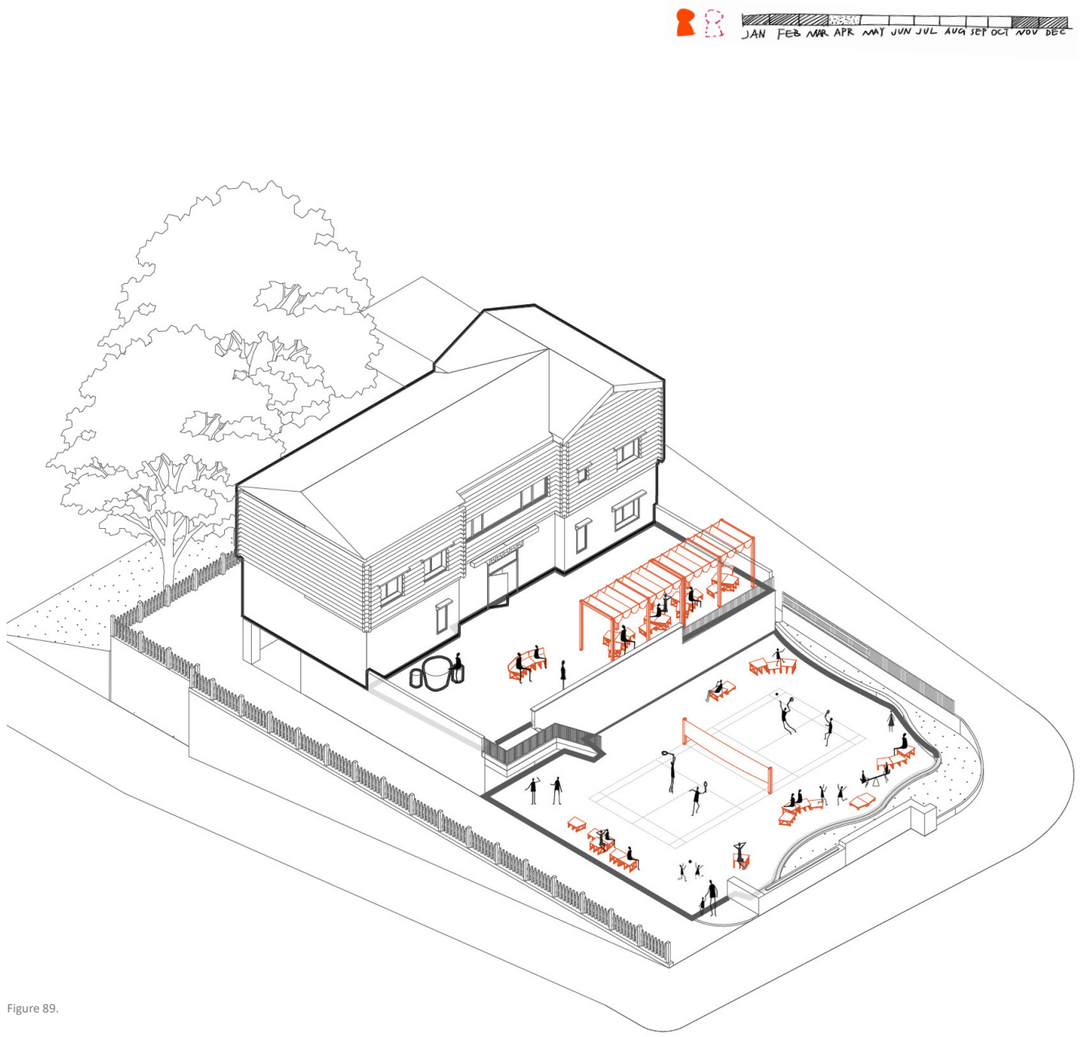


Figure 89.

winter normal

In winter, parking is directed to the rear so that the front forecourt can support everyday village use, including informal play, badminton, and staying.
The upper terrace becomes a quieter place for sitting, resting, and watching.

Rear Parking Priority

- cars are guided to the rear parking area
- front ground is released for village use

Active Forecourt

- open ground supports badminton and informal play
- everyday activity returns to the front space

Resting Terrace

- the upper terrace becomes a quieter place to sit and stay
- shaded structure supports resting and watching below

Flexible Modules

- light modules provide sitting, waiting, and small social use
- the edge remains adaptable for different everyday needs

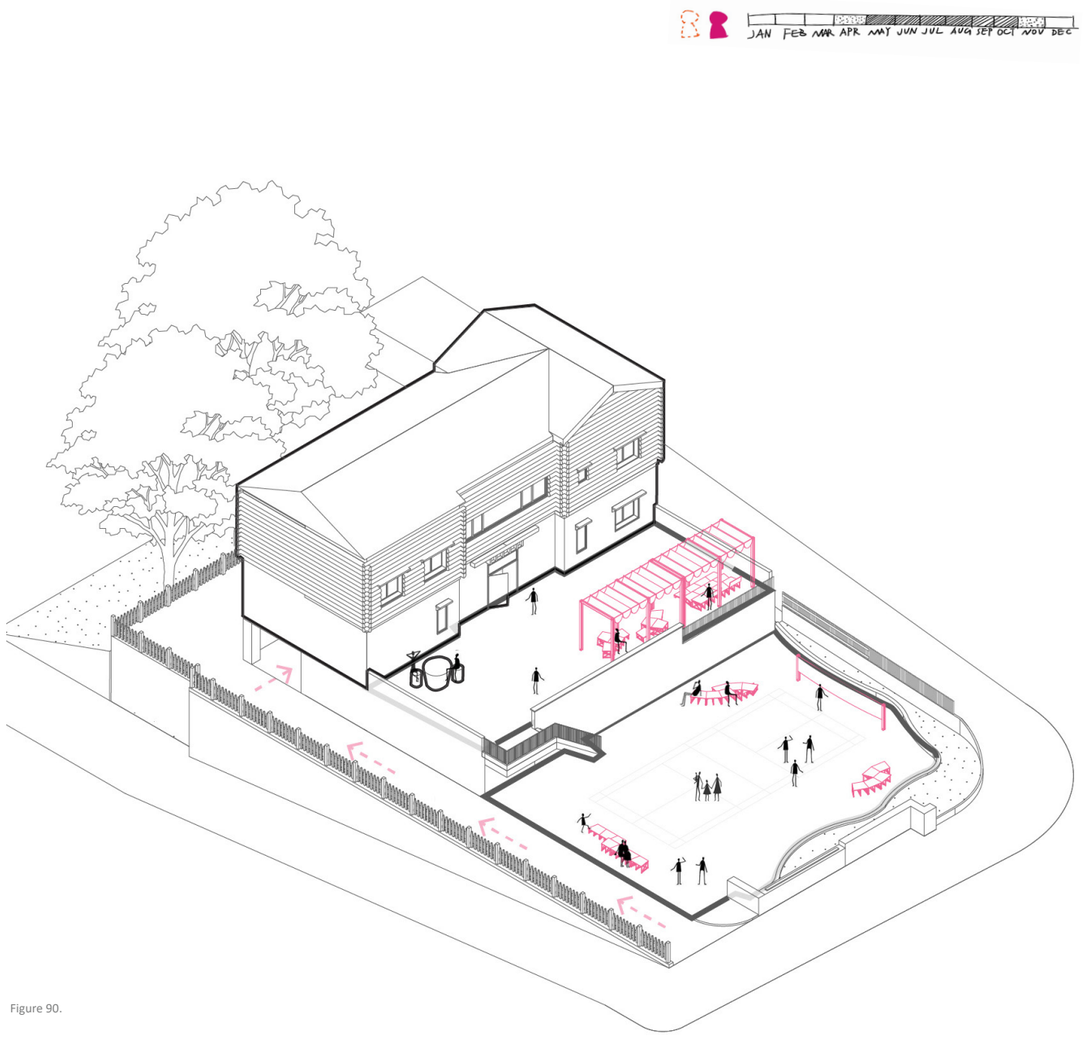


Figure 90.

tourism season

During the tourist season, the rear parking remains the main parking area, while the front ground stays open as a shared forecourt.
The upper terrace hosts a light seasonal structure for information, local display, or temporary selling.

Organised tourist parking

- parking remains mainly at the rear of the building
- the front forecourt stays clearer and more legible

arrival and forecourt

- the front ground supports short stay, waiting, and orientation
- visitors can pause without occupying the whole space

Terrace information / stall support

- the upper terrace accommodates resting, information, or small local selling
-the foldable structure acts as a seasonal support element

Flexible seating

- light modules provide temporary sitting and short-stay support
- the forecourt remains open, shared, and low-impact

Node 2 — Tourist Center and Basketball Ground

Youth space, loss of commons, and parking pressure

Role:
main seasonal commons / event ground

Users:
tourists in summer,
locals/children in winter, normal & event



Figure 91.



Figure 92.

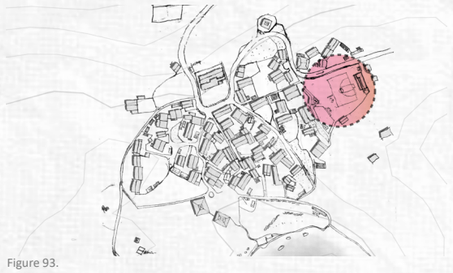


Figure 93.

Main activity:
parking & basketball / children / collective event

Direction:
organized parking + seasonal convertible commons

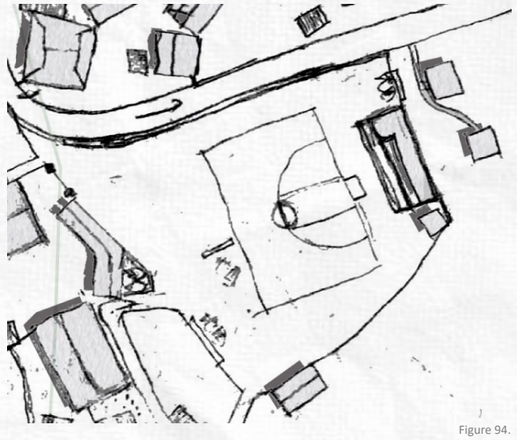


Figure 94.

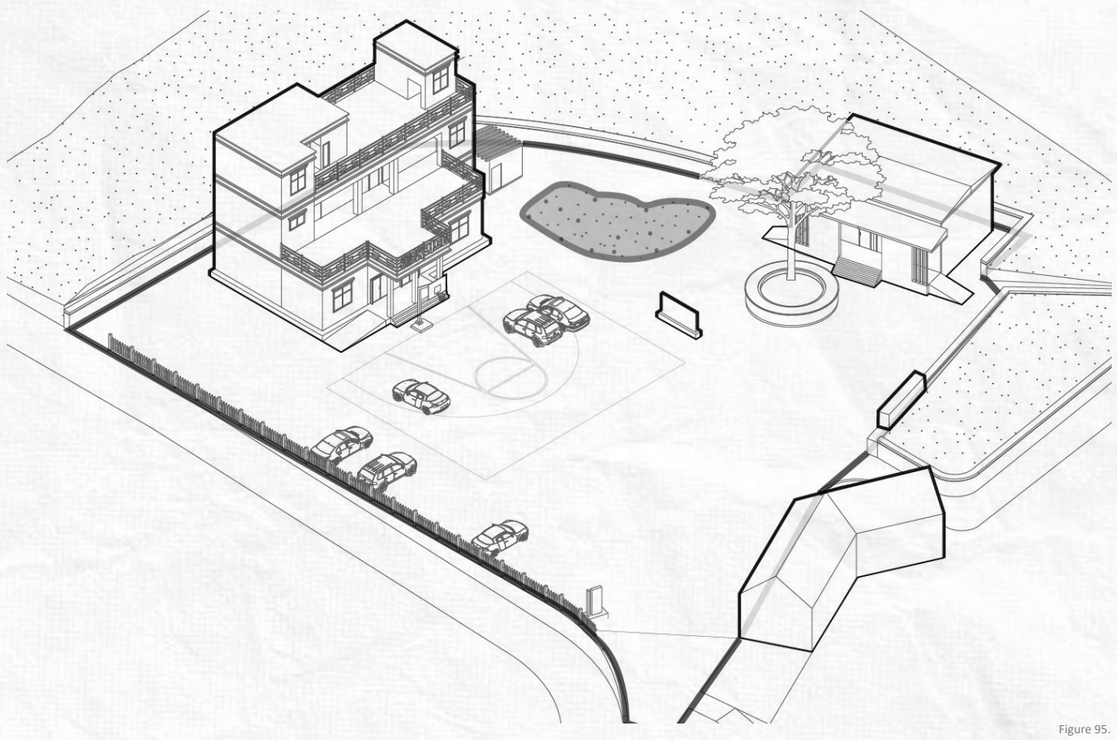
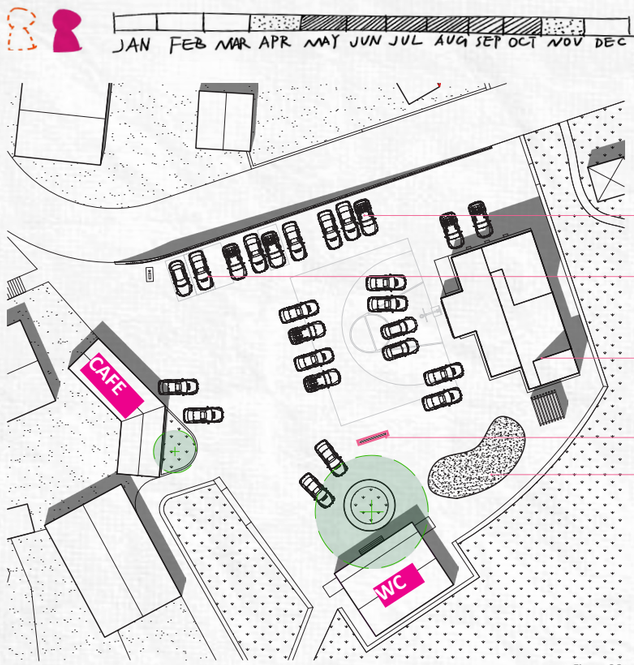


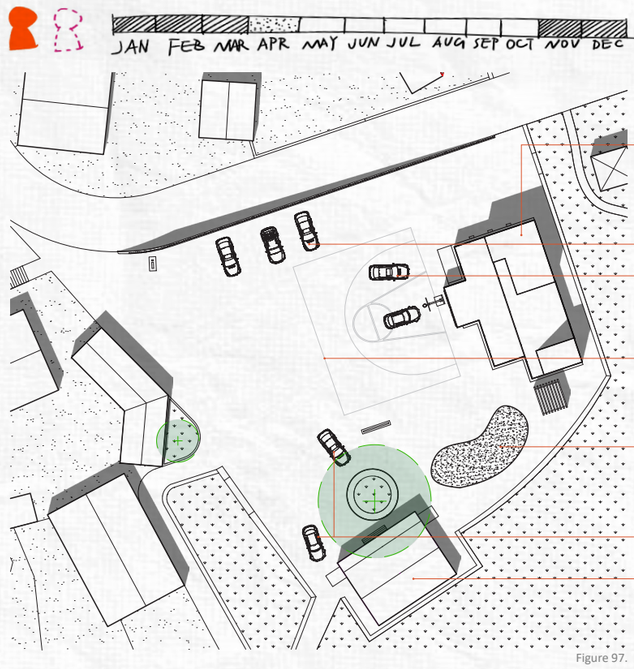
Figure 95.



PARKING PRESSURE

- Unclear parking boundaries
- Limited parking spaces
- Abandoned tourist center
- Confusing information board
- Construction waste occupying activity space

Figure 96.

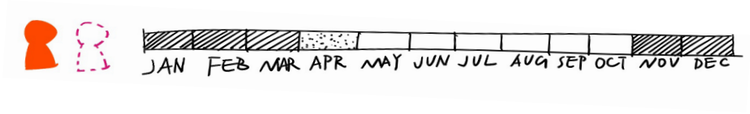


LOSS OF COMMONS

- Abandoned tourist center function as storage and children's secret base
- Unclear parking boundaries
- Cars occupying activity space
- Unclear basketball court boundaries
- Construction waste occupying activity space
- Illegal parking
- Closed due to the water pipe being frozen

Figure 97.

Tourism infrastructure occupies the village's main open ground, creating parking pressure and the loss of youth commons.



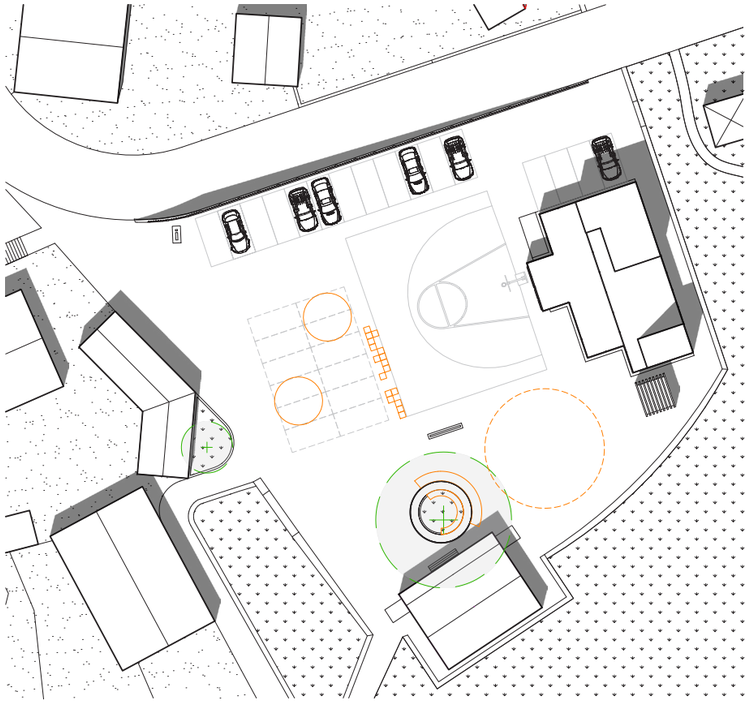


Figure 98.

winter normal

In the off-season, the ground shifts back toward everyday village use: basketball, children's play, sitting, and staying.

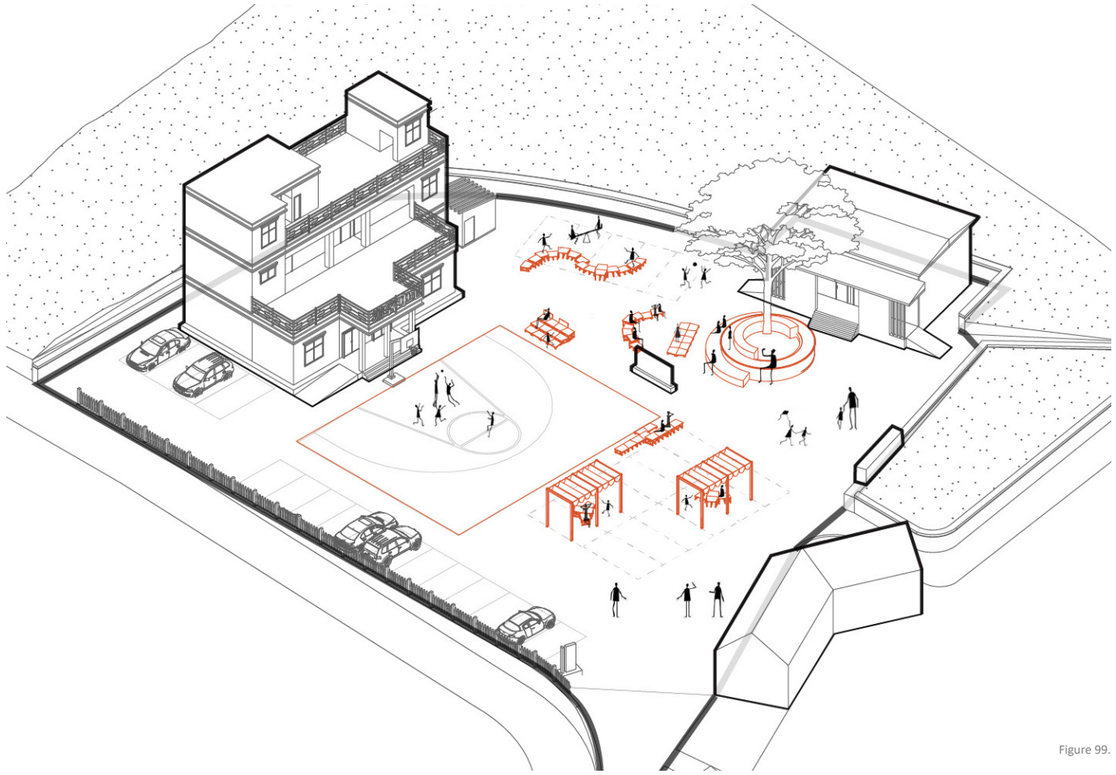
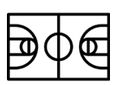


Figure 99.

Defined Court Boundary



- modules define the court
- prevents random parking

Children's Play Support



- play, climb, perch
- supports children's activity

Sitting & Watching Edge



- everyday sitting
- watching games and play

Released Local Commons



- more everyday use space
- parking becomes common space



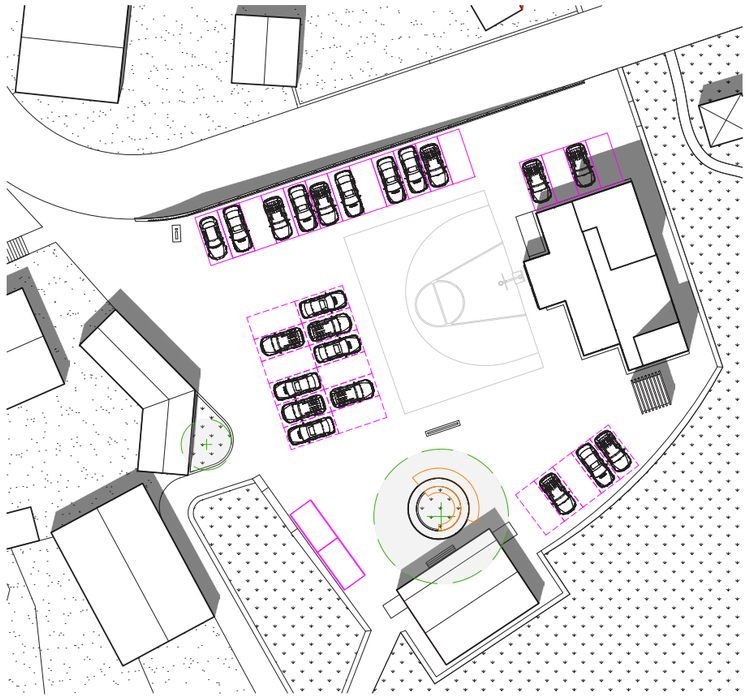


Figure 100.

tourism season

In peak season, the ground accommodates organized parking while keeping limited space for pause, orientation, and local seasonal support.

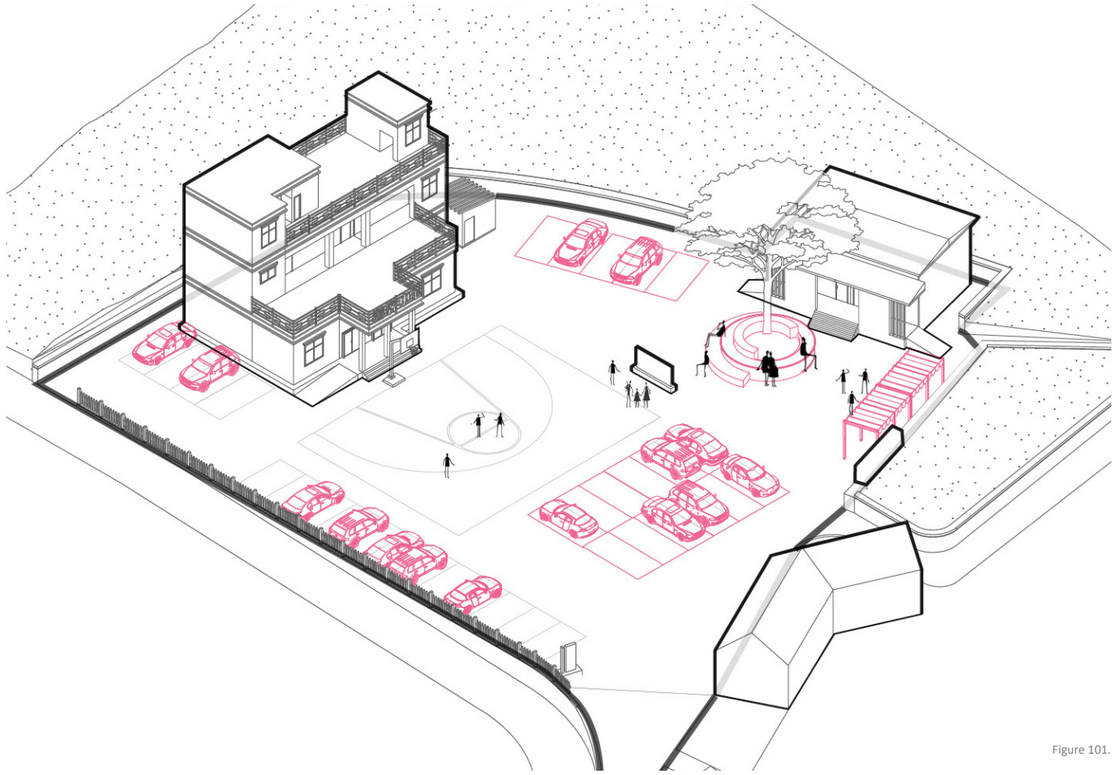


Figure 101.

Organized Parking

- *marked parking bays*
- *clearer parking order*

Pause & Wait Edge

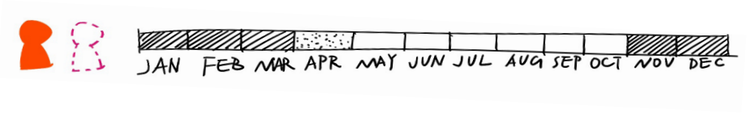
- *short stay*
- *waiting and resting*

Basic Information Point

- *orientation*
- *local guidance*

Optional Local Stall Edge

- *seasonal display*
- *small local selling point*



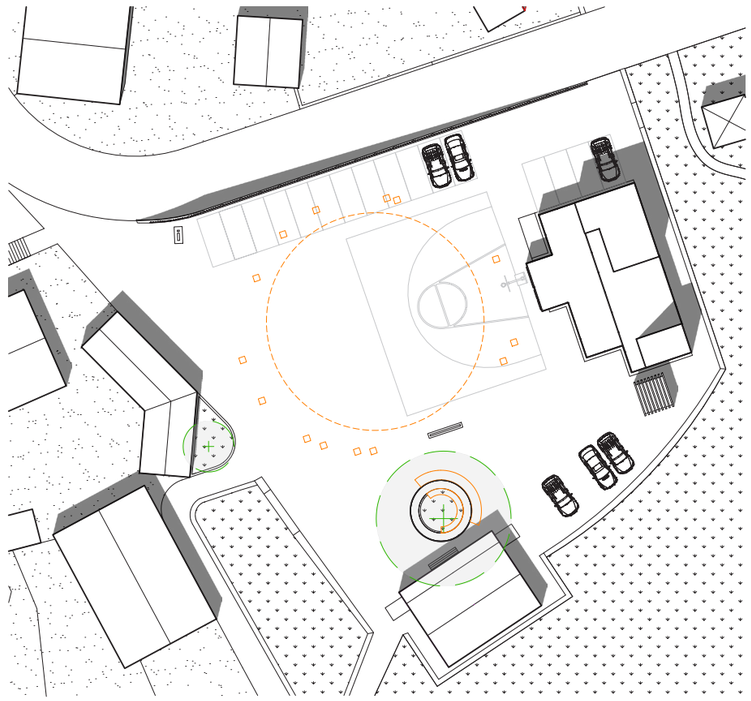


Figure 102.

event mode

During collective events, the same ground is released as a shared open center with reconfigured edge support.

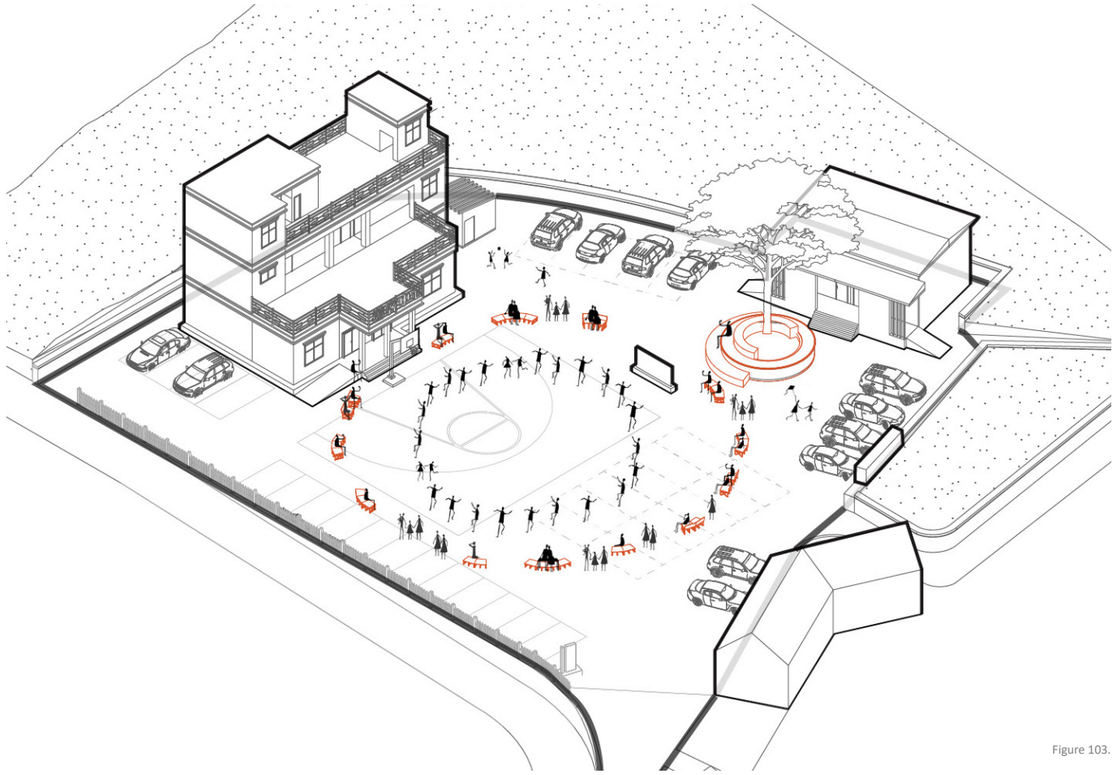


Figure 103.

Open Central Ground

- clear central event space
- center kept open

Guozhuang Ring

- circular gathering space
- supports collective dancing

Reconfigured Edge Seating

- modules form event seating
- sit and watch from the edge

Flexible Event Modules

- modules shift by season
- supports multiple event uses

Node 3 — Prayer / Gathering Building and Forecourt

Shared ritual ground and everyday sacred use



Figure 104.



Figure 105.



Figure 106.

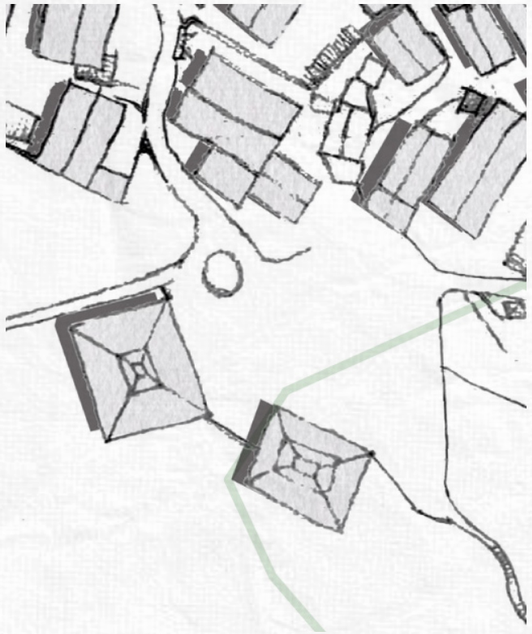


Figure 107.

Role:
sacred-adjacent threshold and gathering ground

Users:
ritual users, local villagers, passing visitors

Main activity:
slowing down, gathering, ritual passage, everyday sacred use

Direction:
paving articulation + subtle seating + legible path hierarchy + respectful threshold definition

This node is developed as a light spatial strategy rather than a full construction proposal, because of its sacred-adjacent condition.

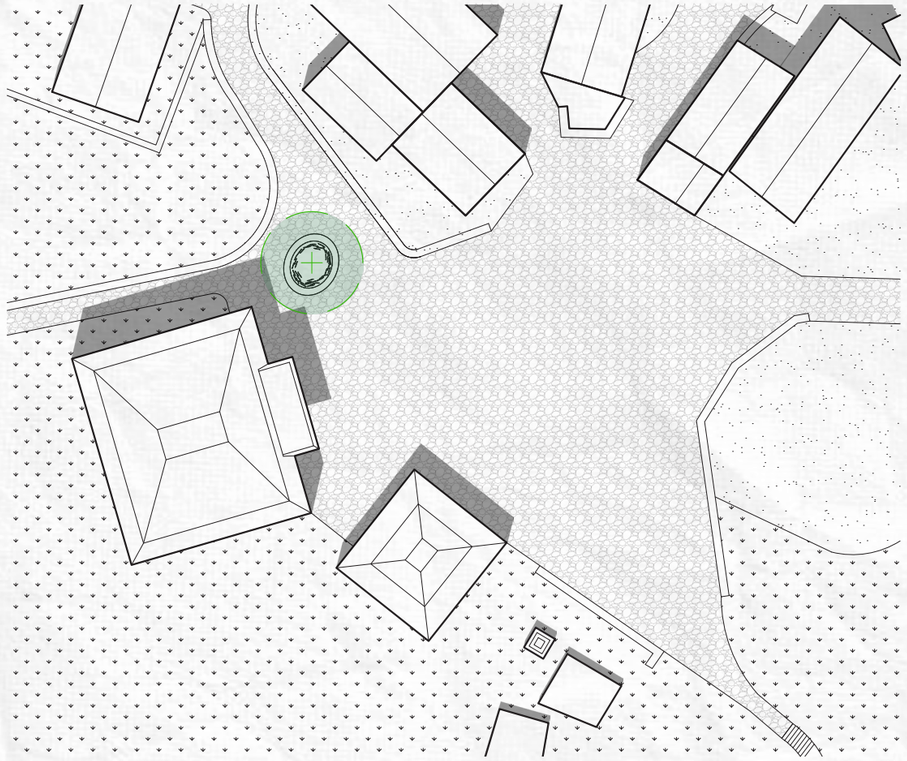


Figure 108.

Overlapping movement

everyday passage, ritual approach, and visitor movement overlap without spatial hierarchy.

Strategy: use paving and directional articulation to distinguish movement without rigid separation.

Unclear sacred threshold

the forecourt is spatially open, but the sacred condition is not clearly legible to outsiders.

Strategy: define a threshold ground through subtle geometry and centered paving.

No place to pause respectfully

people pass through, but there is little support for pausing, waiting, or observing with respect.

Strategy: add light edge seating / waiting points outside the ritual center.

Weak articulation of gathering ground

the shared ground lacks a readable center and edge relationship.

Strategy: strengthen the center-edge structure so gathering and circulation can coexist.

Design Proposal

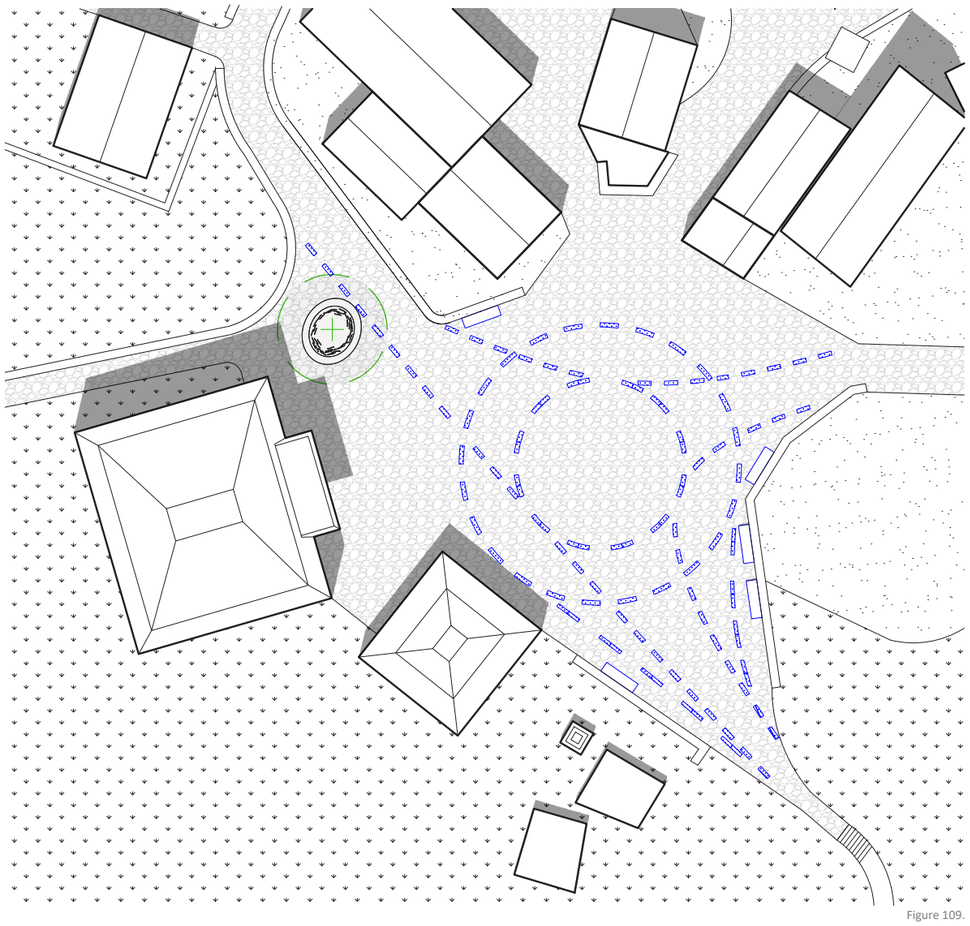


Figure 109.

Layered Use of the Threshold Ground

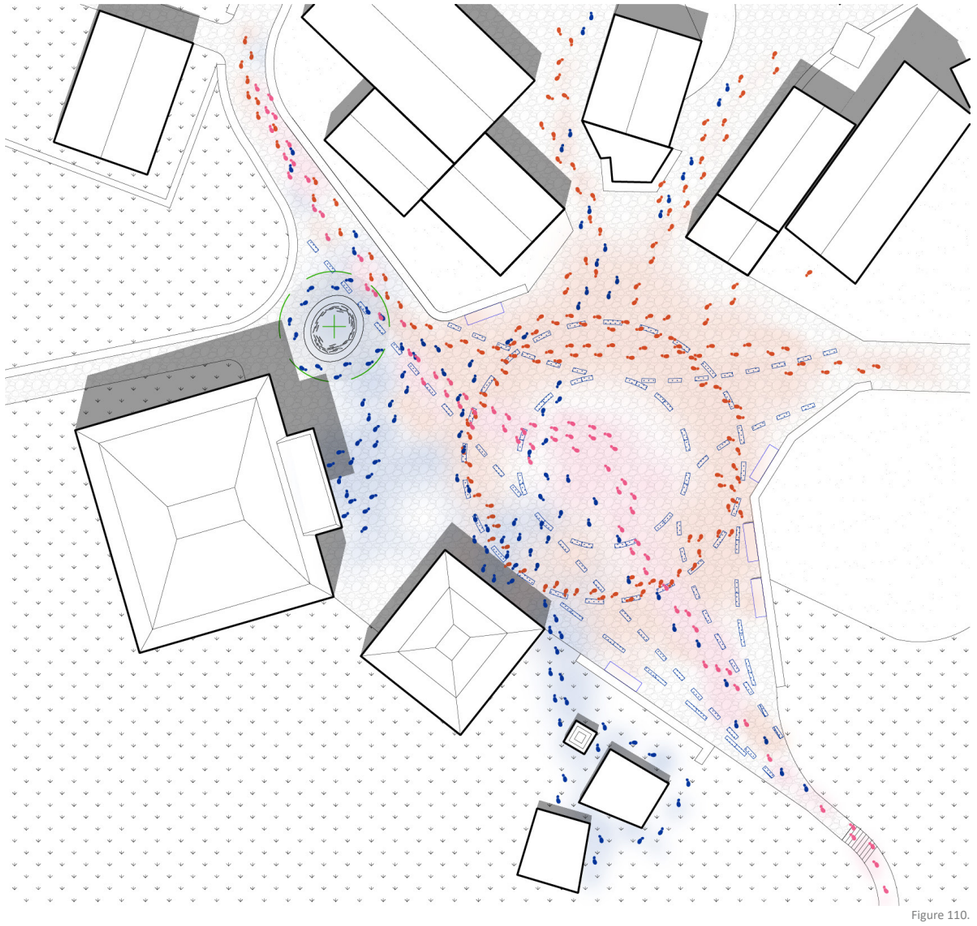


Figure 110.

Ritual users

Local movement

Visitors

Node 4 — Lakeshore and Ice Edge

Care for the lake and sacred rules in movement



Figure 111.



Figure 112.

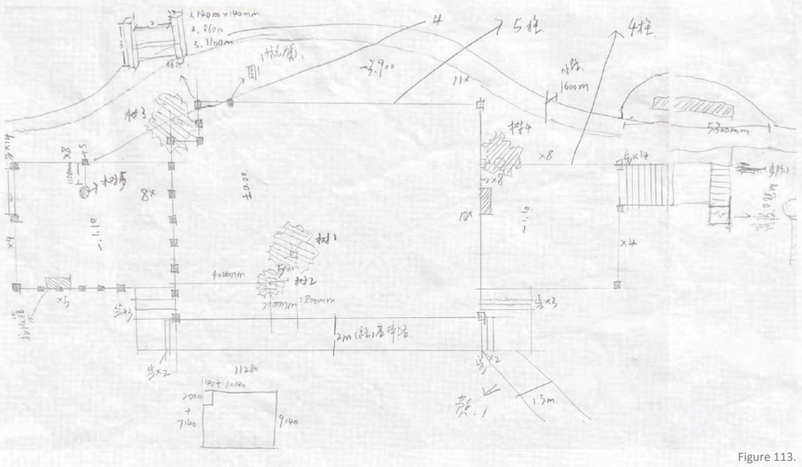


Figure 113.

Role:
pause and orientation node at the sacred lakeshore edge

Users:
visitors approaching the lake, villagers passing, occasional ritual presence

Main activity:
unclear pause boundary, over-approach risk, seasonal water fluctuation

Direction:
create a minimal raised threshold that supports pause, viewing, and respect toward the lake

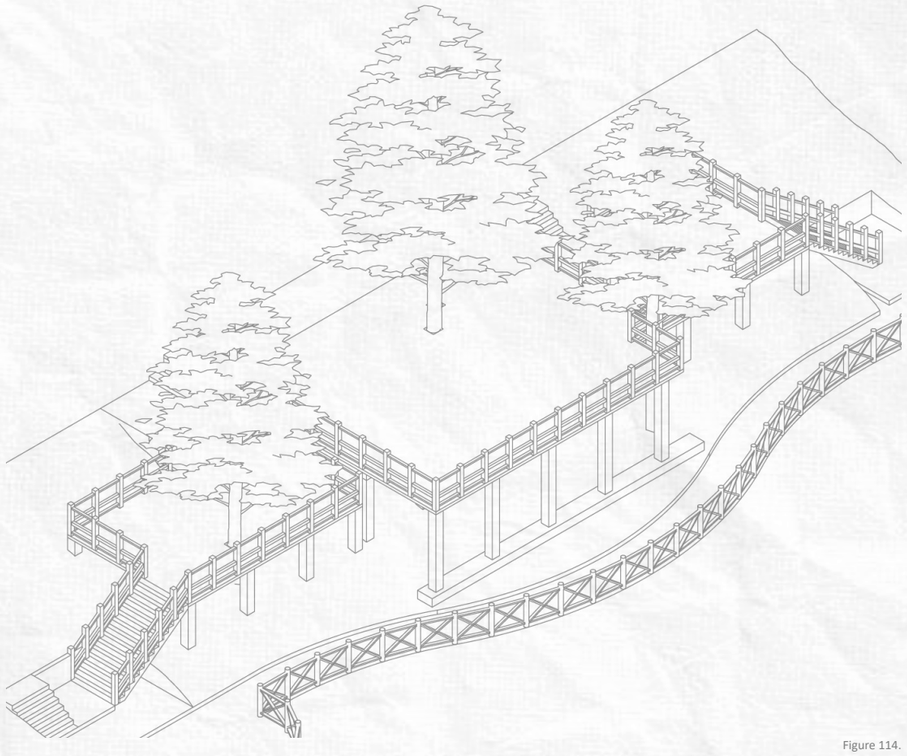


Figure 114.

Problems

Over-approach to the lake edge

- the current platform encourages direct approach
- the sacred boundary is not spatially legible

No place to pause with intention

- visitors may stop randomly
- there is little guidance for orientation or quiet staying

Strategies

Raised pause threshold

- a slightly lifted edge element creates a place to stop and look
- sitting is integrated into the threshold, not pushed toward the lake

Seasonal resilience

- the upper pause edge remains usable when water rises
- the lower edge can recede without losing the overall spatial logic

normal condition

A raised pause edge allows visitors to stop, sit, and orient themselves toward the lake without stepping further into the sacred edge.

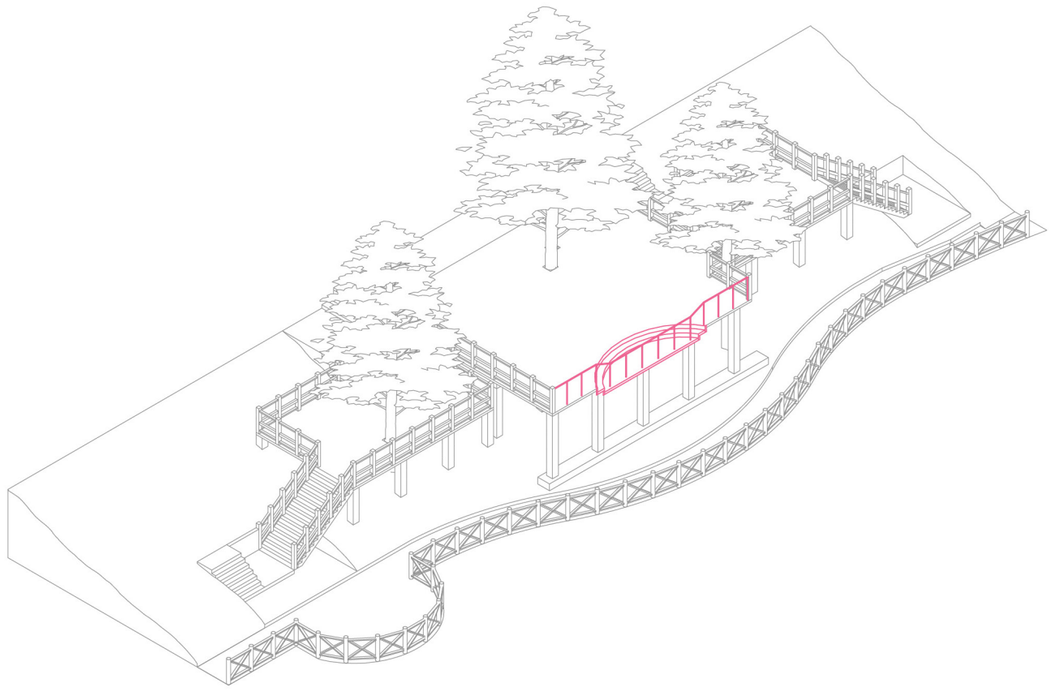


Figure 115.

high-water season

When water rises, the lower edge becomes inaccessible, while the raised pause structure remains as a minimal threshold for viewing and orientation.

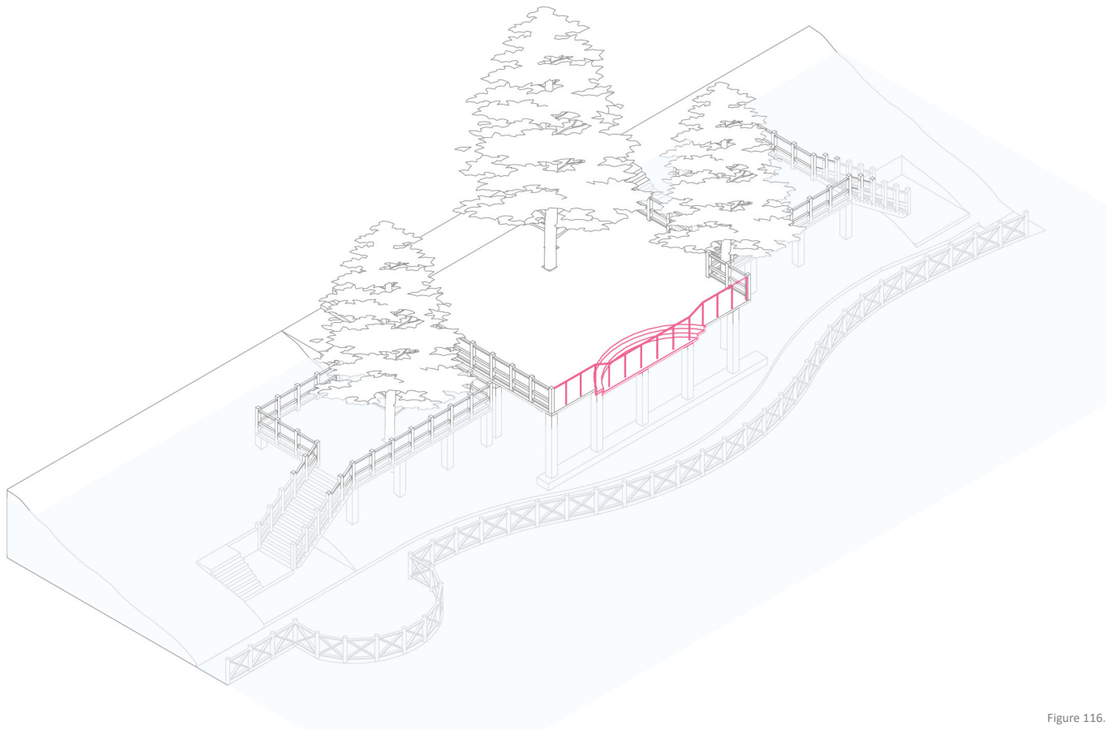


Figure 116.

Discussion

1 Re-reading the Liminal: From Pre-field Framing to Situated Threshold Conditions

Liminal space was already central to the project before fieldwork. From the beginning, I was reading the village, the prayer and gathering building, and the sacred lake as a threshold field rather than as separate sites. Pre-field studies on threshold devices, heterotopic relations, and vernacular spatial typologies helped establish this first reading (Foucault, 1986; Turner, 1969; Bhabha, 1994; Herrle & Wozniak, 2023).

What changed in the field was not the presence of liminality itself, but my understanding of what actually produced it. Before arrival, I tended to read threshold conditions mainly through visible markers, spatial types, and symbolic contrasts. In the village, these conditions appeared more through use: where children played, where cars were left, where people paused, crossed, gathered, or avoided. Seasonal return, everyday movement, unfinished infrastructure, and uneven occupation of commons all became part of how liminal space was made and felt.

So the project did not move away from liminal space. It became more grounded in it. The pre-field material still mattered, but more as a first reading than as an answer. Fieldwork shifted the focus from abstract threshold categories to situated threshold conditions shaped by time, pressure, and negotiation. This also helps explain why the final design response took the form of differentiated nodes rather than one fixed intervention (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Bhatta, 2023).

2 Tourism as an Absent Presence

One of the clearest field findings was that tourism was still shaping the settlement even when tourists themselves were not very present. I arrived in late winter, so the village was not crowded and the lake edge was relatively quiet. But tourist-oriented space was still there, and quite legible. Parking areas, photo points, visitor signs, route markers, and unfinished or underused facilities continued to organise how space was approached and understood. In that sense, tourism did not disappear in the off-season. It remained as an absent presence, embedded in infrastructure, spatial expectation, and ways of seeing the site (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Bhatta, 2023).

This is quite interesting that it shifted the project away from a simple idea of tourist conflict. People tend to consider it as something that only happens when visitors physically arrive in large numbers. But what I found was that the tension was still present in quieter forms in the field. Some spaces were oversized for seasonal use. Some commons were partially occupied by parking or tourism-related infratructures. Some paths seemed to carry two different logics at once: local care, ritual habit, and everyday circulation on one hand, and viewing, photographing, and route control on the other. Tourism was therefore not only a matter of flow, but also of spatial order. Reading it this way made it possible to see how seasonal design might respond not only to peak occupation, but also to the quieter infrastructures and anticipations on the apsces that remain in place throughout the year.

3 Positionality and Situated Field Reading

My reading of the site was shaped by a position that was neither fully inside nor fully outside. It moved between the two. I come from the wider Tibetan cultural region (half Gyarong), so some ritual language, spatial habits, and social sensitivities did not feel entirely unfamiliar. But I was not from the village, did not speak the local Tibetan language, and depended on local guides and family networks to understand many situations. At the same time, I entered the field as an architecture student trained in a different academic context, carrying my own concepts, methods, and expectations. This in-between position helped in some ways, but it also required caution. In that sense, familiarity and distance were both present, and neither of them was fully reliable on its own. Familiarity could make me assume too quickly that I understood something, while distance could make me see patterns clearly but flatten their complexity. Tenzin's discussion of layered and situational nativeness was helpful here, especially the idea that one's relation to a place or community is not fixed, but shifts depending on context and form of engagement (Tenzin, 2024).

This also shaped how I approached fieldwork. Rather than trying to produce one final or authoritative explanation of the site, I relied on slower and more partial ways of reading: walking interviews, map corrections, children's drawings, repeated observation, and small conversations that often changed my first assumptions. In that sense, the field was not only where I collected information. It was also where my own framing was corrected. This helped the later node-based responses to the research question. It come from a process of being adjusted by local stories, spatial habits, and different forms of participation rather than a single outside reading. This does not mean that the project became fully collective or representative of every voice. But it does mean that the work tried to avoid speaking about space only from outside it. In this sense, a principle close to "nothing about us without us" remains relevant: spaces that matter to people should not be interpreted only through external assumptions, but through some form of dialogue, correction, and shared reading. (Charlton, 1998)

4 Answering the Research Question: From Node-Based Responses to General Principles

The project does not answer the research question through one complete building design or one overall urban plan. That would have been too blunt for this site. The conditions were not the same everywhere, and the tensions did not gather in one single center. They appeared differently in parking grounds, terraces, ritual forecourts, and lakeshore edges. For that reason, the design response became node-based. But the point was not just to produce four separate small scale projects. What mattered more, in the end, was that these nodes made a few recurring conditions easier to see. Once those conditions became clearer, the answer to the research question also became clearer. Architectural thinking here works less by fixing the whole settlement at once, and more by reading where negotiation is already happening and then responding with careful, limited, and seasonally adjusted spatial moves.

4.1 Recurring Threshold Conditions

Across the four nodes, several threshold conditions kept appearing again, even if their forms were different.

One was seasonal pressure on shared commons. This was strongest where tourist-oriented parking and infrastructure occupied the same ground that local people needed for play, gathering, and everyday use. Another was the quieter problem of misused or underused supportive space: places that were not sacred or central, but still mattered because they could support village life if they were better organised. A third condition appeared in sacred-adjacent grounds, where ritual movement, everyday passage, and visitor presence overlapped without a very clear spatial order. And the last one there was the sensitive natural-sacred edge, where the issue was not crowding so much as over-approach: how to let people pause and understand the place without encouraging too much occupation of it.

What links these conditions is that none of them can really be solved by simple separation. The answer is not to divide everything into fixed zones, or to treat sacredness, everyday life, and tourism as fully independent systems. The field showed something more uneven and more specific than that. Some places needed to be reclaimed seasonally. Some needed clearer edges. Some needed slowing down. Some needed less design, not more. This is why the project moved toward differentiated responses rather than a single formal language repeated everywhere. The important thing was not to make the nodes look similar, but to let each one respond to the kind of threshold condition it was actually holding (Bhabha, 1994; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Bhatta, 2023).

4.2 To broader context: Design Principles

Across these different threshold conditions, a few broader design principles became clear. They do not form a universal model, but they do suggest a consistent way of working in culturally sensitive pastoral landscapes.

Work on thresholds, not cores

Focus architectural attention on paths, edges, forecourts, and shared grounds rather than on the sacred core itself .

Differentiate node roles

Do not force one solution everywhere. Different threshold conditions require different spatial responses.

Respond seasonally

Allow space to shift with rhythms of return, gathering, tourism, and everyday use instead of fixing it into one permanent function.

Design for coexistence, not separation

Support overlap, negotiation, and careful sharing rather than rigid zoning between local life, ritual use, and tourism-related pressure.

Keep interventions light and reversible

Work with small, low-impact, and culturally legible spatial moves rather than heavy permanent structures (Hamdi, 2004; Herrle & Wozniak, 2023).

5 Methodological Contribution, Limitations, and Broader Relevance

One contribution of this thesis is methodological as much as spatial. The work did not move in a straight line from site analysis to design proposal. It moved through framing, correction, selection, and translation. Pre-field mapping and theory helped establish a first reading of the site, but fieldwork changed what counted as important. Walking interviews, participatory mapping, children's drawings, and repeated observation did not simply add more information. They shifted attention toward where tensions became spatially visible: in shared grounds, parking edges, forecourts, paths, and lakeshore thresholds. From there, the project identified differentiated nodes and translated them through seasonal and light-touch responses. In that sense, the thesis suggests a way of working: read overlapping regimes first, identify where they become spatially legible, and respond through specific threshold conditions rather than through one total design gesture (Chipchase, 2017; Hamdi, 2004; Hamdi, 2014).

At the same time, the work is limited in obvious ways. Fieldwork took place in late winter and early spring, so some seasonal patterns had to be understood through conversations, memories, and traces rather than through year-round observation. Tourist presence was also read partly through infrastructure, routes, and anticipation, not only through direct observation of peak-season occupation (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Bhatta, 2023). The people I spoke with were important, but not exhaustive. Their readings were situated, and so was mine. The node proposals are therefore not implementation plans or complete architectural solutions. They are spatial responses developed from a particular field moment, a particular set of relationships, and a particular way of reading the site (Tenzin, 2024).

What stays with me most at the end of this thesis is not simply the idea of making smaller interventions. That would be too simple, and also not quite honest. At the beginning, I also expected that a more complete architectural design might emerge, perhaps even a built structure using local materials. But once I entered the field, lived there, and built relationships with local people, it became harder and harder to hold onto design as time goes. At 3,866 meters, materials, ground, and construction all had a different weight and they are touchable. They were no longer abstract possibilities on a plan. I did try to think through architectural prototypes, and even tested some of them, but in the end I left them behind because they did not feel necessary, useful, or appropriate in that context. This was not a rejection of architecture. If anything, it made the architectural question sharper. It forced me to ask not what else could be added, but what kind of intervention was actually needed, where, and to what degree.

The argument here is not that architecture should always build less, or that small design is automatically better. It is more specific than that. In contexts where sacred meaning, seasonal rhythms, everyday pastoral life, and tourism-related pressure already overlap in uneven and fragile ways, the first task may not be to add another strong form, but to read where negotiation is already happening and how space is already being connected together. In such cases, architectural thinking may work more appropriately through thresholds than through cores, through differentiation rather than one dominant solution, and through seasonal and reversible solutions rather than permanent formal building.

What this thesis has also made very clear to me is the importance of being there. In a place with strong cultural and landscapes, especially when design concerns everyday life, remote information is never enough. Many of the most meaningful things I encountered were not visible in maps, online sources, or quick visual readings, but in ordinary use, informal correction, and the creativity and resilience of people already living there. This is why ethnographic ways of working matter, not only for anthropology, but also for architecture. They slow down the conclusion and embrace complexity. They make space for forms of knowledge that cannot be extracted quickly or fully from outside (Chipchase, 2017; Tenzin, 2024). They also make time visible. In this village, pastoral migration and tourism made seasonal rhythm especially legible, but the point is broader than this site alone. Every place has its own rhythms, even if they unfold at different scales. Design that ignores them risks misunderstanding space from the beginning. In that sense, the thesis does return to design, but to design understood less as formal production and more as the careful positioning of architectural attention in relation to use, time, and cultural meaning.

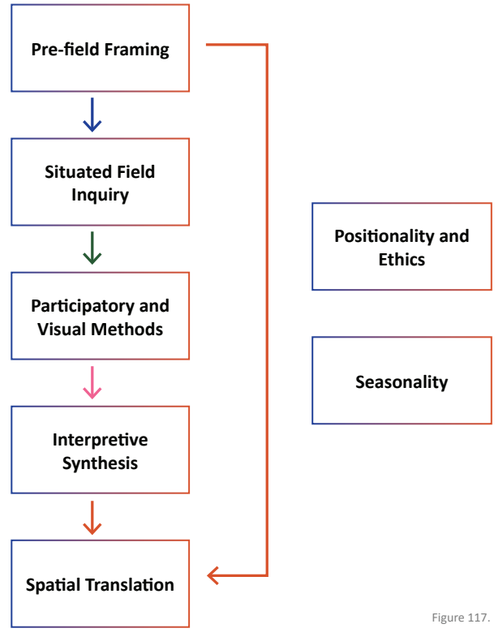


Figure 117.



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Appendix A — Children's Drawings



Appendix B — AI Appendix

Tool used
ChatGPT

Purpose of use
Used for discussion of booklet structure, chapter organisation, abstract refinement, and reflection on research framing.

Type of prompts / questions
Questions related to chapter structure, expression clarity, interview questions, brainstorm ways of presenting field material.

How the output was used
AI outputs were used as discussion support and as suggestions for wording and organisation. All field observations, interpretations, drawings, and final decisions were made by the author.

Limitations
AI was not used to generate field data, text, invent references, or replace site-based analysis.