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*by* Eva Aitsam

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# An urban prescription:

## **Spatial interventions for under-used public spaces in shrinking cities**

MSc Urban Design and City Planning  
Major Research Project

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Eva Aitsam





**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON  
FACULTY OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT  
BARTLETT SCHOOL OF PLANNING**

**MAJOR PROJECT: URBAN PRESCRIPTION: SPATIAL INTERVENTIONS IN UNDER-USED PUBLIC SPACES IN SHRINKING CITIES**

**EVA AITSAM**

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Being a Major Project in Urban Design and City Planning submitted to the faculty of The Built Environment as part of the requirements for the award of the MSc Urban Design and City Planning at University College London, I declare that this project is entirely my own work and that ideas, data and images, as well as direct quotations, drawn from elsewhere are identified and referenced.

(signature)

(date)



Perhaps everything lies in knowing what words to speak, what actions to perform, and in what order and rhythm; or else someone's gaze, answer, gesture is enough; it is enough for someone to do something for the sheer pleasure of doing it, and for his pleasure to become the pleasure of others: at that moment, all spaces change, all heights, distances; the city is transfigured, becomes crystalline, transparent as a dragonfly.

~ Italo Calvino in 'Invisible Cities' (1974)

## ABSTRACT

The importance and role of public spaces have been long-established in literature. Aside from being the physical embodiments of a place's identity, they contribute toward social and economic diversity and are generators of well-being and quality of life. However, there is a distinct gap in understanding how underutilised, dilapidated and neglected public spaces can be re-purposed and re-appropriated through informed decision-making to add vibrancy to areas affected by socio-demographic and socio-economic effects of urban shrinkage.

This is a particularly acute problem in peri-urban areas in Kohtla-Järve, Estonia where severe shrinkage in the last 30 years has led to a myriad of vacant and underutilised public spaces with no coherent strategy with regards to their use and function. This has resulted in the hollowing of the historic urban grain and in turn, significantly affected place identity and accelerated the dilution of the local community. These challenges are not unique to Kohtla-Järve; a similar pattern can be detected in other cities and towns in Estonia but also in the more wider context of Eastern Europe.

This new urban reality requires to fundamentally reconsider the urban planning toolbox. There is an opportunity to utilise these public spaces as testbeds for 'smart shrinkage' and establish new strategies which can create re-concentration of activity and use, catalyse place identity, social cohesion and thereby add vibrancy and excitement to places that due to their peripheral locations are often left out from the wider strategic decision-making processes.

The project explores how public spaces in shrinking cities can be re-purposed through utilising informed strategies and design interventions. The author argues that such an approach has the potential to increase place attachment, inspire citizen participation and encourage flexibility in the interpretation of urban futures of these places.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Aitäh!



# TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1	INTRODUCTION	Research question	Defining the problem	Relevance	Objectives	Limitations	Contribution to practice	7-10
2	METHODOLOGY							11-12
3	LITERATURE REVIEW	Value, role and physical typology of public spaces		Strategies for public spaces in shrinking cities		Design principles for social cohesion and place attractiveness		13-21
4	CASE STUDY REVIEW	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4			22-27
5	DESIGN FRAMEWORK	Conceptual framework	Toolkit					28-34
6	SITE ANALYSIS	Character areas	Urban grain	Pedestrian, vehicular movement	Existing uses	Typology of public spaces		34-41
7	APPLICATION OF FRAMEWORK	Site 01	Site 02	Site 03	Site 4.1	Site 4.2		40-66
8	REFLECTION & CONCLUSIONS							69-70
9	REFERENCES							70-74

## LIST OF FIGURES:

F1: Visualising the problematic	8	F30: Secondary school and residential blocks	51
F2: Location of Ida-Viru County and Kohtla-Järve	8	F31: Dilapidated garages at the western end	51
F3: Town boundary of Kohtla-Järve	9	F32: Semi-mature woodland immediately south	51
F4: Population trajectory for Kohtla-Järve	9	F33: Sports ground to the north	56
F5: The values, roles and physical typologies of public spaces	14	F34: Dilapidated courtyard space	56
F6: Strategies extracted from the literature review	16	F35: Overlooked courtyard space	56
F7: Challenges of public spaces in shrinking cities and design principles to address these	18	F36: Semi-mature trees along the edges	56
F8: Key lessons extracted from the literature review	21	F37: Central Square terminated by an old cinema (now local shops)	61
F9: Key lessons extracted from the case study review	27	F38: Retail uses fronting the square	61
F10: Framework for identifying appropriate strategies for underperforming public spaces	29	F39: Retail uses fronting the square	61
F11: Principles and objectives to identify a relevant strategy	30	F40: Car park on the north-eastern side of the Square	61
F12: Kohtla-Järve character areas	36	F40: View toward the neighbouring residential buildings	66
F13: Järve District character areas	36	F41: 1950s water tower	66
F14: Urban morphology	36	F42: View south-east from the edge of the site	66
F15: Key vehicular routes	37	F43: Coach station with the water tower in the back	66
F16: Key pedestrian routes	37		
F17: Key land uses	37		
F18: Existing typology of public spaces	40		
F19: Illustrations of various urban characters	41		
F20: Key challenges and opportunities in the Järve District	41		
F21: Design concept for activating & intensifying public spaces	43		
F22: Inspiration board for activating & intensifying public spaces	43		
F23: Site locations for design interventions	43		
F24: View westward	46		
F25: View of the open space between slab-blocks	46		
F26: View from one of the adjacent main routes	46		
F27: Semi-mature trees lining the central route	46		
F28: Apartment blocks overlooking the space	46		
F29: View of the dilapidated basketball court	51		

# 01

## INTRODUCTION



This project explores how under-utilised public spaces in shrinking cities can be re-purposed through informed and consistent decision-making. The project focus is on how can underutilised public spaces in shrinking cities be re-purposed in a strategic manner through utilising an informed criteria for the identification of (1) appropriate high level strategies and (2) specific design interventions that would increase place attachment, encourage civic engagement and allow for flexibility in the interpretation of urban futures.

**Public spaces in the context of shrinking cities**

World Urbanisation Prospects report (UN 2018) notes that despite predictions of over-

Spatially, urban shrinkage has caused several buildings to become neglected and redundant and the original generous public space (a remnant of the Soviet-era planning) to become underused and dilapidated due to the scarcity of resource to manage it. This in turn has resulted in the hollowing of the urban grain, significantly affected place identity and accelerated the dilution of the local community. The 'image of polarisation' has been furthered by old governance tactics where the lack of civic engagement enforces negative connotation of these areas as hinterlands and peripheries.

Due to lack of capital and investment in the region, the development of these urban regions is also lagging compared to other areas in Estonia and highly funded transformations in shrinking towns like Kohtla-Järve are not possible nor are they realistic without a clear economic driver. In addition to this, municipalities have an added challenge of dealing with infrastructural challenges where lack of resources (both financial and expertise) has oftentimes halted the basic management of public spaces, let alone their development and upgrading. These challenges are not unique to Kohtla-Järve but a similar pattern can be detected in other cities and towns in Estonia but also in the more wider context of Eastern Europe.

As in the UK, local governments in Estonia are required to set targets and objectives in their Local Plans to be implemented in the course of a set period. This has also been done for Kohtla-Järve (Kohtla-Järve Local Authority, 2010: 24).

The Plan refers to several aspirations including overturning population decline, creating opportunities for establishing a new residential neighbourhood and striving toward making the town into a regional centre and a provider of cultural and educational services.

Whilst these broad aspirations are laudable, the overall vision for the area appears overly optimistic in trying to reverse shrinkage. This approach is questionable given the socio-demographic and economic challenges of the region and the lack of resources available to develop and implement major transformative change.

### Core objectives

In summary, the core objectives set for this project entail the following:

1. Expand discussion on the spatial challenges and characteristics of public spaces in shrinking cities;
2. Explore how strategic approaches toward under-used public spaces can help to tackle place detachment and social cohesion in shrinking cities; and
3. Establish a design toolkit for identifying appropriate interventions in under-performing public spaces.

The author argues that a more strategic and coherent strategy toward re-purposing public spaces has the potential to inspire citizen engagement, increase place attachment, encourage flexible practices of social inno-



F3: Town boundary of Kohtla-Järve.



F4: Population trajectory for Kohtla-Järve.



vation and allow for flexibility in the interpretation of urban futures of these places.

### **Limitations**

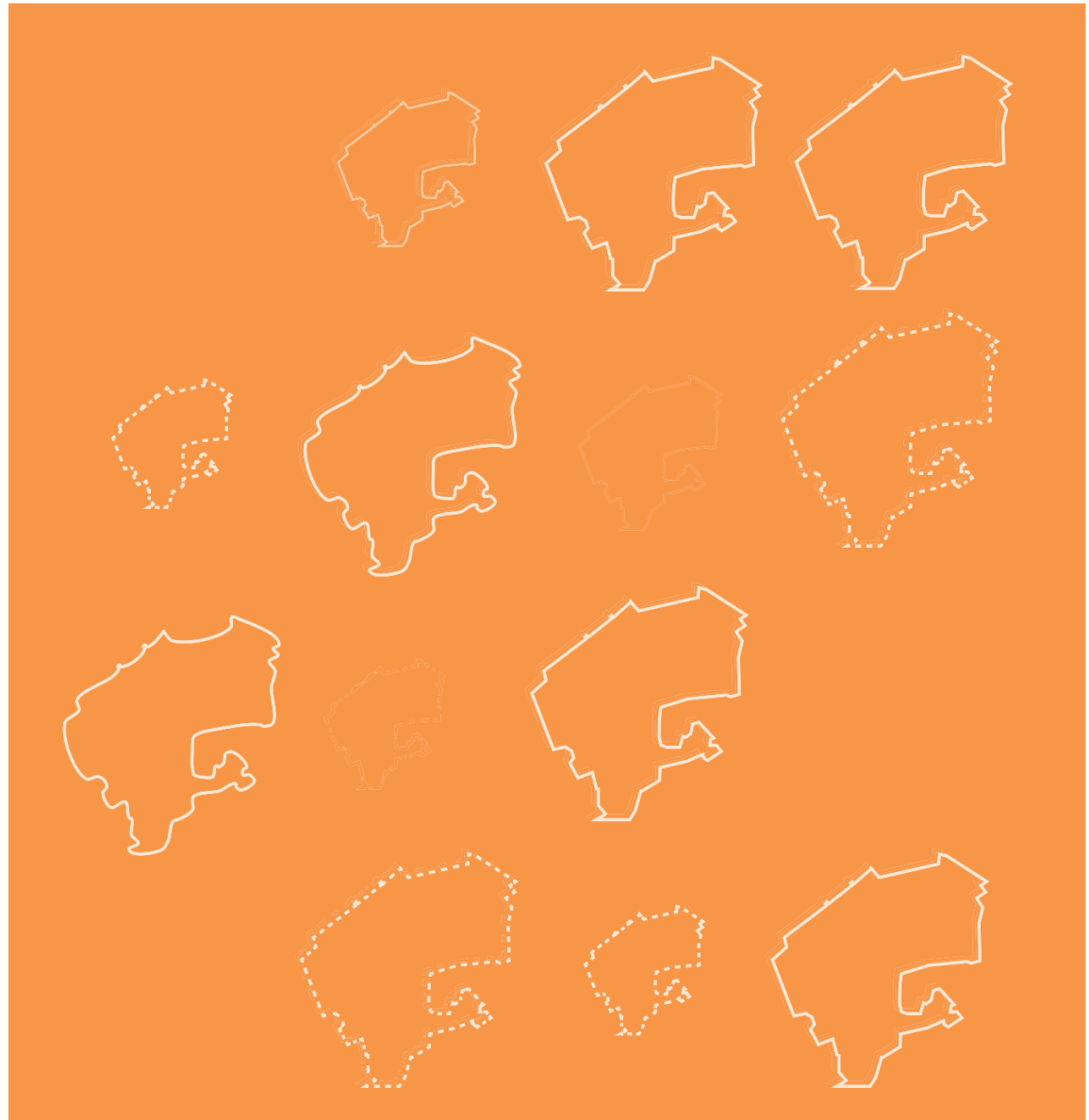
Whilst this project intends to take a comprehensive approach toward the wider problematic of urban shrinkage, it specifically focuses on developing a strategic design framework for identifying appropriate strategies for an under-performing network of public spaces. The second limitation relates to the identification of relevant collaborative governance models (i.e. challenges relating to the management and maintenance) of public spaces. Whilst this topic has been briefly included to demonstrate it is a significant part of the overall “equation” for re-purposing public spaces in shrinking cities, it is acknowledged this is best expanded upon as part of a separate research project. Therefore, this project does not by any means attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis and identification of innovative governance models for these spaces.

### **Contribution to practice**

Whilst placemaking strategies in the context of public spaces have been widely addressed in urban design literature and practice, most of these focus on growing urban areas. However, there has been very limited focus on the problematics of public spaces in the context of urban shrinkage. Therefore, this project seeks to contribute to this less discussed narrative by developing a practical approach to the decision-making process toward under-utilised and neglected public spaces in shrinking cities and to re-discover place identity and create social cohesion.

# 02

## METHODOLOGY



The methodology broadly comprises three stages: (1) research and formation of the design framework (May and June 2019), (2) design proposal based on the framework (July 2019) and (3) critical reflection of the (theoretical) implementation of the framework (August 2019).

The literature review comprises consulting various relevant academic articles, research reports, guidance and legislation. The core aim is to identify common themes and narratives but also, and more importantly, to identify gaps in the discussion toward which this project can contribute.

The second part of the research stage comprises a case study review to identify and explore other examples that are broadly situated in similar spatial, social and economic contexts as the project's focus site in Eastern Estonia. This will allow direct comparison with the site and where relevant, potential transferability of good practice principles and methods to incorporate into the design framework.

The review and accumulation of understanding of relevant research discussions coupled with conclusions from the case study review form the foundation upon which the proposed design framework will be situated.

The decision to test the design framework in public spaces in Kohtla-Järve was based on the town's spatial context and representation of the core challenges visible across the Ida-Viru County (and more widely in Estonia). The detailed identification of intervention sites is based on the character analysis

of the entire urban area as well as the existing public space typology.

To form a thorough understanding of the application site, several site visits to Kohtla-Järve form a crucial part in the development of the design interventions.

Site visits (undertaken in July) were organised to consist of visual observation of the townscape concerning the spatial layout, movement pattern, land uses as well as informal conversations with locals.

Following early site visits in July, an initial site selection for detailed design interventions was made, informed both by the analysis of local government-owned underused public spaces in Kohtla-Järve but also to allow for a varied testbed of how the proposed design framework could be flexibly applied. Relevant design interventions are identified in accordance with the proposed design framework and illustrated through various graphics, including drawings, diagrams and sketches.

The implementation of the framework allows for its review at the end of the project. This reflects critically on the successful elements of the project as well as on those which could use further research and development.

03

**LITERATURE  
REVIEW**



### 3.1. The role and characteristics of public spaces

The significant role public spaces play in urban life is acknowledged within the body of literature including renowned authors like Lynch (1960), Jacobs (1961), Lefebvre (2009) and Harvey (2012).

Firstly, public spaces play a vital role in achieving social cohesion and inclusivity (Mean & Tims 2005, Douglas 2014). Another study on civic engagement showed that interaction between volunteers (in particular the notion of working toward a common goal) can foster community pride and connection (Dresner et al. 2015).

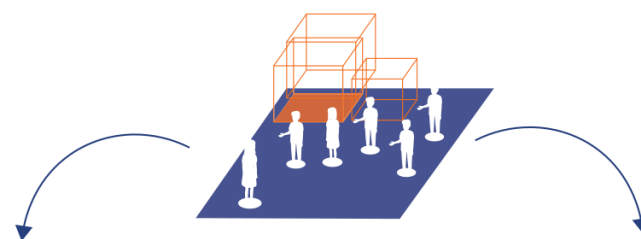
Furthermore, research on the social value of public spaces found that street markets are extremely valuable as a meeting point and interactions in these spaces can be an invaluable resource for groups with limited networks (i.e. elderly) (Studdert & Watson 2006).

Secondly, public spaces are an important contributor toward the cultural aspects of urban life. Madanipour (2003) emphasises the value of public spaces as a platform for cooperation and meeting point of various groups (i.e. with different languages, customs, beliefs and ideologies) thereby cultivating mutual understanding and building identities between different groups. Therefore, public spaces can be seen as essential gateways to the cultural development of urban communities.

Both cultural and social aspects contribute to the economic value of public spaces. This is manifested in the variety of uses these spaces can take (e.g. street markets, performance space) but also illustrated in the surrounding land and property values (UN Habitat 2018). Namely, inclusive and welcoming spaces are attractive to businesses who in turn attract clients, customers and other services thereby increasing the footfall of the area (CABE 2014).

There are various ways of categorising the physical attributes of public spaces. Cullen (1971) has defined 'sense of enclosure' as one of the high-level characteristics. Building on Cullen's principles, the classification established by Carmona and Wunderlich (2012) is useful in organising public spaces:

- **Streets and boulevards** (residential, commercial, civic): whilst historically their primary purpose was to provide mobility as movement corridors that role has become much more complex as streets are a major generator of public life that goes beyond just facilitating movement (Sandalack 2010).
- **Squares:** Whilst these can be transitional spaces, squares can also facilitate lingering and therefore the potential for meaningful social interactions (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012). Similar to streets, the character of squares is defined by their edge condition (i.e. what buildings, uses and activities articulate them, Sandalack 2010).



## VALUE

**Contribute towards:**

- 1 Social**
- 2 Cultural**
- 3 Economic**

Gehl (1987), Studdert and Watson (2006), CABE (2008), Madanipour (2003)

## ROLE

**Facilitate range of activities:**

- 1 Necessary**
- 2 Optional**
- 3 Social**

Gehl (1987)

## PHYSICAL FORM

Streets	Squares	Courtyards
Parks, gardens	Forecourts	Incidental spaces
Other (sports fields, playgrounds)		
<small>Carmona and Wunderlich (2012)</small>		

F5: The values, roles and physical typologies of public spaces.

- **Courtyards:** Compared to squares, courtyards are more intimate as they are often surrounded by specific uses (e.g. residential only) thereby making the user typology different from the more formal and public squares.
- **Forecourts:** These can be defined as public spaces in front of buildings that do not necessarily form a square but can be perceived as transitional spaces between the private amenity space of the residential buildings and the public realm of streets. These can be often either semi-public or private spaces specifically catering for the residents in the surrounding buildings enclosing the space.
- **Gardens and parks:** These form one of the major components of the public realm that either cater to more formal civic uses and/ or are for recreational purposes. Sandalack (2010) notes that these often correspond in size and scale to the urban environments they are catering toward (i.e. population and densities).
- **Incidental spaces** (paths, trails, right-of-way): These are informal spaces, not specifically intended as public spaces but have either evolved into one as a result of prevailing user-patterns or appropriation of previous 'left-over' spaces.
- **Other spaces** (i.e. sports fields, playgrounds): The classification of public spaces cannot be definite and there remain various amalgamations and amorphous spatial manifestations that necessarily cannot be categorised into individual groups as they can

incorporate multiple characteristics found in other formal / informal spaces listed above. Whilst these typologies are useful in establishing the physical forms of public spaces, they must be considered as part of the wider urban morphology (Sandalack 2010). Furthermore, the typology above is not in full accordance with the typology of public spaces in Estonia. This limitation is acknowledged and will be adjusted as part of the proposed design framework.

The form of public spaces is closely tied to the uses happening within them. Gehl (1987) distinguishes between necessary, optional and social activities. Necessary activities happen regardless of the environment (i.e. going to work or school).

Optional activities are more dependent on the physical environment as well as other conditions (i.e. weather). These can include leisure-related activities (i.e. sitting outside, taking a walk). The frequency of these is argued to be in correlation with the quality of the space. Kim and Kaplan (2004) note that pedestrian network and natural features within open space have a significant role in cultivating social interaction among residents.

Lastly, Gehl distinguishes social activities, which are a derivation of optional activities, related to the animation of the space as a result of social interactions (i.e. playing sports, public events). Whilst the quality, content and intensity of contact cannot be planned into the physical environment (as human behaviour cannot be planned), understand-

ing these activity-types can aid in creating new possibilities for meeting and interacting (1987).

Therefore, understanding the physical typologies of public spaces is vital in understanding the effect they have on the people using them.

### 3.2. Strategies for under-used public spaces in shrinking cities

World Urbanisation Prospects report (UN 2018) notes that despite predictions of overall urban population growth, several cities are facing severe shrinkage. This affects cities which have in the past focused on a single industry and/or a concentration within a single sector and as a result of significantly decreased demand and competition are now experiencing the 'negative side-effects' of globalisation (Cunningham-Sabot and Fol 2007).

This project focuses specifically on Estonia where the phenomenon of shrinkage can partly be attributed to post-Soviet transformation processes coupled with de-industrialisation, low birth-rates and (cultural) polarisation. This has resulted in stark socio-economic and spatial implications comprising increased unemployment, housing surplus and dilution and under-performance of urban public spaces (Mykhnenko & Turok, 2007).

A key characteristic of public spaces in shrinking cities relates to the hollowing out of the once dense urban structure and due to lack of financial resources required for their constant upkeep and management, they are often plighted by decay (Lee et al. 2018). These underperforming spaces have often superseded their original use. Furthermore, the "production" of new open space due to the demolition of abandoned buildings is common in shrinking cities (Rößler 2008; Frazier et. al. 2015). This, in turn, has

resulted in a network of once active public spaces becoming redundant and a burden for local governments to manage and maintain. This downward spiral is highly problematic as whilst the relationship between the local community and public spaces has drastically changed, the amount of services required for these spaces (to avoid them becoming overgrown and neglected) has not (Frazier et al 2015). Pallagst et al. (2008) argue that effective strategies, programmes and techniques for managing these spaces could help to create a perception of stability and even increase the market value of adjacent properties.

There has been some (albeit limited) discussion on potential strategies for underperforming public spaces in shrinking cities. For example, forestation can be appropriate along urban edges where existing uses have become redundant and a new, economical way of managing these peripheries is required (Detmar 2005, Pallagst et al 2010). Whilst this is strictly not a traditional public space, it does allow for re-concentration of the public space network to areas with the highest levels of activity.

Urban wilderness (e.g. eco-parks) is based on similar principles and might be justified in the context of shrinking cities as it could successfully address the amount of underutilised public spaces and offer an implementable solution.

### STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC SPACES IN SHRINKING CITIES



F6: Strategies extracted from the literature review.



For example, Leipzig has utilised these 'non-productive spaces' in the formation of green infrastructure and ecological reinforcement (Lima 2017). This approach could reflect the changing nature of user-patterns relating to the re-configuration of urban structure as a result of shrinkage. However, it also raises issues relating to the usability and accessibility of these spaces.

Another approach to underused public space is urban agriculture (Röblier 2008). In the context of shrinking cities, this could be a step toward renewable energy-sources but also a way to encourage social sustainability through cultivating place attachment and social cohesion (Boix 2018). Zeunert and Waterman (2018) note that predominant typologies are allotments and community gardens which are generally located on peripheral locations and remain small-scale community operations rather than commercial enterprises. In contrast, working large-scale agricultural landscapes are relatively uncommon in urban contexts due to their demanding spatial requirements.

Whilst re-naturalisation strategies listed above are long-term in nature (aside from urban allotments), temporary and interim interventions in shrinking cities have been gaining momentum in recent years as well. By definition, temporary projects have a limited duration. However, that 'duration' can extend to either a few weeks or a few months.

Temporary projects involve various benefits which are especially relevant in the con-

text of shrinking cities. Namely, they are (1) small scale but not limited to further expansion if required, (2) they offer involvement of various user-groups and can encourage self-management by local communities, and lastly (3) they do not require significant financial input (Conseil Jeunesse de Montréal 2017). Furthermore, Pallagst et al. (2008) argue that innovative temporary projects which require less regulation and are catered more toward collaborative creation and experimentation can become a step toward wider urban regeneration. This is also supported by Ikeda (2018) and Madanipour (2018) who both advocate that temporary innovative uses can be a flexible method for the production and consumption of space that can become a viable long-term option and part of a progressive urban narrative.

These 'meanwhile' uses can act as catalysts in (re-)activating and re-purposing existing connections and uses in a shrinking urban structure thereby helping to create stable and vibrant neighbourhoods (Cermasi 2017, Pallagst et al. 2009).

Madanipour (2017) argues that these underutilised (public) spaces can become 'urban stages' that (1) seek to animate and intensify use of spaces by reproducing a new identity for a short period of time (i.e. urban beaches, pop-up markets), (2) be part of more permanent re-branding of a space/area (i.e. re-appropriating spaces to better facilitate local needs and uses relating to sports, arts, and social events) or (3) become dedicated (productive) spaces for the local community (i.e. urban allotments / orchards).

Nemeth and Langhorst (2014) note that temporary approaches have the potential to deliver tangible results through a focus on common goals and needs instead of catering toward external agendas.

Whilst there is limited literature on strategic approaches for public spaces in shrinking cities, it appears there are broadly two directions: (1) re-naturalisation relating to the termination of public space and (2) strategies relating to (re-) activating and intensifying uses in underperforming public spaces to create re-concentration of activity. The latter direction requires further investigation, namely in identifying key design principles that could address core challenges of urban life in shrinking cities – dilution of social cohesion and place attractiveness.



### 3.3. Design principles for social cohesion and place attachment

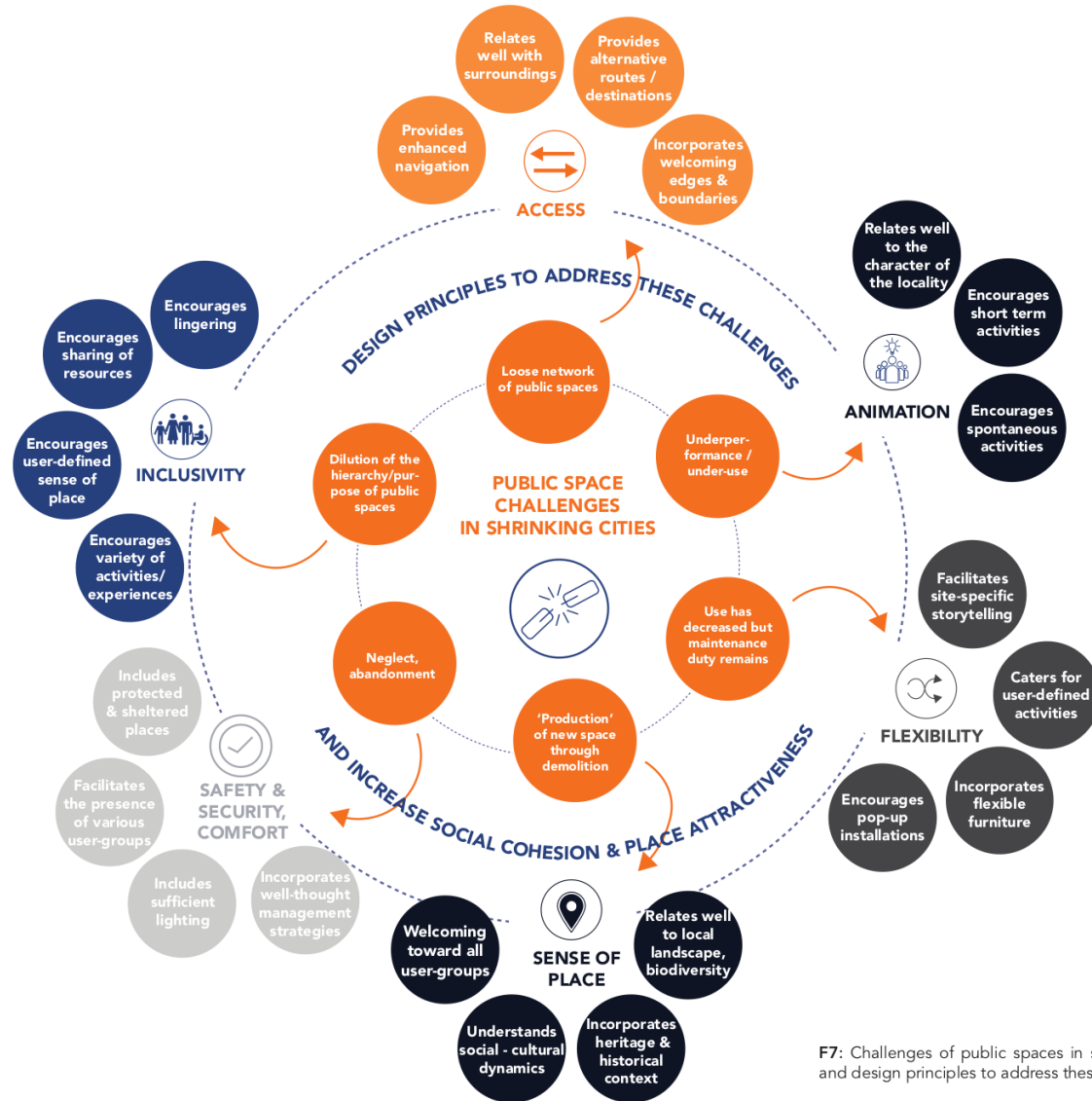
There has been somewhat limited focus on the link between public spaces in shrinking cities and their potential in supporting social dimensions of urban life (in particular social interaction, sense of belonging and sense of place, Furlan et al. 2017).

Underutilised public spaces in shrinking areas further the 'image of polarisation' and sense of isolation and loneliness. This, in turn, can lead to enforcing a negative perception of these areas as hinterlands and peripheries and add to the dilution of community and identity of a place. Furthermore, several studies have illustrated that socially isolated people (Lederbogen et al. 2011) are likely to be less healthy, more susceptible to stress and depression (DeVriens et al. 2011).

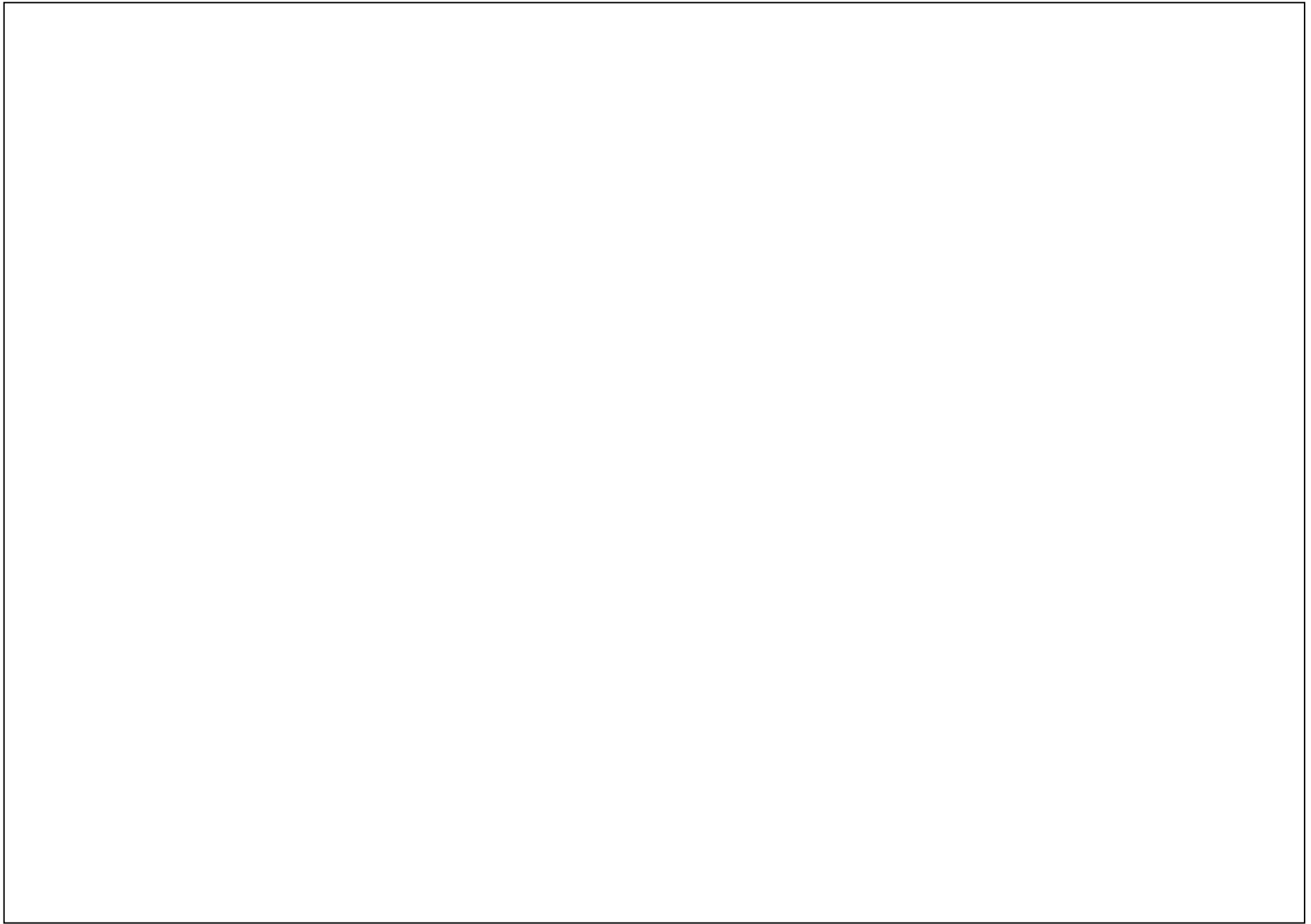
As public spaces contribute toward the overall sense of citizenship, community and ownership, it is fundamental to consider what are the key principles for achieving these objectives.

#### Sense of place

Public spaces play a vital role in the identity of a city. This goes beyond physical 'beautification' of places (Watson and Studert 2006). Sculpting the identity of a place through the creation of new uses and activities should be rooted in understanding local socio-cultural dynamics, heritage and historical context as well as relating well to the local landscape and biodiversity. There are various strategies for cultivating a sense



F7: Challenges of public spaces in shrinking cities and design principles to address these.

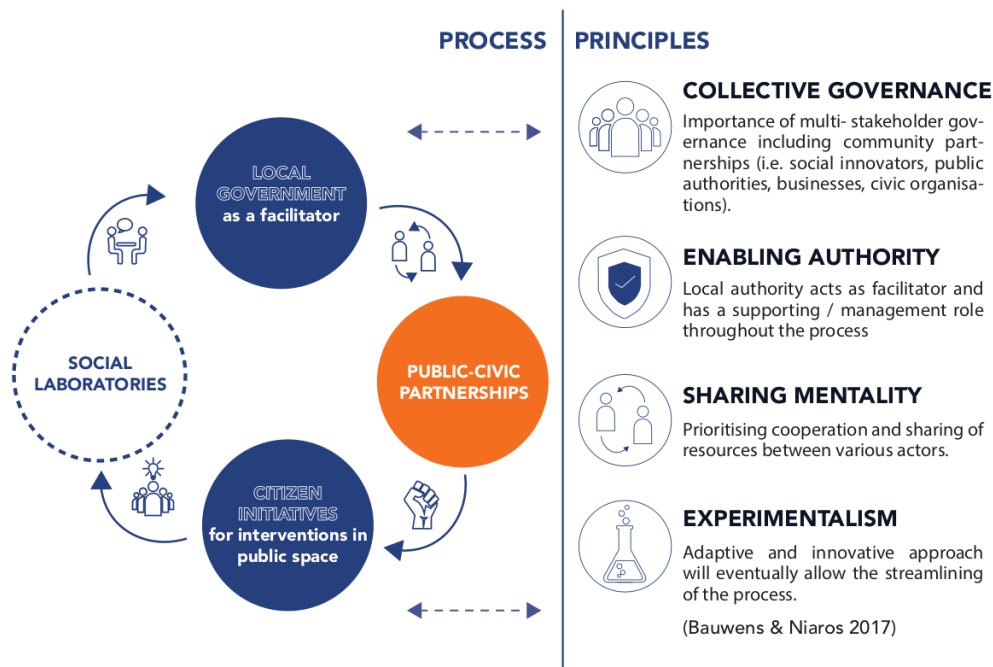


### 3.4. Collaborative governance of public spaces

Collaborative governance models in the context of shrinking cities are important due to constrained economic opportunities and their potential in providing innovative solutions to complex problems which in turn can cultivate active citizenship, enhance social cohesion and place attachment.

This governance method could be applied through various principles including encouragement of various partnerships between the (local) government and community groups, role of the local authority as a facilitator in the management process (i.e. through provision of guidance, support and knowledge); prioritisation of co-operation and sharing mentality and innovative and experimental approaches toward management that would eventually allow for streamlining of the process (Bauwens & Niaros 2017).

It is acknowledged that exploring the link between design interventions and collaborative practices is a significant part of the overall "equation" for re-purposing public spaces in shrinking cities but due to the limited scope of this project, this is best expanded upon as part of a separate research project.





### CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC SPACES IN SHRINKING CITIES

- 1 Dilution of the hierarchy/purpose of public spaces
- 2 Neglect, abandonment
- 3 'Production' of new space through demolition
- 4 Loose network of public spaces
- 5 Under performance / under-use
- 6 Use has decreased but maintenance duty remains

Dilution of the role and values of public spaces



VALUE

- 1 Social
- 2 Cultural
- 3 Economic

ACTIVITY

- 1 Necessary
- 2 Optional
- 3 Social

### STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC SPACES IN SHRINKING CITIES

#### 'MOTH-BALL'

- 1 Re-forestation
- 2 Urban wilderness

#### ACTIVATE INTESIFY

#### CREATE CONCENTRATION

- 3 Productive space: urban agriculture
- 4 Activating existing spaces through re-branding
- 5 Animation of spaces through interim uses

Key principles for public spaces that contribute toward social cohesion and place attractiveness:



F8: Key themes, methods and tools extracted from the literature review.

# 04

## CASE STUDY REVIEW



# GULDBERGS PLADS, COPENHAGEN



<http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2016/08/guld->

0

CONTEXT

**City/country:** Copenhagen, Denmark  
**Year:** 2012 - 2013  
**Area:** 4.500 m2  
**Lead actors:** Locals and municipality

Activating an existing neighbourhood green space for the benefit of the local community through collaborative planning (engagement with community in designing a play and leisure space)

1

PUBLIC SPACE



Courtyard Residential neighbourhood

2

CHALLENGES

- Dormant neighbourhood space
- Anti-social behaviour
- Neglect and abandonment
- Place detachment

3

OBJECTIVE



**Social objectives**

- Increasing social cohesion
- Improving public health
- Improving social inclusion / community feeling
- Strengthen local resilience
- Foster local engagement, place attachment



**Economic objectives**

- Encourage community ownership and shared resources
- Reduce strain on maintenance costs

4

STRATEGY



**Activating existing spaces through re-branding**



Collaborative planning with local residents to identify best intervention

5

DESIGN PRINCIPLES



- Provides alternative destinations
- Incorporates welcoming edges & boundaries



- Flexible furniture
- Caters for spontaneous activities



- Presence of various user-groups



- Welcoming toward all user-groups



- Encourages lingering
- Encourages variety of activities / experiences



- Caters for a variety of physical capabilities

6

LESSONS LEARNED

- Re-branding of a public space through provision of a play and leisure space
- Sharing responsibilities between local partners, citizens and public authorities
- Increased sense of local community and place attachment through providing a space for a variety of local groups (i.e. play and leisure space)
- Incorporating natural surveillance through presence of various groups
- Elements made of durable materials requiring minimal maintenance



# 'EMBRACING CHANGE', ST ETIENNE, FRANCE



<http://www.collectifetc.com/realisation/place-au-changement-chantier-ouvert/>

## 0 CONTEXT

**Year:** 2011  
**Area:** 700 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Lead actors:** Local community, artists, Collectif ETC

The petrol station on the site was demolished to make room for a residential development which never came forward. The intervention sought to animate and intensify the space through the creation of a temporary 'common living room' by the locals who designed / built the intervention.

## 1 PUBLIC SPACE



Incidental spaces



City centre

## 2 CHALLENGES

- Abandoned neighbourhood space
- Anti-social behaviour
- Dilution of public space network
- 'Production' of new space through demolition

## 3 OBJECTIVE



**Social objectives**

- Creation of neighbourhood space
- Increasing social cohesion, inclusion
- Strengthen local resilience
- Foster local engagement



**Economic objectives**

- Encourage community ownership and shared resources
- Reduce strain on maintenance costs of the local government

## 4 STRATEGY



**Animation of spaces through interim uses / urban acupuncture**

## 5 DESIGN PRINCIPLES



- Provides alternative routes / destinations
- Incorporates welcoming edges & boundaries



- Presence of various user-groups



- Encourages lingering
- Encourages variety of activities / experiences



- Flexible furniture
- Caters for spontaneous activities
- Facilitates site-specific storytelling



- Welcoming toward all user-groups
- Understands social-cultural dynamics
- Integrating public spaces into an

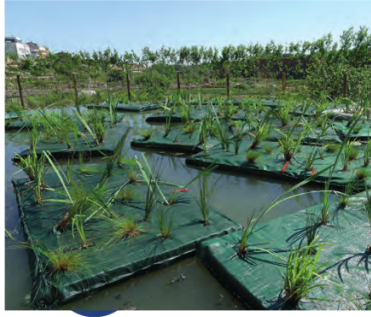


- Benefits of demountable structures to allow for variety and greater flexibility throughout different times of the year

## 6 LESSONS LEARNED

- Reinvention of a 'non-space'
- Benefits of engaging with wider actor-groups: collaboration with local artists
- Increased sense of local community and place attachment through 'interim' use

# THERMAL ORCHARDS, CALDES DE MONTBUI, SPAIN



<https://archello.com/project/recovery-of-the-irrigation-system-at-the-thermal-orchards>

## 0 CONTEXT

**Year:** 2016  
**Area:** 370,000 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Lead actors:** CAVAA Architects, local community

The orchards were created as part of the restoration of an old irrigation system of thermal waters to create urban allotments and a community space on the edge of a town.

## 1 PUBLIC SPACE



Parks, gardens



Incidental spaces



Periphery

## 2 CHALLENGES

- Dormant open spaces on the periphery of the urban area
- Place detachment - not seen as part of the town
- Neglect and abandonment

## 3 OBJECTIVE



**Social objectives**

- Creation of neighbourhood space
- Increasing social inclusion
- Improving public health
- Strengthen local resilience



**Economic objectives**

- Encourage community ownership and sharing resources
- Reduce strain on maintenance costs



**Environmental objectives**

- Creation of new green public space
- Enhance quality and condition of the natural environment

## 4 STRATEGY



**Productive space: urban agriculture**



Collaborative planning with local residents to

## 5 DESIGN PRINCIPLES



- Circularity: utilising existing structures



- Presence of various user-groups



- Encourages sharing of resources
- Encourages variety of activities / experiences



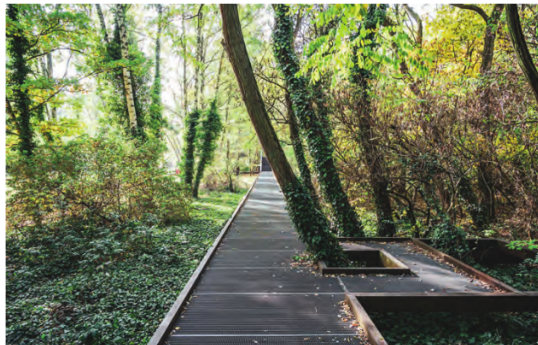
- Welcoming toward all user-groups

## 6 LESSONS LEARNED

- Creation of a productive public space
- Sharing responsibilities between local partners, citizens and public authorities
- Increased sense of local community; tighten community ties through professional (gardening), leisure (walking, lingering), educational (school visits) uses of the space
- Enhanced self-sufficiency in food production



# NATUR-PARK SÜDGELANDE, BERLIN



<http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2013/02/schoneberger-sudge->

0

## CONTEXT

**Year:** 2000  
**Area:** 18 hectares  
**Lead actors:** Local and regional government

Industrial wasteland was allowed to re-naturalise with only key access path guiding the pedestrian through the natural green space. To preserve the biodiversity in the long run the space has been designated as a nature conservation area.

1

## PUBLIC SPACE



Open space    Incidental space    Periphery

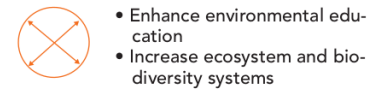
2

## CHALLENGES

- Dormant and diluted network of neighbourhood spaces
- Neglect and abandonment
- Severe underuse
- Use has been superseded but duty of maintenance remains

3

## OBJECTIVE



### Environmental objectives

- Enhance environmental education
- Increase ecosystem and biodiversity systems



### Economic objectives

- Reduce strain on maintenance costs of the local government

4

## STRATEGY



Re-naturalise areas with no intended use / little usage in the inhabited urban edges

5

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES



- Relates well to local landscape, biodiversity
- Incorporates heritage and



- Emphasises process over the finished product



- Could provide alternative routes

6

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Extinguishing severely underused and neglected space through re-naturalisation
- Distinguishing between the hierarchy of public spaces
- Access through may be maintained but spontaneous vegetation is allowed to take over
- Minimal maintenance relating to keeping main access open
- Pathway guides the visitor through the re-naturalised area thereby preventing pedestrians from navigating off the paths (Champres 2017)

STRATEGY

OBJECTIVE

DESIGN TOOLS UTILISED



MOTHBALL

 **Re-naturalisation**

**PERIPHERAL - EDGE FOCUS:**  
Extinguish severely underused neglected / abandoned public space through re-naturalisation to create re-concentration in the space network

- Relates well with surroundings
- Relates well to local landscape, biodiversity
- Incorporates heritage & historical context identity
- Emphasises process over finished product
- May provide alternative routes



ACTIVATE

 **Productive space: urban agriculture**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD OR EDGE FOCUS:**  
Activate to provide energy and food for the neighbourhood, aid in poverty alleviation and encourage social interaction through communal activities

- Encourages sharing of resources
- Encourages user-defined sense of place
- Encourages variety of activities/ experiences
- Utilising existing structures
- Facilitates the presence of various user-groups



 **Activating existing spaces through re-branding**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD FOCUS:**  
Activate as play and/or leisure neighbourhood and/or town centre spaces to tackle isolation and encourage social interaction through community activities and sharing

- Includes protected & sheltered places
- Encourages variety of activities/ experiences
- Provides alternative routes / destinations
- Caters for user-defined activities
- Understands social - cultural dynamics
- Facilitates the presence of various user-groups
- Encourages lingering
- Incorporates flexible furniture



INTENSIFY

 **Animation of spaces through interim use**

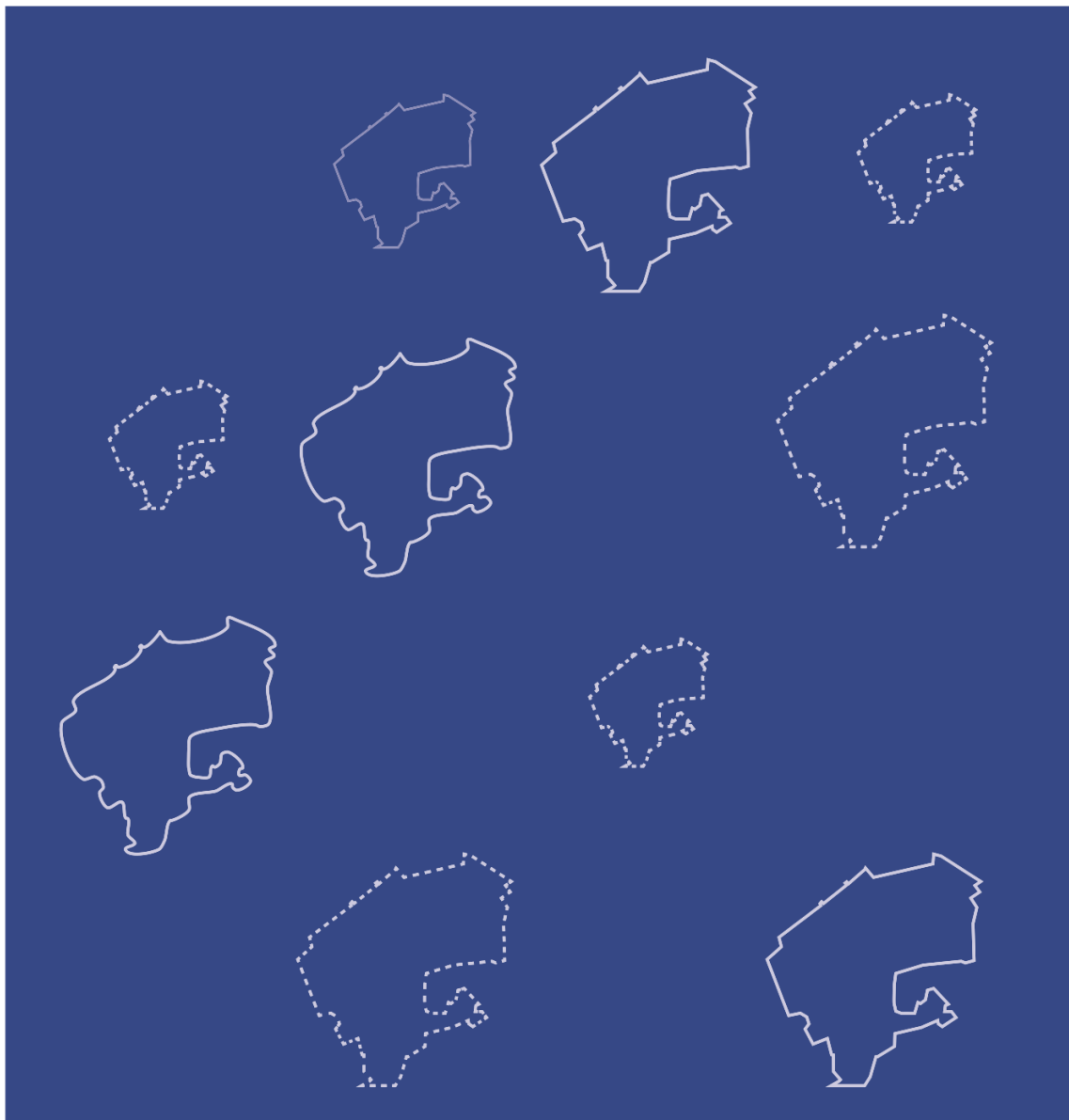
**TOWN CENTRE FOCUS:**  
Create concentration and activity through intensified use as a social destination space for sports / leisure / cultural activities that allow for community engagement and creation

- Encourages short term activities
- Encourages spontaneous activities
- Encourages pop-up installations
- Encourages variety of activities/ experiences
- Provides alternative routes / destinations
- Caters for user-defined activities
- Understands social - cultural dynamics
- Incorporates heritage & historical context identity
- Incorporates flexible furniture
- Encourages lingering
- Incorporates welcoming edges & boundaries
- Facilitates site-specific storytelling
- Facilitates the presence of various user-groups

F9: Key themes, methods and tools extracted from the case study review.

05

**DESIGN  
FRAMEWORK**



## Overview

The proposed framework identifies strategies on how to re-purpose under-performing public spaces in shrinking cities and identifies criteria for their selection.

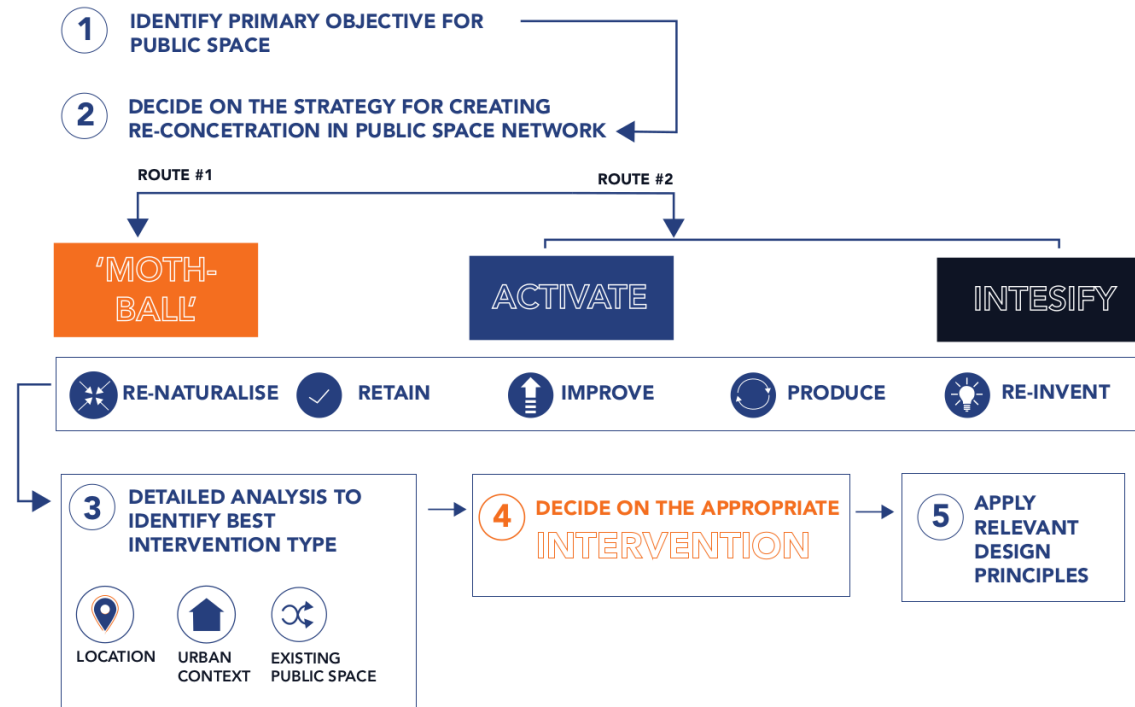
It draws from the literature and case study review and builds strategic and informed decision-making process into the selection criteria and design of these spaces.

The design framework identifies 5 key strategies, each comprising a set of key objectives (and secondary objectives) (Figure 11).

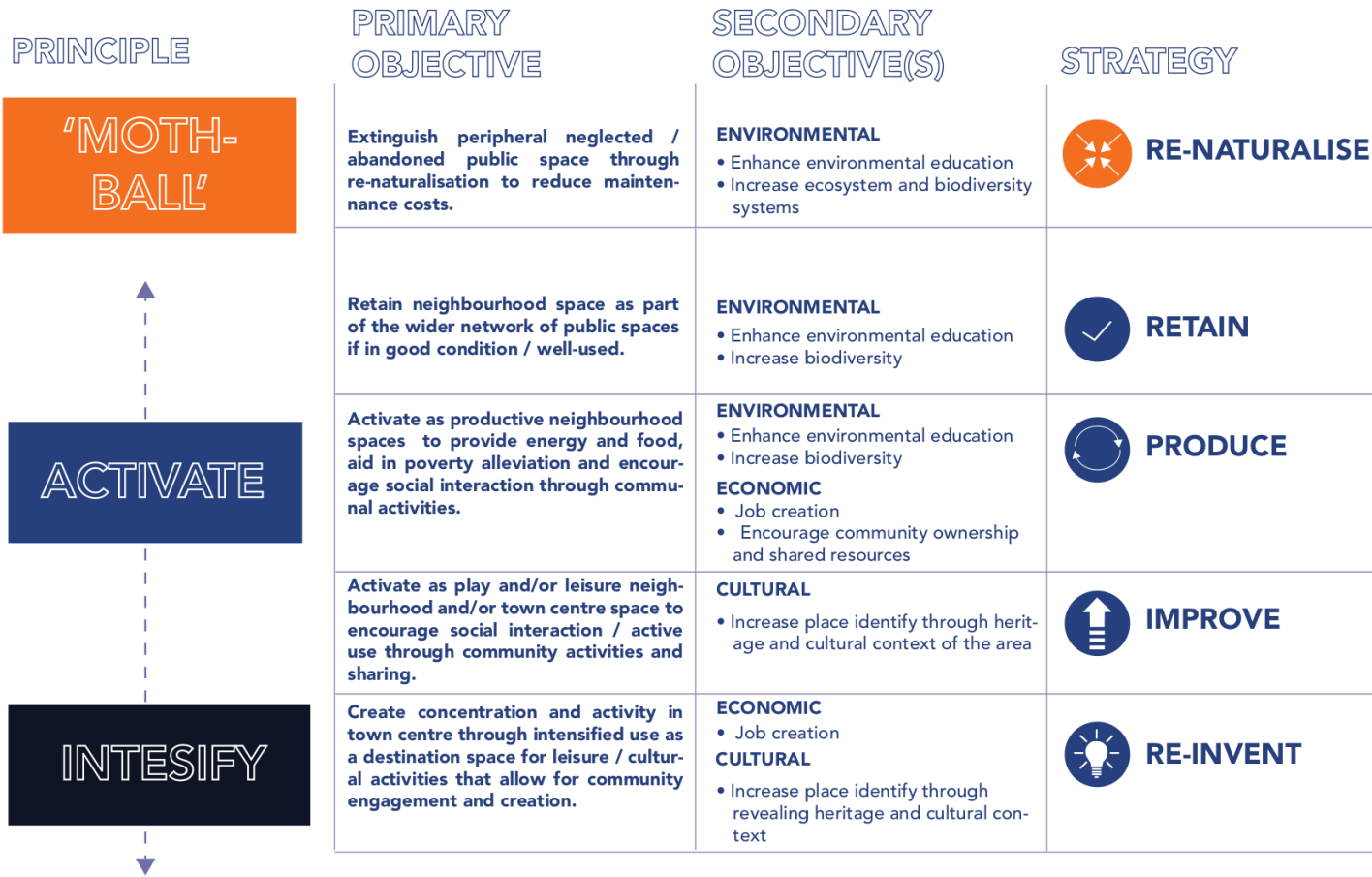
After the identification of an appropriate high-level strategy based on the key objective, detailed analysis of the space and its context will help to identify an appropriate design intervention for a specific site.

The design interventions are accompanied by a set of key design principles and tools that will help to achieve the core objective. These have been extracted from the literature and case study review.

The list of detailed interventions presented under each of the high-level strategies is not definite and can be expanded as required.



F10: Conceptual framework for identifying appropriate strategies for underperforming public spaces.



F11: Principles and objectives to identify relevant strategy.



# 'MOTH-BALL'

Extinguish peripheral neglected / abandoned public space through re-naturalisation to reduce maintenance costs

## ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES

- Enhance environmental education
- Increase ecosystem and biodiversity systems



# RE-NATURALISE

## LOCATION



Periphery

## URBAN CONTEXT

- Bordering active industrial areas
- No active uses in the immediate vicinity
- Edges of housing estates or low density detached housing
- No key routes through
- Might include abandoned infrastructure (i.e. garages, storage facilities, roads)

## PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT



Open space

- Extensive open areas with no intended use / little usage in the inhabited urban edges



Incidental spaces

- Narrow strips of open space that could be utilised as a buffer zone



Open space

- Extensive open areas with no intended use / little usage, between slab blocks on urban edges



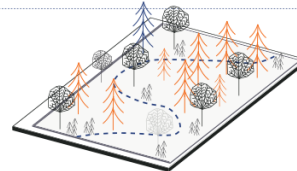
Incidental spaces



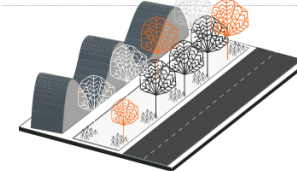
Streets, roads

- Narrow strips of open space either side of the road infrastructure

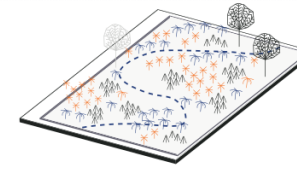
## INTERVENTION



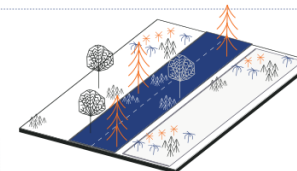
RE-FORRESTATION



INDUSTRIAL BUFFER



URBAN MEADOW



GREENWAYS

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Relates well with surroundings

Relates well to local landscape, biodiversity

Incorporates heritage & historical context identity

May provide alternative routes

Emphasises process over finished product

## IMPLEMENTATION



- Potential for engagement between volunteers and local government



- Long-term

Retain neighbourhood space as part of the wider network of public spaces if in good condition / well-used.

- ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES**
- Enhance environmental education
  - Increase biodiversity



**LOCATION**



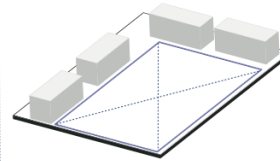
**URBAN CONTEXT**

- Variety of single family housing (detached or semi-detached) or slab blocks
- Areas near the centre/ adjacent to secondary routes

**PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT**



**INTERVENTION**



DO NOTHING SCENARIO

**DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

- Not applicable

**IMPLEMENTATION**

- Not applicable

**ACTIVATE**

Activate as play and/or leisure neighbourhood and/or town centre space to encourage social interaction / active use through community activities and sharing.

- CULTURAL OBJECTIVES**
- Increase place identity through heritage and cultural context of the area



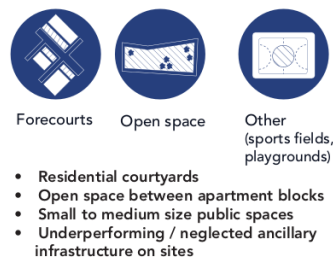
**LOCATION**



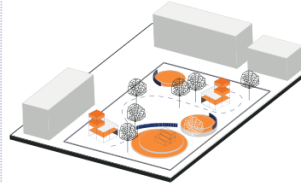
**URBAN CONTEXT**

- Variety of single family housing (detached or semi-detached) or slab blocks
- No primary routes through, largely local nodes linking secondary and tertiary routes
- Limited variety of uses, largely comprising local shops

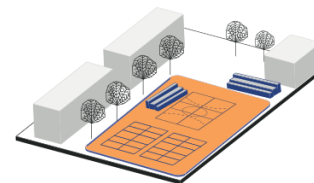
**PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT**



**INTERVENTION**



PLAY SPACE



SPORTS GROUND

**DESIGN PRINCIPLES**



**IMPLEMENTATION**

- Potential for engagement between volunteers and local government
- Temporary or medium term but potential to become viable long-term alternative

# ACTIVATE

Activate as productive neighbourhood spaces to provide energy and food, aid in poverty alleviation and encourage social interaction through communal activities

## ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES

- Enhance environmental education
- Increase biodiversity

## ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES

- Job creation
- Encourage community ownership and shared resources



# PRODUCE



## LOCATION



Residential neighbourhoods



Periphery



## URBAN CONTEXT

- Largely slab block housing estates
- Neighbourhoods comprising detached single-family housing
- No primary routes through, largely local nodes linking secondary and tertiary routes
- Limited variety of uses, largely comprising local shops



## PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT



Open space

- Extensive open areas with no intended use / little usage, between slab blocks on urban edges



Forecourts



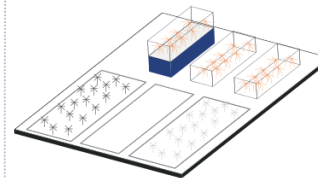
Courtyards



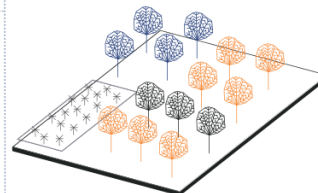
Incidental spaces

- Residential courtyards
- Open space between apartment blocks
- Small to medium size public spaces
- Underperforming / neglected ancillary infrastructure on site

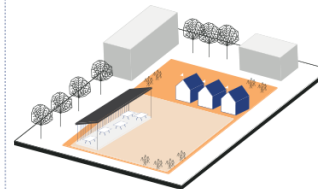
## INTERVENTION



URBAN ALLOTMENTS



URBAN ORCHARD



TOOL SHARING / WORKSHOPS

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Encourages sharing of resources

Encourages user-defined sense of place

Encourages variety of activities/experiences

Welcoming toward all user-groups

Utilising existing structures



## IMPLEMENTATION



- Potential for engagement between volunteers and local government



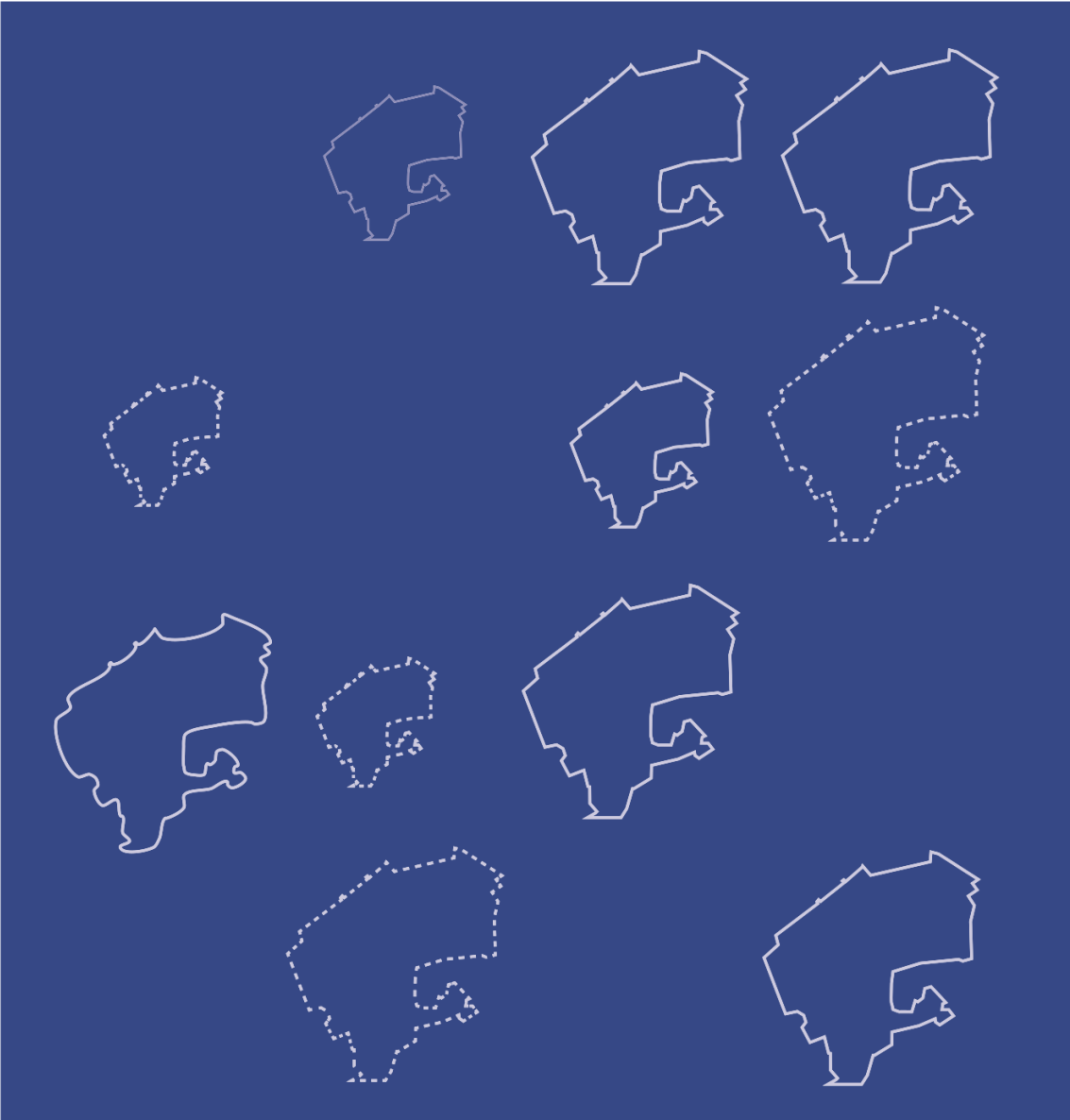
- Temporary or medium term but potential to become viable long-term alternative

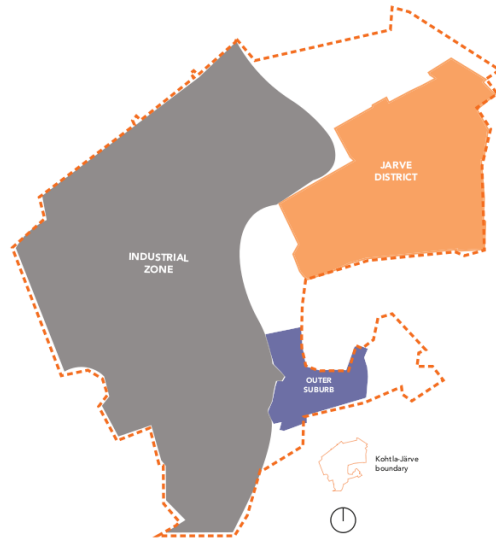




# 06

## SITE ANALYSIS



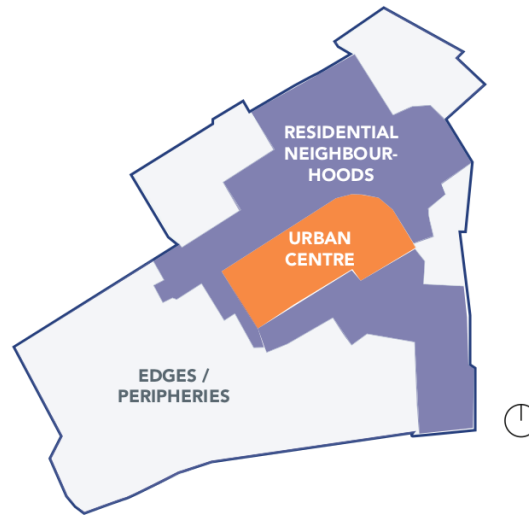


F12: Kohtla-Järve character areas.

### Character areas

The project focuses on the Järve district of Kohtla-Järve. Whilst the overall urban boundary is drawn much more widely, the remainder includes the industrial zone to the west and isolated small clusters of residential neighbourhoods to the south. Only the Järve district has distinguishing urban characteristics and therefore is a good testbed for the design framework.

In broad terms, the district can be divided into three areas: edges with a limited variety of uses and extensive open space (green or brownfield land), residential neighbourhoods largely spreading north and eastward and the central area which the residential neighbourhoods are clustered around.



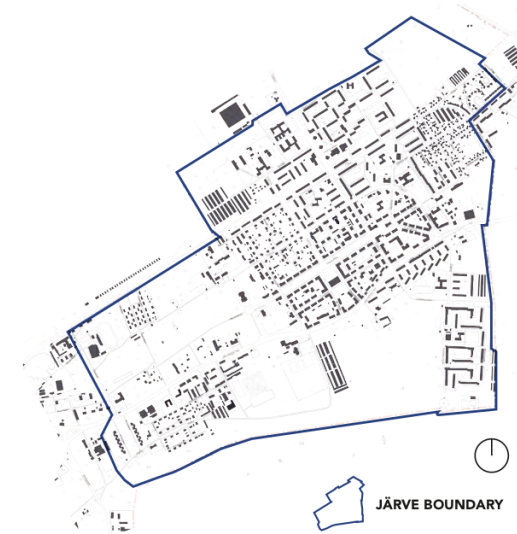
F13: Järve District character areas.

### Urban morphology

The urban morphology of the district reflects its historic development. Namely, the layout is based on a grid-system that spreads outward the central axis of these areas.

The central area comprises the earliest development (1950s and 1960s) and illustrates the Soviet-era approach toward city-planning. The hierarchical model comprises a mix of uses at the centre, interspersed with 4-5 storey housing set around communal courtyards.

Later phases (1960s-1980s) comprise a more flexible layout and were catered toward providing the required quantity of housing for the increasing population. The spatial layout took the form of large slab blocks enclosing a central courtyard or blocks set linear with each other and forming extensive open space between. Most of these neighbourhoods are located in the northern and southern areas of the district.



F14: Urban morphology

The edges of the town were planned to be developed in the future to cater for population growth. However, this halted in 1980s and the peripheries remain as brownfield land / extensive open space with somewhat isolated residential clusters to the south-west, south-east and north-east.

Specific typology of the public spaces in the district has been identified in Figure 18 and is based on the analysis of these spaces on the following pages. This will form the baseline upon which a decision for the most appropriate strategy and design intervention will be based.



F15: Key vehicular routes.

### Vehicular network

The road and street network is set on a grid pattern with a clear hierarchy of vehicular roads.

The east-west artery at the southern end allows for through traffic from the south and connects it with the main motorway to Narva, the easternmost city in Estonia. The north-south routes are less important and whilst providing access from one of the key national motorways, are less travelled and appear to be used by local traffic only. The remainder of the movement network comprises distributor streets catering for local traffic / access to residential properties.



F16: Key pedestrian routes

### Pedestrian network

The pedestrian movement was observed during several site visits at different times of the day and week. This was complemented with consulting the statistics included in the evidence base for the Local Plan.

The main routes appear to be between the coach station (south-east), the local shopping centre, the central square and Central Boulevard where most of the active uses are located. Due to the multiplicity of schools in the district, a significant amount of pedestrian movement pattern appears to be associated with this use. Lastly, very limited pedestrian movement was detected in the western extent of the area (i.e. the People's Park). This is because it remains distinctly separate from the key destinations in the east.



F17: Key land uses.

### Land uses

Key principles followed in the Soviet-era urban planning were based on the traditional, hierarchical approach of central areas comprising concentration of uses with residential areas extending beyond. The edges of the centre are marked by civic buildings (e.g. Town Council, cultural centre). Central Boulevard ('Keskalllee') connects the four corners of the Järve central area (i.e. the Town Council to its south, the public square at its eastern end, a cultural centre and People's Park ('Rahvapark') at its southwestern end. The Soviet-era principles of urban planning incorporated a 'holistic approach' where the residential uses were accompanied by strategically located primary and secondary schools, various retail and commercial uses, sports facilities and markets. However, as the population decreased, many of these uses now remain at the peripheries of the district.

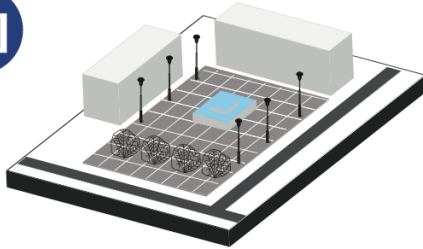


## CENTRE



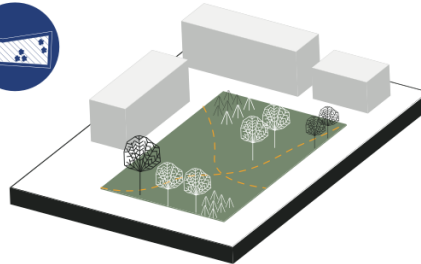
### SPATIAL TYPOLOGY

- Low scale, mainly 2-3 storey semi-detached houses
- Greatest variety of uses including retail, commercial, cultural and institutional
- Good selection of primary, secondary routes



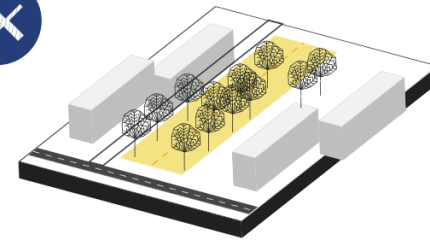
### SQUARES

- Marking key civic functions (i.e. Town Hall, Cultural Centre)
- Hard landscaped with some furniture / water features
- Terminating a boulevard / central street
- Located at / vicinity of nodal points



### CORNER PARKS

- Located at street junctions
- No structures within these spaces
- Providing informal routes to town centre from neighbouring residential areas
- Usually grassed with semi-mature trees



### CORRIDORS (PRIMARY STREETS / BOULEVARDS)

- May be bounded by vehicle road to all sides
- Overlooked by semi-detached houses to either side
- Landscaped area with mature trees and some seating
- Significant remnant of Soviet era planning

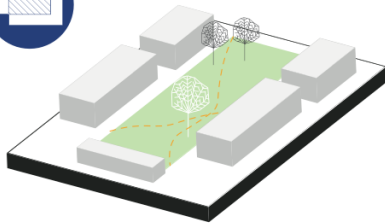


## RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS: DETACHED / SEMI-DETACHED



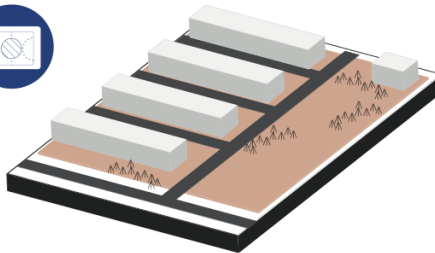
### SPATIAL TYPOLOGY

- Mixed scale, detached houses of 2-3 storeys
- Some variety in uses, mainly local retail and commercial
- Good selection of primary, secondary, tertiary routes



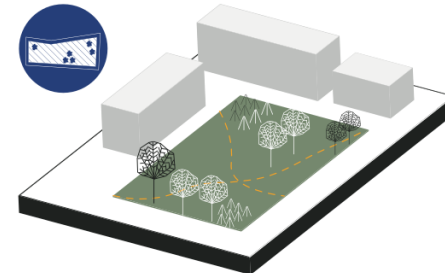
### COURTYARDS

- Surrounded by low scale housing
- Close to various town centre uses
- Some courtyards have ancillary structures (sometimes neglected / empty), including garages, storage or dilapidated play infrastructure
- Mostly landscapes, with informal routes across



### BROWNFIELD

- Areas of extensive garages / storages
- Some have been neglected / severely deteriorated
- Informal spaces with routes through to neighbouring areas
- Safety concerns due to poorly lit areas
- Anti-social behaviour



### CORNER PARKS

See above

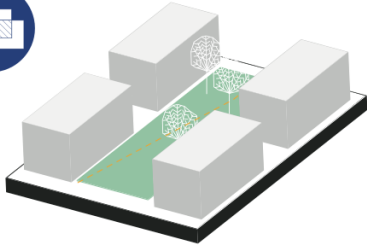


## RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS: SOVIET ERA ESTATES



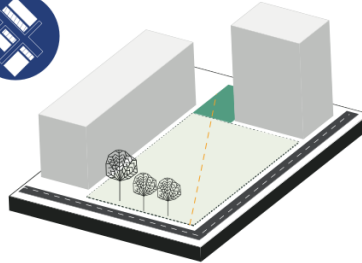
### SPATIAL TYPOLOGY

- Mixed scale, mainly large Soviet era slab blocks
- Some variety in uses, mainly local retail and commercial
- Good selection of secondary, tertiary routes



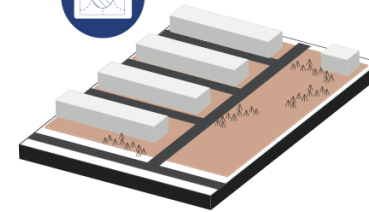
### COURTS

- Dilapidated infrastructure (i.e. sports ground)
- Providing informal routes to town centre
- Usually grassed with semi-mature trees
- Vehicle access / parking routes on all sides
- Located near some local retail/ educational uses



### OPEN SPACE AROUND SLABS

- Dilapidated infrastructure / roads
- Providing informal diagonal routes to town centre from neighbouring residential areas
- Usually grassed with few/no trees
- No specific function



### BROWNFIELD / STORAGE

See above

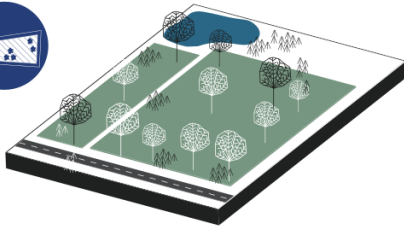


## PERIPHERIES / EDGES



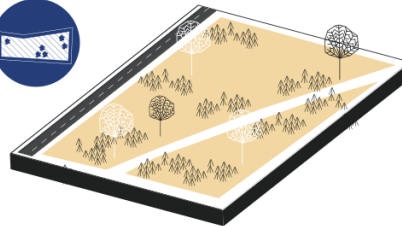
### SPATIAL TYPOLOGY

- Largely open areas comprising parkland, woodland or brownfield
- Very limited variety in uses, some light industrial uses
- Very limited selection of routes, some connect to the main motorways



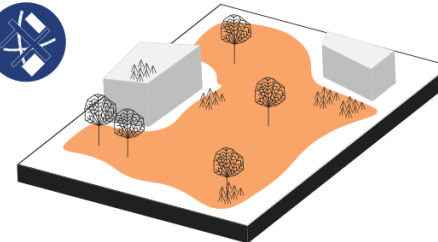
### PARKLAND

- Bounded by vehicle road to at least one side
- Landscapes with mature trees
- Shaded and sheltered routes mixed with open parkland
- Some educational and cultural uses located on the edges of the Park



### EXTENSIVE OPEN SPACE

- Extensive spaces on the peripheries
- Connect neighbourhoods to centre
- Maintained but with no / little infrastructure
- Not for lingering
- Some trees but most remain open grassed spaces with tarmac / gravel routes through



### NEGLECTED PLACES

- Adjacent to abandoned / neglected structures
- Not managed and overgrown
- Green buffer between the main arteries and buildings
- Combination of grassed area and tarmac surfaces
- Attract anti-social behaviour





**F18:** Existing typology of public spaces.

Public spaces examined in this project only include locations traditionally perceived as public (open) spaces, including (high) streets, markets, squares, parks, allotments and playgrounds.

A large part of these form green open spaces as greenery was a significant part of the Soviet-era planning and the original 1940s plan for the new town created an extensive Park at

the western end of the town which (also act as a buffer zone between the town and the industrial area). Whilst the Soviet-era principles of urban planning are still evident in the spatial layout, urban shrinkage in the last 30 years has caused several of the buildings to become neglected and the generous public space to become underused and dilapidated due to the scarcity of resource to manage it.



**SQUARES**



**CORNER PARKS**



**COURTYARDS**



**BROWNFIELD / STORAGE**



**COURTS**



**EXTENSIVE OPEN SPACE**



**OPEN SPACE AROUND SLABS**



**NEGLECTED PLACES**



**CORRIDORS**



F19: Illustrations of various urban characters.

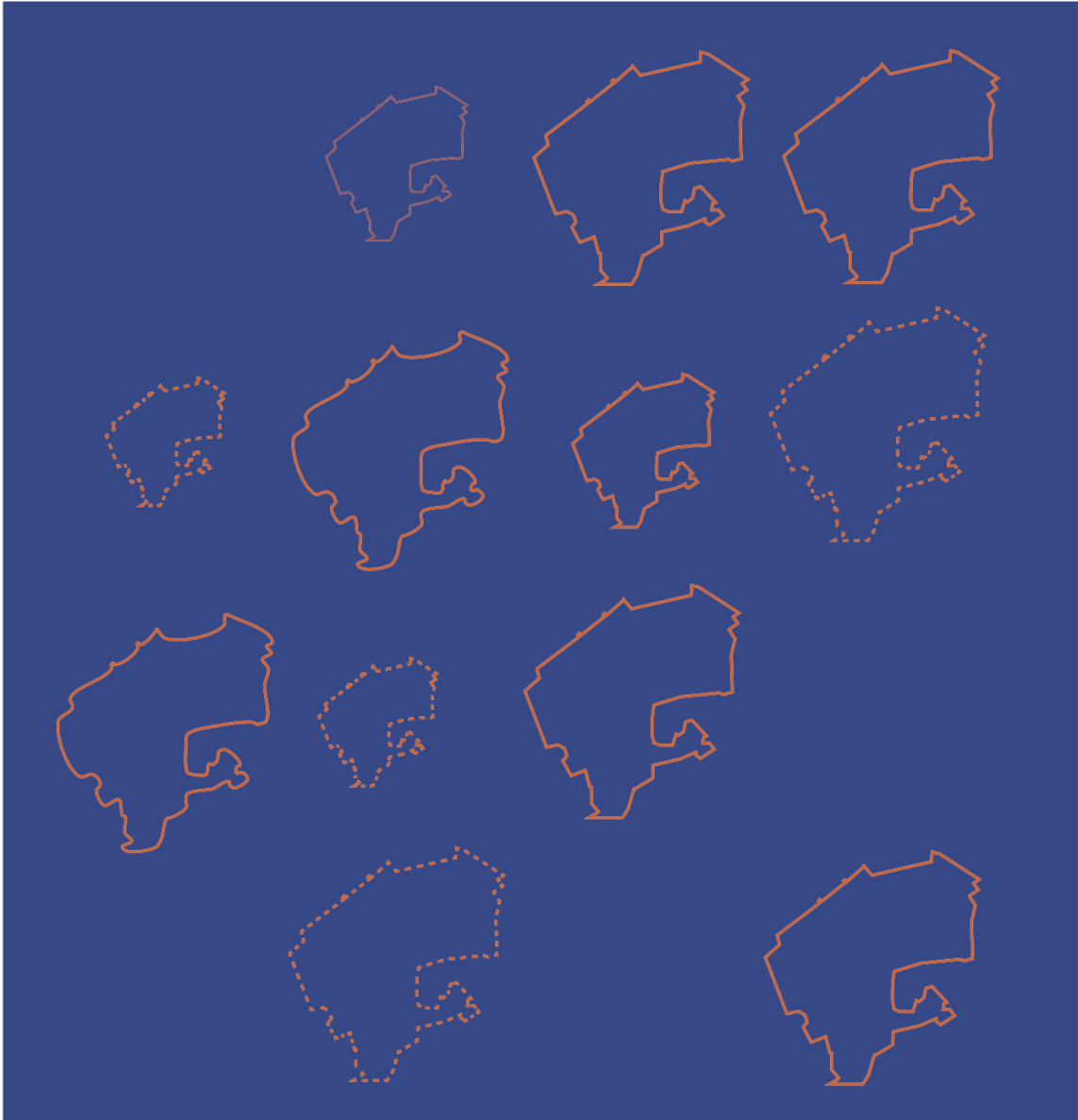


F20: Key opportunities & challenges in the Järve District.

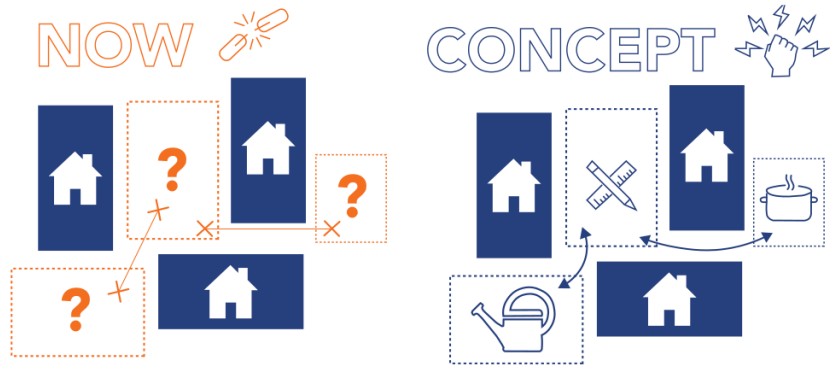


07

APPLICATION



# DESIGN INSPIRATION & SITE LOCATIONS

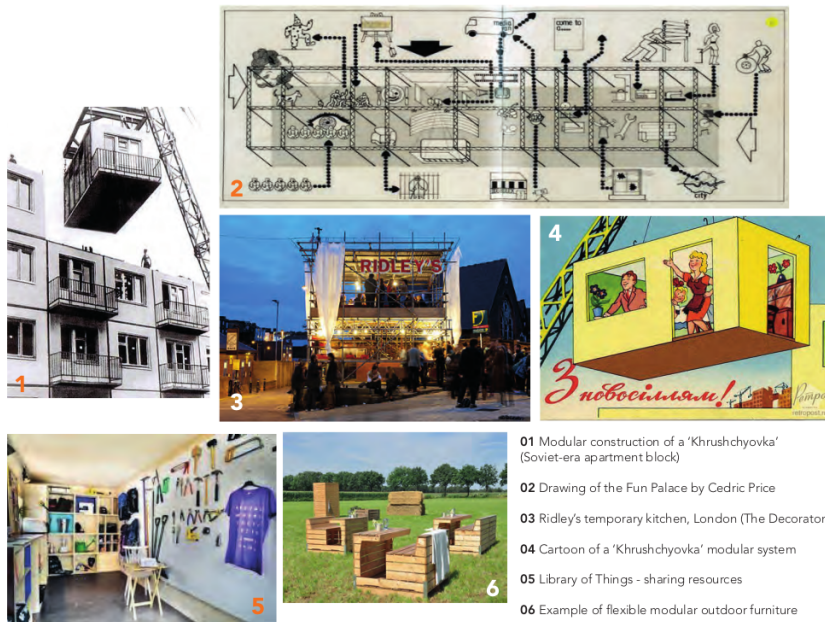


F21: Design concept for activating & intensifying public spaces.



F23: Site locations for design interventions.

The selection of sites followed the detailed analysis of the existing public spaces in the District to illustrate how a variety of strategies and interventions could be applied in an urban context.

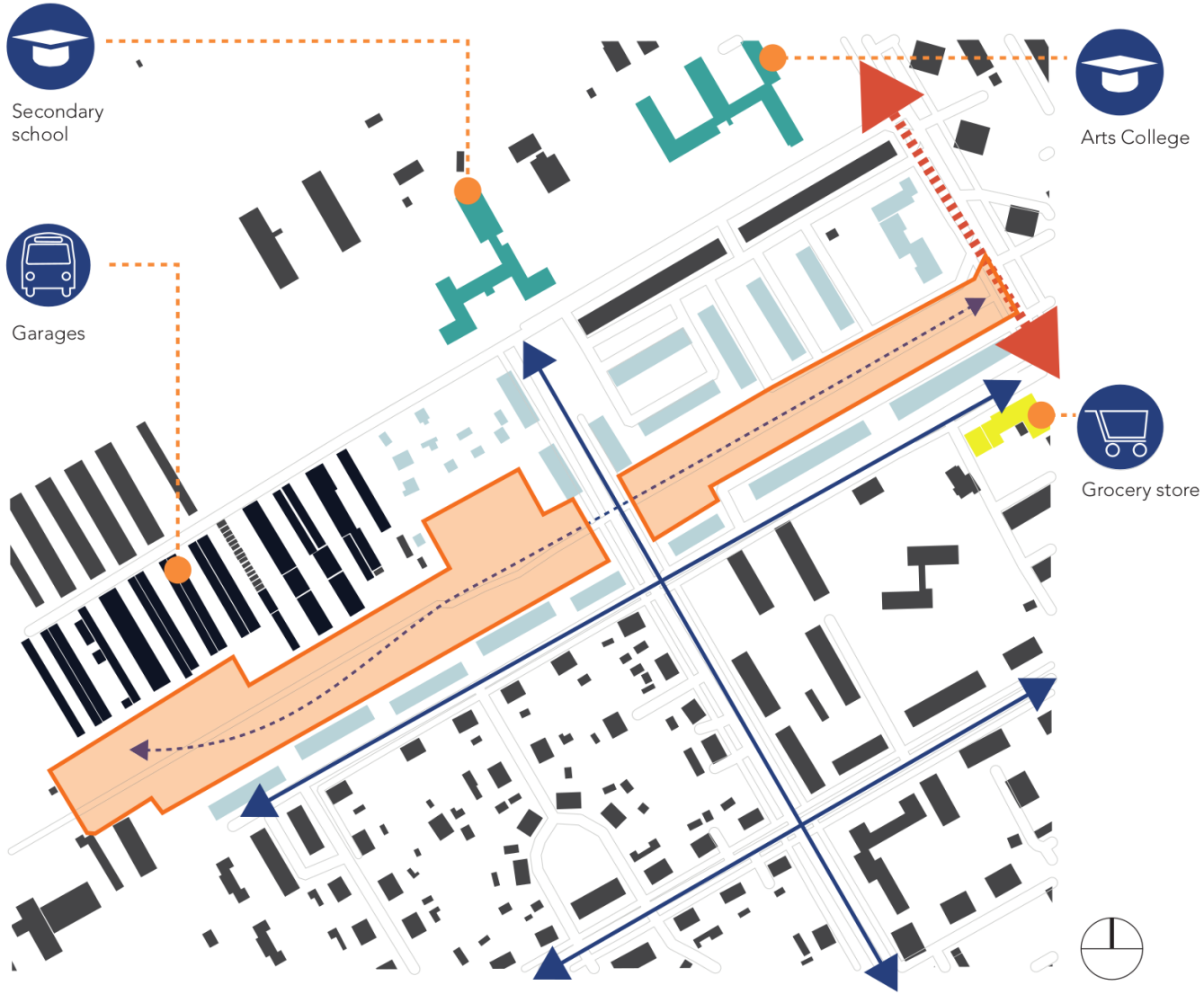


F22: Inspiration board for activating & intensifying public spaces.

- 01 Modular construction of a 'Khrushchyovka' (Soviet-era apartment block)
- 02 Drawing of the Fun Palace by Cedric Price
- 03 Ridley's temporary kitchen, London (The Decorators)
- 04 Cartoon of a 'Khrushchyovka' modular system
- 05 Library of Things - sharing resources
- 06 Example of flexible modular outdoor furniture



# Site 01: Back to nature!





site 01: green space corridor between slab blocks



F26: View from one of the adjacent main routes.



F27: Semi-mature trees lining the central route.



F24: View westward.



F25: View of the open space between slab-blocks.



F28: Apartment blocks overlooking the space.

site 01

**OBJECTIVE:** Extinguish peripheral neglected / abandoned public space through re-naturalisation to reduce maintenance costs



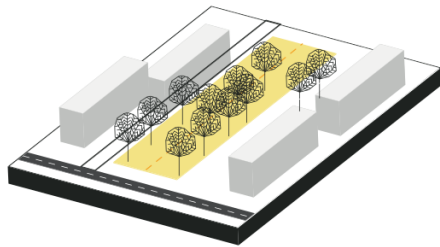
**RE-NATURALISE**

**3**

**IDENTIFY INTERVENTION**



**PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT**



Open space



Corridor

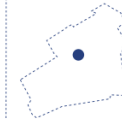


**URBAN CONTEXT**

- Overlooked by apartment blocks on two sides
- Landscaped area with mature trees
- Remnant of Soviet era planning
- Pedestrian movement corridor



**LOCATION**



Residential neighbourhood

**1**

Management strain

**2**

Extremely underutilised space

**CHALLENGES**

**4**

Limited shelter

**3**

Anti-social behaviour

**1**

Generous public space area

**2**

Mature planting around the edges

**OPPORTUNITIES**

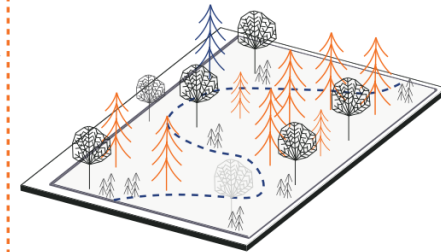
**4**

Connecting residential blocks to main routes

**3**

Surrounded by slab blocks

**PROPOSED INTERVENTION:  
BACK TO NATURE**

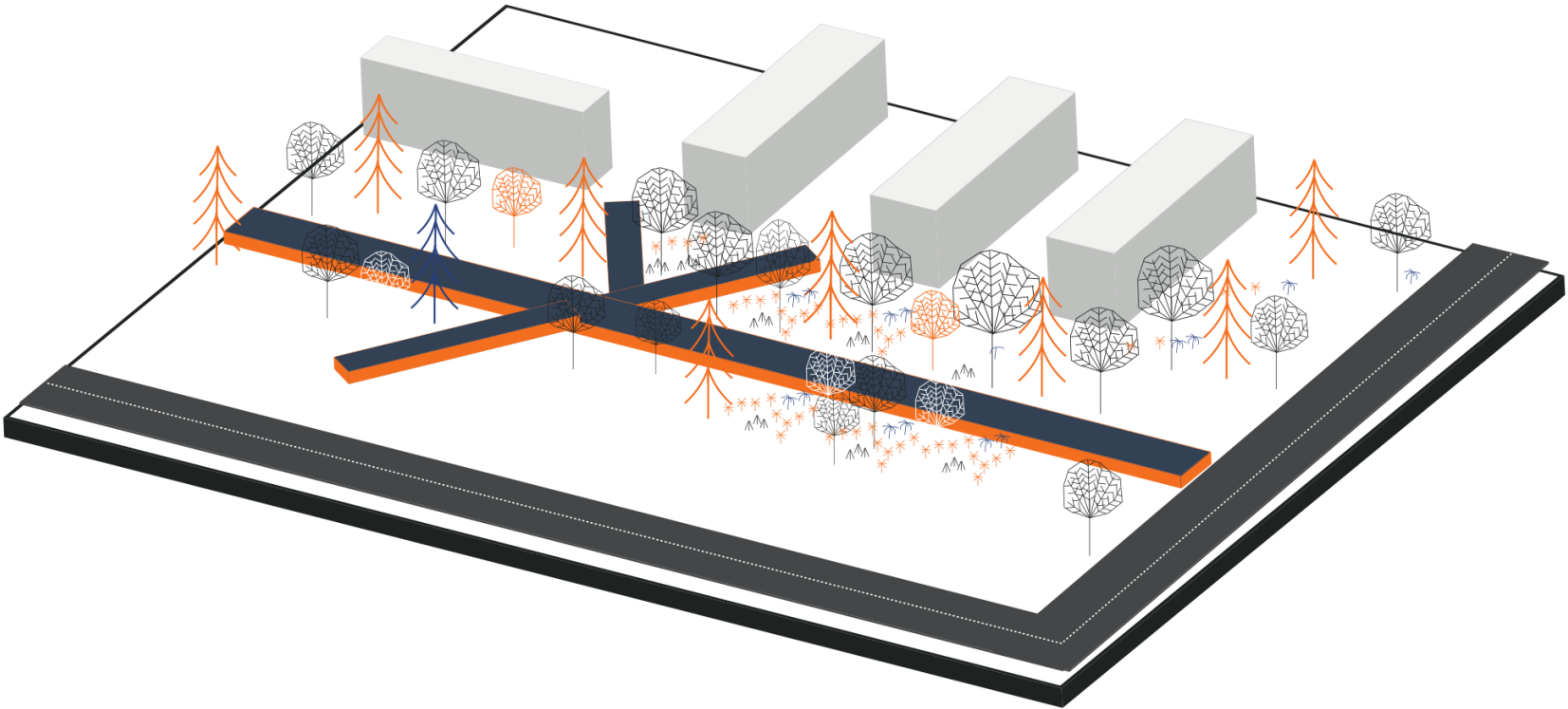
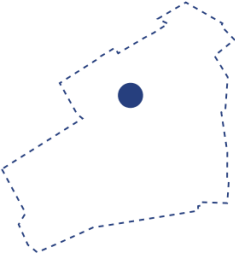




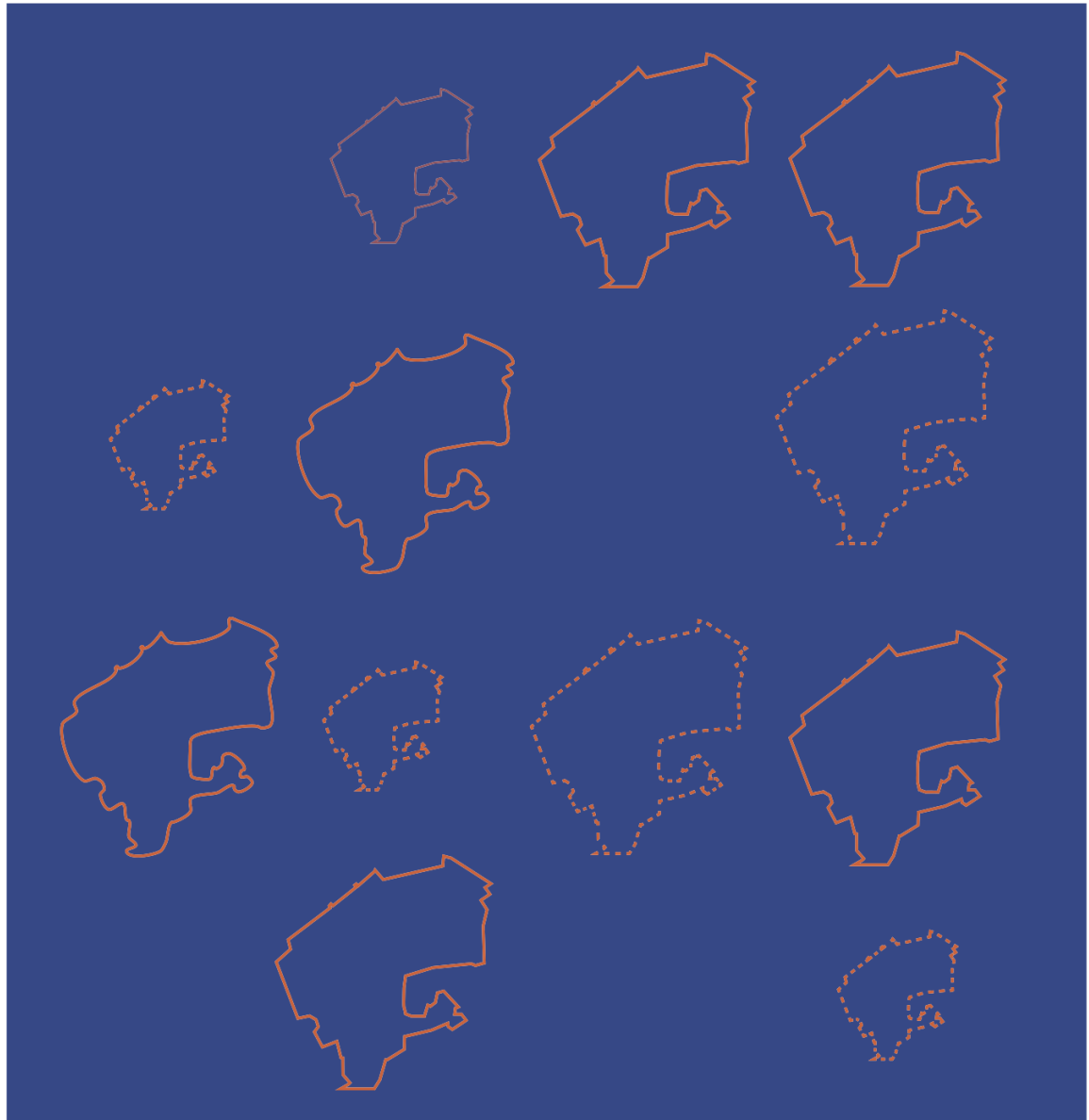
'MOTH-BALL'

site 01: Back to nature

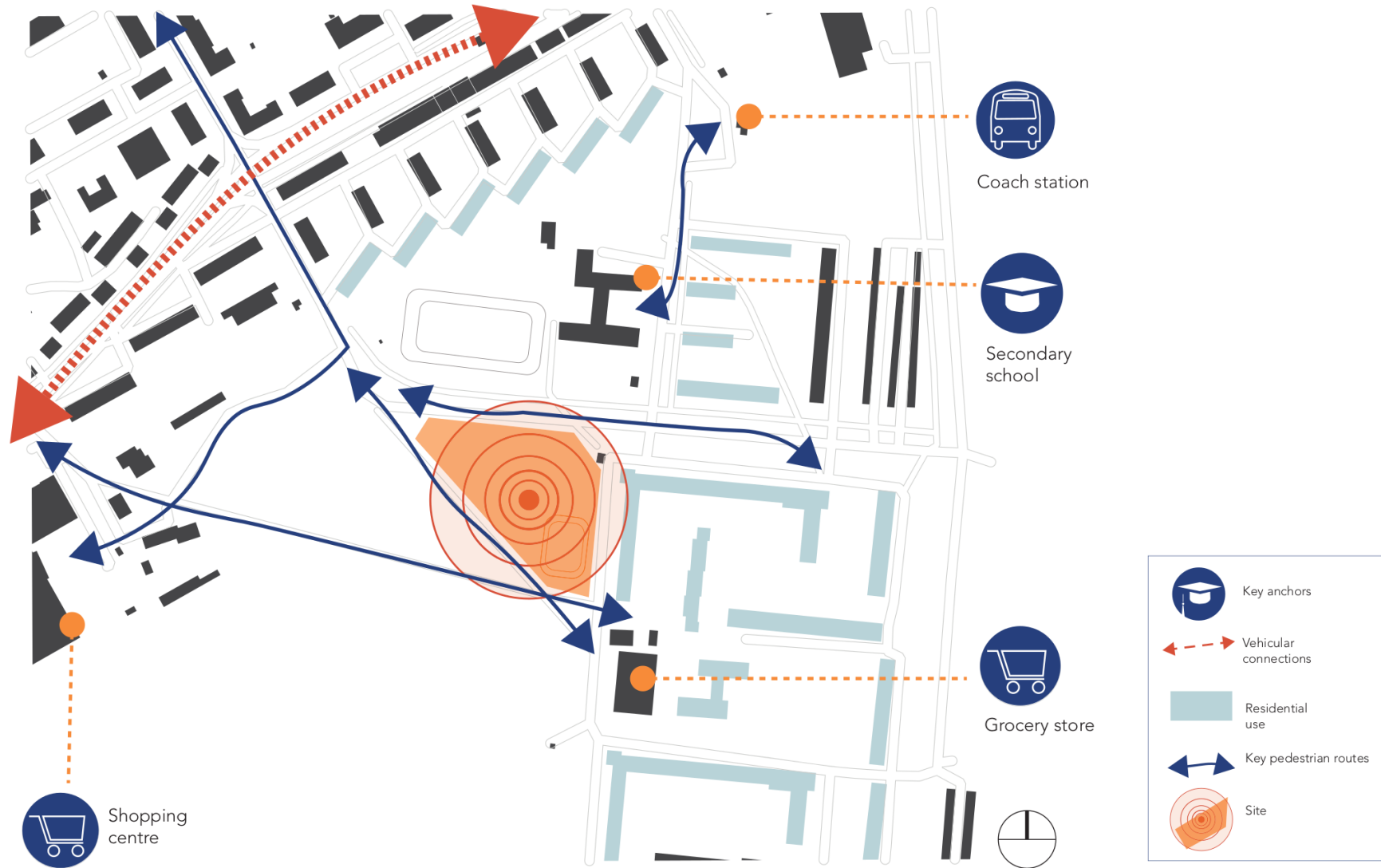
The proposal relates to turning the long linear extensive space between the slab blocks into an urban eco-park, essentially re-naturalising most of the site to reduce maintenance of the space whilst retaining key pedestrian routes to slab blocks.



# SITE 2



## Site 02: Playspace & skatepark



site 02: extensive open space



Route to town  
centre and  
secondary school

Route to the  
local grocery  
store

**OBJECTIVE:** Activate as play and/or leisure neighbourhood and/or town centre spaces to encourage social interaction through sports-related activities



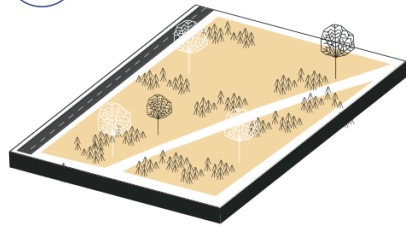
IMPROVE

3

IDENTIFY INTERVENTION



**PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT**



Open space



Other (sports field)

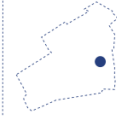


**URBAN CONTEXT**

- Slab-block neighbourhood
- Local nodes linking secondary and tertiary routes
- Local shops
- Adjacent to a major school



**LOCATION**



Residential neighbourhood / next to town centre

1

Lack of play /leisure space

2

Extremely underutilised space

4

No existing shade or shelter

3

Anti-social behaviour during night time



1

Generous public space

2

Mature planting around the edges

3

Existing underutilised basketball court

4

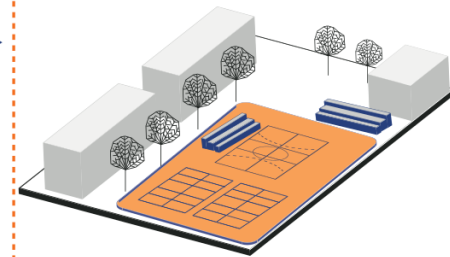
Next to a major neighbourhood and school

5

Existing lighting infrastructure



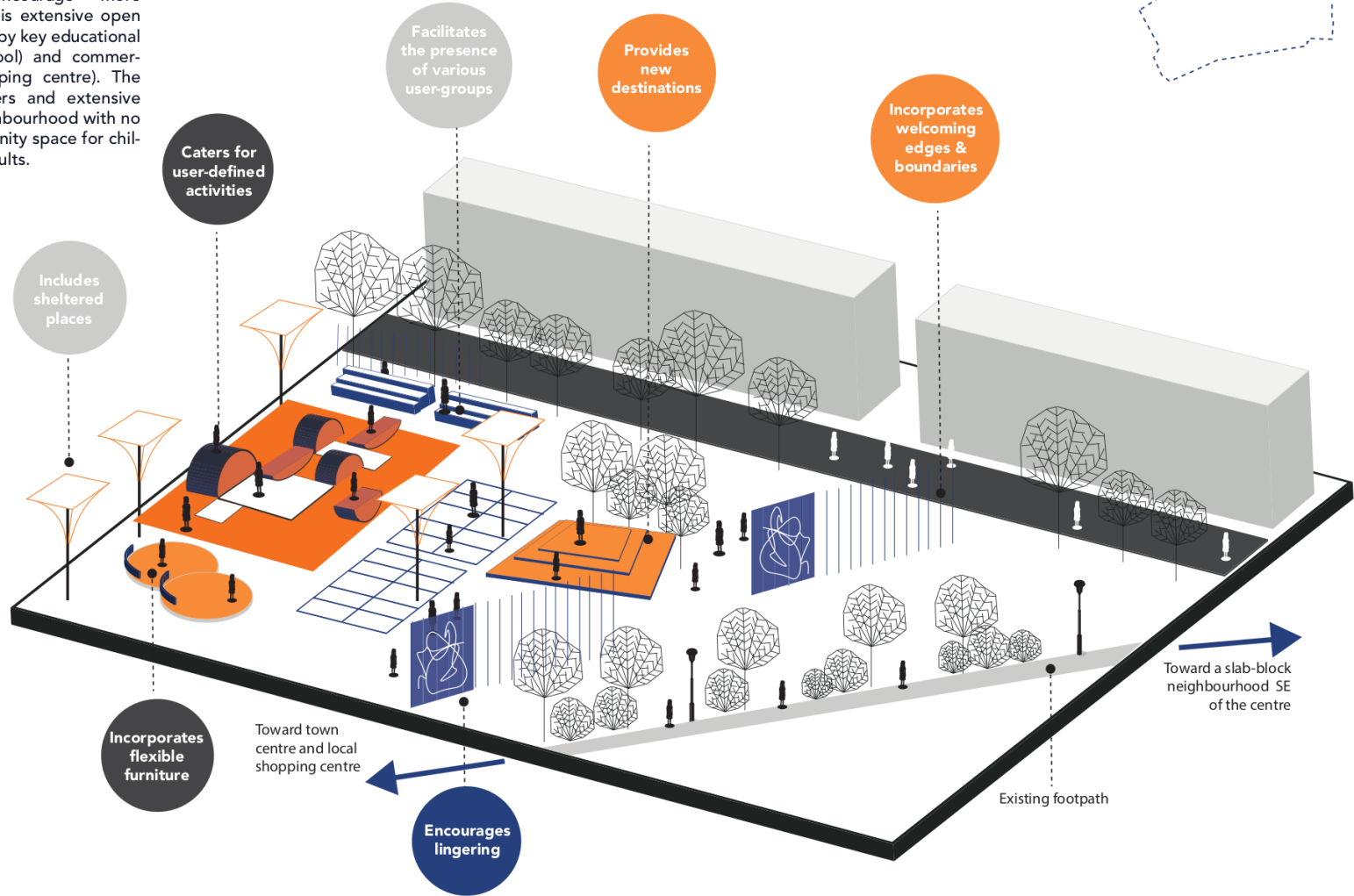
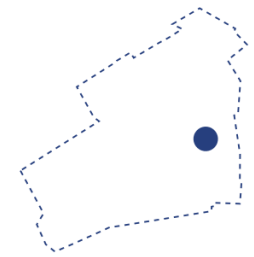
**PROPOSED INTERVENTION: PLAY SPACE**



# ACTIVATE

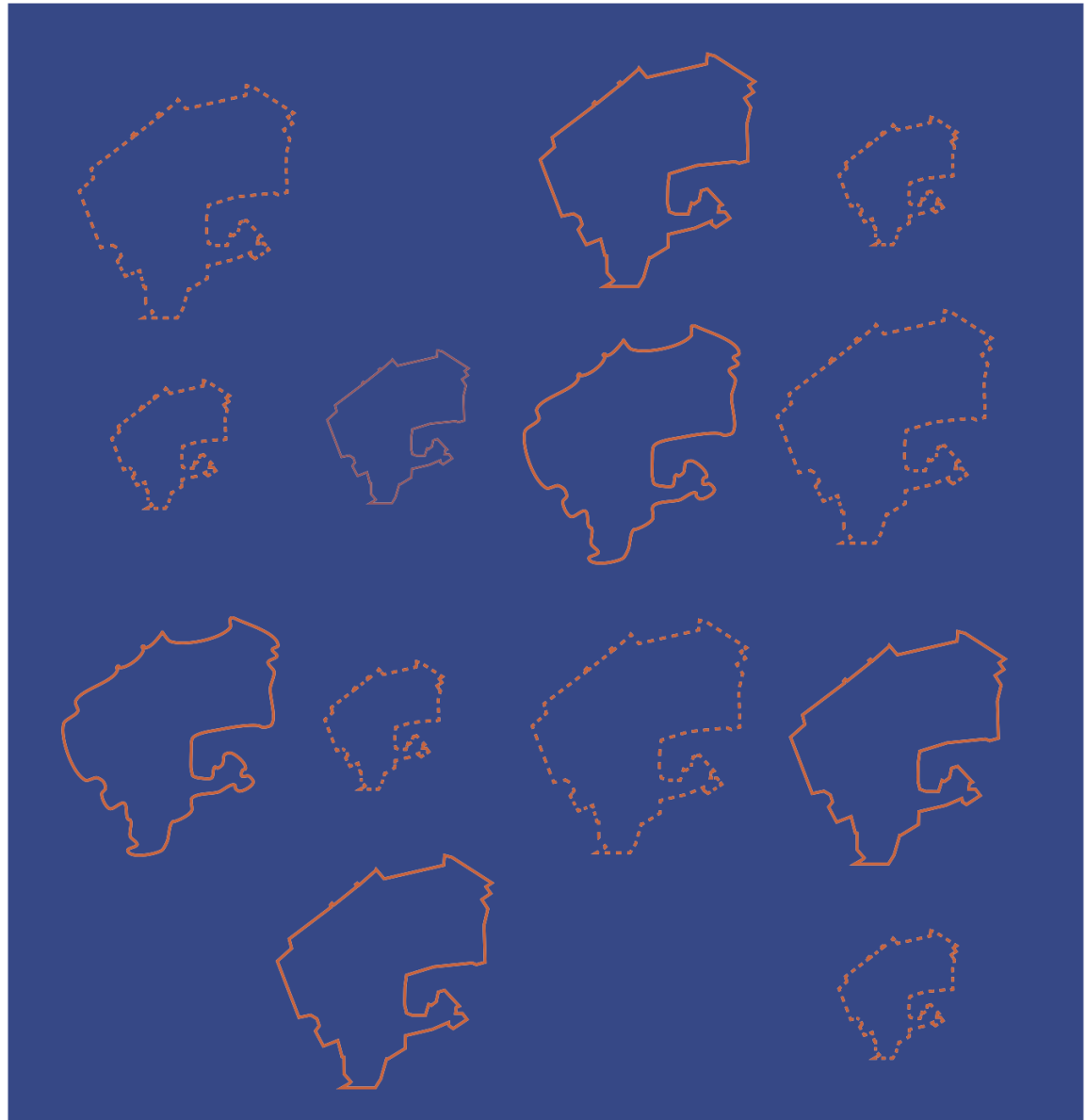
## site 02: Playspace and pop-up skatepark

Proposed playspace and pop-up skatepark to encourage more active use of this extensive open space bounded by key educational (secondary school) and commercial uses (shopping centre). The site also borders an extensive residential neighbourhood with no designated amenity space for children / young adults.

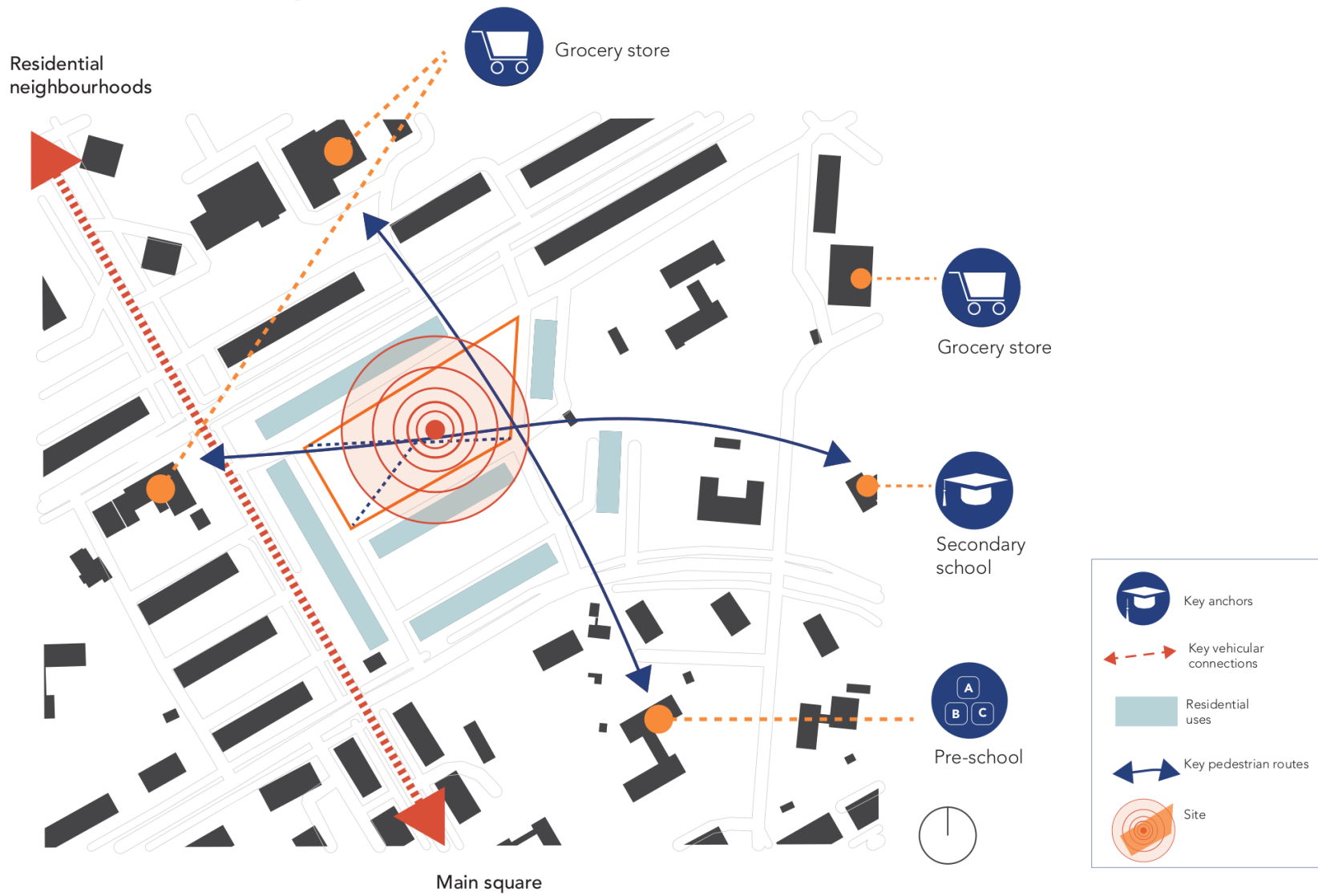




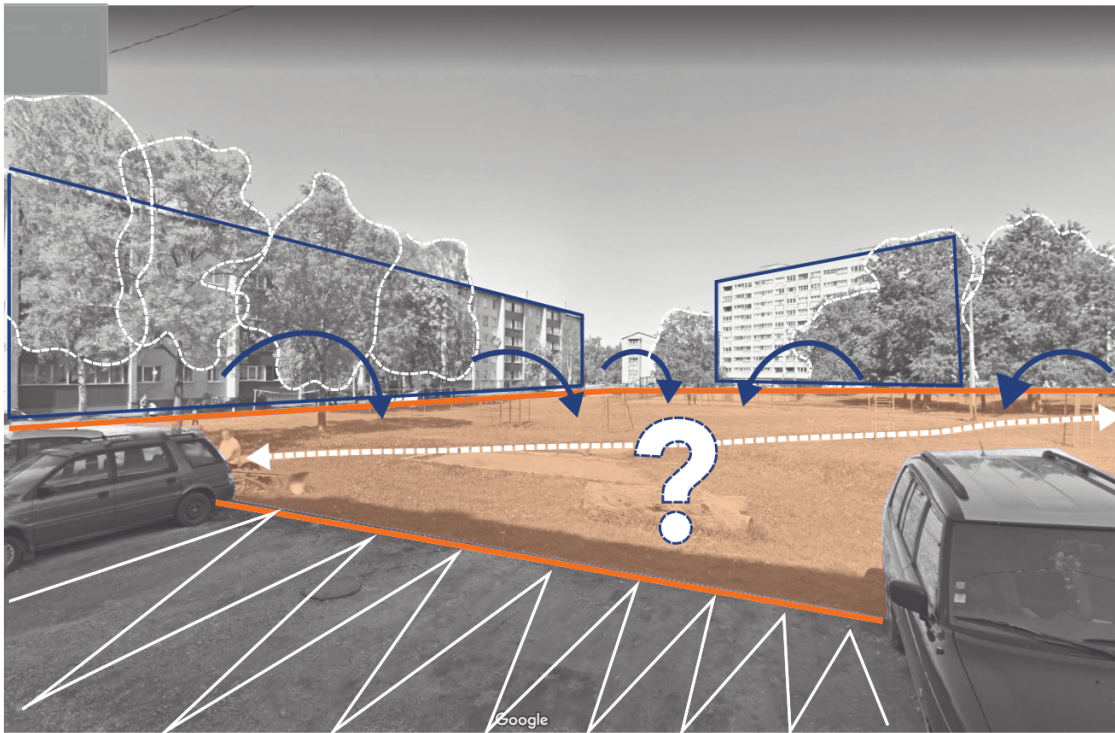
# SITE 3



# Site 03: Green it up!



site 3: Residential courtyard



F35: Overlooked courtyard space



F36: Semi-mature trees along the edges.



F33: Sports ground to the north



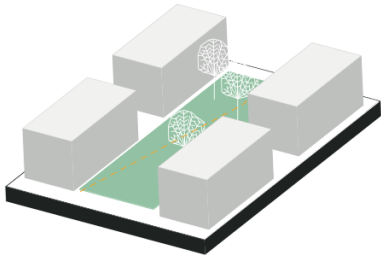
F34: Dilapidated courtyard space

site 03

**OBJECTIVE:** Activate as productive neighbourhood spaces to provide energy and food, aid in poverty alleviation and encourage social interaction through communal activities



**PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT**



Courtyard

**URBAN CONTEXT**

- Part of the communal space
- Dilapidated infrastructure (i.e. sports ground)
- Providing informal routes
- Grassed with semi-mature trees
- Near local retail/educational uses

**LOCATION**



Residential neighbourhood

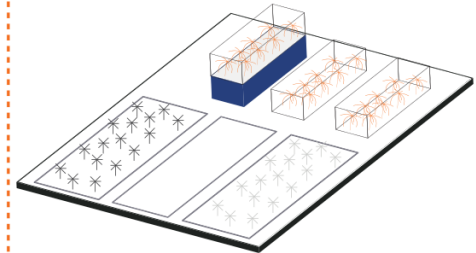
**CHALLENGES**

- 1 Derelict infrastructure (benches, basketball court)
- 2 Extremely underutilised space
- 3 Lack of communal activities
- 5 Limited shade or shelter

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- 1 Generous public space area
- 2 Existing mature planting around the edges
- 3 Safe environment due to natural overlooking
- 4 Good connections to neighbouring amenities
- 5 Good amount of sunlight

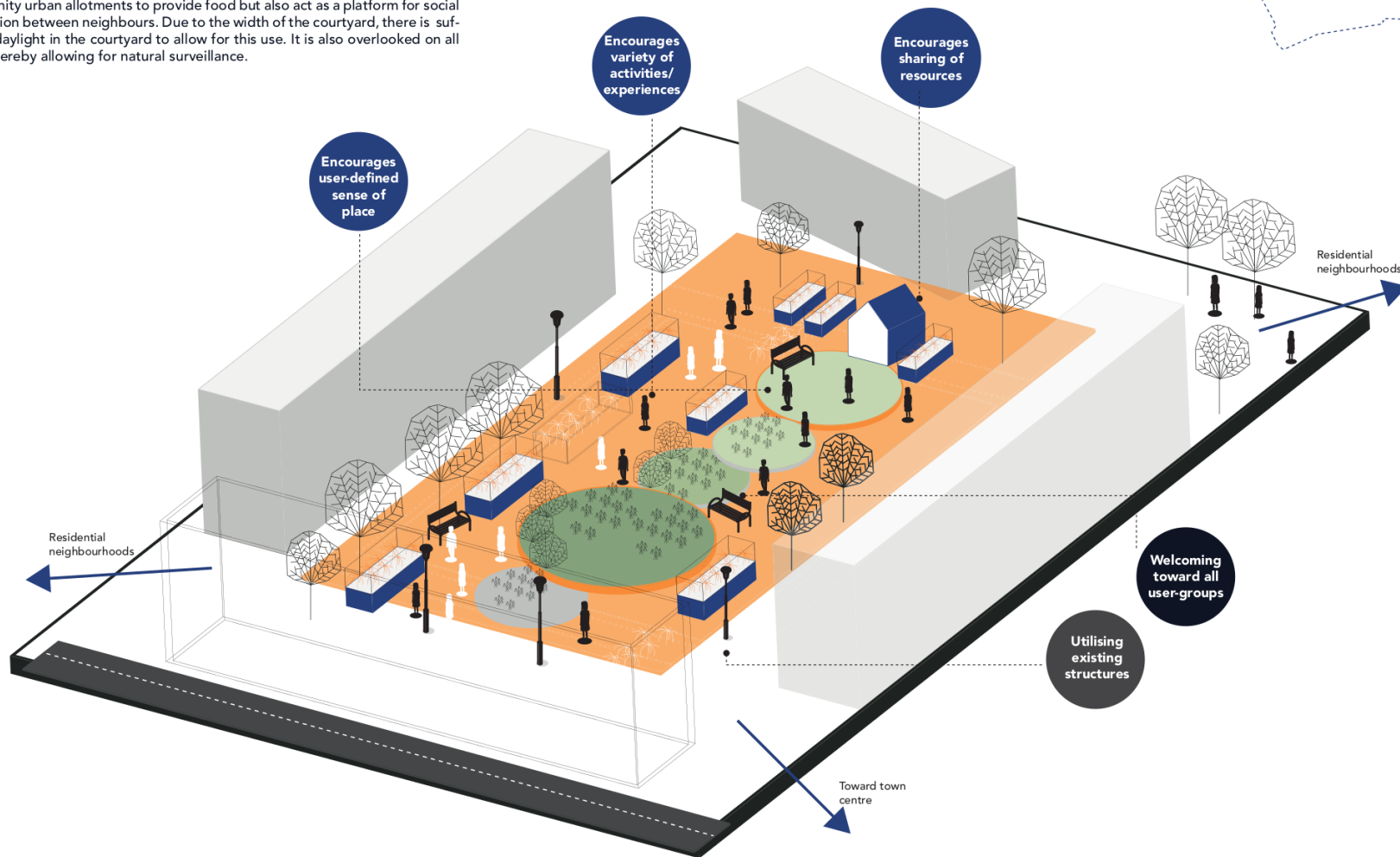
**PROPOSED INTERVENTION: URBAN ALLOTMENTS**



# ACTIVATE

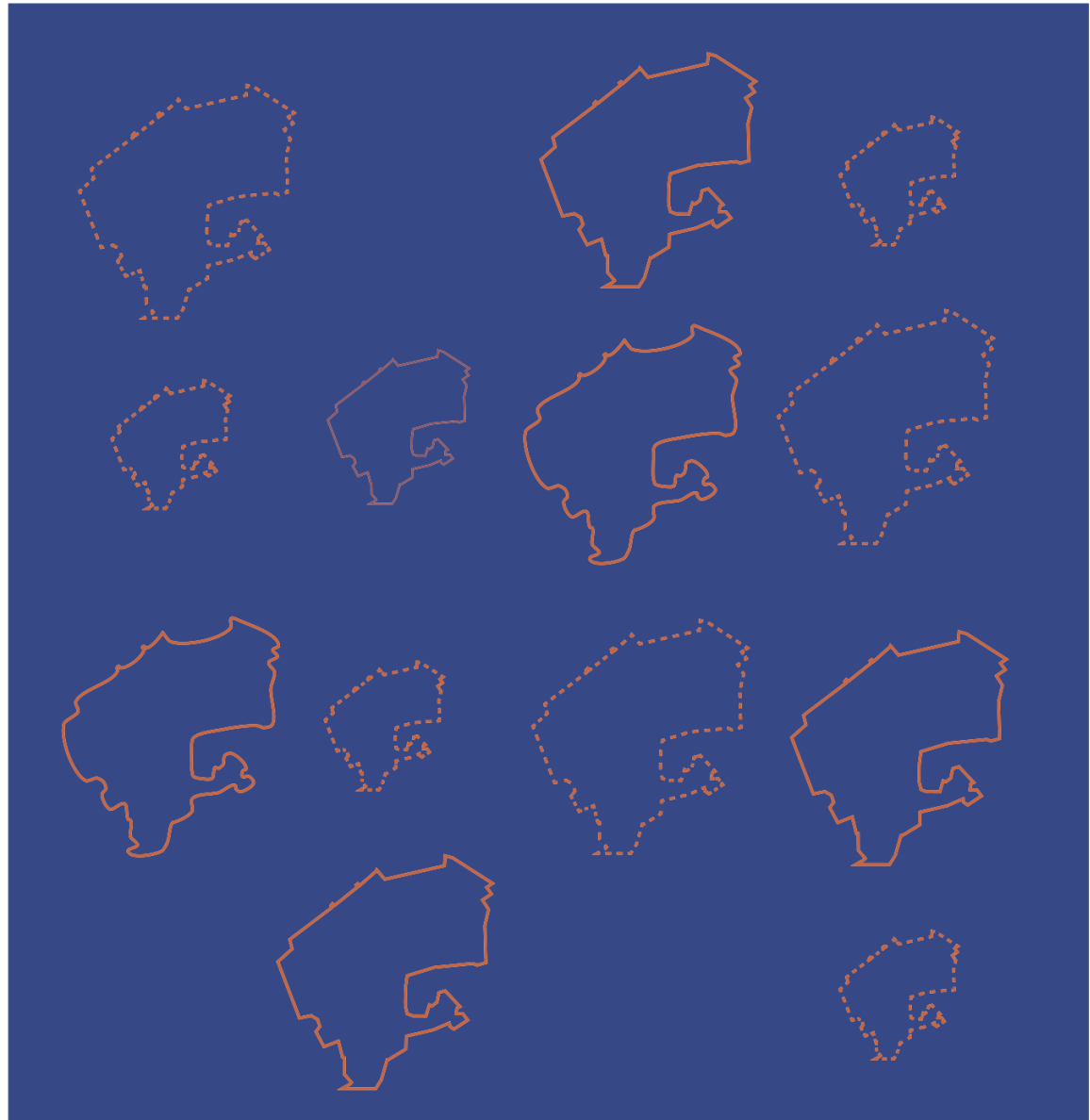
## site 03: Green it up!

Proposal relates to re-purposing the extensive underused courtyard space into community urban allotments to provide food but also act as a platform for social interaction between neighbours. Due to the width of the courtyard, there is sufficient daylight in the courtyard to allow for this use. It is also overlooked on all sides thereby allowing for natural surveillance.

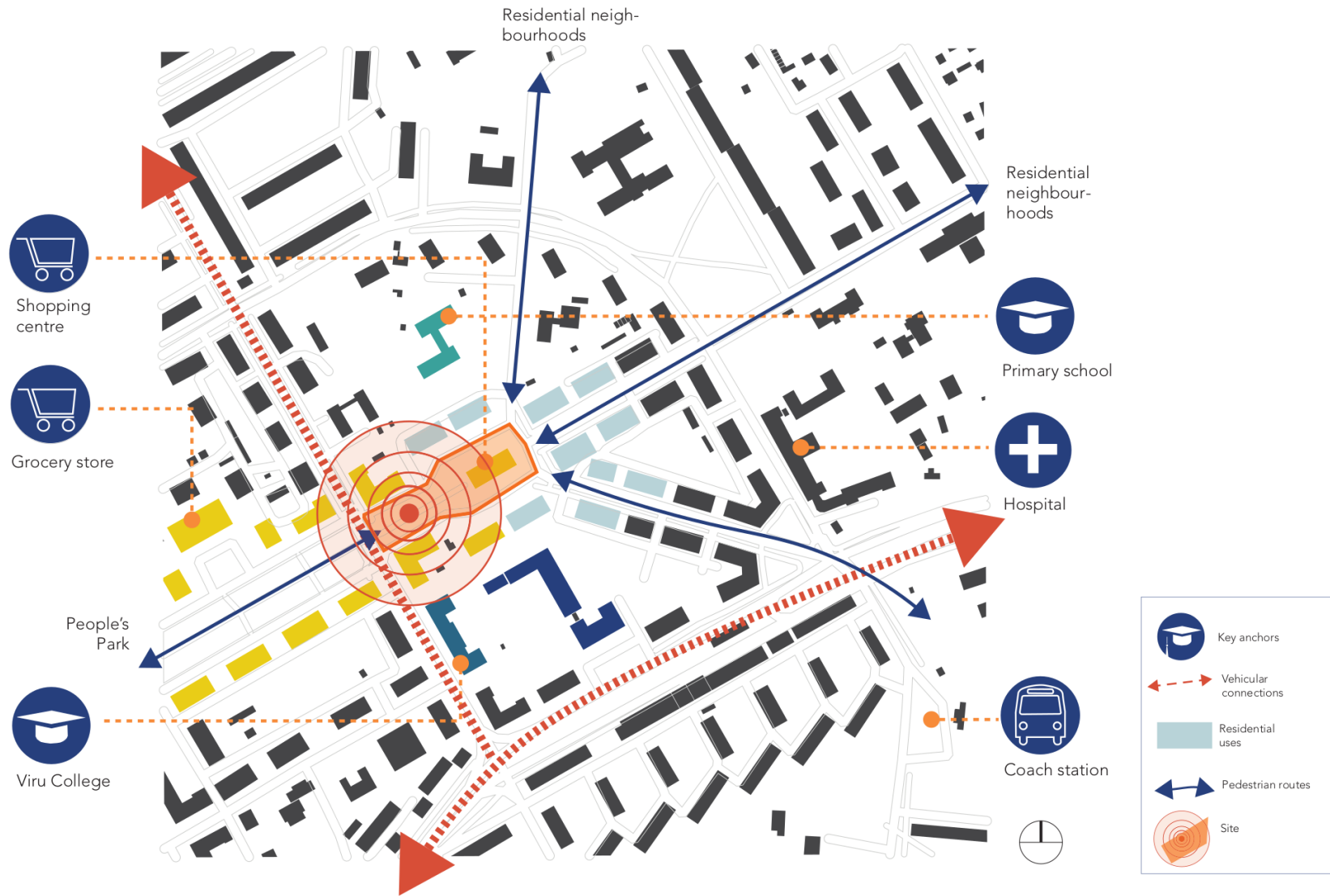




# SITE 4.1



# Site 4.1: Staging the square



site 4.1: Central square



F39: Retail uses fronting the square.



F40: Car park on the north-eastern side of the Square.



F37: Central Square terminated by an old cinema (now local shops).



F38: Retail uses fronting the square.

# site 4.1

**OBJECTIVE:** Create concentration and activity through intensified use as social destination space for leisure / cultural activities that allow for community engagement and creation



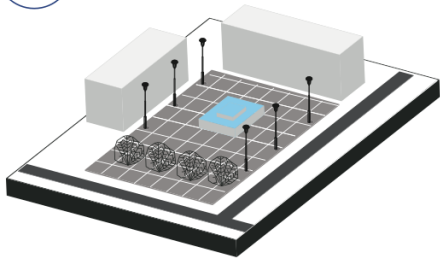
## RE-INVENT



## IDENTIFY INTERVENTION



### PUBLIC SPACE CONTEXT



Squares



Streets

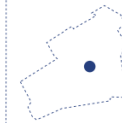


### URBAN CONTEXT

- Marks key civic location in town centre
- Hard landscaped with limited street furniture
- Terminates a grand boulevard
- Located at a key nodal point



### LOCATION



Town centre

1

Lack of active civic space

2

Extremely underused

4

No shade / shelter

### CHALLENGES

3

Upgrades (i.e. benches) have failed to address underuse

1

Generous public space

2

Potential to introduce new activities

5

Existing lighting

### OPPORTUNITIES

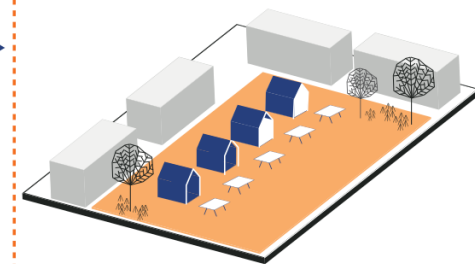
4

Very good connections to surrounding area

3

Surrounded by retail uses

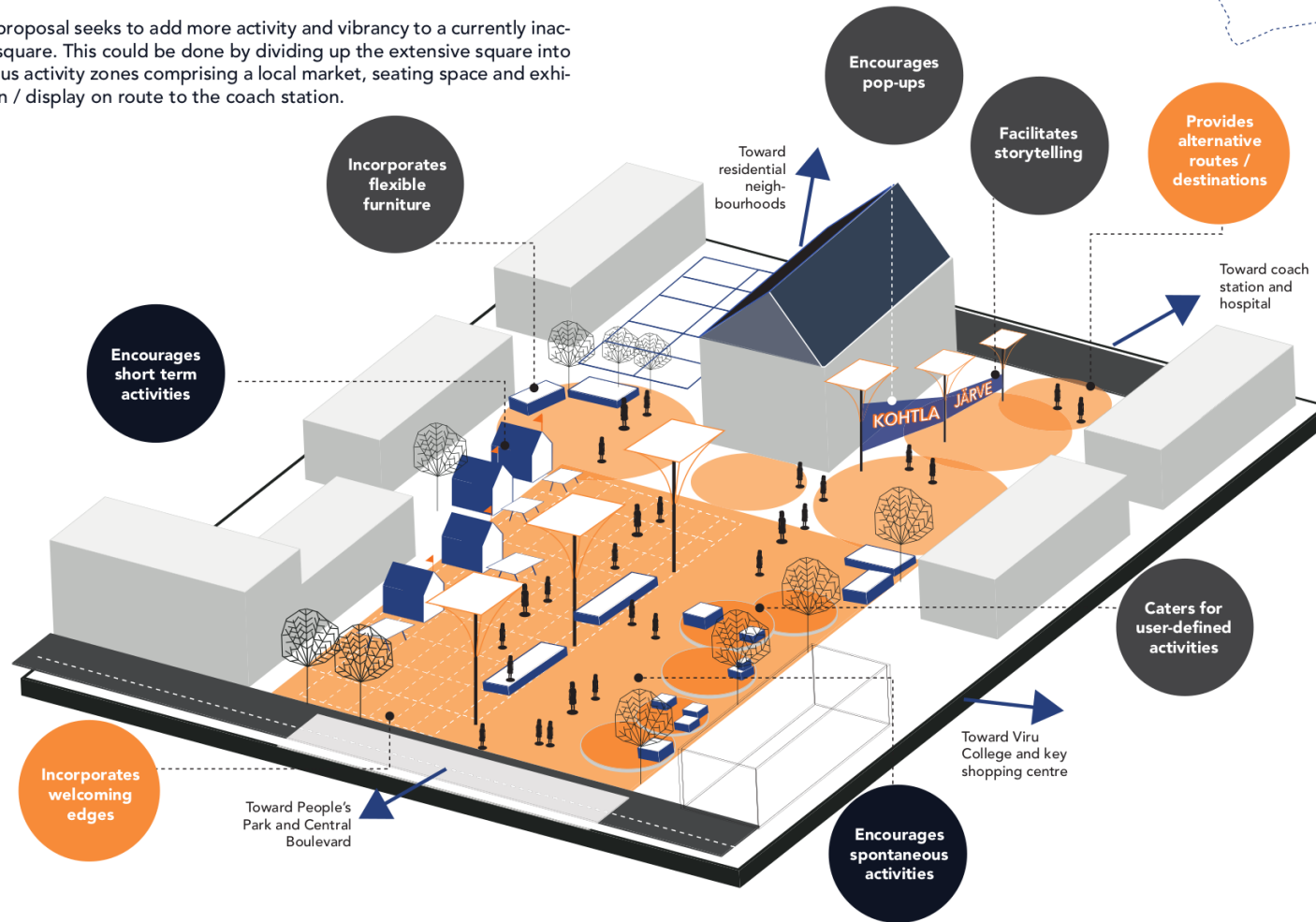
### PROPOSED INTERVENTION: STAGING THE SQUARE



# INTESIFY

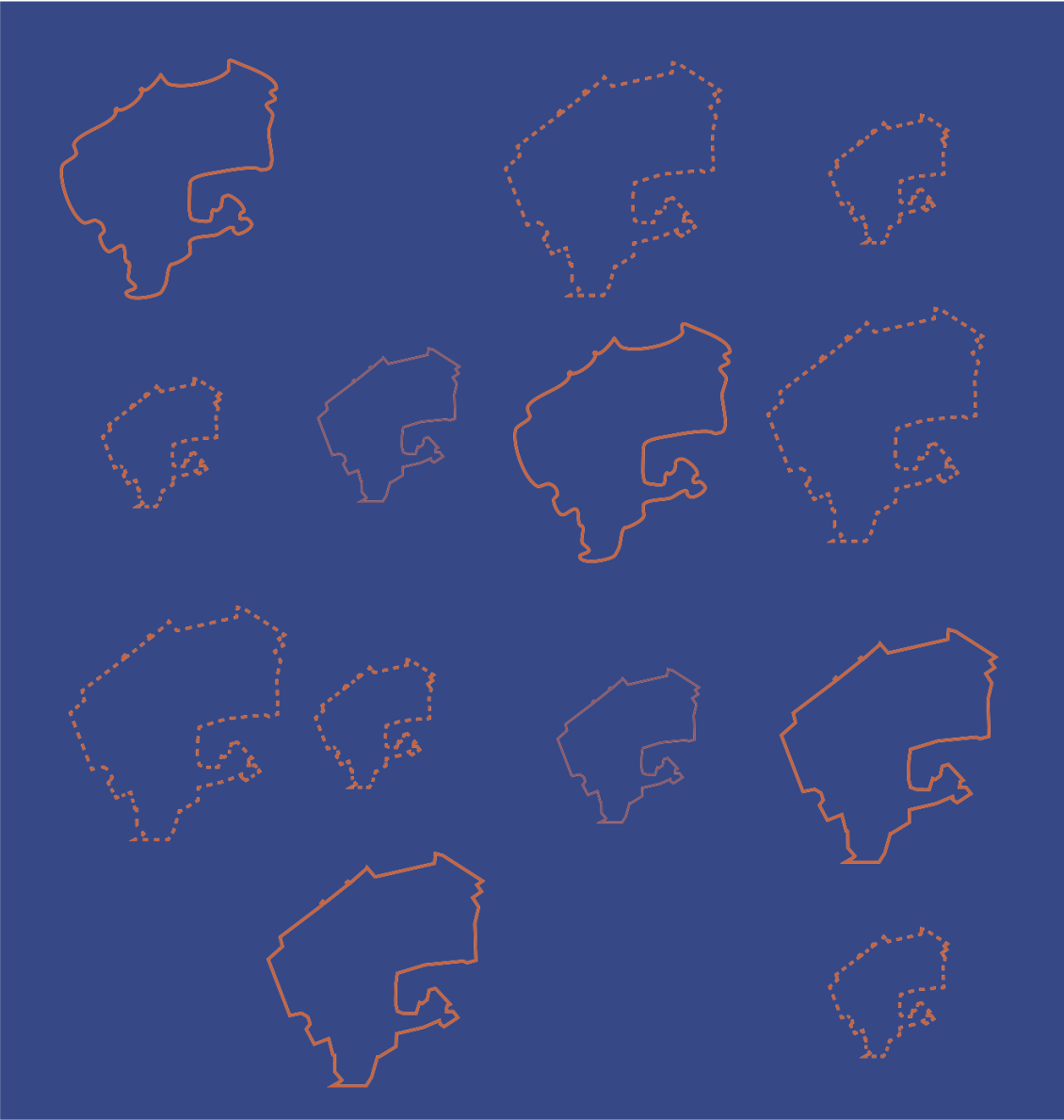
## site 4.1: Staging the square

The proposal seeks to add more activity and vibrancy to a currently inactive square. This could be done by dividing up the extensive square into various activity zones comprising a local market, seating space and exhibition / display on route to the coach station.

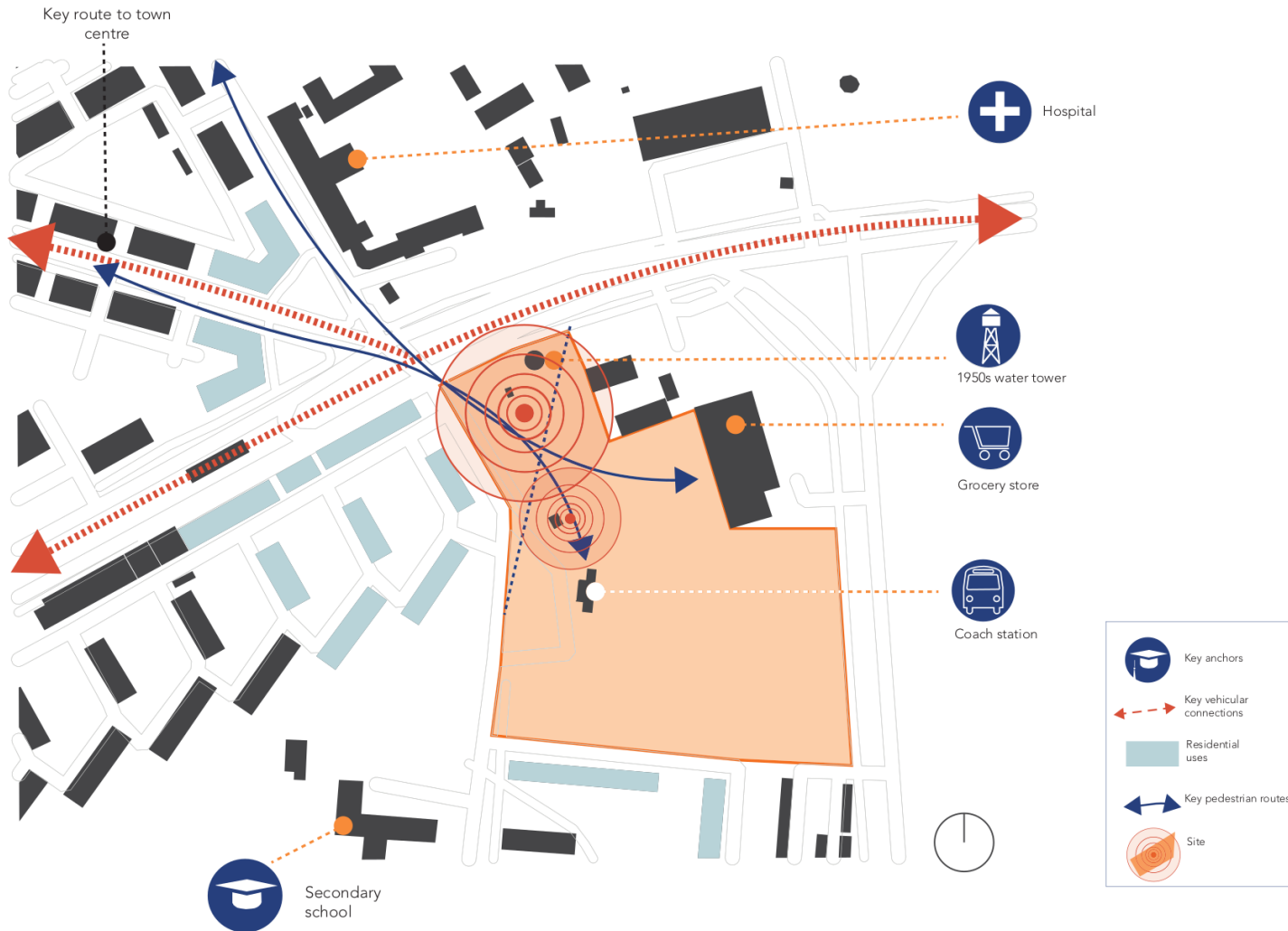




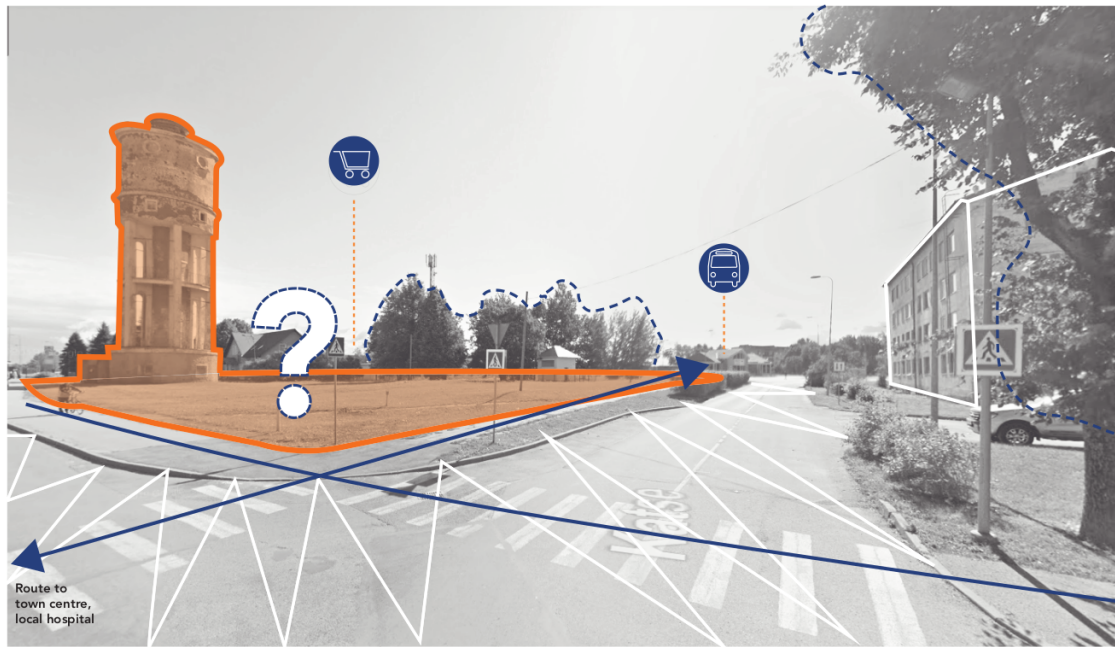
# SITE 4.2



## Site 4.2: Host space



site 4.2: Open space



F43: View south-east from the edge of the site.



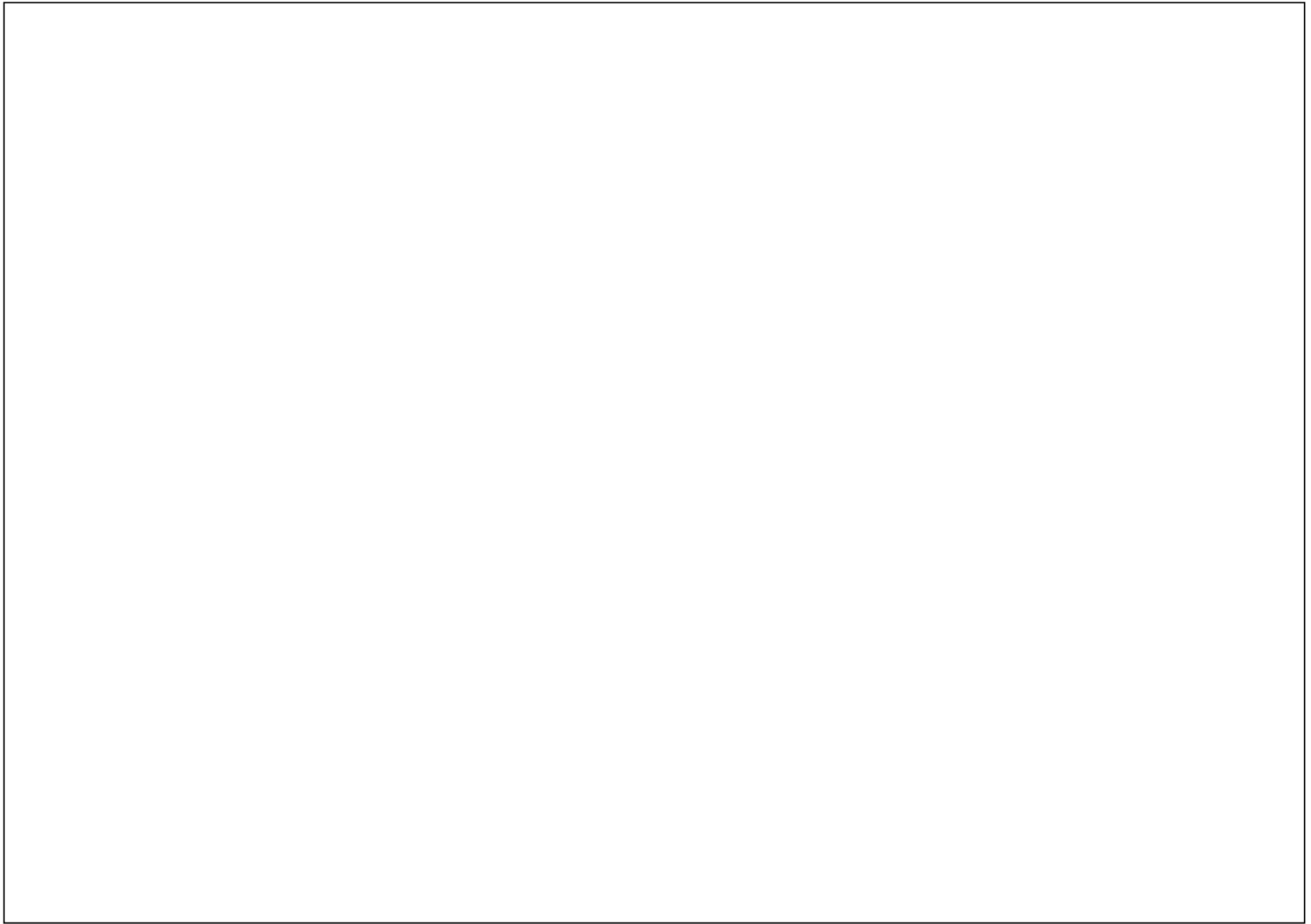
F44: Coach station with the water tower in the back.



F41: View toward the neighbouring residential buildings.

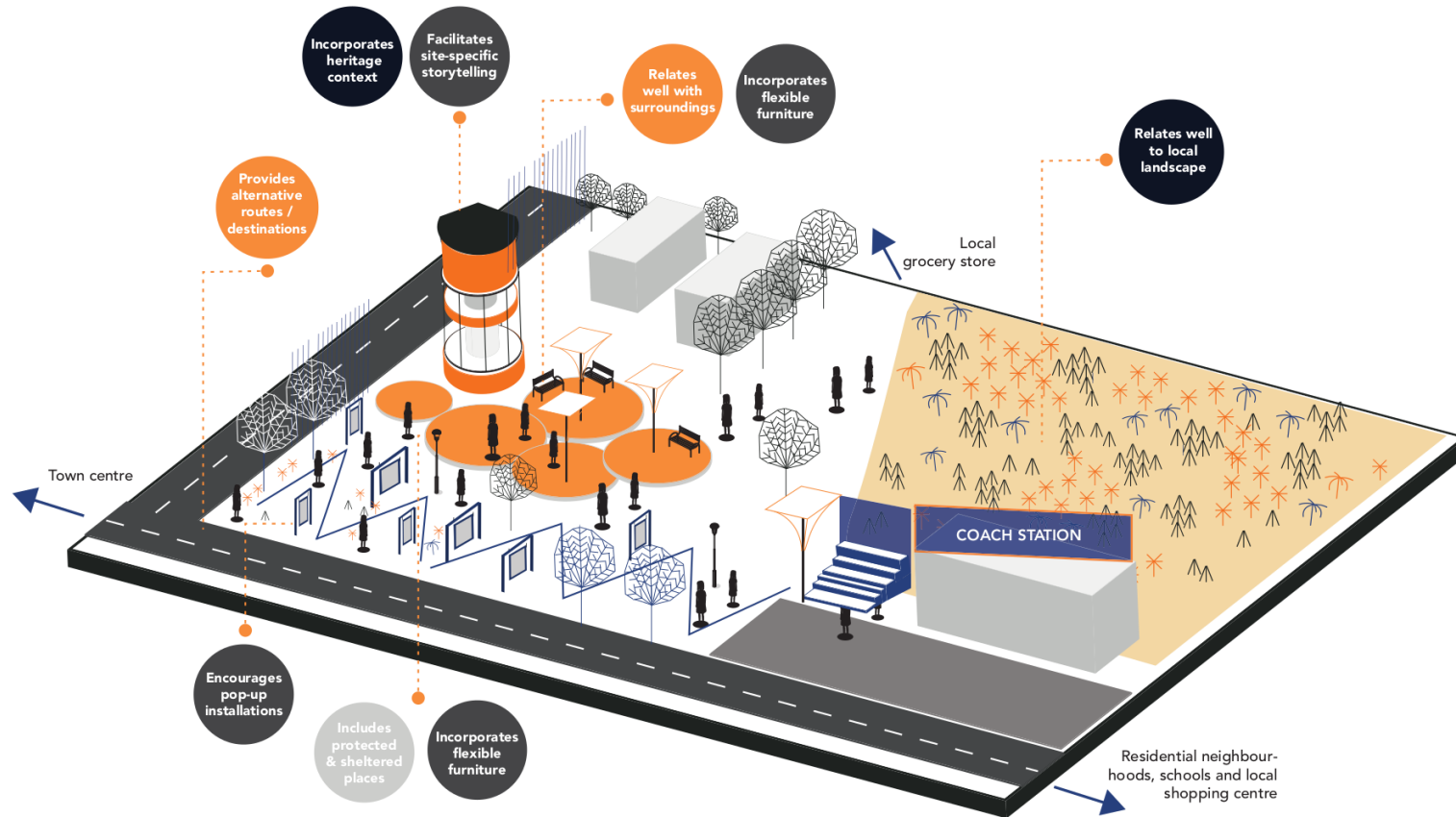
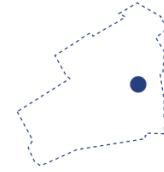


F42: 1950s water tower.



## INTESIFY site 4.2: Host space

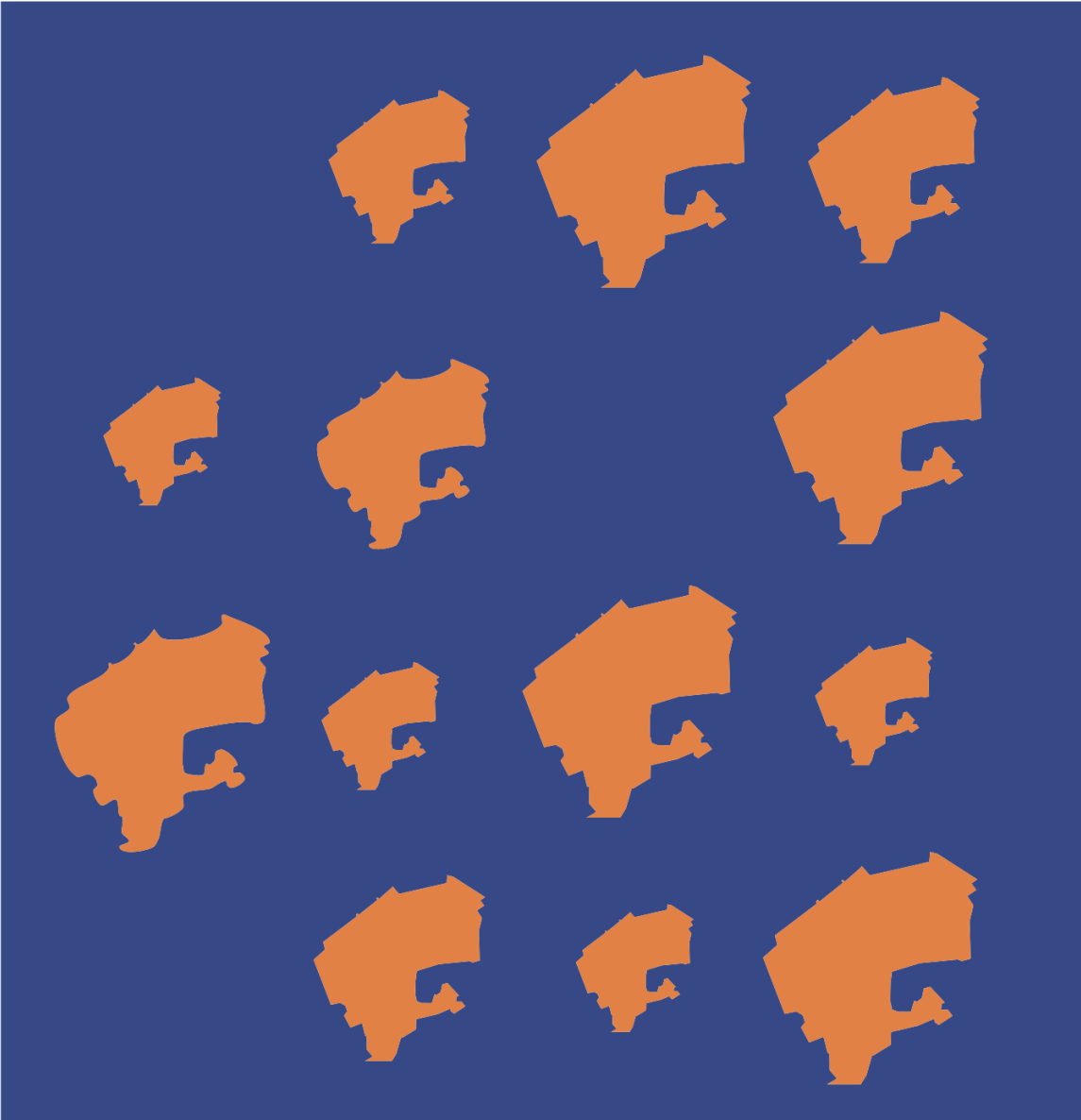
The proposal relates to utilising the 1950s watertower as a landmark/gateway for people arriving via the coach station. The site is on the route toward the town centre and could be utilised as a 'Host space' for various outdoor exhibitions that could better reveal the heritage / history of the town and / or display the work of local schools / amenity groups. On the other hand it would allow spending time whilst waiting for the county bus to arrive.





08

**REFLECTION &  
CONCLUSIONS**



The project started from a belief that urban environment, regardless of the wider processes of socio-economic and socio-demographic trends, should strive to cater to the community that lives within its boundaries. However, the multidimensional and complex effects of urban shrinkage can severely affect these qualities of urban life which in a growing urban context can be taken for granted.

The project expands on the issue of underperforming public space in the context of shrinking cities. Specifically, it focuses on the poor condition of these spaces in Kohtla-Järve, Estonia through posing a question how can strategic decision-making approach help to re-frame the *ad hoc* approach toward these places and thereby reverse the negative social effects that have resulted from this phenomenon.

Whilst there are no easy solutions to the complicated and multidimensional process of urban shrinkage, the project argues that it is imperative to review strategies (or the lack thereof) toward changing spatial patterns of these places.

The project addresses this through proposing a multi-step approach to aid focused decision-making on how to strategically identify and apply appropriate interventions in the diluted network of underperforming public spaces and thereby create re-concentration of uses and activities in the face of changing spatial patterns.

Whilst it is acknowledged that (collaborative) management and implementation principles of these interventions are just as important as the planning and design process, it is not within the scope of this project to address the former in detail as it warrants separate research to do justice to this complicated topic.

Both literature and case study review revealed there has been limited focus on public space strategies explicitly addressing this urban condition. In the face of shrinkage, major transformative change is not possible due to constrained economic resources coupled with lack of investment. Therefore, instead of quantitative change, the project identified that strategies should be qualitative instead, and instruments to achieve these must reflect the economic reality of these regions.

Therefore, the project proposes two routes to achieving that re-concentration in the context of economic constraints: extinguishing select public spaces whilst activating and intensifying others.

The set of principles (sense of place, animation, access, safety, inclusivity, flexibility) identified for the proposed interventions specifically focuses on increasing the satisfaction and enjoyment of the urban environment through increasing social cohesion and place attractiveness – two aspects which have significantly affected the quality of life in the context of urban shrinkage. However, as became evident from the literature review, these two challenges are not exclusive to shrinking cities and therefore, the identified design principles form part of a wider set of good practice place-making methods not alien to placemaking principles in cities not affected by shrinkage.

The application of the framework seeks to illustrate how it could be applied to varying public space conditions ranging from intimate courtyards to extensive open space. The core idea is to directly link understanding the existing context of these spaces to the proposed strategy/intervention and thereby build informed decision-making into the process.

The applicability of the framework was tested on 5 different sites in Kohtla-Järve, Estonia. This illustrated that a chain of linked-up decision-making can significantly help in identifying the most appropriate strategy for the site. However, it is acknowledged that due to this being a theoretical exercise, testing the framework in reality, and through a conversation with the local community, will likely reveal additional principles and methods to be utilised in the process.

A second potential limitation of the framework relates to the dangers of over-generalisation. Whilst the framework sought to add nuance and detail to relevant categories, it is clear that taking a 'cookie-cutter' approach to decision-making can have the opposite effect from the intended outcome. It became evident in the application stage that whilst the framework provided a useful high-level 'step-by-step' guide toward decision-making, the design of the detailed interventions cannot be prescribed to minute detail as it would destroy the creative and innovative aspect of the process.

However, the application stage did prove that strategic decision-making can help to identify a coherent way forward and toward the organisation of underperforming public spaces.

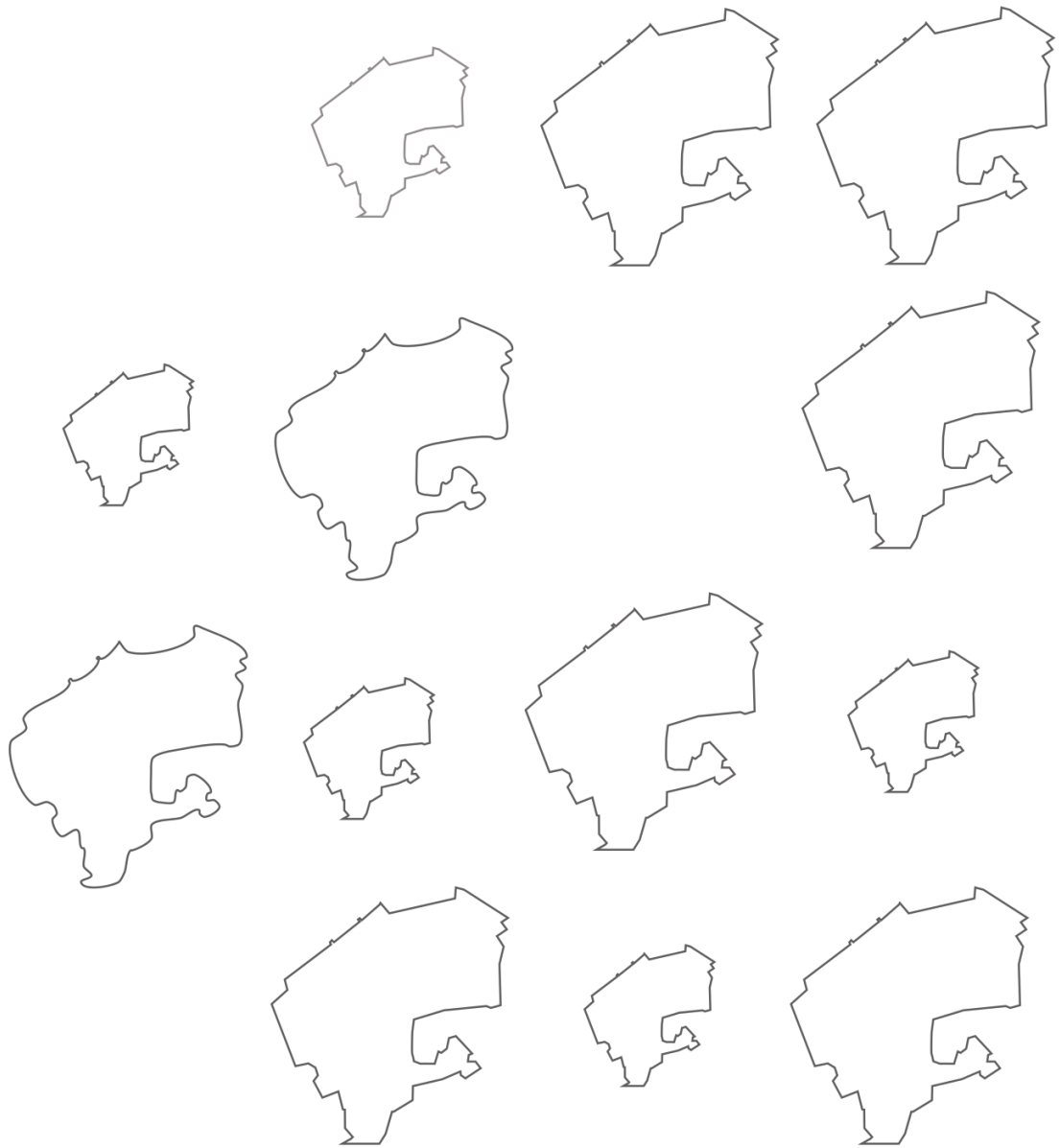
Lastly, it did also demonstrate that the high-level principle of re-concentration that emerged from the research stage, coupled with multiple routes to achieving this, have the potential to address the negative perception of these urban areas as neglected peripheries through re-discovering and celebrating the identity of these places and thereby encouraging communities to fully participate in urban life.

Identified as one of the negative side effects of globalisation, it is clear that new types of solutions are needed to address the complex topic of urban shrinkage. The project concludes that it is imperative to continue developing these strategies and tools for strategically thinking about the organisation and production of space in the context of shrinking cities.



09

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