Libre

THE BOOK AS MEETING PLACE

Master thesis by Siri Boekhout

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BOKEN SOM MÖTESPLATS

Libre

Siri Boekhout



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Supervisor: Nina Falk Aronsen

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ABSTRACT

The book as meeting place - Libre

The concept of the library has evolved over time, adapting to the changing needs of society and there are various types of libraries, from public institutions to private collections. Today, digitalization is reshaping how we access information and interact with the world, yet libraries and books continue to hold an essential role as spaces for reflection, learning, and community connection.

Small communities do not always have access to physical libraries and there has been a trend of declining library branches in different conurbations in Sweden. This thesis looks into the transformative library operation and how it can be relevant in smaller communities today.

The project began as an artistic exploration which shaped both the process and outcome and primarily serves as a reflecting program.

SAMMANFATTNING

Boken som mötesplats - Libre

Bibliotek har över tid utvecklats och anpassat sig efter samhällets föränderliga behov, och idag finns det många olika typer av bibliotek - från offentliga institutioner till privata samlingar.

Sättet vi får tillgång till information och interagerar med omvärlden har med digitaliseringens framväxt förändrats - men bibliotek och böcker har en fortsatt viktig roll som plats för reflektion, lärande och gemenskap.

Mindre samhällen har inte alltid tillgång till fysiska bibliotek, och det har funnits en trend med ett minskat antal bibliotekfililer i svenska tätorter. Detta arbete undersöker den transformativa biblioteksverksamheten och hur det idag kan vara relevant i mindre samhällen.

Projektet tog sin början som en konstnärlig utforskning vilket har format både process och resultat, och fungerar främst som ett reflekterande program.

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Chapter 1.

AIM & METHOD

Exploration through architecture

The aim is to explore the role of the library room in smaller communities that do not have access to physical libraries.

How can architecture serve as a tool to explore the transformative library operation and keeping it relevant in small communities today?

A reflective process

Method to explore the thesis question has mainly been through gathering information and the development of a design program, summarizing the thoughts and conclusions found along the way.

Chapter 2.

INTRODUCTION

THE LIBRARY AS PLACE

The library shows that the value of a built space can go beyond the building and function itself. It is a place with more layers than meets the eye which holds a symbolic meaning of individual freedom and democracy. The library is one of our more quiet meeting places that exist for free under a roof - a space between the introspective and the social, for both personal reflection and collective knowledge. It is a place where one can study or read in solitude - together - a space where the private and the public coexist and integrate.

Thus, one could claim that the library is a very divergent space and represents history, knowledge and new thinking at the same time.

What defines a library?

According to the Swedish National Encyclopedia the term *library* stands for "a collection of information and media arranged in a certain way, generally stored in systems and facilities adapted for the purpose and managed by specialized staff; the term is also used to refer to the facility itself." (Nationalencyklopedin, n.d.). Thus, the term is separating the library as a function and institution and as a building.

The word library in Swedish, *Bibliotek*, is a combination of the Greek words *biblion* and *theke* which means book and storage room (Biblioteca, n.d.). The word is wider than the term and covers both public and private libraries.

The service to store/provide information is the common link for the word and term of a library, and can be scaled down to merely one book or to a virtual platform. This means that libraries can be bookless. In a bookless library (if defined as a service that stores/ provides information) the digital service would *be* the library, while the building would simply serve as its space rather than being a library itself.



Image 1. (ReneMagritte.org, n.d.)

René Magritte's surrealist painting of a pipe - "ceci n'est pas une pipe" French for "this is not a pipe" - challenges the traditional idea that objects, words, and images directly correspond (ReneMagritte. org, n.d.).

The providing of information, as the common link for the library is largely connected to its word/term. If one removes the connection to the word another way of thinking about what defines a library might take place. For example, if one would ask the general public what a library is, many people would probably mention specific buildings, bookshelves and books just as much as information.

To draw an analogy to Magritte's painting - is the virtual library (made up of text and images) the pipe or the painting of the pipe? The question is rhetorical, as it would be for the physical library, but it emphasizes *the building blocks* and navigation of a library - with the purpose to further discuss the role of the book.

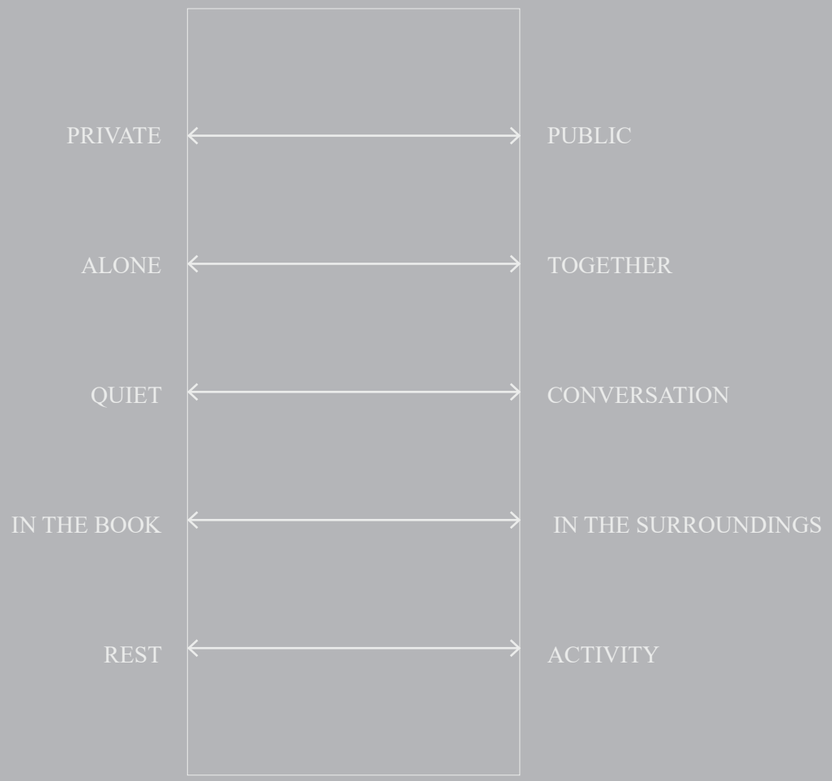
THE BOOK AS OBJECT

Even though the same information can be found in the computer as in books, the mediator itself affects the experience and space. While a book would mediate information, a computer would in a way mediate both the book and the information. The book as an object provides another type of information by being a reference. The presence of books can give readability to the architecture, giving the visitor immediate information about what kind of building it is and what it stands for.

One could also claim that books can affect the atmosphere/interior of a room simply by their genre, form and size e.t.c. - the sensorial experience.

A book could serve as an object to turn to in various situations in public spaces. The book as an object can act as a companion, a pastime, or provide a sense of security - much like a phone or earphones might for many. However, a book might be more connected to the surroundings and the moment, and can enhance the sense of place and vice versa. A certain book may be linked to a season, a phase in life, a person, or a location - a memory.

Also, a book might make experiencing things alone more enjoyable and effortless - whether at the bar or café, while waiting for the bus or simply at a place without a specific purpose, like the beach or the park e.g.



TRANSITIONS

Through space and object

Different states blend and shift in a library, through people and activity, and perhaps the book in public spaces could be seen as a ”tool” for this.

Chapter 3.

THEORY

THE LIBRARY

System in Sweden

In Sweden, all municipalities have a library according to law and the purpose of the public library system is to spread knowledge, to contribute to free thinking and the democratic development in society, among others.

The libraries in the public library system work together and the public libraries provide literature to the public, through different publication forms, free of charge for a certain period of time (Sveriges riksdag, 2013).

Different typologies

National libraries

Public- and regional libraries

School- and university libraries

Research libraries

Mobile libraries

Digital library services

Reading rooms

Hospital libraries

Prison libraries

Research libraries

Special libraries (niched)

(Sveriges riksdag, 2013)

Other:

Little free library movement

Personal collections/private home libraries

Community-led libraries

THE MEANING OF A LIBRARY

The role of libraries is explored by Shannon Mattern (2014), who examines them as evolving infrastructures. Mattern opened up questions about the role of the library - public education and social services e.g. - and what the library requests and how much it should support. She writes about the library as a place of symbol in the community - symbolic and social as a ruler, state, knowledge, power or by its social services, and architectural as a landmark.

Mattern discusses how the library can meet different wishes or needs from society, beside the function of providing vital info services and how it has reinvented itself to society multiple times throughout history, through technology and providing rooms with different designs and functions, e.g. The ancient library of Alexandria, the automated Joe and Rika Mansueta Library and the portable library Biblioburro are examples of this - those, along with additional case studies, were looked into to explore the diversity of libraries.

CASE STUDIES

Library of Alexandria, Egypt

In the ancient civilizations - Egypt and Greece e.g. - the first institutional libraries were local and regional. The universal library was based on a wish for a wider view of the world by the Greeks, that looked for knowledge beyond the borders. One of the most famous universal libraries in ancient times was the library of Alexandria that served as part of the research institute Mouseion in Egypt (El-Abbadi, 2025).

The library was “built in the fourth century B.C., it flourished for some six centuries” (Garlinghouse, 2022) and contained literature by Socrates, Plato and Homer, among others (Haughton, B. and Games, M, 2023). It is not certain if the library was founded by Alexander the Great or the following rulers of Egypt - Ptolemy I or II (Garlinghouse, 2022) but according to Britannica (El-Abbadi, 2025), the idea of the library and the mouseion were founded by the philosopher and politician Demetrius in demand of Ptolemy I. The library seemed to be mirroring Ptolemy’s vision of the city of Alexandria as whole - merging Egypt and Greek cultures (Mark, J.J. and Games, M, 2023).

Architecture-wise, there were no remains or archaeological finds of the library (Haughton, B. and Games, M, 2023) but it was described as a complex consisting of different buildings and functions - for example, living quarters, reading rooms, library stacks, observatories, lecture halls, landscaped gardens, with colonnades for walks and interactions between the scholars (Mark, J.J. and Games, M, 2023).

Notes: local/universal libraries, the library as a vision of the city, different functions, walks for interactions

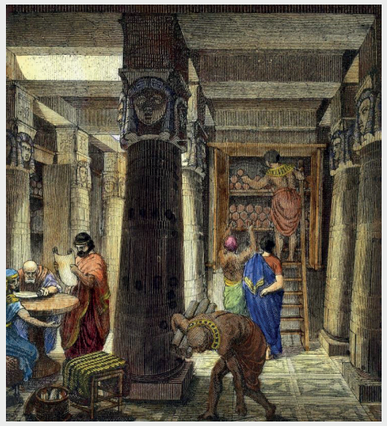


Image 2. Illustration (El-Abbadi, 2025)

The Joe and Rika Mansueta Library, Chicago US

The Joe and Rika Mansueto Library, designed by architect Helmut Jahn, is located at the heart of the University of Chicago campus and opened in 2011. The library is distinguished by its elliptical glass dome that covers a 180-seat grand reading room, alongside conservation and digitization laboratories, it incorporates an underground, high-density automated storage and retrieval system. The system, featuring robotic cranes, allows materials to be retrieved in an average time of just three minutes, which significantly boost productivity (University of Chicago, n.d.).

Notes: open reading room with pillars, ”building for the future”

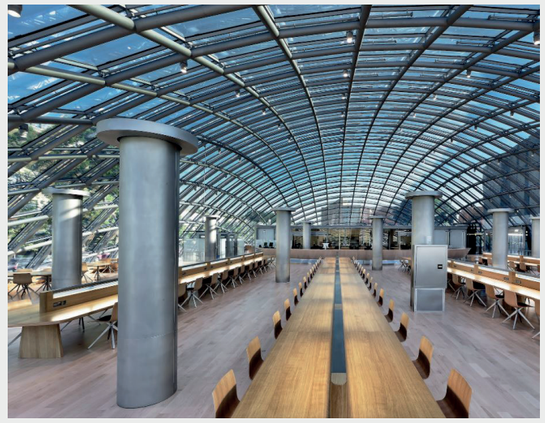


Image 3. Reading room (Barton Malow, n.d.)

Biblioburro, La Gloria, Colombia

Biblioburro - the portable donkey-library - was founded 1997 by Spanish teacher Luis Soriano in La Gloria Colombia, with the mission to give students and children in rural areas access to books (BBC, år). With the help of his two donkeys, Alfa and Beto (making *Alfebeto*), he visited local elementary schools in the countryside, providing them with books from his own personal collection. In an interview on BBC (Peñarredonda, J.L., 2022) Luis describes the joy, imagination and connection that the kids experienced when picking up- or just seeing a book. What began as a single initiative has now expanded into a network of librarians traveling on donkeys, reaching towns to spread the education and joy of reading (Ibid.).

Notes: small book collections can go a long way



Image 4. The donkey library (Walsh, 2011)

Stockholm City Library, Sweden

Stockholm city library was drawn by architect Gunnar Asplund and is characterized by its 24 m high rotunda (central book hall), surrounded by four rectangular, connected backhouses - a gemoetric composition. The walls are made of brick/lime-plaster with a stucco frieze on top, which features figures symbolizing the different subjects in the library.

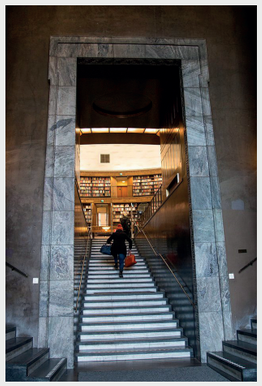
The journey from the street to the central book hall is through a stair with long landings between the steps, leading towards the main entrance - a high, tapering portal. Inside - a narrow, high, dark passage with a tapering stair leads to the open, light central book hall. The elements and contrasts on the way to the rotunda further enhances the sense of its height and light from clerestory windows.

The library could be said to be an art piece itself through materiality, concept and craftmanship and also houses several functional art pieces, such as the original door handles and drinking fountain by Nils Sjögren, among others (Stockholms stad, 2024).

Notes: the entrance, ornamentation, clerestory windows









Images 5-8. Stockholm City Library (Stockholms stad, 2024)

Philips Exeter Academy Library, US

The Philips Exeter Academy Library, a modern building, was completed 1972 with Louis Kahn as the architect. The building is structured around a square atrium with clerestory windows on the top and circular openings towards the different floors. The main materials are load bearing brick, reinforced concrete and teak. The concentric layout consists of the inner atrium, the middle ring for book stacks and the outer ring for reading desks. Through form, light and material - Kahn created both a functional and monumental library building that carries weight/permanence in its expression (Archeyes, 2020).

Notes: diffused light, visual connection between floors/zones, weight



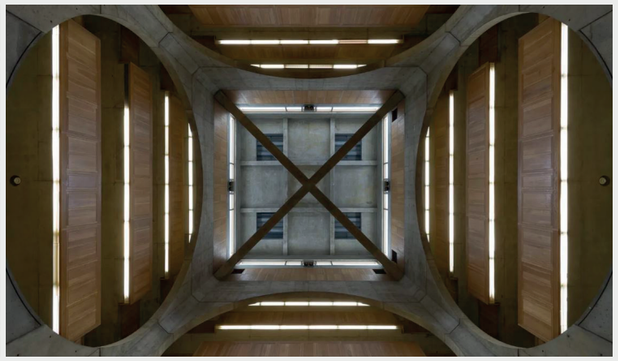


Image 9-10. Atrium (de Jauréguiberry, 2020)

Vennesla Library and Culture House, Norway

The Vennesla library and culture house by the architects Helen and Hard is made of prefabricated glue-laminated ribs (glulam), working both as structural support, built in bookshelves- and furniture and houses technical systems. The ribs also create different zones in the building that are more- or less intimate. The building was completed 2011 (Archdaily, 2012).

Notes: integrated furniture and technical systems, prefabricated elements

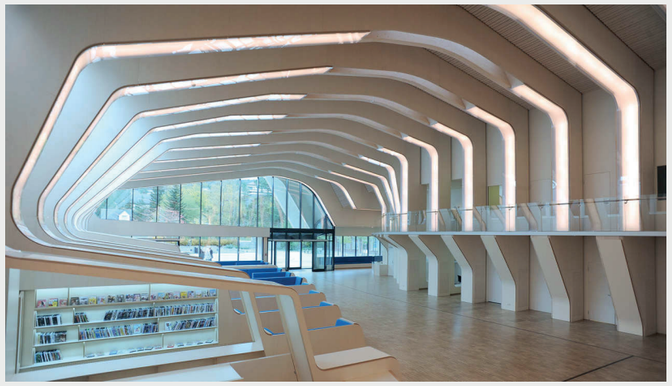


Image 11. (Ashley, 2012)

Little free library & private initiatives

Little free library is a non-profit organization and enhances the access to books through book-sharing boxes. The concept is ”take a book, share a book” (Little free library, n.d.). The organization is based in Minnesota, US but the movement has expanded globally (Ibid.).

Resembling private initatives can be found here and there, for example, ”Sweden’s smallest library” in Brantevik, Sweden (page 59) or a self-made ”mini-library” in Malmö, Sweden (Image 13).

Notes: communal/individual level



Image 12. Little free library box (Little free library, n.d.)



Image 13. Private mini-library (Falk Aronsen, 2025)

Bima Microlibrary, Cicendo, Indonesia

SHAU Indonesia architects created a compact community library for underserved urban areas and it is thought to be one of many micro-libraries throughout Indonesia. The building is made of steel-frames and concrete slabs, with a facade of recycled ice-cream buckets (Archdaily, 2016).

Note: Network of mini-libraries



Image 14. (Sanrok Studio, 2016)

Children's Book Forest, Kumamoto, Japan

The architect Tadao Ando developed a concept of a series of libraries dedicated to children. The fourth library opened in 2024 next to the Kumamoto Prefectural Library. The idea involves a partnership between the public (city provides building) and the private (citizens/ firms provide books/operation). The children's book forest in Kumamato is built of concrete and local timber and incorporates walls of books/shelves and reading nooks (Sommariva, 2024).

Note: Interplay public-private, reading nooks in walls



Image 15. (Ogawa, 2025)

ARCHITECTURAL QUALITIES FROM THE LIBRARY

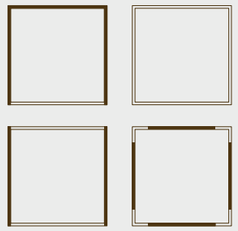
Experience & function



ENTRANCE

Distinct

Easy to spot/reach

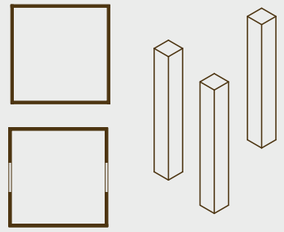


OPENESS

Panorama/framing views

Axes

connection to outdoor/ surroundings



ENCLOSEMENT

Nooks

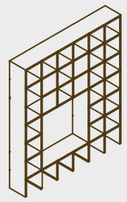
Pillars



DIFFUSED LIGHT

Skylights

Clerestory windows



INTEGRATED FURNITURE

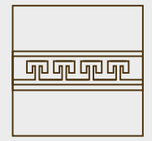
Shelving systems



NATURAL MATERIALS

Aucostics

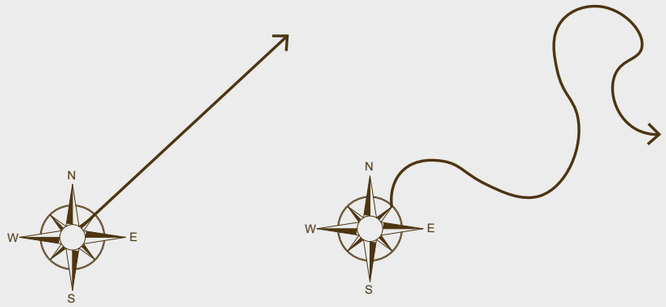
Tactility



SCULPTURAL ELEMENTS

Ornamentation

Feature walls



THE NAVIGATION IN A LIBRARY

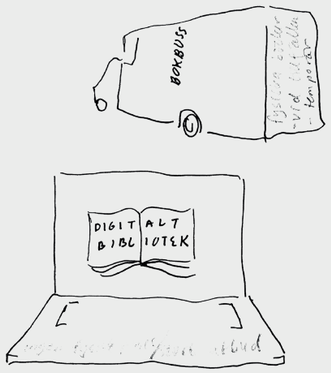
The target-seeking and the flaneur

Björn (Gram, ed., 2002) describes architecture and literature both as “objects to read” and how in architecture every element is referring to something else. She explains that seeing these references is through understanding stylizations and abstractions in buildings. Björn writes about old buildings that through design and craftsmanship mediated messages (about ideals, knowledge e.g) and that architecture later developed to simpler buildings with symbolism and references as part of the form.

She also mentions the similarities between the library and the city - the grid of bookshelves and city plans - both structured models that are lucid and literally inclusive. She describes how these models and their lucidity provide two different ways, one who has a certain aim (register/maps) and one that is a path of discovery. She talks about the person walking the first way as a “target seeking robot” that makes sense of a rational digitized library, and the person walking the second way as a flaneur who wanders and explores - and the importance of being both (Ibid.).

Notes: The path of discovery could be said to be closely tied to physical objects and space and their openness, information and accessibility - this indicates another value of the physical library room beyond the meeting space.

- symbolism/abstractions as part of the design, flaneaur and target-seeking paths, reference between library and city



THE TRANSFORMATIVE LIBRARY OPERATION

Choosing site - Simrishamn

Through a limited study based on municipalities that have closed one or several library branches (between 2012-2016), the Swedish municipalities and counties in collaboration with researchers from the University of Borås have been looking into the decline of library branches in Sweden. The reason behind the library branches that were closed was many times due to a combination of economics and the need for development of the library operations (Jacobsson & Ögland, 2018).

The municipalities often replaced the closed libraries with other digital/mobile library services. One of the municipalities in the study was Simrishamn. In 2014 all five of Simrishamns library branches closed due to economic cuts and them not being sufficiently relevant enough since people mostly went there to gather or leave books.

The study suggests that the decline of library branches actually can be seen as the library operation looking for development to stay relevant for its users (Ibid.).

Choosing typology - A niched library

If the library operation is in fact looking for development - perhaps the smaller, niched library that might operate- or be (partly) funded in more various ways could be further explored to meet the needs of communities. In a niched library a smaller book collection could be sufficient and the space could be regulated in other (more flexible) ways than a public library. Such a library, in the context of this project, could complement the mobile- and digital services and its primary role could be as meeting place while also incorporating more functions for the community - work spaces e.g.

This would explore a balance between public and community-led operations, with the niched book collections reflecting the building as a library.

Chapter 4.

EXPLORATION

QUESTIONNAIRE

Gather more thoughts and experiences

To broaden the perspective of the role of the library and book in people's lives a short questionnaire was made and shared online. It was meant to gather thoughts, not facts, as the receivers/respondents were a relatively homogeneous group.

A summary of the answers and some citations from the questionnaire are added to the report.

Seventeen people responded anonymously, and the quotes have been translated from Swedish to English.

Summary - The library

1. MEETING PLACE, VENUE FOR MORE EVENTS

(MUSEUM E.G.)

2. CALM BUT NOT SILENT

3. OPEN, ACCESSIBLE, SAFE

4. A GATHERING PLACE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO BE

ALONE WITH OTHERS

5. GREET AND CHAT

6. LEARN, WORK, PLAY

Summary - The book

1. ALONE IN PUBLIC SPACES – THE BOOK AS COMPANION

2. AN OBJECT FOR EXPERIENCE, A PROXY FOR FEELING

MORE “AT HOME” IN A PLACE OUTSIDE HOME

3. SOMETHING TO DO, SOMEWHERE TO LOOK

4. TACTILE OBJECT, READING EXPERIENCE

Leafing through pages, travel in time and space

5. EMOTIONAL VALUE – MEMORIES

Times, situations, people

Citations - The library

“A stable and important role - especially as a meeting place during childhood. A place for play and learning. During my studies, libraries were also important as they served as optimal workspace, it’s hard to find a better office!”

“No major role for me personally at the moment. But I definitely think it’s a place that should remain! I believe everyone should have access to books.”

“A calm, safe place I can always go to, whether it’s to study or just to have some time to myself.”

“I remember discovering LGBT+ and related literature at the library when I was thirteen. I had just fallen in love for the first time (with a girl) and felt lonely and confused. It felt really scary to stand in front of the shelf marked QUEER in big letters. I remember feeling like everyone was watching me and I was embarrassed, but the books answered many questions I had about myself.”

“I’d say it plays a big role! Books I’ve borrowed, a place where I’ve studied, a place that’s been a source of inspiration. I often visit libraries and really enjoy the atmosphere. Sometimes I leave with a book I never thought I’d borrow.”

”For me, libraries have served as a breathing space. A calm place in the midst of chaos. I started going to the library on my own when I was around 11 years old. My parents were in the middle of separating, and it became a place where I could be by myself and find peace. During a time filled with overwhelming thoughts and emotions, I went to the library several times a week to take a break from everyday life and escape into other worlds. Now that I’m older, I don’t go as often, but I think of the library as a friend who will be there when I need her again.”

”A big role, I went a lot as a child with my mother to develop my Swedish.”

”My best memories from the library are marked by murmurs and soft sounds. Never complete silence, but no loud noises either. It felt safe and pleasant. I think future libraries should continue to be low-key places, especially in a digital age filled with highly stimulating screens, games, and noise.”

”The most generous thing we have. A way to build understanding of people, the world. Comfort.”

”It played a bigger role when I was a child and the library was located in the town square. I rarely borrow books now.”

”When we went there with school, there was a very passionate culture guy I remember clearly who made everything exciting. And other events at the museum that made it exciting to visit. Walking around between the bookshelves.”

Citations - The book

“I remember a book from my grandmother’s bookshelf, I couldn’t have been older than 4, maybe. It always stood in the same spot. When I asked her about it about 10 years ago, she said it was so awful she’d never read it again (Christiane F.). Now it’s on my shelf. There are few books I feel I want to own to be able to reread, and I probably won’t read this one again. But the spine of the book on my shelf means more to me than its content.”

“Yes, if I’m sitting alone at a café, the book can act as a shield against an uncertain world.”

“If I know I’ll have to wait somewhere alone for a long time, I like to bring a book as company.”

“A book is a bit like a room in itself. Physical environments are experienced through certain senses, and imaginary spaces through others. It’s easy to get lost in a book and forget time and place.”

“Yes. I associate many books with specific places, trips, or people. Especially books that made a strong impression.”

“Peter Pan, the French version, was the first book I really remembered as a child. I flipped through it at the library and was amazed at how a children’s book could be so dark.”

“I like when you’ve bought a large paperback and have to aggressively bend it open past 180 degrees so it doesn’t feel so stiff.”

“I like hardcover books that open all the way and lie completely flat if you leave them open on a table.”

“I like the feeling of flipping quickly through the pages of a book with my thumb, so the pages fly past and you feel a small puff of air. It’s hard to describe the motion.”

“I often bring a book with me when I’m spending time alone. Both for entertainment and as a kind of comfort. No one bothers someone who’s reading. You get left alone.”

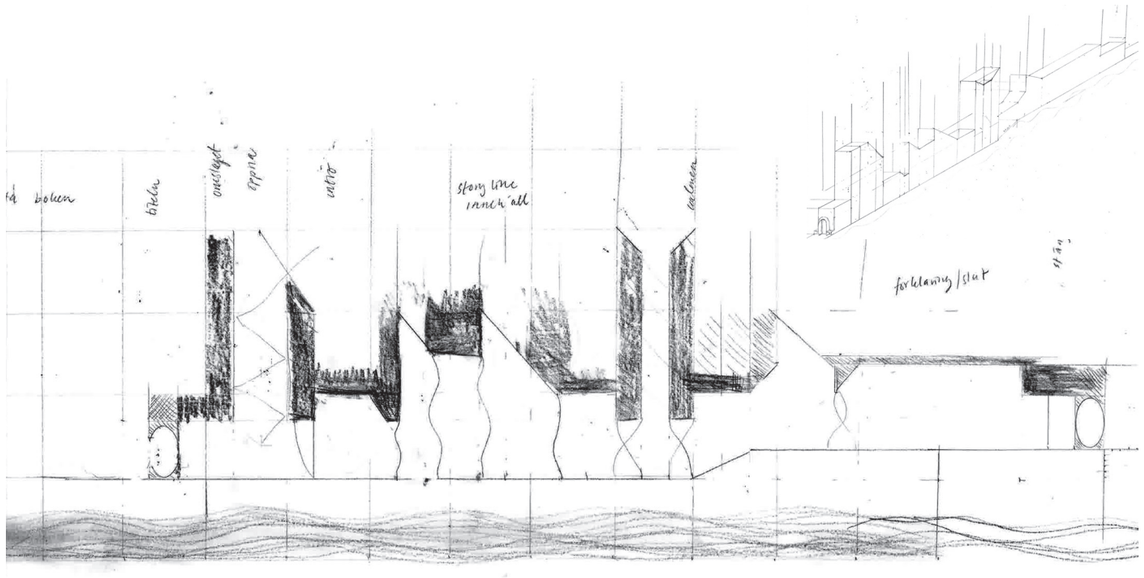
“I think they’re beautiful , love bookshelves. Books make interiors feel safe.”

“I read Joan Didion – The Year of Magical Thinking just after my grandmother passed away in 2021. Life felt upside down with the pandemic and losing her, and the book was a real comfort. It’s nice how some books get tied to a specific time, like a vacation. They become markers in time.”

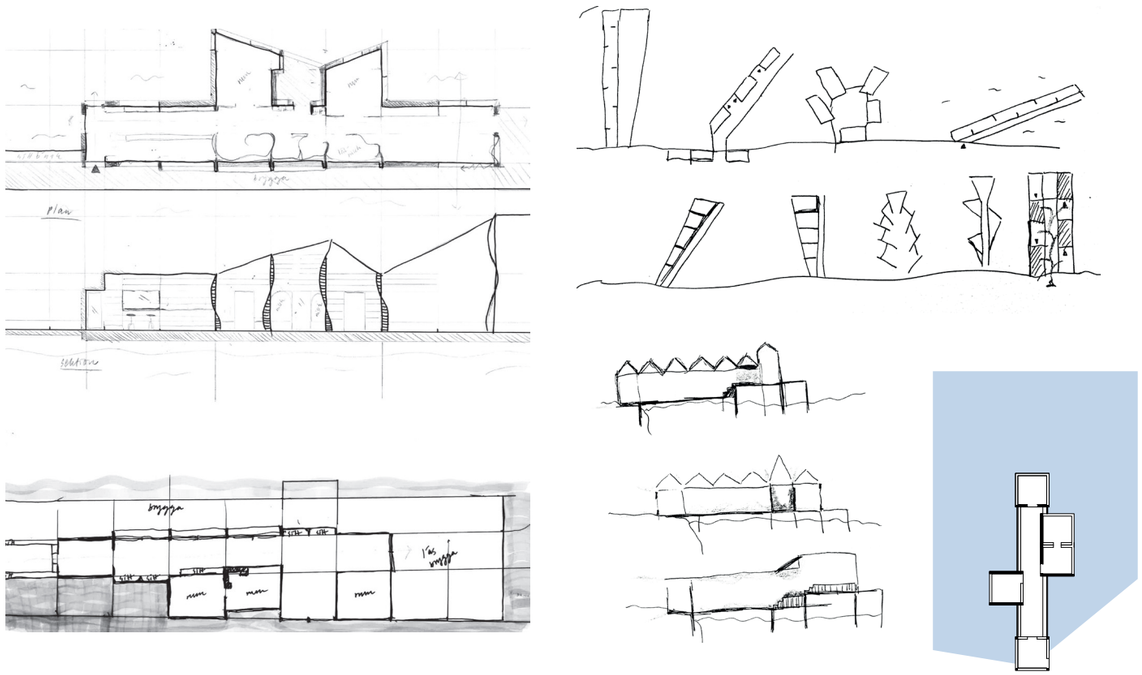
BRAINSTORMING

Sketching as a thought process

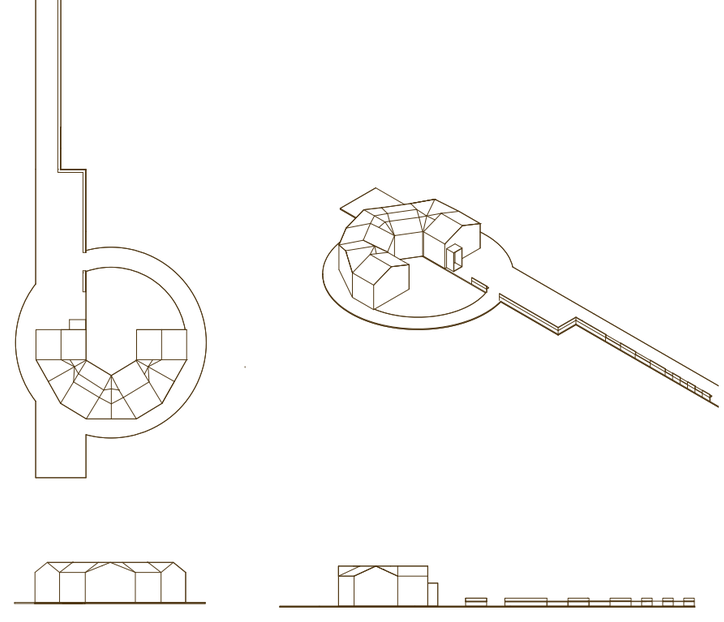
Early sketching was advised, so sketches were created alongside the research. This approach helped visualize the thought process, potentially shaping the results. Therefore, sketches, even if not directly used, are included in the report.



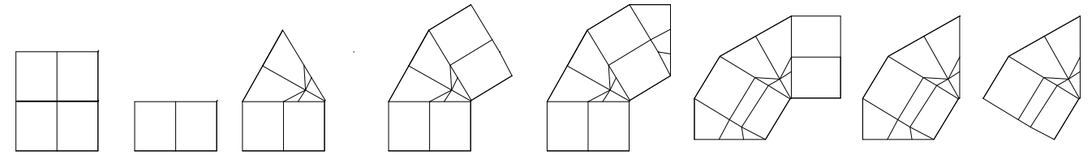
Transitions through space and experience through ceiling heights and skylights

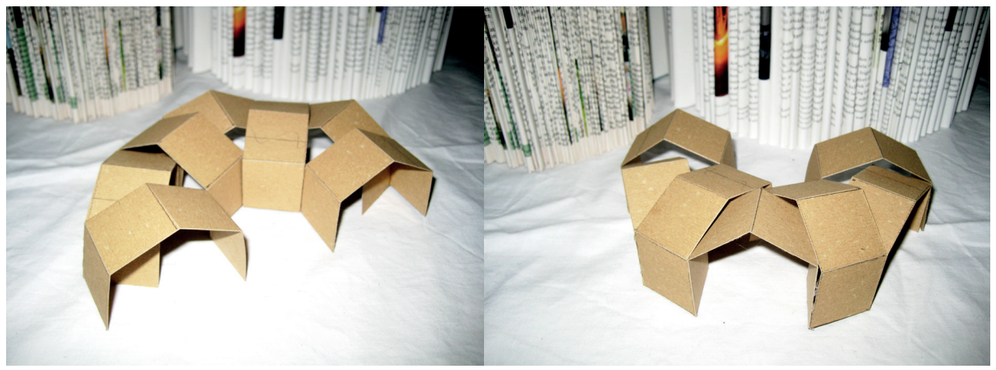


Connected small-scale rooms



Testing more site specific options





Testing more flexible, modular systems



Image 16. ”Sweden’s longest storytelling-bench and smallest library” (Ystads Allehanda, 2017)

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERED SITE

Brantevik

Since the project is aimed to also the smallest communities - another conurbation in Simrishamn, Brantevik, was thought of in the process. The village has a permanent population of around 350 persons (Orti, n.d.) and also houses ”Sweden’s longest storytelling-bench” and ”Sweden’s smallest library” (Ystads Allehanda, 2017).

In communities with this scale -a snug library room might be both enough and more suitable to fit in current layout of buildings/streets/ character (also if placed in nodes that do not have a lot of space).

Although focus in the project was further explored on other sites - the research of Brantevik gave inspiration for both size and how simply a bench (in context) can become a good meeting place.

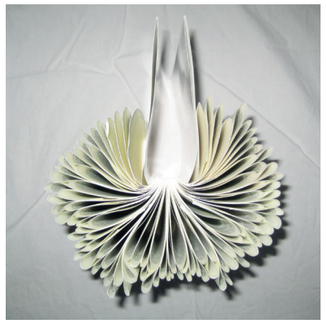
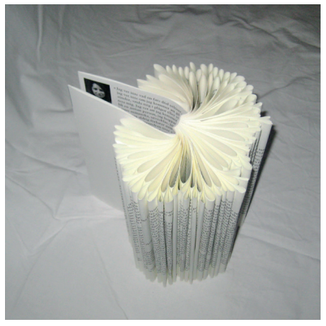


WORKSHOP

with the book

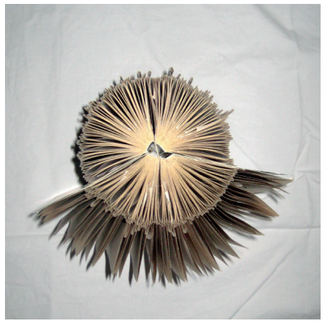
A workshop with the book was made to emphasize it as an object in the project.

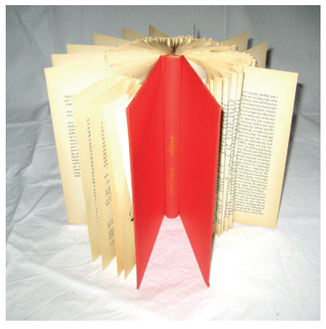
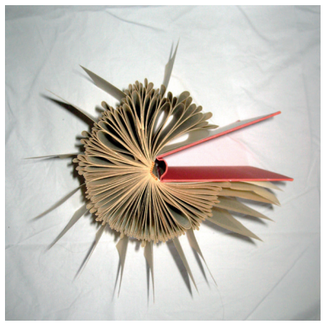
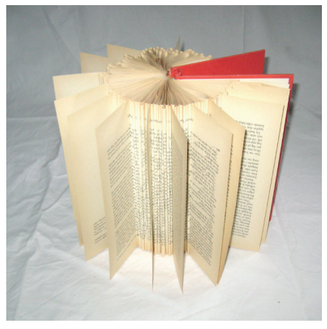
Through folding the pages in various ways, different forms, hardness/ softness and surface structures were created - changing the expression of the book without cutting or tearing it apart.

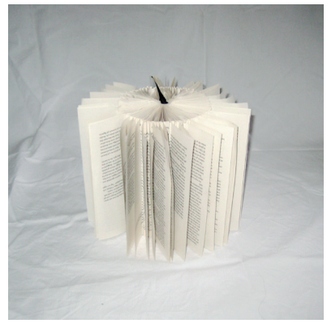



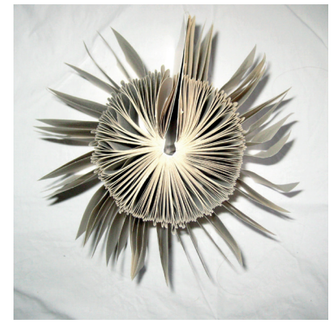






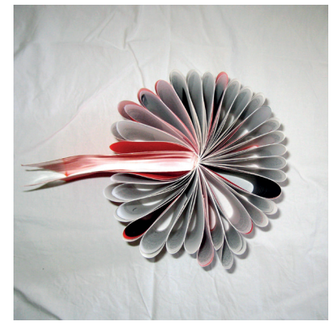
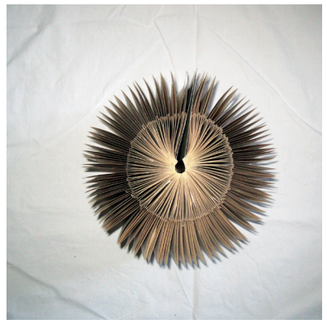














The excersice resulted in, once again, thinking about the components of a structure.

This could be useful for the balancing site specificity and flexibility - by using the same set of components, different library rooms could be assembled with variation for different sites.



MEASUREMENTS

Small scale

Working with components, different sizes of the buildings could be made - but the smallest building should still be functional as a meeting space, accommodating at least 4-6 people and providing room for furniture. In Sweden, the minimum width for accessible public corridors is 1.5 meters (Boverket, 2024) and this would serve as the narrowest (free floor) dimension. After measuring different rooms/areas not less than 9 m² was decided for the smallest area.

To gain a reference for space allocation per person, a study on a conference room in a Swiss school (Silva & Meyer, 2018) focusing on acoustics - was read. By counting the number of chairs (154) in relation to the total area of the conference room (167.44 m²), space of ~ 1,09 m² per person was calculated. In comparison, a room of 9 m² for 6 persons would give 1.5 m² per person. While the function, materials, and overall volume of the conference room might not be the exact same as the buildings in this project - the study gave a reference for spatial needs in shared environments.

Resulting in the following indoor measurements for the smallest library room: A: ~ 3 x 3 m B: ~ 1,5 x 6 m

The proportions were set with as much contrast as possible to enable more varierty when building the rooms together.

OBSERVATIONS

Sitting in a library

During the project, Malmö City Library was visited several times and a wide range of furniture configurations was observed. Many times, most visitors appeared to be alone, which was reflected in how the space was used: small tables with two seats were typically occupied by just one person, nearly all standalone chairs were taken, and many of the desks/seats along the walls and windows were in use - with empty seats often left between people. Even the sofas in use were generally occupied by a single person. In contrast, the larger furniture sets were mostly used by groups of young people who seemed to know each other.

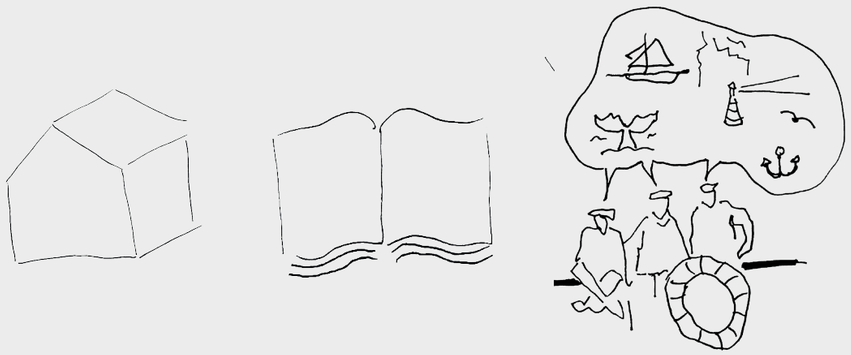
Most sitting people were along the walls/windows.

Note: Integrated desks and seating along walls, sit next to each other

The space features a variety of furniture configurations, including:

- Small tables with two seats positioned along the windows
- Large armchairs with integrated side tables
- Sofas (different types) - enclosed or standard
- Set of furniture (sofa, chairs, table)
- Desks with seating along windows and walls
- Lounge chairs
- Tables with multiple chairs suitable for larger groups
- A central circular sofa
- Fixed, swivel chairs without accompanying tables





VALUES FROM THE LIBRARY ROOM & BOOK

Space, objects and experience

Through the exploration, tree values were found from the library building and book to consider in the project:

1. The threshold between public and private

2. Tactility (book/paper/wood)

3. Interaction

The threshold between private and public

The library as a place: a space where people often might feel at ease, whether alone or together

The book as an object: has the ability to affect the experience of a place

If one were to seek a similar quality in a piece of furniture, it could the ”storytelling bench” - a fixed place in the public space that can offer a sense of familiarity, drawing the same people back, perhaps even at specific times (daily rhythm)

In this way, the library, the “storytelling-bench”, and the book all share the common quality of their ability to create more ”personal zones” within the city.

Tactility and interaction

Tactility in architecture can influence the sensory experience and the book as an object could add another layer to this - time, sensory memory and sensory associations e.g.

Enhancing tactility and interaction within a building could potentially encourage the connection between people, the space and community (sense of care, value and ownership).

PRINCIPLES

Design & operation

The process resulted in a set of principles for the design and operation of the library rooms. These principles were later developed into a design program (next chapter).

DESIGN

SMALL SCALE

MODULAR

flexible + site specific

COMPONENTS

architectural qualities from the library room

FURNITURE AS PART OF THE BUILDING

SYMBOLISM

book

OPERATION

PUBLIC + LOCAL

ACTIVATOR

local functions, events, meeting space, work space e.t.c.

SELF-SERVICE

Chapter 5.

DESIGN PROGRAM

Libre

ADAPTABLE

components

COMMUNAL

operation/

additional functions

DEMOCRATIC ROOM

values

NICHED BOOK

collections

SELF-SERVICE

MEETING SPOT

activator

Libro = book

Libri = books

Libre = free

CONCEPT

Libre

The design program is called Libre where free-standing library rooms (pavilions) can be assembled and placed on different sites that do not have direct access to a physical library today. The concept is considered to work in any city/village throughout the country (a bit as a network of library rooms).

The rooms would work to complement the digital- and mobile library services while also providing space for other activities - thus, can work as activators for the communities.

The book collections in the library rooms would be niched and could for example reflect the communities themselves or the additive functions in the library rooms.

Libre would be an interplay between public- and community driven regulation and operation - but for the communities to define.

PRACTICALITIES

Community involvement

By working more as “activators” for the sites, the (multifunctional) library rooms could be initiated/funded by the municipality (perhaps in collaboration with other parties) while the operation of the rooms could be more community driven - altered by the community’s needs and wishes, for instance through events like reading circles, functions like a cafe or other *(value: interaction)*. In operation, the municipality could simply continue with its digital and mobile service (just change/ add a stop by the reading rooms).

The hope is that the rooms would be fixed/permanent places for the community - although keeping flexibility in the way they are shaped.

Before adding a library room to a site - an idea could be to give the community the possibility to contribute with their opinions and wishes through a formulary, for example on the website of the municipalities, in the same way as is sometimes done for local plans. The rooms could be shaped with consideration of this, for example by architects working at the municipality, and the components would function as a simple method to incorporate the wishes (social/introspect, tables/ chairs, openess/enclosement e.g.). In this way the library rooms, within limits, could become a “model” by the community.

Many rooms

The library rooms can function independently, in multiples, or be combined into larger configurations. A site could start with only one room, and more could be added with time and need, but it could also be possible to start with larger rooms at once.

If more than one room is added to a site - different constellations could be created depending on placement configuration. For example, the rooms can be spread out- and claim more or less land - adapted after the possibilities of the site, terrain and landscape. The rooms might be placed to create different outdoor rooms, courtyards or paths.

Comfort, sorting system & self-service

The project also explores how the book can become part of the architecture and how people can use the book to create more personal space through some of the furniture in the building *(value: tactility)*, while still being close to others *(value: private/public)*. Explained in chapter 6 components.

Beside fixed furniture- and general lighting, there could be loose reading lamps, chushions, pillows and blankets.

The sorting system in the library would be more organic (in contrast to the structured sorting systems in ”normal” libraries) and the books would work more as a shaper of atmosphere in the rooms or perhaps as topics of conversation or inspiration *(flaneur)*. The mobile libraries would still provide specific books that are searched/wished for *(target-seeking)*.

The rooms would work through self-service (lending and returning books) and the visitors would have access to the reading rooms through a library card that functions on set opening-times. This concept is already used in several libraries (including Simrishamn city library) - called ”mer-öppet”.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Components

DISTINCT

ENTRANCE

familiarity

INTEGRATED

FURNITURE

walls

COLUMNS

BEAMS

INFORMATION DESK

computer

notice board

library bus book drop

SKYLIGHTS

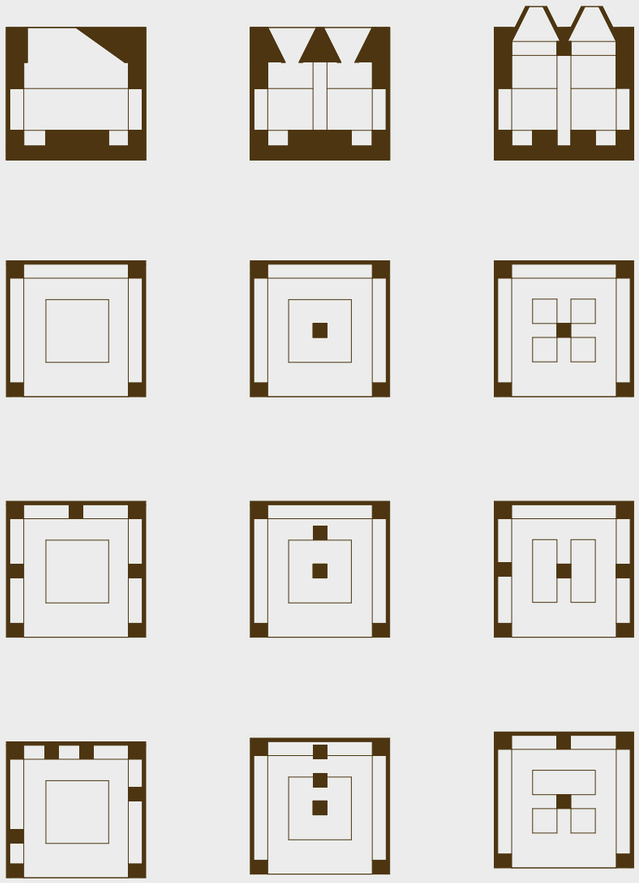
roof

BOOKS

readability

Shaping space with components

Diagram illustrating how pillars, furniture and skylight create different rooms of the same footprint.



LIMITED SPACE

Incorporate the library room's qualities and values

Pages 36 & 74.

- Columns (rather than internal walls)

Allowing for separation while maintaining an open and connected feeling.

- Skylights (rather than monumental heights)

Nuance interior heights and natural light. Also, might be beneficial on sites where the surroundings are not "favorable". *Keeps walls free for interior use.*

- Integrated furniture

Benches, desks and storage integrated into the building structure.

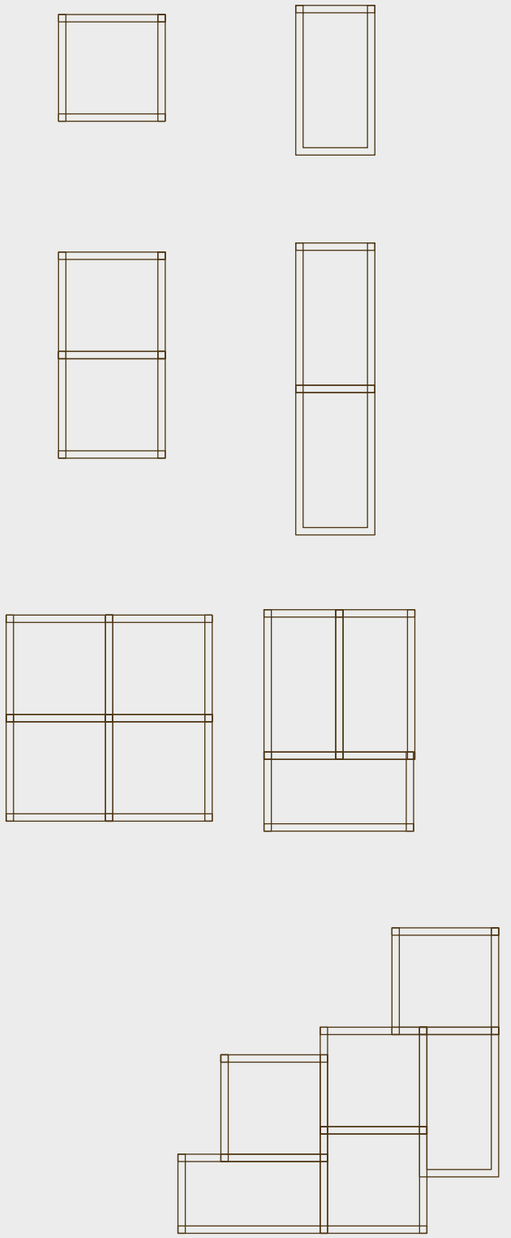
Space makers for the book/spacers between seating.

Avoid larger unused spaces between people

Furniture that allows for many seats

Chapter 6.

COMPONENTS



STRUCTURE

Material and more

For sustainability, acoustics- and insulating capacity and to fit a modular concept the main construction material is cross laminated timber (CLT), spruce.

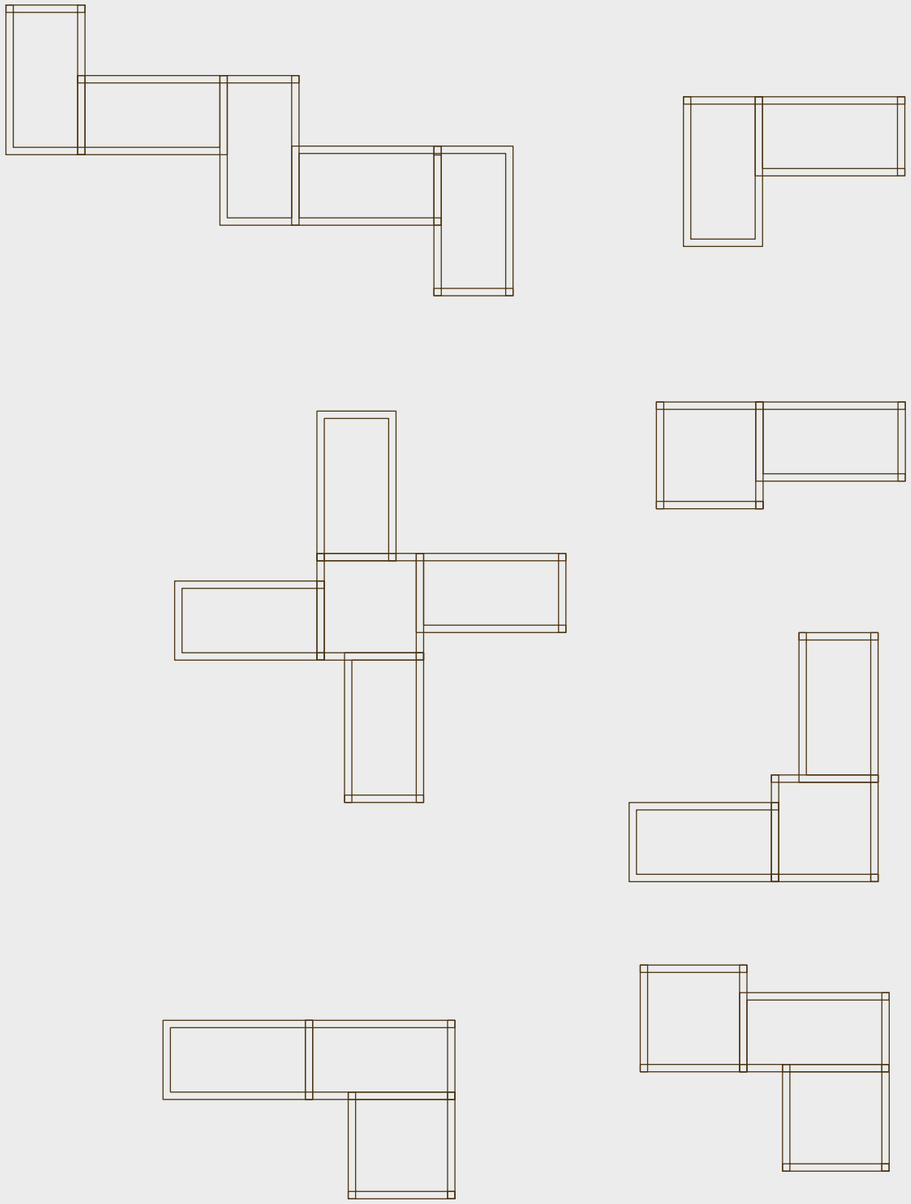
The measurements are mainly based on modular measurements (300 system).



Transverse planks

Longitudinal planks

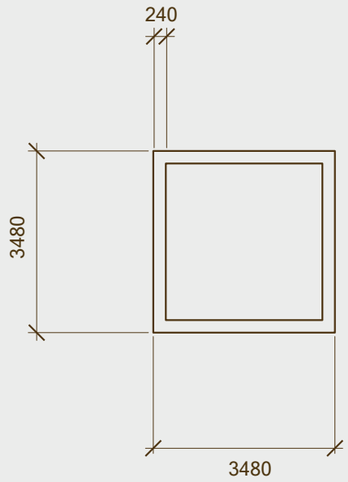
3 layer CLT



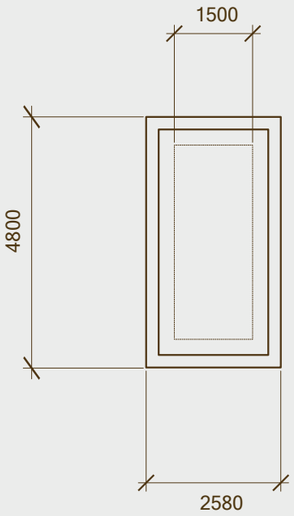
BASE MODULES

Plan view 1:100

The areas were originally based on 9 m² but has been slightly adjusted to better fit modular measurements.



9 m²



9,24 m²

Accessible toilet



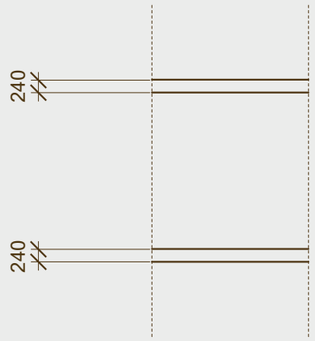
4,84 m²

WALLS & FOUNDATION

Front view 1:100

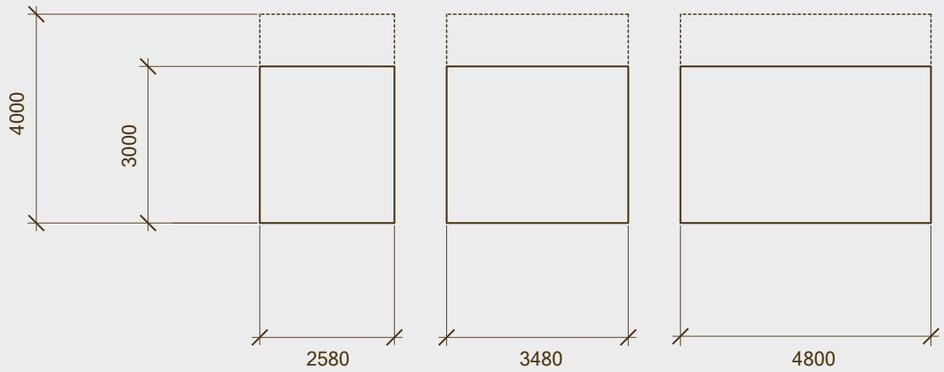
Adapted after footprint.

Outside deck has the same width as foundation.



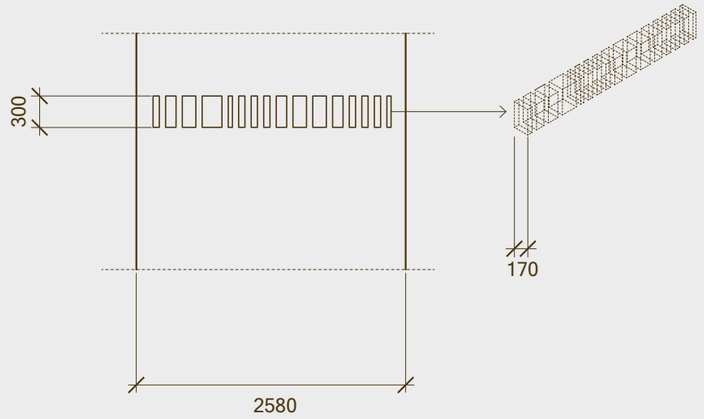
Two heights on walls - front view 1:100

Walls 3000 m height to give a sense of space and 4000 mm height as a choice (particulary if more modules are assembeled - larger areas).



Feature wall with space for books 1:50

Possible on different walls/measurements.



1. 3-layer CLT

2. AVCL (with continuous vapor-tight sealant in floor)

3. Mineral wool, rigid boards between battens

(Insulation locally cut and sealed around bracket to prevent thermal bridging)

4. Self sealing WRB, overlaps flashing min. 50 mm

5. Ventilation cavity

6. Pressure-treated spruce cladding

7. Battens fixed with stainless screws (WBR self-sealing around fasteners)

8. Metal flashing with drip edge, sloped outwards to shed water

9. Metal bracket

10. EPDM sealing membrane

11. Bearing pad EPDM

12. Thermal break

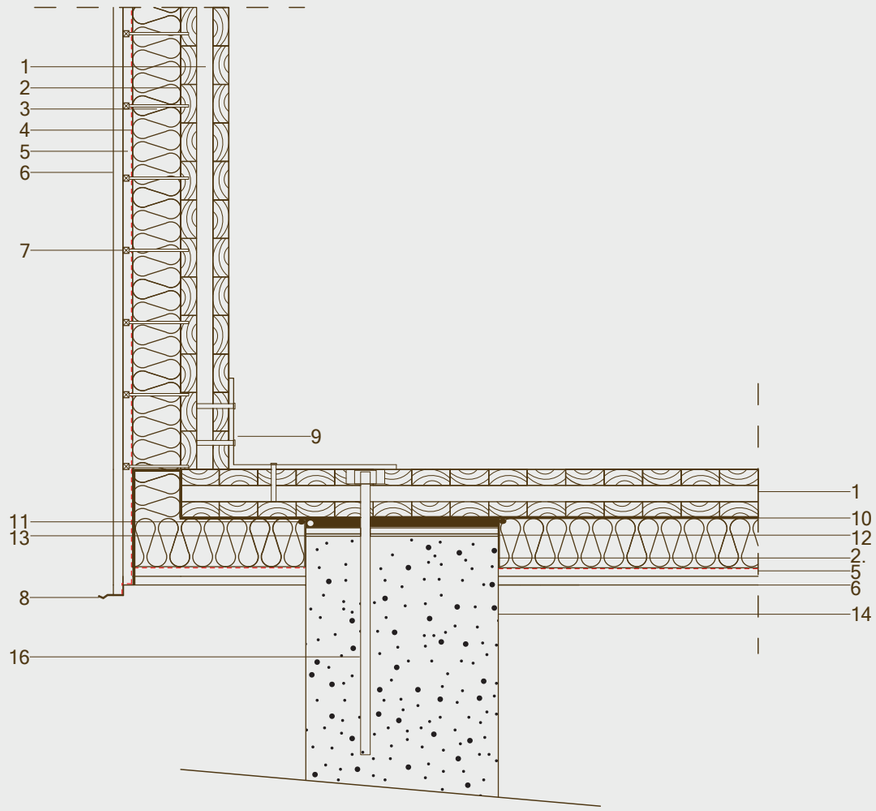
13. EPDM sheet, capillary break

14. Concrete pad

15. Anchor

MEETING GROUND

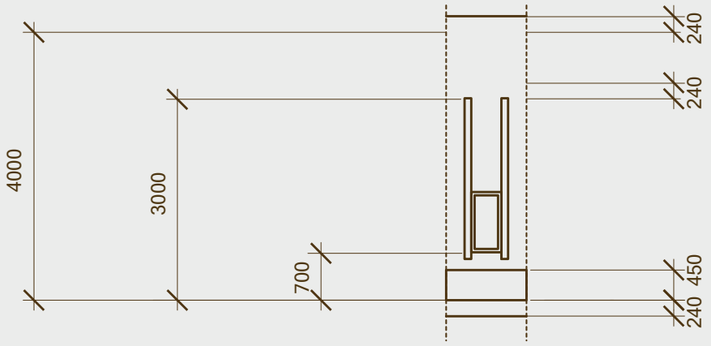
Draft 1:12,5



Recessed concrete pads to give the structure a more ”floating” expression

Accessability - Front view 1:100

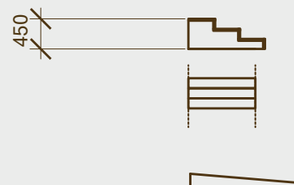
The height of the window sill is set to be accessible, allowing people in wheelchairs to easily look in and out the windows.

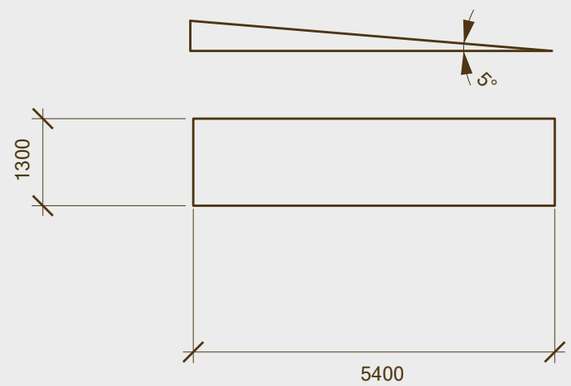


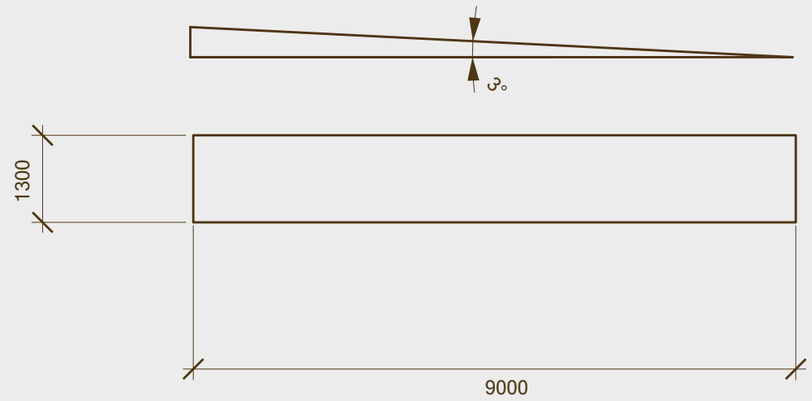
STAIR AND RAMP

Front and plan view 1:100

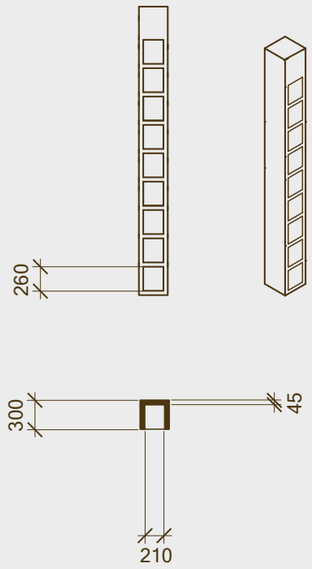
Outdoor deck is reached by a ramp for accessability. Stairs could be added as choice (functional or as a social stair).







Column with space for books 1:50



COLUMNS (& BEAMS)

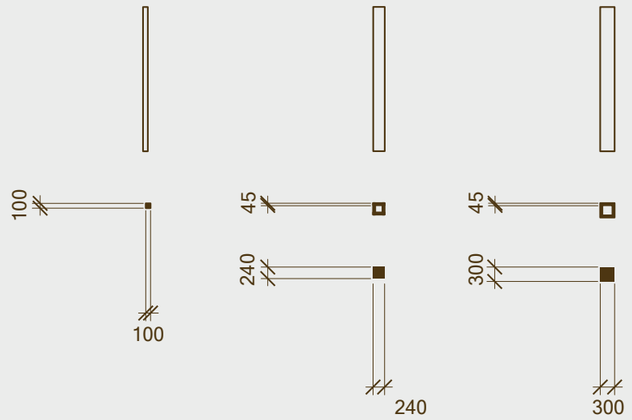
Plan and front view 1:100

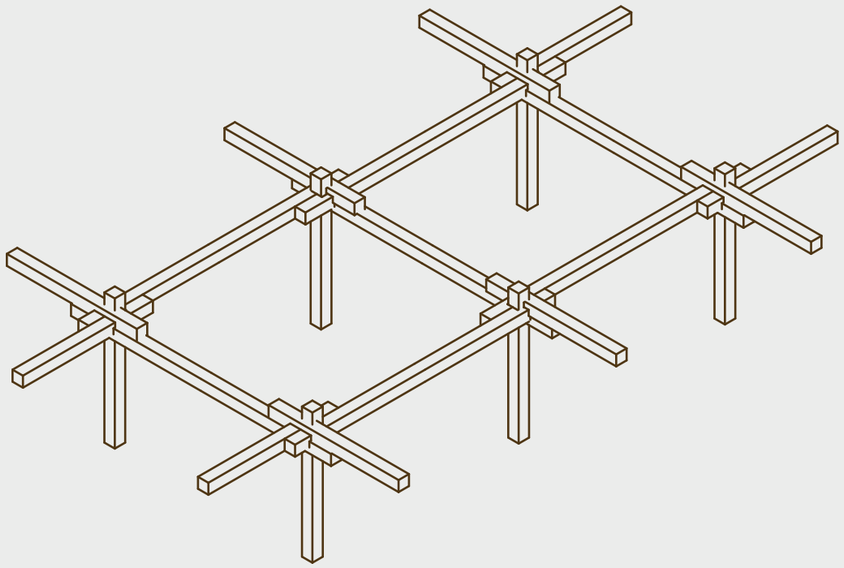
Glulam, spruce, oiled

The hollow columns are for a more light-weight transportation and handling and use less material.

The hollow columns could also be space for electrical- and lighting systems, eventual insulation/acoustic material or further storage for books.

The measurements are set after the thickness of the walls, pilasters and narrowest furniture depth.



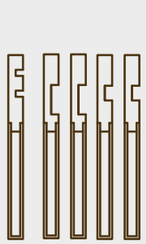


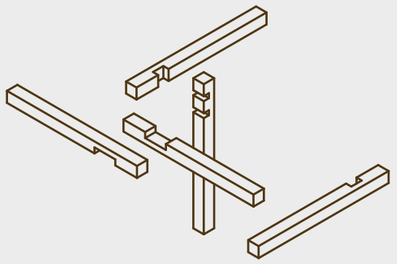
Node - Front and perspective view 1:100

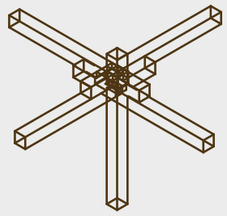
Node - intersection beams and column - could work both in one base module or as a repeatable element (grid-system) in larger rooms for room division.

Hollow with solid connection modules.

Made of 240 x 240 mm or 300 x 300 mm columns.



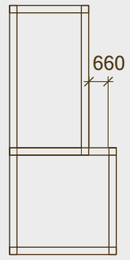




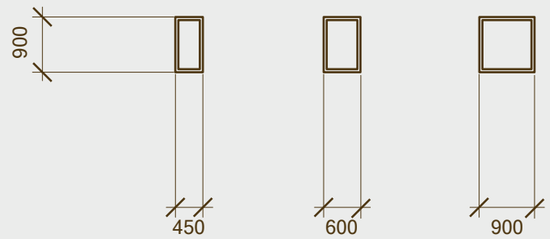
WINDOWS & PILASTERS

Plan view 1:100

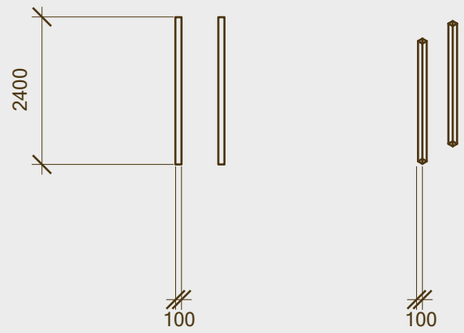
The measurement for the narrowest window (+ pilasters) was chosen to fit between the space that is created when building the different modules together.



Base window components
Front view 1:100

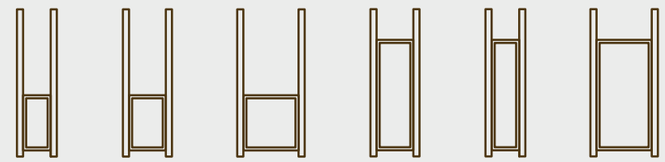


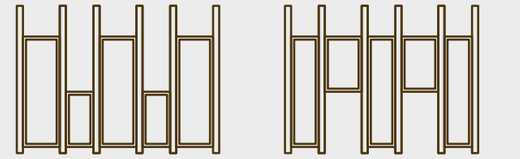
Windows + frames

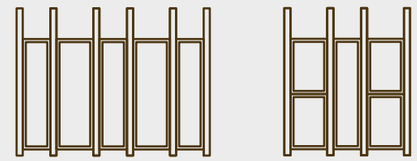


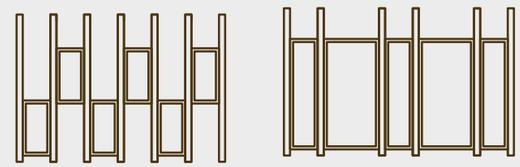
Pilasters

Examples of different window configurations

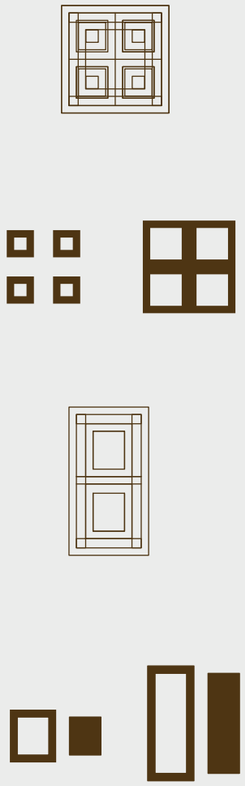








Concept diagram for skylight sizes 1:200



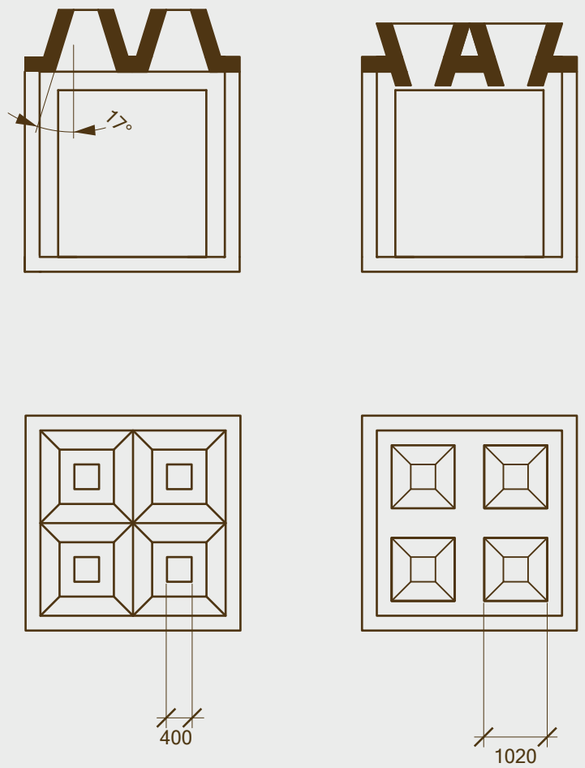
SKYLIGHTS

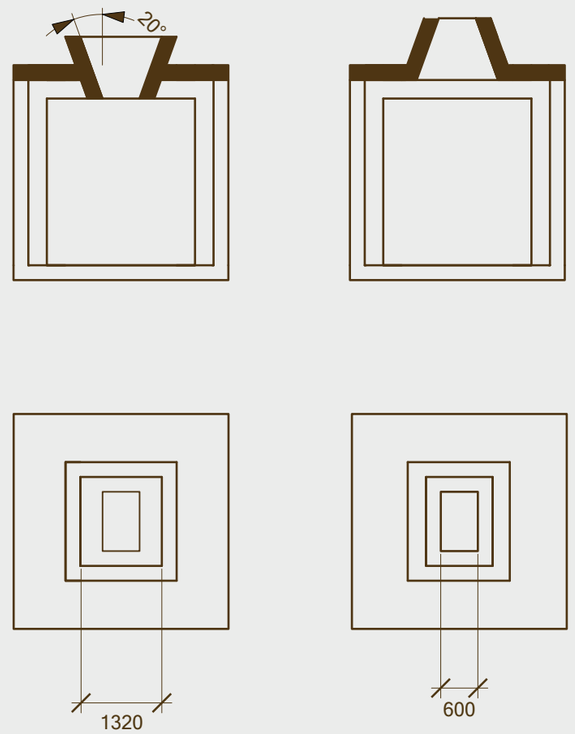
Diffused daylight

Dimensions were mainly set after the base modules. Most skylights work on both base modules (except the largest ones).

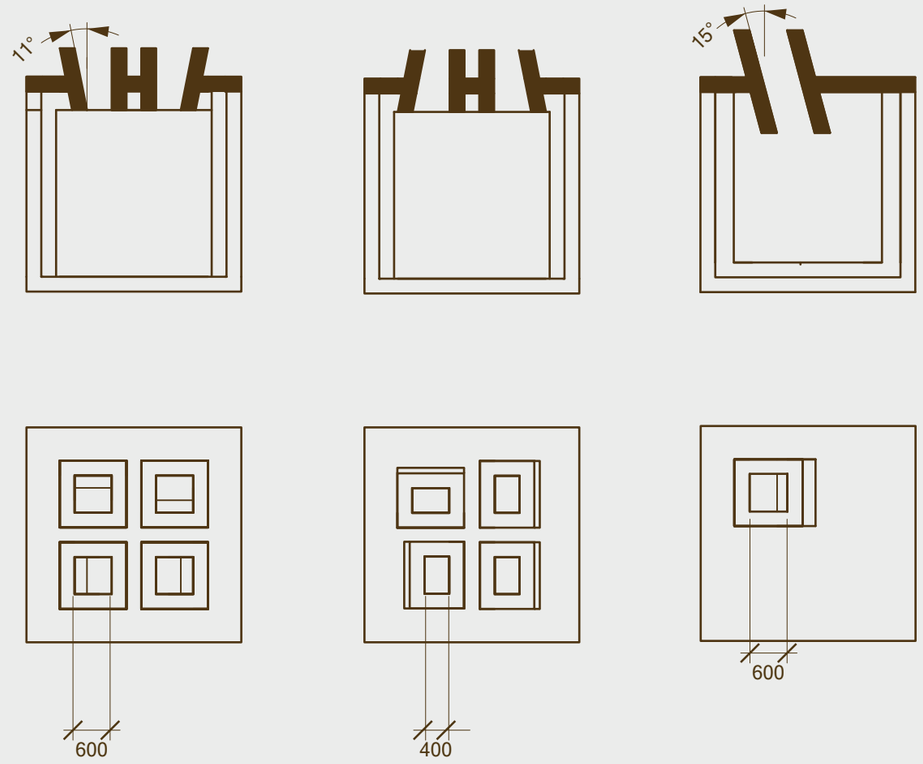
Most angles between of 11° - 20° were chosen to help optimize passive solar heating during colder months (low sun) while reducing the risk of overheating in the summer (high sun) - still being able to shed rain. The angles work well to catch sunlight especially when the sun is low - mornings and late afternoons e.g - which might be when most people visit the library rooms. Higher angle for reflecting light.

Soft light, spread or concentrated
Diagram section and top view 1:100

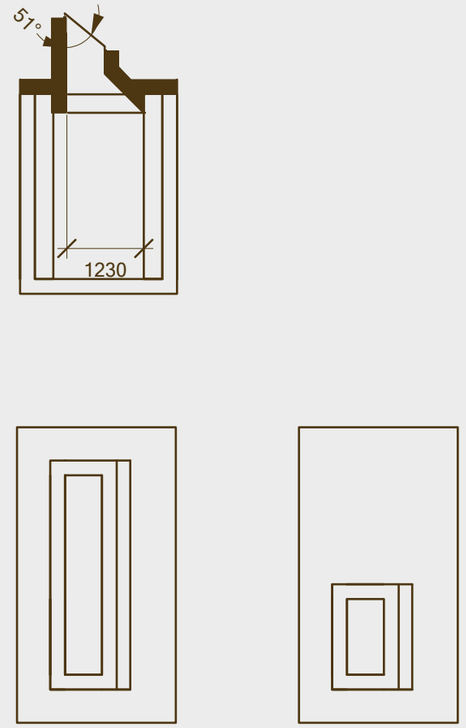




More angled light/light well
Diagram section and top view 1:100

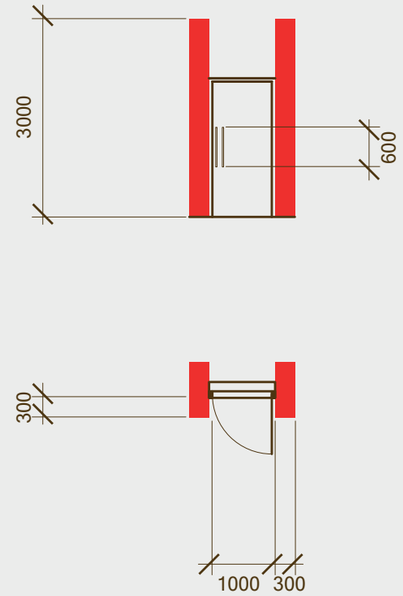


Reflecting light
Diagram section and top view 1:100



DOORS & PILASTERS

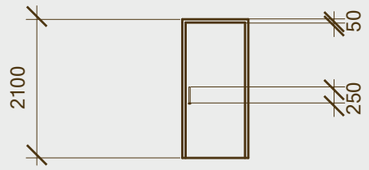
Entrance - front and plan view 1:100

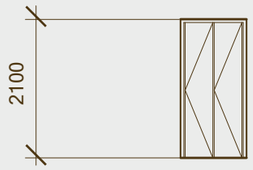


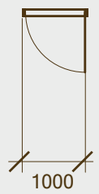
Additional door and folding doors - front and plan view 1:100

Additional door for the seperate library buildings since they are for public use (safety e.g.).

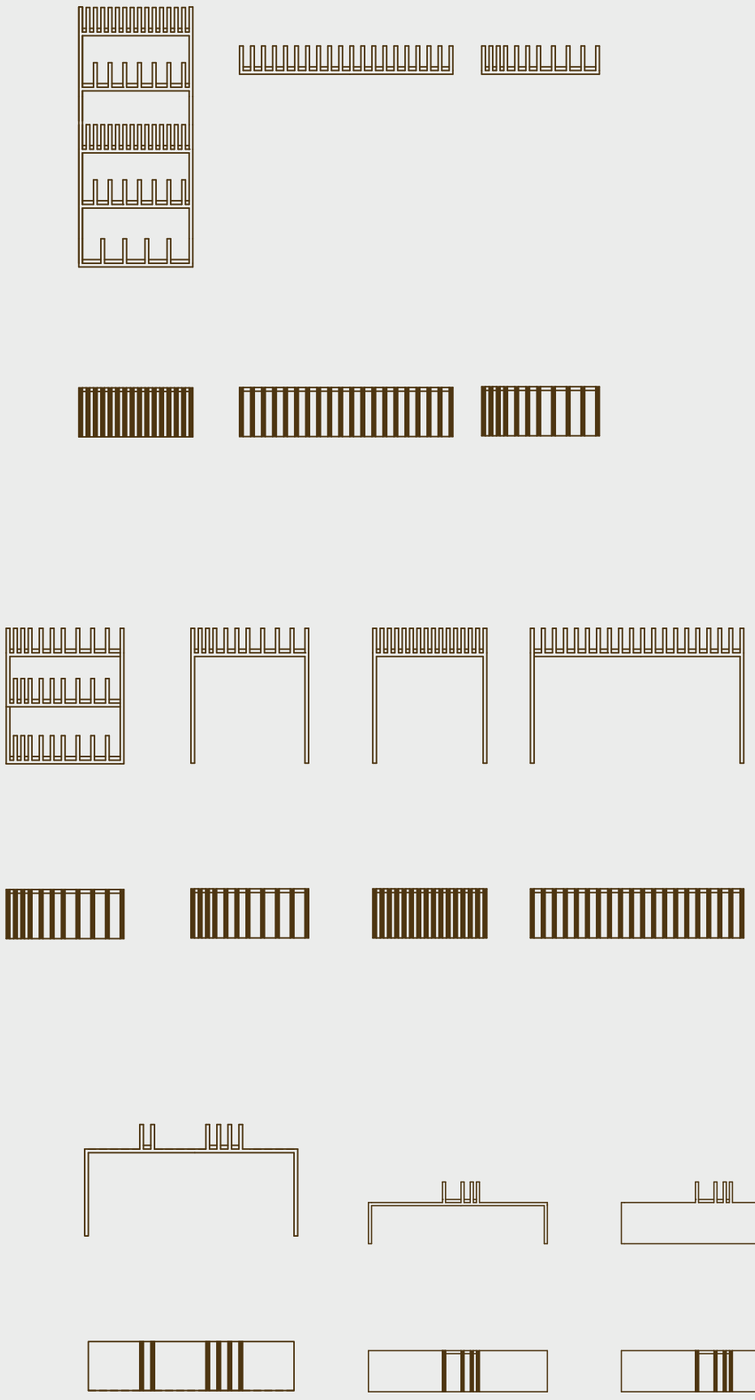
Folding doors as an option for more openess/connection to surroundings.











FURNITURE

Create space for the book

A concept for a furniture serie to further create dedicated space for books, taking the form of benches, desks, bookshelves, and ”display tables”. Some spaces on the shelves hold just one book, while others hold several.

The furniture was designed neither as functional storage nor interior decoration. Instead, it is conceived as a space maker for books - playing with the idea of designing space for the object itself, shifting the focus from utility to presence. The furniture would integrate the book physically (space) and symbolically (bookends) throughout the library rooms.

Built of 22 mm spruce planks, oiled

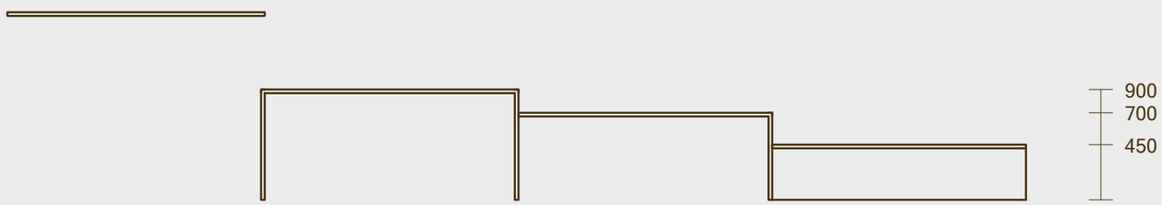
Diagram of the heights

Free-hanging shelves

Bar desks

Desks

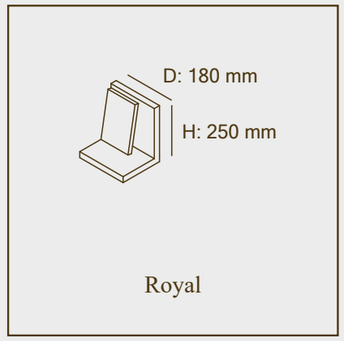
Bench



1:50

Measurements for the bookends standing between the books 1:25

Since the measurements for royal often is for ”standard books” they were chosen for the project.





A4 *Coffeetable*

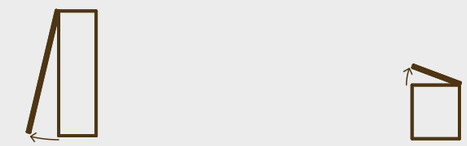


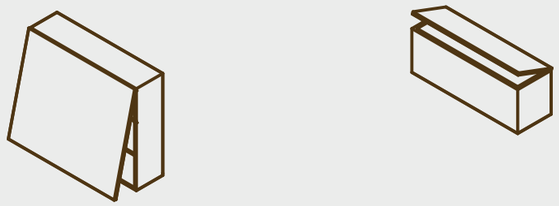
Pocket *Royal* *Crown*

1:50

Measurements from Ramstedt, 2019

Storage (as benches and interior walls) 1:50





Chapter 7.

EXAMPLES



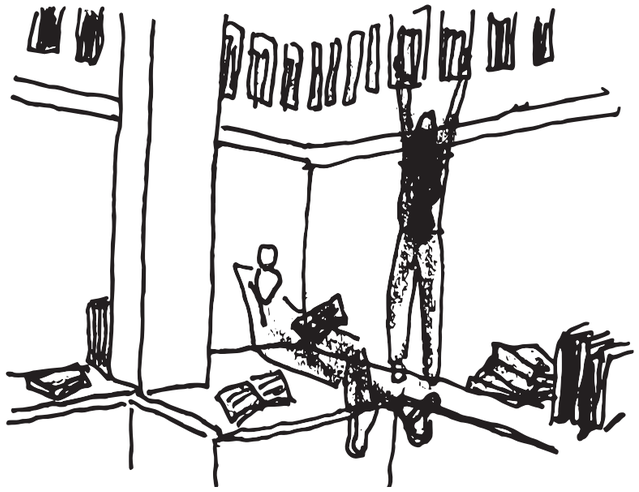
Learn



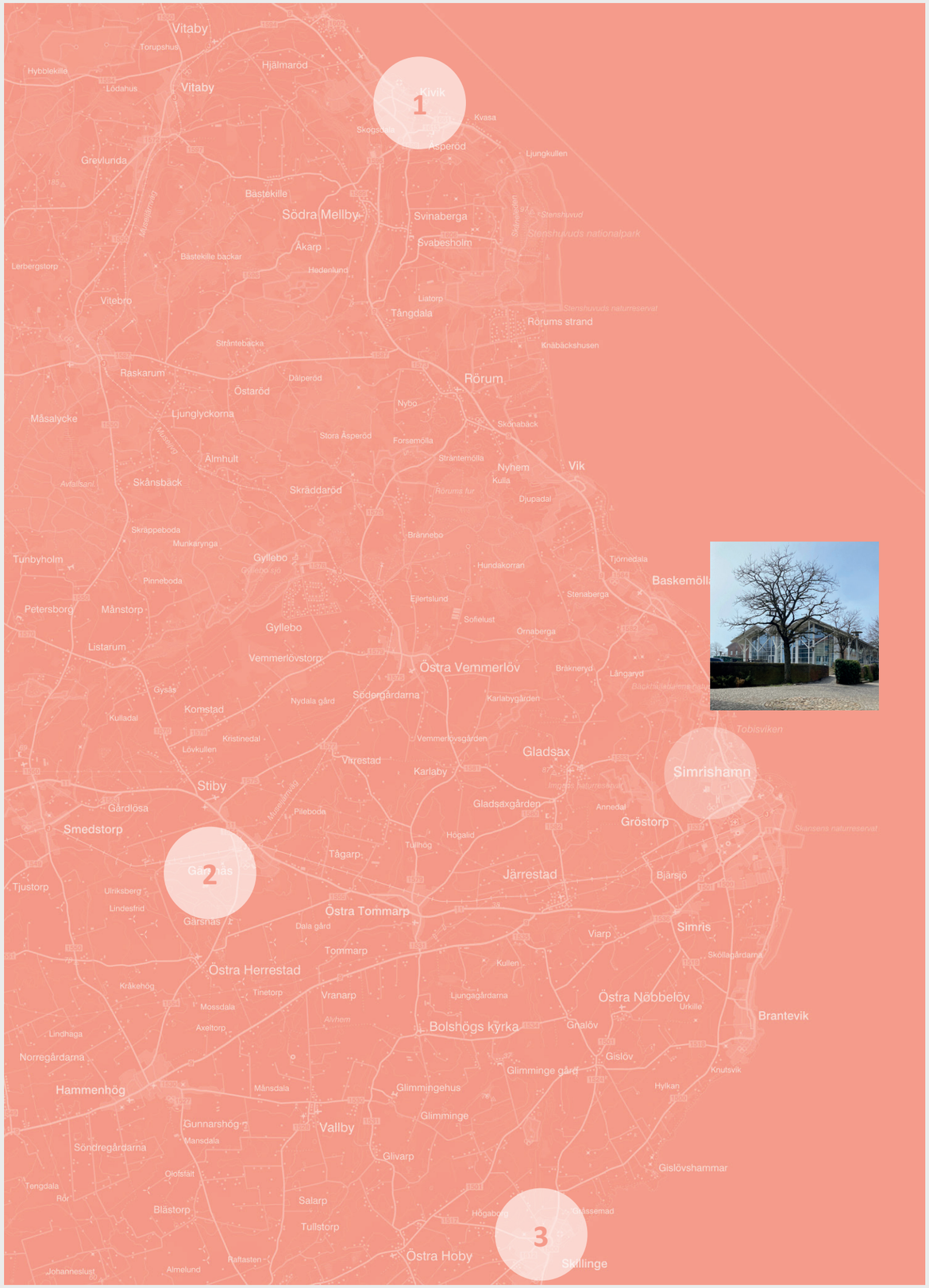
Discover



Read



Relax



CHOSEN SITES

Conurbations in the municipality of Simrishamn

For this project, three of the conurbations in Simrishamn where the library branches closed, were chosen as examples to test the program. The closest library to the conurbations is Simrishamn city library.

1. Kivik

population estimation: 871 inhabitants (citypopulation, 2024a)

~ 19 km to Simrishamn library

2. Gärsnäs

population estimation: 1030 inhabitans (citypopulation, 2024b)

~ 12 km to Simrishamn library

3. Skillinge

population estimation: 962 inhabitans (citypopulation, 2024c)

~ 12 km to Simrishamn library

The examples include 2-3 base modules and are assembled to fit each site. Kivik was chosen for site-visit.

LIBRE KIVIK

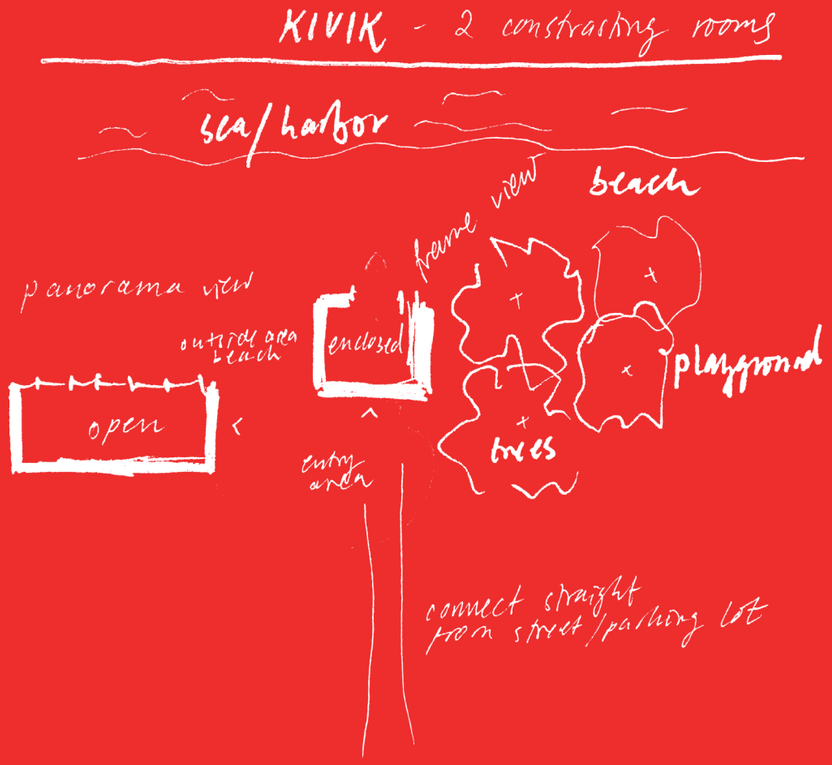
Close to the harbor

Kivik lies along Österlen coast and wether it is swimming weather or not the view of the sea is an experience itself. Perhaps the opportunity to be close to the water during the cold months of the year could be enhanced by creating a a sheltered library room near the harbor.

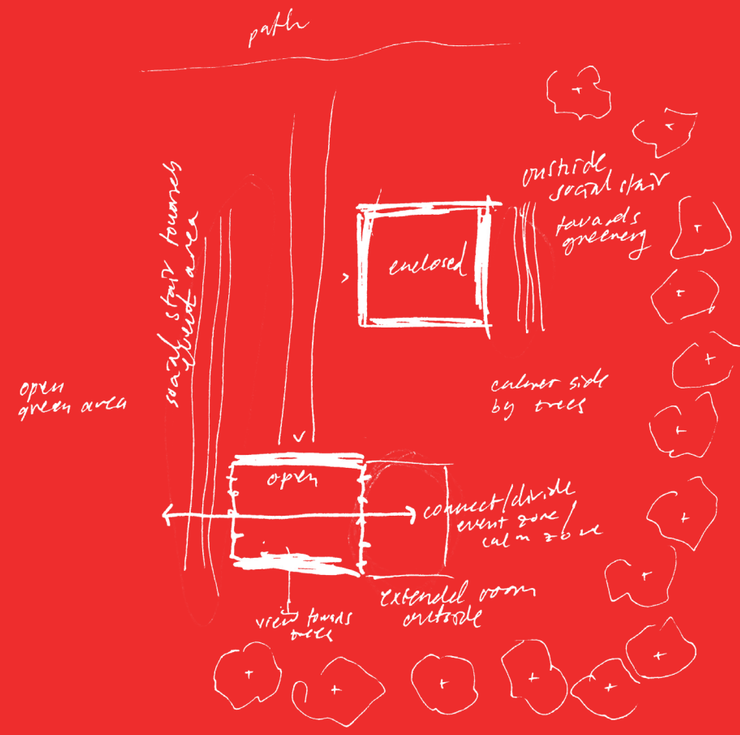
The harbor also serves as a central, meeting spot for both locals and tourists. Here lies restaurants and cafés, an (outside) notice board for community events, parking lots, hotel, footpaths and a large playground e.g.

Since the harbor serves as a natural place to go, two alternative sites close to it were chosen to test the program. One site to the west, by the beach and one (more weather protected) site to the east, by greenery and trees.

Here, the library rooms could also serve as workspace, meeting rooms or a space to use for events. Since Kivik is famous for apples in Sweden - the theme for the book collection could for example be apples (addition to Kiviks museum and apple house).


KIVIK - 2 constrasting rooms
sea/harbor
beach
frame view
panorama view
outdoor area beach
enclosed
playground
open
trees
entry area
connect straight from street/parking lot

A.


path
outside social stair towards greenery
enclosed
open green area
calmer side by trees
open
connect/divide event zone/ calm zone
view towards beach
extended room outside

B.

2 alternative sites

A

B

playground

playground

boule

0 100 200 400

1:2000

1. Beach

2. WC

Alternative A

6. Beach hotel

3. Haven

4. Large playground

5. Ice-cream café

7. Boules court





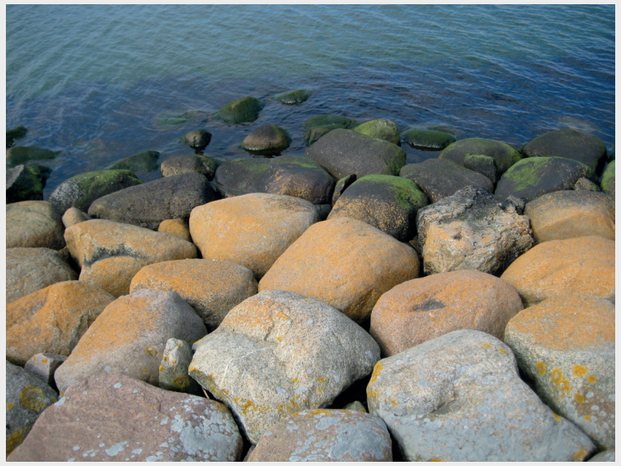


View towards chosen site



Chosen site







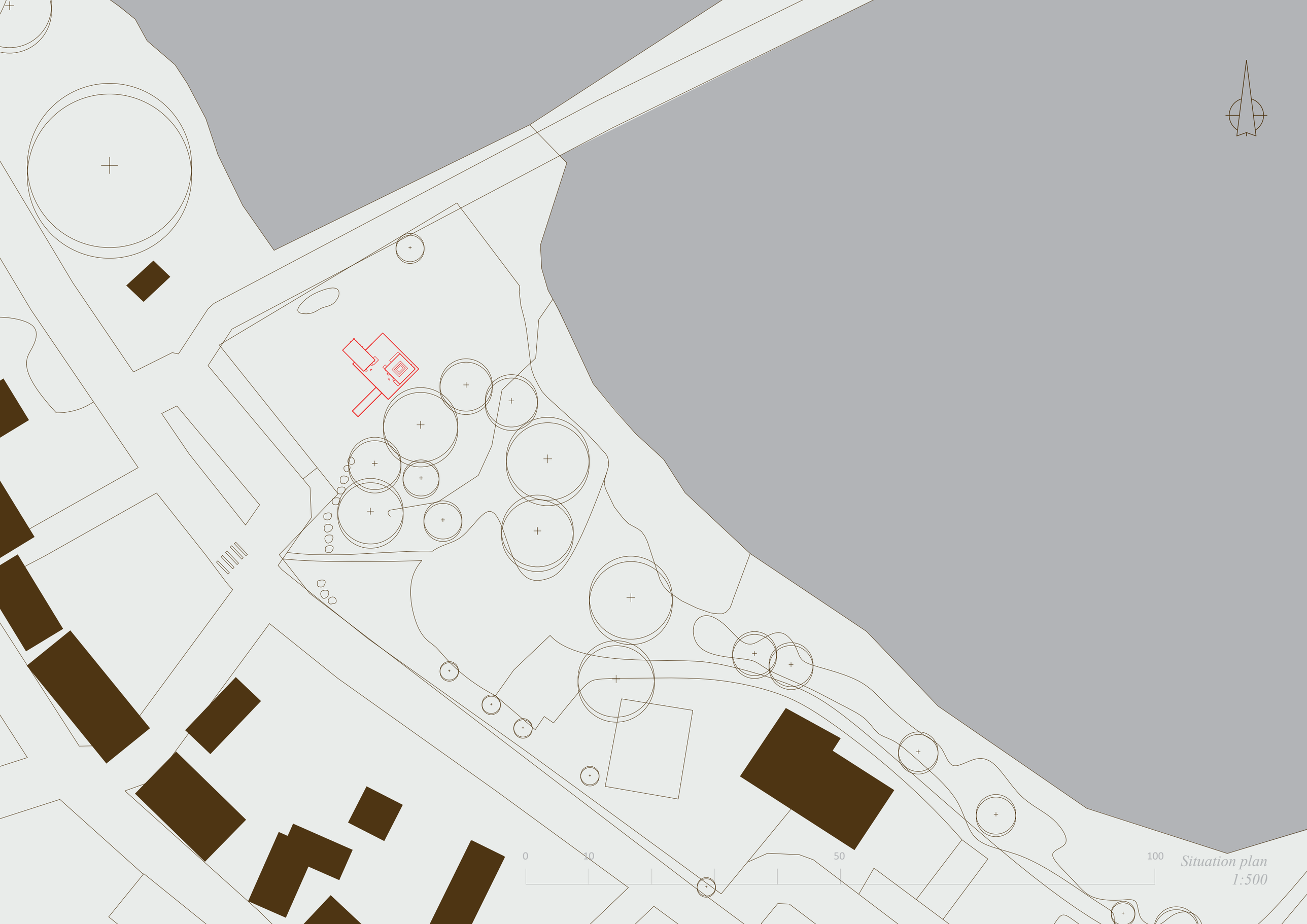
View from the harbor to the north

beach - more ”calm” side

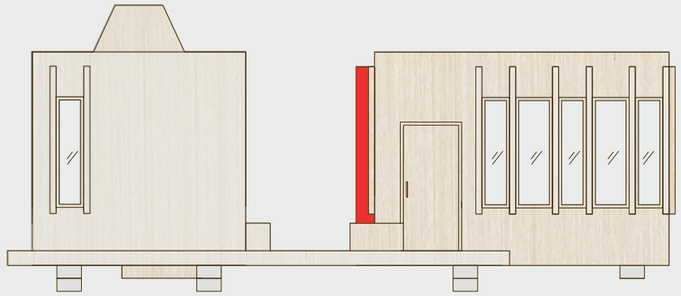


View from the harbor to the south

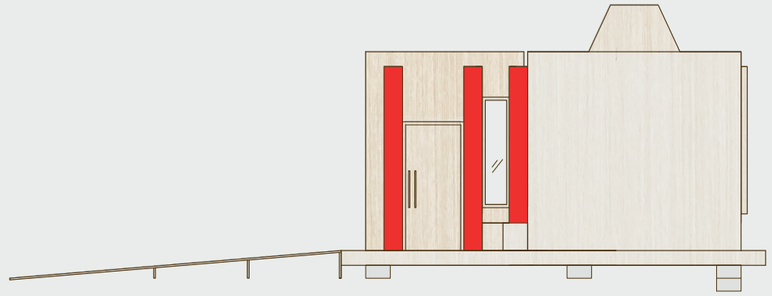
restaurants, boats e.t.c - more ”active” side



Situation plan
1:500



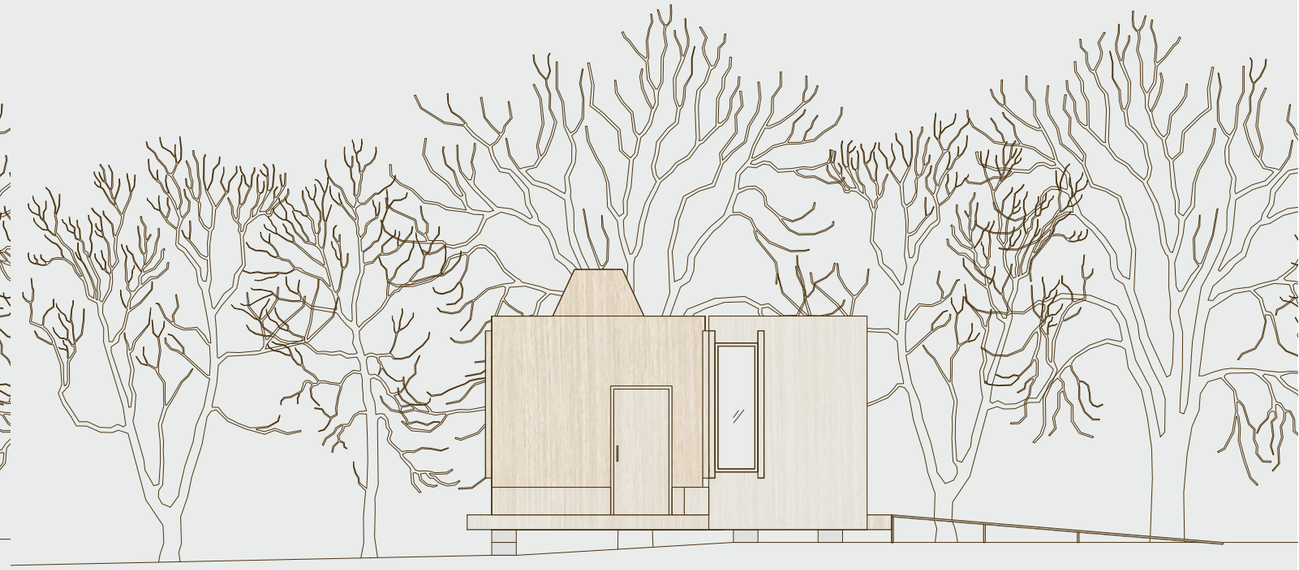
North facades
1:100



East facades
1:100



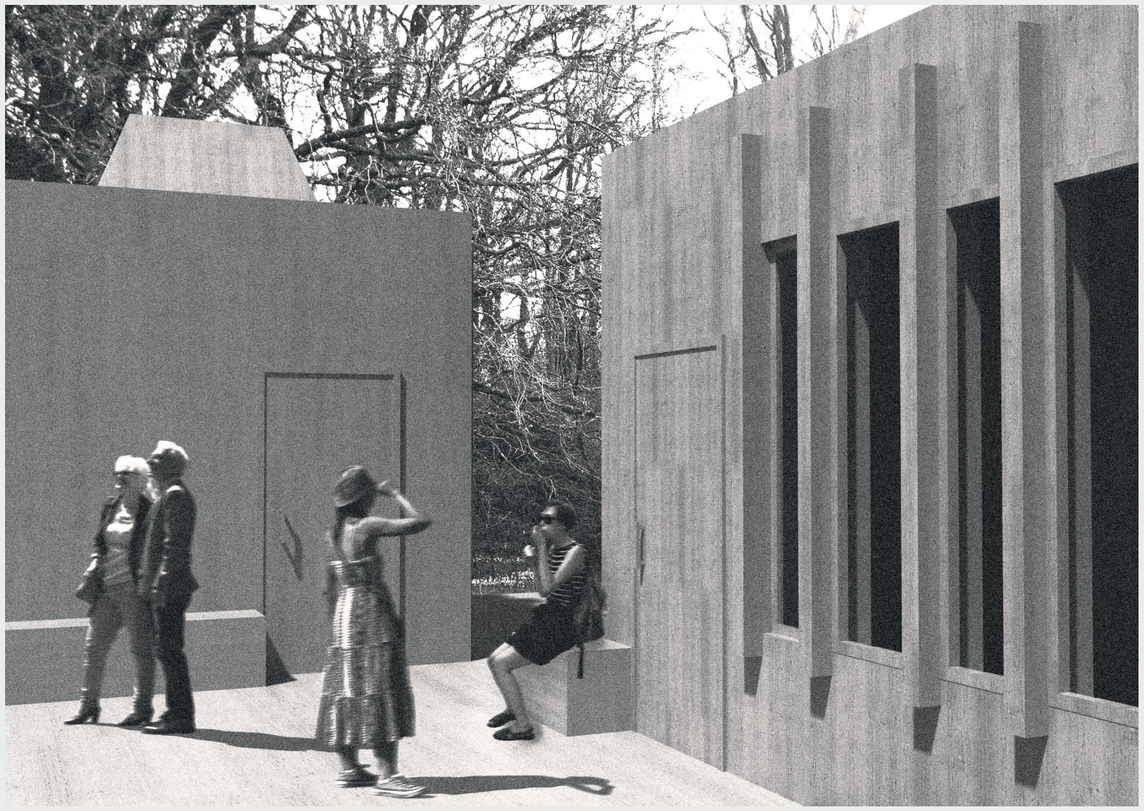
South facades
1:100



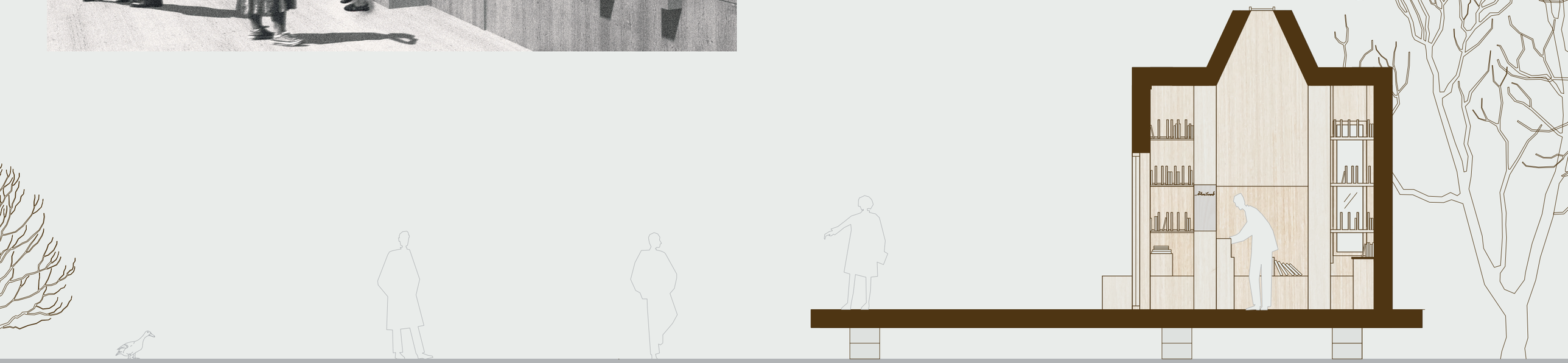
West facades
1:100

0 5 10 15 20

Plan
1:100







Section A - A
1:50

View point room

Feature wall


2. Parking lot
1. Green area
also used for different events
Alternative B



Site



View from site towards south



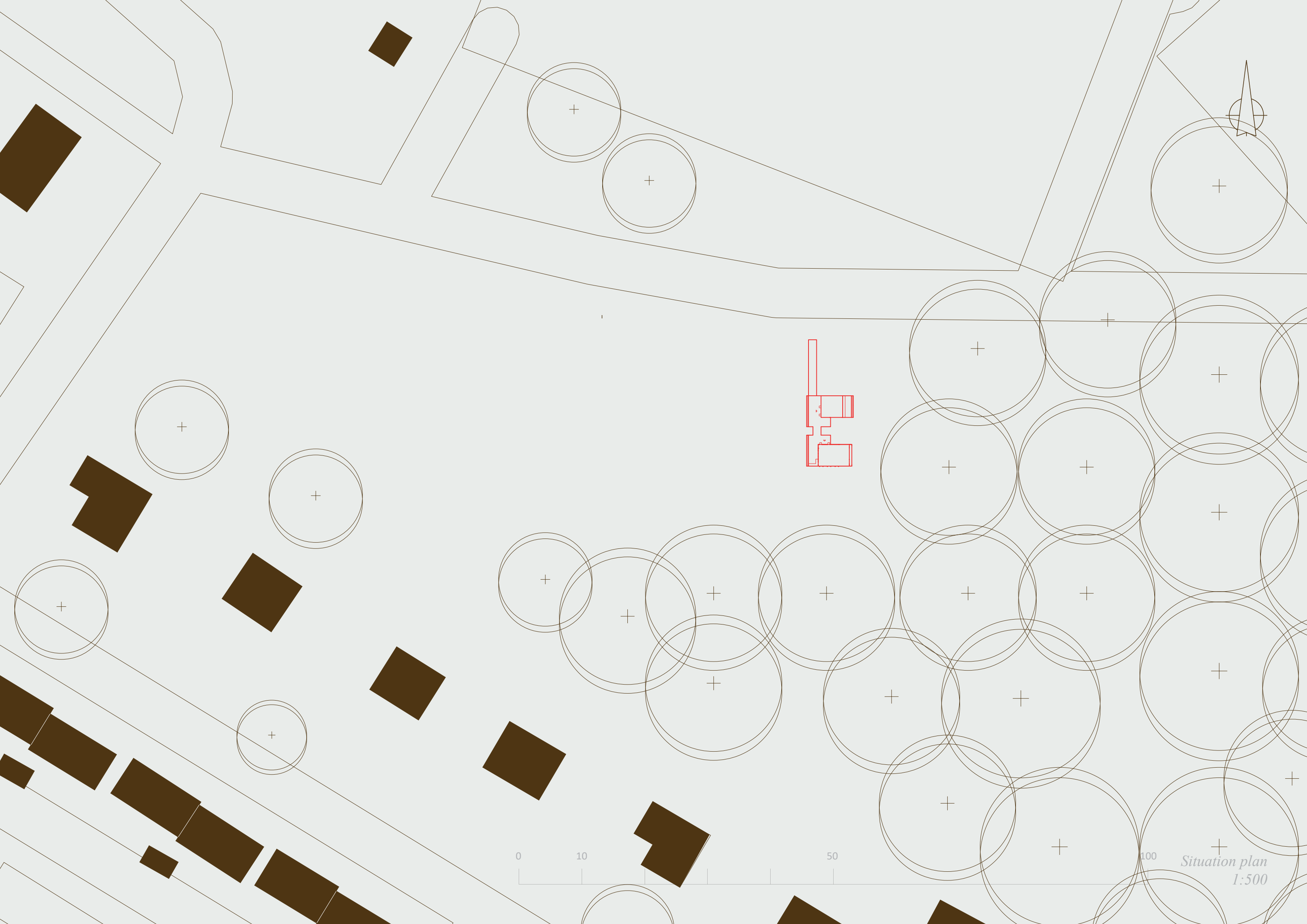
View from site towards north



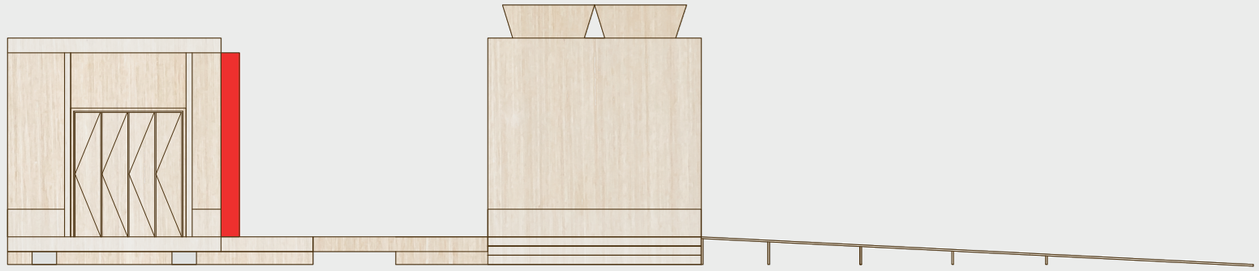
Old benches (east)



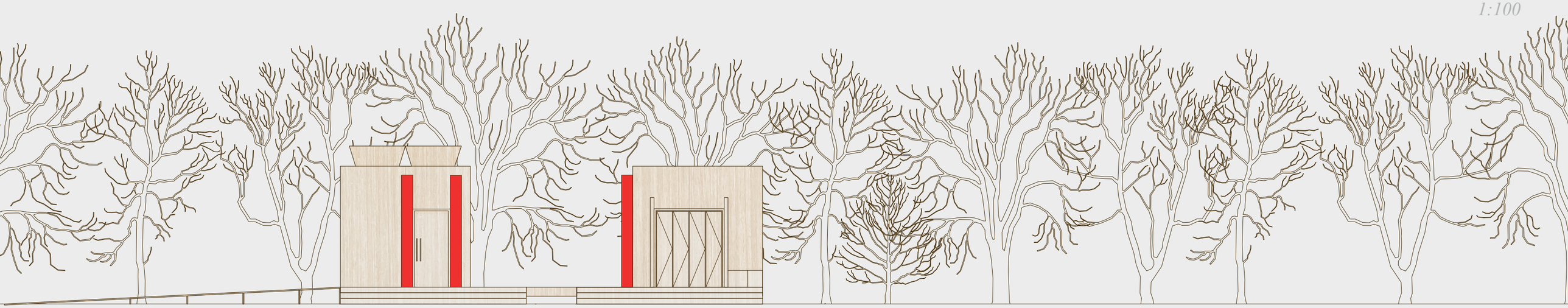
View from site towards west



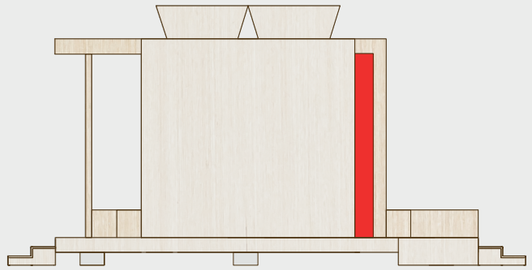
Situation plan
1:500

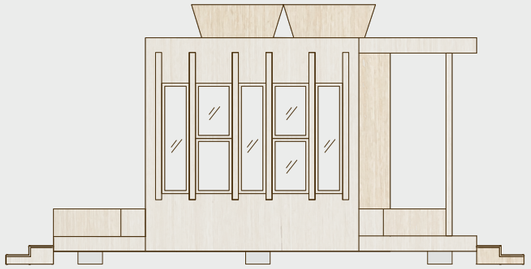


East facades
1:100



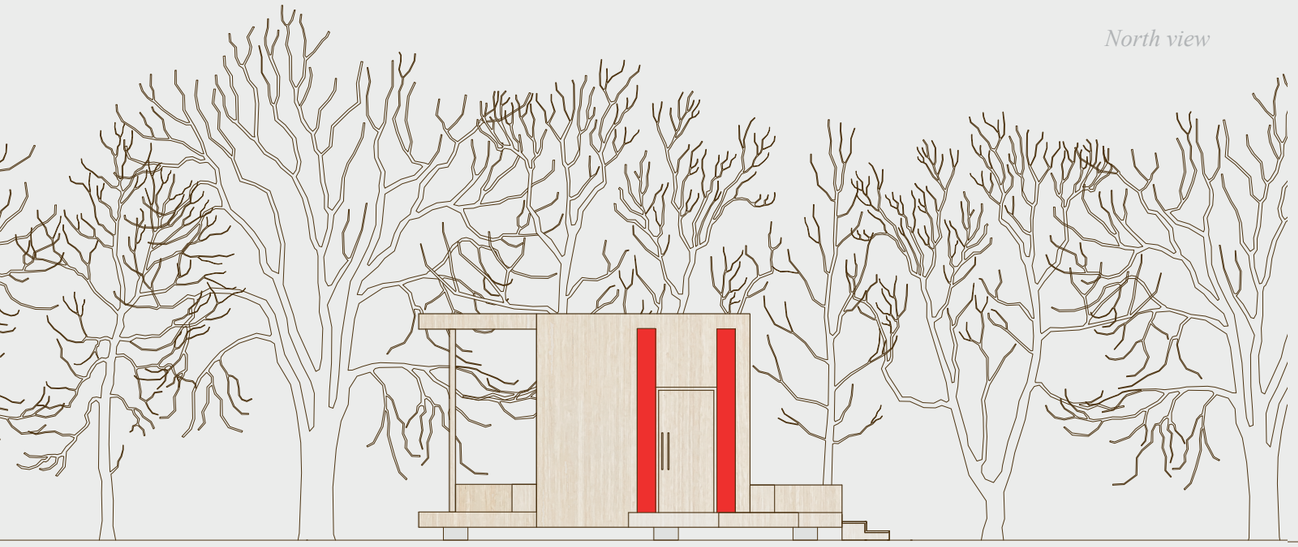
West facades
1:100

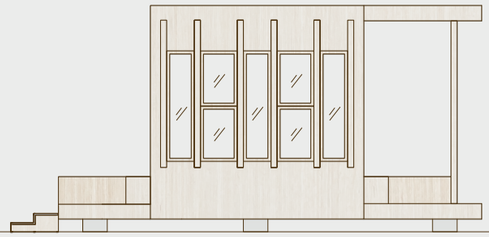




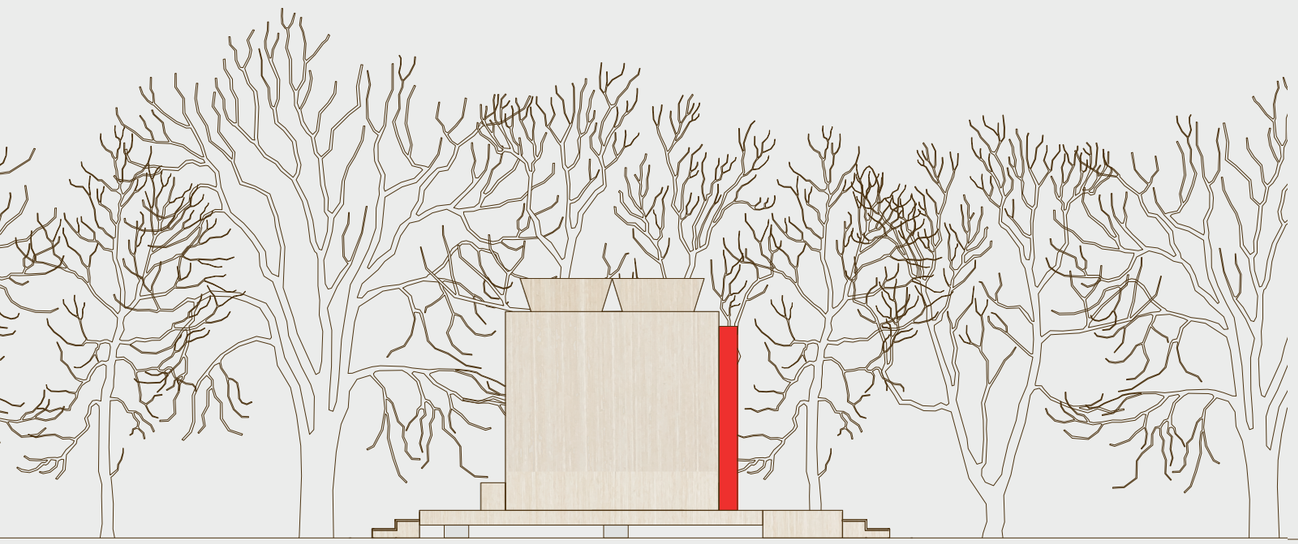
North view

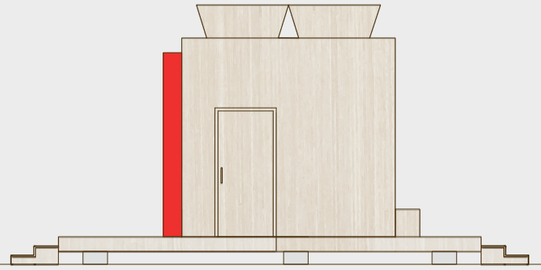
South view







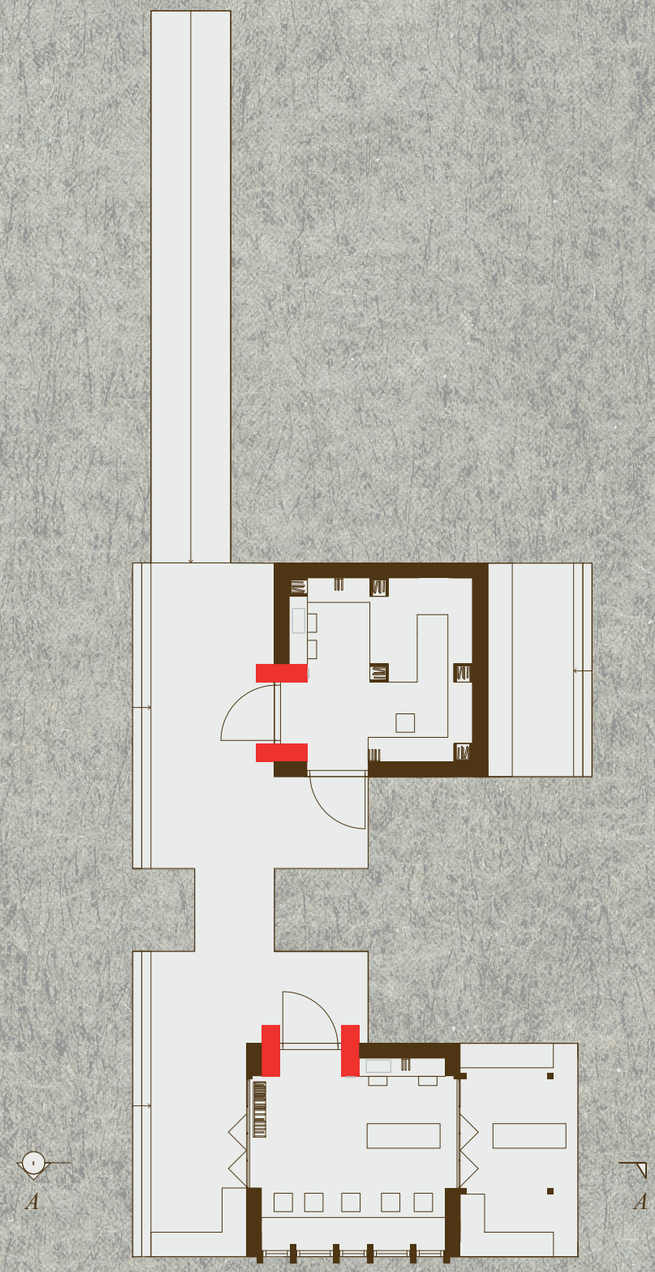






North facades
1:100

South facades
1:100



0 5 10 15 20

Plan
1:100



Section A - A
1:50



Open-air

Enclosed room

Seating- and room division by columns and beams

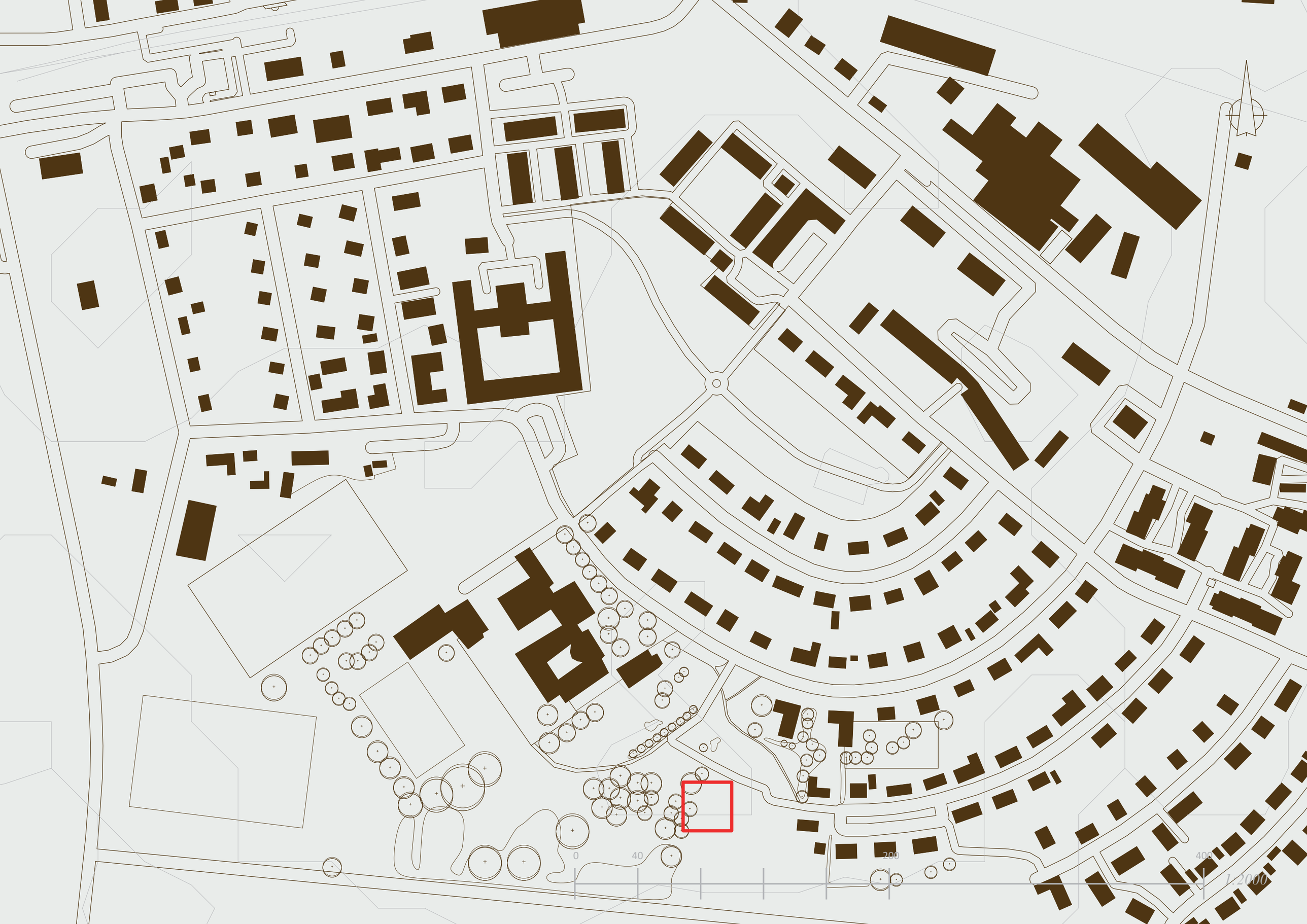
LIBRE GÄRSNÄS

Between dwelling, school and greenery

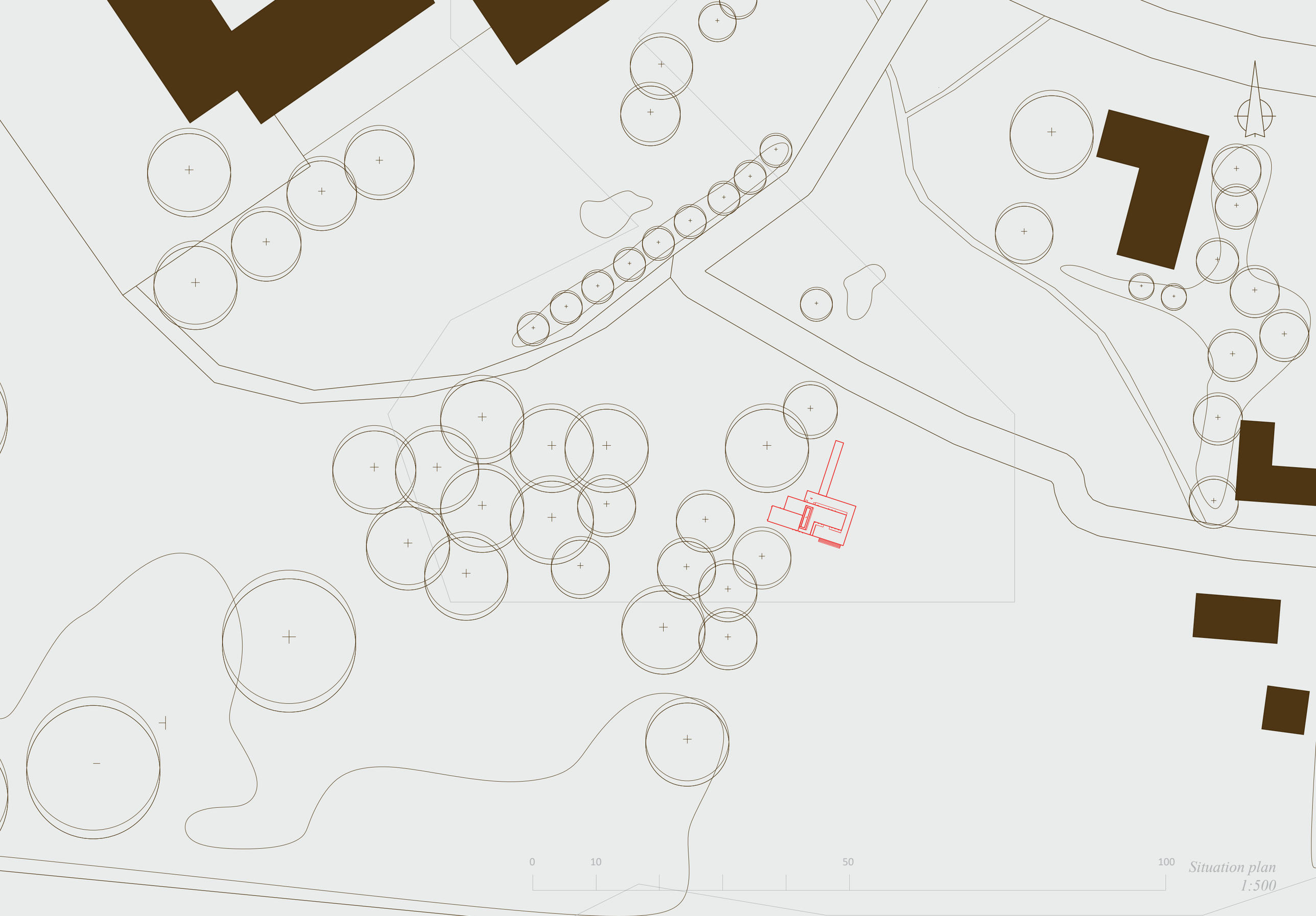
Between dwelling and the school and preschool in Kivik are natural areas and open fields. Here, the library room could also function as a study- and social space for the students and inhabitants after hours. People could bring a lunch back and use the small pentry to make coffee.

Since Gärnäs is known for furniture design in Sweden - the theme for the book collection could for example be furniture.

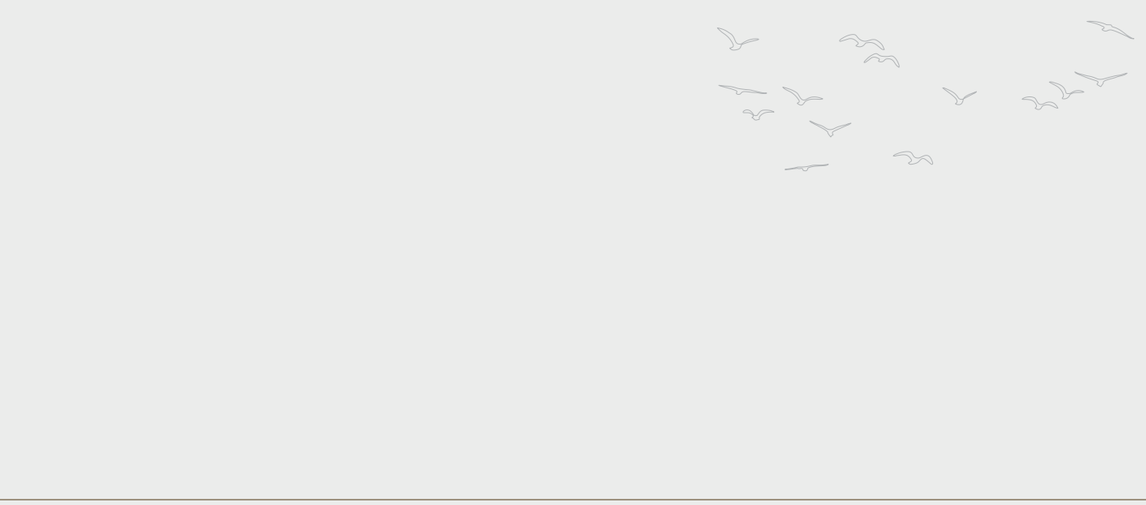

GÄRSNÄS
view towards open field
study room
view towards tree crowns
seating
seating room
WC
seating towards road/dwelling


0
40
200
400
1:2000

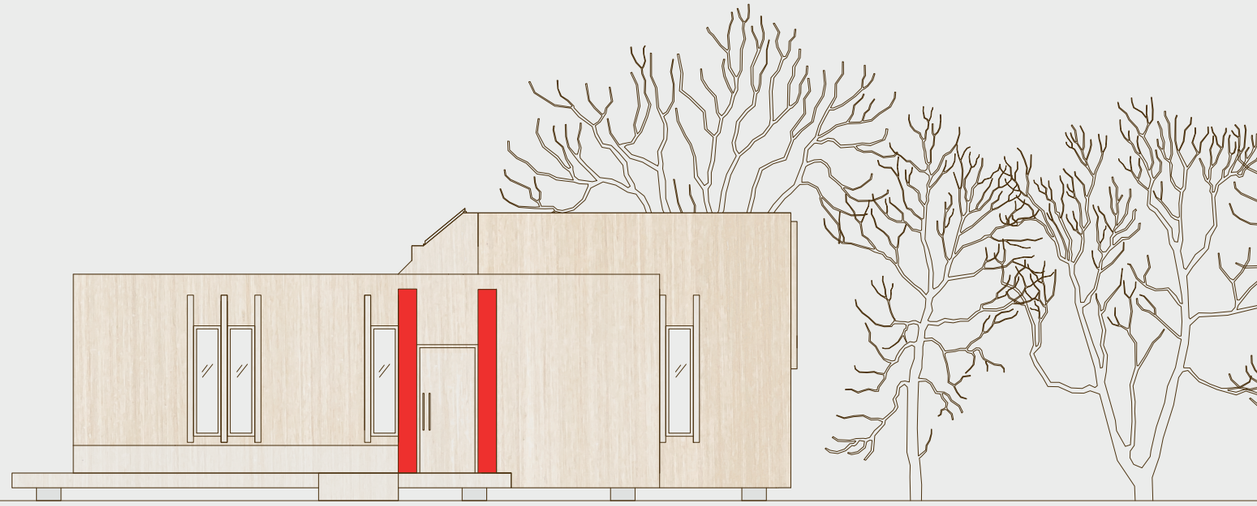

1. Sports area
2. School
3. Pre-School & playground
4. Footpath/biking trail
Green area
View towards open fields



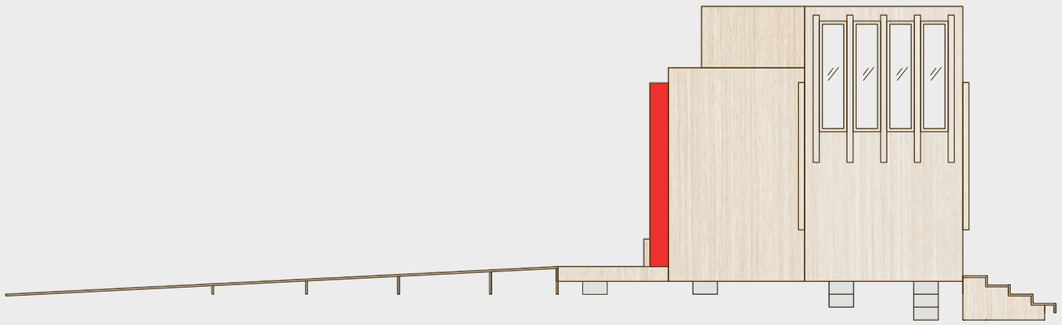
Situation plan
1:500



South facade
1:100

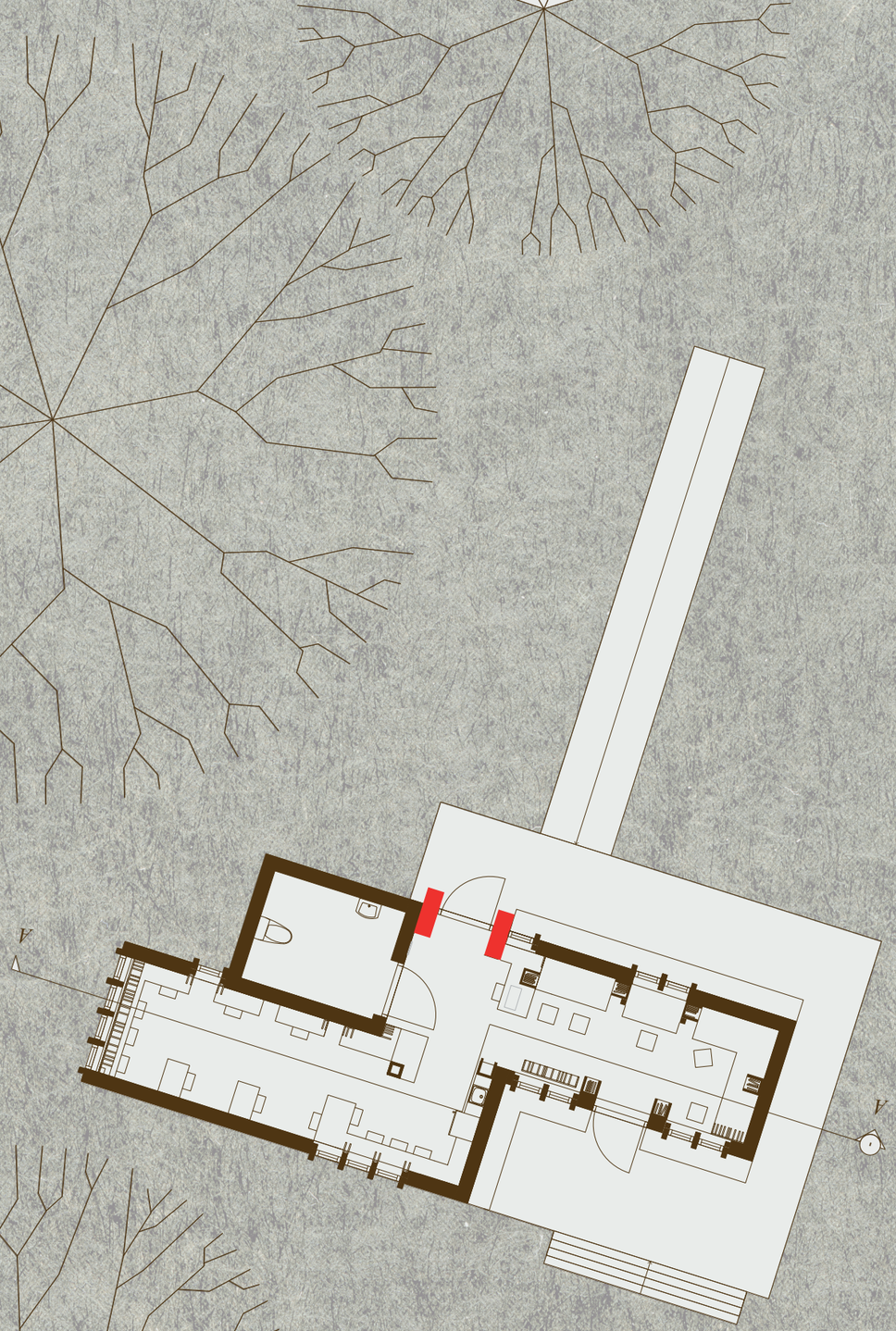


North facade
1:100



West facade
1:100

East facade
1:100



0 5 10 15 20

Plan
1:100



Section A - A
1:50



Clerestory window and integrated bookshelve

LIBRE SKILLINGE

By the commuter hub

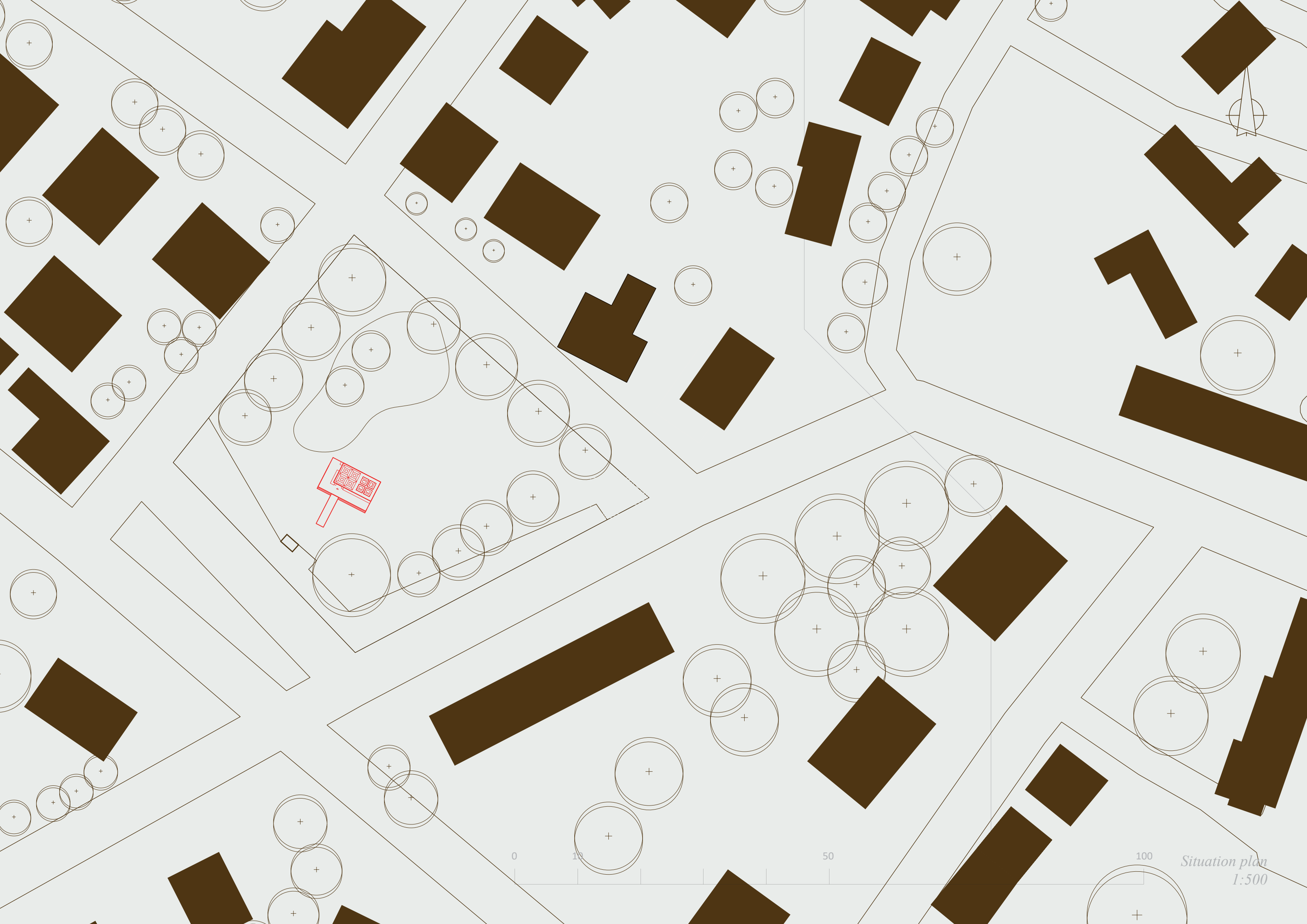
Close to the bus stop that connects to larger cities are some private art galleries. Here, the library room could follow the theme and therefore, also works as a small gallery that could be used for exhibitions by locals or students e.g. that people could visit while waiting for the bus.

The theme for the book collection could, for example, be art.

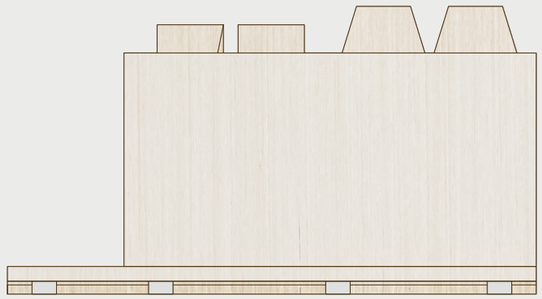

SKILLINGE
- diffused light
free plan/walls
outdoor furniture
trees
outside space
pm/evening
(connection to existing/temporary furniture)
open plan for exhibitions
social stair towards south
BUS STOP


0
40
200
400
1:2000

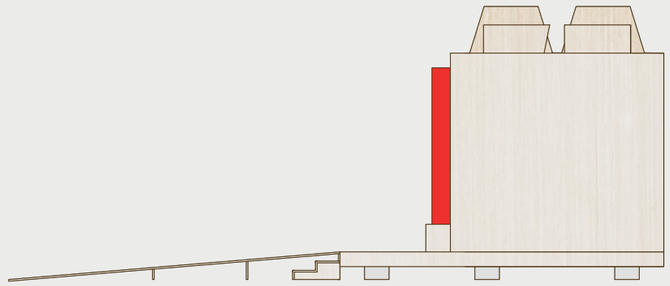

1. Bus stop
2. Playground
3. Private art gallery



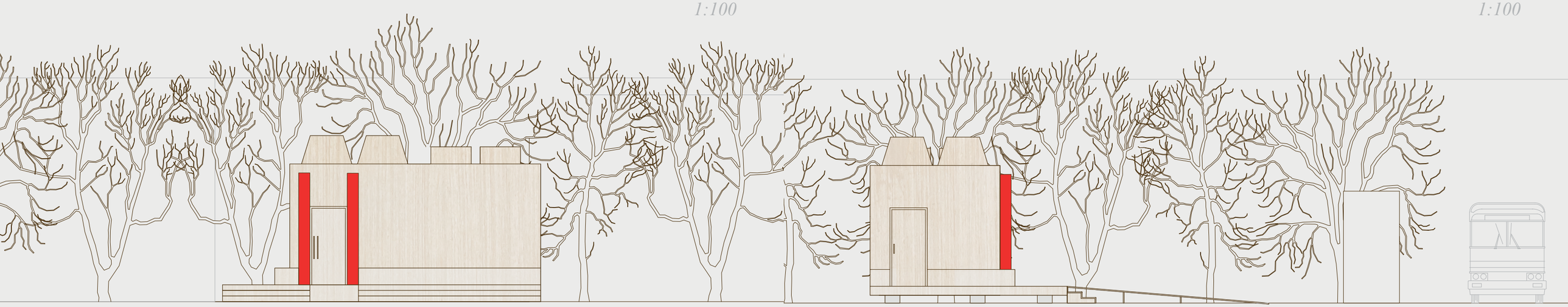
Situation plan
1:500



North facade
1:100

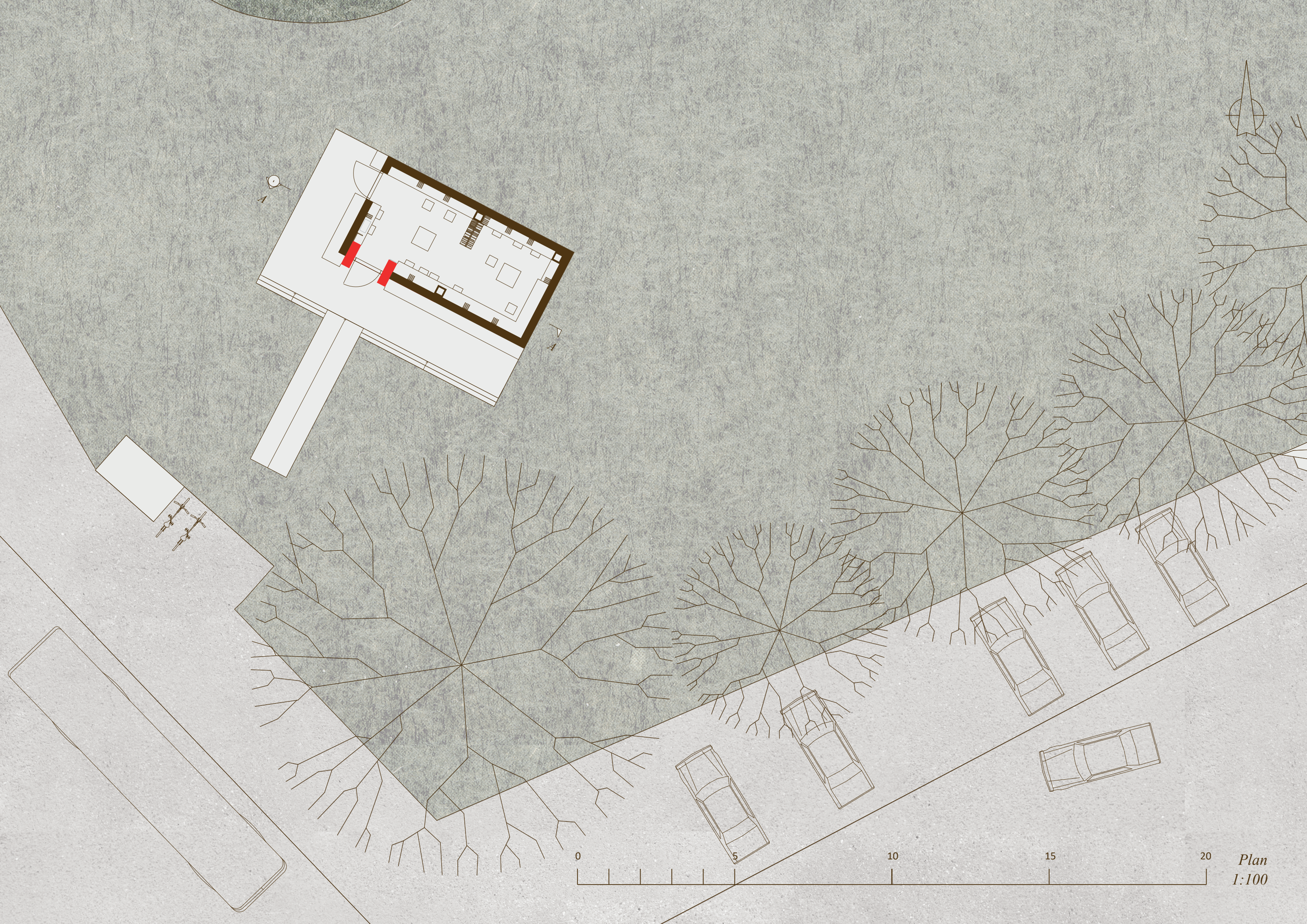


East facade
1:100



South facade
1:100

West facade
1:100



Plan
1:100



Section A - A
1:50



Different skylights define the open room



The book as meeting place

Chapter 8.

DISCUSSION

ARCHITECTURE AS A TOOL

Thoughts

In the introduction, Magritte´s paiting of a pipe was mentioned as a reference to the building blocks of a library and what a library can be. In this project, the building blocks are a clear set of components, the book being one of them. The components were a way to to fragment the library and to architecturally put it together as small as possible (costs/small sites/adaptable e.t.c) while aiming to keep its qualities.

One could say that the result could work a little bit as the painting - as something to evoke reflections.

The thought was to create something that could potentially contribute to the discussion for the development for libraries long-term. This is why the library rooms were considered from a regulatory perspective (public/community), architectural through the possibility to assembly the rooms to each site (municipality/community), societal through incorporating the community in process and operation (community/individuals) and artistic through the building as a sort of abstraction of the book/bookshelve.

Through creating an architecture project but within the frames of testing rather than solving - the process allowed to potentially find different angles on the library room. In a way, the buildings were much approached as large, weather protected public furniture (bench e.g.) - mostly due to the focus of the library as a meeting place and the book as an object, rather than storage of information.

Through the research and process, the conclusion was made that considering both more or less social spaces is not only a quality from the library room, but might also encourage more spontaneous/ inclusive interactions. This is why the furniture was designed to be both spacers in seating and space makers for books *(values: private/ public, interaction, tactility).*

Since the buildings can look/be assambled into different forms and would also house other activities - the project wanted to keep readability of the core function (library room) and therefore symbolizm was integrated into the design. The visual language of the furniture is recurring on the facade as pilasters (if there are windows) - with the entrances being most distinct as a recognizable element for the (buildings) concept.

Note

The integrated furniture would, through itself, ensure most furniture remain in the library rooms - providing consistent access to seating for visitors. The choice to build more open rooms with the components, allowing more flexible furniture, would of course also be possible.

The visualisations in the report show wooden cubes as loose seating - some of them work as exhibitions tables (Skillinge) and most of the cubes work as both small coffee tables or additional seating. All the cubes have the heights of 450 mm (standard height chair/coffee table) or 700 mm (standard height table). The cubes were mostly a way to show loose furniture in the visualisations - in real life they could be replaced with other stools (padded e.g.) or chairs with backrests.

CONCLUSIONS

Civic architecture

The library branches in Simrishamn closed due to costs and need of development, wheras the latter gave a notice of the importance of their built space.

The main difference between this project and ”normal” library branches, beside operation e.t.c, is that the architecture is dedicated to its purpose (as ”real” libraries are) rather than being a local in other buildings (which can also be good - but in this project the library rooms were not thought of as branches but more as ”small trees”). This could potentially enhance the significance of the library room itself and the access to it. While there are already different modular systems, this project followed that path but adjusted it specifically for the library room. Perhaps it could be possible to cooperate with exisitng modular systems/companies to develope components/rooms.

The design program might not be a solution that could be implemented (right away) but the result, process towards the final design and the design program could perhaps provide another perspective on forming future library concepts.

Through combining the library rooms with other activites that could serve the community, building with sustainable materials (lower regulation costs) and keeping it down to a dedicated small scale - perhaps the library *space* could be even more emphasized as something worth keeping, prioritizing and evolving instead of replacing with only its function as a provider of information (digital/mobile).

Space for libraries/library branches may not equate to space for squares, parks or nature in “immediate effect” on the urban/public space (or in costs) - but the library is one of the few free, democratic meeting places that is weather protected. Therefore, the library room might be something to look onto more as a natural part of a public space - regardless if it is a city or a village.

While different books are known to symbolize different meanings - the thought with this project is that the presence of books (and library rooms) would symbolize the purpose of the Swedish library system - free thinking and democracy - but in a smaller scale, with more flexibility and more connection to community engagement.

REFLECTIONS

Closing words

While the process was explorative - its outcomes were translated into a more direct design program. The project learned that an artistic and theoretical approach to a practical problem can open up new questions and alternative ways of thinking, which may be valuable in *developing* built environments or *addressing* practical challenges.

With further development, the library rooms could easily be scaled up slightly for more accessability in measurements and allow for a greater variety of seating options. However, the project serves as a minimal base to build upon.

The result of this project is not seen as a *final* result, rather as a starting point - something that could be used to discuss and develop further in collaboration with municipalities and the library sector.

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Image 5-8. Stockholms stad (2024). Om Stadsbiblioteket av Gunnar Asplund. Stockholms stadsbibliotek. Available at: https://biblioteket.stockholm.se/om-stadsbiblioteket-av-gunnar-asplund (17 May 2025)

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Libre



THE BOOK AS MEETING PLACE

Master thesis by Siri Boekhout

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