CITY LIFE IN A DORMITORY TOWN?

- A spatial investigation into the potential of a suburban local square
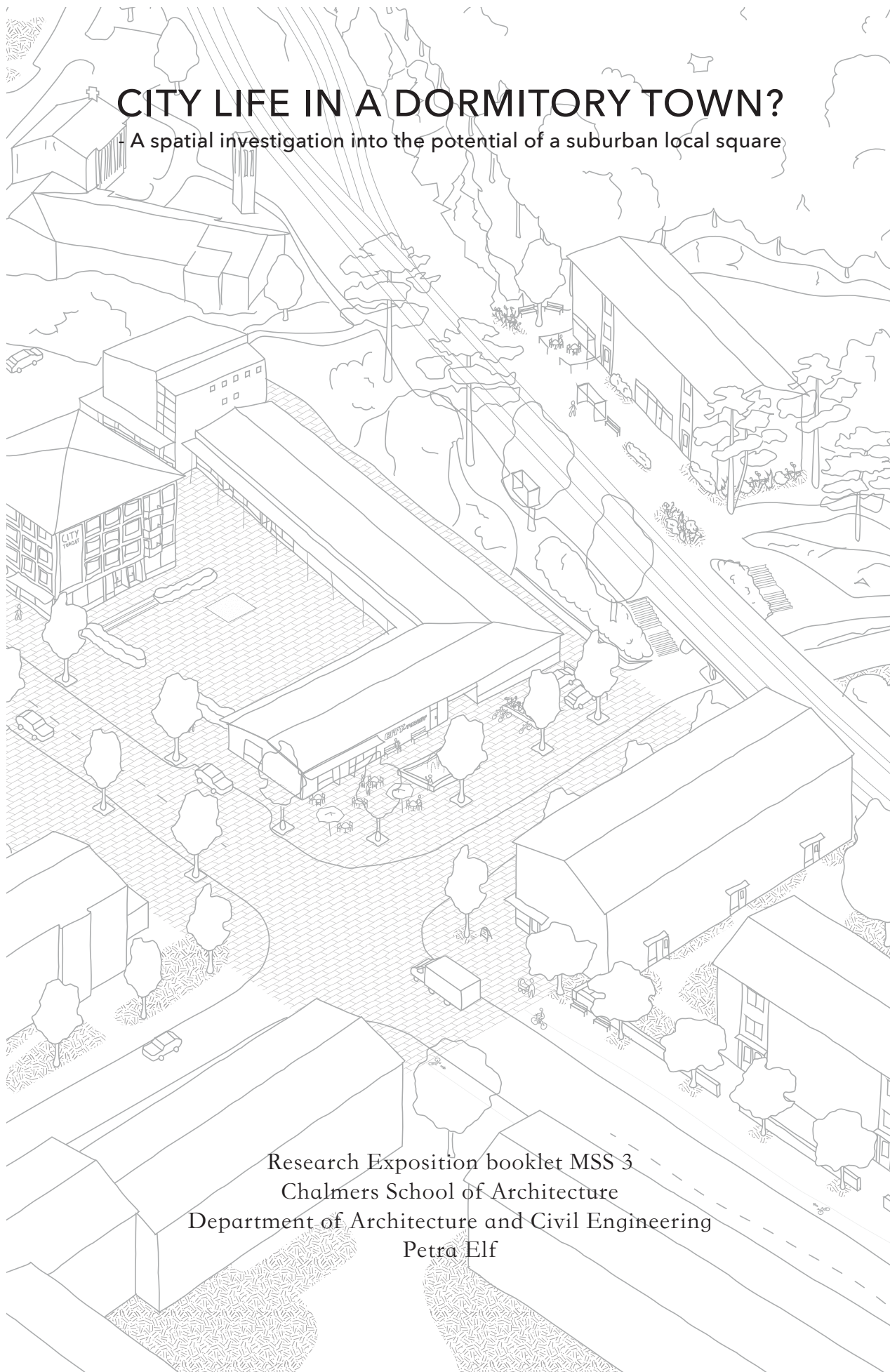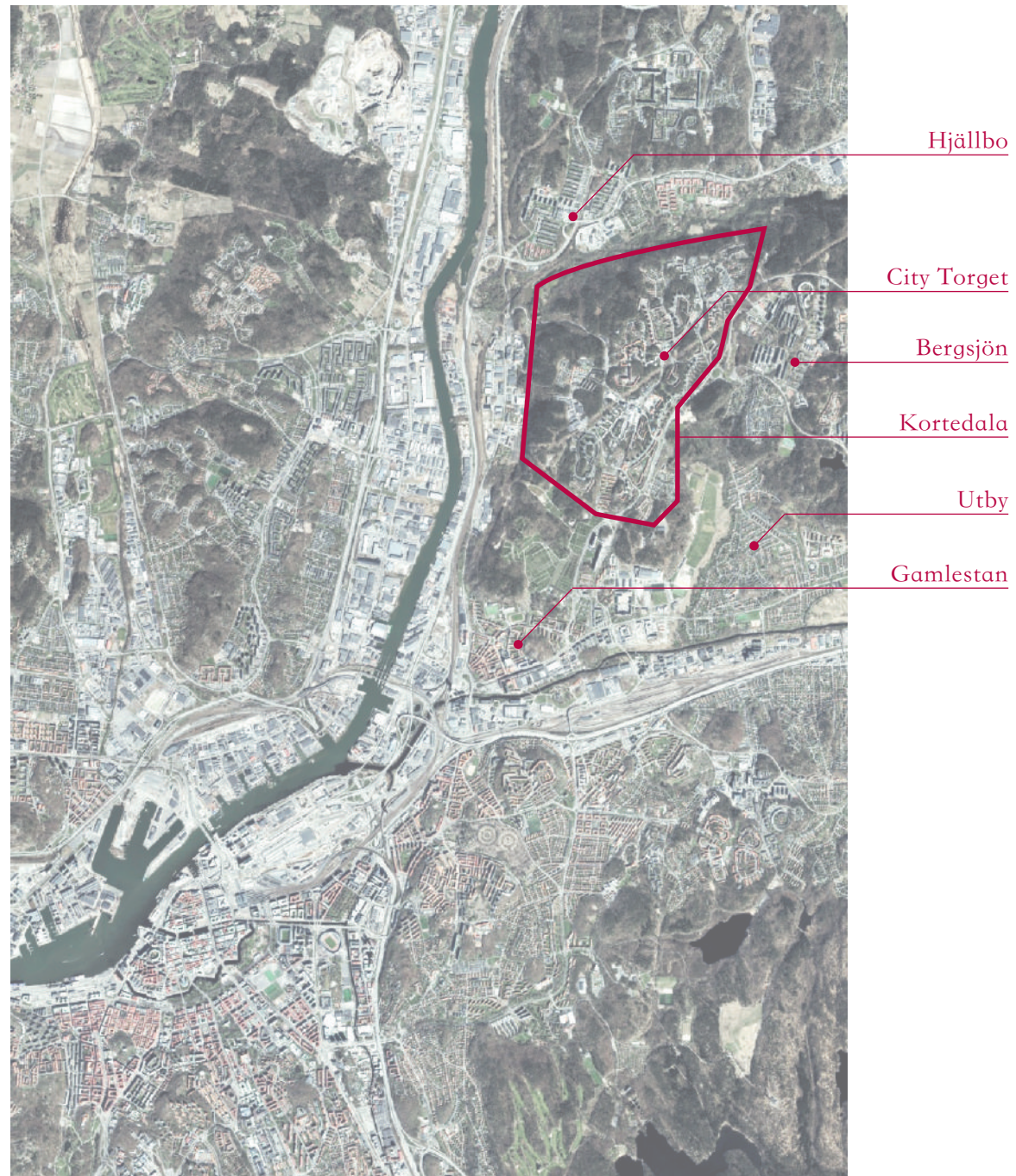
Content

INTRODUCTION

Hjällbo

City Torget

Bergsjön

Kortedala

Utby

Gamlestan

Introduction

The starting point of this project and the thesis it prepares for is a personal experience of living in the area which will be the subject of the project - seeing both things lacking in the local context as well as great values and potentials. The thing most noticeably lacking is meaningful public space, where we as inhabitants actually want to spend our time providing the possibility for social encounters.

Suburban areas are however often underestimated and preconceptions about their potential for city life risk to dictate the planning of new additions in these locations - leaving public space as a negative, what simply becomes left over when new building additions are made.

With several social challenges in society today, public space is too valuable to be left to chance, but rather needs careful planning to fulfill its potential.

The thesis aims to discuss the importance of meaningful public spaces in the local context which can work as a catalyst for city life and social encounters. This is made through the redesign of City torget and its surroundings within the existing urban structure. This booklet describes some of the initial explorations, laborations and analyses done to prepare for that task.

Background

As the housing shortage in cities increase it becomes more and more relevant to explore the possibilities for densification also in more peripheral locations in the city. Densification is commonly described as the end goal rather than as one of several possible means for social intensification which would be more desireable (Stenberg et al., 2021).

In these more peripheral locations there are often areas of already claimed land which at a first glance seem to have played out their purpose, like parking lots or closed industries (this can be, but is not always true - informal use of these areas is often overlooked). Together with already existing connections to public transport and other forms of communications - two attributes which are seen as desirable when new housing projects are planned are fulfilled.

There is however a risk, that predjudice about these areas - often referred to and categorized as the suburbs - dictate the planning, and within new additions in these landscapes the design of public space in a human scale is downgraded and overlooked - simply because the common picture of these landscapes is that they are a failure from an urban point of view. The prospect of city life in these environments is judged as impossible in advance, and in the end it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If we want to create meaningful public spaces in the city which provide the foundation for city life we have to start with a vision which tell us it is possible, and not reduce the value of public urban space to being the negative which is left over when the buildings we needed are built. (C. Alexander et al, 1987)

In a time when society is divided by segregation and the increasing polarisation of opinions and values we can not afford to waste the potential of public space as a basis for feeling a connection to those around you and to society as a whole.

That is where this project and the thesis it will lead up to is situated - around a local square which today functions as little more than a backside to the tram station, but which I believe holds the potential for so much more.

Discourse

The discourse for the thesis itself will be broader, but during this semester in MSS 3 the main theoretical reference has been *A new theory on urban design*, and the notion of negative space described in that book, as well as the starting point of creating new wholes which has guided the focus when outlining the scope of the thesis projekt.

Two quotes from the book capture what I have brought with me especially well:

"/.../ in our time, urban space has become negative... the leftover... after buildings are built. However, in all cultures which produced great cities and buildings, space was understood as a positive thing created by the buildings."

"Every interment of construction in the growing city must be designed to preserve wholeness at all levels, from the largest level of public space, to the intermediate wholes at the scale of the individual buildings, to the smallest wholes that occur in the building details."

Alongside A new theory on urban design, the report *City measures* by Spacescape, texts from *City Sense and City Design*, a collection of the works of Kevin Lynch, and *Life between buildings* by Jan Gehl have been studied.

A selection of key-words from the studied texts:

A New Theory On Urban Design

Wholeness

The centering process

A whole - healing

Negative space

Jan Gehl - Life Between Buildings

Public life

Necessary, optional and social activity

Quality of the physical environment

Passive contacts

Orientation in the social surroundings

Spacescape . city measures

Urban Life

Public open space

Sociotope map

Ease of orientation - changes in direction

Being co-present

Entrance-density

Kevin Lynch - City Sense and City Design

Spacial legebility

Temporal legebility

Diversity of environments

Sense of place

Meaningful environment

Belonging

Methods

The methods used during this course have all aimed at exploring and mapping the site in different ways, as well as experimenting with developing different tools for analyse, laboration and communication.

Different methods have been tested at the same time as doing design laborations in order to spark my own imagination redarding what the potentials of the site could be.

Among others, the main methods used during this project have been digital and sketched collages, photography, and mapping through texts, sketches and graphical representations.

Aim of the master's thesis:

To design spaces on and around City Torget which enhance a sense of place, local identity and promote interaction between inhabitants.

Master's thesis research questions:

How can a design proposal be shaped to make City Torget a well integrated feature in the local urban landscape?

How can a redesign and spatial interventions on and around City Torget in the north of Kortedala showcase the potential of the local urban square as a catalyst for city life and social encounters?

Aim for MSS 3:

Doing preparatory work for the thesis including both starting to find the theories most relevant to the project as well as mapping and doing design laborations with the purpose of gaining a tool set which can be used both for analyse, laboration and communication.

MSS 3 research question:

How can I develop tools and methods to use for analysing a site, doing design laborations on that site as well as communicating what impact the design can have within the subject for my master's thesis?

CONTEXT MAPPING

Context

The location for this project is City Torget in the north of Kortedala. The project includes the premis of the square, as well as adjacent property and the design of the public space leading to the square from all directions.
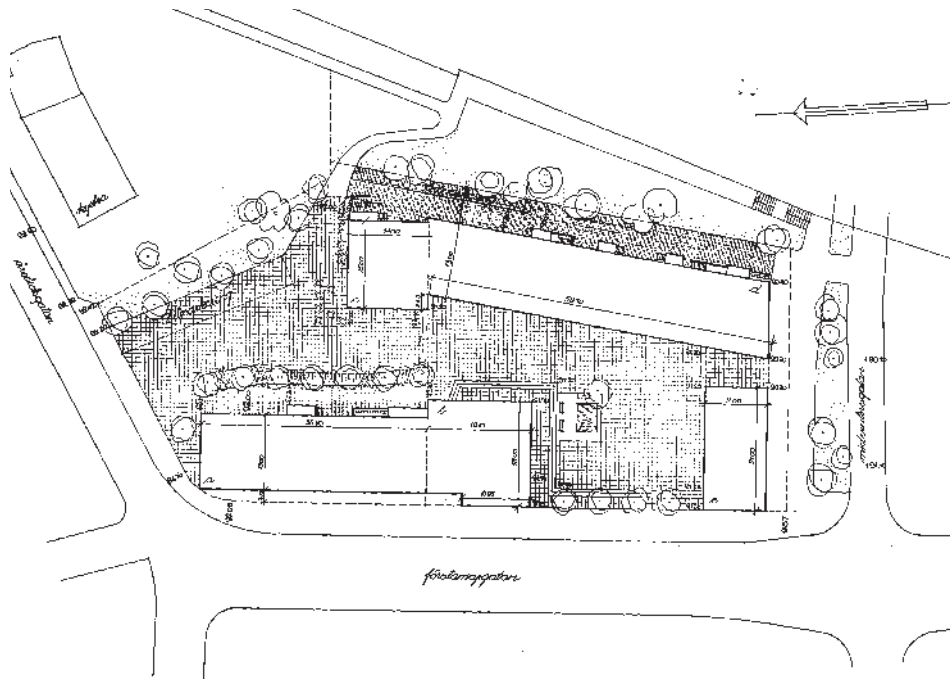
Kortedala

Kortedala has a complex history. Starting as a celebrated grand vision of building an urban village based on the idea of folkhemmet (the people's home) where good housing was available to "ordinary people" as well as providing for all types of services and functions needed in the daily life (Gunnemark, 1998). However the ciritque towards the project started not many years after it was finished, social problems and violoence started to dominate the local news and gradually replaced news about grand openings and international study visits. *Sovstad* (dormitory town) became a label used to describe the district in the press despite the initial intentions and efforts to create something different.

The phenomenon of dormitory towns is widespread (Adelfio, 2014) and the effect in Kortedala has been intensified by the decrease in population from 26.000 inhabitants when it was newly built (Andersson et al., 1993) to 17600 in the year 2020 (Göteborgs stad, n.d.).

The Square

City Torget (The City Square) is one of three secondary centers to the main square in the area, Kortedala Torg. It is situated between a preschool, a church, a parking lot and the tramway with a connecting tram stop.

City Torget is a square which started out in the 50s as a modern square with so many services provided it could sustain a city life of its own, but has over the years been left to decay. With its run down character together with a design of the spaces relying on the power of attraction to draw visitors rather than a natural flow of pedestrians, the square is left feeling a little deserted, and out of touch with its context. Primarily, flows of pedestrians occur along backsides with a very closed character, preventing a feeling of connection to the square as you move by. No one resides on the square, and the visitors are driven by necessity rather than desire.

City Torget

Preliminary
Project Area
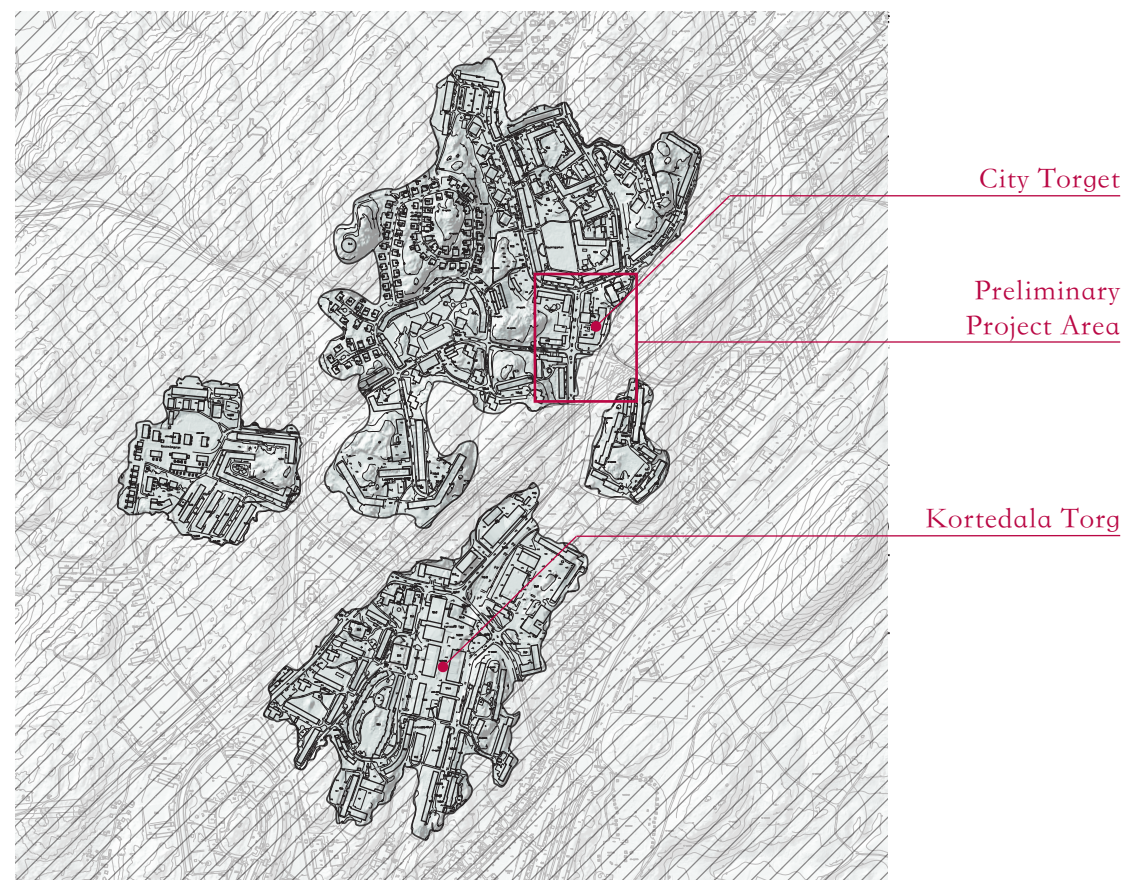
Kortedala Torg

An interpetation of Kortedala as a series of islands - where topografical barriers and larger areas with mainly infrastructure are left out. All "islands" are not included in this map.

Situation

Kortedala is in many ways unique in its location in Gothenburg. Like islands scattered in the forest rather than in the ocean, but islands just the same - with few bridges connecting them to each other and to the rest of the city.

Other parts of the city may look close on a map, but in addition to not offering much other than Kortedala itself has to offer, the paths are from a pedestrian perspective riddled with barriers. To the east the path to Bergsjön is cut off by enourmous infrastructure adapted for cars, and in order to get north west to Hjällbo the path through the forest takes you 100 meters down and then 30 meters up again before you arrive to your desitnation.

This renders the communications from the neighbourhood pretty much a one way communication - to the mainland, to the city center, and then back again.

So in many ways Kortedala is like little islands, where the tramway provides us pedestrians with the only connection to the mainland, where, in difference to our little sleeping city, life seems to happen.

The question about meaningful public space in connection to this bridge to the mainland to me becomes much larger than whether or not I have somewhere to spontaneously go for a beer on a weekday without the need to travel - it becomes a question of identity, about how we feel when we leave, and how we feel when we return. And ultimately how we feel a connection to each other or not based on that feeling.

16.   17.
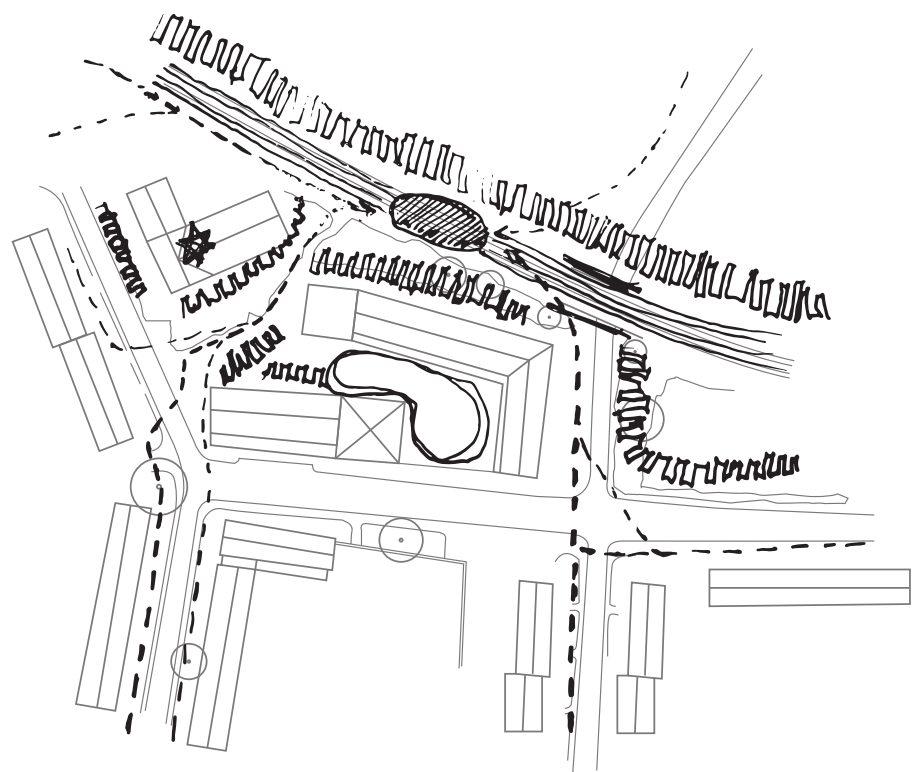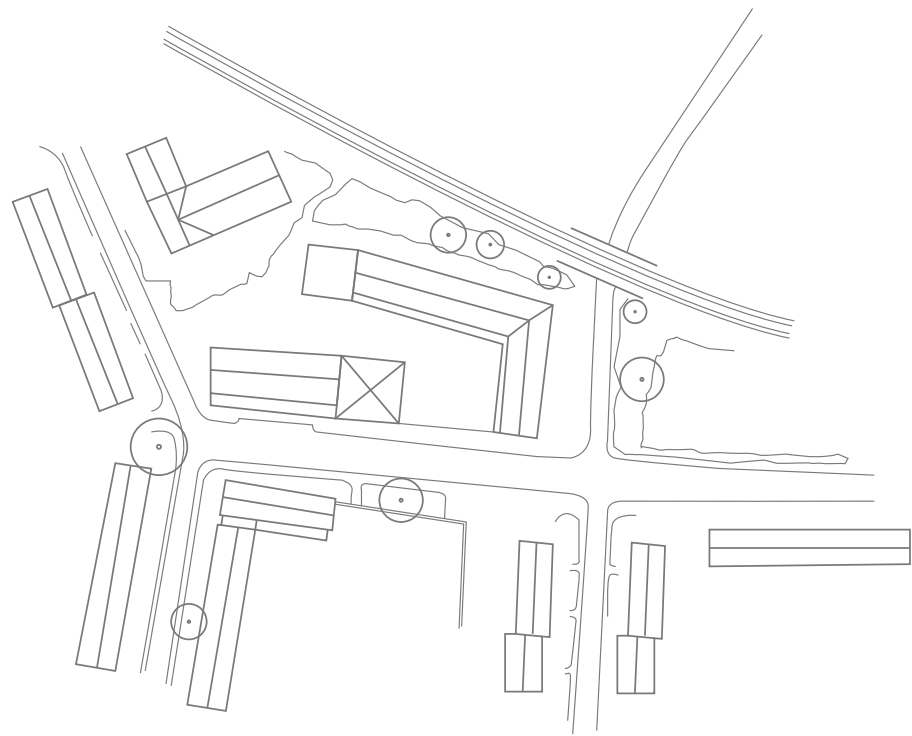
Kevin Lynch inspired site mapping

Using the concepts of edges, nodes, paths, landmarks and districts to visualize some of the most distinct characteristics of the square and its surroundings.

The elevated tramway is a large edge, a barrier even which contributes to the feeling that instead of having reached the center when you arrive to the square, you have reached the very edge.

The paths to the tram stop, the most distinctive node in the area, are going between other edges made up of topographical barriers, gaps in the built environment and closed facades, giving the feeling of all the time moving between backsides, never being part of the square itself.

After doing these sketches and presenting them, I still felt it was hard for people to get an intuitive understanding of the site from a flat map, and a lot of important information, like for example tophography, gets lost. In the next iteration of trying to capture, and communicate the site I therefore moved on to the axo-esque graphical interpretation displayed on the next page, hoping to provide a map which can be a foundation for more intuitive understandings of my analysis and sketches.
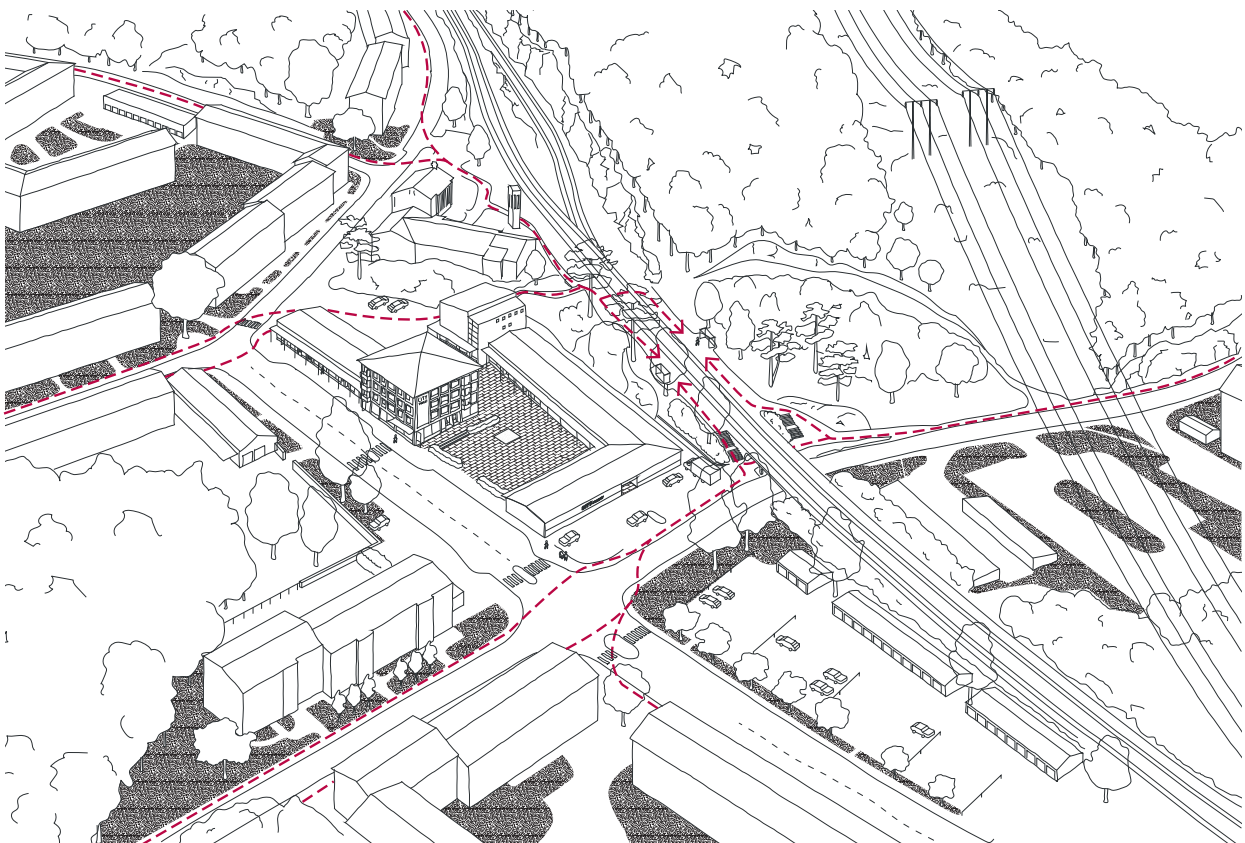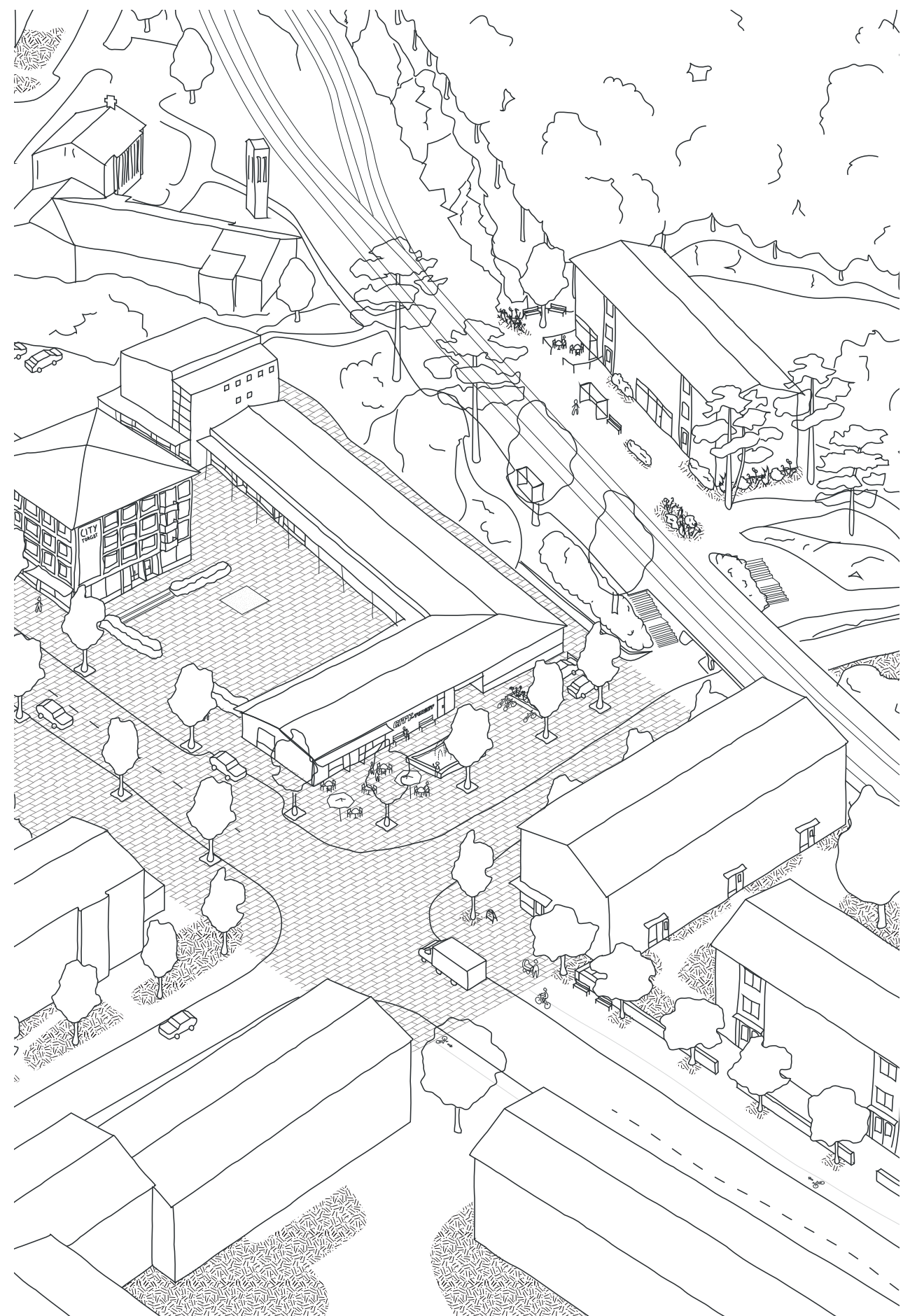
EDGES

NODES

PATHS

LANDMARKS

ENTRANCE

Axo-esque site map
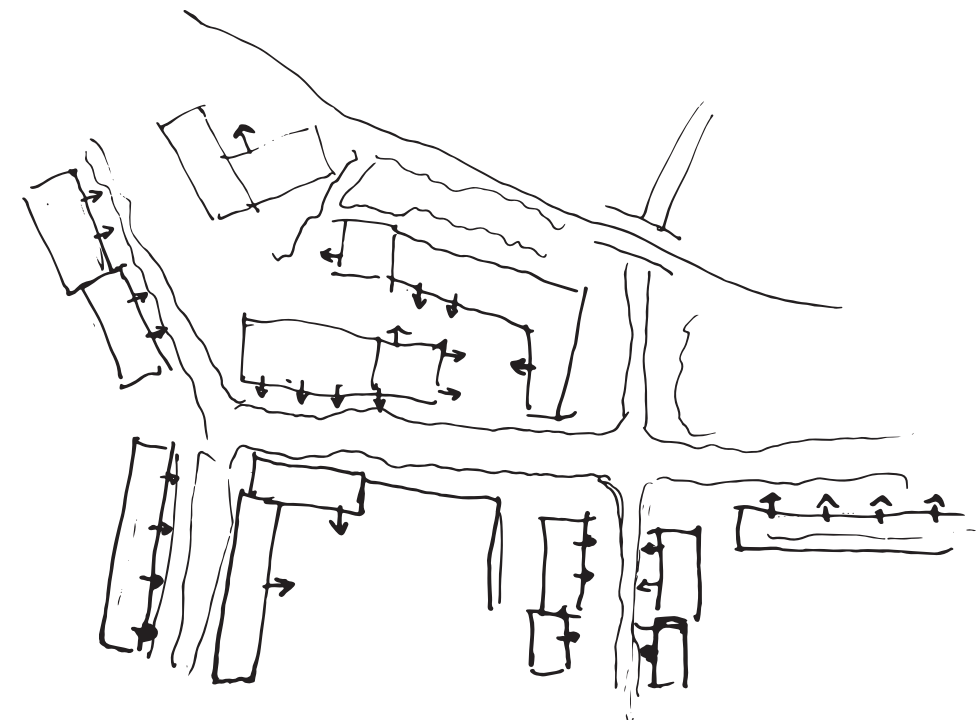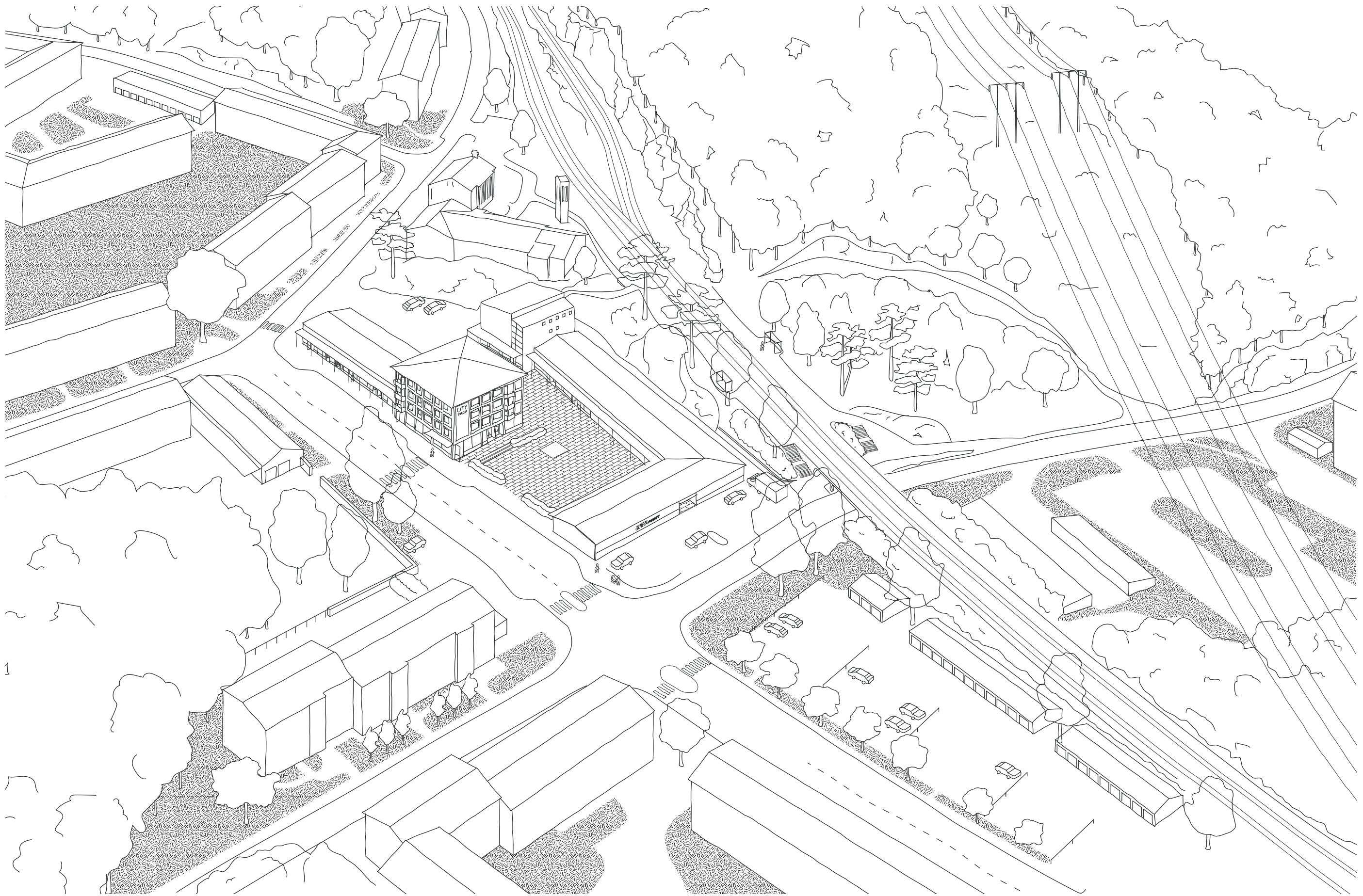
A graphical interpretation of the current appearance of the site to use as a tool for analyze, sketches and communication.
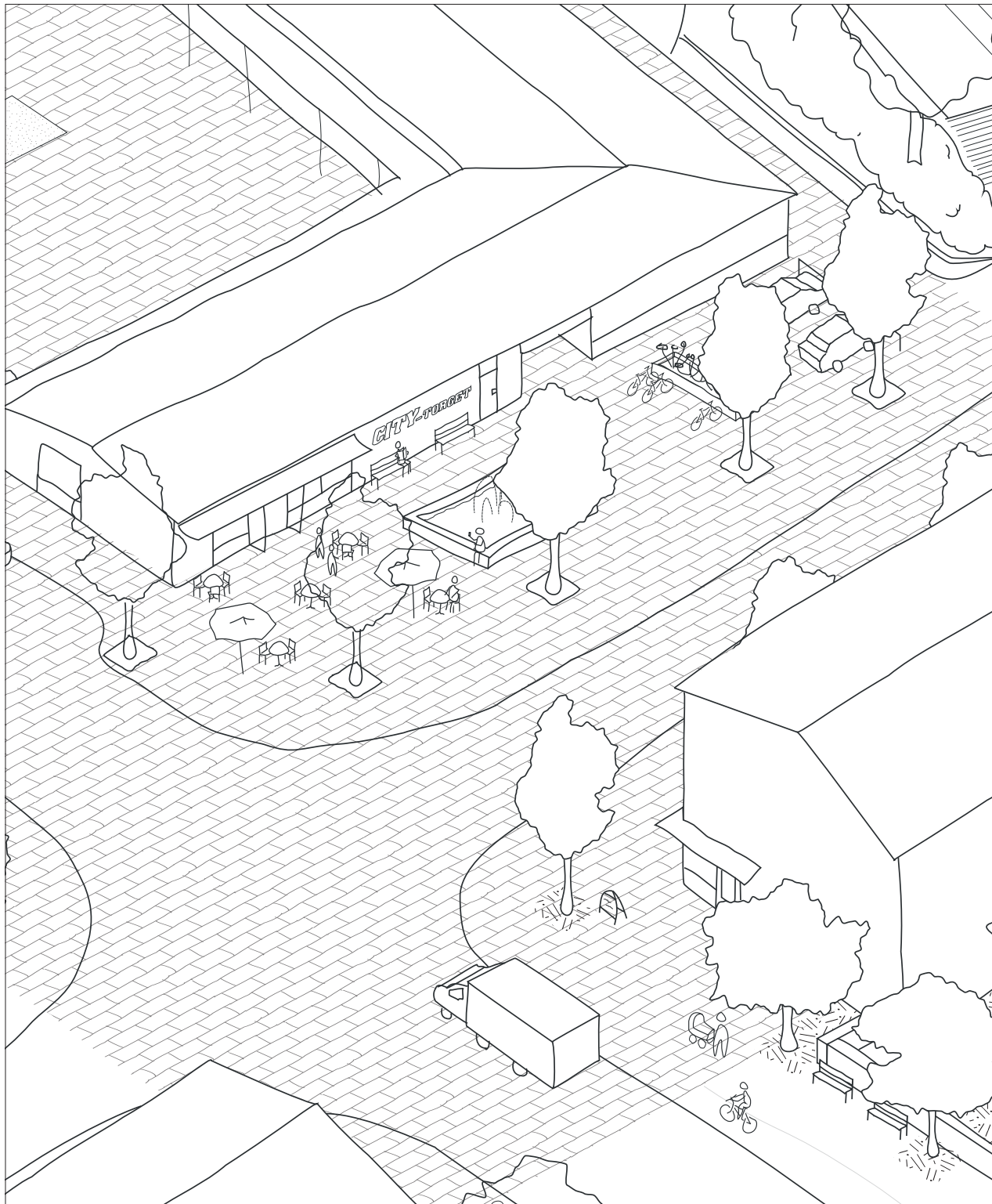
20.

21.
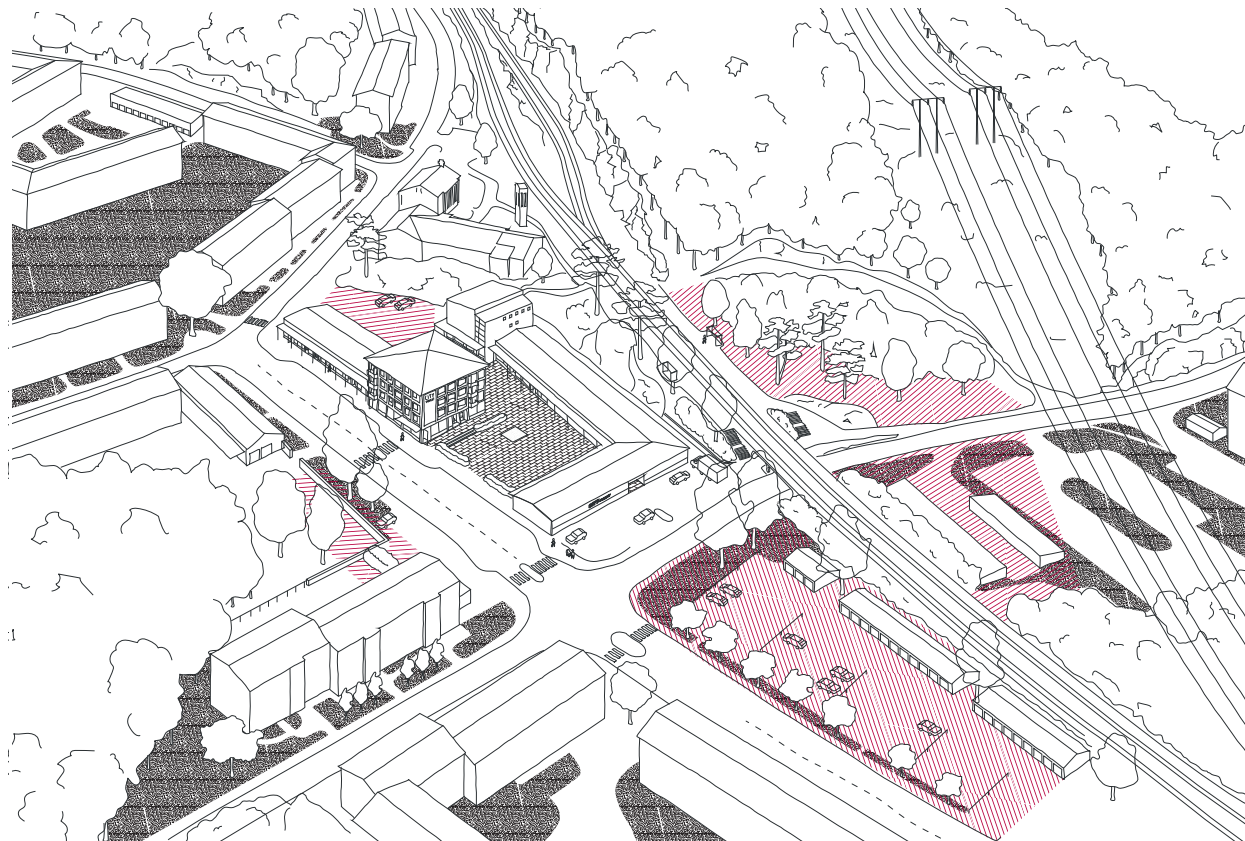
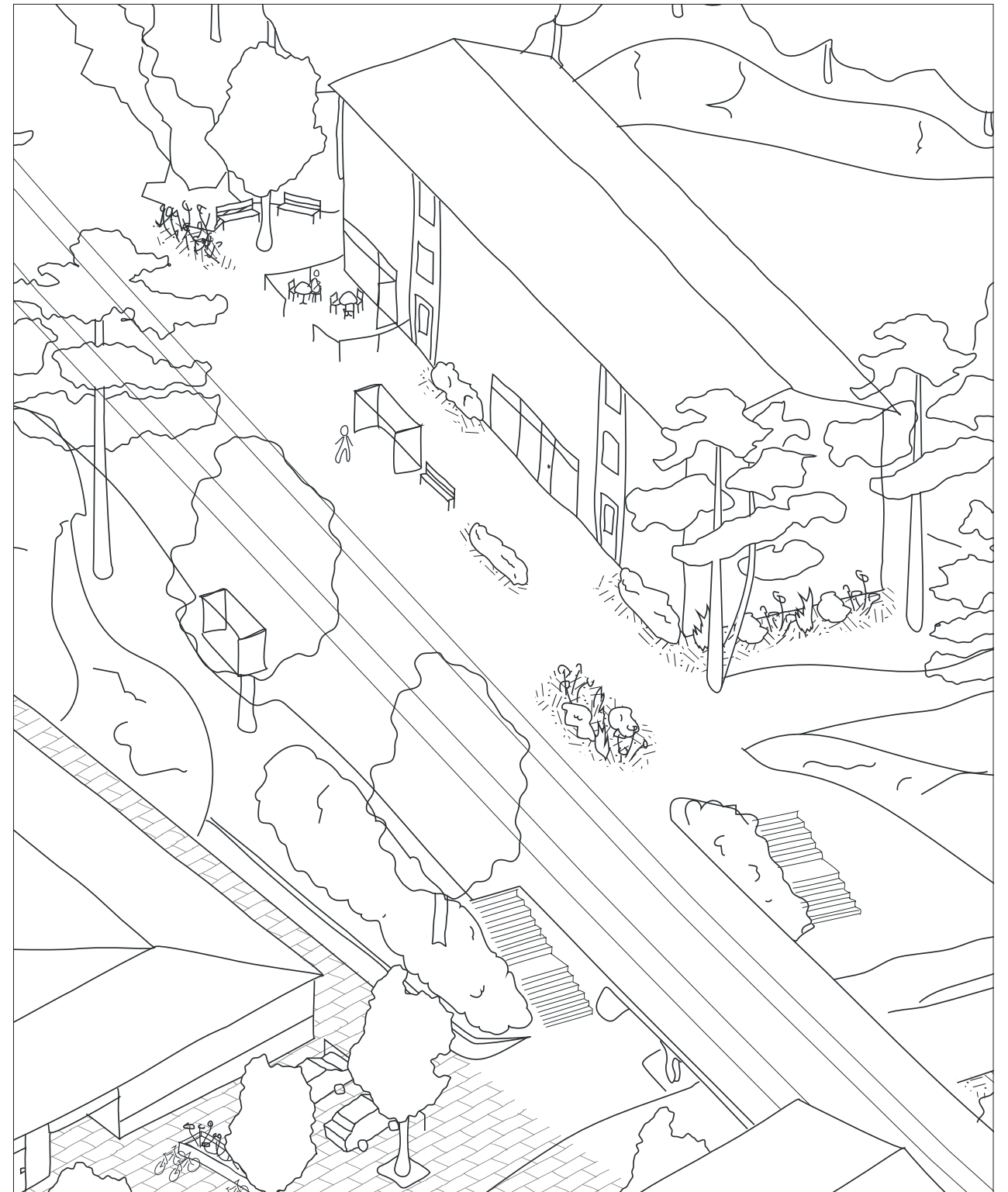POTENTIAL SITES FOR NEW BUILDING ADDITIONS

- - - MAIN PATHS TO THE TRAM STATION

22.

A trial regarding how the map can be used to sketch, design and communicate new qualities.

23.

Sketch on how to turn one of the backsides of the square to a welcoming public space.

Sketch on how to integrate the tram station in the urban environment.

24.

25.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Nature

Built Environment

Poor Materials and Detailing

Durable Matierials and Detailing

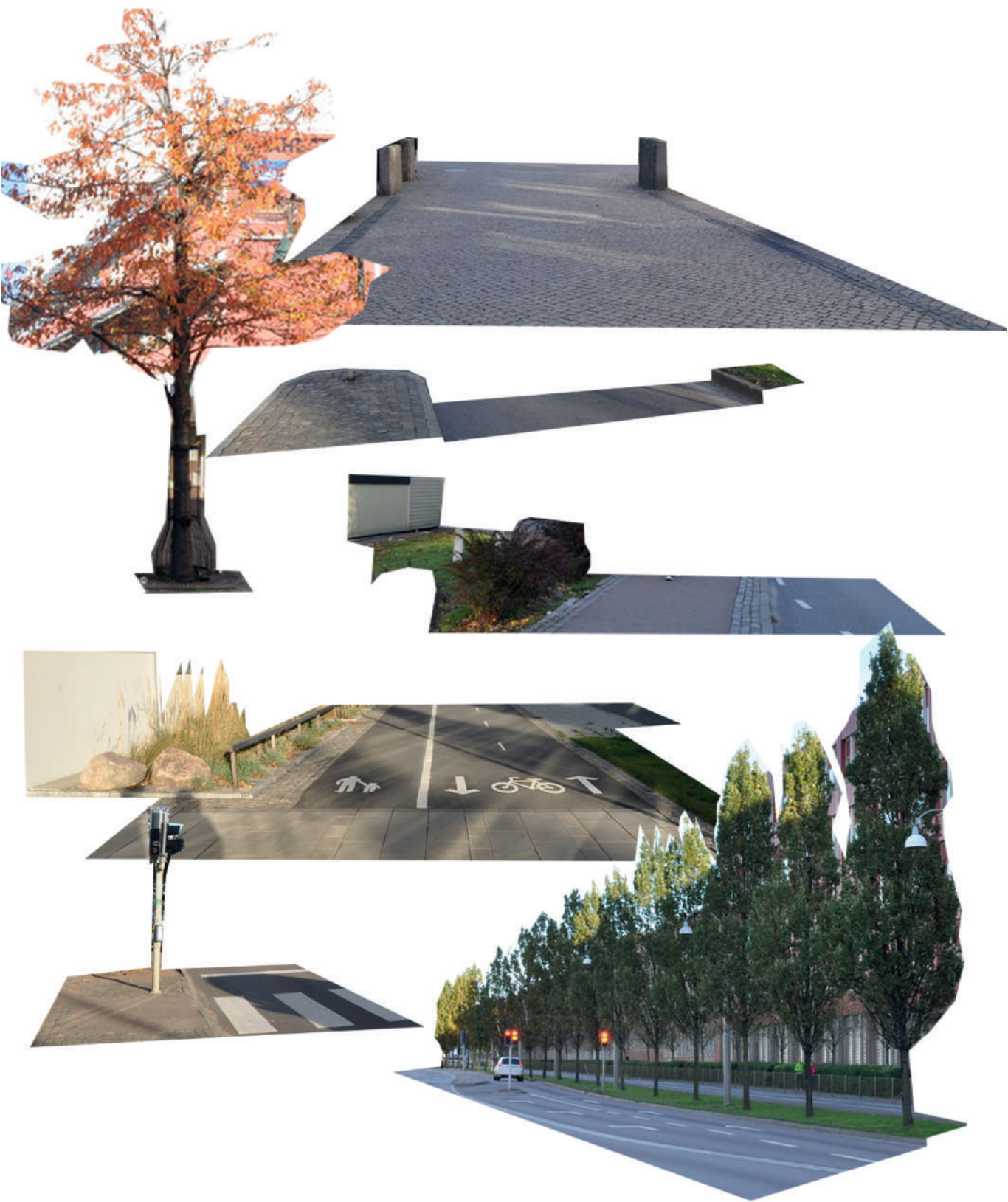Decorated

Decorated?

Crammed

Open

Unusable

Enjoyable
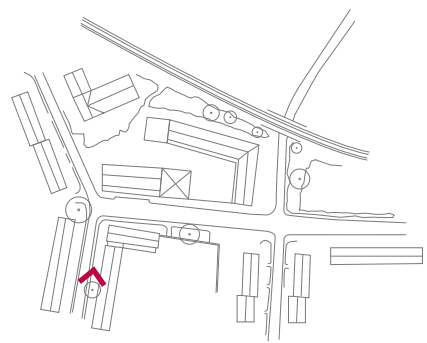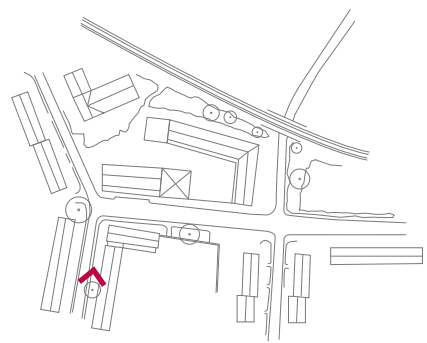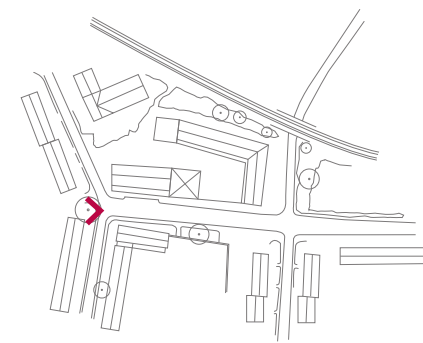
COLLAGES

Collecting details

From Gamlestan

From Kortedala

40.

41.

Separating the room or forming it

Being useful or unapproachable

Telling me as a pedestrian, am I valued?

How can character change

Being static or fluid

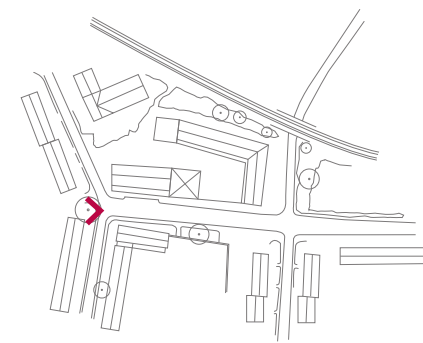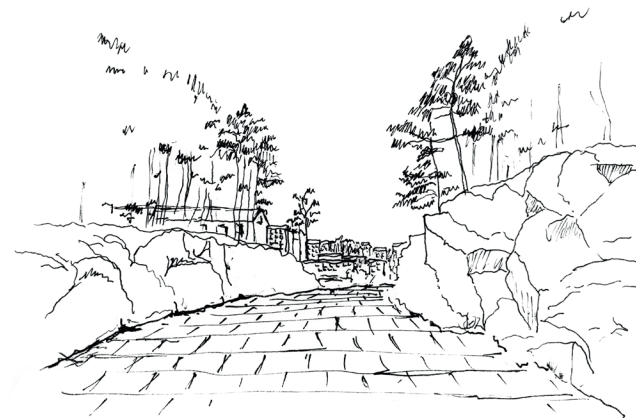*Being meaningful?*

Separating the room or forming it

Being useful or unapproachable

Telling me as a pedestrian, am I valued?

How can character change

Being static or fluid

Being meaningful?

44.

45.

A gap in the built environtment, framed by nothing?
An unclear context/room, no hierarchy of direction

Laborations with framing, visual connection, conveying a value and hierarchy of directions.

What could make us experience a shorter distance, be more likely to walk and thereby be more likely to stop and inhabit public space?

"A city's street-network produces continuity in public space. How public space connects visually matters to how we orient ourselves in the city and which networks we choose. Routes which are located in such way that they are easy to find and which visually connect to other routes tend to attract higher flows of people." (Spacescape et al., 2018)

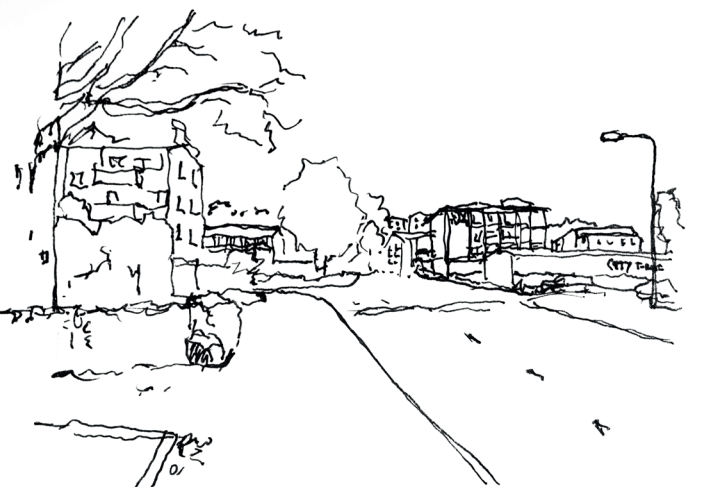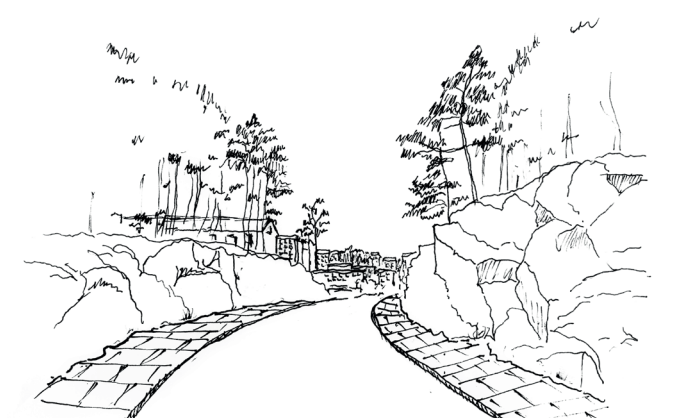A gap in the built environtment, framed by nature
A clear context, a clear direction

What space am I as a human given in the public space?

Reflections on the process

The free format of this semester has been challenging in many ways. A lot of time and energy has gone into not knowing what to do, and feeling that everything that gets done only gets half done.

It was challenging starting to do a project relating to the thesis before really knowing the focus of the thesis, but in the end the course has led to both doing mistakes and taking wrong turns which I no longer risk to take this spring, as well as at the same time as the methods used in this course were developed and tested, getting a clearer picture regarding what actually was important to focus on for the thesis.

Even if in the end, a lot of material was produced during this process - it still feels like most of the work happened mentally. This is of course also rewarding in the end, but if theres something I regret it is not being better to document everything - including what is only happening in my mind. This is something I will consider and bring with me in the process of the thesis.

General references for the project

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Göteborgs stad. (n.d.). *Statistikdatabas Göteborgs Stad. Statistikdatabas Göteborgs Stad. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from http://statistikdatabas.goteborg.se/pxweb/sv/*

Stenberg, J., Thuvander, L., Kain, J. H., & Adelfio, M. (2021). *Linking research, education and citizen codesign: compact cities as social intensification. SN Social Sciences, 1(10). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-021-00257-9*