

Spatial Practices of Ageing Well in Place

Collaborative Housing Prototype in Quanfang Village



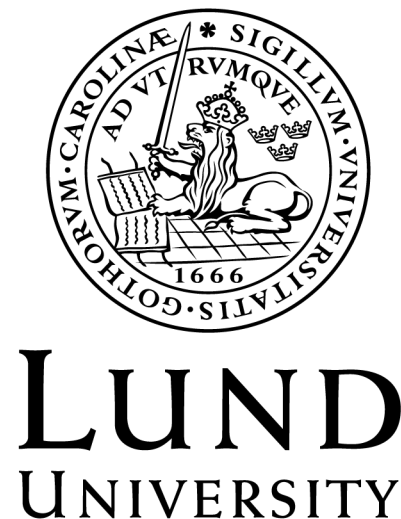
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ABSTRACT

As population ageing deepens and rural-urban migration continues, the practice of ageing in place in rural China is facing new housing challenges. Many older people prefer to continue living in familiar villages, but the out-migration of adult children has made family care less stable. Institutional care can provide structured support, but it does not always fit their living habits or emotional needs. This thesis project therefore focuses on how housing design can support ageing in place in low-income, kinship-based villages.

Taking Quanfang Village in Jiangxi Province as a case study, the thesis explores how collaborative housing can be translated through spatial design into a small-scale housing prototype. It brings together literature review and fieldwork to relate ageing in place, collaborative housing, everyday participation, and productive practices to older residents' everyday lives. Rather than directly copying existing collaborative housing models, the thesis treats collaborative housing as a set of spatial principles that need to be adapted to local conditions.

To make this adaptation more specific, the two key design concepts of threshold spaces and activity catalyst are proposed. The spatial interaction framework then summarises how everyday encounters, visual connections, and productive practices can be understood in spatial terms. These ideas are used to inform the later design strategies. The design therefore focuses on two main relationships: the transition between independent living and mutual support, and the connection between shared common spaces and the everyday practices older people are familiar with.

The final proposal is a small-scale collaborative housing cluster between the old village and the new village. It responds to older people's needs for independent living and daily interaction, while also using an incremental development strategy to adapt to local resources, residents' acceptance, and changing care needs in the future. In this sense, the housing cluster offers Quanfang Village a spatial response between family care and institutional care. It may also provide a useful design reference for ageing well in place in similar low-income, kinship-based villages.

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01 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 Housing Challenges in an Ageing Society

As population ageing continues, living environments are facing new pressures. For many older people, an ideal later life means continuing to live in a familiar home and community. This aspiration is often described as ageing in place (Pani-Harreman et al., 2021). The World Health Organization (2007) also recognises ageing in place as an important principle in discussions of age-friendly cities and housing policy.

Yet there is still a gap between older people’s wish to remain in familiar surroundings and the housing choices available to them in practice. The ordinary homes they currently live in may provide a sense of familiarity, but many were designed with younger, healthy, and mobile households in mind. They are therefore often unable to respond well to the physical changes and care needs that arise in later life (Tanner, Tilse and de Jonge, 2008). Institutional care can provide more comprehensive care, but this often comes at the cost of personal autonomy and privacy (Scott et al., 2003). It also often struggles to create the rhythm of everyday life found at home (Hauge and Heggen, 2008).

This situation points to an important housing challenge. The key issue in housing for older people is not simply how to provide more care facilities, but how to reorganise living space and strengthen neighbourhood support within a familiar living environment. For architectural design, this creates the need to explore a form of housing between ordinary homes and institutional care, so that older people can maintain independent living while still having daily interaction and necessary support.

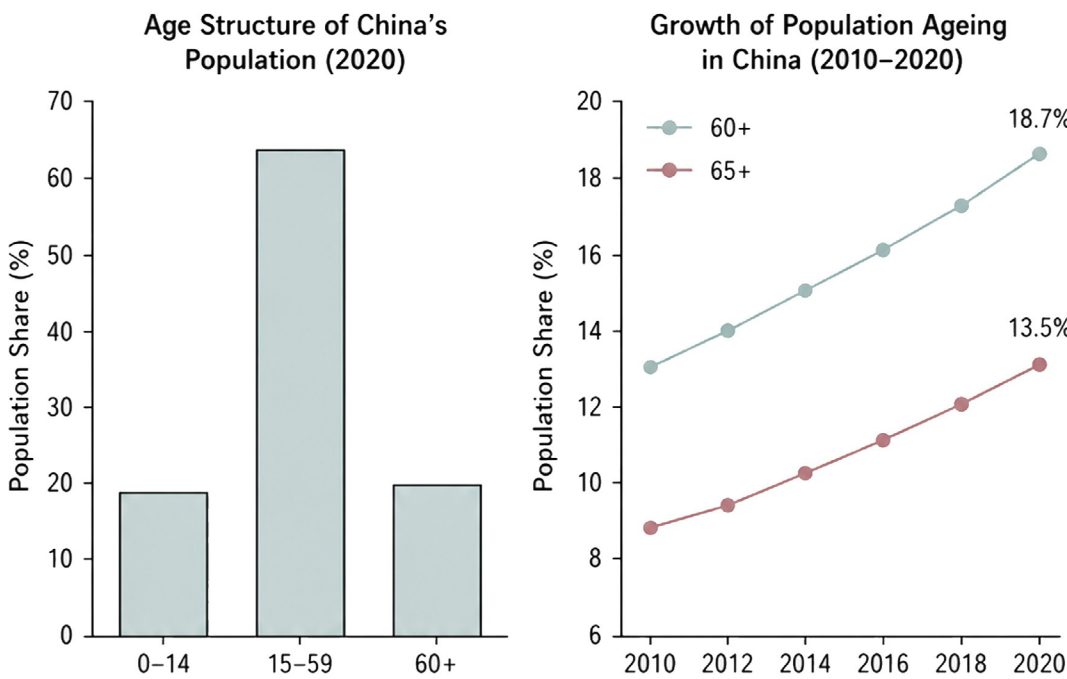


1.2 Population Ageing and the Weakening of Family-Based Care in Rural China

In China, population ageing and rural-urban migration have together changed the conditions of elderly care in rural areas (Zhang et al., 2022). According to the Seventh National Population Census, people aged 60 and above accounted for 18.70% of the total population in 2020, while those aged 65 and above accounted for 13.50% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). These figures indicate that China has already entered a stage of advanced population ageing. This trend is even more evident in rural areas. As large numbers of young adults move to cities for employment, the resident population of many villages now consists mainly of older people and children.

For a long time, the family has been an important basis of elderly care in rural China. Adult children usually take responsibility for financial support, daily care, and emotional companionship. But as they continue to leave for work, this family-based model of care has become less stable. Related studies show that when adult children leave for work, both the form and frequency of intergenerational support change (Guo, Chi and Silverstein, 2009; Zhang et al., 2022). Older people in rural areas may then face more uncertainty about who can provide daily care and emotional support, and who can help them in unexpected situations.

At the same time, many older people also hope to remain in their familiar villages rather than move into institutional care or live with their adult children. Community-based support has therefore become a more realistic option (Zhang and Zhang, 2023). For this kind of support to take place in practice, further thought is needed on how housing and neighbourhood spaces should be organised.



1.3 Problem Statement

Current discussions of elderly care in rural China focus mainly on policy and governance, service provision, and the operation of care facilities (Zhang and Zhang, 2023). Discussions from the perspective of architectural design remains limited. For low-income rural villages where kinship ties still exist, the main issue is not simply whether to build more care facilities or leave older people in unsuitable old houses. A more important question is how new forms of housing configuration can help older people live independently in a familiar village environment, while also allowing everyday interaction and mutual help to continue.

Collaborative housing offers one possible direction for addressing this problem. It focuses on the relationship between private living space and shared space, and also emphasises everyday participation and mutual support among residents (Arroyo, Yahia and Johansson, 2022). But for low-income, kinship-based villages in China, the key is not to adopt an existing model. It is to consider how its spatial principles can fit the local conditions.

1.4 Aim and Research Questions

This thesis project takes Quangiang Village in Jiangxi Province as a case study. Through fieldwork, literature review, and spatial design, it aims to explore a small-scale housing prototype suitable for low-income, kinship-based villages in China. Copying existing elderly care facilities or Western collaborative housing models is not what this project seeks to do. Instead, the project adapts these spatial principles through a new form of spatial organisation. In this way, living spaces can be integrated with everyday mutual support and shared activities.

The main research question is:

How can collaborative housing be spatially reinterpreted as a small-scale housing prototype to support ageing in place in low-income, kinship-based rural villages in China?

This main question is addressed through three sub-questions:

1. What everyday spatial practices, social relationships, and living preferences shape ageing in place in Quangiang Village?
2. Which collaborative housing principles are relevant to a low-income, kinship-based rural context in China, and how might they be spatially reinterpreted within this setting?
3. What spatial strategies can balance autonomy, privacy, and everyday interaction while supporting productive activities?

02 | EMPIRICAL STUDY: QUANFANG VILLAGE

2.1 Case Study Context

Quanfang Village is located in Jiangxi Province in southern China. It is a traditional village with a historical background dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties, and covers an area of about 4.61 square kilometres (Zeng, 2023). The village is surrounded by hills, farmland, and woodland, and its overall spatial structure remains relatively complete.

From a spatial perspective, the terrain of Quanfang Village slopes from north to south, shaping the overall layout of the settlement. Woodlands, farmland, and water systems are closely integrated, forming a layered spatial pattern of “fields-ponds-village-forest-hills” (Zeng, 2023). In recent years, changes in living needs have led to the expansion of housing toward the outer areas. New houses coexist with the original settlement, forming a spatial structure in which the old village is located in the southeast and the new village in the northwest.

The population structure of the village has changed significantly. A large number of working-age residents have moved out for employment. Younger families mainly live in the newly developed residential area, while older residents remain in the old village. As a result, the permanent population is now mainly composed of older adults and children. At the same time, some traditional houses in the old village lack regular maintenance, and their living conditions are relatively poor.

In terms of development, the traditional buildings in the old village have significant historical and cultural value and are a key focus of current conservation efforts. The government is promoting a gradual relocation of residents to newly developed housing areas through policy guidance and financial support. This aims to create better conditions for the preservation and restoration of the old buildings. These measures are still in progress. In the future, there are plans to introduce tourism-related programs and reuse the old village space, seeking a balance between heritage conservation and village development.

This project selected Quanfang Village as the case study site partly because it still retains the spatial features of a traditional rural settlement. More importantly, most of the rural ageing issues discussed in this thesis project can be clearly seen here: the population is ageing, family care capacity is becoming weaker, institutional care is not widely accepted, and most older people still hope to remain in the familiar village environment. At the same time, kinship ties and mutual help among neighbours have not disappeared in the village. These local conditions make it possible to explore a new form of living between family care and institutional care.



Current Land Use Map of Quanfang Village

Old village

The old village forms the earliest part of Quanfang Village, and its overall layout is relatively well preserved. The settlement is organised around a pond at the village entrance. Buildings are arranged along narrow lanes, forming a compact and organic village fabric. Most of these lanes are paved with stone and remain modest in scale.

The old village retains a large number of traditional buildings from the Ming and Qing dynasties and later periods, including public buildings as well as residential houses. Most of these buildings use brick-and-timber construction and follow a courtyard layout. Within the traditional houses, the spatial sequence usually moves from the entrance to the courtyard, and then to the main room.

At present, the residential function of the old village has weakened. Many buildings are vacant or only used occasionally. The houses that are still occupied are mainly home to older residents. Some buildings lack regular maintenance and show signs of deterioration, which makes the living conditions relatively poor. Despite these issues, the overall historic character of the old village remains intact. Its spatial structure is still clear, providing a solid basis for future repair and adaptive reuse. This also gives the old village potential for cultural display and tourism-related development.



New village

The new village is located in the northwestern part of the village and has gradually developed in recent years as the main residential area. As living needs have changed, villagers have built new houses in areas with better access and more available land.

The buildings are of modern construction, mostly two to three storeys in height. Compared with the old village, the spatial layout is more dispersed, with wider streets and more convenient circulation. Building forms are more varied, and the overall appearance is less unified, showing a clear difference from the traditional fabric of the old village.

Living conditions in the new village are relatively better, and infrastructure has been gradually improved. However, public spaces are still limited, and the village lacks clear activity centres or a clear hierarchy between different spaces.



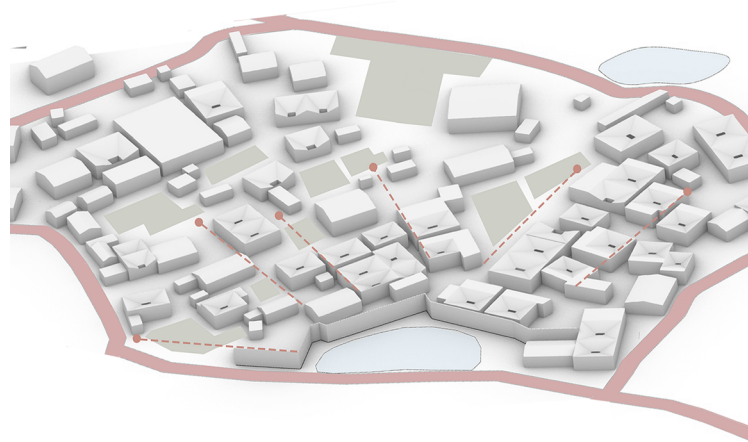
Nature View

Quangfang Village is located in a gently undulating rural landscape, surrounded by farmland, woodland, and bamboo groves. The overall natural environment is relatively well preserved. Farmland is mainly located on flatter land close to the residential areas, forming a productive landscape with a long history. Around the village, woodland and bamboo groves create dense vegetation coverage and provide a soft green background to the settlement.

At the village entrance, the pond and surrounding greenery form an important landscape node, as well as a main area for daily activities. The landscape here is shaped mainly by natural conditions and everyday agricultural use, rather than by large-scale intervention. Together, these elements give the village a continuous and quiet rural character.

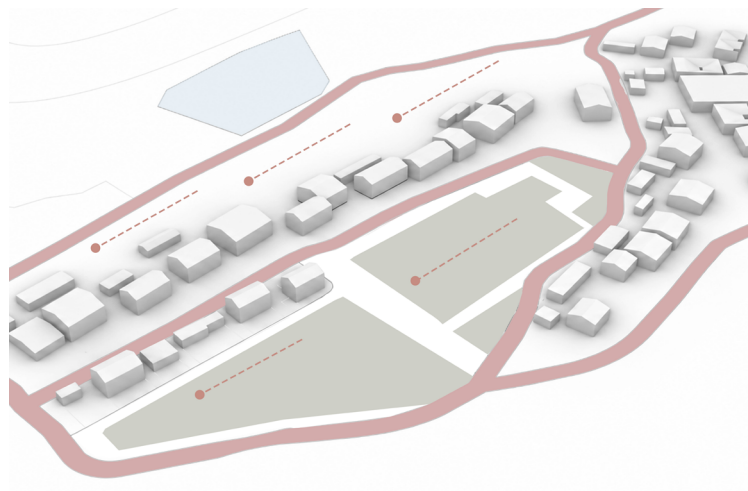


Old Village Fabric



The old village fabric is organised around the central pond, with buildings and lanes extending outward from the water space. This forms a relatively organic settlement pattern, shaped by daily movement. This spatial structure helps explain the role of public space in the village and its connection to everyday life.

New Village Fabric



The spatial fabric of the new village is organised mainly along the road network. Most buildings are positioned parallel to the main routes, creating a linear spatial structure with clear orientation. This arrangement forms a more direct relationship between the dwelling units and daily movement within the village.

Collage of the Old Village



Materials



Roof Tile



Brick



Bamboo



Wood

2.2 Methodology

This project unfolds through a series of processes that translate research into design. Rather than following a single linear approach, the methodology integrates literature review, site investigation, fieldwork, and design development to gradually establish connections between real-life contexts and spatial strategies.



01 LITERATURE REVIEW

I have read studies on ageing in place and collaborative housing to build a theoretical foundation. This helped me better understand what should be considered when designing housing for older residents to age in place.



02 SITE INVESTIGATION

I conducted an initial investigation of Quanfang Village and its surrounding context. This included the village structure, building patterns, public spaces, and natural conditions. It provided a basic understanding of the spatial context for the subsequent design.



03 FIELDWORK & INTERVIEWS

During a two-week fieldwork period, I observed daily life in the village and conducted interviews with older residents. These conversations revealed their routines, spatial practices, needs, and expectations for future living.



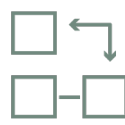
04 OBSERVATION & SPATIAL MAPPING

Through photography, mapping, and behavioral observation, I recorded everyday activities and patterns of spatial use. This helped me identify existing forms of interaction, spatial qualities, and potential issues within the village.



05 SYNTHESIS & INTERPRETATION

I organised and analysed the collected material, focusing on lifestyles, social relationships, productive activities, and spatial conditions. Key issues and opportunities were then identified and translated into spatial considerations.



06 DESIGN TRANSLATION

From this analysis, I developed a set of spatial principles and tested them through diagrams and design strategies. This process helped me connect behaviour, space, and interaction within a clearer design logic.



07 SPATIAL DESIGN

Finally, these strategies were integrated into a housing proposal that responds to the needs of older residents for independent living, everyday interaction, and mutual support.

This methodological path not only helps me understand the local context, but also ensures that the design emerges from real life rather than abstract assumptions.

2.3 Fieldwork Approach and Interviews

At the initial stage of the project, a two-week period of fieldwork was conducted in Quanfang Village. I visited different parts of the village and observed the overall spatial environment, living conditions, and residents' daily activities. These observations were recorded through notes, photographs, and simple spatial markings to develop a more direct understanding of the site.

Building on this, I interviewed several older residents who had lived in the village for many years. The conversations focused on their daily routines, housing choices, neighbourly relationships, health conditions, and views on future living arrangements. Through these discussions, I gradually understood how they live and move within the village, and how they balance independent living with mutual support.

Rather than focusing only on specific information, this process helped me build an overall understanding of the place. It allowed me to see how spaces are used, how people relate to each other, how daily interactions happen, and how productive activities are woven into everyday life. These on-site observations and interviews became a direct basis for the later design, allowing the project to respond to the realities of village life rather than starting from abstract assumptions.

Interview Structure 1: Elderly Villagers		
Legend: [Must ask] recommended for every participant [N-of-1] participant is encouraged to express their preference [Conditional] depending on time and conversation flow [PD] participatory design step		
Aspect	Focus (Why it matters)	Natural ways of asking
A. Basic background and life in the village [Must ask]	Age group and long-term relationship with the village	May I ask roughly how old you are? How long have you lived in Quanfang Village?
B. Current living location and reasons [Must ask]	Current residential choice: the old village or the new village	Do you mainly live in the old village or the new village now? Why did you choose to live here?
C. A typical day [Must ask]	Everyday rhythm of ageing in place	What is a normal day like for you? Where do you usually spend most of your time during the day?
D. Physical condition and mobility [Must ask]	How ageing affects daily activities and space use	How is your physical condition these days? Is walking, climbing steps, or cooking more difficult than before?
E. What supports ageing well in place [Must ask]	Key factors that allow continued living in the village	What is most important for you about living here? Is there anything you feel you cannot live without in this place?
F. Difficulties and changes with ageing [Must ask]	Where ageing in place starts to break down	What feels most tiring or difficult in daily life now? Compared to before, what has become harder?
G. Suitability of the current dwelling [Must ask]	Whether the house still fits current ageing needs	Does your home still suit your life now? Are there spaces you use less than before?
H. Daily routes and place mapping [Must ask] [PD]	Actual spatial network of everyday life	[Map] Could you mark places you often go to and places you rarely go to?
I. Attitudes toward the old village vs. the new village [Must ask] [N-of-1]	Emotional attachment versus functional reality	If there were no constraints, where would you prefer to live? 1 Old village 2 New village 3 Either 4 Not sure. Why?

Aspect	Focus (Why it matters)	Natural ways of asking
J. Views on previous renovation proposals [Conditional]	Whether past designs addressed elderly needs	Do you remember earlier renovation plans for the old village? Did they help older residents? Was anything important overlooked?
K. Everyday support and mutual help [Must ask]	Existing informal care and collaboration	Who do you usually rely on when you need help? Do neighbours support each other in daily life?
L. Attitudes toward living close and mutual support [Must ask] [N-of-1]	Spatial logic of siting a new project	If older people lived closer together and could support each other, how would you feel? 1 Very positive 2 Acceptable 3 Unwilling 4 Not sure
M. Preferred location for a new shared living place [PD]	How ageing affects daily activities and space use	[Map] If there were a new place for older residents, where should it be located? Why?
N. Building form and neighbour relationships [Must ask] [PD]	Balance between privacy and interaction	[Diagrams] Which layout do you prefer most? Which do you dislike? Why?
O. Essential spaces and facilities for ageing [Must ask] [PD]	Minimum requirements for a new living environment	If you moved into a new place, what spaces or facilities must be included?
P. Attitudes toward reuse of the original house [Conditional] [N-of-1]	Acceptance of reuse and income generation	If you moved to a more convenient place and your original house was managed and reused, how would you feel? 1 Yes 2 Depends 3 No 4 Not sure
Q. Overall future living choice [Must ask]	Whether relocation could be considered	If the conditions were right, would you consider a different way of living? What matters most?
R. Open ending and additional thoughts [Must ask]	Space for unexpected perspectives	Is there anything important about ageing or living here that I haven't asked?



During the fieldwork in Quanfang Village, I interviewed several older residents to better understand their needs and expectations around housing and care. The following images show three groups of interviewees who agreed to be photographed.



The first older resident I interviewed was a 76-year-old woman. She has lived in the village for around fifty years. She has three children, all of whom have started their own families and now work in other cities. At present, she lives with her husband in their house in the old village.

When I interviewed her, she and her husband were processing bamboo shoots. Their children were going to visit them in a few days, and the food was prepared for them. During our conversation, she told me that she still preferred to live separately from her children, as she did not want to become a burden to them.



This interviewee was a 67-year-old man. When I interviewed him, he was sitting and chatting with several other older residents in the village. He told me that his children had already moved to the new village, while he now lives in the old house. He prefers to live independently because he feels that his daily habits are different from those of his children. For him, living separately is more convenient.



When I interviewed these two women, it was raining. They were sitting with several other villagers under the covered corridor. It was during this conversation that I learned the village had once organised a communal dining hall, but it closed after a few months due to issues such as funding and management. They said that cooking and eating together had been a good activity, and that it was a pity the dining hall could not continue in the long term.



2.4 Productive Activities

During the fieldwork, I found that older residents are not only involved in social and leisure activities, but also continue to take part in a range of productive tasks. These activities can provide some additional income for their households. More importantly, they allow older people to remain active in everyday life, rather than being positioned only as people who need care. These activities often extend beyond the home and bring residents into shared spaces. As people move, stay, and work around these spaces, everyday tasks create chances for casual encounters, short conversations, and mutual support. This makes productive activities a useful starting point for spatial design.

Harvest drying was one typical practice observed in the village. After the harvest, residents spread crops such as chilli peppers, corn, and tea leaves on rooftops, in courtyards, or in front of their houses to dry. This process often lasts for several weeks or even longer. During this time, residents need to turn, sort, and check the crops regularly. These repeated actions keep the spaces in use over time. They also make the drying process visible to others, creating chances for neighbours to meet, talk, or offer help.



Sources of online photographs in this section: China Daily (2025), Sohu Travel (2025), and Sohu (2017). Full details are listed in Image References.



Planting: Many older residents grow vegetables in their own courtyards or on nearby open plots. This helps meet daily food needs and maintain a connection to the land. As the planting often takes place in open areas, residents can see and talk to neighbours while looking after the plants.



Food Processing: Food processing includes activities such as making dried bamboo shoots, drying tea leaves, and processing rice noodles. These activities often take time and involve several steps. They usually take place in kitchens. Because the process is not completed at once, it keeps the space in use for a longer period and creates chances for people to stay, talk, and work together.



Bamboo Crafting: In the village, bamboo is a common local material, and residents use it to make simple tools and small pieces of furniture. These activities usually take place in front of their houses. They require a relatively large working area, but there is currently no dedicated space in the village designed for this kind of activity.



Firewood Preparation & Crop Handling: In the rural context, older residents continue to take part in basic tasks such as organising firewood, sorting crops, and storing harvested produce. These activities usually take place around the house or in semi-open spaces. They require space for stacking, sorting, and handling materials, with firewood and tools often temporarily placed around the house.

2.5 Fieldwork Insights

During the fieldwork in Quanfang Village, a range of design-related information was collected. I organised these findings into three main categories: Demographics & Living Patterns, Social Fabric & Activities, and Care Challenges. The diagram below summarises these findings in more detail.



1. Demographics & Living Patterns

- The village is mainly inhabited by older residents, with around 45 to 55 older adults currently living there. A smaller number of grandchildren also live in the village, making up about 15–20% of the total population.
- Most older residents have a strong wish to age in place. They prefer to maintain their familiar routines and live as independently as possible, rather than relying heavily on their children.
- The village committee had previously set up a communal dining hall, but it closed after a short period and did not continue as a long-term service. Although many older residents found it useful and meaningful, it was located away from their daily routines and depended heavily on external support. Many residents expressed regret about its closure.



2. Social Fabric & Activities

- The village is rooted in kinship and long-term familiarity. Most villagers are connected through extended family networks, which has created a culture of trust and informal mutual support.
- Older adults remain active and independent. Daily social interaction happens naturally through routines, such as chatting at doorsteps, passing by neighbours, and helping with small tasks.
- Many older residents engage in productive activities such as farming, harvest drying, craft making, and food processing. These activities support household income and give meaning to everyday life.
- These activities are also closely linked to specific spaces, creating opportunities for visibility, encounter, and informal support.



3. Care Challenges

- As adult children leave the village for work, family-based care is no longer always consistent or available.
- Current alternatives, such as surveillance cameras and neighbour alerts, can help in some situations, but they usually respond only after a problem has already happened.
- At the same time, common privacy practices, such as closed doors and inward-facing layouts, limit casual encounters and make it harder for neighbours to check in on each other.
- There is a growing gap between the village's existing culture of mutual support and its current spatial conditions, which no longer adequately support everyday interaction.

03 | LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Ageing in Place

Ageing in place has been a central concept in ageing studies. Many older people, families and policymakers support this idea because it allows older adults to stay in familiar surroundings (Wiles et al., 2012). However, the term is not used in exactly the same way across the literature. In its most common sense, ageing in place refers to older people continuing to live in their own home or community, rather than moving into institutional care (Wiles et al., 2012). Earlier studies and discussions often placed the home at the centre. They paid more attention to housing adaptations and support provided within the dwelling itself (Wiles et al., 2012; Grove, 2021).

Yet older people's daily lives extend well beyond their front doors, so ageing in place cannot be reduced to simply staying inside a housing unit. Wiles et al. (2012) found that older adults themselves often make sense of the concept through home, neighbourhood, and community. These spaces help maintain their sense of familiarity, independence, and belonging. Pani-Harreman et al. (2021) approach the issue in a different way, breaking it down into place, social networks, support, technology, and personal characteristics. Both studies show that ageing in place hinges as much on social support as on spatial conditions. This also means that older adults' ability to age well in place depends largely on whether they can keep up everyday routines, stay in touch with neighbours, and receive support from family or the community when needed.

Therefore, ageing in place cannot be simply seen as an ideal way of ageing. It is better understood as a dynamic balance between personal competence, spatial conditions and available resources (Grove, 2021). If the environment older people currently live in does not accommodate their changing physical conditions and needs well, they may still face mobility limitations and emotional vulnerability, even if they remain in place. Familiarity does not equal suitability. To support ageing well, the key question is how the existing living environment can be adjusted and supplemented so that older people can continue living in the community.

Due to the growing demand for ageing in place, China has developed an elderly care service model in which home care forms the basis, community care provides support, and institutional care plays a supplementary role (Zhang and Zhang, 2023). Existing studies have focused more on how ageing in place can be applied in urban communities, while its practice and theoretical discussion in rural areas remain limited. Villages now face problems such as the out-migration of adult children, weaker family care capacity, and relatively poor housing quality. These issues make ageing in place more complex in rural areas. Some pilot villages have already begun to develop elderly care facilities such as happiness homes, day care centres, and mutual-support organisations for older people (Zhang and Zhang, 2023). Yet these practices are mainly discussed from the perspective of service provision and operation, with less attention paid to architectural design.

This thesis project therefore approaches the topic from the perspective of housing design. It explores how spatial organisation can support ageing in place in low-income, kinship-based villages. For Quanfang Village, this means that older people do not necessarily need to remain in their original homes. A small-scale housing model that brings together living spaces, shared spaces, and the surrounding environment may better support them in continuing to live in a familiar place.

3.2 Collaborative Housing

Collaborative housing is an umbrella term that encompasses different housing types including cohousing, collective housing, ecovillages, and intentional communities (Vestbro, 2010, cited in Arroyo, Yahia and Johansson, 2022). Arroyo, Yahia and Johansson (2022) note that collaborative housing and cohousing are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature, and there is no full agreement on where the boundary between the two concepts lies. In the Swedish context, collaborative housing refers to “a multi-family building with normally equipped apartments with kitchen, living room and bedrooms, which also has common premises where the residents can cook and eat together, carry out a hobby or just socialize. Residents decide themselves what and how much they do together” (Grip et al., 2015, cited in Arroyo, Yahia and Johansson, 2022). This definition shows that collaborative housing is not only about shared facilities. Its focus also lies in making everyday interaction and mutual support easier through spatial organisation, while keeping clear boundaries for private life.

In studies on housing for older people, collaborative housing is worth discussing because it offers another option besides family care and institutional care. Fernández Arrigoitia et al. (2025) point out that this type of housing can help older people socialise more and stay physically active through everyday mutual support. It can also make up for some of the limitations of family support and institutional care. In this sense, collaborative housing is linked to ageing in place not by keeping older people in their original homes, but by reorganising living arrangements so that they can continue to live in the community in a more sustainable way.

The benefits of collaborative housing do not happen simply because shared spaces are provided. Whether it works well in practice also depends to a large extent on residents' willingness to participate, their ability to negotiate, and their capacity to develop effective rules for shared management (Arroyo, Yahia and Johansson, 2022). Differences in residents' participation and daily practices across projects can directly affect the actual outcomes. For this reason, the area and number of shared spaces should not be the only measures when designing this type of housing. What matters more is whether the shared common spaces are easy to reach, useful in everyday life, and able to support natural interaction among residents.

In the Chinese context, collaborative housing is still rarely discussed as a clear type of housing for older people (Li, 2016). But this does not mean that rural China lacks the local conditions that could support it. Many rural areas like Quanfang Village still retain kinship ties, acquaintance networks, and habits of mutual help among neighbours. These conditions make shared living and informal support easier to achieve (Zhang and Zhang, 2023). However, typical examples of collaborative housing and senior cohousing have mainly developed in European and North American contexts. These projects often serve middle-class residents, and the projects usually depend on well-developed cooperative organisations and a strong basis of resident self-governance (Arroyo, Yahia and Johansson, 2022; Fernández Arrigoitia et al., 2025). This situation does not fit well with the reality of low-income, kinship-based villages in China. For this reason, this thesis project does not directly copy existing Western models of collaborative housing, but tries to translate the idea into a form of housing that better fits rural China.

3.3 Everyday Participation and Productive Practices

When discussing later life, older people are often first seen as people who need care. Yet later life is not only shaped by care and safety needs. The active ageing framework proposed by the World Health Organization (2002) also sees participation as an important part of improving quality of life in later years. This means that the living environment needs to meet older people's basic needs while also supporting their continued participation in daily activities.

However, this kind of participation does not necessarily need to depend on formally arranged group activities. Levasseur et al. (2010) reviewed different definitions of social participation and suggested that its quality depends not only on the form of activity, but also on whether it helps people interact with others in a meaningful way. Scholars have also looked beyond common leisure activities and paid attention to other forms of participation. For example, Baker et al. (2005) link productive activities with older people's subjective well-being. They argue that these activities can have a positive effect on older people's lives by strengthening social integration and providing meaningful social roles.

This discussion is especially important for Quanfang Village. The field study in Chapter 2 shows that older people's daily lives there do not mainly depend on leisure activities, but are closely linked to productive activities such as planting, food processing, drying, and handicrafts. These activities are a real part of older residents' everyday life. They give them a reason to leave their private rooms, stay in nearby spaces, and come into natural contact with others. The thesis treats the ability to accommodate productive activities as an important condition in the design of shared spaces, so that older residents can interact naturally in everyday life and mutual support can become possible. This understanding forms the starting point for the Activity Catalyst proposed in later sections.

04 | DESIGN TRANSLATION

4.1 From Literature and Fieldwork to Spatial Strategies

This section translates the literature review in Chapter 3 and the fieldwork in Chapter 2 into spatial design strategies. The literature review provides the conceptual direction for the project, while the fieldwork relates these ideas to the actual conditions of Quanfang Village.

Based on the literature review in Chapter 3, this project develops three main points:

- Ageing in place should not be understood as simply continuing to live in one’s original house. It refers to older people’s ability to maintain daily life in a familiar environment, keep social connections, and receive support when needed.
- Collaborative housing is not treated here as a model that can be copied directly, but as a set of spatial principles that need to be adapted. What matters for this project is not a fixed housing layout, but the way it helps to think about the balance between private life and shared space. This then supports the development of a small-scale housing prototype that better fits the local context.
- The discussion of everyday participation and productive practices shows that older people should not only be seen as people waiting for care. They also maintain their own rhythm of life through daily activities. Therefore, the shared spaces in this project should not simply be designed as ordinary activity rooms. They need to be connected with the everyday practices that local older people are familiar with and still continue.

Based on the points developed from the literature review, the findings from the fieldwork are further translated into spatial principles and design responses. The following table shows how the research basis is turned into spatial strategies.

FIELDWORK INSIGHT		SPATIAL PRINCIPLE		DESIGN RESPONSE
 Strong preference for independent living	→	 Enable autonomy through spatial separation	→	 Private dwelling units with optional shared access
 Reliance on informal support networks	→	 Support mutual awareness through visual proximity	→	 Porch and balcony thresholds with oriented openings
 Everyday interaction embedded in daily routines	→	 Encourage everyday encounters through transitional spaces	→	 Semi-open corridors and small-scale shared courtyards
 Productive activities as part of daily life	→	 Activate shared activities through collective courtyards	→	 Shared productive courtyards for daily activities
 Low-income conditions and uncertain acceptance	→	 Allow incremental growth over time	→	 Phased cluster expansion strategies

4.2 Key Design Concepts

01 THRESHOLD SPACES

Threshold spaces refer to the use and configuration of different spatial elements to create a clear transition between private spaces and shared spaces. In the design, I do not want each space to be separated in a simple or rigid way. Instead, I aim to create a series of spatial layers that can adjust visibility, distance, and the degree of interaction.

In this project, porches, balconies, corridors, and entrance areas are designed as important threshold spaces. They provide opportunities for everyday encounters, while also maintaining the privacy and sense of security that residents need.

By creating a gradual transition between private and shared areas, these spaces allow older residents to remain aware of the people and activities around them without feeling directly exposed or disturbed. In this way, threshold spaces help connect independent living with communal life, making the relationship between private space and shared daily life more natural.

02 ACTIVITY CATALYST

Activity Catalyst refers to using everyday activities as a way to encourage the use of shared spaces and interaction between residents. Rather than simply providing an activity room and expecting residents to carry out fixed activities there, I want the activities themselves to become the reason why people enter shared spaces, stay there, and communicate with others.

In the village, activities such as food processing, small-scale planting, and handcrafting are common parts of daily life. Designing from these activities can respond to the practical needs of older residents, while also making shared spaces more relevant to everyday life.

When these activities take place, residents are not just completing a task. They may chat together or help each other while working. In this way, these activities can keep shared spaces in regular use and gradually support more stable neighbourly relationships and mutual support.

05 | SPATIAL INTERACTION FRAMEWORK

In the previous section, I translated field observations into spatial design principles. However, these principles remained relatively conceptual and could not be applied directly to the design. In this section, I therefore use a series of diagrams to further analyse the relationships between daily activities, interaction patterns, and different spatial types.

First, I start from basic behavioural states and divide interaction in daily activities into three levels: Pass, Pause, and Stay. Each behaviour corresponds to different spatial needs, while different spatial configurations can also encourage new forms of interaction.

I then focus on visibility and interaction between people, examining three conditions: direct participation, controlled visibility, and indirect awareness. This helps me understand how different types of threshold spaces can create varying degrees of visual interaction, which then shape how people experience and use the space.

Finally, I focus on productive activities. In most existing collaborative housing projects, shared spaces are mainly designed for leisure-based activities. However, this does not fully respond to the rural context of this project. Compared with activities such as reading, watching films, or playing music, productive activities are more closely related to the daily lives of older residents here. These activities, such as cooking and farm-related work, can provide some additional income for older residents. They also encourage interaction and mutual support between residents. Therefore, it is useful for the next stage of design to explore what kinds of spaces different productive activities require, and how different spatial arrangements may influence the ways people interact with each other.

These diagrams are not direct representations of the final design. Instead, they work as intermediate testing tools. They help me visualise the relationships between behaviour, space, and interaction, and allow me to understand how people connect, keep distance, or collaborate under different spatial conditions. The three diagrams developed in this section will be used as a catalogue of spatial forms for the design proposal. In the following sections, I will refer to the numbering system in these diagrams to clearly show which spatial forms or interaction patterns are applied to each part of the proposal.

DIAGRAM SERIES

01

**INTERACTION TYPES
AND SPATIAL CONDITIONS**
behavioural states and spatial support

02

**VISUAL INTERACTION
AND SPATIAL MEDIATION**
visibility gradients and social awareness

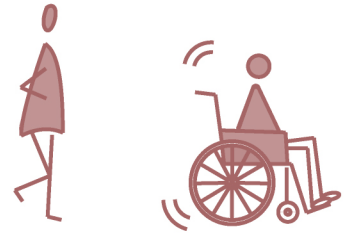
03

**PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES
AND SPATIAL TRANSLATION**
activities, spatial conditions,
and interaction modes

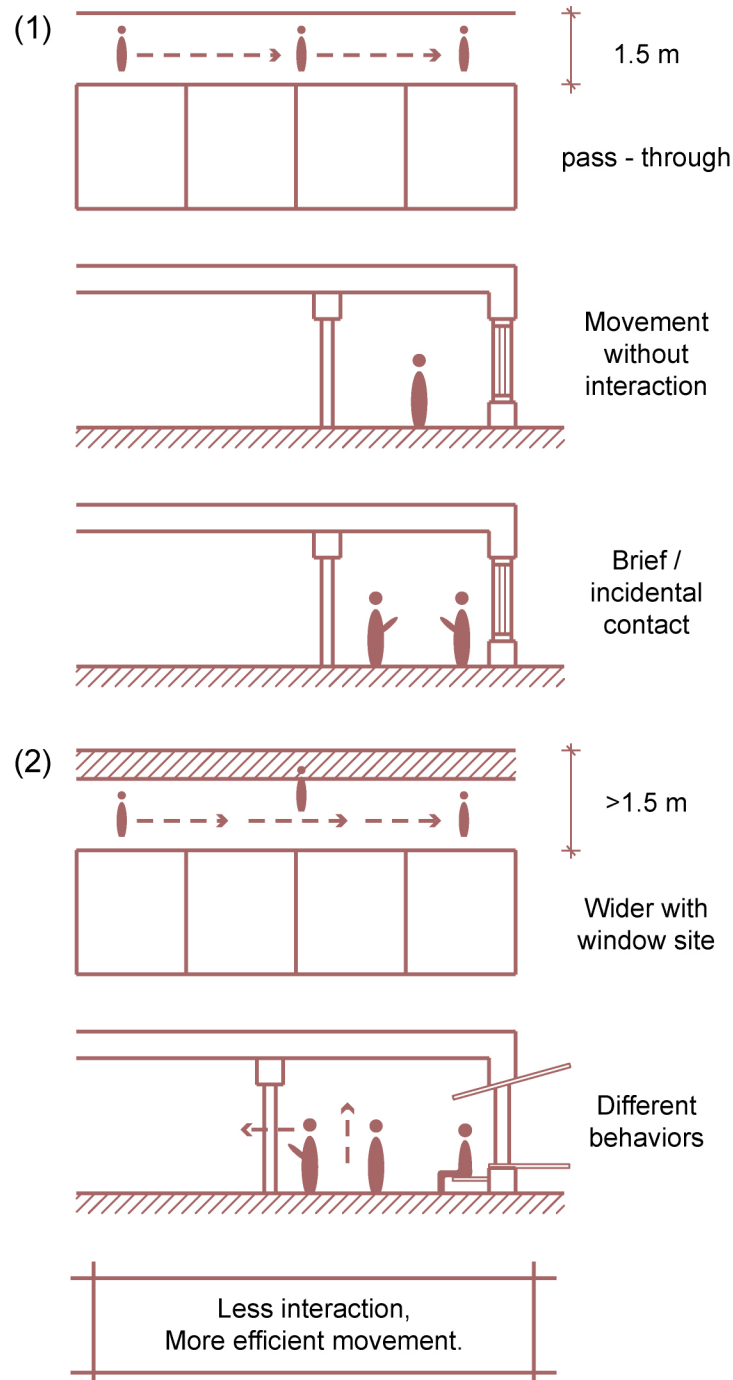
Diagram 1 : Interaction Types and Spatial Conditions

Space shapes behavior, and different interactions demand different spaces.

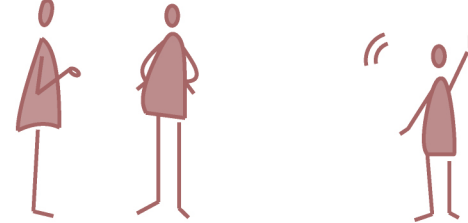
A. PASS



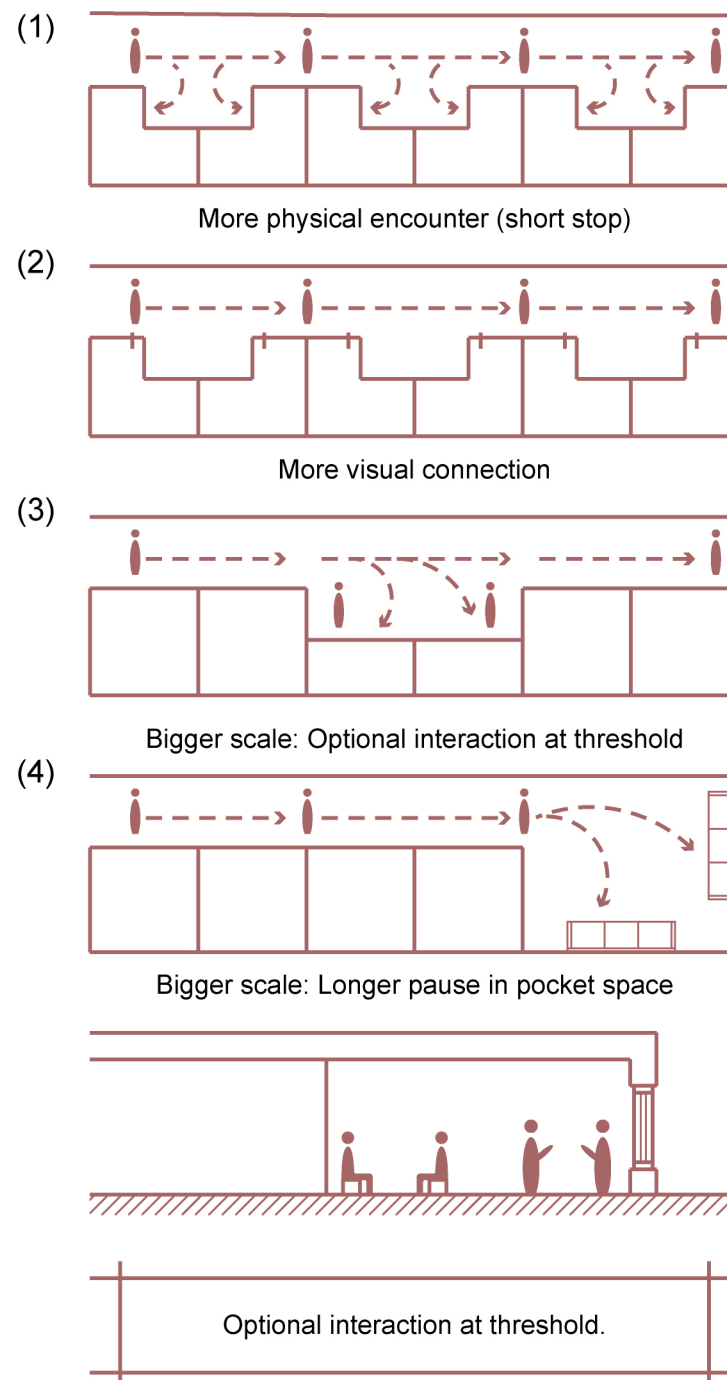
1. Corridor



B. PAUSE



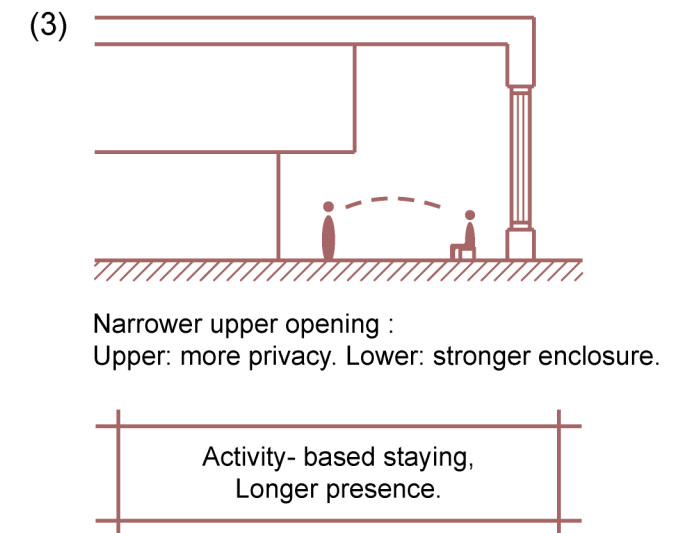
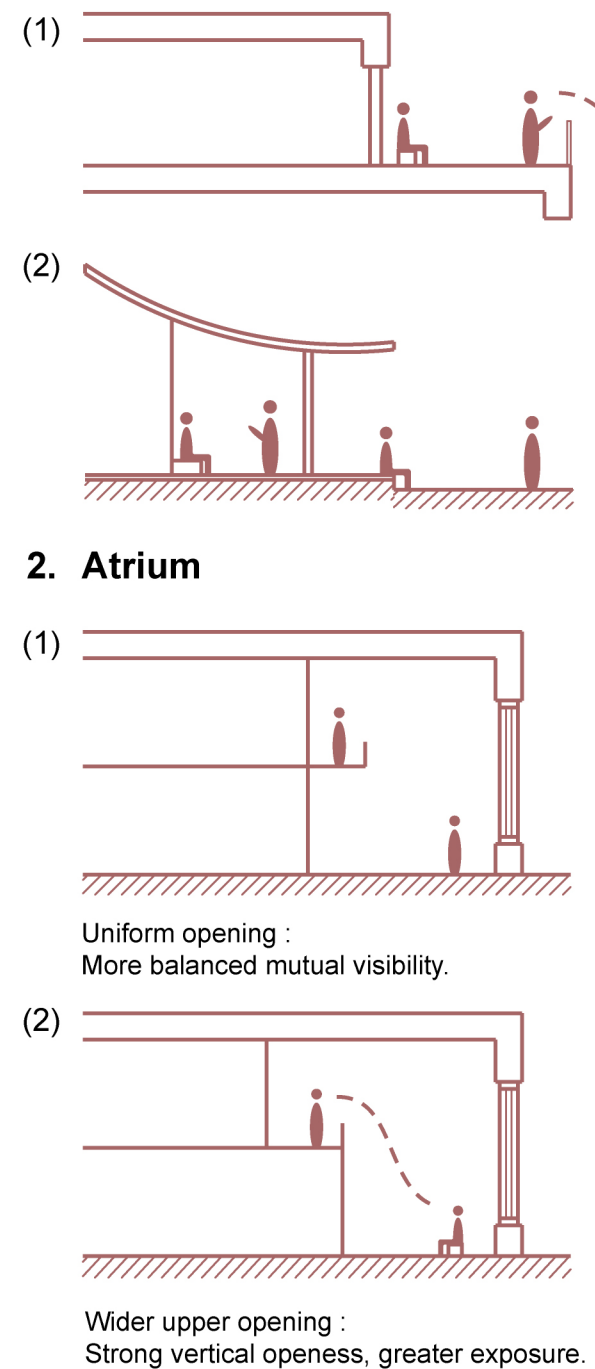
1. Porch / Pocket Space



C. STAY



1. Balcony / Terrace



3. Courtyard

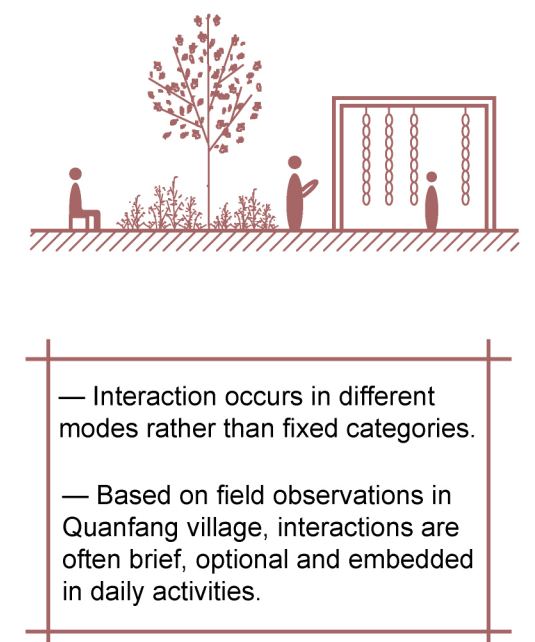


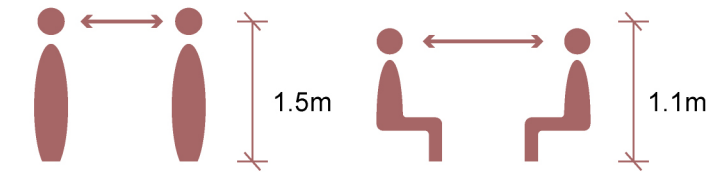
Diagram 2 : Visual Interaction and Spatial Mediation

Visual interaction ranges from direct engagement to indirect awareness, allowing different levels of social connection.

A. DIRECT ENGAGEMENT

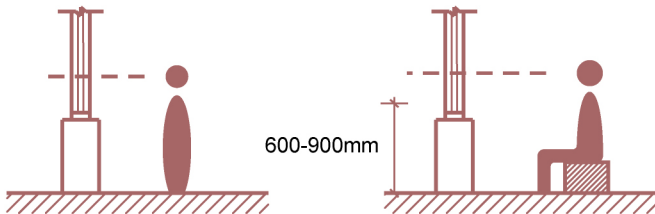
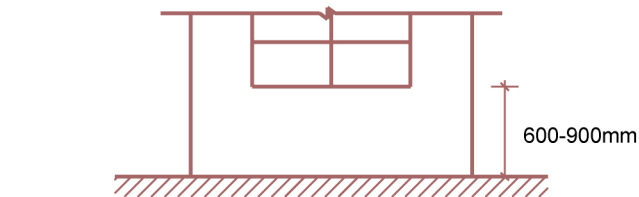
B. CONTROLLED VISIBILITY

C. INDIRECT AWARENESS

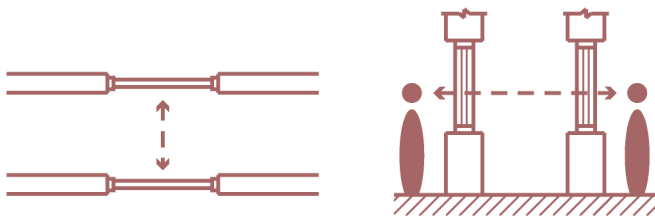


1. Window

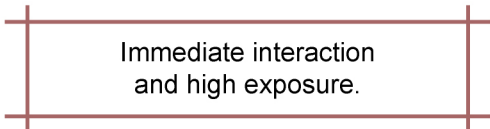
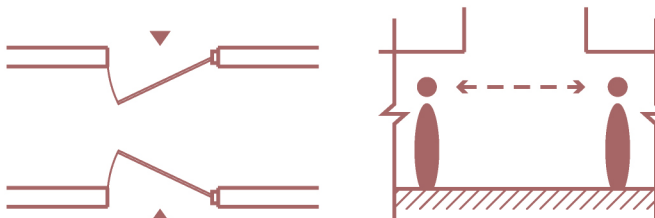
(1) Type — Low - window



(2) Spatial relationship

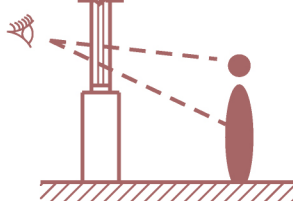
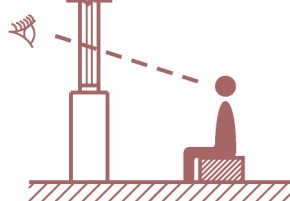
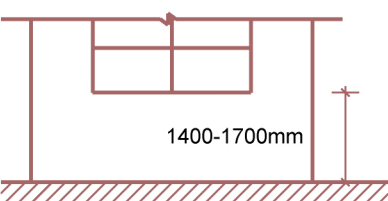


2. Door



1. Window Type

(1) High - window



(2) Ribbon window



Visual continuity
Strong visual exposure
Lower privacy

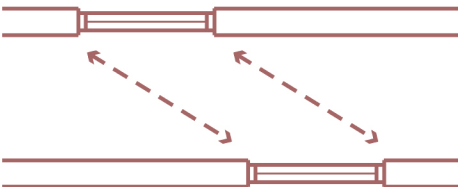
(3) Vertical slit window



Restricted view
Quieter place
Higher privacy

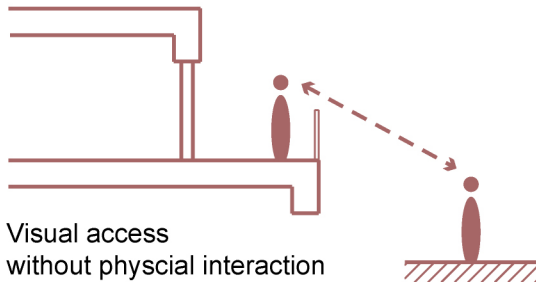
2. Spatial Relationship

(1) Offset opening



No direct eye contact

(2) Balcony edge



Visual access
without physical interaction

(3) Window edge



Good views
Good daylight penetration
Lower privacy



Sense of enclosure
Encourage longer stay
Higher privacy

(4) Atrium



Vertical visual relation



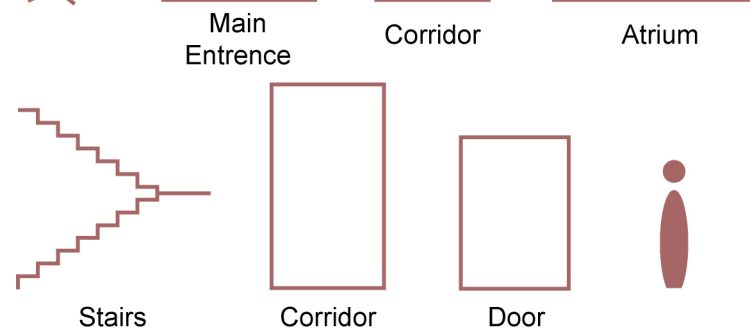
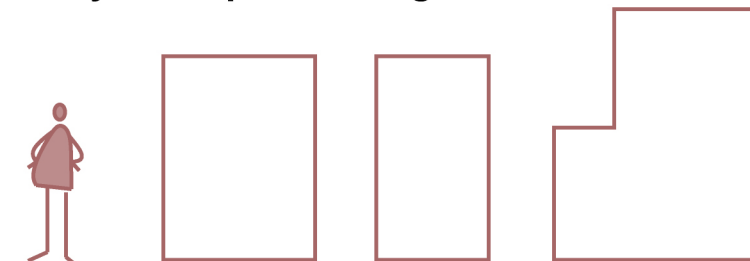
More controlled



1. Light / Wind Transfer



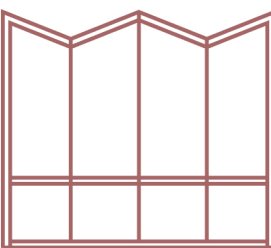
2. Layered Space / Long Distance



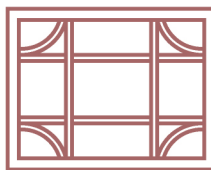
3. Visual Filter



Translucent Glass



Lattice / Perforated screen



Chinese Lattice window

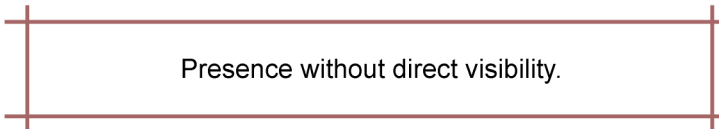


Diagram 3 : Productive Activities and Spatial Translation

Everyday productive routines generate distinct spatial conditions and different modes of social interaction.

ACTIVITY TYPES

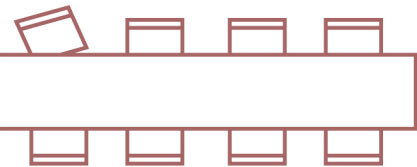
SPATIAL CONDITIONS

INTERACTION MODE

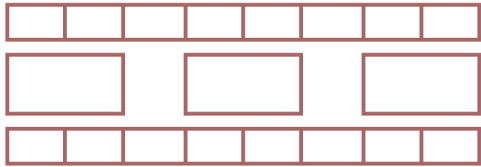
A. Cooking / Dining

- . preparing food collectively
- . cooking in shared kitchen
- . gathering around a common table
- . eating together as a routine
- . shared meal preparation
- . routine - based collective activity
- . sitting and eating in groups

1. Long Table



(1) Most shared configuration

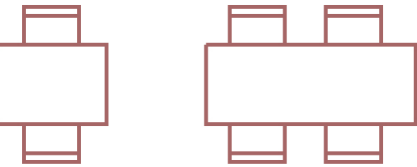


(2) Separate tables with continuous seating

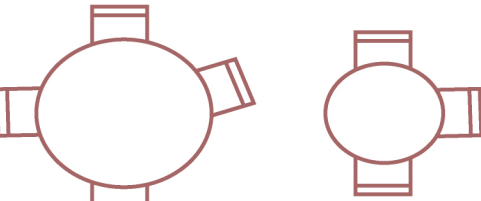


(3) Fully detachable and combinable

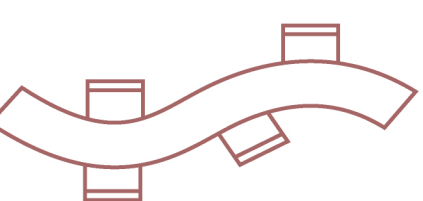
2. Shorter-length Table



(1) Family Mode



(2) Round Table

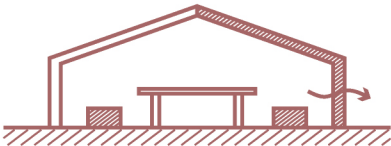


(3) Guided Movement Path

3. Spatial Position



(1) Completely Indoor

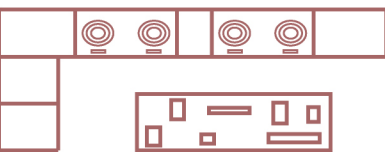


(2) Half-Half

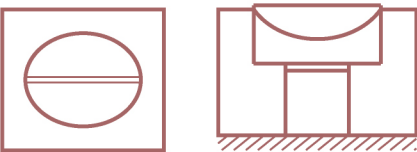


(3) Under corridor

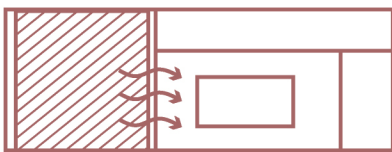
4. Kitchen Mode



(1) Mode 1



(2) Mode 2 Plan / Section



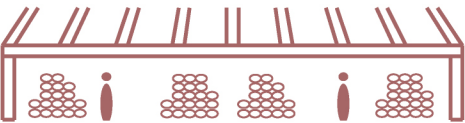
(3) Garden / Kitchen

B. Processing

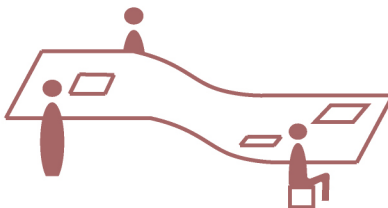
- . sorting
- . cutting / washing
- . small crop processing



1. Planting



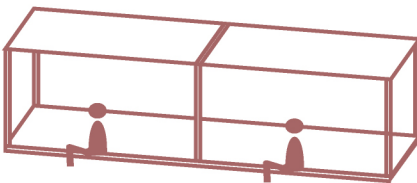
2. Collecting



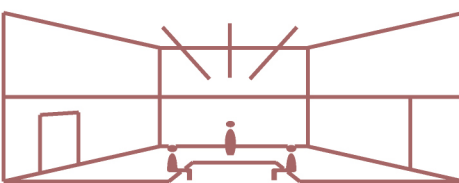
3. Processing

C. Manual Work & Recreation

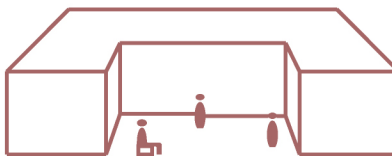
- . bamboo work / weaving
- . quiet manual task
- . play chess / chatting



1. Under Roof / Corridor



2. Atrium



3. Porch

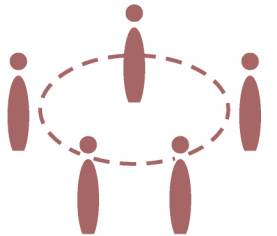
Eat face to face



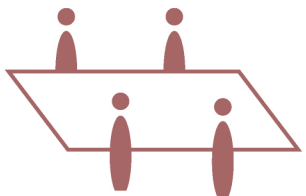
Cook together



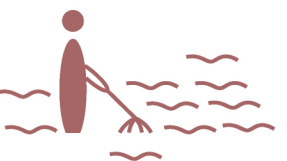
Gather together



Work together



Work / plant alone



Chat together

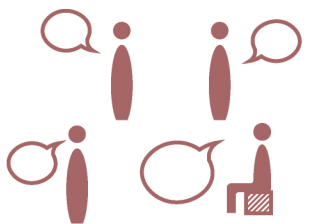


Diagram 3 : Productive Activities and Spatial Translation

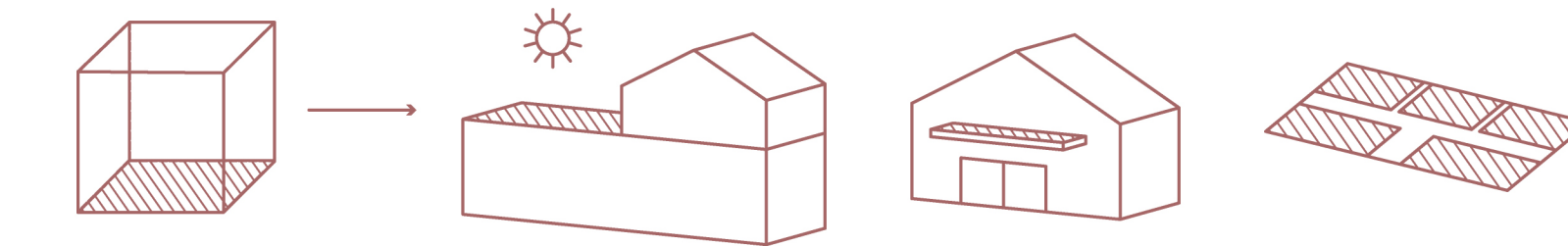
Everyday productive routines generate distinct spatial conditions and different modes of social interaction.

ACTIVITY TYPES

— Drying

- . drying crops in the sun
- . laying out seasonal produce
- . occupying shared outdoor surfaces
- . sun - oriented collective activity
- . hanging clothes in open air
- . small recreational activities

D. Harvest Drying

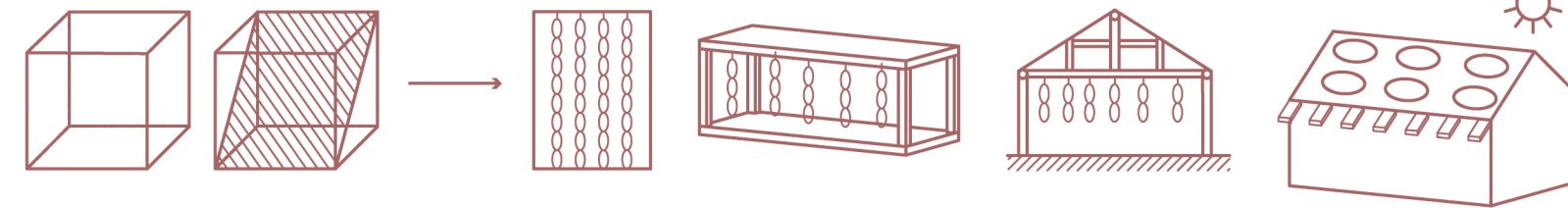


1. Platform-type drying

(1) Terrace

(2) Balcony

(3) Courtyard



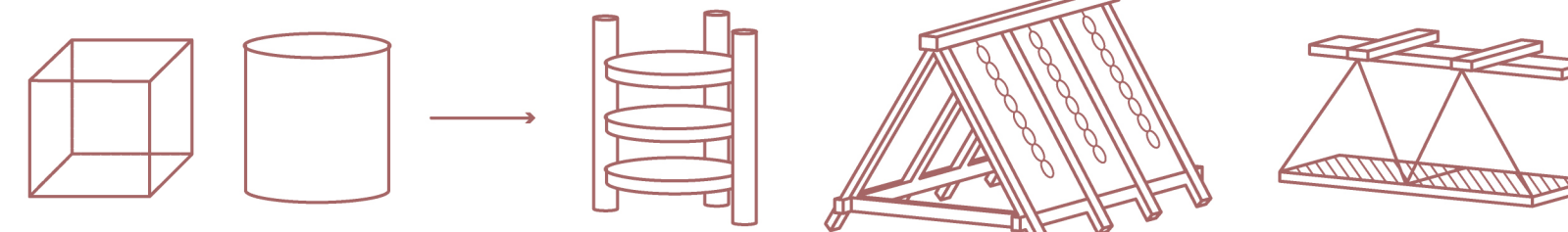
2. Hanging-type drying Inclined-type drying

(1) Facade

(2) Corridor

(3) Under the roof

(4) On the roof



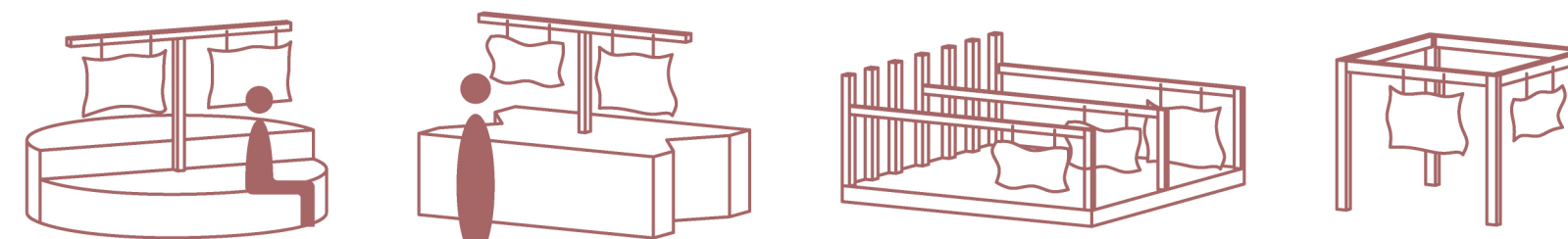
3. Rack-type drying

(1) Mode

(2) Mode 2

(3) Mode 3

E. Clothes Drying

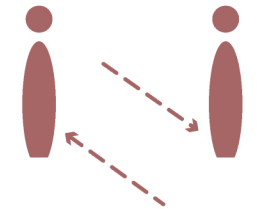


1. Integrated with resting / leisure space

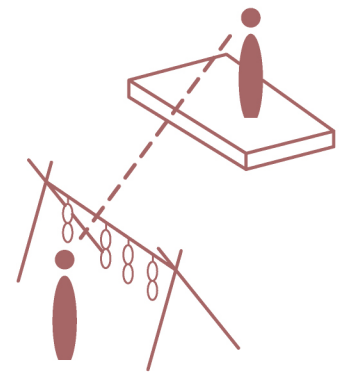
2. Hide behind

3. Regular

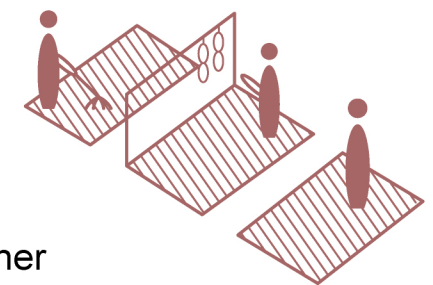
Pass - by



Visual contact



Work together



Chat together



Different productive activities imply distinct spatial conditions, shaping how space is occupied, and extended in everyday life.

Interaction emerges through everyday activities, ranging from dispersed presence to collective engagement.

06 | DESIGN PROPOSAL

6.1 Site Selection and Site Analysis

The site of this project is located between the old village and the new village of Quanfang Village. This site was not chosen as a random empty plot. It was selected so that older people can improve their living conditions while still carrying out daily activities in a familiar environment.

Why this site?

Connecting with the Old Village

The old village carries older people’s long-term memories of everyday life. Placing the site close to the old village allows them to stay connected with familiar places.

Connecting with the New Village

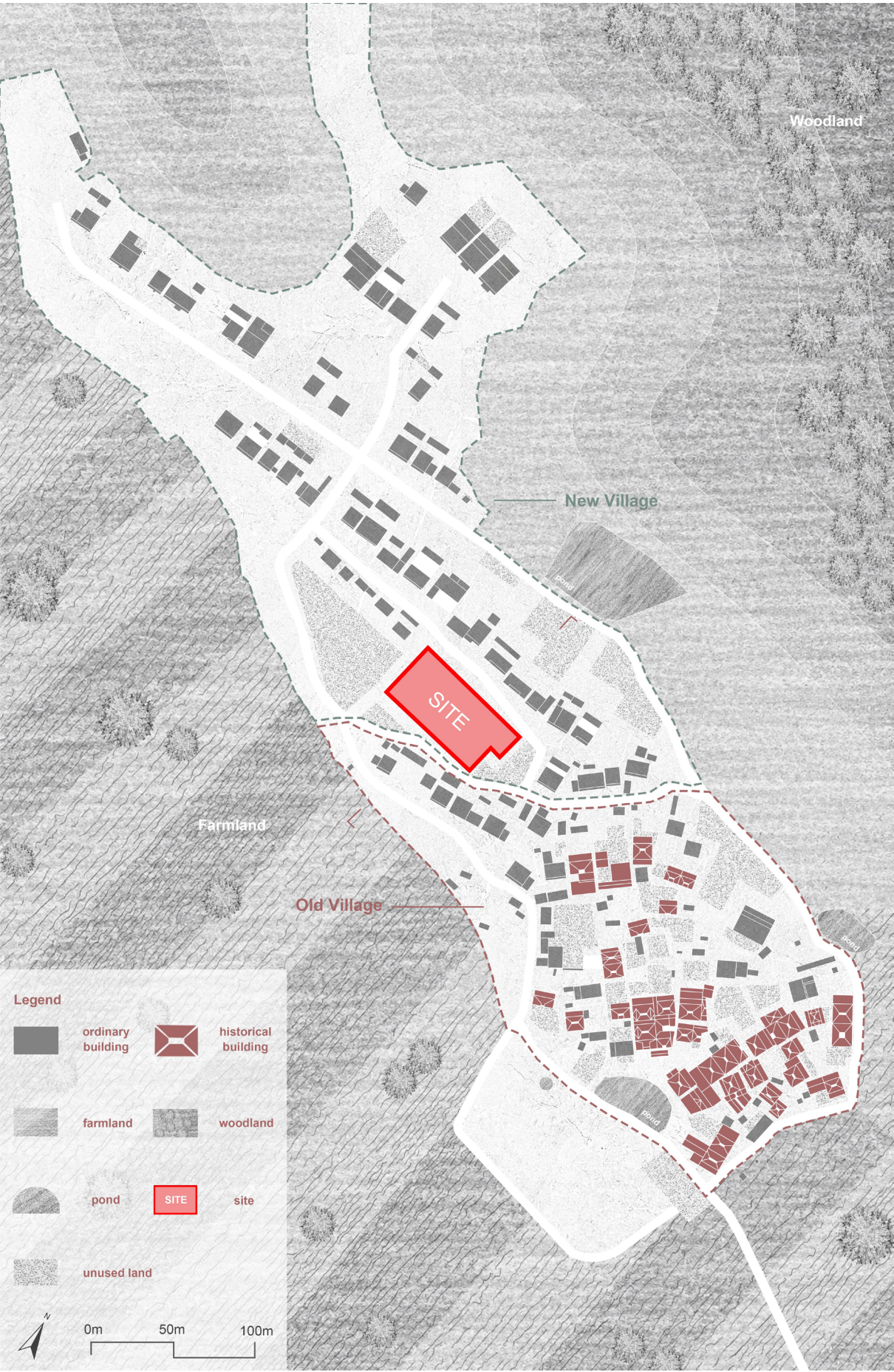
Many young families and adult children live in the new village. Choosing a site that is also close to the new village allows older people to maintain contact with their children more easily.

Located within the Village’s Everyday Routes

The site is easy to reach and can support older people’s daily movement around the village. Older people living here in the future are less likely to feel that they are staying in an isolated elderly care space.

Supporting Shared Everyday Life

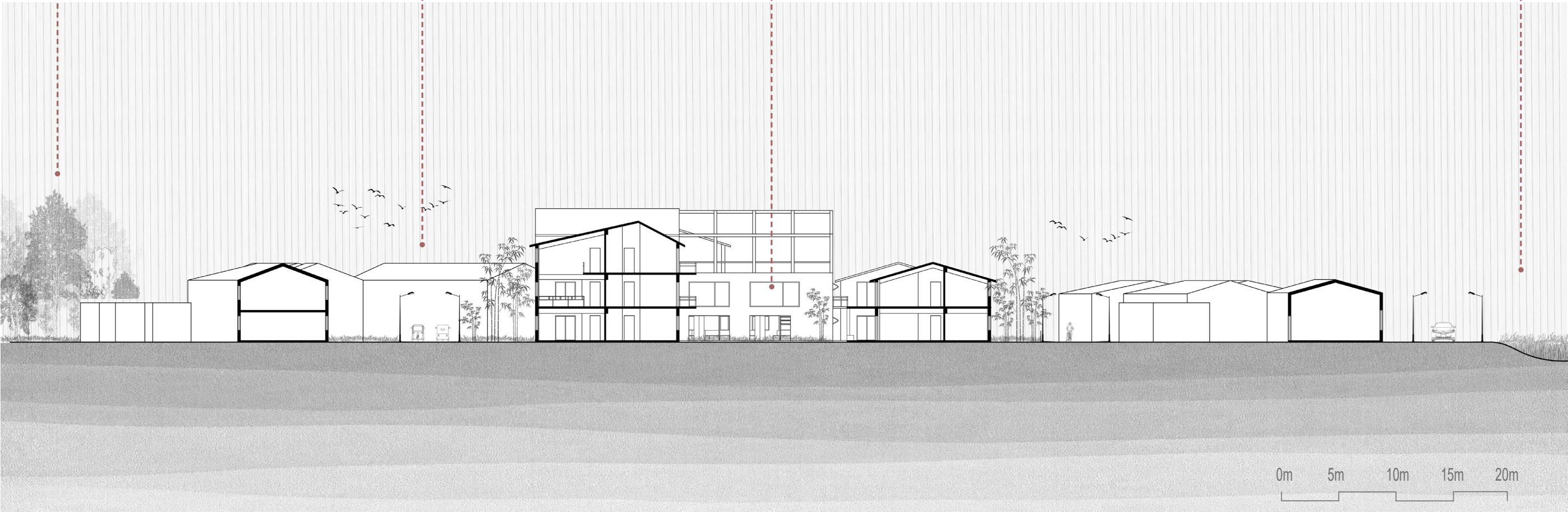
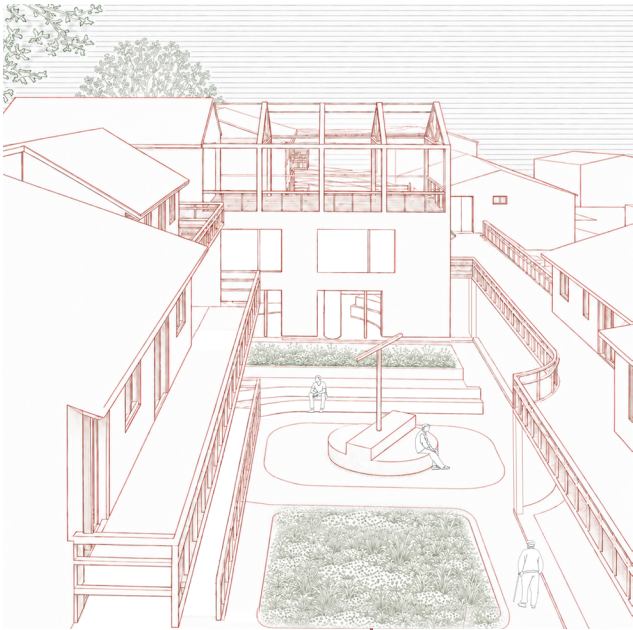
The scale of this site is suitable for organising a small-scale collaborative housing prototype. It can provide space for housing units while also allowing daily encounters and productive practices to take place.

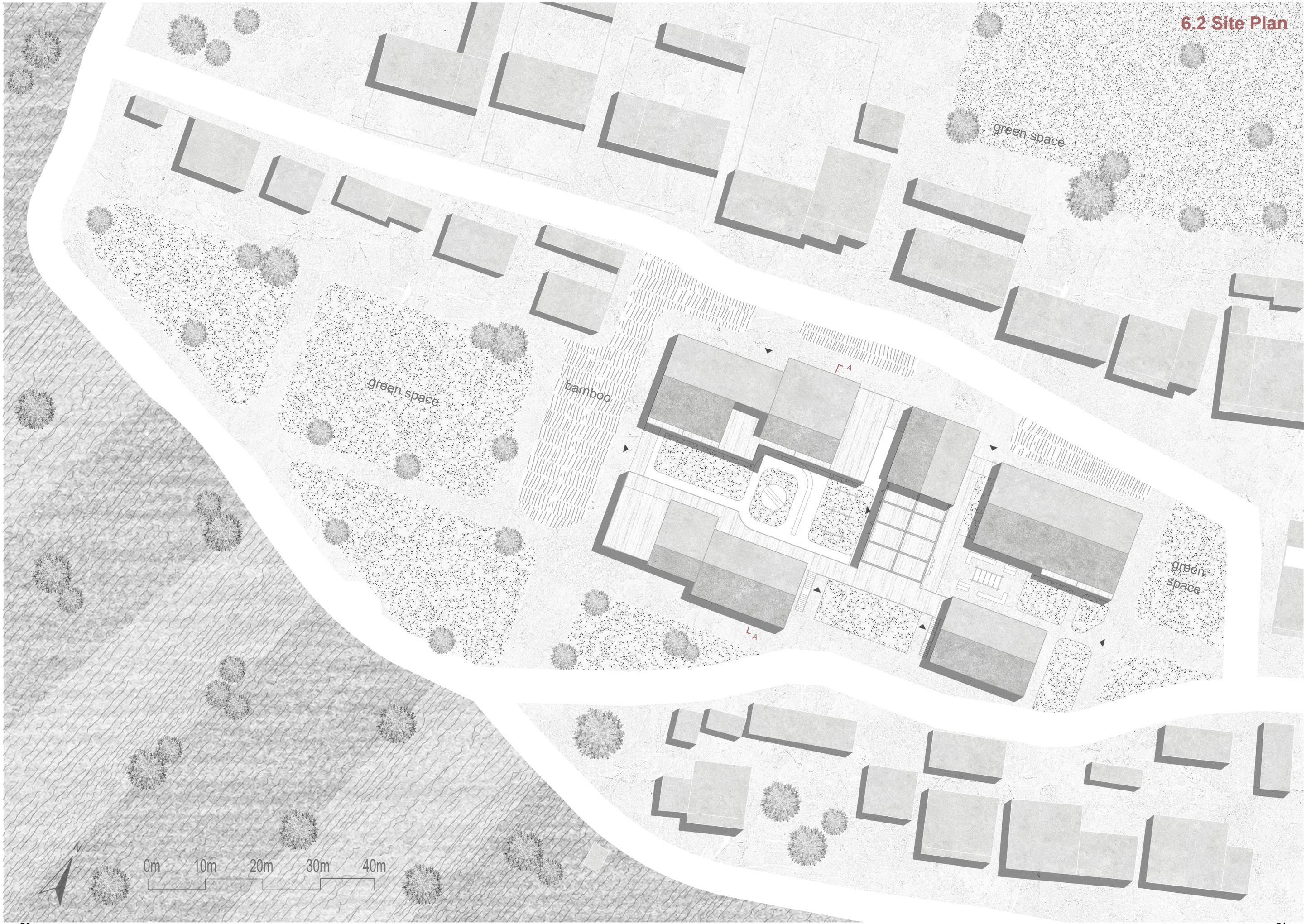


Site Selection Map of Collaborative Housing for Older Residents in Quanfang Village

The Proposed Housing Cluster in Its Rural Setting

The section shows how the proposed housing cluster sits in relation to the village route, woodland and farmland within the wider rural setting.





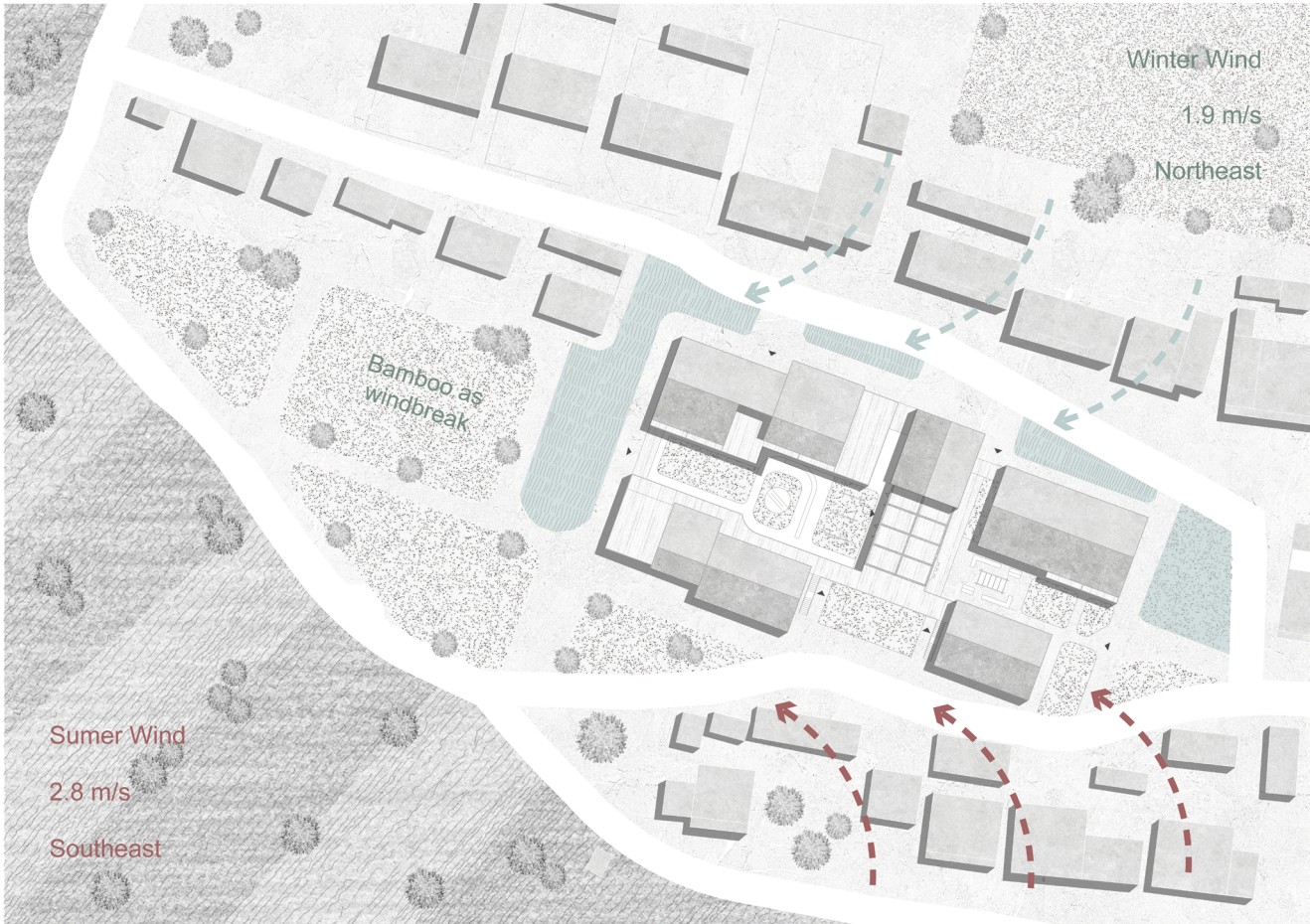
6.2 Site Plan

6.3 Site Plan Analysis



Public-Semi Public-Private Diagram

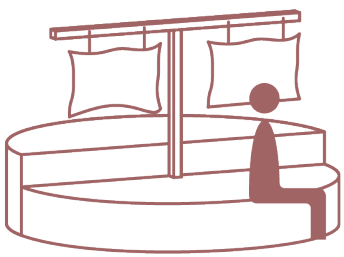
Overall, the solid green lines in the diagram represent the more public vehicular routes, while the dashed green lines indicate semi-public routes mainly used by pedestrians and cyclists. As a result, the southwestern part of the site is more public, while the northern and eastern areas are relatively quiet. At the building scale, the central volume containing the communal hall forms the most public area. Moving from the centre towards both sides, the spatial sequence gradually shifts to semi-public courtyards, and finally to the more private residential spaces.



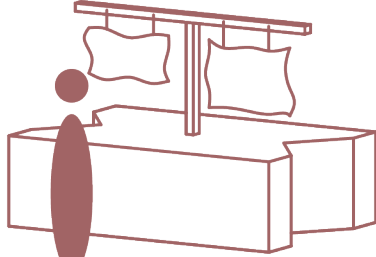
Seasonal Wind Direction Diagram

This diagram shows how the design responds to the local climatic conditions. In winter, the prevailing wind comes from the northeast, with a speed of 1.9 m/s (Wang et al., 2022). Bamboo is planted in the open space on the northeastern side of the building to reduce the impact of cold winter winds. It acts as a windbreak and helps make the courtyards more comfortable for residents' daily use. The northern building volume is also one storey higher than the southern volume, offering additional protection from the winter wind. In summer, the prevailing wind comes from the southeast, with a speed of 2.8 m/s (Wang et al., 2022). In response, more openings are placed on the southeastern side of the building, allowing the summer wind to pass more easily through the whole building cluster. This helps support passive ventilation and cooling. Together, these strategies help create a more comfortable living environment for the older residents.

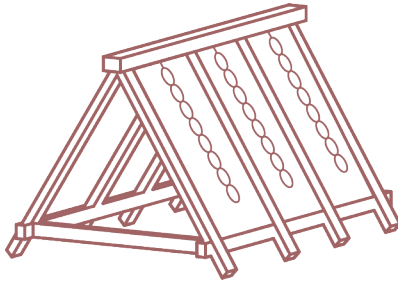
6.4 First Floor Plan



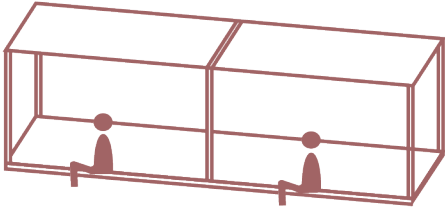
3E-1-(1) Clothes Drying I



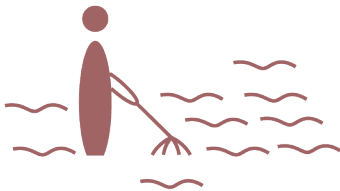
3E-1-(2) Clothes Drying II



3D-3-(2) Harvest Drying

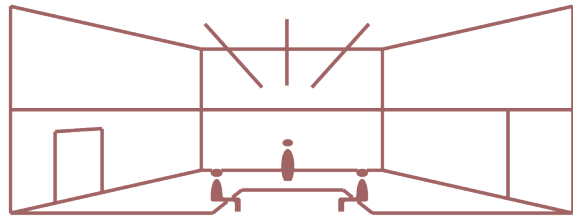


3C-1 Manual Work -Corridor

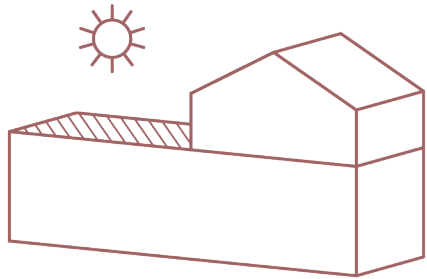


Planting

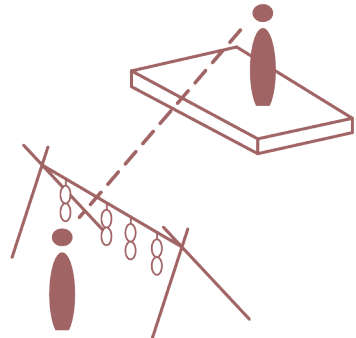
6.4 Second Floor Plan



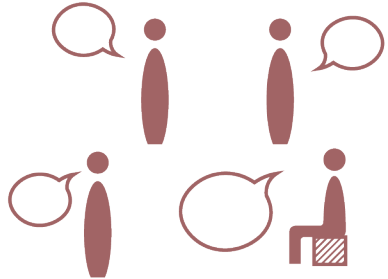
3C-2 Atrium-Manual Work & Recreation



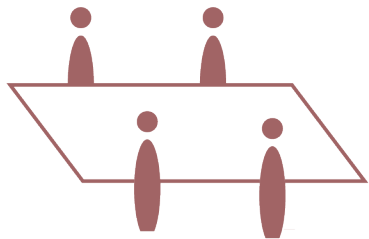
3D-1-(1) Terrace-Harvest



Visual Contact

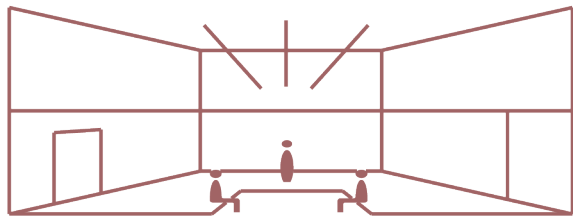
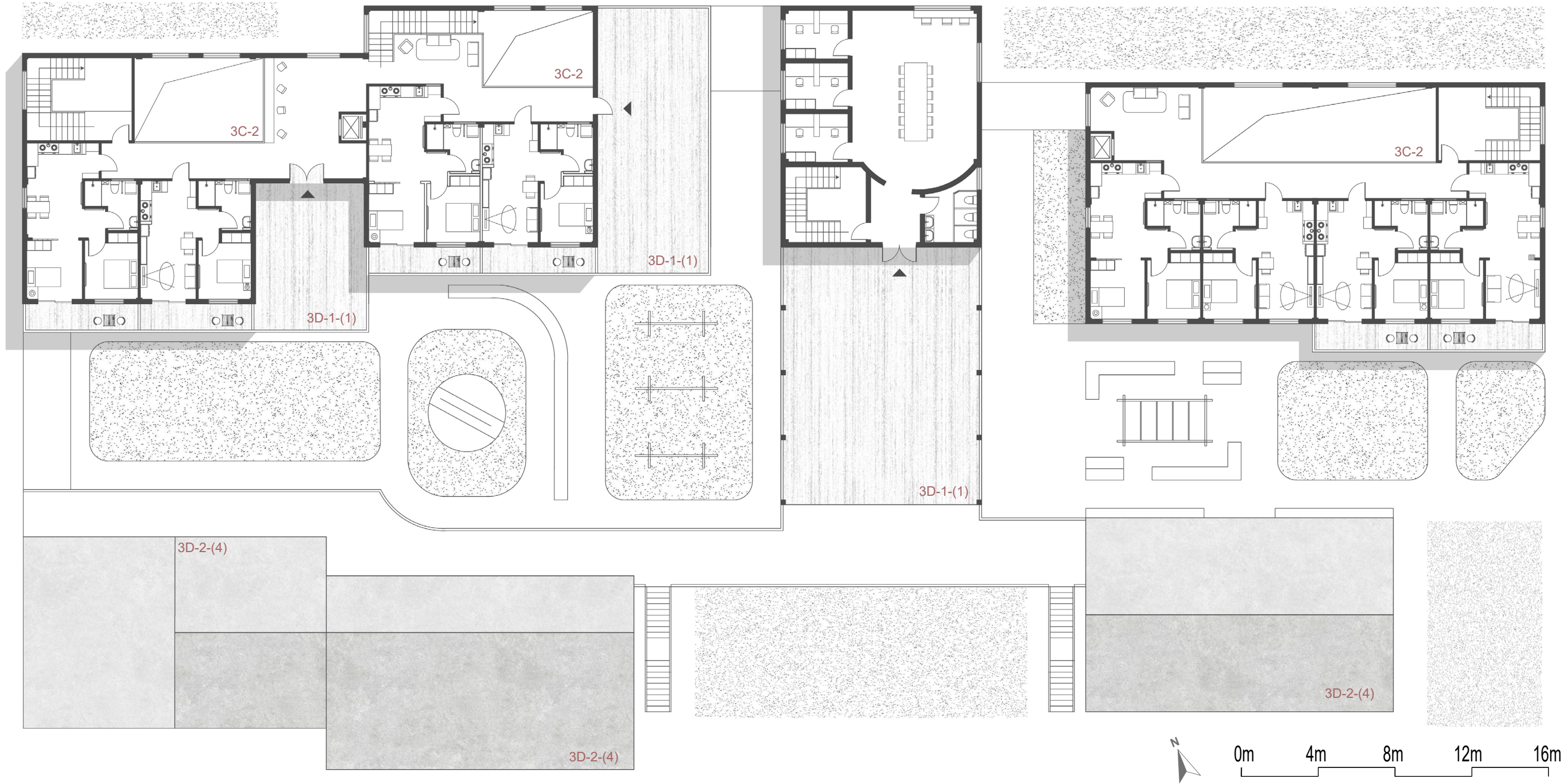


Chatting & Recreation

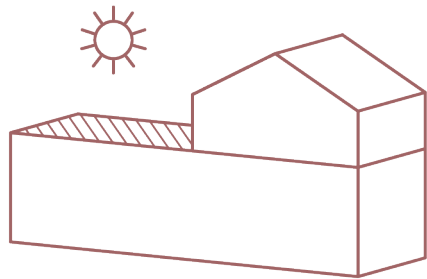


Work Together

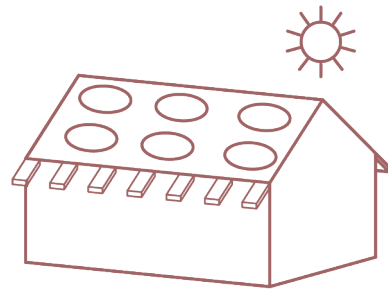
6.4 Third Floor Plan



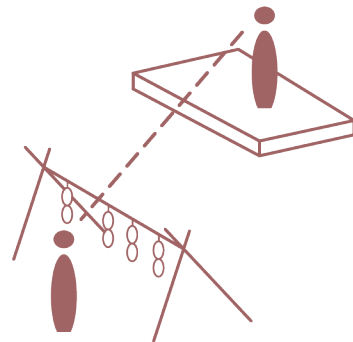
3C-2 Atrium-Manual Work & Recreation



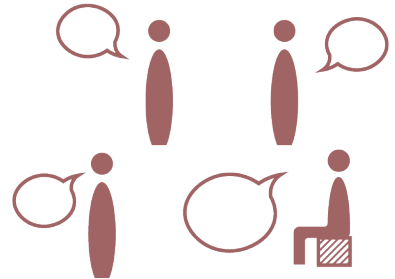
3D-1-(1) Terrace-Harvest Drying



3D-2-(4) Roof Harvest Drying



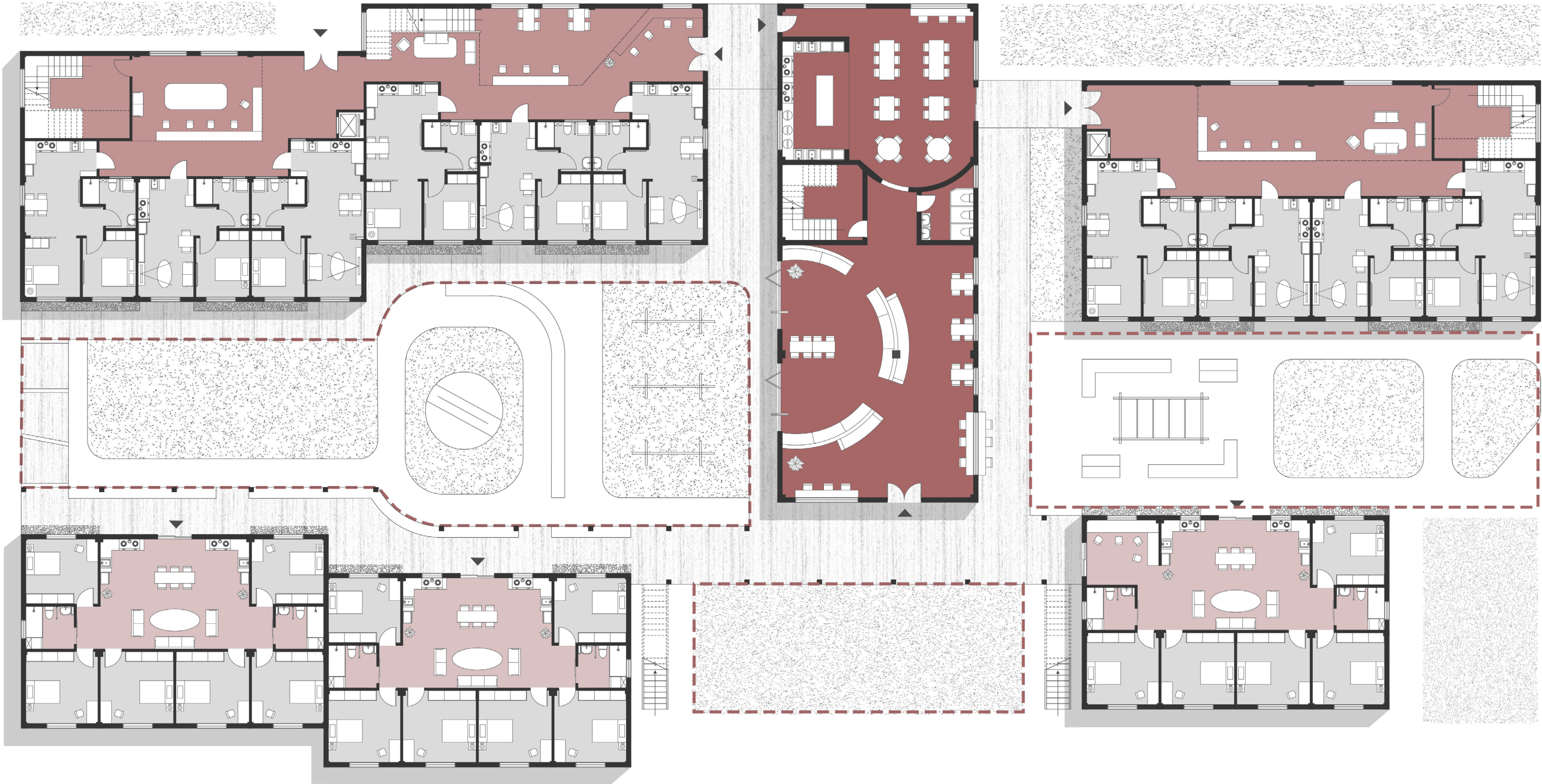
Visual Contact



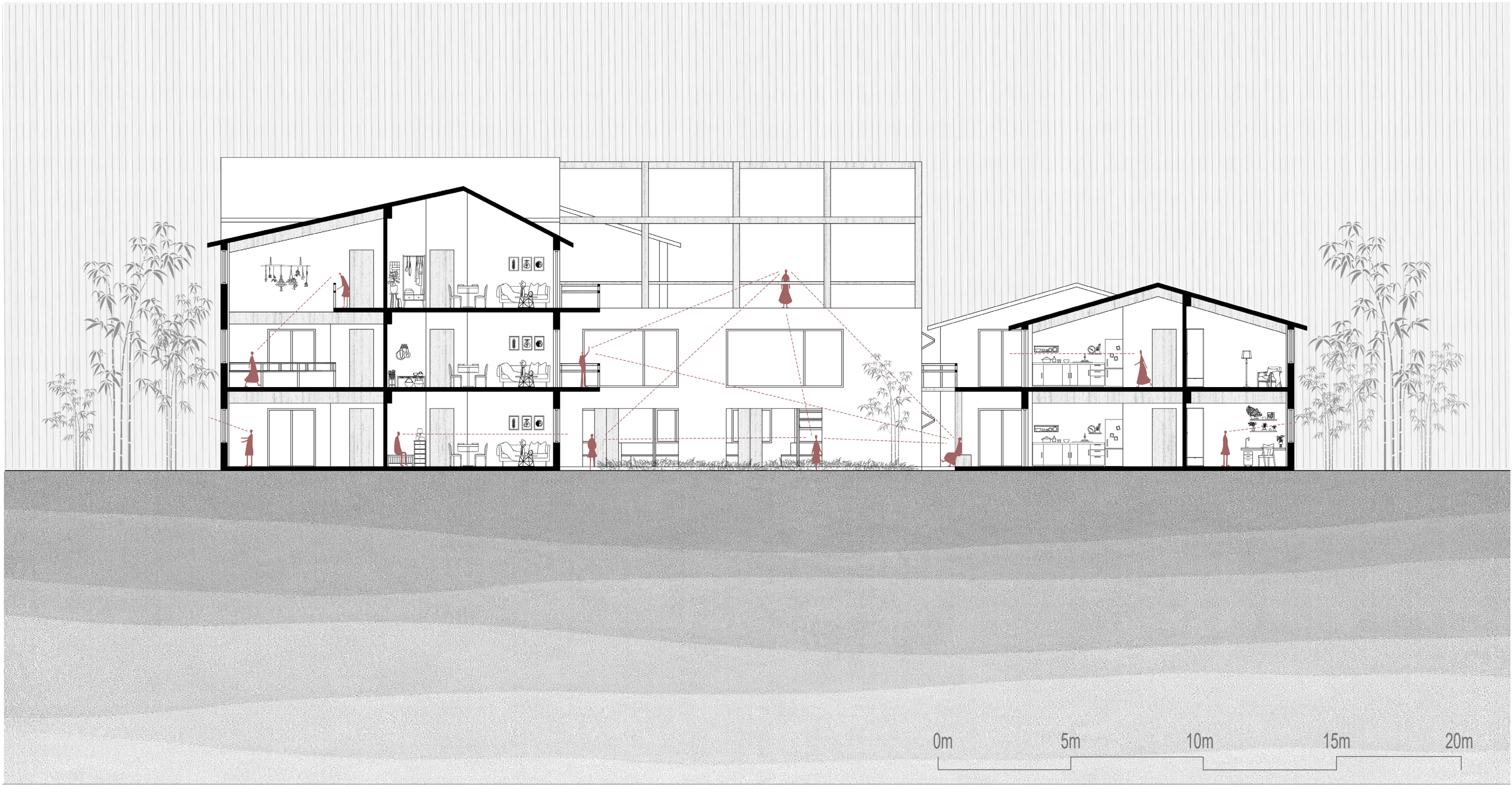
Chatting & Recreation

6.4 Public–Private Area Distribution Diagram

Private area inside a residential unit Shared area inside a residential unit Shared spaces within a building (e.g. stairs, corridors) Areas that can be shared with external people



6.5 Section A-A



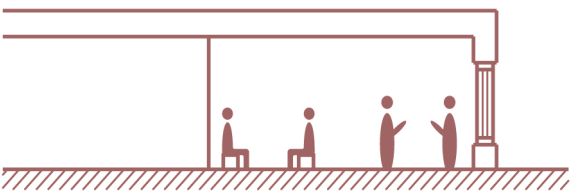
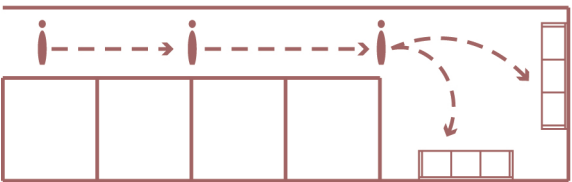
6.6 Plan | Cluster I

Cluster I consists of Unit A and Unit B, arranged around a central atrium. Each living unit remains relatively independent, while the atrium and the shared activity spaces outside the units become the main areas for daily interaction among residents.

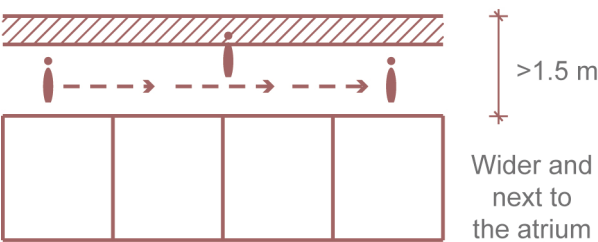
This arrangement can be understood as a contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional residential pattern found in the village.

Controlled Visibility & Interaction

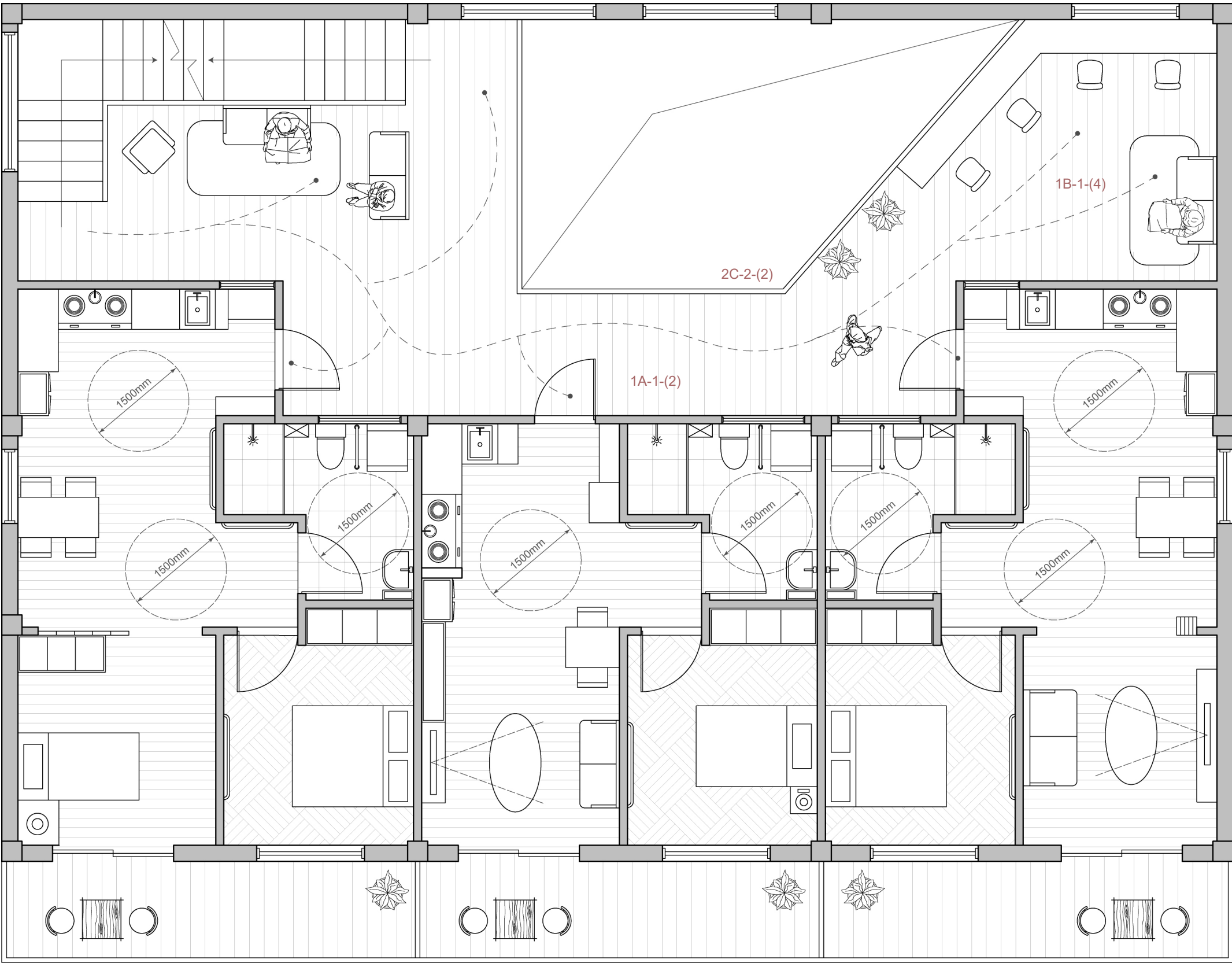
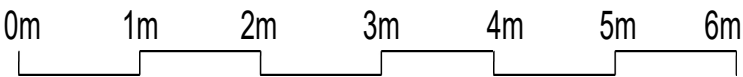
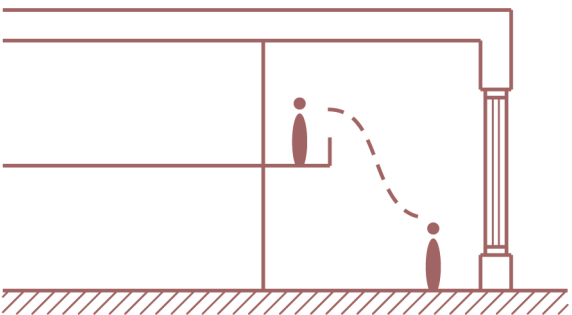
1B-1-(4) Corner Pocket Space



1A-1-(2) Wider Corridor



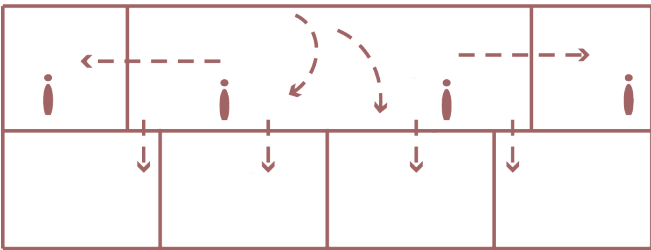
2C-2-(2) Central Atrium



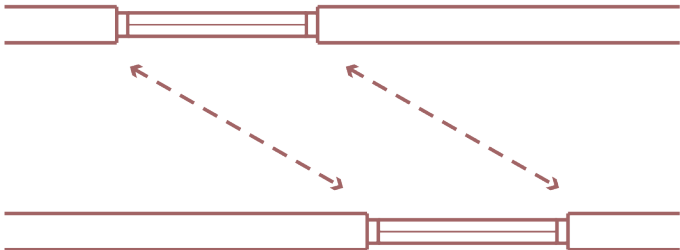
6.6 Plan | Cluster II

Controlled Visibility & Interaction

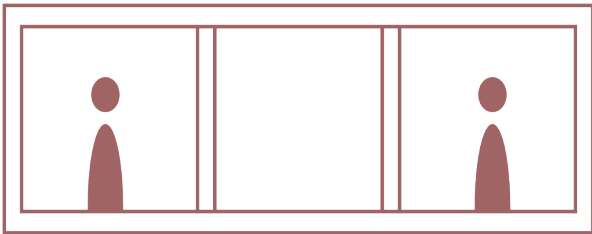
1B-1-(3) Central Pocket



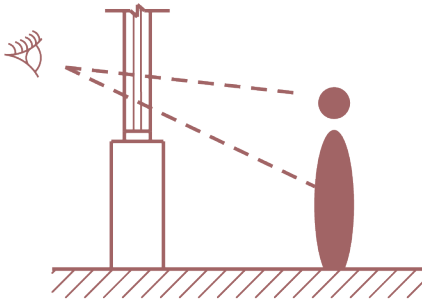
2B-2-(1) Offset Opening (windows & doors)



2B-1-(2) Ribbon Window



2B-1-(1) High Window



Area : 16 m² per single bedroom

Number of Bedrooms : 33

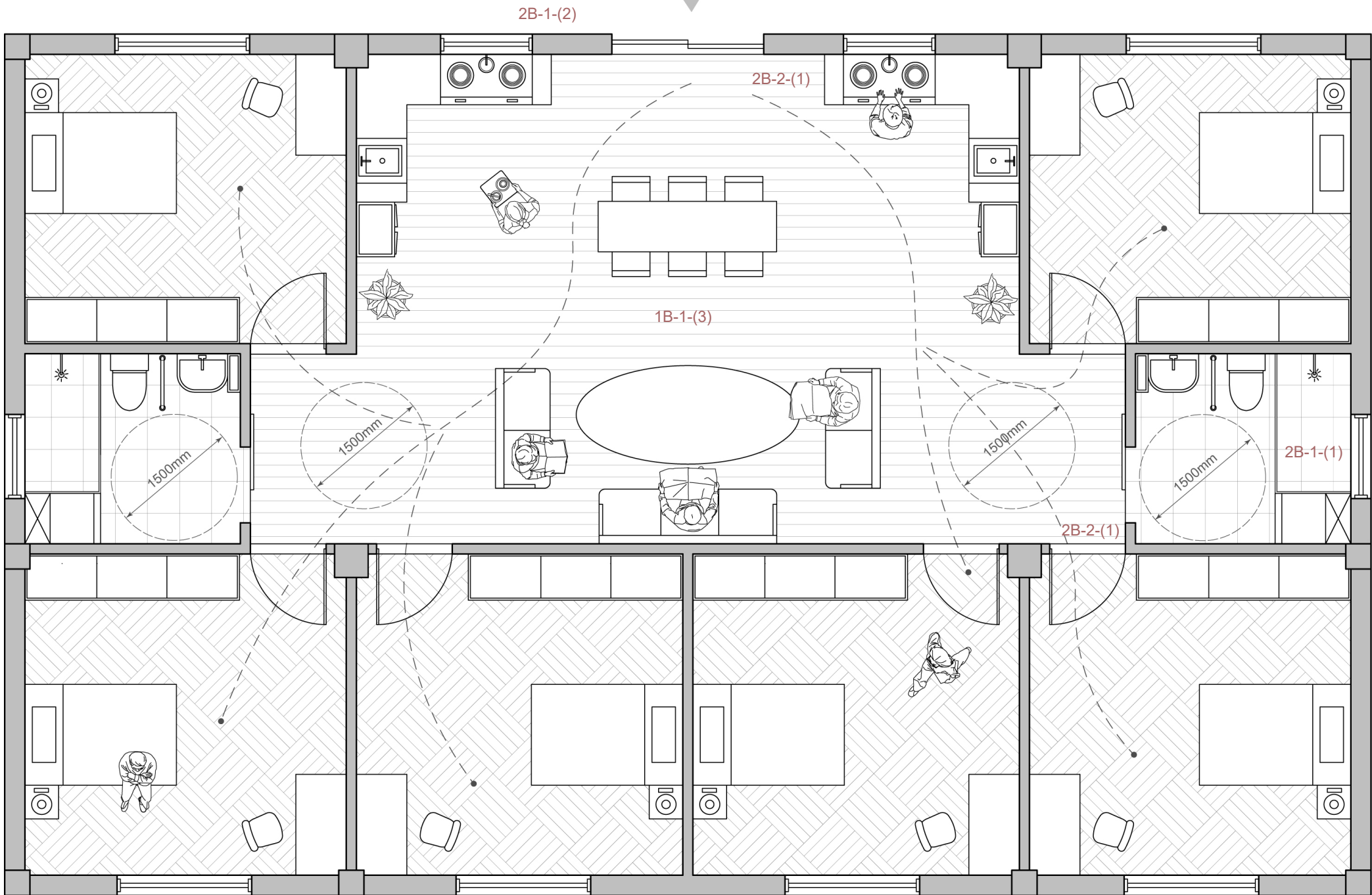
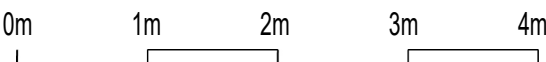
Tenure : For Rent

Capacity : 6 residents per cluster

Cluster II is mainly designed for older residents who may benefit from more companionship and mutual support. Each resident has their own private bedroom, which serves as their main private space.

The six residents in the cluster share one living room and kitchen. This shared space is located at the centre of the cluster, close to the entrance. Residents pass through this area as they enter and leave the cluster, so it also becomes the place where daily interaction happens most frequently. Here, they can discuss and decide how to take turns cooking and cleaning. This not only reduces each person's daily workload, but also strengthens mutual support among the residents.

There are two bathrooms in the cluster, with each bathroom shared by three residents. This arrangement makes efficient use of space and resources, while still providing reasonable convenience and meeting basic hygiene needs. Overall, Cluster II supports social connection and mutual support, while allowing each resident to retreat to their own private room when needed.



6.7 Plan | Unit A

Area : 45 m²

Number of Units : 16

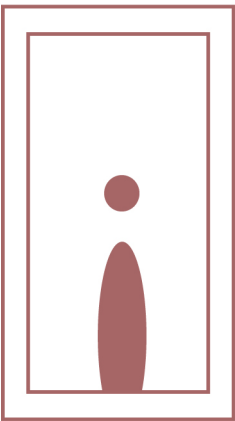
Tenure : For Sale

Capacity : 2 residents, mainly for couples

Unit A has its own kitchen and bathroom, making it a relatively self-contained living unit. It allows residents to have a more independent daily routine, without relying too heavily on shared spaces and facilities. This type of unit is more suitable for an older couple, or for residents who prefer a quieter and more private living environment.

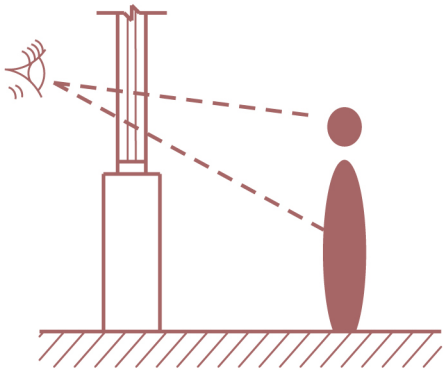
Controlled Visibility & Interaction

2B-1-(3) Vertical slit window in kitchen area



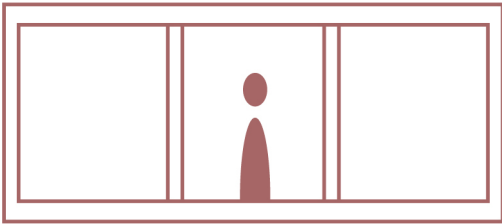
This type of window in the kitchen creates a controlled level of visibility: it allows the activity of cooking to be perceived from outside, while limiting visual clarity enough to protect the resident from feeling disturbed or overly exposed.

2B-1-(1) High - window in the bathroom



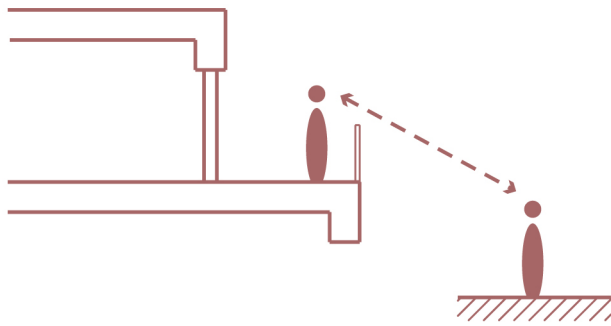
The bathroom is designed with a high window, which allows for adequate ventilation while maintaining privacy by preventing outside visibility into the space.

2B-1-(2) Ribbon Window / Door

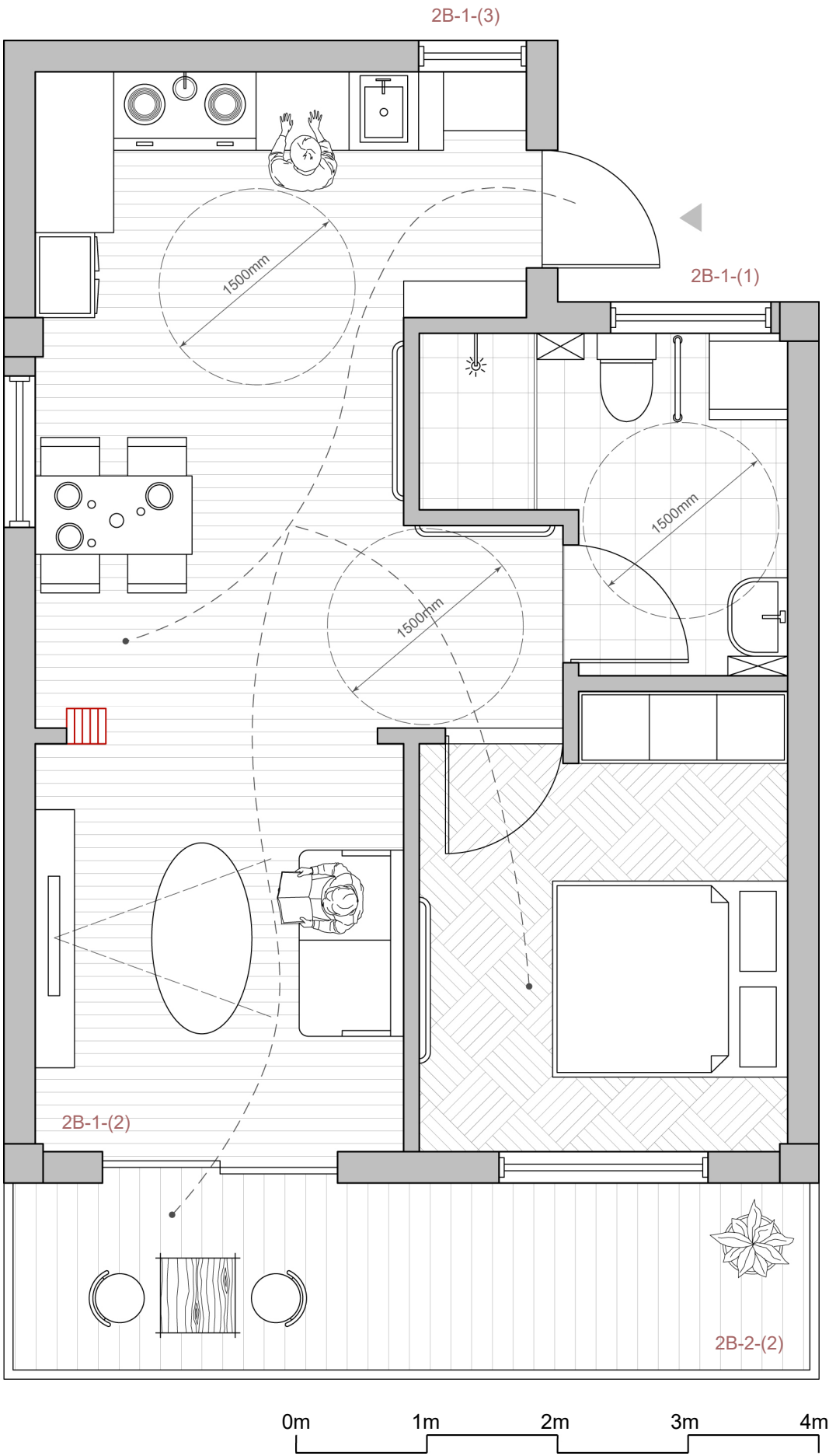


The ribbon window and the door enhance visual continuity across the space, increasing the degree of visual exposure. This makes the area one of the most public zones within the unit.

2B-2-(2) Balcony Edge

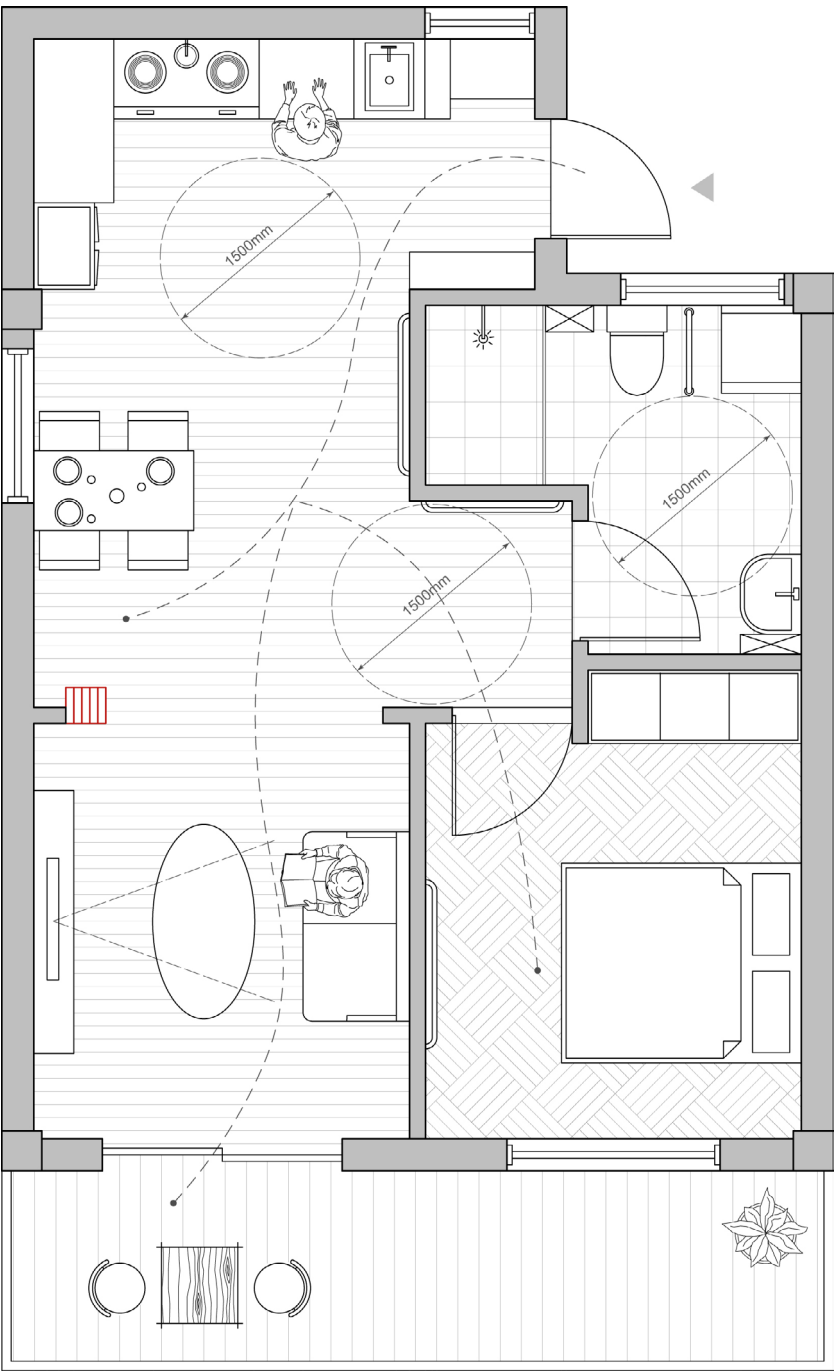


The balcony creates a visual connection between residents, the surrounding natural environment, and people in the courtyard, while maintaining physical separation and limiting direct interaction.

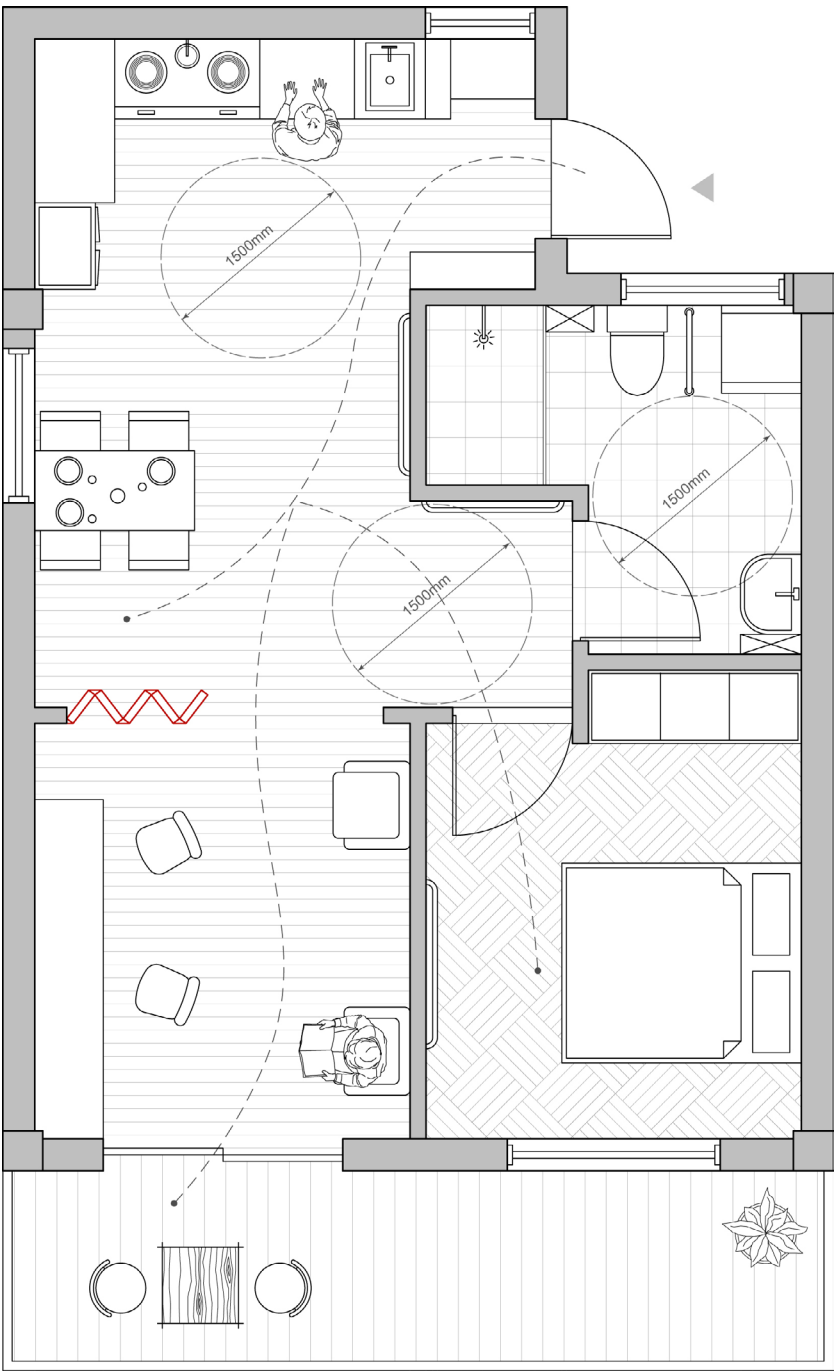


6.7 Plan | Unit A Layout Change

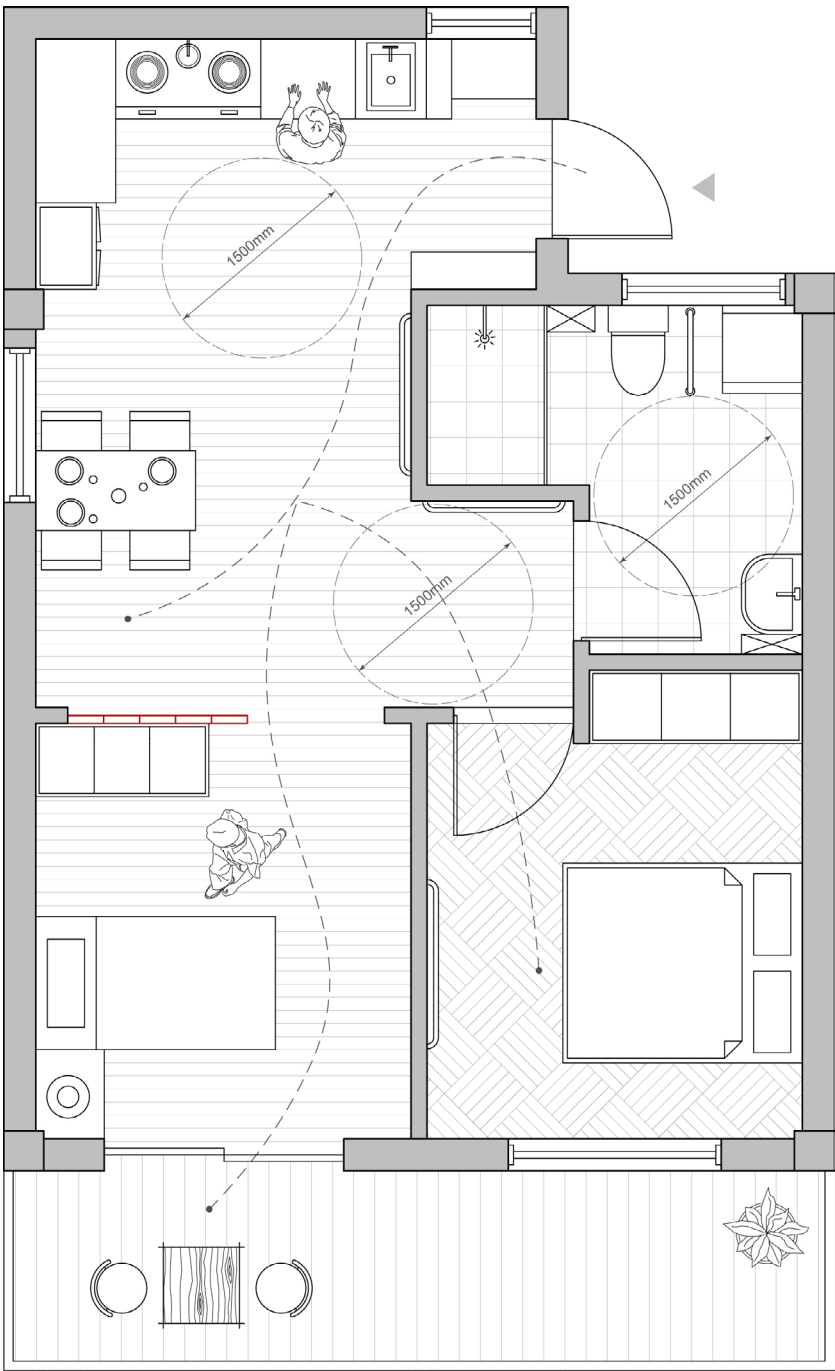
The layout of Unit A is designed to adapt to residents' changing needs as they age. The flexible room can take on different functions depending on the residents' health condition, lifestyle, and level of social activity. It can be used as a living room for receiving guests, an activity room for personal hobbies, or a second bedroom when additional care is needed. This flexibility allows the unit to support independent living while also making space for care when required.



When the residents of Unit A are in good health and maintain an active social life, the flexible room can function as a living room. It provides a semi-private space for meeting friends, receiving visitors, and hosting guests within their own unit.



When the residents are still in good health but prefer a quieter lifestyle, the flexible room can be used as an activity room. It supports individual hobbies and everyday leisure activities, such as painting, making crafts, or playing music.



When one resident becomes unwell and requires additional care, the flexible room can function as a second bedroom. This arrangement allows the couple to sleep separately when necessary, while still supporting care and assistance within the unit.

6.7 Plan | Unit B

Area : 36 m²

Number of Units : 12

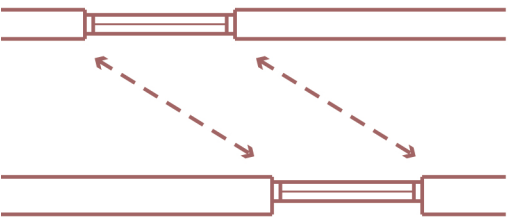
Tenure : For Sale

Capacity : 1 resident

Unit B is similar to Unit A, as it also has its own kitchen and bathroom, but it is slightly smaller. It is a relatively private and self-contained living unit, so the resident does not need to rely heavily on shared facilities. This type of unit would suit older residents who value privacy and prefer a quieter living environment. At the same time, the unit still keeps a degree of openness. From the semi-outdoor balcony, the resident can see the activities taking place in the courtyard and maintain a visual connection with people there.

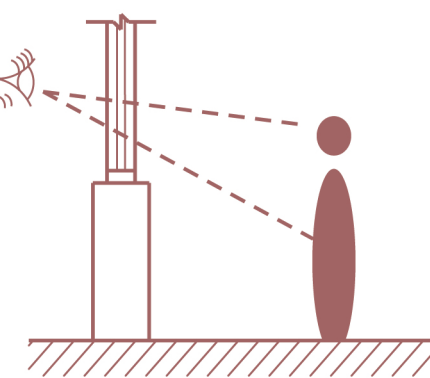
Controlled Visibility & Interaction

2B-2-(1) Offset opening (windows & doors)



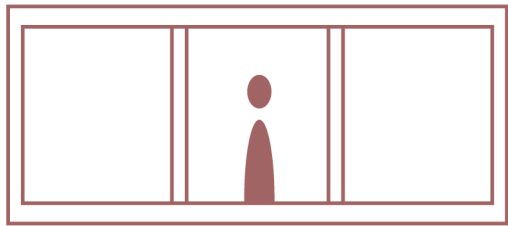
Although the unit is compact, the offset door arrangement helps protect the privacy of the bedroom. By preventing a direct view from the entrance into the sleeping area, it creates a greater sense of privacy within the unit.

2B-1-(1) High - window in the bathroom



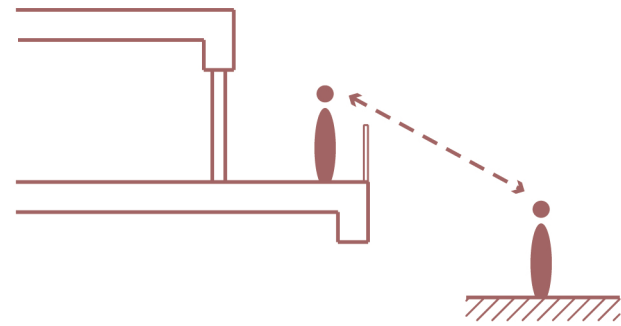
The bathroom is designed with a high window, which allows for adequate ventilation while maintaining privacy by preventing outside visibility into the space.

2B-1-(2) Ribbon Window / Door

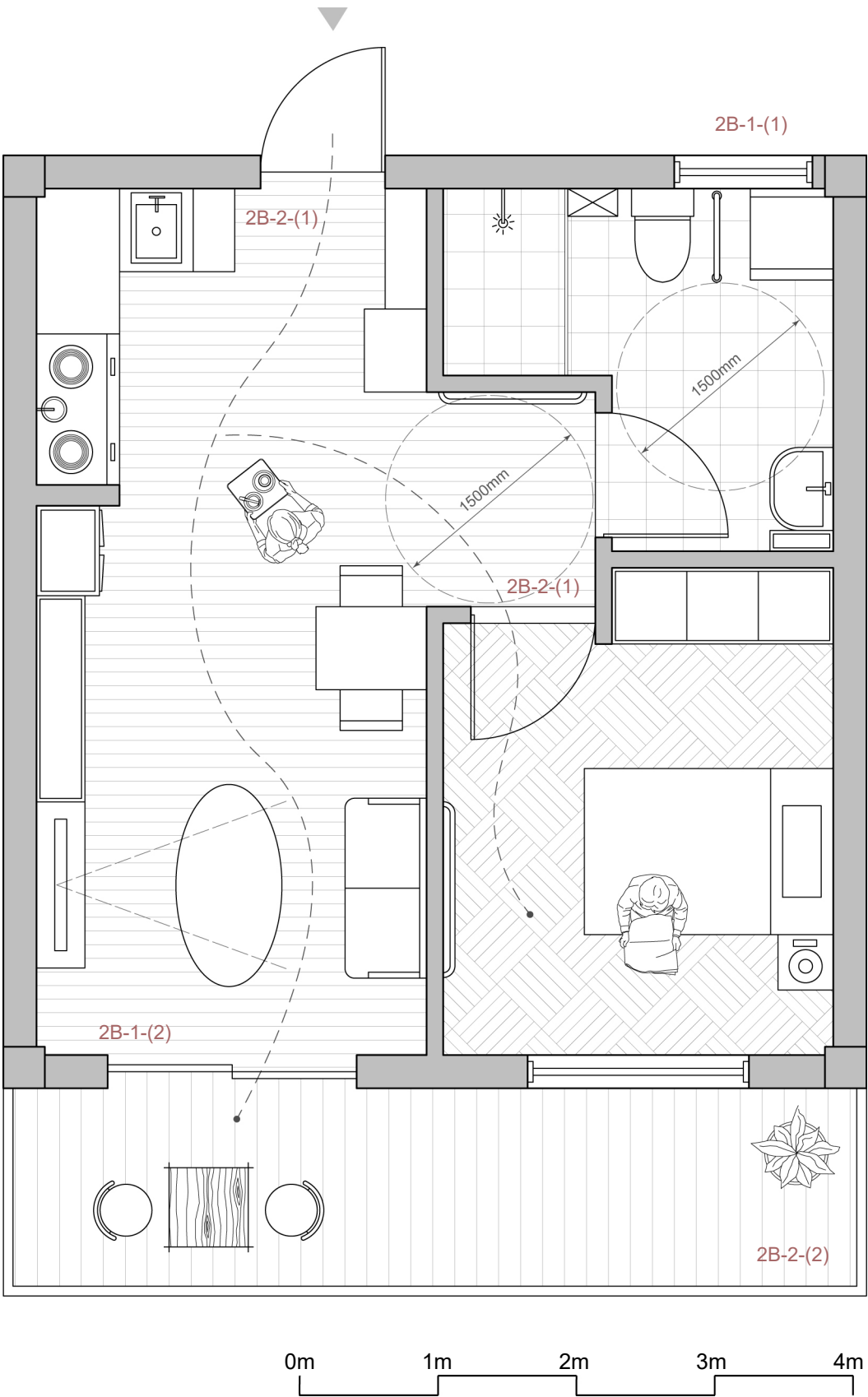


The ribbon window and the door enhance visual continuity across the space, increasing the degree of visual exposure. This makes the area one of the most public zones within the unit.

2B-2-(2) Balcony Edge



The balcony creates a visual connection between residents, the surrounding natural environment, and people in the courtyard, while maintaining physical separation and limiting direct interaction.



6.7 Plan | Communal Hall

Area : 260+ m²

User Groups : Residents, Local Villagers,
Village Committee

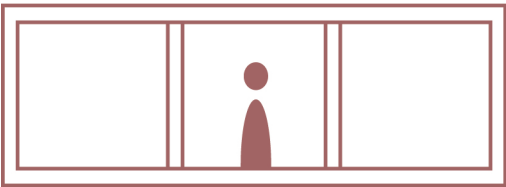
Use Mode : Reservation-Based Use /
Open Public Access

Program : Community Gathering,
Meetings, Shared Kitchen and Dining

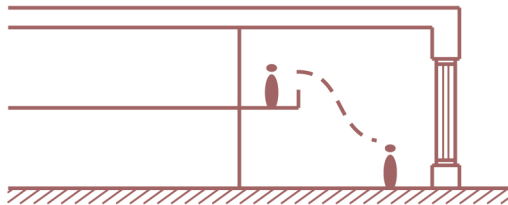
The Communal Hall is not only for the older residents living here; it also serves as a public space for the whole village. In the future, it could also serve nearby villages and outside visitors. The ground floor is open to the public throughout the day, with access to the shared kitchen, dining area, and shared living room. The second floor is mainly used by staff, with meeting rooms and offices. For special events, residents, villagers, and outside visitors can book the whole building for exhibitions, gatherings, and other community activities.

Interaction & Productive Activities

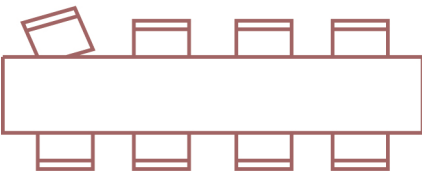
2B-1-(2) Ribbon Window



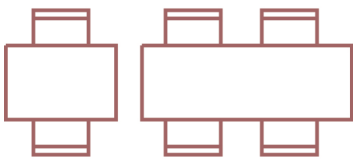
2C-2-(2) Central Atrium



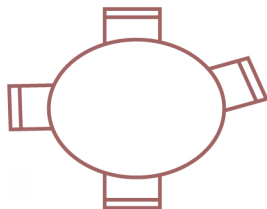
3A Dining



3A-1-(1) Long Table

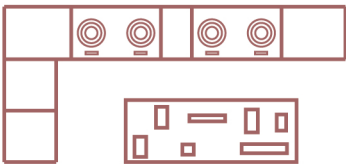


3A-2-(1) Family Mode

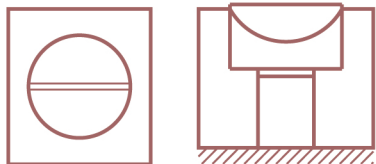


3A-2-(2) Round Table

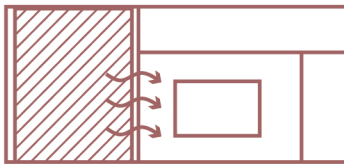
3A Cooking



3A-4-(1) Mode 1

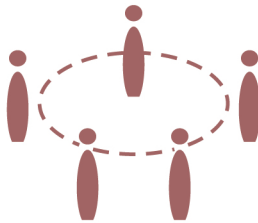


3A-4-(2) Mode 2 Plan / Section

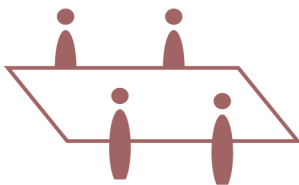


3A-4-(3) Garden / Kitchen

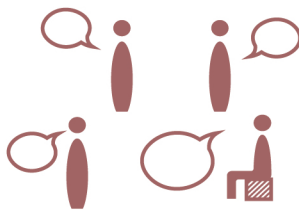
Interaction



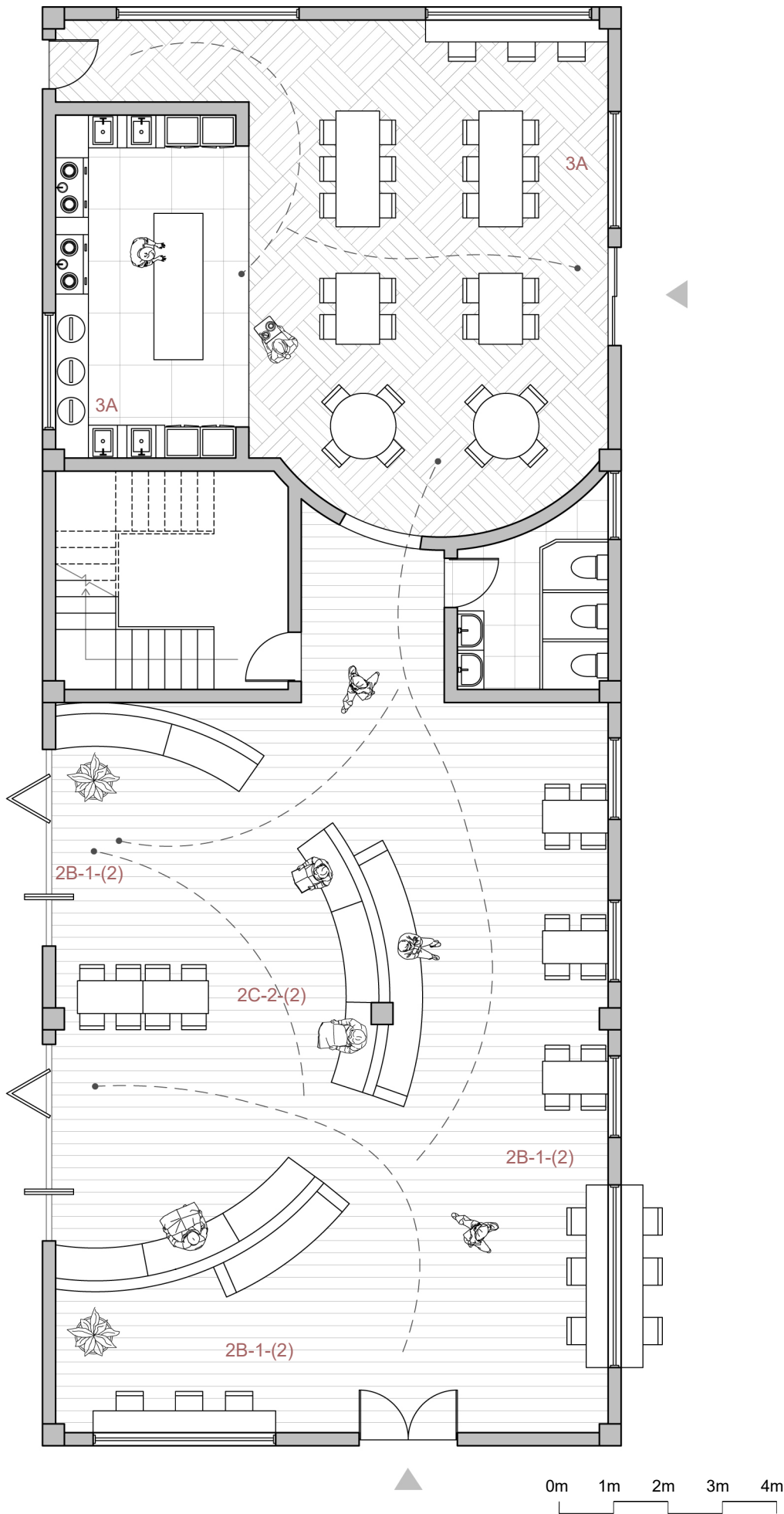
Gather Together



Work Together



Chat Together



6.8 Interior Perspectives

This perspective shows the central atrium and corridor in Cluster I. Since the units in Cluster I are relatively independent, this area works as the most active part of the cluster, where most daily interactions take place. Older residents can rest, chat, and take part in productive indoor activities in the different pocket spaces connected by the corridor. At the same time, the atrium allows them to maintain visual connections with people on the upper and lower floors.



6.8 Interior Perspectives

This perspective shows the shared kitchen and living room in Cluster II. The interior is mainly finished with warm local materials, such as timber and bamboo, creating a more familiar and comfortable living environment for the older residents. The windows face the shared courtyard, bringing pleasant views into the room. The kitchen and living room are shared and maintained by six residents, who can take turns cooking and cleaning. This helps reduce the workload for each person and also encourages mutual support among the residents.



6.8 Interior Perspectives

This perspective shows the shared living room inside the communal hall. It is a double-height room with a relatively flexible layout. On the ground floor, a curved sofa is placed within the atrium, facing the courtyard. From here, people can maintain a visual connection with those on the upper floor, while also easily seeing the people and activities taking place in the courtyard. In this shared living room, villagers and older residents living in the building can sit together, talk, play chess, and take part in various small group activities. The space could also be used for regular exhibitions and other community gatherings.



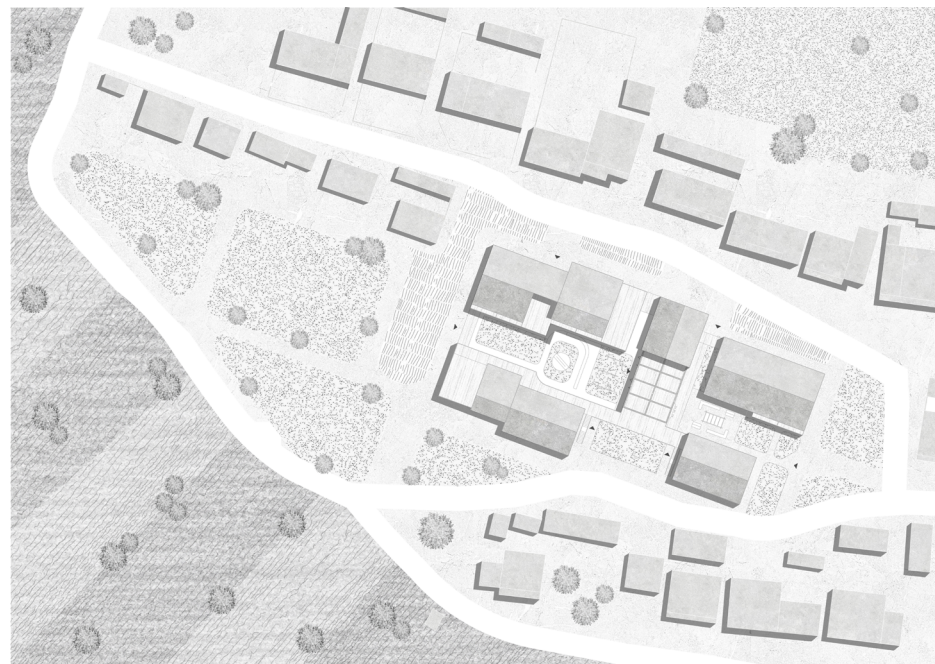
6.9 Building Perspective



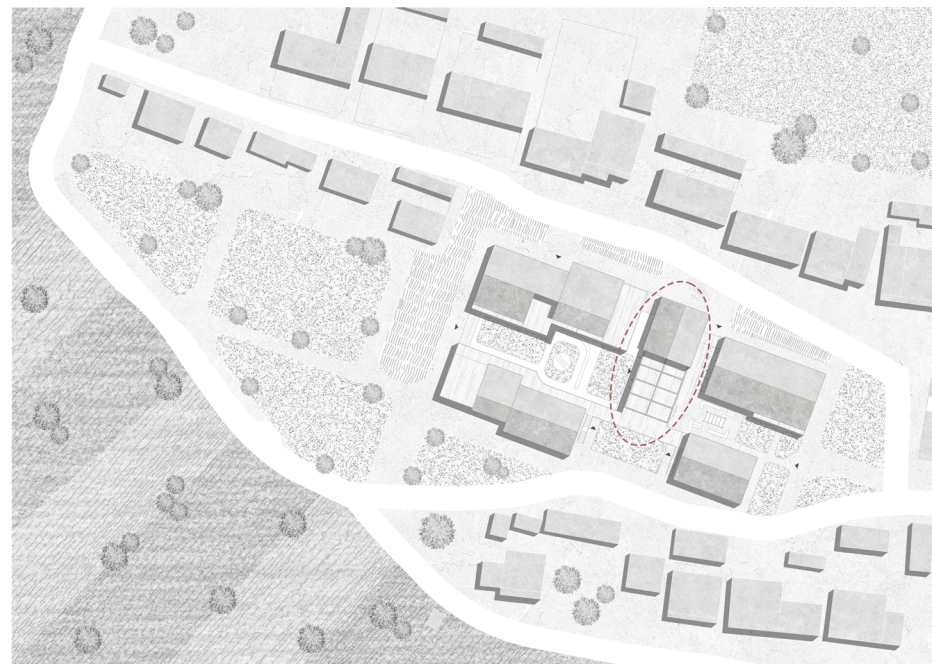
07 | INCREMENTAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Considering the limited economic resources of the village and the uncertainty around residents' acceptance, the project proposes an incremental development model that allows the housing clusters to grow gradually over time.

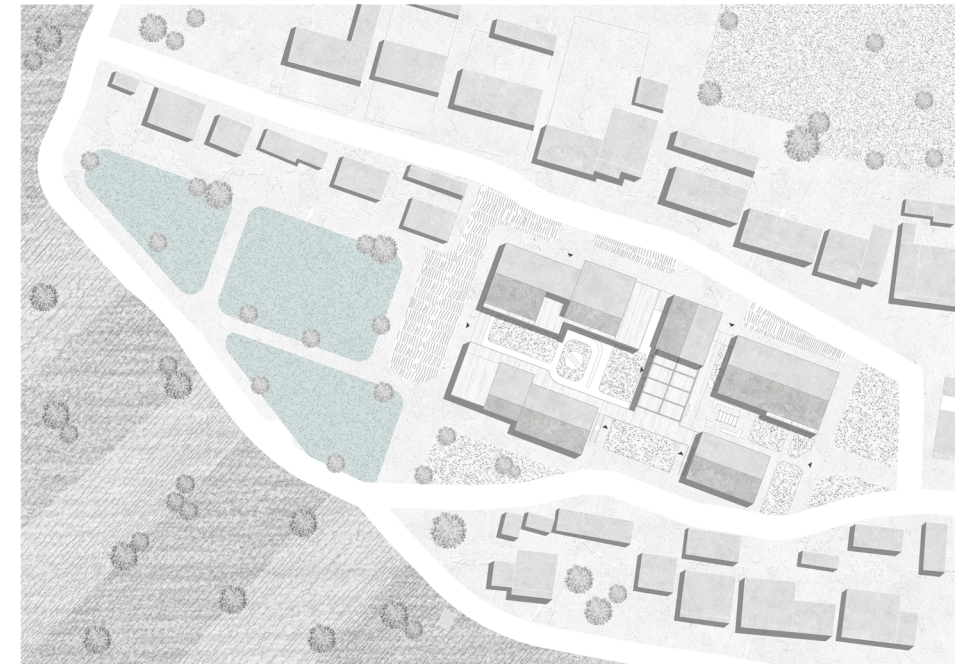
Phase 1: Build 40+ units and establish essential shared spaces and facilities.



Phase 2: Expand the communal hall, adding more recreational spaces and basic healthcare facilities.



Phase 3: Add more units on the adjacent lots, organised around the shared spaces.



08 | CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

This thesis project starts from the main research question: how can collaborative housing be spatially reinterpreted as a small-scale housing prototype to support ageing in place in low-income, kinship-based rural villages in China? Through the case of Quanfang Village, the project argues that ageing in place should not be understood only as a matter of care services, but also as a spatial issue. It concerns how older people can continue living in their familiar village and receive support when needed.

One important point that comes out of the project is that older people should not be seen only as care receivers. The fieldwork in Quanfang Village shows that many of them still want to maintain a relatively independent life and keep their familiar rhythm of daily life. Although they face problems caused by weakening family care, poor conditions in old houses, and physical decline, they still take part in everyday life and maintain a certain degree of agency. With this understanding, housing for older people is not treated here as only a set of rooms and care facilities. Instead, the design tries to integrate independent living, everyday contact, and mutual support through spatial arrangement.

The second understanding is that ageing in place does not necessarily mean that older people must always stay in their original homes. For older people in Quanfang Village, what matters more is whether they can continue living in a familiar environment. This understanding is reflected in the choice of a site between the old village and the new village. The location keeps the housing cluster connected to the old village and makes it easier for older residents to stay close to family members in the new village. It supports a wider meaning of ageing in place by allowing existing social relationships and familiar daily rhythms to continue.

A third point is that collaborative housing cannot be understood as a fixed model. In a rural context such as Quanfang Village, collaborative living should not mean that everything is shared. Older people still need private space and independence in everyday life. The project therefore proposes a lighter and more flexible form of shared living. Threshold spaces are used to adjust the relationship between private living spaces and communal areas, while the concept of Activity Catalyst links these areas with the everyday practices familiar to older people. This allows interaction and mutual support to happen naturally in daily life, rather than depending on arranged group activities.

The spatial interaction framework helps connect research and design. The related diagrams do not directly determine the architectural form. Instead, they help the project understand how different spatial conditions affect movement, visual connections, and productive practices. This process allowed the project to move beyond simply adding shared rooms and to think more carefully about how shared living can happen in real spatial settings. It also helped the later design establish a clearer relationship between living units, threshold spaces, and communal spaces.

The contribution of this project is not to provide a standard answer that can be applied to all rural villages. Its main value lies in using the specific case of Quanfang Village to explore a housing design approach rooted in everyday rural life. Older people's everyday practices, social relationships, and housing needs were taken as the starting point, rather than treated as background conditions. The project develops these concerns into a small-scale housing prototype that can be adjusted over time. In Quanfang Village, this prototype offers a housing option between family care and institutional care. It also provides a possible design reference for ageing well in place in similar low-income, kinship-based villages.

This project also has several limitations. First, because the fieldwork period was short, the understanding of village life remains limited at this stage. Second, whether collaborative living can be accepted by local older people still requires more communication and adjustment. Building scale is also an issue that needs further discussion. The project uses a layout of two to three floors to balance land use, cost, and the existing building scale of the village. But this should not be seen as a fixed answer for all rural housing. At this stage, the project focuses mainly on a spatial prototype, while real implementation would still require further consideration of ownership, tenure, management, maintenance, and funding. Future work could also test different housing unit types, spatial combinations, and care strategies.

Overall, this project gave me a clearer understanding of housing design for older people. Such design should not start only from care functions or existing housing types. It should be based on older people's real lives, including how they use space, their social relationships, and their expectations for later life. This also provides a basis for my future study of rural housing for older people and ageing in place.

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