

THEN _____

_____ THE

STONES _____

_____ SPEAK

Balancing the Weight of Terezín's History
with its Need for Contemporary Development

JOSHUA
RICHARDSON

Master

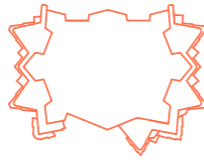
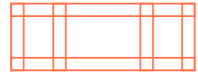
Thesis

2026

Chalmers School of Architecture, Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering

Supervisor: Naima Callenberg

Examiner: Daniel Norell



THEN THE STONES SPEAK



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THEN THE STONES SPEAK: ABSTRACT

Terezín is facing a crossroads. The historic bastion fortress town in north-west Czechia is most widely known as the site of the Nazi-controlled Theresienstadt Ghetto, a major prison and transit camp for Jews during the Holocaust. Between 1941 and 1945, 144,000 prisoners were transported to Terezín. Most were sent onwards to extermination camps such as Auschwitz and Treblinka. 33,000 died in Terezín itself.

Yet today, Terezín is still a living town, with a population of around 3,000.

In many ways, the future of Terezín's Dresden Barracks – the largest building in Terezín – can be seen as a paradigm for the changing face of Holocaust commemoration throughout Europe. Uninhabited and damaged by years of weathering, in its current state it serves neither to memorialise the thousands persecuted within the Nazi-controlled Theresienstadt Ghetto, nor to support the town's current need for inhabitants and infrastructure.

Then the Stones Speak focuses on the coming post-witness era, where no survivors of the Holocaust remain. Mediating between site-specific and broader social current issues, the thesis will explore questions that on the

surface may seem intuitive. How best to preserve sites of historical trauma when living memory is lost? Should one preserve these sites, or should the needs of current and future inhabitants take precedence?

The thesis will take a multi-layered approach, focusing on a broader background on Holocaust sites and sites of trauma around the world, before zooming in on Terezín and the Dresden Barracks. A reuse approach for the dilapidated building will be proposed following interviews with municipality officials, ghetto survivors and historians, site visits, and investigations into the experiences of prisoners within the Dresden Barracks through written accounts and artworks produced during the ghetto years.

The scheme will involve an overall programme, as well as detail designs of moments throughout the building, incorporating the concept of "past presencing" as a means to mediate between the building's traumatic history and the current living needs of the town.

The aim of the thesis is to contribute to a growing discourse over the contemporary use of sites such as Terezín as its development progresses in real time.

GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS

Terezín	A fortress town in the Ustí region of North-west Czechia	Czechoslovakia	The country comprising modern-day Czechia and Slovakia, recognised between 1918 and 1992, and partially annexed by Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1945
Theresienstadt	The German name for Terezín, used in this thesis to refer to the Nazi-controlled Jewish ghetto operating in Terezín between 1941 and 1945	Post-Witness Era	The approaching period of time in which no survivors of the Holocaust will remain alive
Holocaust	The systematic murder of over 6 million Jews, Roma, gay and disabled people carried out by the Nazi party between 1941 and 1945	Past Presencing	A process of recognising the past through everyday practice, used in this thesis as a proposal for an alternative method of commemoration
Ghetto	A segregated urban area used for the mass concentration of certain minority groups. Although not part of a larger urban area, Terezín operated as a ghetto for 144,000 Jews during the Holocaust		

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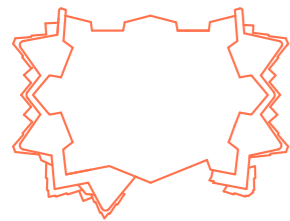
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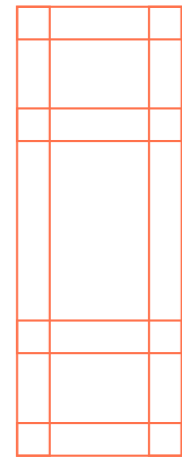
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I INSPIRATIONS

Dearest,

I am leaving Prague today and will be able to breathe country air. Don't worry about me even if you don't get any news from me, as soon as things will be easier I will get in touch with you. I am well and strong so don't worry. You know our beloved Father prays for me in heaven and we will be happily reunited. I hug you and kiss you all in love.

Růžena Stutzová, 2nd July 1942

Růžena

In the summer of 1942 during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, my great-great-grandmother Růžena Stutzová was taken from her home in Prague and imprisoned in the fortress town Terezín, known to the Nazis as Theresienstadt. Three months later, she was forced onto a train to Treblinka extermination camp, where she was murdered.

Three years earlier, Růžena's daughter Helen Mayer, and granddaughter Charlotte, fled Prague as refugees to the UK where they remained for the rest of their lives. Charlotte - my grandmother - was ten years old, and never saw her grandparents again.



Charlotte age 3 with Helen age 28
Prague, 1933



Růžena age 61
Prague, 1927

Charlotte

The years Charlotte lived in Prague represented a time of safety and wonder that would profoundly shape her life. Charlotte would often recount memories of her grandmother Růžena and grandfather Eduard to me with the greatest fondness, describing a strong, sophisticated woman with wonderful sense of humour, and a serious, kindly man who would spend happy times with her showing her books of natural history and science. Růžena inspired Charlotte's curiosity, playfully introducing her to subjects including music, biology, art and sculpture. It is this last discipline that Charlotte decided to pursue as a career, eventually becoming a celebrated sculptor.

Charlotte's relationship with Růžena had a profound influence throughout her life. In turn, Charlotte's sense of wonder, openness and creativity has been one of the biggest inspirations of my life.

This thesis may be born of generational grief, but through it I hope to celebrate the creativity and desire for exploration that also transcend generations.

In the same way, whatever Terezín's future looks like, I hope the town will be able to recognise, respect and yet still flourish in the wake of its difficult history.

A Journey to Terezín

In 2018, I visited Prague and Terezín for the first time. It was a deeply moving trip. I was intensely aware that these were the buildings and streets Růžena would have seen - or perhaps more so, that would have seen Růžena - in the last months of her life. This town was her last witness, and the bricks, windows, and rafters conceal a connection across time, and beyond words.

In sites of such deep trauma it is often hard to describe the feeling imbued in the physical space. *It's just a room.* And yet, the intangible in the architecture is just as striking, just as real.

WHEN PEOPLE
ARE SILENT, _____

_____ THEN THE
STONES SPEAK.

(CHARLESWORTH,
2004, P. 216)

I journeyed to Terezín to come to terms with my family's connection to the Holocaust, and it was difficult to come to terms with the new life within the fortress walls. But there *is* new life. After my visit, I couldn't escape the conflicting feeling arose when contemplating living, or enjoying life in a site of such historical trauma. Could one, *should* one?



Charlotte age 80 with me age 8
London, 2009

Balance

This thesis has been a study in balance. It has given me the opportunity to explore my own feelings about these ever-pertinent questions; at the same time, I have made efforts to not let my own presuppositions overshadow an issue with highly varying, equally valid solutions. The more I have investigated, the more I understand there is no single correct solution to the issues raised. It has allowed me to experience the role of architecture as an instrument of compassion, and a bridge between emotion and functionality; between the intangible and the mundane. It has been a huge privilege to work on such a project.

METHOD AND SCOPE

Method

This thesis takes a multi-layered and approach that examines the issues facing Terezín at different scales. To aid in the articulation of an inherently non-linear process, the thesis will be broadly divided into three sections.

Part One: A Post-Witness Era examines Holocaust sites through the lens of the coming post-witness era, where no living memory of the Holocaust remains. This section introduces theories around the necessity of imagination, referencing Diana Popescu; and the notion of events forming part of their surrounding architecture, posed by Bernard Tschumi.

Part Two: Terezín focuses on Terezín's current situation at a town scale, introducing future plans contrasting viewpoints from organisations and individuals with ties to the fortress town. Investigations are made into the inhabitation and state of preservation of buildings around the town, key stakeholders, and a history of Terezín in relation to its present state.

Part Three: The Dresden Barracks zooms into the Dresden Barracks, Terezín's largest building, analysing and proposing new uses and sustainable renovation strategies. As well as a site visit and analysis, Theresienstadt prisoners' artworks and photographs are studied to inform contemporary interventions into the barracks. This section introduces the theory of "past presencing", coined by Sharon Macdonald, as a key design driver in the renovation of the barracks. Several focus designs are proposed alongside a broader programmatic scheme and plans.

As a proposal intended to stimulate discourse around the reuse of Terezín's dilapidated buildings, research will be conducted on two fronts: *for* design, and *through* design.

Thesis Questions

This thesis aims to address the following questions:

How does the transition to a Post-Witness Era affect how Holocaust sites such as Terezín are commemorated and inhabited?

How can Terezín's derelict Dresden Barracks be reinhabited without erasing its memory of the Holocaust?

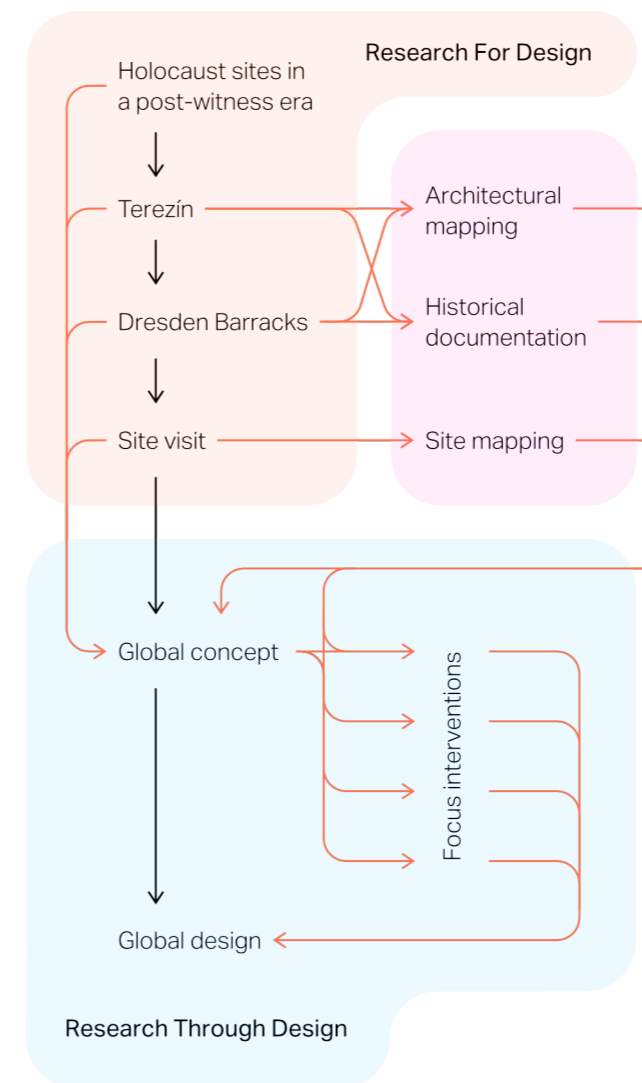


Figure 1: Flowchart detailing the research fields and methods throughout the thesis

Scope

Then the Stones Speak strives towards a middle ground: between the personal and the public; between the social and the technical; between commemoration and the need for new life. In this sense, whilst many of the issues this thesis will focus on are in conjunction with ongoing work at Terezín, the aim of this thesis is not to satisfy one specific client. Current plans for Terezín's development will be taken into account, but not treated as a brief. In the same vein, whilst being mindful of costs and funds required for restorative work, this thesis does not aim to address budgeting concerns in detail. Furthermore, the Dresden Barracks are huge, and this thesis does not aim to provide a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of the building, but rather focused interventions that complement the wider scheme.

The concept and design proposals are speculative, and the thesis will remain equally valuable in the discourse on the preservation of sites of historical trauma should it provoke or inspire.

PART ONE



A POST - WITNESS ERA

THE FUTURE OF HOLOCAUST SITES IN A POST-WITNESS ERA

A Capacity to Imagine

Eighty years after the end of the Second World War in Europe, living memories of persecution and immense human suffering are fading. We find ourselves soon approaching a total post-witness era, where all first-hand survivors of the Holocaust and the Second World War have passed. In many ways, this gradual, inevitable transition will pass quietly. At the same time, it marks a significant shift in the perception of the Holocaust: all remaining memory will now forever reside in the collective. Mental reconstruction of the Holocaust, however visceral, can only be experienced through imaginative practice (Popescu & Schult, 2015).

Whilst "a sense of living connection" to the inhumanity of the Holocaust has remained, so has a disregard for the power of imagination to perpetuate memory, argues Holocaust researcher Diana Popescu. In a post-witness era, however, this must change if a collective memory is indeed to be perpetuated. "The transfer of memory and the domain of post-ness itself are increasingly dependent on a capacity to imagine." (Popescu, 2015, p. 2). Allowing physical, mental, and emotional space for imaginative –



Figure 2: *The Thornflower* by Charlotte Mayer - a work of artistic imaginative practice, created to come to terms with her grandmother Růžena's imprisonment in the Theresienstadt Ghetto

and thus interpretive – discourse is essential to maintain the Holocaust's relevance for current and future generations. At the very least this transition to a post-witness era should mark an important call to current generations to re-address the significance of sites of commemoration, historical documents and works of art.

No Architecture Without Events

Architecture plays an important role in bridging the transition to this new era of Holocaust remembrance (Charlesworth, 2004). As a vessel for the commemoration of an event, it also exists as a witness to – and therefore a result of – the event itself, holding potential to remain both a space of memory and a direct source of imagination. "There is no architecture without action, no architecture without events," wrote architect Bernard Tschumi in his provocative publication *Architecture & Disjunction*. In other words, events experienced within a building's lifetime, particularly those as deeply scarring as the Holocaust, become part of the building itself. Therefore, to suppress their expression is to deny the building of its own architectural fundamentals. "Actions qualify spaces as much as spaces qualify action." (Tschumi, 1994, pp. 122-123).

How, then, to allow Holocaust sites to express the traumatic events that have shaped them? And should this be re-evaluated as we place greater emphasis on imaginative practice in the coming post-witness era? These questions perhaps run parallel to historian Marianne Hirsch's writings (2012, p. 104) on post-memory: "What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them?"

Eighty Years of Future History

In the last half-century, the standard answer – at least in political canon – has been a shift towards preservation and consecration as is: as little as possible should change, as little as possible should be left to the unregulated bounds of imagination (Carr, 2024). On first glance, this may seem like the simplest way to ensure Tschumi's theory of allowing expression of a certain event in a building's lifetime. Major concentration and extermination camps such as Dachau, Majdanek or Mauthausen may spring to mind, images of them today closely resembling that of their inherited state soon after liberation.

However, as Holocaust archaeologist Gilly Carr explains, to assume this principle for the vast majority of Holocaust sites (an estimated 44,000) is a naivety. All Holocaust sites have now experienced 80 years of succeeding history – major political shifts such as the rise and fall of the Iron Curtain; repurposing for a multitude of uses including military and refugee accommodation; demolition; vandalism; and destructive weathering. Thus, the commemorative aspects of many sites have been subject to partial or total erasure, or dramatic reinterpretation.



Figure 4: Majdanek concentration camp in Poland remains one of the most accurately preserved Holocaust sites

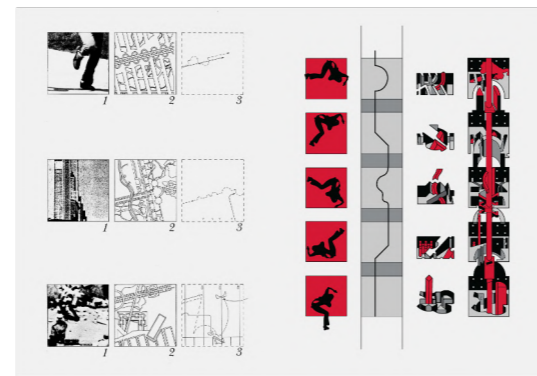


Figure 3: The Manhattan Transcripts by Bernard Tschumi attempt to capture temporal events in architectural drawings (courtesy of Bernard Tschumi Architects)

Reinterpretation and Erasure: Borgo San Dalmazzo and Drancy

In the case of reinterpretation, for example, in the 1960s the Borgo San Dalmazzo concentration camp in Italy was transformed into a memorial site. Architect Romano Boico, in line with the Catholic state's vision, turned the courtyard into an "open-air cathedral", and one of the prisoners' buildings into a "hall of crosses". Such Christian imagery may recognise the site as a place of mass trauma, but falls short of acknowledging the fact that the Holocaust was a systematic persecution of the Jewish people. (Carr, 2024). Even through its commemoration, the history of Borgo San Dalmazzo has nevertheless been suppressed.

After their liberation, many concentration camps and ghettos continued to operate, instead housing refugees, military personnel, or even Nazi prisoners. The sites that fell under the Iron Curtain were subjected to Soviet war narratives, often with a disregard for the Jewish and Roma victims. (Terezín, as I will discuss later, experienced both.) Some sites were quietly subsumed back into the cities they were isolated from, their original architecture totally erased. Examples include the internment camp in Drancy, Paris, which resumed its function as a social housing estate in 1948. Only after its demolition in 1976 did any commemorative efforts take place. Others, in large part due to the Nazis' comprehensive dismantling of many concentration camps, have slowly been left to fade into obscurity. Others still have been actively destroyed in the years since: the swift burning of the Bergen-Belsen camp after the liberation of the last prisoners was carried out to eradicate potential diseases remaining on the site.



Figure 5: Drancy internment camp in France resumed operations as a social housing scheme after WWII

Even the most strictly preserved Holocaust sites such as the aforementioned Dachau, Mauthausen and Majdanek have undergone extensive changes, material replacements and modernisations to make them accessible and relevant in the 21st Century. Their state of preservation is not and has never been static, despite external appearances. And, of course, the state of preservation they remain in is a fundamentally different, sanitised version of that in which they were inherited in 1945, "complete with corpses and emaciated bodies, mud and filth, and riddled with typhus." (Carr & Cooke, 2025, p. 43).

Pragmatic Commemoration

This adaptation to necessity and changing times is not something to be avoided, but navigated pragmatically. Aiming to maintain the authenticity of Holocaust sites through total preservation is to disregard the very real issues they face today, not least weathering caused by climate change, or their vacancy in the face of Europe's housing crisis. "Does it make sense to move out the societally marginalised, persecuted and dispossessed among the living in order to remember the marginalised, persecuted and dispossessed among the dead?" writes Carr (2024). Transforming Holocaust sites into museums, memorials and education centres serves great importance, but can no longer remain the default option for their architectural management. The coming post-witness era requires a broader interpretation of what constitutes Holocaust remembrance, driven by pragmatism. This can manifest externally, in the form of architectural reuse, and internally, through the practice of memory-driven imaginative discourse.

Preservation Through Inhabitation: Staro Sajmište

Staro Sajmište (the "Old Fairground") in Belgrade, Serbia, has followed a more organic – and highly contested – route to preservation. Built in 1933 as an international expo site, in 1941 the Nazis transformed it into Serbia's largest concentration camp, imprisoning and murdering upwards of 50,000 Jewish and Roma women, children, and later Serbian nationalists and Communists. Except for an old memorial plaque and a relatively recent commemorative statue, authorities have not ensured its preservation as a site of memorial. Over time, many buildings have been privately bought and reused as businesses: art studios, restaurants, a bookshop a gym, a nightclub, and even briefly a kindergarten. Business owners have faced backlash for "inappropriate" reuse of buildings that do not respect the site's dark history, and inhabitants have even been threatened with eviction to make way for a memorial centre that has not progressed since its proposal in the 1990s. Eyal Weizman, founder of human-rights research group Forensic Architecture, condemns the decision to evict local business owners in the name of Holocaust commemoration as unacceptable. The construction of a memorial centre "required the displacement of the site's inhabitants, including, perversely, the Roma communities who were themselves victims of the Nazis." (Weizman, 2017, p. 61).



Figure 6: Staro Sajmište in Serbia serves as an example of preservation through inhabitation

Furthermore, the inhabitation of Staro Sajmište, however “inappropriate”, has actually contributed to the preservation of the site more than any state-led restorative efforts. Both Weizman and Carr concur that the Staro Sajmište’s survival is precisely because of the reuse of its buildings. Fellow Forensic Architecture researcher Caroline Sturdy Colls puts it concisely: “the people who have lived in these buildings have played a role in preserving them. Many of these buildings wouldn’t be here if people hadn’t lived in them.” (Weizman, 2017, p. 63). This is echoed by one of the building owners, businessman Miodrag Krsmanović, who in a 2019 interview stated:

I’ve been battling for 20 years, investing in this building, caring for it, nurturing it. I bought it in a terrible state – totally ruined. It didn’t even have a roof, it was completely rotten. They should compare the state of this building in ‘98 and today. They should all be saying ‘thank you kindly, sir, excellent work, sir. (Eror, 2019).

Perhaps the reason for the perceived failure of Staro Sajmište is not the reuse of its buildings, but the lack of ability for visitors to partake in commemorative discourse, even imaginative. This cannot be blamed on its tenants, many of whom were unaware of the former use of the site. In this case, a mediation between state and local investors may have prevented the introduction of unsuitable establishments. A dialogue between parties could have ensured organic rejuvenation without the need for hostile state intervention and eviction.

A Mediated Dialogue

A dialogue between public and state could also prevent wholly inappropriate reuses. The construction of an industrial pig farm at Lety, Czechia, a former concentration camp for Roma, for example, was hugely controversial. However, the farm was removed in 2024 and a Holocaust memorial is in development. This came about thanks to decades of campaigning; ultimately, its fate was decided by the public. If nothing else, this proves the public can be trusted to act as a mediator too, perhaps in contrast to the prevailing narrative of state-controlled preservation.

These sources discussed suggest that unlike the prevailing rhetoric of the witness era, the most powerful long-term preservation attempts shift to a middle ground, between strictly imposed guidelines and public agency. To return to the interlinked questions of how best to allow Holocaust sites to foster meaningful imaginative practice, and how best to convey their past traumas without the displacement of ourselves: as we ready ourselves for the post-witness era, we must be open to a more flexible, self-perpetuating form of preservation, one that is aware of possibilities of reinterpretation, and one that allows adaptation to – and consequently expression of – current events that continue to shape the future of Holocaust remembrance.



Figure 7: A mediated approach to Holocaust site governance may allow for appropriate reuse and imaginative practice

IN CONVERSATION: ZUZANA JUSTMAN

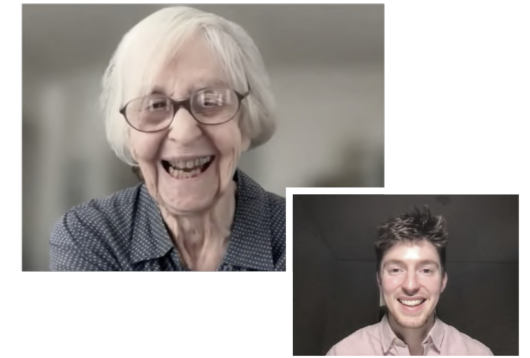


Figure 8: Zuzana Justman and I in conversation, March 2026

Born in Prague in 1931, Zuzana Justman is a survivor of the Theresienstadt Ghetto, where she was imprisoned as a child. Emigrating to Buenos Aires and then New York, she spent much of her career as a filmmaker. Her films *Terezín Diary* and the Emmy-winning *Voices of the Children* focus on the Ghetto.

This interview has been abridged and edited for clarity.

Joshua Richardson How do you see the future of Holocaust commemoration, when there are no more survivors left to speak?

Zuzana Justman Remembering will be different. It will be less emotional. That is inevitable. Those of us who survived felt an obligation toward those who didn’t, to make sure the world found out what happened. Alfred Kantor said that in *Terezín Diary*, and I felt the same. In the future, others will have to take on that responsibility. Not in the same way, perhaps, but through education.

JR When I visited Terezín, one thing that struck me was the disconnect between what happened there during the Holocaust and the fact that it is still a living town. How do you see that tension?

ZJ I don’t expect the inhabitants of Terezín to feel the way I do. I have my personal feelings. Personally, I would like the town to remain exactly the way that it was when I was there, but I don’t want to impose that wish on anybody who lives there now. They have a right to a normal life.

JR There are discussions about reusing the large barracks buildings, even converting some into housing. What is your reaction to that?

ZJ I don’t think you can turn the entire town into a memorial. It was always a town, even before the ghetto. If

buildings are empty, something has to be done with them. The people who live there now have to live. I may wish things would remain the same, but that is my feeling. That cannot be the basis for how a town functions. What is important is that the history is not forgotten.

JR As someone working on an architectural project there, I’m very aware of my own emotional connection. I don’t want to impose my feelings about the town on people who live there and may not share them.

ZJ I would feel the same way if I were doing work in Terezín. Memory is personal. You cannot expect people who are not directly connected to it to feel the same way. Commemoration involves feeling. Education is different. The people who live there now are not responsible for preserving our feelings. They have to live there.

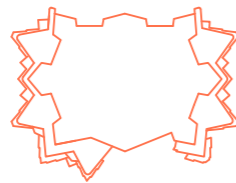
JR So how should remembrance coexist with reuse?

ZJ Education is very important. Commemoration involves feeling, and that will lessen in the future. But education must remain. There was a time when Terezín was ignored under communism. There was no research, nothing. That must not happen again. If the town changes, the history still has to be known. That is essential.

JR Do you think architecture can play a role in that education?

ZJ I made films because that was the only way I could respond. Others may use architecture, or writing, or teaching. Those of us who survived felt an obligation toward those who didn’t, to make sure the world found out what happened. In the future, others will have to carry that responsibility - not with the same emotion, perhaps, but with knowledge.

PART TWO



TEREZÍN

TEREZÍN: AN INTRODUCTION

Bastion

In the north-western corner of Czechia, surrounded by green plains, gentle hills and tucked against the bank of the river Elbe, lies the fortress town of Terezín. A gateway between East and West Europe, it is a quiet, rural area of the country known for agriculture. Since its construction, Terezín has stood still while the continent has continually shifted around it, and its history has been shaped by the colossal changes it has endured.

Terezín's history dates back almost 250 years. Completed in 1790, Terezín originally served as a military barracks. Housing between 5,000 and 10,000 soldiers, the town's purpose was to defend Austria-Hungary from potential Prussian attacks. The town is a rare - and perhaps one of the best preserved - example of a Bastion fortress, implementing its eponymous angular bastion walls in a striking star formation, surrounding its gridded garrison buildings.



Figure 9: Terezín's location in Czechia

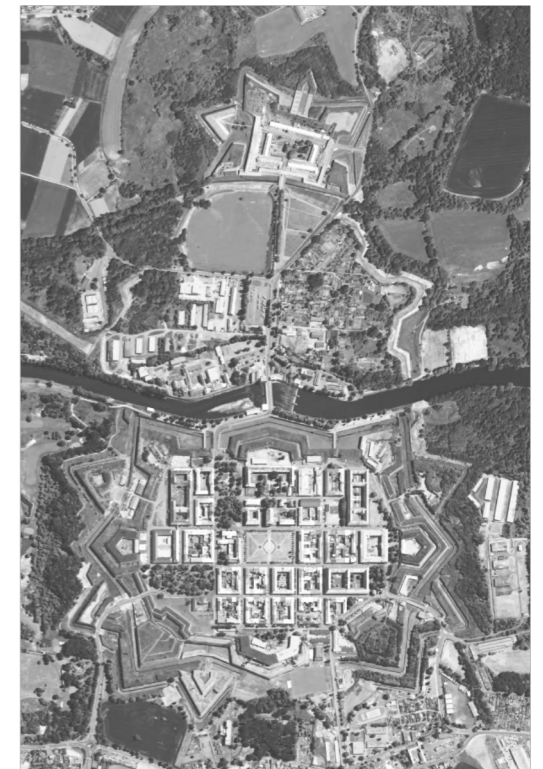


Figure 10: Terezín's striking star-shaped bastion walls and grid layout from above

Ghetto

Terezín is widely known as the largest Jewish ghetto in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia during the Holocaust. From 1939 to 1945, Terezín was commandeered by the German SS, and used to house Jews, Roma and other marginalised groups in squalid and inhumane conditions. Of the 144,000 prisoners that passed through Terezín, the majority were transported on to concentration and death camps across Europe, where they were systematically murdered. 33,000 prisoners died in Terezín itself.

Memorial

The town is now visited by thousands of tourists each year, paying homage to Terezín's Holocaust memorial and Ghetto Museum, and visiting the small fortress and historic bastion walls. However, Terezín is still home to almost 3,000 inhabitants. In recent years, little intervention has been made to keep Terezín afloat, and many of the old garrison buildings are in disrepair. House prices are low, and Terezín's population is ageing with a lack of quality housing in the town. Meanwhile, many of the town's existing buildings need update and renovation, with some rendered uninhabitable due to neglect and weathering.

TEREZÍN: A TIMELINE

Joseph II, Habsburg Emperor, founder of Terezín



Thereisenstadt is officially declared a free royal town
1782

Maria Theresa, mother of Joseph II, after whom Terezín is named



Pavilion in Smetana park, Terezín

Further fortifications are added to Thereisenstadt
1850



Terezín crematorium

A decree is issued to abolish the fortress following an improved relations between Austria-Hungary and Germany
1882

Church of the Resurrection of Christ, Terezín



The Austro-Hungarian Empire collapses: Terezín becomes part of newly-formed Czechoslovakia
1918

Gateway in Terezín's Small Fortress



The Sudetenland is annexed by Nazi Germany
1938



1780
Construction of Thereisenstadt begins, following the designs of General Karl Clemens Pellegrini

1790
Construction of Thereisenstadt completes

1809
First extensions to Thereisenstadt are added, including a fortified bridgehead and recognisable arrow-shaped bastion

1866
The seven-week Austro-Prussian War takes place; Thereisenstadt is armed but never besieged

1939
Nazi Germany takes control of Terezín as it occupies the remaining Czech provinces

1940
Nazi Germany's SS plan to adapt Terezín; main town becomes a Wehrmacht military base, and a Gestapo prison is set up in Terezín's small fortress

1941
Thereisenstadt Jewish Ghetto set up in Terezín and the first Jews are deported there

1942
Transportations of Jews from Thereisenstadt to death camps begins. Over 100,000 prisoners pass through Thereisenstadt

1943
The SS widens the scope of deportations to house Dutch and Danish Jews

1944
The SS run a deception campaign, rehousing and transporting prisoners while advertising their "model ghetto" for a Red Cross visit

1945
The Thereisenstadt Ghetto is handed over to the Red Cross and the SS flees; Soviet troops occupy Terezín

Thereisenstadt camp officially closes; Czechoslovakia falls under communist rule
1948



Terezín town hall

1947

Czechoslovak Republic establishes a Memorial to National Suffering at Terezín

Communist rule in Czechoslovakia ends
1989



National Cemetery at the Terezín memorial

Czechoslovakia holds its first free elections
1990



Terezín's Ghetto Museum opens in the former boy's school building
1991

All remaining Soviet troops leave Terezín; Terezín becomes part of Czechia after its split with Slovakia
1992

Stephen Holl Architects & SKUPINA win first prize in Terezín's Ghetto Museum extension competition
2022

1996
The Czech army withdraws its presence in Terezín, and all troops leave

2002
Terezín is hit by major flooding, damaging many buildings including the crematorium

2023
The Czech government pledges up to CZK1.7B (\$80M) for the restoration of Terezín's derelict buildings

Empty Buildings

In many ways, Terezín's condition serves as a paradigm for the issues surrounding the future treatment of Holocaust sites. Whilst much of the town stands intact, its history has been anything but preservative. After liberation, Terezín was used to house German prisoners of war. Despite the establishment of a monument to national suffering in 1947, one year later Czechoslovakia fell under the Iron Curtain, and Terezín was used as accommodation for the Czech army until 1996. In the wake of the army's departure, Terezín's population dropped from 8,000 to under 2,000, causing investment in the town to fall drastically, and leaving many plots vacant. As mentioned, climate change and harsh weather are increasingly real threats to Holocaust sites, and Terezín has suffered on this account after major floods in 2002 and 2013 caused significant damage.

City of Change

This issue has been identified locally and nationally, and in 2023, the Czech Government pledged CZK 3 billion (~€120 million) for the restoration of Terezín and a similar bastion-style fortress town, Josefov. Further progress has been made by parallel arrangements with Interreg Europe, an EU-backed development fund scheme, and local and municipal bodies. In correspondence with Jiří Hofman, director of *Terezín: Město Změny* (Terezín: City of Change), he outlined the proposal for a masterplan for the town, expected in 2026. Alongside this, four buildings have been earmarked for restoration: the former Dresden barracks, military hospital, the armoury, and the food storage unit.



Figure 12: Church of the Resurrection of Christ seen from Havlíčkova. Has Terezín's inhabitation led to the preservation of many of its buildings?



Figure 11: Major flooding in 2002 and 2013 damaged many buildings in Terezín, including the crematorium now owned by the Terezín Memorial

A Vicious Circle

The contrasting outlooks of municipal bodies and stakeholders in the rejuvenation of Terezín similarly reflect the conflicts that arise when considering what to do with Holocaust memorial sites. Bodies such as *Památník Terezín* (Terezín Memorial) are keen to preserve, favouring museums and spaces for publicising the events of the Holocaust. Ivana Rapavá, a member of the Terezín Memorial foundation, described to me the contrasting outlooks on the development of Terezín:

Some of the inhabitants and representatives of the city of Terezín would prefer to preserve the fortress in its original form and not allow any interventions in its architecture. Of course, then Terezín would become an open-air museum in which people who need at least partial social amenities would not be able to live.

Others, she continues,

understand that it is in the interest of the city's development to attract young people to live, work and participate in development in the city. In that case, however, it is necessary to accommodate them, to allow the construction [and] reconstruction of houses without unnecessary delays, to ensure [appropriate] services in the city. However, in this they mainly encounter [regulations around the] preservation of monuments, which is quite strict. It is therefore a vicious circle.

CONFLICTING OPINIONS

Between the Ditches and the Ramparts

Terezín faces an uncomfortable crossroads, caught between the municipal and the memorial.

Municipal organisations such as *Pevnost Terezín* (Terezín Fortress) and *Terezín: City of Change* are keen to promote aspects of Terezín's history other than that of the Holocaust. Others, such as the Terezín Memorial and *Institut Terezínské Iniciativy* (Terezín Initiative Institute) focus on commemoration of the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

The 2024 film *Mezi Přikopy a Valy* (Between the Ditches and the Ramparts) explores this exact dichotomy. Filmmaker Viktor Portel and researcher Martin Šmok explores the lack of recognition for Jewish suffering in Terezín that prevailed under communist rule. With this knowledge, Terezín mayor René Tomášek's interview with Šmok feels unsettling. "You're still focused on those four years [1941-45]," he says. I see a 240-year span, but you're still on those four years."

"We hope we can persuade people," he continues, "not to focus on the war, but to come and see our nice history." (Portel, 2024, 33:21).

Tomášek's view, Šmok explains, may be a "symptom of the whole national memory" that has lingered long after the fall of the Iron Curtain. As mayor, he understandably says that "the town's priority is to populate Terezín." But to do so in a way that overlooks the history of the Theresienstadt Ghetto is rash.

"Accepting the simple fact that its wartime history will always interest tourists more than its wonderful baroque fortress would allow the town to function more maturely," concludes Šmok (Portel, 2024, 36:07).

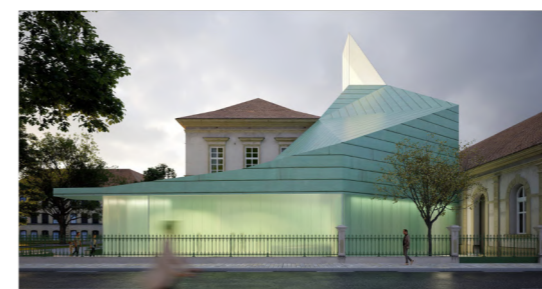


Figure 13: Tower of Light - Steven Holl Architects & Marcela Steinbachová's design for Terezín Ghetto Museum's extension

The Tower of Light

In 2023, an architectural competition was held to design an extension of the Terezín Ghetto Museum. The winners, Steven Holl Architects and Marcela Steinbachová, designed a striking, contemporary Tower of Light, inspired by the drawing of Moon Landscape by Petr Ginz, a 14-year old prisoner who was later murdered in Auschwitz. Upon completion, it will be by far the most strikingly contemporary piece of architecture built in Terezín. It serves as an apt precedent for the complexities of contemporary development in the town: the design was met with mixed reviews and broadly criticised by survivors of the ghetto.

Helga Hošková-Weissová, prisoner in Terezín's Dresden Barracks as a child, openly criticises the beautification of what she remembers as a place of "suffering, hunger, disease, epidemics, filth, and constant fear of deportation to other camps." Whilst noting its artistic merit, she writes that the design "does not capture the sombre historical atmosphere of the Terezín ghetto; on the contrary, it disrupts it!" (Hošková-Weissová, 2022, p. 5).

Further feedback encouraged the preservation of Terezín's buildings: one comment criticised the design in comparison to the treatment of the Magdeburg Barracks: "only the absolutely necessary structural modifications were carried out with great care, which practically do not alter the exterior appearance. With so many empty barracks spaces available, the Terezín Memorial should all the more follow this example."

The criticism continues: "Above the entrance is a Hebrew inscription, 'Do not forget.' But suddenly, the authors of the winning project seem to be thinking of something completely different." (Merová, 2022, p.4).

The Terezín Memorial's stance is that such a contemporary architectural intervention would attract more visitors and allow more people to learn about Terezín's history. To me, the argument brings to mind Hirsch's remark:

"What do we owe the victims?"

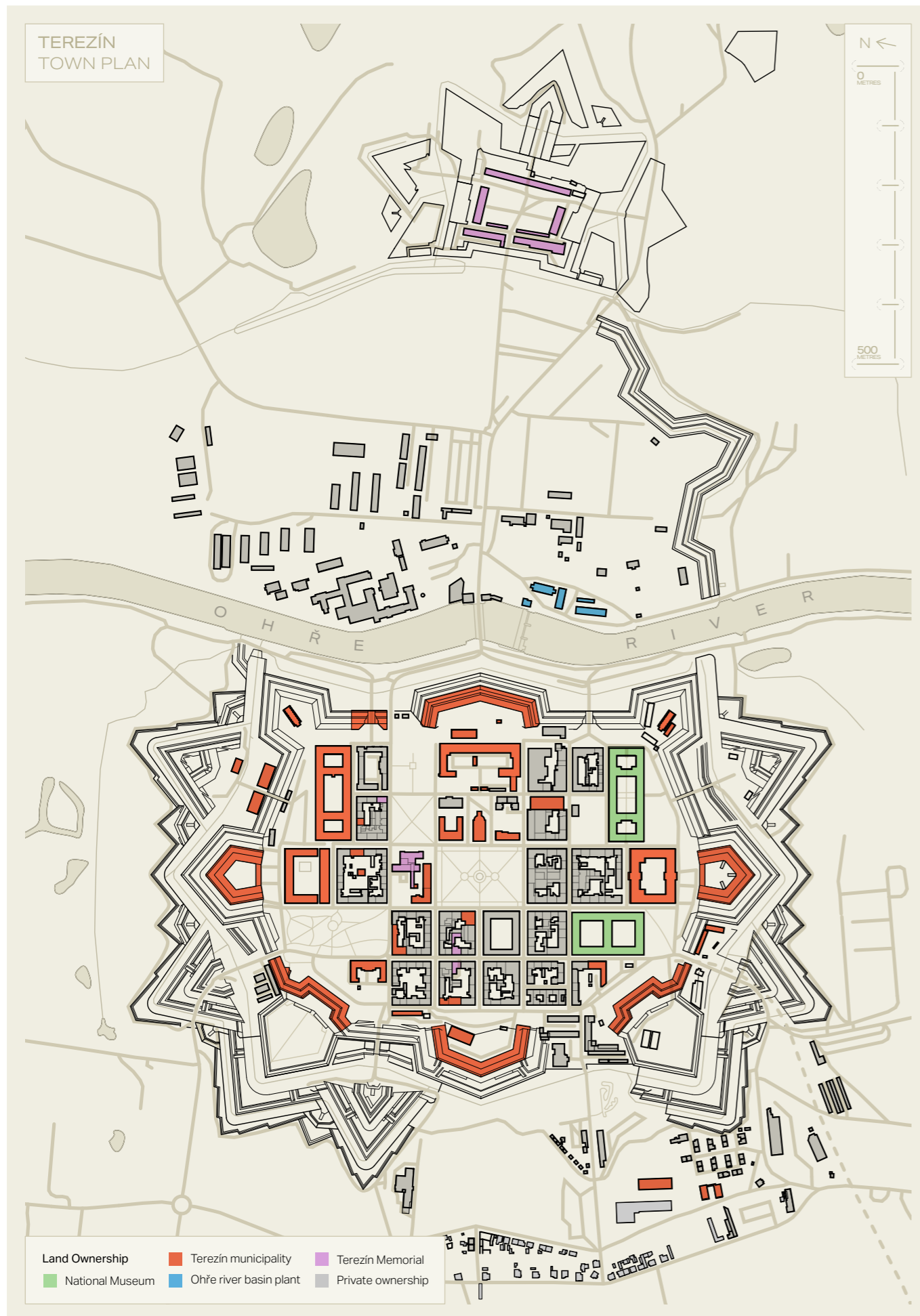


Figure 14: Town plan of Terezín with land ownership designations

TEREZÍN'S KEY STAKEHOLDER BODIES



Pevnost Terezín / Terezín Fortress

The Terezín Fortress association owns the fortress structure - primarily the fortress walls - and is responsible for opening them up to the public. The organisation is concerned with promoting Terezín's history beyond that of the Ghetto, focusing on its preservation as a Habsburg bastion fortress.



Památník Terezín / Terezín Memorial

The Terezín Memorial foundation is responsible for the Ghetto Museum, memorial and Small Fortress museum, as well as several other visitor sites across the town dedicated to documenting and commemorating the history of the Theresienstadt Ghetto. In 2023, the foundation held an architectural competition for the extension of the Ghetto Museum, which was met with mixed opinions.



Interreg Europe (European Regional Development Fund)

Funded by the European Union, Interreg Europe is an inter-regional programme designed to help local regions across the EU share good practice and improve policy. Terezín is receiving funding from Interreg Europe as part of the "Project of the Restoration of Historic Buildings" scheme, focusing on significant buildings across Europe.



Národní Muzeum / National Museum

The Czech National Museum in Prague runs two "depository" sites in Terezín, which are used for restoration workshops and digitisation departments. With the proposed restoration plans for Terezín, the National Museum's resources and connections may become a valuable asset for the town.



UNESCO

Terezín is currently on UNESCO's Tentative List, submitted twice by the Czech state in 2001 and 2024. Preservation requirements for consideration by UNESCO may influence the functions and aesthetics of future development in Terezín.



Ústecký kraj / Ústí nad Labem Region

The Ústí nad Labem region, in which Terezín is located, manage Interreg Europe's "Project of the Restoration of Historic Buildings" project, concerning Terezín.



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

The IHRA were key supporters of Terezín's restoration efforts, and acknowledge the need for contemporary development alongside Holocaust commemoration in the town's future.

**IN CONVERSATION:
JIŘÍ HOFMAN**



Figure 15: Jiří Hofman and I on site at the Dresden Barracks, March 2026

Jiří Hofman, director of Terezín: City of Change, offered his thoughts in an insightful interview. Terezín has a future, however it remains unclear exactly what that future will currently look like.

This interview has been abridged and edited for clarity.

Joshua Richardson Could you describe your role in Terezín and the organisations you work with?

Jiří Hofman I head *Steinmetz Terezín*, an association of locals and others interested in the town's earlier, pre-war history, particularly the eighteenth-century fortress period. I also work with *Terezín: City of Change*, which promotes the older heritage and tourism aspects of the town. In addition, I cooperate with the municipality and the regional government on heritage and development projects.

JR What is the national restoration programme currently under way?

JH The Czech government has launched a rescue programme with two main components. The Ministry of Culture is funding roof restorations on four large historic buildings – the Dresden infantry barracks, the armoury, the military hospital, and the food store. Complete reconstruction is not yet possible because future use has not been defined. The Ministry for Regional Development is addressing the fortress walls, underground corridors, and the eighteenth-century water-defence system, about 90 per cent of which still survives.

JR How is the new Master Plan progressing?

JH We are still in the preparatory stage, developing the vision and framework for the town's next 5 to 20 years. This phase will continue until February 2026, after which the municipality will prepare the terms and tender a design company to produce the full plan. The process is being developed with Dutch-Belgian consultants.

JR What ideas are being considered for re-using the large barracks buildings?

JH One major challenge is depopulation – since 2000, Terezín's population has dropped from about 8,000 to 1,800. Attracting new residents is key. Housing conversion is possible, but daylight regulations and monument protection mean only about half of the large barracks could become apartments. The remainder might house administrative, educational, or community uses, but all interventions must respect the buildings' memorial significance as parts of the former ghetto.

JR What does the population of Terezín look like today?

JH The average age is around forty-one, comparable with the national average. After the army left, many younger residents moved away, but the town now attracts young families thanks to affordable housing and good connections to Prague and Ústí nad Labem. The decline has slowed, and numbers have stabilised near 1,800 people.

JR What are the restrictions on renovation?

JH The entire town is designated a monumental reservation, so all exterior changes – façades, colours, windows, roofing – require approval from the Monument Preservation Office. Plastic windows and solar panels are not allowed, as they would alter the historical roofscape. Interior alterations are less restricted.

JR How is Terezín's UNESCO status progressing?

JH Terezín has been on the UNESCO Tentative List for roughly two decades. Following the cancellation of the previous list, a new joint nomination is being prepared with other Habsburg bastion fortresses – such as Josefov and Komárno – to distinguish this Central European defence system from French Vauban fortresses. The new submission is still in progress.

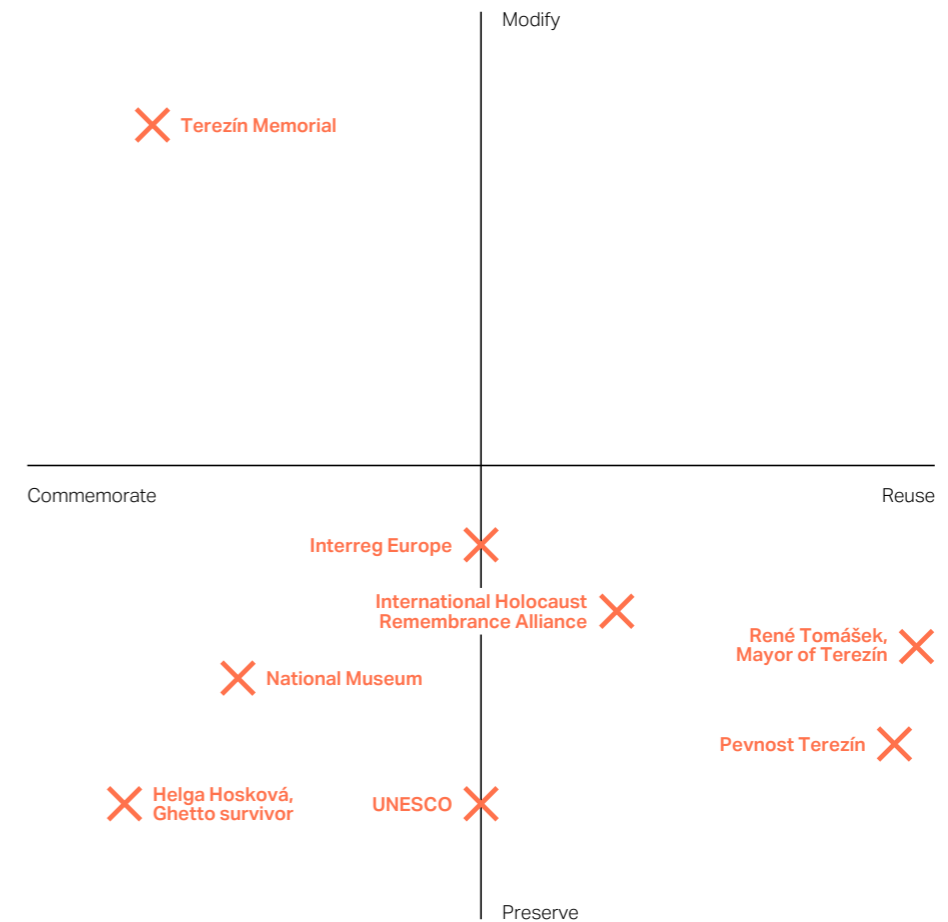


Figure 16: Conjectured stances of different parties on the architectural future of Terezín

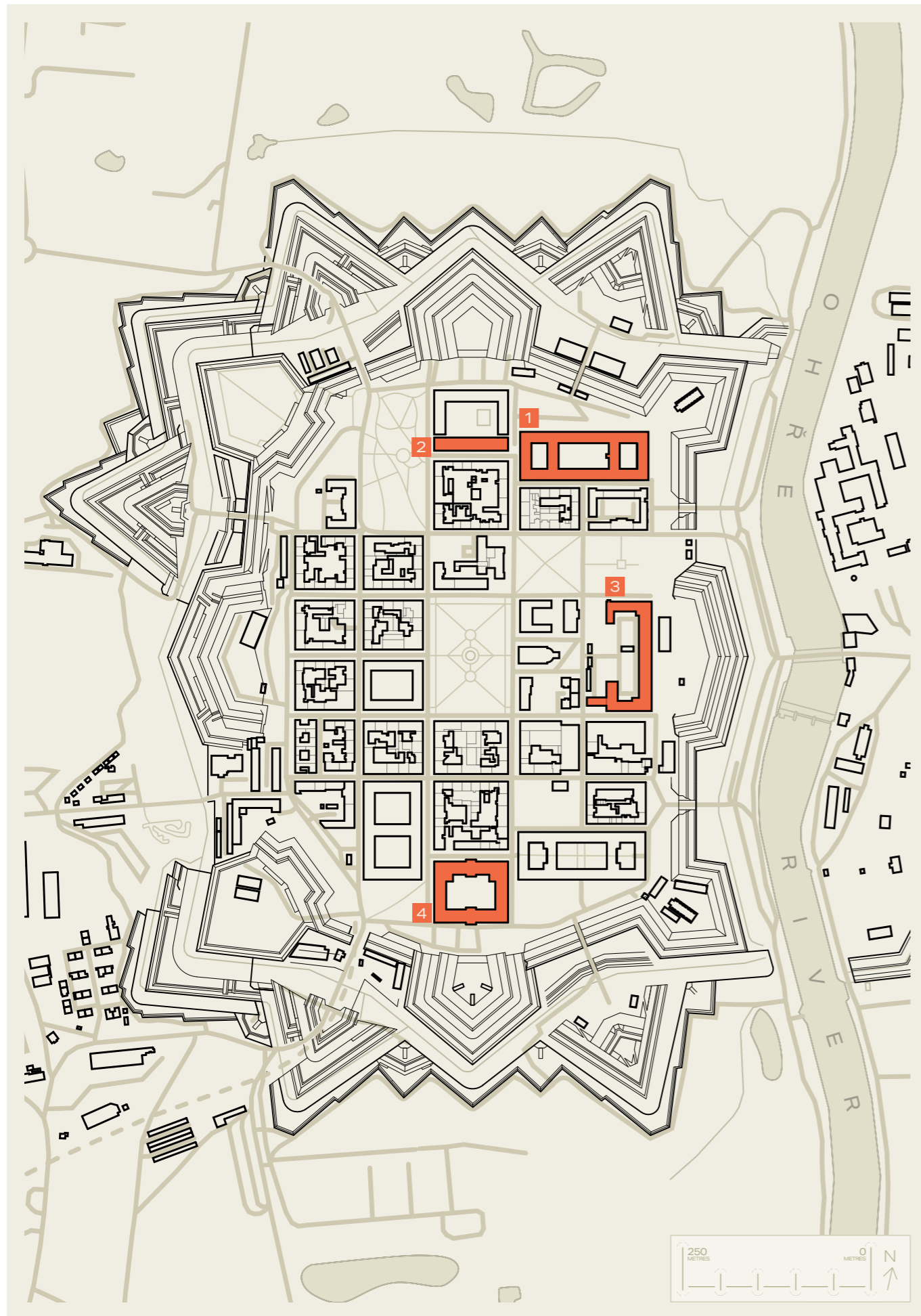


Figure 17: Town plan of Terezín with land ownership designations

TEREZÍN'S EMPTY BLOCKS

Four disused buildings have been chosen by the Terezín municipality for renovation and reuse. This page highlights the suggestions by the municipality - *Terezín: City of Change* - for their reuse.



1 DRESDEN BARRACKS

The Dresden Barracks has been uninhabited since the 1990s, when the occupying Czech army left. Since then it has fallen into a state of ruin and imminent collapse.

The municipality has proposed the barracks be reused as residential, educational and commercial spaces.

2 ARMOURY

The armoury operated as an administrative checkpoint during the ghetto years.

The municipality has proposed the armoury could be converted into a wellness and sports centre, or a children's science and discovery centre.



3 MILITARY HOSPITAL

Operating as a prison for mentally ill Jews during the ghetto years, the military hospital was also the place where Gavrilo Princip, assassin of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, died.

The municipality have suggested a transformation to a mixed-use residential, spa and wellness centre.

4 FOOD STORAGE UNIT

A large building with minimal fenestration, the food storage unit acted as a men's prison during the ghetto years.

The municipality have suggested a primary conversion into university research facilities.



**PRESERVATION
THROUGH
INHABITATION**

Contrary to the denunciations of Terezín as a "ghost town", a visit in March 2026 gave me an impression of Terezín as a quiet but very much living town. Inhabitation of many of the buildings used to imprison Jews and house SS soldiers has in fact allowed for the preservation of the town. This page compares the present uses of buildings to the functions during the Ghetto years.



Terezín Memorial headquarters
Gestapo guards' office



Office spaces
Nazi SS commandant headquarters,
post office, prison for girls age 14-16



City library
Prison for the elderly

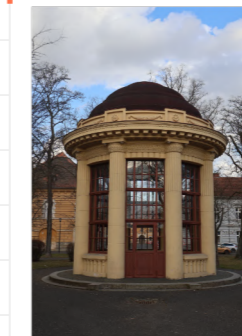
Key
Current use
Ghetto use



Residential properties
Mass dormitories



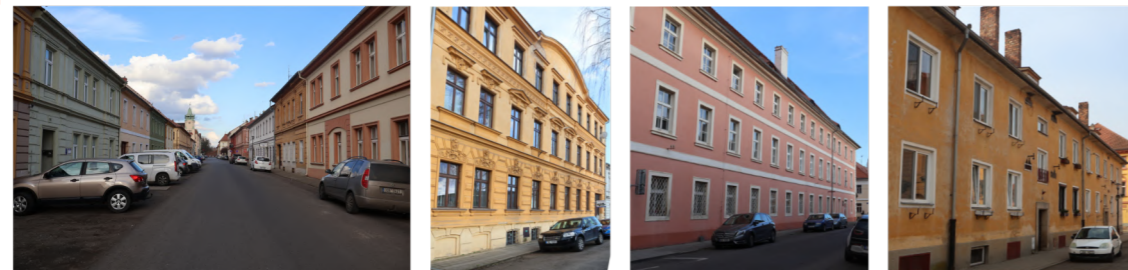
Apartments and commercial spaces
Prison for women



Park pavilion
Prisoner's music
performance space



Equestrian school
Prisoner's carpentry workshop



Residential properties
Mass dormitories



Museum and archive centre
Seat of Jewish self-government



Town hall
Seat of the Ghetto Court and bank of Jewish
self-government



Commercial bank
Nazi SS commandant
headquarters, prisoner torture
and interrogation centre



Centre for Genocide Studies
Ghetto police station



Restaurant
Mass dormitories



Electrician / apartment
Mass dormitories

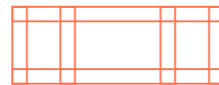


Hotel and restaurant
Nazi SS accommodation



Terezín Memorial Ghetto museum
Prison for boys age 10-15

PART THREE



THE DRESDEN BARRACKS

THE DRESDEN BARRACKS: HOW TO REUSE THEM?

Barracks, Prison

Within the fortress walls, one building encapsulates the current dilemma facing Terezín perhaps more than any other. The Dresden Barracks, known locally as the Žižka Barracks, is a 170-metre-long construction comprising three courtyards, originally designed to accommodate around 1,150 soldiers on its completion in 1783 (Institut Tereziňské Iniciativy, 2024).

Most infamously, the Dresden Barracks operated as a prison for elderly women, mothers and girls during the Holocaust. It may have been where my great-great-grandmother Růžena was imprisoned. Thousands of prisoners were forced into rooms containing between 20 and 40 people, with a total population of up to 4,500, over four times the intended maximum capacity (Adler, 1955). Like most of the buildings in Theresienstadt Ghetto, diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, polio, encephalitis and tuberculosis were rife and spread quickly in such cramped conditions. Prisoners were slowly starved on 900 calories a day: enough to prevent death, but not enough to live properly, recounts Theresienstadt survivor Miloš Dobrý in a 2013 interview (Kanner & Schwarz, 2013, 13:34). Thousands died in the barracks.



Figure 18: Prisoners queue for food in the Dresden Barracks courtyard, 1945 (courtesy of Terezín Memorial)

The Liga Terezín

The 1944 film *Theresienstadt: Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet* (Theresienstadt: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area) depicts Terezín as a functioning town with healthy-looking Jewish inhabitants giving orchestral performances, at a café, and playing sports. The Dresden Barracks features significantly, its central courtyard transformed into a football pitch, with thousands of spectators peering out of the arched openings. It is an image of conviviality, community and health, and it is a lie, one of many propaganda tools deployed by the Nazis. Several weeks after filming, most of the cast would be dead, transported to extermination camps and gassed.

Although given more significance in the film than in the bleak reality of the Theresienstadt Ghetto, the *Liga Terezín* (Terezín League) did operate as a football league throughout the ghetto's existence. The league served a perverse double-role, being used as propaganda during inspections such as the 1944 International Red Cross visit, whilst also providing a lifeline of camaraderie, recreation and better rations for the male prisoners on the teams.



Figure 19: "In the Courtyard of the Dresden Barracks" by Malva Schalek (courtesy of Terezín Memorial)



Figure 23: The Liga Terezín as shown in the 1944 propaganda film Theresienstadt (courtesy of Beit Theresienstadt)



Figure 20: Sketch of a dormitory space used for prayer by Emo Groag (courtesy of Beit Theresienstadt)

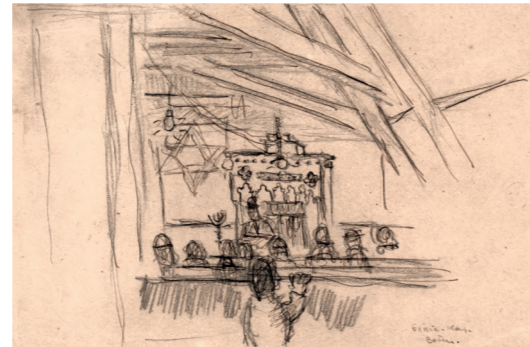


Figure 24: Sketch of a loft space used for prayer by Emo Groag (courtesy of Beit Theresienstadt)

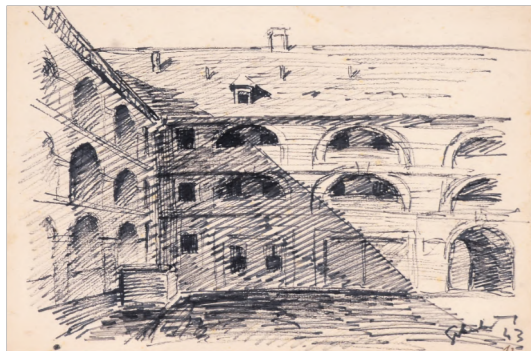


Figure 21: Sketch of the Dresden Barracks courtyard by Albin Glaser (courtesy of Beit Theresienstadt)



Figure 25: "Food Delivery" by Malva Schalek (courtesy of Terezín Memorial)



Figure 22: Sketch of a kitchen in the Dresden Barracks by Adolf Aussenberg (courtesy of Beit Theresienstadt)



Figure 26: "While Eating" by Malva Schalek (courtesy of Terezín Memorial)

Shared Creativity

Sport was not the only relief for some prisoners in the Dresden Barracks. Amidst the inhumanity of imprisonment, the building was witness to moments of shared spirituality, community and expressions of art. Terezín is known as a place of uncommon cultural production during the Holocaust. Imprisoned as a child in the Dresden Barracks, Helga Hošková-Weissová survived Terezín and subsequent transportations to Auschwitz, Freiburg and Mauthausen concentration camps. Published 70 years later, her diary and sketches of life in Terezín are devastating in their honesty; through overcrowding, forced labour and widespread disease, she tells of prisoners who turned to poetry, music, theatre, and art as she did.

Loft Spaces

Notable is the use of loft spaces for communal gatherings. Hošková-Weissová's sketches show musical performances and Hanukkah celebrations held between the rafters of the barracks. These events are depicted in other prisoner's illustrations, too; attic spaces transformed into prayer rooms, spaces of shared devotion and solitude.

The arched dormitory rooms further served as spaces of community. Hošková-Weissová describes a play performed on Christmas eve:

In the room next door the girls prepared a show. Everyone from the rooms nearby came to see. It was beautiful. We sang, the girls even acted out a short play. For a while we forgot completely. It was as if we were home, somewhere at the theatre, as if the candles set on suitcases and mugs were shining on a Christmas tree and we were at liberty and free (Weiss, 2013, p. 56).

Today, little trace of the events experienced by thousands of prisoners remain evident in the Dresden Barracks. After the Communist occupation of Czechoslovakia, the barracks once again housed soldiers. Walking through the corridors, most noticeable are the coats of arms and inscriptions denoting dormitories and storehouses for different military divisions: *palebná četa* (firing squad); *skladiště zbraní* (weapons storehouse); the crayfish-embazoned coat of arms of Hussite military leader Jan Žižka, after whom the barracks are also named.



Figure 27: "The Dormitory in the Barracks" by Helga Hošková-Weissová



Figure 28: "The L410 Dormitory" by Helga Hošková-Weissová



Figure 29: "Hanukkah in the Loft" by Helga Hošková-Weissová



Figure 30: "The Corridor in Dresden Barracks" by Helga Hošková-Weissová



Figure 31: Most traces of the ghetto have been erased from the Dresden Barracks. These markings were all made during the soldier's occupation of the barracks after 1945

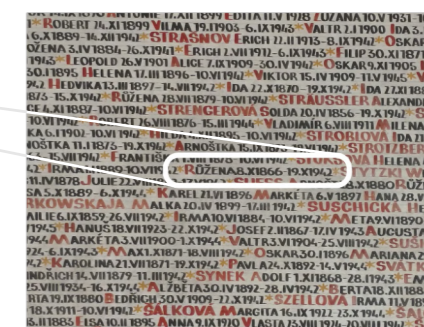


Tacit Erasure

These militaristic adornments allude to a deeper sense of Holocaust erasure experienced during communist rule in Czechoslovakia. In the same interview, Dobrý recalls telling his children about his experience as a prisoner in Theresienstadt. "They didn't want to listen... during the Communist system, they did not [want to know]." (Kanner & Schwarz, 2013, 50:07). The sentiment is echoed by Hořková-Weissová. She recounts the Communists' tacit enforcement of silence around Theresienstadt and the Holocaust, telling of Communist-led forty-year long "reconstruction work" which intentionally blocked entry to the Pinkas Synagogue, a memorial in Prague that inside lists the names of every victim of the Theresienstadt ghetto. "People didn't talk about Terezín at all... [it] was hushed up." (Weiss, 2013, pp. 201-202).



The Dresden Barracks has remained uninhabited since the Czech army left in the late 1990s. Unlike the rest of municipality-owned buildings in Terezín, it has been somewhat overlooked during the growing collective interest in Holocaust commemoration. Thirty years of inattention has left the building in a state of imminent collapse, and many parts are structurally precarious from severe decay and weathering.



RŮŽENA 8.X1866-19.X1942

Figure 32: Around 80,000 names of Czech Jewish victims of the Holocaust are written on the walls of the Pinkas Synagogue in Prague. My great-great-grandmother Růžena Stutzová's name is shown here



Figure 33: Stitched image of the Dresden Barracks, March 2026
Figure 34: Images inside the Dresden Barracks, March 2026



THE

DRESDEN



BARRACKS

TODAY



THE DRESDEN BARRACKS: INITIAL ANALYSES

Concealed amidst a horde of architectural constraints, weathering and damage, the Dresden Barracks hold memories of trauma, overcrowding and suffering; but also acts of resistance. This page examines the weathered state of the building today alongside some the activities that took place during its existence as a prison for women and children. Both architectural and memorial analysis can point towards solutions that respect both aspects of the barracks.

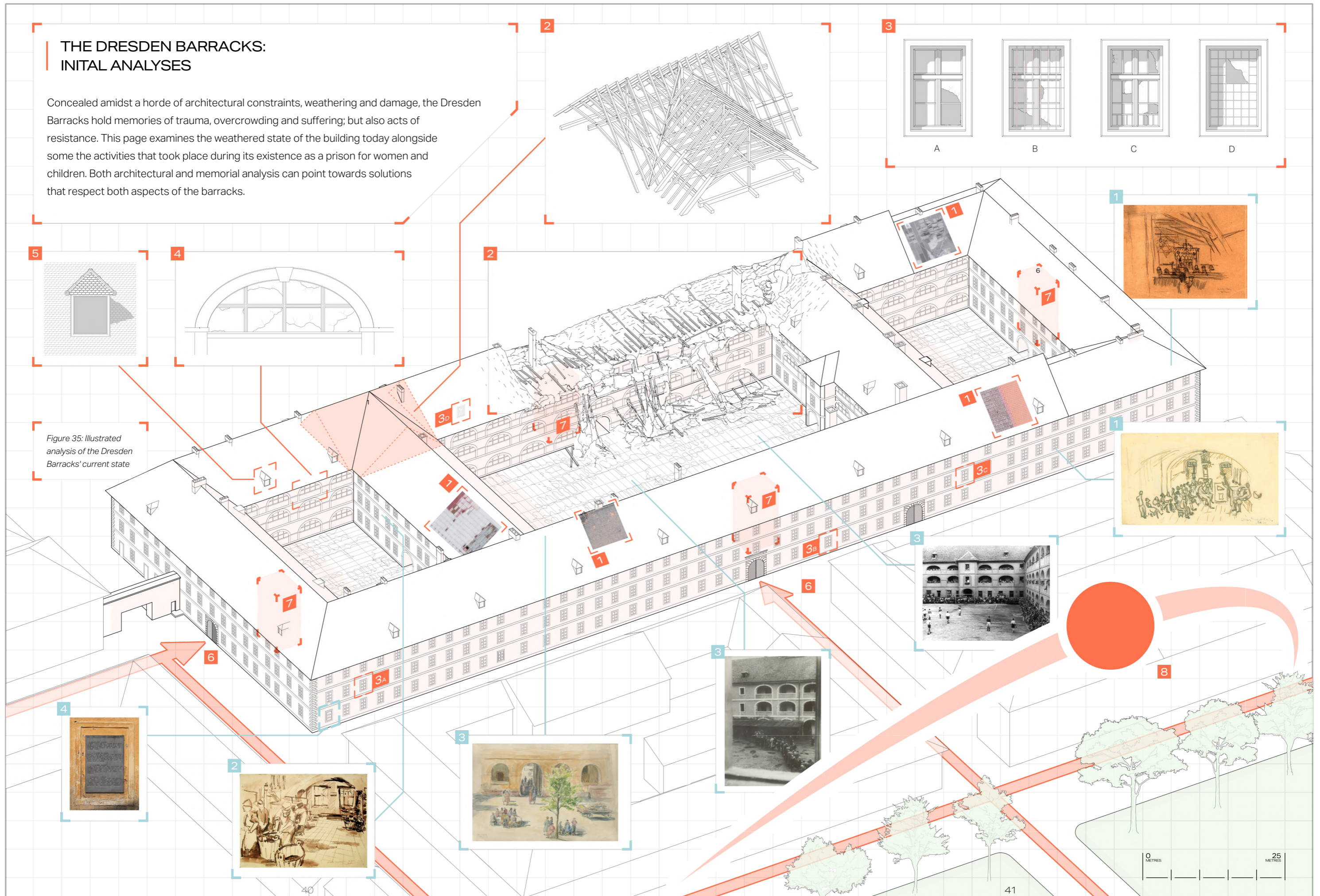
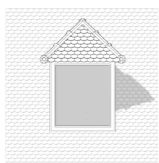
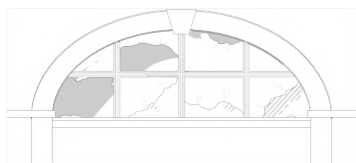
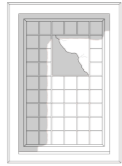
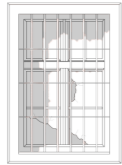
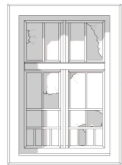
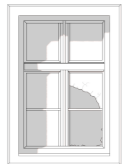
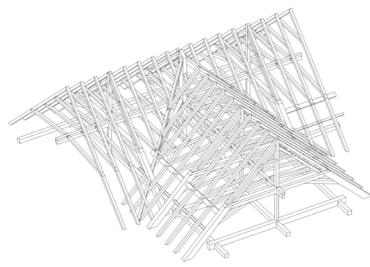
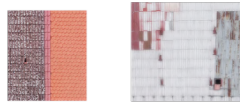


Figure 35: Illustrated analysis of the Dresden Barracks' current state

THE DRESDEN BARRACKS: INITIAL ANALYSES



1 ROOF CLADDING

Much of the barracks' roofspace is unstable, and a discontinuity in cladding shows different areas have been renovated at different times. Examination suggests newest roofing in area A, while the same original tile pattern in area B contains marks of weather damage. Cheaper, newer roofing used in area C still remains damaged, while similar roofing finishes in area D have completely failed, leaving membranes and timber exposed to further weathering.

2 ROOFSPACE

A large part of the barracks' roof collapsed after a series of storms, with more at risk of imminent damage. Combined with the highly varied state of the roof, the need for re-roofing invites a broader question of total roof replacement.

3 ORTHOGONAL WINDOWS

The barracks' outer façades contain traditional windows, most of which are casement. Many are in disrepair, and all are single-glazed, and likely require replacement to comply with contemporary insulation standards. Considering the depth of most rooms, the windows do not let in much light, so a reworking of lighting techniques could be incorporated into the design.

4 ARCHED WINDOWS

The noticeable arched windows running around the inner courtyards are new additions to the barracks; footage from the 1944 Nazi propaganda film shows the apertures were previously unfilled. With many of the windows damaged, the windows likely require replacement or removal.

5 DORMER WINDOWS

A reconsidering of the dormer windows could follow the proposal for re-roofing the barracks; double height spaces could be incorporated on the second floor, altering the use of dormers.

6 ENTRANCES

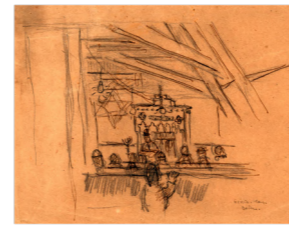
The symmetrical design of the barracks allows for four entrances at the centre of each façade. However, two entrances stand out as the main access to the site. The southwest entrance sits on the same street as the Ghetto Museum, and could be used as the main access for more public-facing areas in the building. The southeast entrance is slightly more tucked away from the centre of town and could act as a private or residential access route.

7 CIRCULATION

Circulation cores are also designed in line with the main entrances, and a strategic zoning scheme could allow for different circulation spaces to be accessed by different users, creating separation between private and public.

8 ORIENTATION

The barracks long side runs along a southwest-northeast axis; rooms that receive the most direct daylight are those on the sides of the main entrances.



1 SPACES OF COMMUNAL GATHERING

Sketches from prisoners show loft spaces as places used for prayer rooms and performances; similarly dormitories were used for communal gathering. Combined with a potential re-roofing strategy, these spaces offer a chance for "past presencing", promoting communal contemplation and togetherness.

2 KITCHENS

The Dresden Barracks housed kitchens run by prisoners. Whilst prisoners were slowly starved on around 900 calories a day, cooking allowed moments of togetherness. "A potato gateau for the holidays? Here in Terezin we have fabulous recipes, of a sort not known elsewhere. For instance, bread cake with poor-man's cream; it's a delicacy," writes Helga Hošková-Weissová (Weiss, 2013, p. 76).

3 SPACES FOR SPORT

The barracks is perhaps most well-known for hosting the *Liga Terezín*, a football league between prisoners of different roles in the ghetto. Whilst over-emphasised in the Nazi propaganda film, the league did act as a means of community for spectators and players. A transformation of the inner courtyards into a space for sport or communal activity offers a chance to reclaim the space while holding the memory of the past.

4 TRADITIONAL COMMEMORATION

Currently the only trace of acknowledgement on the Dresden Barracks building is a small plaque. Its visible placement gives insight into where might best suit the most public-facing parts of the building. Whilst an important recognition of the atrocities committed in the barracks, clearly this commemorative effort has not saved the building from potential architectural erasure. How can the inhumanity of barracks imprisonment be commemorated in a way that allows for its simultaneous revitalisation?

PAST PRESENTING AS COMMEMORATION



Figure 36: The Hamburg Barracks, a former women's prison during the Theresienstadt Ghetto, remains well preserved through inhabitation of residents and small businesses

A Crime with International Consequences

Despite its dilapidation, to demolish the barracks "would be a crime with international consequences," states Tomáš Kraus, director of the Terezín Initiative Institute (2024). Although severe, his comment is not hyperbolic; demolition would be wholly hypocritical to the wider question of Holocaust site preservation for two reasons. Firstly, it would present a carbon-intensive solution that would undermine the fact that the barracks themselves have been severely damaged by the effects of climate change. Secondly, returning to Bernard Tschumi's argument - to demolish would be the ultimate suppression of that which makes architecture what it is: an expression of the significant events it has borne witness to.

Although still in their early stages, current plans from the municipality – mentioned in the interview with Jiří Hofman – propose the barracks will be repurposed as housing alongside other as-yet undecided uses. Early studies suggest this could be used as rentable commercial space or for educational purposes, perhaps by the Czech Technical University, ČVUT (this thesis will not focus further on this aspect of the programme). The conversion of the barracks into housing certainly serves Gilly Carr's pragmatic approach to Holocaust preservation, but this leaves much to interpretation: mismanaged housing can be as inappropriate an intervention as any other typology. However, if approached sensitively, inhabiting spaces of historic trauma can mediate between total erasure and over-musealisation.

Living with Ghosts

Housing in the Dresden Barracks comes with other difficulties. In *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, museologist Sharon Macdonald examines the complexities of housing reuse schemes in spaces of trauma. "Houses, even homes, are not always places in which their inhabitants feel 'at home'". Examining experiences from post-Socialist countries, she cites episodes of new inhabitants feeling "depression, guilt and fear", and increased reports of "encounters with ghosts" (2013, pp. 97-98). This exact phenomenon has been reported in Terezín. "I've got a ghost called Alfred at home," states one resident in the 2024 film *Mezi Přikopy a Valy* (Between the Ditches and the Ramparts), exploring the experiences and outlooks of Terezín's inhabitants. (Portel, 2024, 21:24).

Past Presenting

Whilst no housing scheme should attempt to alienate its residents, facing complex and difficult feelings should not be totally shied away from. Communal spaces, for example, hold more potential for "past presenting", a commemorative technique coined by Macdonald which allows for recognition of past events "without assuming either intentional recollection, or pre-given processes or known actors" (Macdonald, 2013, p. 13). Contrasting private spaces that allow personalised adaptation and escape with communal spaces that promote positive, relevant reflection through everyday practices may allow for historic trauma to coexist with present contentment. Alluding to the small virtues brought about through the

resilience of the Theresienstadt prisoners – spaces of art and creativity; shared cooking spaces; places of communal contemplation; reading and writing spaces; areas for sport – could allow for a gentle perpetuation of collective memory without these memories becoming an invasive presence in residents' lives. "If the ghost doesn't harm me, I don't do anything about it. I say, 'Hello, Alfred, how are you doing?' It's like that all the time."

Social Housing

Regarding residential spaces in the building, a private housing approach feels ill-suited, for example. Alongside the fact that private housing could easily facilitate inappropriate mismanagement, such a system would fail to give intersectional opportunities to residents, favouring higher bidders and effectively marginalising lower income tenants. On such a site, such marginalisation feels highly unsuitable. For this reason, Dresden Barracks must incorporate some form of social housing. This would help perpetuate a mediated approach to commemoration, in which residents remain socially autonomous, inhabiting and interpreting the space in a way that serves them best, under the knowledge that institutional regulation would help prevent inappropriate use of the site.

Makers' Spaces: Portland Works

In our interview, Theresienstadt survivor Zuzana Justman echoed the notion that artists' or makers' spaces could provide a sensitive middle ground between the apparent contrasting outlooks of the municipality and memorial, and provide a gentle act of "past-presenting", alluding to the art created within the Dresden Barracks during the Holocaust.

Such a space also poses a different possibility of mediated ownership for the Dresden Barracks.

In 2009, Portland Works was facing a crossroads. The nineteenth-century listed former cutlery factory in Sheffield, UK, was threatened with conversion into private flats, threatening the heritage value of the site. In response, the building was bought by almost 500 people in a striking campaign of community ownership. The site's future is now determined by these "shareholders", each with equal voting power, and operates as a vibrant makers' space.

Cristina Cerulli, lead architect on the revitalisation project, writes:

The Save Portland Works campaign was effective in shifting the perception of the heritage value of the building from a remarkable yet crumbling edifice to be preserved, to a thriving hub of manufacturing and creativity pulsating from this remarkable building (Cerulli, 2021, p. 207).

The vision for Portland Works feels notably apt when considering models of ownership for the Dresden Barracks. Alongside a social housing scheme, community owned makers' spaces would allow for an alternative form of mediation of commemoration in the post-witness era. Navigating the highly conflicting opinions of Terezín's stakeholders – for example, mayor René Tomášek's push "not to focus on the war but to come see [Terezín's] nice history" (Portel, 2024, 33:21) against Helga Hošková-Weissová's criticism of beautification in the town (2022, p. 5) which contrasts with the "historical gloomy atmosphere of the ghetto" – may be eased through a shared ownership of makers' spaces. These spaces also mediate between public-facing commerce, and private spaces of creativity. As such, they allow for a graded transition of commemorative mediation within the building: from institutionally owned, privately inhabited accommodation; to community-owned, semi-publicly visited spaces of imaginative practice.



Figure 37: A visit to Portland Works in March 2026 - the community-owned building is home to a diverse cohort of independent makers creating musical instruments, furniture, fine art, jewellery, cutlery, bicycles, spirits and more

RENOVATION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This page outlines the resultant guiding principles for a proposal to reinhabit the Dresden Barracks.

MINIMAL DEMOLITION

As little as possible of the barracks will be demolished, following reflection on comments by Terezín Initiative Institute director Tomáš Kraus, (page 44) and Theresienstadt Ghetto survivors Zuzana Justman (page 17) and Helga Hoškova (page 35).

COMMUNITY-OWNED MAKERS' SPACES

Crucial to Diana Popescu's theories on imaginative practice (page 13) is the potential for reinterpretation of historical trauma within the Barracks. Creating spaces for communal artistic ownership is a sustainable extension in the propagation of this principle. Portland Works (page 45) serves as a successful example of this way of ownership.

PRESERVATION THROUGH INHABITATION

As we move into the post-witness era (page 13), allowing new life into sites of trauma may be the most effective way to ensure their preservation.

SOCIAL HOUSING

Social housing allows for a mediated approach to commemoration, giving residents the ability to make the space their own whilst promoting appropriate reuse of the site (page 45).

PUBLIC TO PRIVATE GRADIENT

The barracks' position in Terezín lends itself to a zoning gradient of public to private.

PAST PRESENCING IN COMMUNAL SPACES

Commemorative practice will take place in gentle actions and acknowledgements of past traumas, rather than explicit reinterpretations that would risk over-musealisation (page 44). The design allows for distance and adaptation. Activities in communal spaces quietly allude to acts of resistance within the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

FULLY ACCESSIBLE FLOOR PLAN

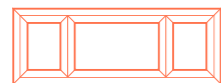
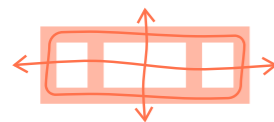
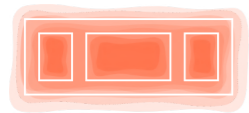
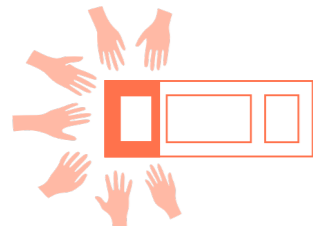
Inaccessibility is a form of marginalisation, inappropriate in the context of the barracks. The building will be made accessible through the addition of ramps, elevators and carefully considered circulation.

REWORKED ROOFSCAPE

The collapsing roof offers a chance to introduce double height spaces on the second floor, allowing for bright and open loft spaces; a gentle reference to communal spaces in lofts during the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

NON-DRASTIC FACADE MODIFICATION

The majority of walls in the barracks are structural; usable spaces are already clearly defined. Furthermore, to respect the municipality's hopes for Terezín's UNESCO status, minimal external modification is promoted within the town (In Conversation with Jiří Hofman, page 26).



[TO DEMOLISH THE DRESDEN BARRACKS]
WOULD BE A CRIME
WITH INTERNATIONAL CONSEQUENCES.
TOMÁŠ KRAUS,
TEREZÍN INITIATIVE INSTITUTE DIRECTOR

THEIR SHADOW WILL REMAIN
OVER THE CITY
FOREVER.
HELGA HOŠKOVÁ-WEISSOVÁ,
THERESIENSTADT GHETTO SURVIVOR

IF THE TOWN CHANGES,
THE HISTORY STILL HAS TO BE KNOWN.
ZUZANA JUSTMAN,
THERESIENSTADT GHETTO SURVIVOR

THE TRANSFER OF MEMORY
AND THE DOMAIN OF POST-NESS ITSELF
ARE INCREASINGLY DEPENDENT
ON A CAPACITY TO IMAGINE.
DIANA POPESCU, HOLOCAUST RESEARCHER

WHAT DO WE OWE
THE VICTIMS?
MARIANNE HIRSCH, HISTORIAN

THE TOWN'S PRIORITY IS TO POPULATE TEREZÍN.
BUT WE CAN ONLY DEVELOP WITHIN THE BUILDINGS WE HAVE.
RENÉ TOMÁŠEK, MAYOR OF TEREZÍN

ACCEPTING THE FACT THAT [TEREZIN'S] WARTIME HISTORY
WILL ALWAYS INTEREST TOURISTS MORE THAN ITS BAROQUE FORTRESS
WOULD ALLOW THE TOWN
TO FUNCTION MORE MATURELY.
MARTIN ŠMOK, FILMMAKER

PAST PRESENCING PRINCIPLES AND PROPOSALS

No More Memorials

The Dresden Barracks should not be a traditional memorial: Jiří Hofman, director of *Terezín: City of Change* makes clear to me that when it comes to spaces for commemoration in Terezín, "we don't want any more".

As mentioned, Macdonald's theory of "past presencing" can allow for everyday inhabitation to coexist with past commemoration, avoiding memorialisation of the site and giving space for new life within, whilst still alluding to the barracks' traumatic history. Crucially, past presencing focuses on everyday actions, and "allows for unconscious or embodied relationships with the past", rather than planned interactions with sites specifically set aside for commemoration. (Macdonald, 2013, p. 16).

Anthropologically, such a theory feels fitting, albeit challenging, in the context of the Dresden Barracks. But how might this translate spatially?



Figure 38: The corridors in the Dresden Barracks are crumbling and marked with layers upon layers of peeling paint



Figure 39: The ceilings of many spaces on the second have collapsed, revealing the roofspace above

Violating Space

If done sensitively, ascribing a new programme to an existing building does not overwrite the past events experienced by the space. Returning to Tschumi's notion of "no architecture without events," a past presencing approach can act as a guideline for reprogramming.

Sensitivity does not imply lack of friction; suggesting spaces for living in a former concentration camp prison will always present an emotional and moral tension. Nevertheless, such tension can be leveraged in order to acknowledge previous events within the building. If "bodies violate the purity of architectural spaces," as Tschumi states, then in such a challenging building as the Dresden Barracks, a space already violated by terrible actions, surely the inverse is also true: its current uninhabitation and neglect undermines the significance of the inhumanity the architecture has borne witness to. "Hypoactivity... can be just as disturbing as hyperactivity." (Tschumi, 1994, pp. 124-131).

Rather than symbolic spatial or architectural gestures, the following programmatic approach acknowledges that the actions of the occupants are key to effective past presencing. Therefore, architectural interventions in the site will only serve to facilitate the designated uses of the spaces, some of which will be adapted to promote practices that enhance past presencing.

Makers' spaces

These spaces allude to the creative hub of Theresienstadt that thrived throughout the inhumanity of the ghetto. Makers' will be given freedom to create and draw inspiration from their surroundings, partaking in Popescu's notion of imaginative practice.

Café and exhibition spaces

Makers' will be able to curate and display works in exhibition spaces, a small area of the barracks that will be made public.

Sculpture garden

One of the barracks' three yards will be turned into a publicly accessible sculpture garden, allowing further display of makers' works. Such a space allows for interpretative discourse from the public, whilst avoids over-musealising the barracks.

Social housing

Social housing will form the main reuse of the barracks. In this space, it is important that residents are able to live independently and develop their own relationship with the space. Past presencing techniques will not be as intentional in these spaces, to allow for emotional distance when necessary.

Educational space

A large part of the barracks will be occupied by educational institutions, such as the Technical University in Prague (ČVUT). Past presencing techniques can endure in these spaces precisely through education and research into the site.

Communal reading room

Communal quiet areas will be designed for residents, incorporating loft spaces so often used for communal gatherings during the ghetto years. The loft spaces will be adapted, allowing residents to inhabit similar volumes under different circumstances.

Communal kitchen

For resident makers, students, and university staff, communal kitchens will be included. During the ghetto years, prisoner-run kitchens within the barracks formed an important part of daily life, operating under conditions of extreme scarcity while also functioning as spaces of social interaction and mutual support. Reintroducing the communal kitchen enables a form of past presencing in which the act of cooking and eating together establishes an embodied and relationship with the past, without replicating the conditions under which these activities originally took place.

Community garden

The community garden introduces a central, shared space for all residents of the barracks. Promoting acts of shared maintenance, as was the case during the ghetto years, the garden will change and grow over time, an embodiment of the ephemeral notion of a static events within a building's lifetime.

Contemplation space

Many makeshift spaces throughout the barracks were used for religious ceremonies such as Hanukkah, and spiritual contemplation. This was also continued during the Czechoslovak army's inhabitation of the barracks. A small space for communal contemplation will be developed, allowing for an awareness of the past without literal reinterpretation.

Sports pitches

The third yard within the barracks will be used for sport, alluding to the football matches played in the central courtyard during the ghetto years. While used for propaganda purposes, football nevertheless functioned as a small act of communal liberation from the ghetto's horrors for many prisoners.

A FUTURE FOR THE BARRACKS

In consultation with the municipal organisation *Terezín: City of Change*, rough programming plans have been drawn up for the Dresden Barracks by Czech architecture studio *Atelier Beneš*. As of spring 2026, the current programming is vague, simply being divided into "residential" and "non-residential", largely based on lighting conditions within rooms. However, it can be used as a starting point for elaboration, when considering a schedule that promotes "past presencing".

The following pages illustrate a more in-depth suggested program for the barracks, incorporating makers' spaces, community spaces and educational use into the majority-residential plan. Due to the scale of the building, the design phase will subsequently zoom in on moments within the barracks that can be guided by a past-presencing design strategy.

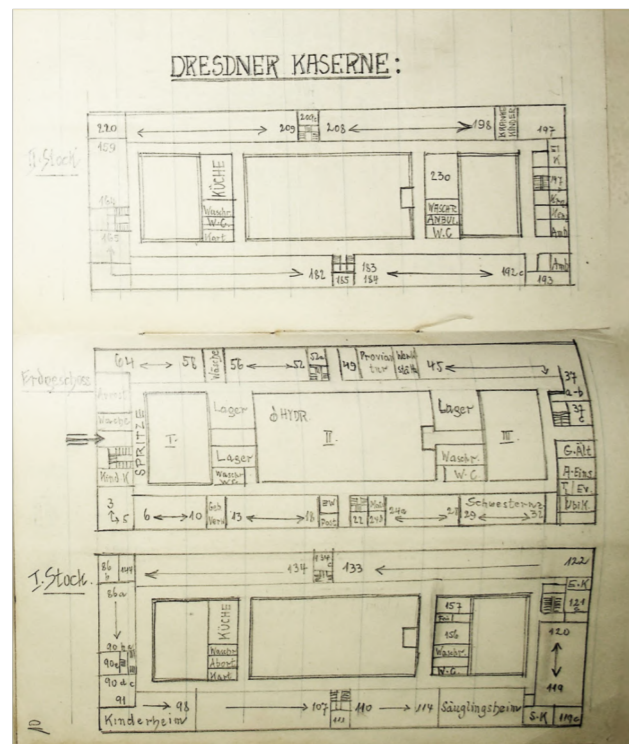
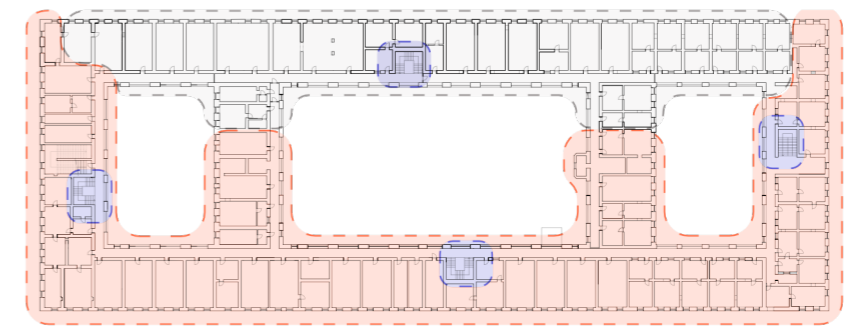
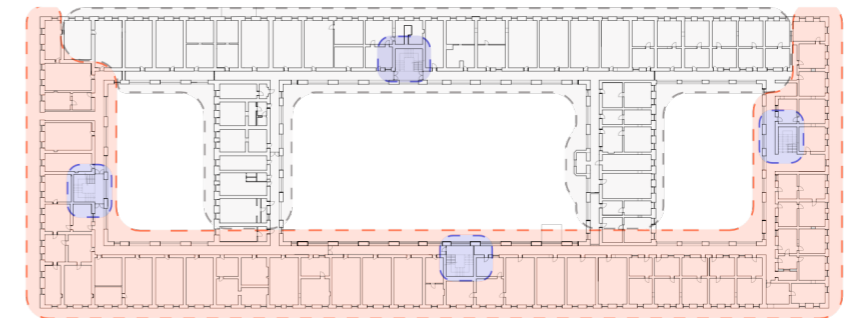


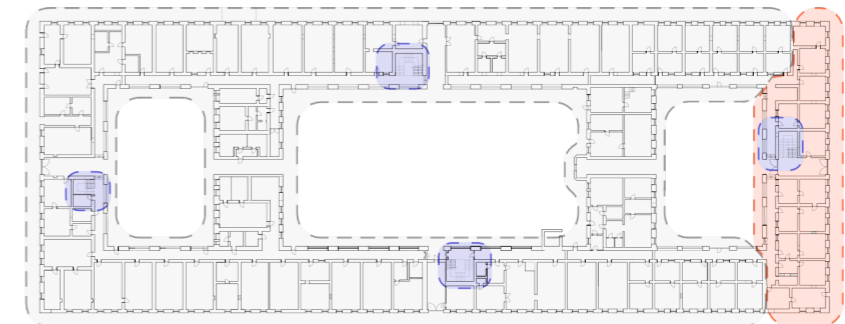
Figure 40: Floor plans for the Dresden Barracks during the ghetto years (courtesy of Beit Theresienstadt)



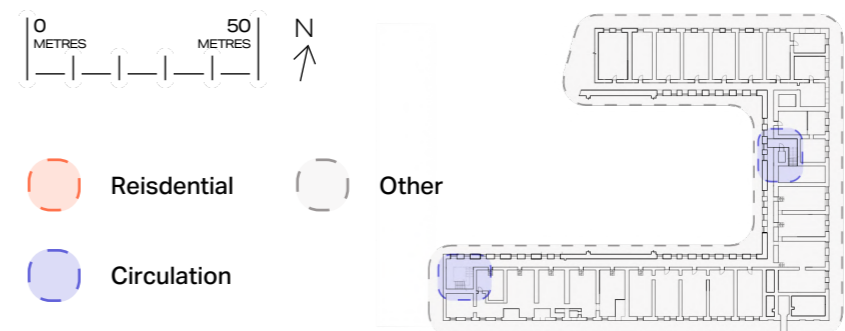
SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



BASEMENT

Figure 41: Suggested reuse program developed by *Terezín: City of Change* and *Atelier Beneš*

**SPATIAL
REPURPOSING:
PROGRAMME**

These plans build on those proposed by the municipality, combining aspects of past presencing in the form of makers spaces, sculpture garden, community spaces and gardens, and residential areas, into the program.

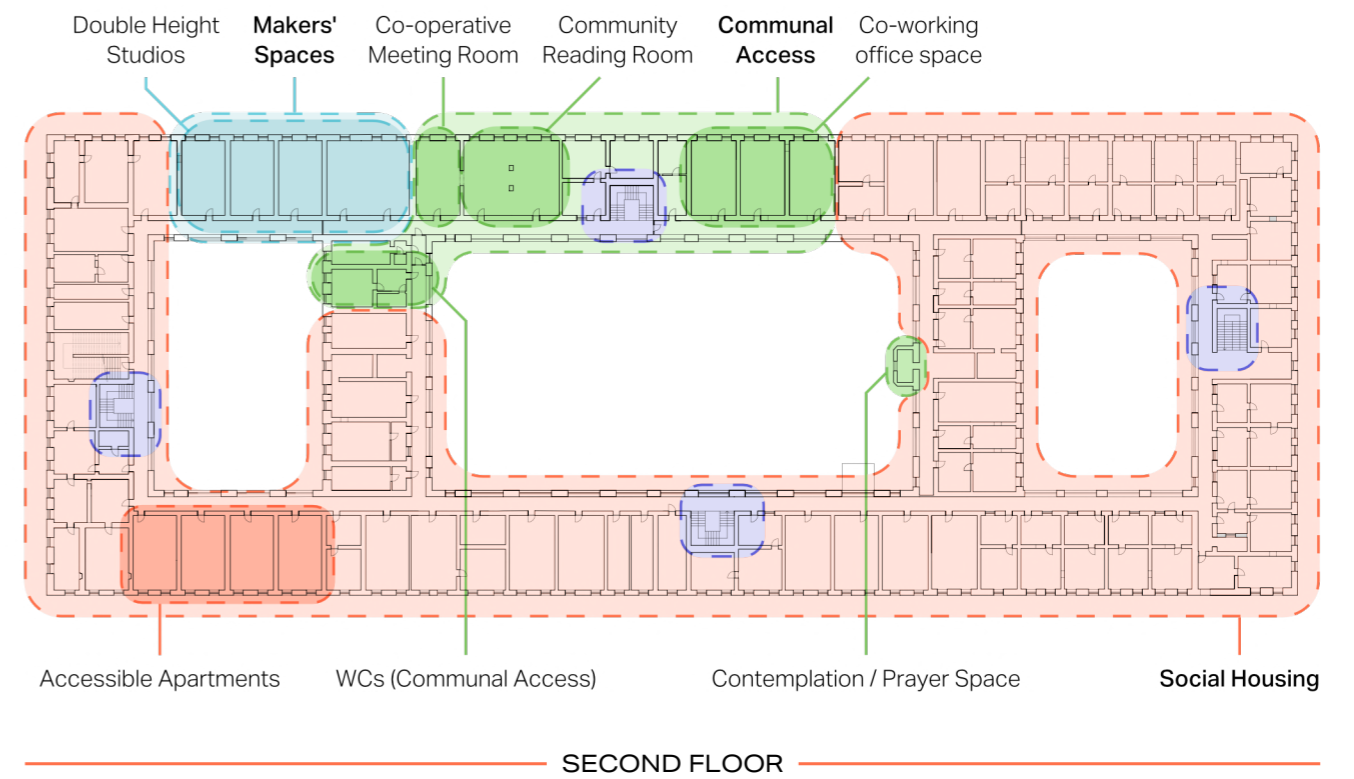
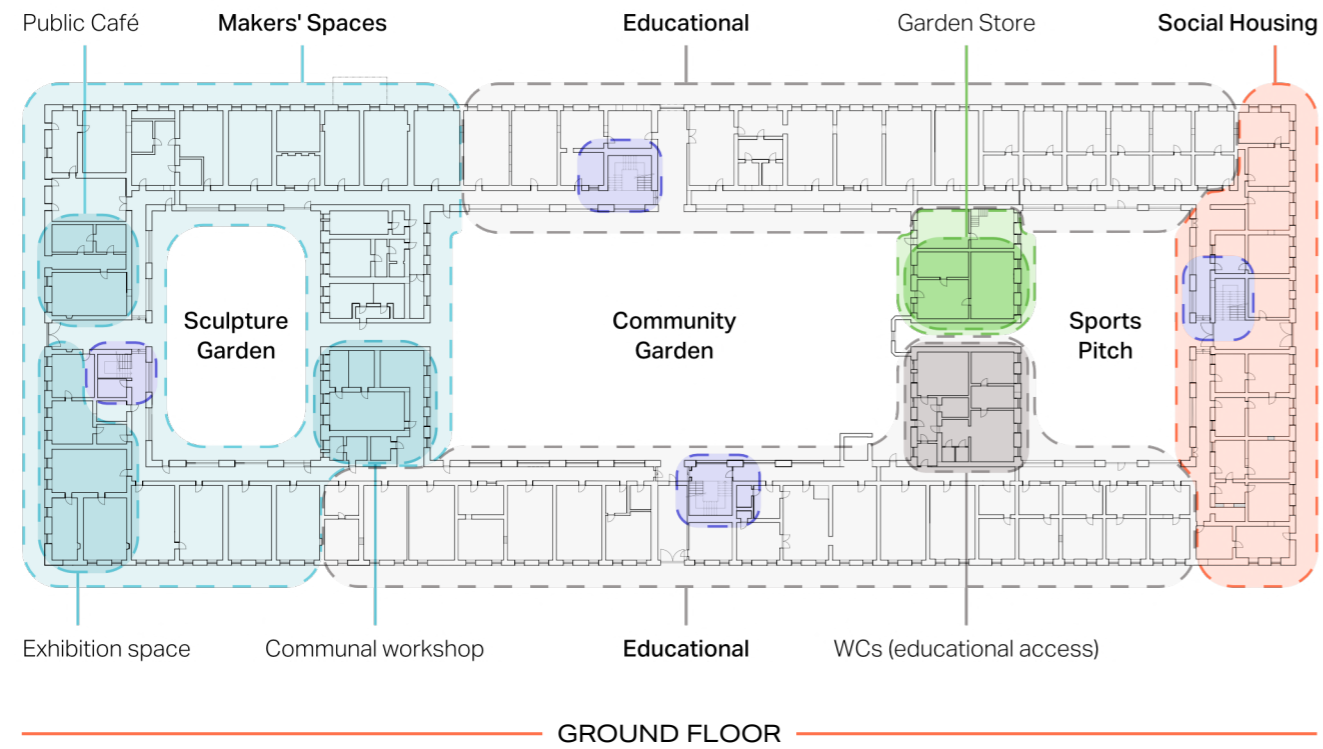
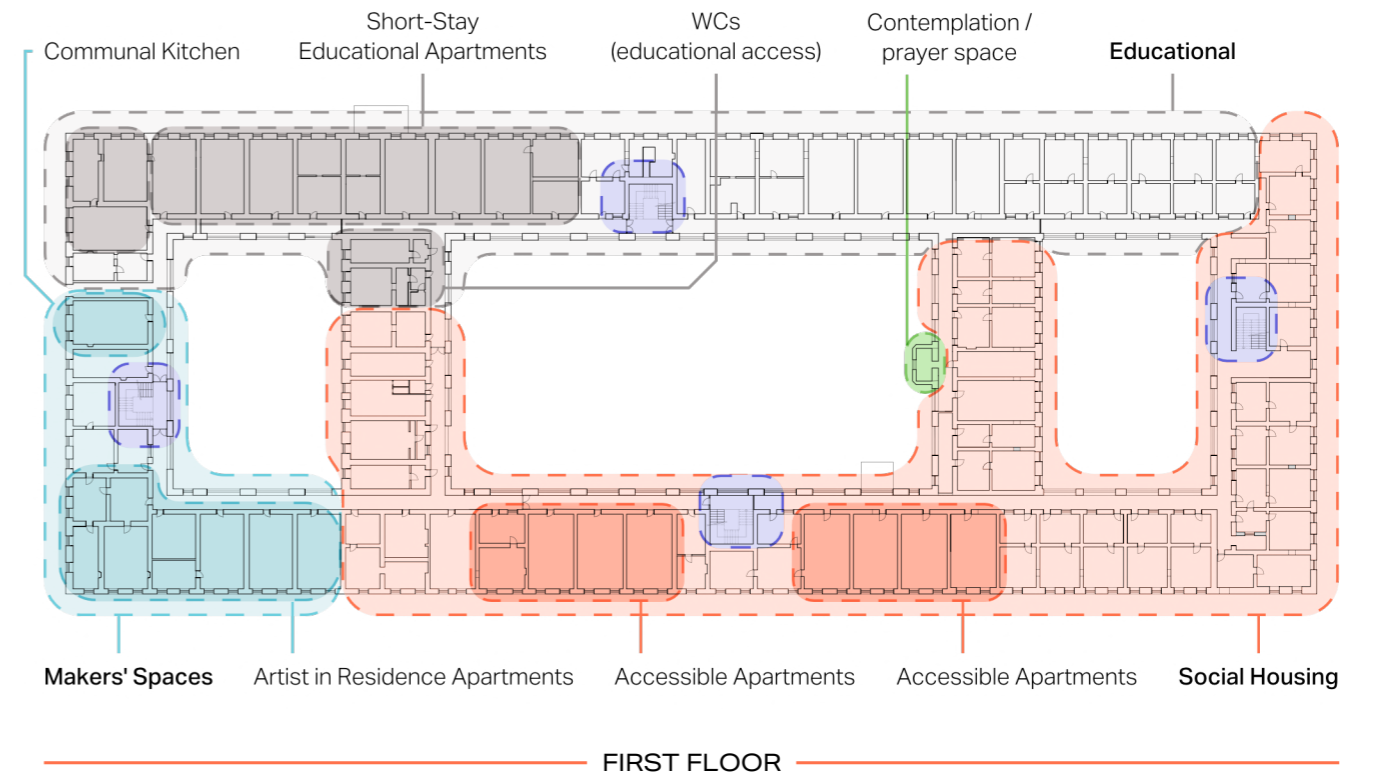
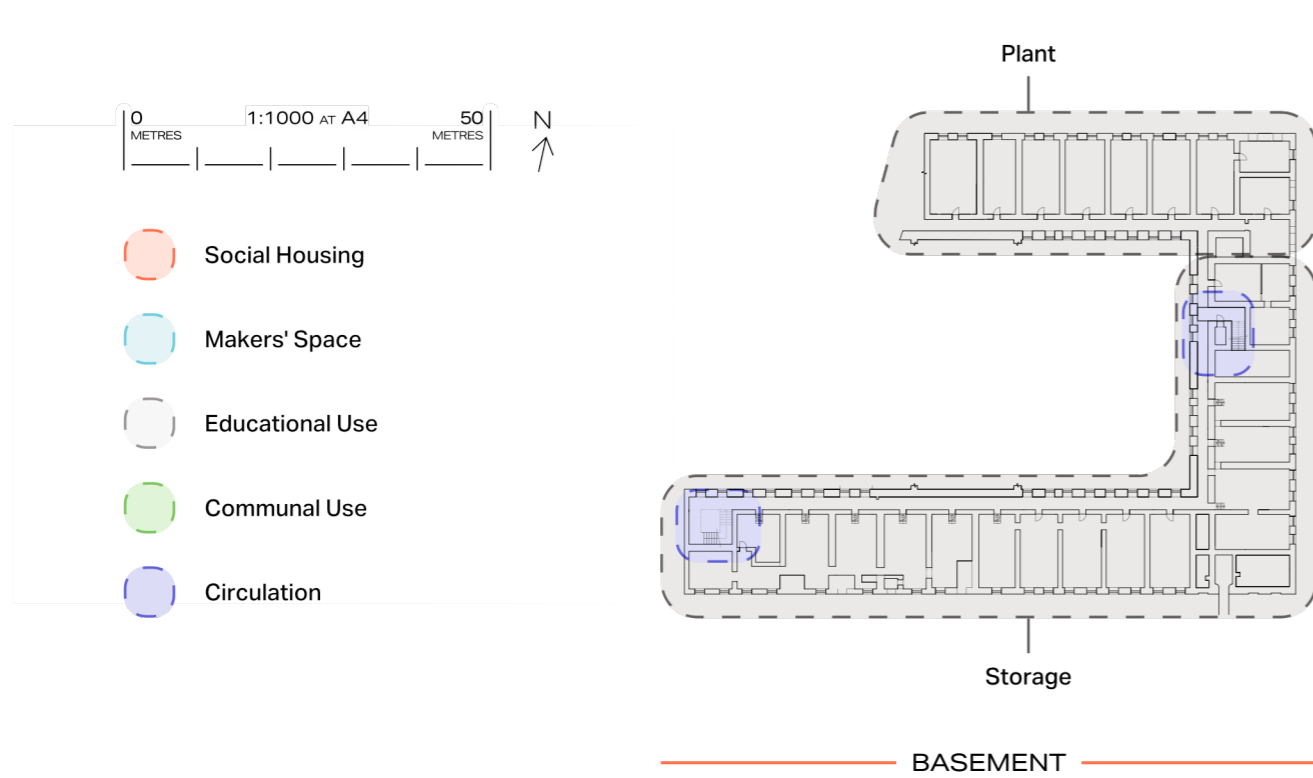
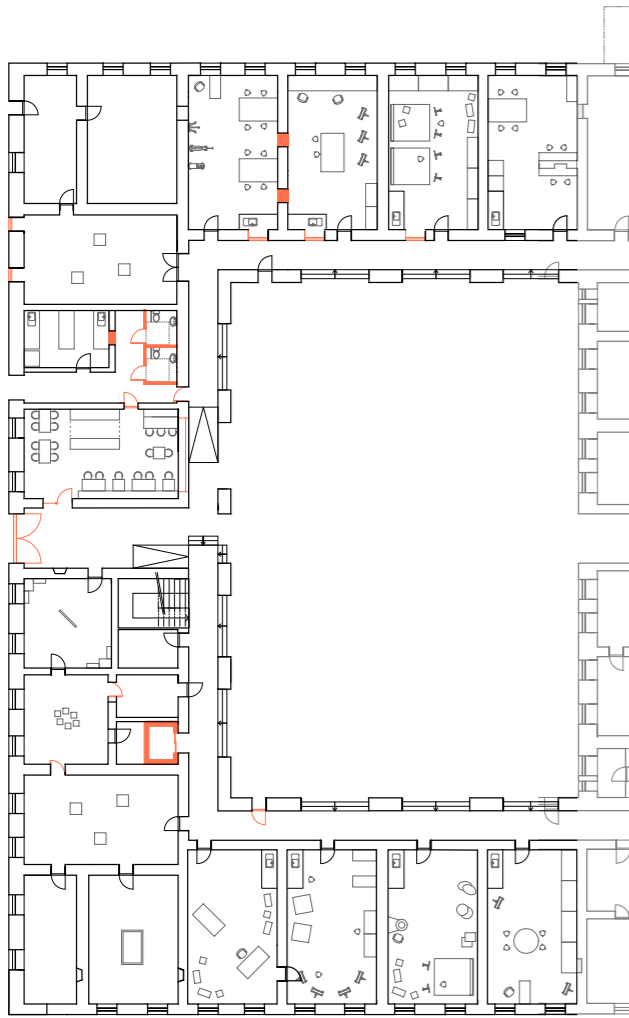
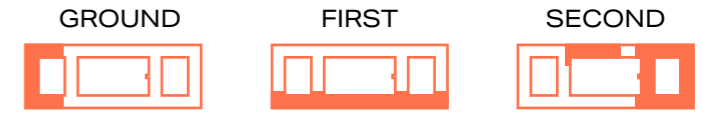
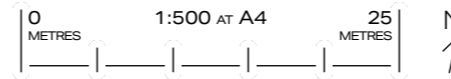


Figure 42: Proposed spatial reuse program

**SPATIAL
REPURPOSING:
PLANS**

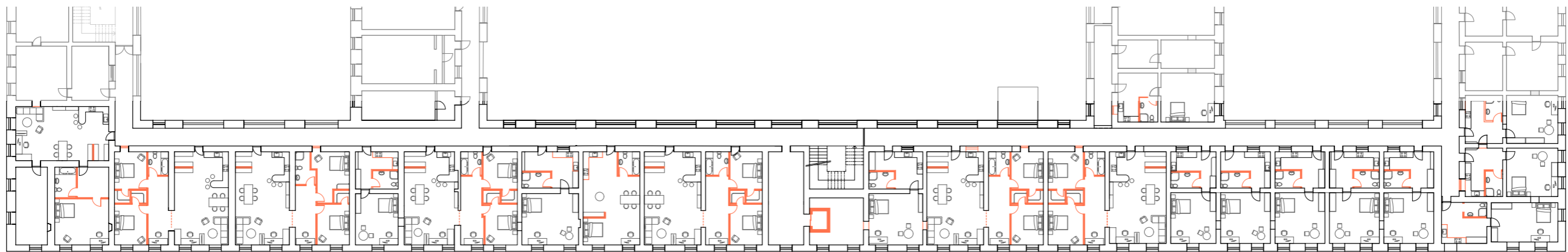
Focusing on makers' spaces, residential spaces and communal spaces, more in-depth interventions are planned, utilising the existing spaces as much as possible.



GROUND FLOOR
Maker's Spaces



SECOND FLOOR
Community Spaces & Social Housing



FIRST FLOOR
Social Housing

Figure 43: Floor plans for different usage typologies throughout the barracks

**A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN:
PRIVATE SPACES FOR
IMAGINATIVE PRACTICE**

Key to Macdonald's past-presencing theory is promoting the opportunity to engage with the past without obligation. In private social housing spaces, residents may be given autonomy to interact with the space as they wish.

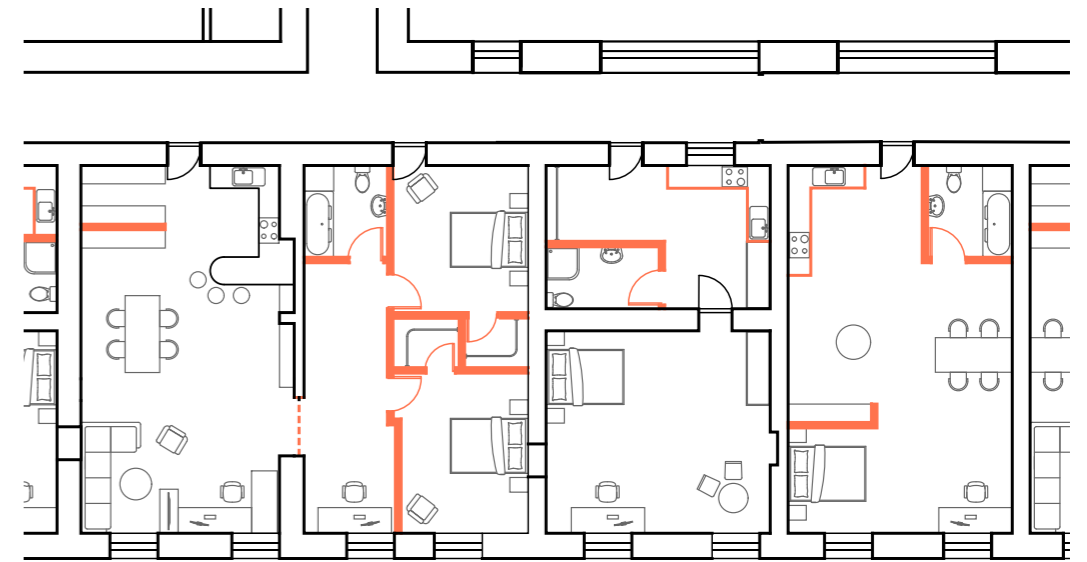


Figure 44: Social housing on the first floor, highlighting three types of apartment use: double apartment; single occupancy with wall division; single occupancy studio apartment



Figure 45: Visualisation of a single-occupancy studio apartment

INTERIOR SPACES

One of the most striking features of the barracks' are the arched dormitories, spanning throughout the building on the ground and first floors. Whilst many flat ceilings in the second floor have collapsed, the arched ceilings generally remain structurally sound, and create a unique - and surprisingly comfortable - spatial experience.

Many of the markings from the ghetto years have been painted over, so much of the past uses of the building as a prison can only be discerned through existing plans. However, most of the rooms pictured below housed up to forty prisoners.

As dormitories at around 60m², such spaces have a large potential to be converted into accommodation. Furthermore, each arched dormitory room is built with "false" doorway arches on either side. Some have already been knocked through, offering a precedent for a potential reuse for larger double apartment spaces.

The room size also provides good potential for makers' spaces and workshop conversion, allowing flexible layout and ample storage space.



Figure 46: A selection of pictures of the regimented interior spaces of the Dresden Barracks, with their striking vaulted ceilings on ground and first floor levels. There are over 200 rooms like these in the Dresden Barracks



Figure 47: First floor family apartment, perspective section



Figure 48: Ground floor maker's space, perspective section



Figure 49: Second floor communal reading space, perspective section

TREATING DECAY

Architecture as Palimpsest

I have previously touched upon the notion of “no architecture without events”, posited by Bernard Tschumi, explaining that architecture is a vessel for action; it is brought into existence by that which happens within and around it. Much of what this thesis discusses, in fact, centres around such events. Before proposing any practical intervention however, that which happens to the architecture itself must also be considered.

In *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage*, authors Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel discuss Rodolfo Machado's 1976 essay *Old Buildings as Palimpsest*, which explains that buildings are constantly updated with new additions, extensions, and renovations, much like a palimpsest, a manuscript that has been reused and overwritten, often with traces of the original text still visible (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). In some ways, this runs as a physically-focussed parallel to Tschumi's more intangible, events-driven position.

The Dresden Barracks' palimpsestic nature is especially evident than in the layers on layers of peeling paint from the occupation of soldiers, the ghetto prison and even the Habsburg era. “There are many walls here,” says filmmaker and Terezín researcher Martin Šmok in *Between the Ditches and the Ramparts*, “and on these many walls there are many layers and many stories.” (Portel, 2024, 24:28).

The barracks is not a static space; it has been constantly changing throughout its history, and perhaps no more so than in its last thirty years of abandonment. Courtyard walls have crumbled, and large parts of the roof have fallen in. Since my initial analysis of the barracks in early 2026, further decay has occurred. During my visit in March 2026, Jiří Hofman pointed out that one second-floor corridor we passed was expected to collapse within the next few weeks. The latest contribution to the palimpsest of the Dresden Barracks has been non-intentional, and non-human: the weathering of the site is undeniably due to neglect in the face of climate change (Carr & Cooke, 2025).

Moving forward, Plevoets and Van Cleempoel explain, there are two ways to treat buildings such as the Dresden Barracks: monumentalise and resist the continuous overwriting of the building (although as I discuss in the first part of this thesis, such resistances can never be absolute); or contribute to the continuity of the architectural palimpsest.

As I hope is clear by now, my proposed strategy for the barracks will take the latter pragmatic route. Whilst I have focussed on how to approach its reinhabitation programmatically, I will address this on a construction scale. The Dresden Barracks is a patchwork of decay, and as such each space within is uniquely degraded. However, I will approach three elements of decay in more detail: non-structural wear, wall collapse, and roof collapse.



Figure 50: A palimpsest of paintwork on the barracks walls - this trace of painted text is from the ghetto years, and reads “Waschraum” (washroom)



Figure 51: Figure X: A corridor leading to a collapsed section of wall and roof



Figure 52: A collapsed section of second floor corridor wall and roof. The Dresden Barracks is in a constant state of deterioration



Figure 53: Some second floor rooms in the barracks are decorated with hand-painted wallpaper, put up during the Czechoslovak army's occupation after WWII

Non-structural decay

The barracks' masonry walls are primarily coated in a rough lime render, much of which has cracked and detached, leaving large, bare-brick patches. Inside, layers of flaking paintwork line the corridors and rooms. Rips in the building fabric lie open throughout the building, often in ceilings.

Arguments for the treatment of such scars are nuanced on both sides, and Plevoets & Van Cleempoel touch on 19th-century academic heavyweights John Ruskin and Camillo Boito in their arguments for the treatment of decay as a part of the building. My pragmatic approach to the Barracks as architectural palimpsest will also help to inform my choice of two valid philosophies here. Whilst Ruskin advocates for a preservatory, perhaps celebratory approach to a building's damage, somewhat akin to Japanese Kintsugi-style methods, Boito argues such an approach is simply impractical (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). Marks of wear can be covered up should the effect be beneficial for the overall use of the site. In the context of my proposal for the Dresden Barracks, Boito's reasoning appears more suitable.

In practice, cracked lime renders would be replaced and corridors and rooms could be superficially altered to the occupants' discretion. Evidence of this is already clear in some wallpapers on the second floor, intricately painted by resident Czechoslovak soldiers after the war.



Figure 54: Non-structural decay of the barracks' external painted lime render



Figure 55: Structural supports in the barracks corridors

Wall Collapse

More drastically, several sections of the second-floor corridor walls have collapsed, leaving the corridors completely exposed. Timber supports have been installed in many of these areas.

For these structurally unsound or collapsed areas, I propose a reconstruction. However, in line with Boito's principles, such an intervention should be legible as distinct from the existing building (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019). I believe this would be effective for two reasons.

Firstly, in relation to my position on past presencing, should have a right to understand which areas of the building are true to history, and which are newly constructed, as this may alter their feelings and actions in the space.

Secondly, to reconstruct these areas to accurately resemble their historical appearance would be to disregard the irreversible nature of climate change. The neglect of the barracks has etched a new layer onto its own palimpsest. That cannot be undone, and should not go unacknowledged.

Roof Collapse

The approach to roof treatment forms a middle ground between the previous two categories. Much of the roof is collapsed, yet the unusable areas are more prevalent than those of the walls, and less defined; many areas of the roof are leaking, and comprise an inconsistent patchwork of broken tiles and steel sheeting.

A new tiled roof will be constructed, allowing space for contemporary skylights. Where possible, existing timber rafters, joists and columns will be preserved. "These attics contained traces of its wartime Jewish prisoners in the form of graffiti and left behind possessions, artifacts that are now beyond reach because of the imminent danger of further collapse of the building," write Carr and Cooke (2025, p. 41). Such an approach allows for practical preservation without over-ornamentation, and crucially will allow some of these traces of the ghetto to be made accessible.



Figure 56: Further collapsed wall sections in the proposed sculpture garden

The coming pages will detail "focus interventions" in line with the proposed treatments of the building discussed here.

**FOCUS INTERVENTION:
SPIRITUAL SPACE**



Figure 57: "Hanukkah in the Loft" by Helga Hošková-Weissová

A small but significant element of the Dresden Barracks is the chapel space, established by Czechoslovak soldiers during their post-war occupation of the building. Located on the second floor, the room is currently defined by a partially collapsed ceiling.

This condition is extended rather than repaired. The existing floor and ceiling are removed to form a triple-height space, opening the chapel to the rafters above. A new glazed roof is introduced, allowing filtered daylight to reach deep into the space and connect the upper structure with a new room on the first floor.

This intervention draws a spatial connection between the post-war military religious use and practices during the ghetto period, where acts of worship were often held in concealed roof spaces, as described by Helga Hošková-Weissová.

The resulting room will become a non-denominational spiritual space. Finishes are stripped back to expose the existing brick fabric, removing decorative hierarchy and allowing for a non-imposing form of spiritual practice.

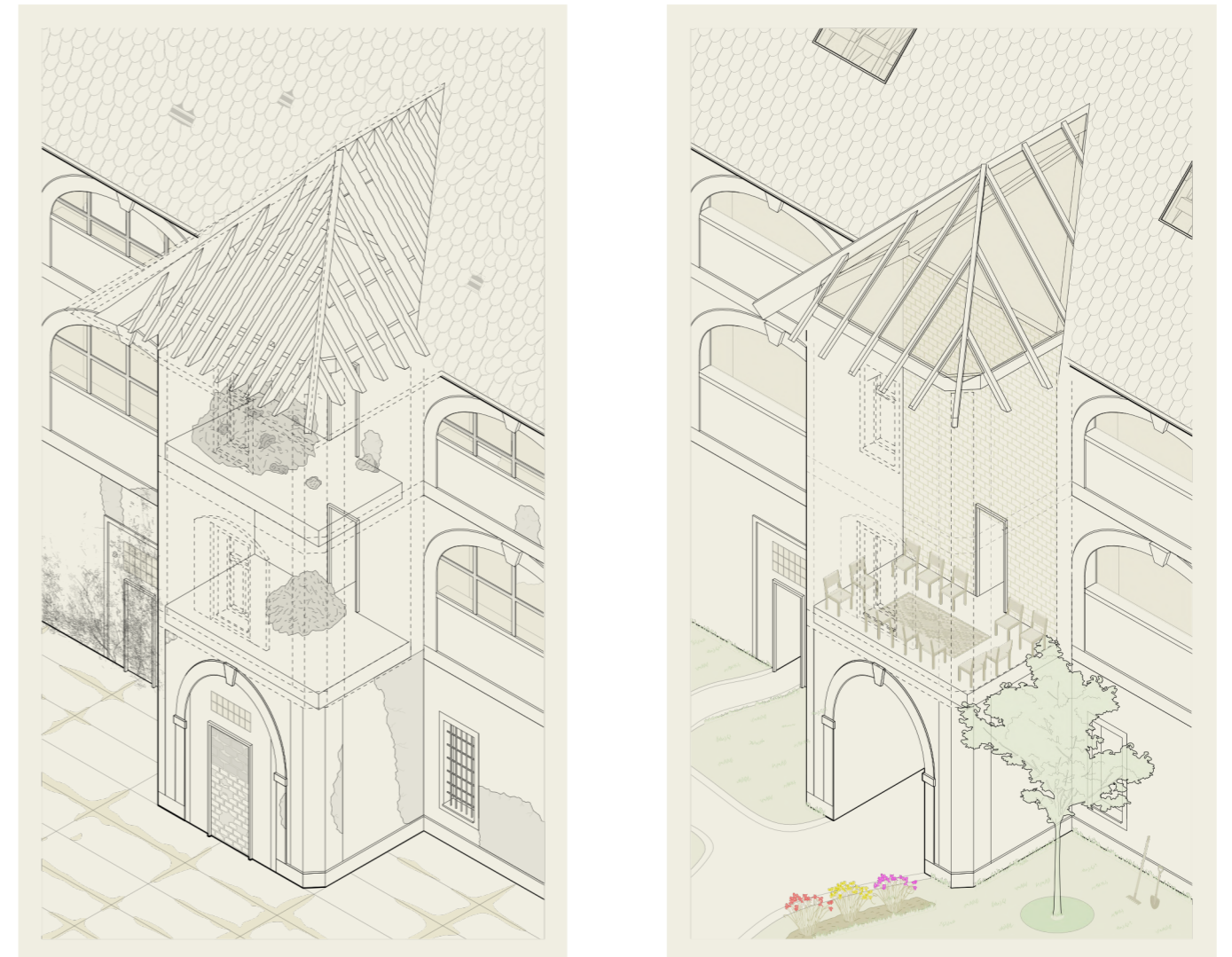
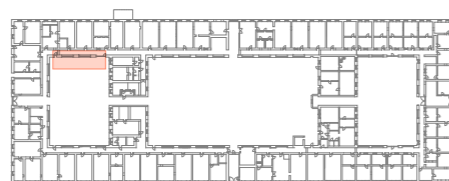


Figure 58: Former soldiers' chapel and spiritual space - existing state (left); proposed design (right)

**FOCUS INTERVENTION:
LOFT SPACES**

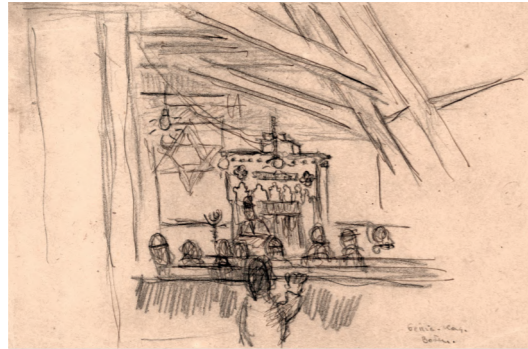


Figure 59: Sketch of a loft space used for prayer; (courtesy of Beit Theresienstadt)

Loft spaces were used throughout the Theresienstadt Ghetto spaces for community, contemplation and resistance.

In this manner, much of the second floor ceilings will be removed, allowing for double height spaces under the existing rafters, which will be retained where possible. Many ceilings are already partially collapsed.

Rooflights will be installed within a new roof system, penetrations intersecting with existing rafter rhythms, inverting the typically dark loft spaces into light-filled areas of private and communal occupation.

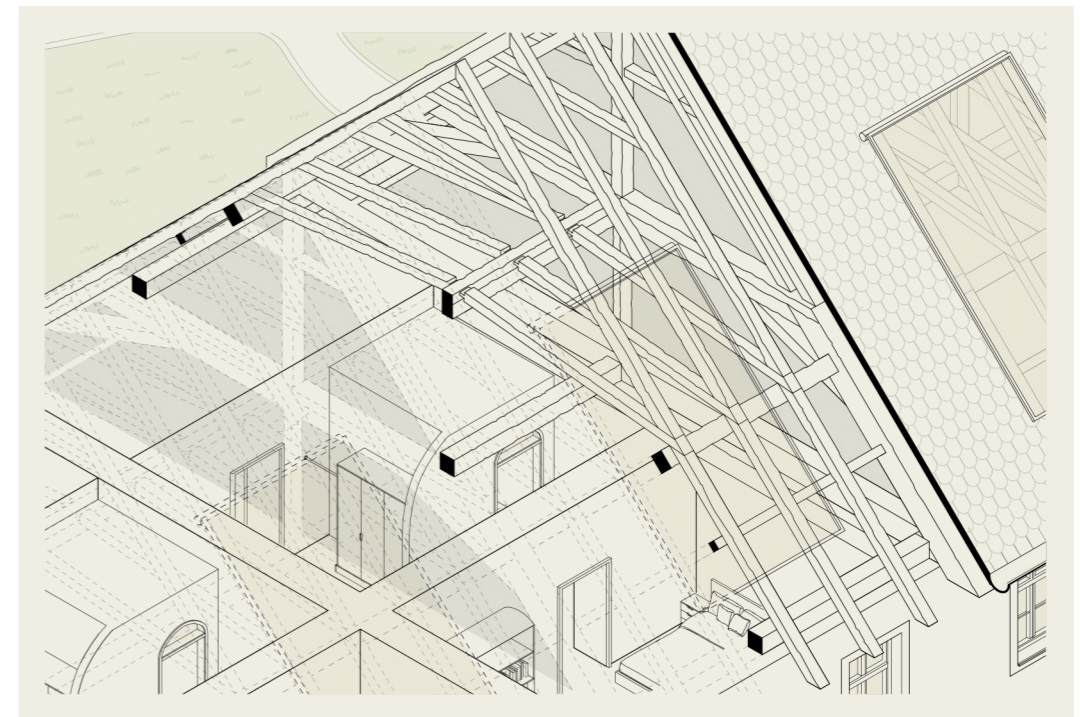
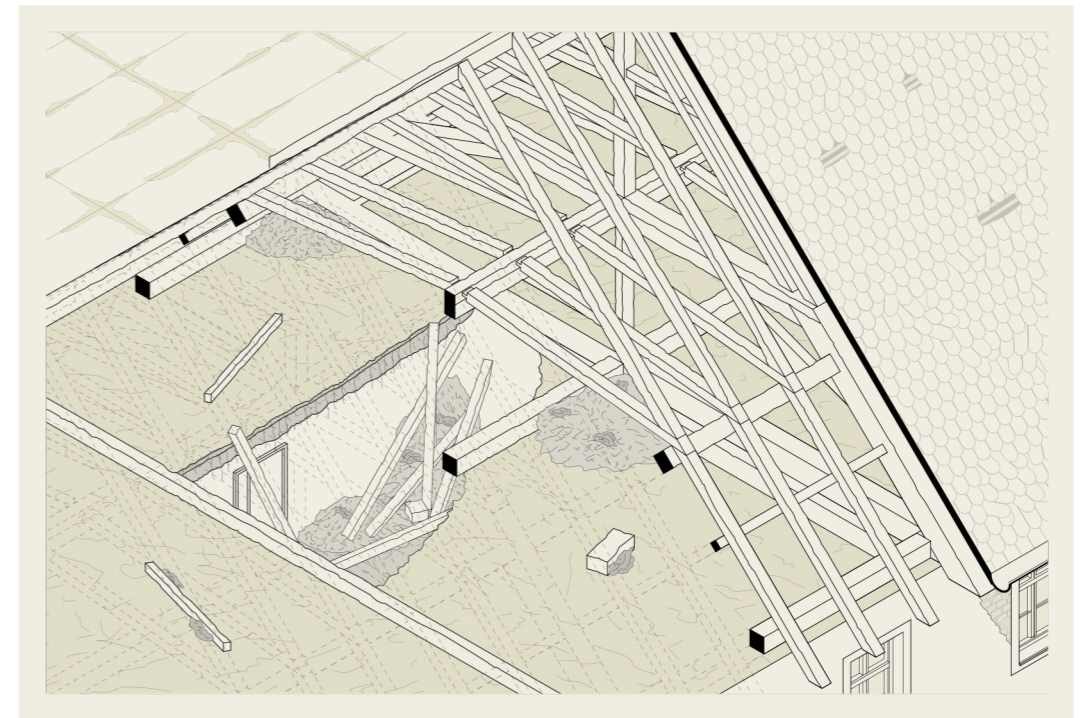


Figure 60: Loft space and rafter construction - existing state with collapsed ceiling (top); proposed design of apartment with skylights (bottom)

**FOCUS INTERVENTION:
ACKNOWLEDGING THE
EFFECTS OF NON-ACTION**



Figure 61: Hans Dollagast's reconstruction of the Alte Pinakothek in Munich

As previously discussed, the Dresden Barracks will be inherited following 80 years of history and wear, including communist occupation, desertion, and the adverse effects of climate change. Much of the barracks is in ruin.

Instead of concealing the ruin behind a uniform façade treatment, the reconstruction of the deteriorating walls will reference only the building's structure – primarily brick – with no façade treatment to refer to either ghetto or military periods of the building's history. This treatment acknowledges the risk of memory erasure of through negligence: collapsed sections of the building will be reconstructed but will not pretend to exist as a remnant of history, homogenous with the remaining structure.

One of the main collapsed sections of corridor overlooking the main courtyard will be repurposed as communal space – reading rooms, meeting rooms, and working rooms. The reconstructed window openings at this level will be extended to the floor, to create a more visually permeable area when seen from the central courtyard.

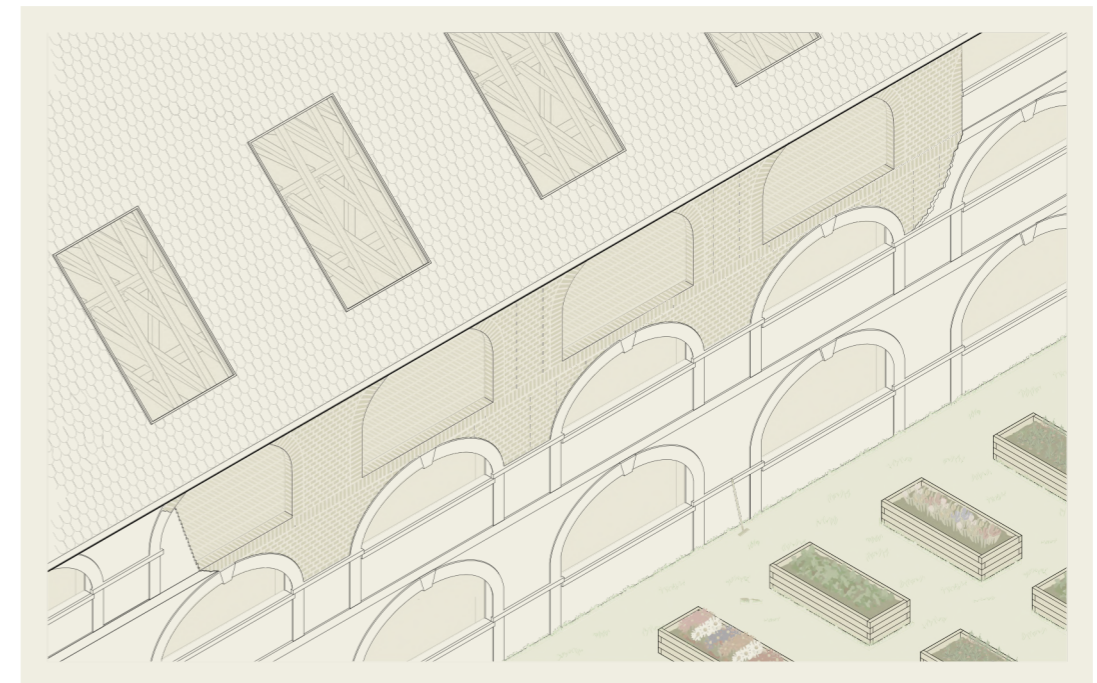
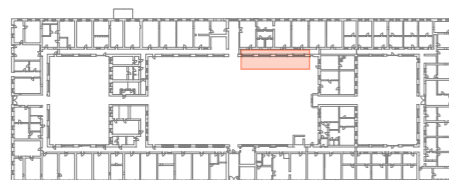


Figure 62: Treatment of collapsed corridor overlooking main courtyard - existing state (top); proposed design (bottom)

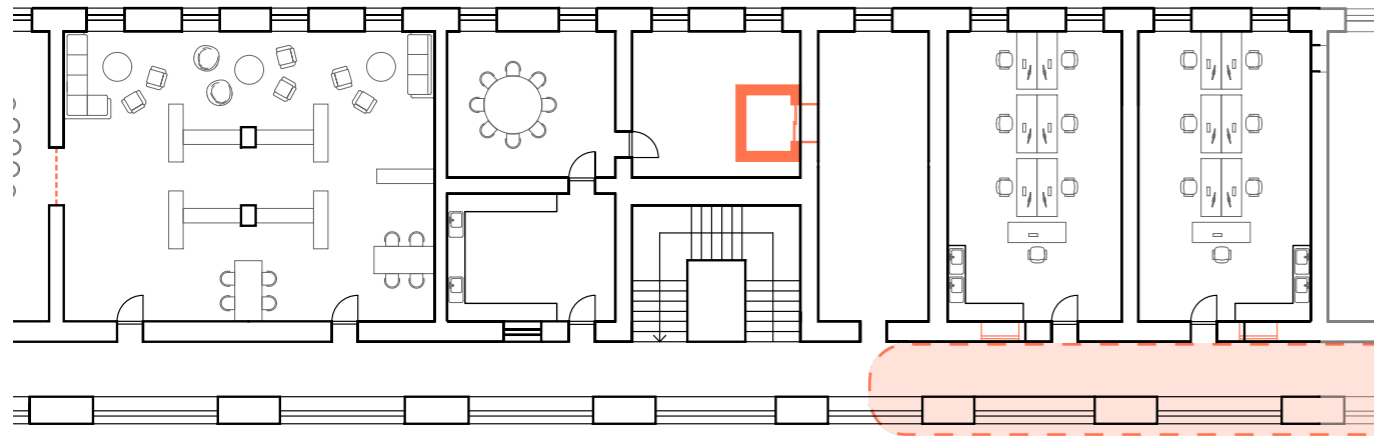


Figure 63: Second floor community reading room, co-working spaces and corridor, with reconstructed section highlighted

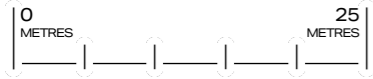


Figure 64: Second floor reconstructed corridor space

**FOCUS INTERVENTION:
COURTYARD WINDOW TREATMENT**



Figure 65: "While Eating" by Malva Schalek (courtesy of Terezin Memorial)

A key element of the courtyards in the Dresden Barracks was their permeability and sense of community during the ghetto years. Numerous depictions show the cloisters around the courtyards as areas of communal gathering, notably prisoner Malva Schalek's sketch *While Eating*.

The Czechoslovak army's occupation of the barracks saw partitions and framed windows introduced to the lower cloister openings. In the sculpture garden, these will be removed, allowing for increased accessibility to view makers' spaces around the central courtyard. Makers and inhabitants are encouraged to make the space their own through redecoration, and self-directed organisation of the sculpture garden.

An asphalt surface was also added in the sculpture garden. This too will be removed, replaced with stone paving as before the army occupation.

Window-frames on the first and second floors will similarly be removed, creating visual openness and alluding to the unglazed openings present during the ghetto years.

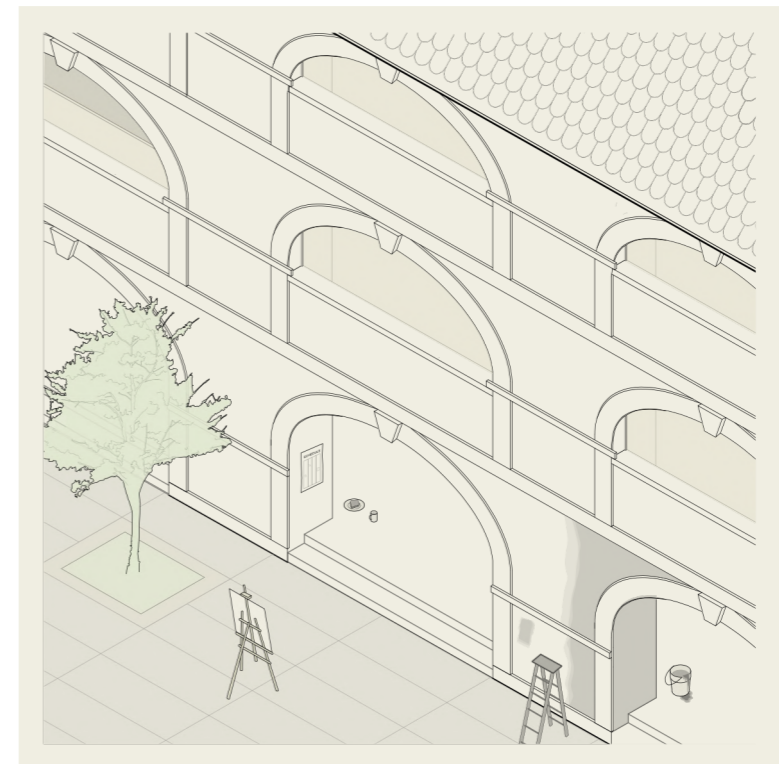
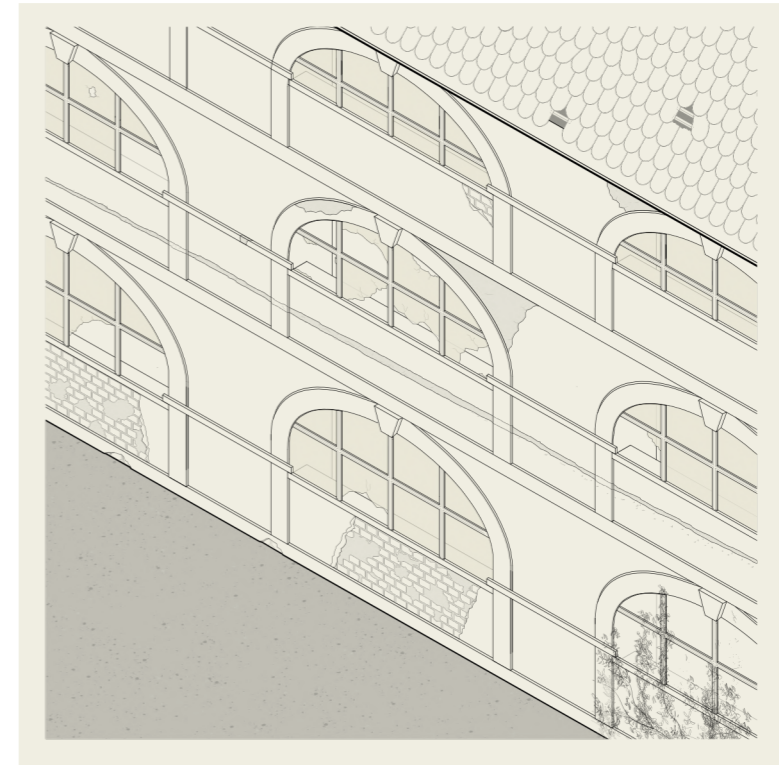


Figure 66: Sculpture garden and surrounding cloisters leading to makers' spaces - existing state (top); proposed design (bottom)



Figure 67: The former soldiers' chapel; both floor and ceiling will be removed to create a triple-height communal spiritual space



Figure 68: Spiritual space, illustration



Figure 69: Central yard community garden conversion, illustration



Figure 70: Central yard, current state

FURTHER INTERVENTIONS IN THE BARRACKS

Whilst the barracks will remain primarily resident-focused, a small area will be publicly accessible. The area surrounding the makers' spaces and sculpture garden will incorporate a small café and exhibition space, curated by the resident makers.

On the first floor, resident makers can convene in a communal kitchen, while the second floor will be used for social housing. In this way, a public-to-private gradient will be established both laterally and vertically.

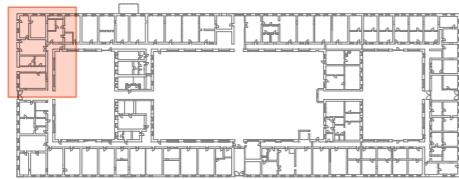


Figure 71: Axonometric section displaying sculpture garden, makers' space café, communal kitchen and private apartment

THE DRESDEN BARRACKS: A MONUMENTAL COUNTER-MONUMENT

The restoration of a building 165m in length is a vast undertaking. The Dresden Barracks requires a huge amount of reconstruction work, but equally important to its preservation – if not more so – is the life that will occur within it. As the largest building in Terezín, the barracks

needs simply to exist to be noticed. Filling the spaces with everyday life, in an appropriate way, will avoid monumentalisation of the space, allowing the barracks to act as a counter-monument to its difficult history.

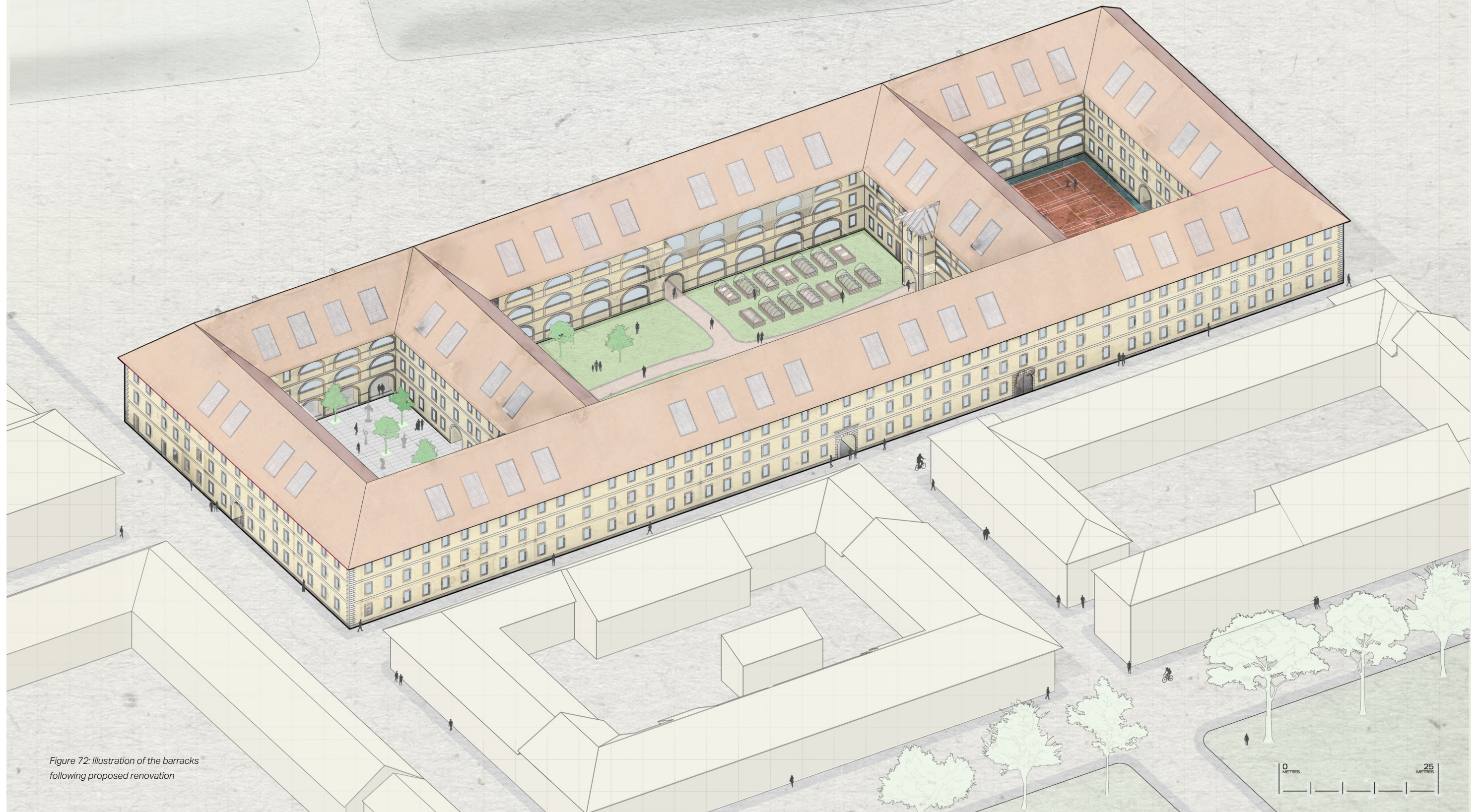


Figure 72: Illustration of the barracks following proposed renovation

THEN THE STONES SPEAK: REFLECTIONS

Terezín is a town with two faces: the site of the Theresienstadt Ghetto, and the living fortress town. Being highly aware of my own connection to the former, yet my relative unfamiliarity with the latter, I wanted to approach this project in as minimally imposing a manner as possible, instead allowing my design to develop by creating as comprehensive a picture as possible of Terezín, past and present.

The result has been a fascinating, challenging, sometimes unnerving test of my own architectural ego and my definitions of what it means to be an architect.

The Dresden Barracks is a beautiful building, with a terrible past. With the right care and investment, it will make a humane and nourishing place to live in the future. However, this cannot be in spite of its traumatic history, but through proper recognition of that history. Such recognition has been denied for the past 80 years and may be the reason the barracks has been allowed to fall into disrepair. Swept under the rug, as time passes, the aversion to address the issue grows.

My applied research into practices of past presencing has allowed me to suggest gentle ways of commemorating the barracks, without letting the shadow of the ghetto years prevent reuse. Acknowledge it, and new life can flourish. Avoid it, and the site will forever remain an untouchable, crumbling stain on the town. Neither living building nor memorial, it has become an image of acquiescence to Holocaust censorship.

Having researched buildings such as Marcela Steinbachová and Steven Holl Architects' Tower of Light intervention in Terezín's Ghetto Museum, my initial thoughts that Terezín could perhaps benefit from further contemporary intervention. However, it became apparent that residents, the municipality, and survivors of Terezín did not feel this type of development would be beneficial for the town. My approach to the reuse of the Dresden Barracks became duly lighter. It was an exercise in restraint, creating small moments, such as the makers'

spaces, community rooms, and spiritual space, within a larger framework of social housing conversion.

The Dresden Barracks are huge – the biggest building I have ever worked on by a long way. As such, the program and interventions I proposed cover only a small section of the space. Given more time, I may have been able to focus on more areas within the barracks for spaces of past presencing, as well as investigate technical elements of the barracks' restoration in greater detail. As Jiří Hofman writes in his paper *Ad Fontes* (2021), it is crucial to understand the historical material constituents of Terezín's buildings before beginning construction in the town. The Dresden Barracks are constructed primarily of brick, but the quality of the brick used at the time varies hugely throughout the building. During my tour of the barracks it was impossible to focus on such documentation of the entire building. Furthermore, whether to comprehensively insulate the building is not touched upon in this thesis. Ultimately, the level of technical upkeep of the building will be dictated by the funds available.

Nevertheless, I hope the principal of my intentions has been adequately conveyed, and however the Dresden Barracks are repurposed, the issues addressed in this thesis can remain worthwhile considerations.

Then the Stones Speak also deals with issues of wider Holocaust commemoration. Reflecting on the significance of the coming post-witness era, no doubt the stewards of many Holocaust sites around the world are considering how best to ensure the knowledge of their history endures. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, as I hope this thesis conveys. However, as the trauma associated with such sites fades, the notion of preservation through reinhabitation may become increasingly relevant. If so, employing past-presencing techniques in a way that responds to each individual site allows for a balance – for balance lies at the heart of all this thesis covers – to be struck between recognising the needs of the present, and respecting the weight of the past.

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APPENDIX:
SECTION MODEL



Figure 73: 1:50 section model; sculpture garden courtyard façade



Figure 74: 1:50 section model; street façade



Figure 75: 1:50 section model; deconstruction showing exposed rafters and vaulted ceilings

THEN THE STONES SPEAK: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Zuzana Justman, Filmmaker and Theresienstadt Ghetto survivor. Online, 02/03/2025
- Michaela Dostálová, head of documentation at Terezín Memorial and Tomáš Fedorovič, historian at Terezín Memorial. In-person, 11/03/2025

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THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

None of the text or images used have been produced, altered or enhanced by artificial intelligence, except for the following purposes:

- DeepL was used to translate Czech and German texts into English.
- Adobe's speech-to-text tools were used to generate a transcript for the interview between the author and Zuzana Justman.

THEN THE STONES SPEAK: LIST OF FIGURES

All drawings and images not listed below are by the author. Permission has been obtained where needed.

Figure 2: Mayer, C. (2006). *The Thornflower*. Pangolin London.

Figure 3: Tschumi, B. (1994). *The Park and The Tower*, from *The Manhattan Transcripts: Theoretical Projects*. MIT Press.

Figure 4: Dyr, J. (2013.). *KL Majdanek crematorium*. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2013_KL_Majdanek_crematorium_-_01.jpg

Figure 5: Wisch. *Frankreich, Internierungslager Drancy*. Bundesarchiv. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-B10919,_Frankreich,_Internierungslager_Drancy.jpg

Figure 6: Unknown author. (ca. 1937–1941). *Staro Sajmište*. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Staro_sajmište_1.jpg

Figure 13: Steinbachová, M. & Skupina. (2021). Winning proposal for the Terezín Ghetto Museum competition. CCEA MOBA.

Figure 18: Unknown author. (1945). *The queue for food in the courtyard of the Dresden barracks, Terezín*. [Photograph]. Terezín Memorial.

Figure 19: Schaleck, M. (1942). *In the Courtyard of the Dresden Barracks*. Terezín Memorial.

Figure 20: Groag, E. (ca. 1942-1945). *Prayer, Common Room in Dresden Barracks*. Beit Theresienstadt.

Figure 21: Glaser, A. (ca. 1941-1945). *Courtyard, Dresden Barracks*. Beit Theresienstadt.

Figure 22: Aussenberg, A. (1942). *Kitchen in Dresden Barracks*. Beit Theresienstadt.

Figure 23: Gerron, K. (1944). Still from *Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet*. Beit Theresienstadt.

Figure 24: Groag, E. (ca. 1942-1945). *Prayer Room in Attic*. Beit Theresienstadt.

Figure 25: Schaleck, M. (ca. 1942-1944). *Food Delivery*. Terezín Memorial.

Figure 26: Schaleck, M. (ca. 1942-1944). *While Eating*. Terezín Memorial.

Figure 27: Weiss, H. (1942). *The Dormitory in the Barracks*, from *Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp*. Penguin Random House.

Figure 28: Weiss, H. (1943). *The Dormitory in the Barracks*, from *Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp*. Penguin Random House.

Figure 29: Weiss, H. (1944). *Hannukah in the Loft*, from *Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp*. Penguin Random House.

Figure 30: Weiss, H. (1942). *The Corridor in the Dresden Barracks*, from *Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp*. Penguin Random House.

Figure 40: Schiff, F. (ca. 1942-1944). *Dresden Barracks Fire Evacuation Plan*. Beit Theresienstadt.

Figure 61: Rufus46. (2012). *Alte Pinakothek, South Façade, Munich*. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alte_Pinakothek_Suedseite_Muenchen-1.jpg

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