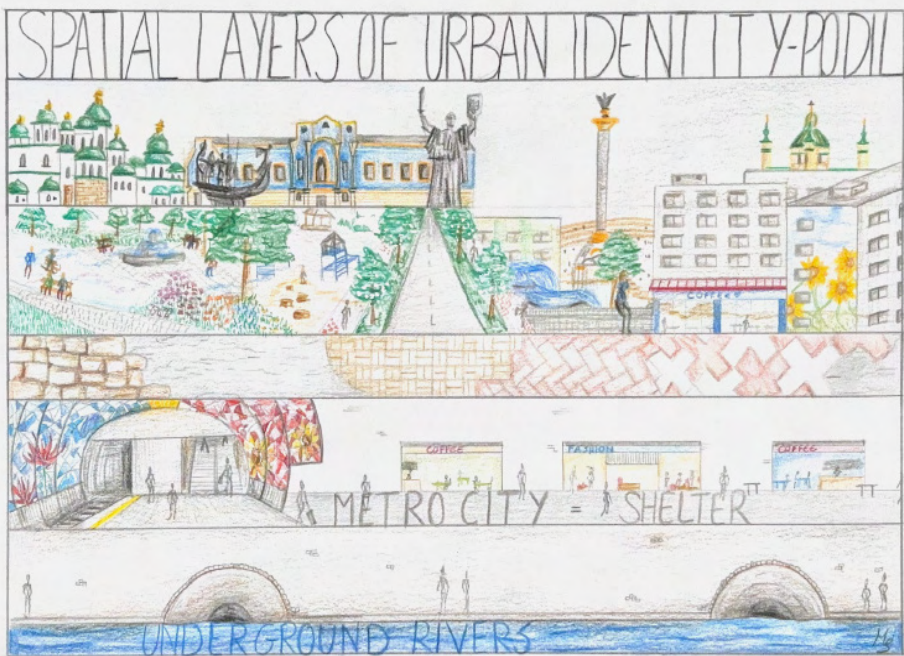




PRESERVING URBAN IDENTITY

Mobilizing pre-war spatial memories in view of urban reconstruction planning

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2025-2026



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Abstract

Wars around the world pose one of the most serious threats to cultural heritage. This goes beyond physical destruction and it also harms community identity. Communities risk losing social cohesion, collective memory, and a sense of belonging (Docherty, 2024; Gubkina & Azzouz, 2023). Urban and monumental heritage function as spatial anchors of collective memory and are important factors in shaping the identity of urban environments (Gantois, 2021; Hawke, 2010). However, heritage is not limited to officially protected monuments. Everyday structures, routes and public spaces also play an important role in how inhabitants identify with their settlement (Lambert & Rockwell, 2012; Sonkoly, 2017).

Settlements can be seen as palimpsests, composed of multiple layers that overlap, whereby heritage is one of the most important within this palimpsest to which collective memories are attached (Pallasmaa, 2024). Following the concepts of “memory of places” and “places of memory” (Truc, 2011), this research examines how collective spatial memory of inhabitants can help with the post-war reconstruction beyond object-based preservation.

The research combines memory talks and mapping with three Ukrainian participants who lived in the same urban area in Podil. First, during our conversations pre-war spatial memories were collected. Second, sketches and models were used to translate their memories in spatial models to understand their lived experiences in the urban fabric. Third, the collected narratives were combined with desktop research about built and urban heritage to identify those that hold the strongest emotional and identity-forming value for the inhabitants.

This thesis aims to develop an identity-based framework that supports the post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian settlements and safeguards collective memory, community identity and the continuity of monumental and urban heritage.

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Prologue

This thesis emerges from a shared studio framework titled Mobilizing Pre-war Spatial Memories in View of Urban Reconstruction Planning. The studio engages with the urgent challenges faced by contemporary cities marked by conflict and destruction, where reconstruction is not only a technical or spatial task, but also a deeply social, cultural, and political process.

At the core of this collective inquiry lies the hypothesis that the mobilization of pre-war spatial memories rooted in lived experiences, spatial configurations, and everyday journeys can contribute to more inclusive and socially resilient reconstruction strategies. Rather than approaching the city as a tabula rasa, the studio explores how these memories can inform future-oriented design processes that acknowledge the complexity and plurality of urban life.

A second line of investigation concerns the role of architectural artefacts. Considered both as epistemic tools and as “objects of speech,” they are mobilized to reveal and communicate otherwise inaccessible layers of knowledge embedded in the pre-war urban fabric. Through drawings, mappings, models, and other forms of representation, the projects seek not only to express ideas, but to actively generate insight into the cultural and emotional ties between communities and their environments.

While grounded in a shared research agenda, each thesis develops its own position within this framework. The projects engage with specific sites, actors, and narratives, often connected to war-affected contexts in Ukraine and informed by voices that remain underrepresented in reconstruction debates, including members of the Ukrainian diaspora in Flanders. Through these situated perspectives, the work collectively questions dominant, top-down planning approaches and explores alternative futures based on multiple, intersecting narratives.

Positioned within the research cell Restoring Broken Journeys, this studio understands “journeys” as processes of transformation, in which stories, lives, and spatial memories are deeply intertwined. The projects therefore do not aim to produce definitive solutions, but rather to contribute to an ongoing exploration of how architectural practice can support the recovery and re-articulation of disrupted social and spatial realities.

Together, these theses form a constellation of inquiries that investigate how reconstruction can move beyond material repair, towards fostering conditions for renewed social and cultural cohesion. Each project constitutes a distinct yet interconnected step in this broader research trajectory.

Prof. Gisèle Gantois

Introduction

Introduction

Post-conflict reconstruction often focuses on rapid rebuilding and economic recovery. However, beyond physical reconstruction, cities also require the preservation of their spatial identity, as it forms the basis through which inhabitants recognise, remember and reconnect with their urban environment (Pallasmaa, 2024; Hawke, 2010).

Monumental and urban heritage play an important role in this process. These elements function not only as historical and aesthetic objects, but also as spatial carriers of collective memory in everyday life (Gantois, 2021; Truc, 2011). They are crucial in restoring identity and to feel connected with the settlements what once was their collective home.

This thesis investigates, through the inhabitants' memories and experiences, which urban elements carry identity and collective memory. Using participatory approaches, the research explores how these elements can form a framework for the reconstruction of Post-Conflict Urban Identity on different scales in Ukraine. Memory is positioned as the central element of the research, while (monumental) heritage is understood as a spatial medium to which memories of pre-war experiences are linked and in which these experiences can become tangible and alive again.

The aim of this thesis is not only to collect interviews, represent them through drawings, or translate them into spatial models, but to transform them into a structured yet open-ended outcome. The research does not result in a fixed final product, but in an evolving set of tools that can be refined as new input is added. These include a representative identity map, a set of identity-carrying spatial typologies, and an identity-based framework for Podil and its surroundings.

In this thesis, the term monuments refers to officially recognised heritage objects and symbolic landmarks. Identity refers to the ways in which inhabitants recognise, experience and attach meaning to their lived environment through collective spatial memory. It is shaped not only by monumental heritage, but also by everyday urban elements such as routes, public spaces, green structures, landmarks and recurrent spatial practices (Hawke, 2010.; Sonkoly, 2017; Veldpaus & Roders, 2013). The framework therefore aims to identify what should be preserved and how spatial memory can inform reconstruction, rebuilding and future expansion beyond the preservation of monumental heritage alone.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The study is based on a limited number of participants connected to the selected case-study area, and participation depended on voluntary involvement. The case study was determined by the place of origin of the participants who were willing to participate. For that reason, the outcomes should not be understood as definitive or fully representative, but as qualitative and open-ended findings that can continue to evolve.

The research also depends on the willingness of participants to share memories and experiences. Its aim is therefore not statistical representation, but a qualitative understanding of how memory and spatial identity are formed. As a result, the findings reflect the perspectives of those participating, rather than the experiences of the entire community. The proposed methodology can be expanded to a larger and more diverse group of participants from the chosen case-study area in order to broaden and further develop the findings.

Background and context

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many cities, towns and villages have suffered severe destruction. Current estimates indicate that more than 250,000 buildings have been damaged or destroyed, including architectural landmarks, cultural heritage monuments and cultural infrastructure (GWZO, 2025). While public attention often focuses on officially recognised monuments, a significant share of the losses concerns ordinary buildings and urban fabrics that were never formally protected. This creates the risk that post-war reconstruction, especially when driven by modernization, may further erase the continuity of the existing urban environments.

In the context of this thesis, cultural heritage is important not only as a collection of monuments, but as a carrier of collective memory, identity and belonging. In Ukraine, heritage is not only tied to national identity, but also to the lived experiences of inhabitants in their everyday urban spaces (Lanka, 2023; Munawar & Plets, 2025). This is also visible in the efforts to protect monuments during the war, for example through sandbags, wooden structures and emergency documentation initiatives such as SUCHO (Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online). These actions show that heritage is valued not only as material fabric, but also as a social and symbolic concept.

The destruction of heritage therefore goes beyond physical loss. It also disrupts the relationship between people and place, by affecting collective memory, continuity and spatial identity (Docherty, 2024; Gubkina & Azzouz, 2023; Pallasmaa, 2024).

For this reason, post-war reconstruction cannot be understood purely as the rebuilding of damaged structures. It also requires an understanding of how inhabitants identify with their environment, and how both monumental and everyday urban heritage contribute to that identification. This forms the starting point of the present thesis.



Figure 1. Statue getting protected by sandbags (Destroyed cultural heritage of Ukraine, 2022)

Figure 2. Statue protected by sandbags through SUCHO (Destroyed cultural heritage of Ukraine, 2022)

Research question

Post-war reconstruction is often approached as a “predominantly material” process, while the familiar social life that pre-conflict urban areas once hosted receives “little or no consideration”. Debates on reconstruction also tend to oscillate between two extremes: the “brave new world” of radical modernization and the preservation of historic centre as “large open-air museums”. In both cases, there is a risk that the everyday urban environment, and the memories attached to it, are overlooked. Yet historical urban areas are closely tied to “belonging, rootedness, place identity and locality”, which makes them more than just a physical setting (Gantois, 2025).

Spatial memory is crucial in understanding how inhabitants remain connected to their lived environment. A “well-defined space” can give memory “an anchor point”, while poorly planned changes may “alter or even erase the memories attached to places”. Reconstruction can thus either help restore collective memory and familiarity, or further damage them by failing to respond to the needs and desires of affected communities. This makes the “agency of spatial memories” and their role in “nurturing the sense of belonging” particularly relevant for post-conflict recovery (Gantois, 2025).

Within this scope, the thesis builds on the **understanding that drawings, maps and models can function as “artefacts of knowledge”**, able to unlock emotional and cultural ties to the pre-war urban fabric (Gantois, 2025). This is especially important in the present work, where the research methodology is not fixed, but is improved over time, through an iterative process of testing, adjusting and refining. The research diary documents how this process unfolded step by step, from the first intensive research week and the initial preparation of the topic to the gradual development of memory talks, mapping sessions, sketches and models as tools for understanding the relation between memory, heritage and reconstruction.

From this initial view point the following research question emerges:

How can spatial memory inform the transformation of both institutional and lived heritage in post-conflict urban reconstruction?

State of art

The state of the art is not only used to contextualize this thesis theoretically, but also to clarify why both participatory methods and desktop research are necessary to study spatial memory in relation to post-war reconstruction.

Memory, place and identity

There are two different types of memory: **“memory of places”** and **“places of memory”**. “Memory of places” is direct, local memory tied to physical sites, is a form of memory that is vivid but fragile. “Places of memory”, however are symbolic or constructed sites such as monuments, memorials that preserve a more stable, collective version of memory. When places are changed, it can transform or even erase people’s memories. “Our domicile is the refuge of our body, memory, and identity”.(Truc, 2011).

“We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the self from its spatial and situational existence...” (as cited in Pallasmaa, 2024, p.55) Identity and self-experience do not only exist within the body. Who we are is also shaped by the surrounding in which we live. The place we inhabit also contributes to the formation of our personal identity. As Gabriel Marcel said, “I am my body” and Noël Arnaud quoted “I am the space, where I am.” (as cited in Pallasmaa, 2024, p.55). Understanding memory and identity connected to physical places explains the choice to map and prioritise monumental and urban heritage based on their collective and emotional importance.

Sense of place

The concept of **sense of place** further expands the importance of memory and identity. **Identification with a place is part of one’s personal identity.** Heritage is not only monumental or material, but also embedded in everyday practices. Activities such as local festivals, craftwork and community gatherings contribute to collective memory, social continuity and personal identity. **Sense of place** is also shaped by how inhabitants describe their home environment and by the distinctiveness they assign to it. This highlights the interaction between people and place. It is further formed through continuity over time, social familiarity or insideness, and elective belonging, showing how individuals locate themselves within both physical and social landscapes. **In this way, sense of place helps people position themselves in both the past and the present** (Hawke, 2010).

This concept is particularly relevant for the thesis because it makes clear that meaningful places are not only historically important in a formal sense, but also emotionally, socially and experientially significant. It supports the decision to work not only with officially recognised heritage, but also with lived and everyday urban environments. It also reinforces the need to combine desktop research with participants’ narratives.

Urbicide

When spatial relationships are disrupted, the consequences are more than physical damage. In conflict situations, this process is described as “urbicide”. According to Carrión Mena and Cepeda Pico, urbicide refers to the death of a city (Carrión Mena & Cepeda Pico, 2023).

The term derives from *urbs*, meaning city, and *cidium*, referring to death or massacre. It does not describe a natural death, but an aggravated form of destruction caused by identified actors. Urbicide destroys not only buildings, but the systems of everyday urban life, including monuments, squares, libraries, infrastructures and services. **It therefore makes it possible to understand not only physical destruction, but also unemployment and the loss of collective memory in urban areas** (Carrión Mena & Cepeda Pico, 2023).

The concept of urbicide is useful for this thesis, because it clarifies that post-war destruction concerns more than damaged objects. It also affects the lived urban fabric and the memory structures through which inhabitants identify with place. This supports the thesis position that reconstruction must go beyond rebuilding individual monuments and should also consider routes, public spaces, everyday environments and the broader urban identity of the case study.

Wounded cities

War-affected cities can also be understood as wounded cities: **places marked not only by physical destruction, but also by social, emotional and intergenerational harm**. These wounds can be examined through memory-work, by listening to the stories of citizens, their experiences of places, and the ways in which collective memory is attached to the urban environment. Memory-work helps create a balance between what has been lost and the imagination of a possible future. Understanding cities as wounded is therefore important in post-war contexts.

Till further links this to a place-based ethics of care. Drawing on Tronto, she describes four forms of care: caring about, taking care of, giving care and receiving care (as cited in Till, 2012, p.8). Together, Till's concept of wounded cities and Tronto's ethics of care show that memory, identity, and belonging are deeply embedded in lived and everyday spatial practices. This makes them especially vulnerable in post-war urban environments.

This perspective is important for this thesis, because it supports memory-work as more than a descriptive method. It frames listening to participants' stories as a way of understanding how urban “wounds” are spatially experienced. It also strengthens the relevance of working carefully and gradually with narratives, drawings, and models, since these can help articulate fragile memories without reducing them to purely factual data.

Psychogeography

An approach that explores subjective experiences of urban space is psychogeography. Introduced by Debord in 1955, the concept studies how the geographical environment affects human behaviour and emotions. While rooted in a materialist view of geography, psychogeography expands traditional spatial analysis by addressing subjective experience and perception (Debord, 1955). It is part of experimental geography and highlights the psychological component of our experiences and perceptions of the built environment (Shields, 2017).

Debord argues that urban experience cannot be understood only through architectural style, historical period or living conditions. He presents psychogeography as an experimental and critical practice in which mapping and manipulating maps can function as active instruments to explore and interpret the city. **Even small interventions within the urban context can therefore have significant meaning.** Psychogeography thus offers a way to investigate lived urban experience (Debord, 1955).

Psychogeography also includes the concept of affordances, introduced by the psychologist J.J. Gibson (Shields, 2017). Gibson explains that affordances refer to what the environment enables for the animal or the human subject (Gibson, 1979). In this sense, urban space is not only perceived visually, but also through what it allows, suggests or enables.

The concept is relevant because it provides a theoretical basis for understanding mapping as more than neutral representation. It helps justify participatory mapping as a way of investigating how urban space is subjectively experienced, remembered and valued. It also supports the use of spatial representations that reveal not only physical layout, but also atmosphere, emotional attachment and the lived potential of urban environments.

Architecture and Urban Heritage as Agents of Healing and Collective Memory

"If we desire architecture to have an emancipating or healing role, instead of reinforcing the erosion of existential meaning, we must reflect on the multitude of secret ways in which the art of architecture is tied to the cultural and mental reality of its time. We should also be aware of the ways in which the feasibility of architecture is being threatened or marginalised by current political, cultural, economic, cognitive, and perceptual developments. Architecture has become an endangered art form" (Pallasmaa, 2024, p. 28).

This passage emphasizes that architecture is not only a physical or technical practice, but also a mental and cultural one. It warns that, without sufficient attention to experience, memory and meaning, architecture risks losing its restorative potential for the inhabitants of the city.

Because of war, cities can fade and become forgotten, a phenomenon that can be described as "war fatigue." In this context, the concept of home becomes particularly powerful because it relates to continuity, belonging and recognition in times of rupture. Home is more than the building people live in. It exists on different scales, such as the neighbourhood, the city and the country, and relates to multiple spaces and practices of belonging. However, heritage institutions often remain blind to this broader meaning of home. Memory is often reconstructed through a single authorized narrative, while the people who carry the deepest traumas do not always feel heard. In the cases of Ukraine and Syria, (Gubkina and Azzouz, 2023) show that people respond by coming together to memorialize, remember and grieve in public.

This perspective is important for the thesis, because it broadens reconstruction beyond the rebuilding of physical structures alone. It shows that reconstruction also concerns the restoration of spaces of belonging, continuity and memory.

Participation and the experiences of inhabitants in heritage reconstruction

The term “cultural heritage” goes beyond material and monumental heritage. In times of war, protection efforts often focus primarily on movable and immovable heritage. What should not be forgotten, however, is that cultural heritage also represents a community’s identity (Lambert & Rockwell, 2012). When these aspects are overlooked, reconstruction risks neglecting the places that hold symbolic and emotional importance for inhabitants.

Studies on public perception of urban identity in the post-Soviet city of Vinnytsia, Ukraine, demonstrate that residents’ perceptions and everyday experiences play a crucial role in determining what is considered meaningful (Melnychuk & Gnatiuk, 2019). In this study, residents were asked about urban transformations, their opinions on public space, and how they perceived and described their home city. The respondents identified 20 landmarks as urban symbols, which helped the researchers gain a better understanding of the qualities of the urban environment.

This study emphasizes the importance of including bottom-up perspectives in post-war recovery processes. It shows that the voices of inhabitants are essential for understanding which places are experienced as symbolic, representative and meaningful. For this thesis, this is particularly relevant because it supports the use of participatory methods to not only identify officially recognised heritage, but also the places that carry lived, emotional and identity-forming value for the community.

Together, these concepts frame heritage not only as a material object worthy of protection, but also as a spatial and social carrier of memory, identity, and belonging. They show that meaningful places emerge through the interaction between built form, everyday practice, and lived experience. For this thesis, this theoretical foundation justifies the combination of memory talks, mapping, models and desktop research in order to investigate how both institutional, and lived heritage contribute to post-war urban identity.

Methodology

The initial studio framework proposed the walking method (walking while talking about memories) as a way to access spatial memories in situ. In this thesis, that approach was adapted into memory talks, mental maps and collective mapping, as this proved to be a more suitable and comfortable approach for the participants. Because the lived environment itself could not be revisited, memory was activated through dialogue, drawing, and spatial representation rather than through walking on site.

The research diary became the methodological backbone of this iterative process, documenting how meetings, interviews, mapping sessions, sketches, and models gradually translated the participants' memories into spatial form. In this way, the diary not only records the development of the method, but also shows how the research evolved from the initial framework towards a representative identity map, an identity atlas, and a memory-based reconstruction framework.

Note to the reader:

This thesis brings together different layers of research. To make these layers readable, a colour system is used throughout the document.

Pink refers to the research diary: the iterative process of meetings, interviews, mapping sessions, sketches, models and reflections.

The methodological sections describe how the initial framework evolved into memory talks, mental maps, collective mapping, and, eventually, spatial representations of memory and identity.

Blue refers to additional desktop research: contextual and theoretical information that supports the project.

Research diary

Methodology

DESKTOP RESEARCH

Research diary + methodology

The research diary records how this process developed from the first intensive research week onwards, gradually shaping the focus, method, and spatial translation of the thesis.

Diary

11th of November 2025

Today we met at school with a PhD student, H.G., and an Ukrainian journalist. The PhD student presented her research, which focuses on Ukrainian women who move back and forth between Ukraine and Belgium. What I found especially interesting was her use of "witnessing through photovoice" as a method to collect information about the everydayness of war. Through this, she explores questions about daily life, collective spaces, and how participants imagine the future of architecture and the built environment.

She also introduced us to the concepts of trajectory ethnography, which studies one route, routine or movement in depth, and multi-scalar ethnography, which examines how the same phenomenon operates across different scales. These approaches made me think about how movement, routine and spatial experience could also become important within my own research.

The woman from the Ukrainian diaspora gave us more insight into her country through a PowerPoint presentation and a Kahoot quiz. The interactive format and the variation in the way she communicated the information caught my attention. She taught us more about communication styles, belief systems, food culture and everyday life in Ukraine. This session made me realize how important it is to approach the participants not only through architecture or heritage, but also through their cultural context and ways of living.

Findings

This session broadened my understanding of the research beyond architecture alone. It showed that spatial memory is closely connected to everyday life, routines, movement, and cultural context. The introduction to photovoice, trajectory ethnography, and multi-scalar ethnography made me reflect on how memory can be accessed not only through static descriptions of places, but also through lived practices and repeated movements.

For the thesis, this was an important moment because it shifted the focus towards the everyday urban environment and role of routine, collective spaces, and daily experience in shaping identity. It also reminded me that working with participants from the Ukrainian diaspora requires sensitivity not only to spatial questions, but also to ways of living, remembering, and sharing.

4th of December 2025

Today, together with the master thesis studio, we watched the documentary "Nice Ladies". It follows an adult cheerleading group in Ukraine and shows how the war affected both their daily lives and their relationships with one another. Although the group tried to continue practicing, some members left the country while others stayed in Ukraine.

What I found most striking was the tension that emerged between those who left and those who remained. The documentary showed that war does not only destroy places, but also affects social relations, trust and shared routines. As people are forced into different trajectories, contacts can weaken and collective bonds may change or even disappear.

Findings

This documentary made me realize that post-war recovery is not only about rebuilding spaces, but also about understanding how collective life is disrupted. It reinforced the importance of memory, everyday practices, and shared spaces in relation for creating a sense of belonging and guiding post-war reconstruction.

12th of December 2025

Today we presented our research question and how we wanted to continue with the thesis. During this semester, I read many texts on war damage, heritage documentation and the listing of destroyed monuments. What started to bother me was that much of this research remained focused on documenting loss or protecting officially recognised heritage.

A turning point came when I found a paper that went deeper into the effect that the loss of heritage has on memory, and into the idea that architecture can act as an active agent. This made me question what else is lost through war, beyond monuments alone, and how this affects inhabitants. From that moment, I became increasingly interested in the preservation not only of monumental heritage, but also of urban identity.

Finding:

Through the literature research the following points were found to have the strongest impact.

Impact of War on Ukraine's Cultural Heritage

>250,000 buildings destroyed, including many unprotected landmarks (GWZO, 2025)

Loss affects cities, towns, villages, especially central buildings

Heritage is the key to national identity, and city identity (Lanka, 2023)
Post-war recovery should consider social and human experiences, not only rebuilding (Belal & Shcherbina, 2021)

Protection & Archiving

Monuments protected with sandbags, shelters, or dismantling
Volunteers and initiatives like SUCHO archive cultural data
UNESCO reported 53 cultural sites were destroyed in 2022
(Destroyed cultural heritage of Ukraine, 2022)

Social Impact

Loss of heritage leads to a loss of collective memory and identity (Gubkina & Azzouz, 2023; Docherty, 2024)

This moment marked the shift from an object-based understanding of heritage towards a broader interest in collective memory and lived urban identity.

18th of February 2026

The research to find participants started with putting a Facebook message in Facebook groups from my local hometown in the second week of February. In this way I received lots of response of people that wanted to help with the thesis. Some people added me on Facebook. Some texted me out of their selves and for some I took the next step to send a message.

20th of February 2026

I sent to local organisations for Ukrainians, residents, that provided apartments for Ukrainians and language schools where Ukrainians learn Dutch. Facebook had the most success and broadened my network to get in contact with people.

21- 23rd of February 2026

Most of the people who contacted me speak English and some of them even Dutch. Also, a family who couldn't speak Dutch or English wanted to help me but unfortunately with the language barrier it would have been hard to communicate clearly. Since I am specifically looking for participants out of the same midsized city, village or district it made the search to find participants more difficult. I got in contact with a Ukrainian woman from Kyiv who knew a lot of other Ukrainian women from Kyiv in my hometown. For the first phase where I try to understand memories and make them spatially, I will meet with them a first time on the 26th of march.

They are three friends who all lived their whole lives in Kyiv and were open to help me out through the whole process. They were very interested in the thesis and talked a lot which gave me a lot of interesting stories and memories.

Hallo iedereen,
(english below)
Ik ben Madeline Smid van de Faculteit Architectuur aan de KU Leuven (Gent). Voor mijn masterproef werk ik aan een project over de wederopbouw van Oekraïne en ik zou heel graag mensen uit de Oekraïense diaspora hierbij betrekken – niet als 'onderzoekspersonen', maar als co-auteurs en als dragers van levende herinneringen. Ik vroeg me af of u mij zou kunnen helpen bij het vinden van deelnemers. Het zou natuurlijk fantastisch zijn als u, of een van uw Oekraïense vrienden of familieleden, kennissen zou willen deelnemen. Ik ben specifiek op zoek naar deelnemers uit een kleine/middelgrote stad/deelwijk in Oekraïne
Hier volgt wat meer informatie over de scriptie:
Voor mijn masterscriptie probeer ik inzicht te krijgen in de stedelijke/landelijke ruimte in Oekraïne, niet op basis van officiële documenten, maar op basis van de persoonlijke verhalen van de mensen die daar hebben gewoond.
Duur van het project: één semester, van 10 februari tot 2 juni.
Bijeenkomsten: februari-maart.
De eerste bijeenkomsten worden bij voorkeur gepland in de week van 23 februari/ vanaf wanneer mogelijk.
Aantal bijeenkomsten: minimaal 3, zodat ik meerdere, fases met de deelnemer kan doorgaan en de herinneringen zo goed mogelijk te begrijpen.
Aantal deelnemers die ik zoek: minimaal 2-3 deelnemers uit dezelfde middelgrote stad. (familie, vrienden, kennissen)
Ik praat vloeiend engels en Nederlands. Ik ben ook zeer flexibel naar de planning van de participanten wanneer het voor hun uitkomt. (Fysiek)
Als u geïnteresseerd bent in deelname, potentiële deelnemers weet, vragen heeft of verdere informatie wilt, kunt u mij gerust een e-mail, messenger-bericht of whatsappje sturen (mail: , messenger: , whatsapp:).
Alvast bedankt voor jullie hulp naar mijn zoektocht naar participanten. :))

Hello everyone,
My name is Madeline Smid and I am a student at the Faculty of Architecture at KU Leuven (Ghent). For my master's thesis, I am working on a project about the reconstruction of Ukraine and I would very much like to involve people from the Ukrainian diaspora in this project – not as 'research subjects', but as co-authors and bearers of living memories. I was wondering if you could help me find participants. It would be fantastic if you, or one of your Ukrainian friends or family members, would like to participate. I am specifically looking for participants from a small/medium-sized city/district in Ukraine.
Here is some more information about the thesis:
For my master's thesis, I am trying to gain insight into urban/rural areas in Ukraine, not based on official documents, but based on the personal stories of the people who have lived there.
Duration of the project: one semester, from February 10 to June 2.
Meetings: February-March.
The first meetings are preferably planned for the week of February 23/from when possible.
Number of meetings: at least 3, so that I can go through several phases with the participant and understand the memories as well as possible. (physically)
Number of participants I am looking for: at least 2-3 participants from the same medium-sized city. (family, friends, acquaintances)
I speak fluent English and Dutch. I am also very flexible to the schedules of the participants.
If you are interested in participating, know potential participants, have questions, or would like further information, please feel free to send me an email, Messenger message, or WhatsApp message (email: , Messenger: , WhatsApp:).
Thank you in advance for your help in my search for participants. :))

Figure 3. Facebook post.

23rd of February 2026

Since I am specifically looking for participants out of the same midsized city, village or district it made the search to find participants more difficult. I got in contact with a Ukrainian woman from Kyiv who knew a lot of other Ukrainian women from Kyiv in my hometown. For the first phase where I try to understand memories and make them spatially, I will meet with them a first time on the 26th of march.

They are three friends who all lived their whole lives in Kyiv and were open to help me out through the whole process. They were very interested in the thesis and talked a lot which gave me a lot of interesting stories and memories.

Phase 1. Top-down heritage map of Ukraine

As a first step, a Mental image of Ukraine was made to provide an overview of the monumental and urban heritage elements that symbolize the country.



Figure 4. Mental Image of Ukraine based on international heritage lists and national organisations.

To identify important national monumental and urban heritage elements, international heritage lists from UNESCO (UNESCO, 2026) and national organisations (Ukrainian Institute, 2026) were used as references. The analysis shows that officially protected landmarks and nodes are mainly concentrated in the largest Ukrainian cities. This map provides a first top-down overview of the institutionally recognised heritage in the country, with the scale of the images reflecting their level of official recognition.

Officially recognised heritage sites include the Wooden Tserkvas near Lviv, Saint Sophia Cathedral and Independence Square in Kyiv, the Mariupol Drama Theatre, and the Odesa Opera and Ballet Theatre with the historic City Garden. A vernacular Ukrainian house type is added as regionally embedded heritage. Together, these references offer a first top-down overview of what is institutionally recognised as heritage in Ukraine before moving to a smaller scale.

26th of February 2026 - First interview

I went to my first interview with three Ukrainian women from Kyiv who are currently living in my hometown. We met at 18:00, and they invited me to the home of one of the women. I arrived at a nice terraced house and received a warm welcome. Once I had settled at the dining table, they immediately told me that they liked to talk a lot and offered me some tea.

They also told me that they were unsure about how open they could be, and that it might be difficult for them to feel comfortable answering certain questions. I respected this and explained that, if any question felt uncomfortable, they could simply tell me, and that they were free to answer only what they felt comfortable sharing. Since I noticed they felt a little stressed about answering too quickly, I gave them paper and some time to think before speaking.

In the end, I only needed to ask one question before they continued talking at length. After two hours of conversation, when the discussion gradually came to an end, I decided to go home. They told me they would be happy to help further and that I could contact them at any time.

Phase 2. Memory talk

Memory talk - Interview 1

In the first phase, participants were invited to talk about their experiences in their district. The goal was to find out which places they considered valuable and through which spatial elements they identified with the urban environment. The aim of this phase was to gain insights into how collective spatial memories are formed and articulated. Rather than directing the participants in a specific direction, the conversation started with an open question. Participants were encouraged to speak freely about the places and experiences that first came to mind. The prepared questions served as a basis for the conversation and were only used to keep it going when needed. This approach allowed the research to explore how memory is spatially structured through landmarks, routes, gathering spaces, and everyday spaces.

Methodologically, this phase draws on theories of spatial memory, sense of place, and lived heritage. As Truc argues, memory is anchored in concrete places and can be altered or even erased when those places change (Truc, 2011). In a similar way, Hawke argues that place identity and belonging are closely connected to how inhabitants describe and experience their home environment (Hawke, 2010). This makes memory talks particularly relevant for identifying meaningful places beyond officially recognised monuments and for understanding how everyday spatial references contribute to collective memory and urban identity.

Results and findings

The first point of interest/importance identified, were **parks**. They were described as key gathering points for free time activities and social interaction, associated with fountains, tall trees, playgrounds, lakes and their good accessibility. Parks also provide openness within the built environment and were seen as important public and social spaces throughout Kyiv, especially in Svyatoshynskyi and to a lesser degree in Podil.

The second element was the presence of **wide streets**. These are lined with large chestnut trees, which separate the road from the areas for cyclists, pedestrians and buildings. Besides ecological, and safety functions, they add a strong green layer to the city. Chestnut trees were identified as an addition symbol of Kyiv.

The next element identified was **built heritage**. Podil was described as a district with many heritage buildings, valued for their beauty and the history they carry. The participants expressed a strong desire to be able to see these places when returning to Kyiv. Theatres were also mentioned as part of family rituals while growing up. Soviet monuments, however, were clearly excluded from this appreciation and were not considered worthy of reconstruction.

The fourth point was the **structure of the different districts** in the city. The participants distinguished between the sleeping districts, with high Soviet apartment blocks and less activity; the district of openness, with single-family houses and gardens; and the historic centre, structured as a grid and filled with old buildings, churches, and monuments.

What is important in these first memories is that they mainly concern the larger structural elements of the city. The participants first recalled broad urban frameworks such as parks, wide streets, district typologies, and heritage anchors, rather than colours, smells, or small material details. These first memories therefore reveal how the city is initially remembered through its main spatial structure.

In the next step, these main elements were spatialised in models. Noticeably, no colours were used yet. The aim of these first models was to bring the initial memories to life and to introduce a conversation about colours, smells, and more detailed experiences in the following interview.

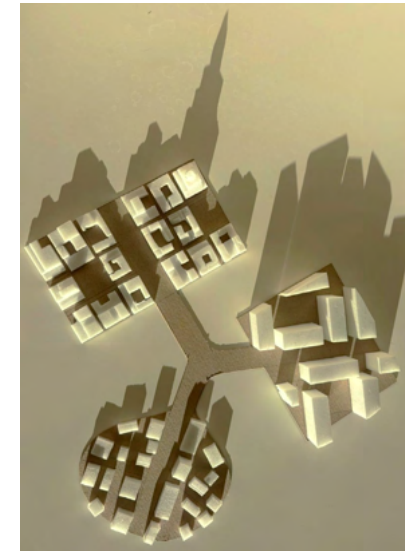


Figure 5. Spatial model of the different districts described by the participants through memories and experiences.

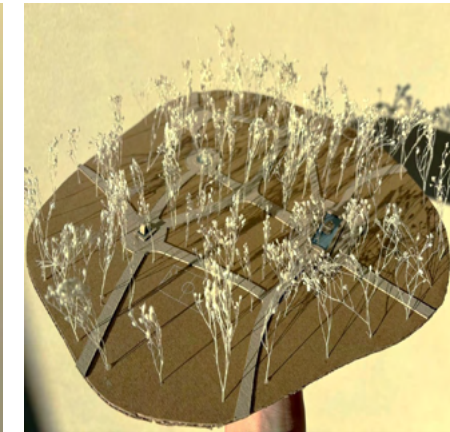


Figure 6. Park described by the participants out of memories and experiences.

Openness

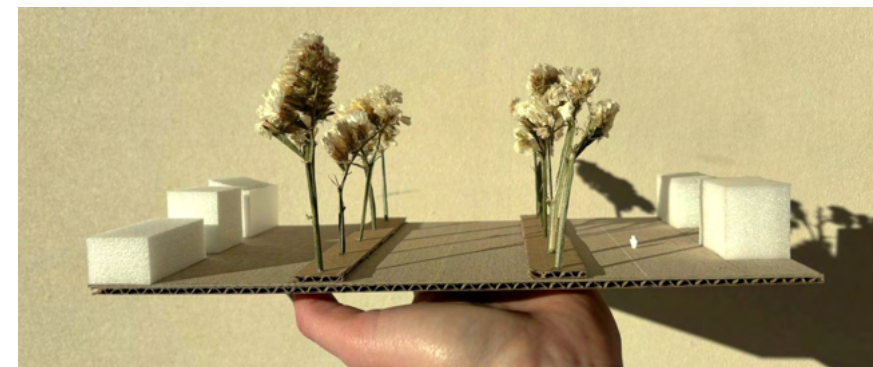


Figure 7. Composition model of the main streets described by the participants through memories and experiences.

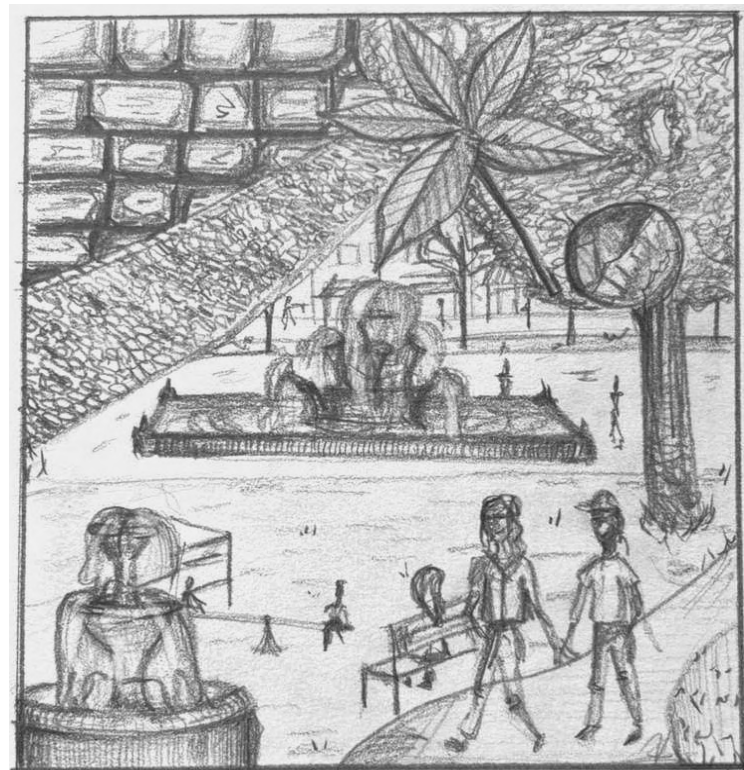


Figure 8. Drawing of the most cited elements: fountains, chestnut trees, openness, playgrounds, greenery, park as social lung, cobblestone streets.

Alongside the first models, a **drawing was made of the spatial elements** most often mentioned by the participants: fountains, chestnut trees, openness, playgrounds, greenery, the park as a social lung, and cobblestone streets. The drawing therefore complements the models as a first spatial translation of the participants' memories and serves as a basis for the next interview.

27th of February 2026

Together with the other students from the master thesis studio, I went to Leuven to meet several Ukrainians through a contact arranged by our supervisor, who had been put in touch with one of the participants. In this way, our network gradually expanded. It was a sunny and warm day, which immediately influenced the atmosphere of the meeting. As we walked towards the University Library in Leuven, our meeting point, three Ukrainians were already waiting for us. We began with a short introduction of ourselves, and soon the others arrived as well.

Instead of staying in one place, we decided to go for a walk and later sat down in the park to have lunch. While we were sitting there, the Ukrainians introduced themselves one by one. They were open, and we were able to ask questions in a relaxed way, which helped me understand who might be relevant for my thesis topic. What struck me was how much the weather and the walking format shaped the meeting. It felt informal and comfortable, more like getting to know one another than conducting an interview. This made me realize how much the setting of a conversation can influence openness and trust.

After further refining my research topic, I decided to continue working with the three Ukrainian women from my hometown. The fact that they all came from the same district made their stories especially valuable, since it allowed me to gather multiple voices connected to the same place. Around the same time, one of the other students in the studio got in touch with the Ukrainian emergency village in Oostakker, which we were later allowed to visit on the 3rd. of March.



Figure 9. Walk through Leuven with the master thesis students and Ukrainian participants. Note: Photo made by Judith Verheyen.

3rd of March 2026

At 10 o'clock, our thesis studio had a meeting with people working at the emergency village. They first gave us an introduction to the village and its functioning. They showed plans of the different phases that the village is built. After which we had the opportunity to ask questions. Afterwards, they showed us around the site. We visited two different housing units and, once the guided part had ended, we were allowed to walk around the village more freely on our own.

The visit was valuable in giving me a better understanding of the temporary living conditions of displaced Ukrainians in Belgium. At the same time, it also made me reflect more clearly on the direction of my own thesis. Although this context was important, I wanted to continue working with participants who shared the same lived urban area in Kyiv, as this allowed me to focus more specifically on collective spatial memory connected to one district.

In the afternoon, I contacted my selected participants from my hometown to arrange a second meeting. The next possible date to meet was the 9th of March 2026.



Figure 10. Emergency village, Oostakker, Greenery.



Figure 11. Emergency village, Oostakker, Phase 1.



Figure 12. Emergency village, Oostakker, Phase 2.

9th of March 2026 - Second meeting

I went to my second meeting at 19:30, in the same place as the first time. I no longer felt like calling it an "interview," because it felt more like a meeting in which they shared stories about their lives. Once again, I received a warm welcome and a cup of tea. This time, only two of the women were present, as the third participant was busy with her son during the week.

When I placed my models and sketches on the table, in which I had spatialised their memories, they immediately started looking at them without me saying anything. They told me they were impressed by how I had brought their memories to life. I had again prepared several questions as a basis for the conversation. This time, I wanted to start by showing them the models and sketches, so they could add more detail to the first interview and correct possible misunderstandings. I also wanted to talk more specifically about smells, materials, colours and seasonal changes.

During the conversation, one of the participants told me that speaking in more detail about these memories had started to feel painful, because in daily life she usually avoids talking about them. This made me aware of how carefully I needed to handle the meeting. I tried to let them tell their stories with enthusiasm, but when the conversation drifted too far away from the focus, I used my prepared questions to guide it back. In this way, the conversation remained open and light, while still staying within an emotional boundary that felt manageable.

After about two and a half hours, the meeting came to an end. Before leaving, I gave them a small homework task: to make a mental map of their district with important places, streets, senses and other meaningful elements. They were excited about the task and appreciated having more time. I also showed them a few examples and explained that the drawing did not need to be beautiful. Before I left, we arranged a new date to meet again: the 25th of March.



Figure 13. Set up of the second meeting with the Ukrainian participants.

Memory talk – Meeting 2

In the second phase, models, and drawings based on the previous interview were shown to the participants in order to initiate a new conversation, unlock new memories, and clarify misunderstandings.

The first topic was the structure of **streets and pavement**. The participants described different street typologies depending on the size of the road. Larger roads often include a central avenue or green strip for pedestrians and cyclists, while greenery, especially large lime trees, is present along most streets. The materials also vary: asphalt is mainly used for larger roads, cobblestones in the historic centre, and coloured pavement patterns in the in-between areas. These elements show how the infrastructure itself carries identity.



Figure 14. Models of described street typologies in Kyiv from the second interview.

The second topic was the role of **parks** as social and climate spaces. Parks were associated with benches, flowerbeds, fountains, playgrounds, and sports facilities. They function not only as places for leisure and gathering, but also as spaces for comfort and everyday public life, in addition to providing shade and cooling the surrounding environment.



Figure 15. A recreation of the modern parks that the participants described.

The third topic was the **difference between district identities**. The sleeping districts were remembered as grey areas with large Soviet housing blocks and limited social activity, while newer districts were described as more colourful, with greener and cozier public spaces.



Figure 16. Model that shows how different typologies in Kyiv do come together.

A fourth theme concerned **everyday lived heritage and colour**. Monuments were described as colourful and admired for their ornaments and details, while murals were mentioned as an important way of bringing colour into the city. Colour could be even found in the brickwork.



Drawing 17. Drawing of the materials and colour identity of the urban landscape from the participants.

The material and colour identity of the urban landscape

Murals add colour to the grey city.

Trees separate the pedestrians from the road.

Pavement patterns with different colours.

Cobblestones in the old district.

Every metro station has unique mosaics.

Asphalt roads

The fifth theme was the **sensory landscape of memory**. Parks were associated with flower carpets, pine trees and pleasant smells, while chestnut and lime trees added seasonal scents to the streets. The smell of coffee, the use of parks in winter for sleighing, and the cooling effect of fountains all contributed to the sensory identity of the city



Drawing 18. Drawing of the Sensory Landscape of Urban memory.

The sensory Landscape of Urban memory

The smell of coffee from the coffeehouse.

The smell of the flowerbeds in the park.

The smell of the flowers from the lime trees at the side of the road and pavement.

A peaceful feeling while taking a walk through the park.

Added colour through the coffee shops on the ground floor.

Sleighing down hills in the parks during winter.

Fountains in the parks to help people cool down in the hot summer times.

DESKTOP RESEARCH

Murals in Kyiv

In Kyiv, murals were once used for social and propaganda purposes, but are now regarded as most striking works of art. This street art emerged from two major 21st-century events: the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity. In the historic district, murals mainly depict portraits of historical figures, while in residential areas they help break up the monotony of large housing blocks. (Abyzov & Chuieva, 2021)

Their themes range from socio-political and patriotic to religious, and decorative. More broadly, murals diversify homogeneous neighbourhoods, activate blank walls, and contribute to a renewed urban identity (Abyzov & Chuieva, 2021).



Figure 19. Collage from murals in Kyiv.

The participants repeatedly referred to murals as a way of bringing colour into the city. Desktop research confirms that murals also play a broader role in shaping neighbourhood identity (Abyzov & Chuieva, 2021).

The sixth theme concerned **monuments**. Monuments remain an important element of urban life, as they act as anchor points that help people orient themselves within the city. At the same time, they are valued for their beauty, historical significance, and the sense of continuity they bring to the urban environment.



Drawing 20. Collage about the historical monuments where my participants were talking about.

What is important about this second memory talk is that the memories become much more detailed and sensory than in the first memory talk meeting. While the first conversation mainly revealed the larger structuring elements of the city, this phase added materials, colours, smells, atmospheres, and more specific distinctions between different urban environments.

18th of March 2026 - Third meeting and first co-creative activity

I went to the same meeting place as before at 18:15 and met again with the same two participants. As always, they welcomed me warmly, this time with tea, chocolate cookies and Ukrainian sweets.

In this meeting, I first wanted to learn more about their personal background. I asked whether they wanted to return, whether they had a husband, their ages, and other similar questions, in order to gain a clearer understanding of who my participants were. By this point, they felt more comfortable with me and were very open in answering. They also mentioned that they are asked these kinds of questions very often, so they did not mind responding to them.

After that, I returned to the models I had made in order to gather some final clarifications and corrections before moving to the next phase of the research. Because we all felt more comfortable with each other by then, I also asked more personal questions about their lives, such as their age, when they had moved, and how they looked towards the future. Since I knew that these topics could become more emotional, I prepared my questions carefully and kept them concrete. This helped me maintain a clear boundary and prevented the conversation from becoming too emotionally overwhelming.

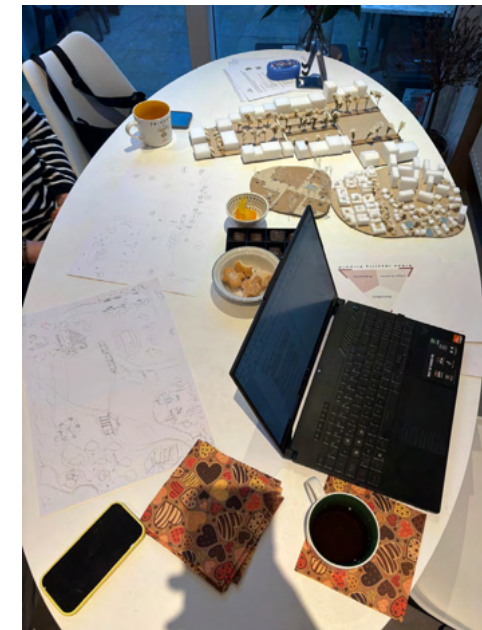


Figure 21. Set up of the third meeting with the author and participants.

Memory talk – Meeting 3

The third interview focused on the everyday relations between urban structures and on the final details before moving further into scale.

A first important finding was that Kyiv does not have one clearly defined city centre. Instead, **different district typologies gradually blend** into one another without strict boundaries. At the same time, each district contains recurring elements, such as a church, police station, fire station, schools within walking distance, and an arts centre. This suggests that every district has its own recognisable local structure.

A second theme was the **importance of parks**, green in-between spaces and courtyards in everyday life. In the historic centre, the courtyards within the blocks also function as shortcuts through the grid. These spaces are therefore not only open residual areas, but identity-carrying urban elements that support familiarity and daily movement.

A third theme concerned the **layered urban fabric**. Streets and buildings do not always follow the same orientation, and in the historic centre different historical layers remain visible. Some buildings are oriented differently from the grid structure that emerged after the Second World War, showing how multiple urban logics coexist in the city.

The metro also emerged as an important element of everyday urban memory. It was described as a place where people spend a large part of their lives because of its strong transport connections. At the same time, it is remembered as an underground city and as a shelter. The metro also has a distinctive smell that residents of Kyiv immediately recognise, even above ground near the station vents.

A final observation was that not all urban reference points are monumental. Murals, for example, do not necessarily function as orientation tools, but rather as elements that bring colour to the city and can act as personal landmarks, just like a building or a tree.

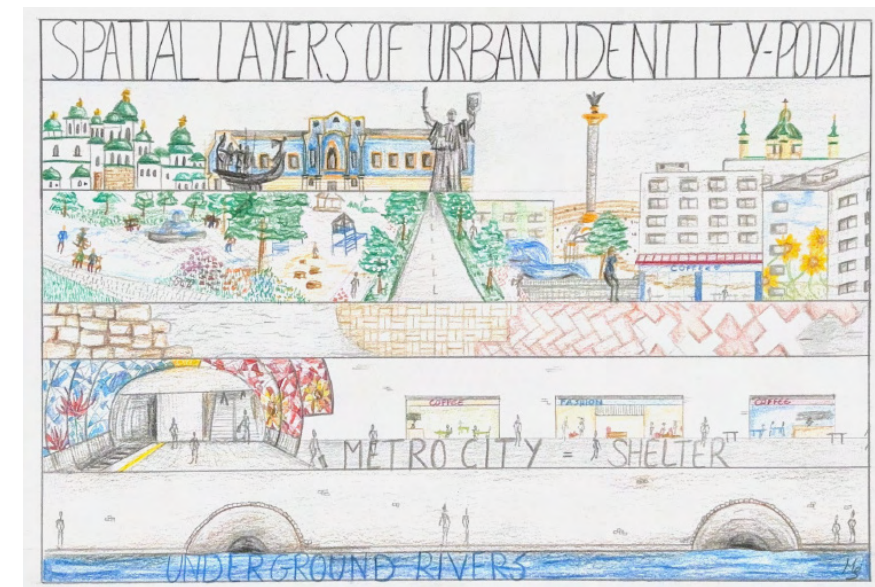


Figure 22. Drawing of the different urban identity layers in Podil and the surroundings found out of the memory talks with the participants.

Out of the three interviews a map was created with the **spatial layers of urban Identity in Podil and the surroundings**. The spatial layers are based on what the participants told and separated in five layers. All the layers work together to form together the identity of the area where the participants were talking about.



Figure 23. Relief model.



Figure 24. Inner courtyard model – historical centre – Podil

Following the third interview, two additional models were made. The first is a **relief model of the wider area**, showing the relation between the hills of the right bank, the lower area near the Dnipro, and the position of Podil. The second is a **zoom-in model of a Podil block**, bringing together recurring spatial qualities mentioned by the participants, such as inner **courtyards, shortcuts, trees, benches and play areas**. While the relief model situates the memories within the larger topographic structure of Kyiv, the block model explores how everyday spatial qualities within the urban fabric contribute to identity and social use.

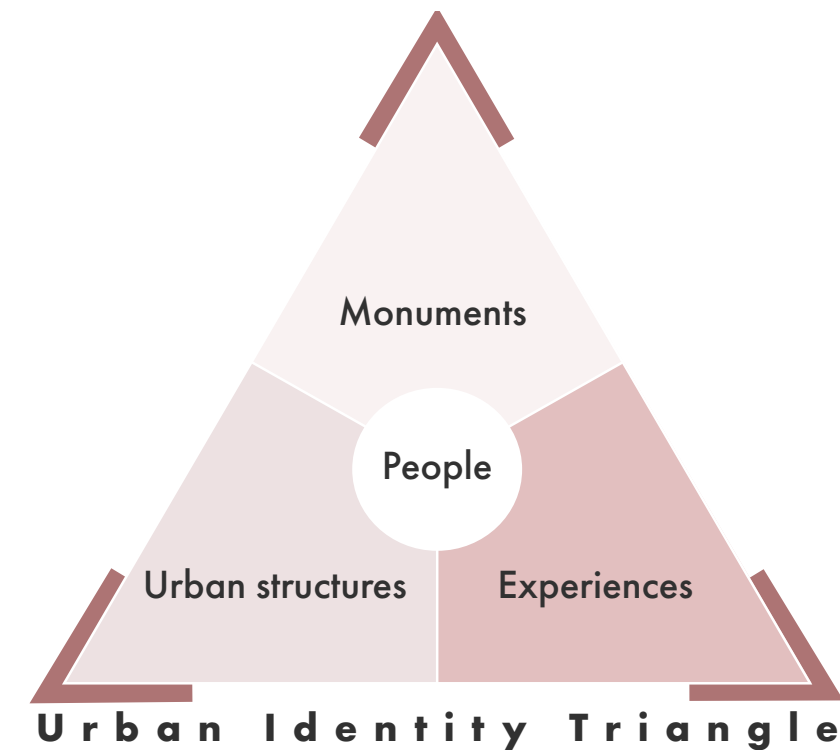


Figure 25. Urban Identity Triangle.

The analysis of the interviews was translated into an abstract diagram that synthesises the main components of collective spatial memory. Three interrelated dimensions emerged from the participants' narratives: monuments, urban structures, and lived experiences. The findings show that memory is not attached to heritage objects alone, but is produced through the continuous relation between symbolic landmarks, everyday spatial frameworks, and sensory and emotional experiences. Their interconnection forms the underlying structure of collective memory, and spatial identity.

It should be noted that from the second meeting onwards, only two of the three participants were consistently present due to personal circumstances. The findings from the memory talks and mapping sessions are therefore primarily based on the contributions of S.C. and L.D., while A.P.'s input is limited to the first interview.

Background information of the participants

Participant 1	S.C.
Sex	Female
Age	35 years
Work	Kyiv: Close to becoming senior economist/planner in a large company Belgium: Administrative employee in the IT-department of the authors hometown.
Origin	Country: Ukraine City: Kyiv District: Podil and Svyatoshinsky
Children	13 years old daughter
Husband/ Boyfriend	Divorced before war
When moved to Belgium	Currently a Belgian boyfriend 23 March 2022, four years ago with her daughter and mother.
Family	Mother and grandmother in Ukraine. Mother came to Belgium but returned.
Friends	Living around the world and in Kyiv. Still in contact with them but through due to distance less. Sometimes a bit of tension because of the different living circumstances.
Returning to Ukraine?	Daughter is totally integrated here. For now, she will stay in Belgium and let her daughter study here. She will stay here as long as she can help her daughter and see what the future brings.
Spoken language during the interview	English and Dutch. Preferred language is English.

Participant 2	L.D.
Sex	Female
Age	42 years
Work	Kyiv: Lawyer in a private law firm Belgium: Administrative assistant in a law firm
Origin	Country: Ukraine City: Kyiv District: Podil
Children	17 years old daughter
Husband/ Boyfriend	Divorced before war.
When moved to Belgium	Three and a half years ago with her daughter, ex-husband and cousin of the ex-husband.
Friends	Friends are spread out over the world and still has contact with them. She is also still in contact with her Ukrainian friends
Returning to Ukraine?	Rationally: No, because there is not a bright future for her daughter there with the political and economical situation. It will never be the same there as it was before. Emotionally: Hard to accept the rationally thoughts. She does not know if she wants to stay here for the rest of her life and does not want to leave her daughter alone. Time will tell.
Spoken language during the interview	English and Dutch. Preferred language is English.

Participant 2	A.P.
Sex	Female
Age	38 years
Work	Kyiv: Coffeeshop together with her husband with takeaway coffee and desserts. Belgium: Cleaning lady at the court.
Origin	Country: Ukraine City: Kyiv District: Podil
Children	Sons of 18 and 7 years old
Husband/ Boyfriend	Husband: Organizes tours through Europe for Ukrainians.
When moved to Belgium	Moved to Belgium 2 years ago.
Family	Some family still in Kyiv and they keep in touch with their phones.
Friends	Many friends moved to different countries, and they keep in touch with their phones.
Returning to Ukraine?	Sees a future for their children here. It becomes for her younger son easier to speak Dutch than his native language. For her it is professionally more difficult. The longer they live here the more they get used to the life here.
Spoken language during the interview	English (sometimes Dutch)

Culture and free time

They go often to concerts and Ukrainian events in Belgium, Amsterdam, Paris, Antwerp and so on which gives them positive energy and brings back a part of their lifestyle from Ukraine. They have a positive mentality: of even that if times are hard, they try to make as much as they can a positive experience out of it.

Where did they meet?

S.C. and L.D. met each other back in Kyiv through S.C. her ex. S.C. and A.P. do know each other even from earlier. Occasionally they hung out with each other.

18th of March 2026 - First co-creative activity

Last time I gave them the homework to make a mental map of their neighbourhood and daily routines that includes places, buildings, streets, nodes... That meant a lot for them. In this second interview, they both explained their mental map to me. I was curious how good they would have understood the assignment. I was very much impressed how good they did it. The interview ended at 21:30.

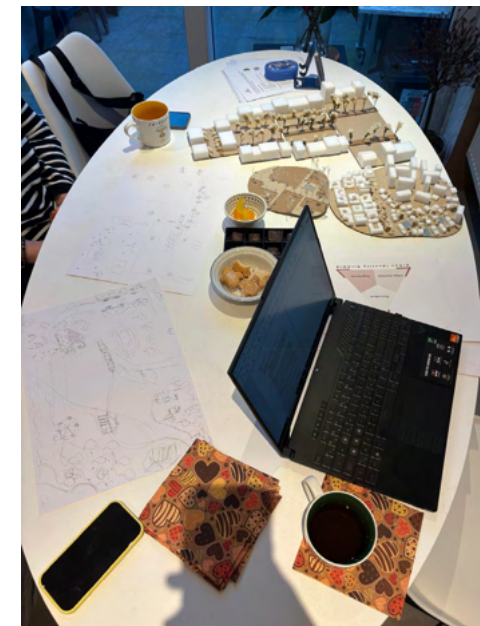


Figure 26. Set up of the third meeting with the author and participants.

Phase 3. Mental mapping

Mental mapping – Co-creative activity 1

In phase 3, the focus shifts to mental mapping. In this phase, the participants are asked to map their city as they identify, and remember it, by drawing the buildings, places, and spatial elements that are most important to them. This is done on a blank sheet of paper, allowing them to freely indicate routes, open spaces, landmarks, meaningful places and other relevant elements. In this way, the memories gain more shape, and spatial position, making it possible to understand what the participants themselves consider most significant.

Mental mapping is particularly valuable before introducing an actual map, since the participants are not yet influenced by existing structures, boundaries or urban divisions. The map emerges directly from memory, allowing the most meaningful and memorable elements to come to mind first.

Mental map - participant 1

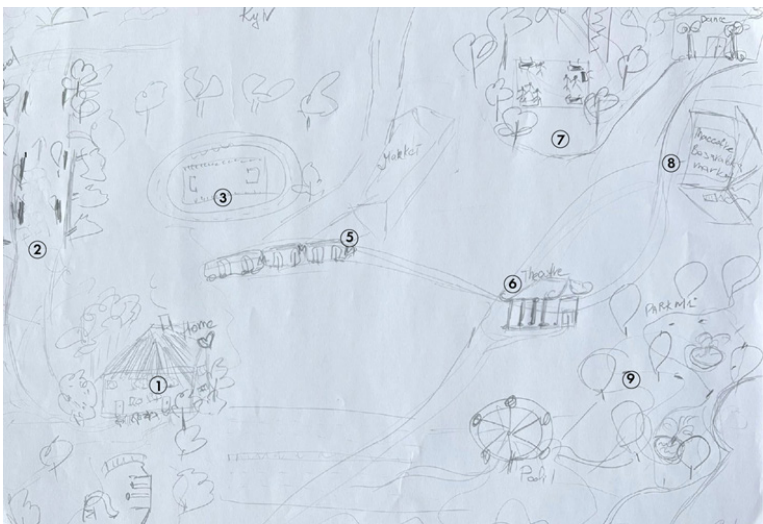


Figure 27. Mental map made by participant 1 S.C.

S.C.'s mental map begins at home and follows her **daily route** through the boulevard, athletic field, market, metro, theatre, House of Art, coffee place, meeting bench and park. The drawing connects everyday movement, leisure and social life, showing how her memory of Kyiv is structured through recurring places, and daily routine.

Mental map conclusion

Elements	Spatial carriers
Anchor	Home
Structure	Organic
Nodes	Market, house of art, park, playground
Path	Long road with trees and boulevard, metro, paths in the park
Landmarks	Theatre building
District	Residential district, historical district
Edges	Tree lines
HOME BOULEVARD ATHLETIC FIELD METRO THEATRE HOUSE OF ART MARKET/ COFFEE BENCH PARK = DAILY ROUTINE	

Mental map - participant 1

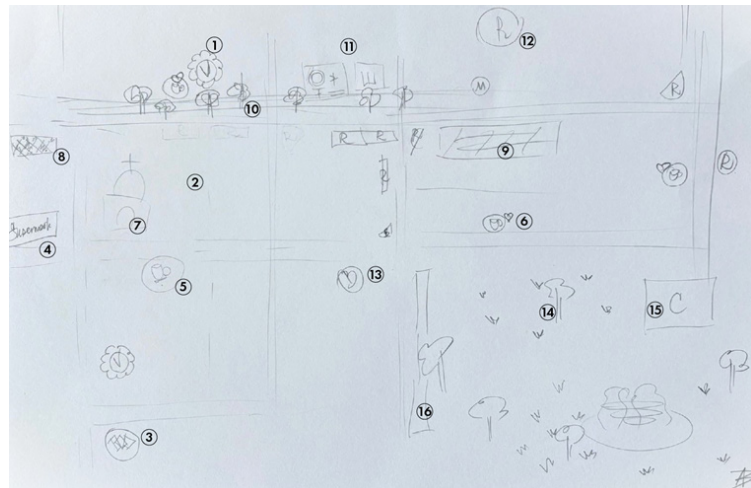


Figure 28. Mental map made by participant 2 L.D.

L.D.'s mental map begins at home in Podil, and is structured through the district's grid. The map combines **everyday facilities** such as shops, a supermarket, restaurants, coffee places and a bakery with memorable buildings, including a new church, the bombed Domino building, and an oversized apartment block remembered negatively. A large tree-lined road connects her home to her school, while the park and its old cinema appear as important collective places. The map shows how Podil is remembered through a combination of daily routine, local amenities, favourite social places, and shared urban landmarks.

Mental map conclusion

Elements	Spatial carriers
Anchor	Home
Structure	Grid
Nodes	Small shop, supermarket, bakery, coffee place, cinema
Path	Street with big trees and boulevard, paths in the park
Landmarks	Church, Domino-house, high ugly building
District	Tramlines, Tree lines
Edges	Park, historical district
DISTRICT LOGIC – SOCIAL/COMMERCIAL NETWORK -- GREEN-CULTURAL ZONE	

Mental conclusion map

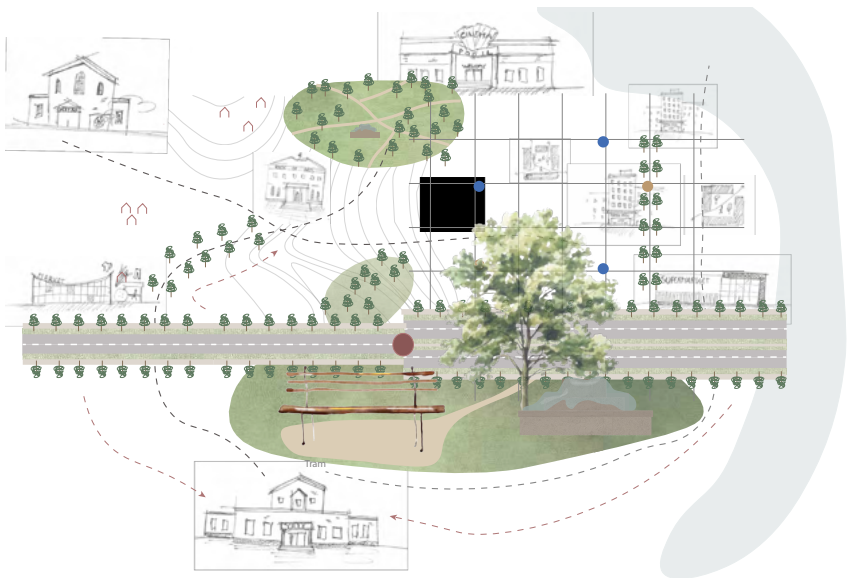


Figure 29. Combined mental map.

- Home
- Coffee bars
- Restaurant

This collage **combines two personal mental maps** and gives an overview of the important spatial elements in the district. It shows both which elements are most meaningful to the participants and how they relate to one another within their mental image of the city. A striking example is the bench, which, although small in scale, carries strong meaning, and appears throughout the district and city. The collage also reveals similarities in the described structures, confirming several key findings from the previous memory talks.

Final conclusion

Elements	Spatial carriers	Qualities
Anchor	Home	Anchor of the memories
Path	Boulevard, paths in the park, pavement	Chestnut trees, space, safety, walk
Nodes	House or arts Cinema Bakery/ coffee places Market Bench	Embedded in daily urban life Collective value Daily rituals, smell In every district Social meeting point, everywhere
District	Park	Important collective spaces: Openness, greenery, big trees, flowerbeds, benches, fountains, playgrounds, sport, smell
	Historical district	Grid structure, squares, inner courtyards in each block
	Residential district	Trees, lakes, greenery, playgrounds, benches
Landmarks	Church, theatre, remarkable buildings	Historical continuity, religion, orientation points
Edges	Metro, tram	Everyday life: good transport, metro-smell, dividing park

The mental maps were interpreted through Kevin Lynch’s five elements of the city image: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks (Lynch, 1960). This framework helped to understand how the participants structured, and communicated their city through memory, and which spatial references emerged as most meaningful in their drawings.

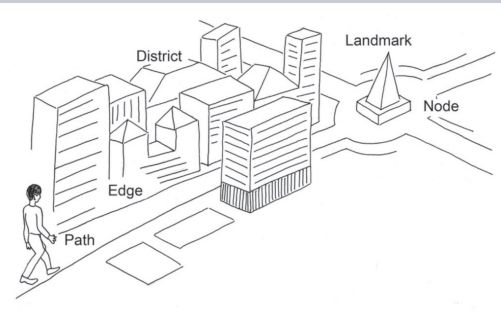


Figure 30. Elements of the city, adapted from Lynch.
Note. From Tangibility and Richness in Digital Musical Instrument Design, by R. H. Jack, 2019, ResearchGate.

1st of April 2026 – Co-creative activity

At 18:00, I went to the same meeting place as in the previous sessions. I met again with the same two participants, as it remained difficult for the third participant to join due to her busy schedule.

This meeting continued the work on the mental maps through a co-creative activity. To start the session, I brought two physical models as conversation tools. The first model focused on the inner courtyards of the old district of Podil. I was interested in understanding how these courtyards function, and the model helped me test whether I had interpreted their explanations correctly. The second model represented the topography of the area they had referred to most often in previous meetings. Through this model, I was able to learn more about the differences in elevation and how these affect the experience of moving through and perceiving the city.

Based on their earlier explanations of the mental maps, I had written short stories for each participant. I read these stories aloud to them one by one, while they simultaneously added drawings, notes, and new elements to their maps. This process allowed the maps to become more layered and detailed. It gave the participants the opportunity to expand on their previous stories, add new memories, and place these experiences more precisely within their mental map.

The participants seemed to enjoy this co-creative activity. While one participant was listening to and responding to their story, the other participant could continue working on their own mental map. This created a relaxed and productive atmosphere, in which both participants remained engaged throughout the session. They described the activity as a kind of art therapy: enjoyable and creative, while gently bringing back memories.

Mental mapping – Co-creative activity 2

A second mental mapping session will be conducted in order to further develop the first mental maps. While the first mental map revealed where important elements were positioned in the participants' minds, this second phase allows for the addition of more detailed information through a co-creative storytelling approach.

By retelling the participants' stories to them, they are given the opportunity to respond, correct, and add missing elements, such as textures, colours, sounds, feelings, and other layers of experience. This makes the maps more defined and enriches them with new spatial, and sensory information.

In addition, the session continues to build on previous findings that triggered interest. Earlier conversations touched upon colours, feelings, atmospheres, and daily experiences, but sound remains a less developed layer. Therefore, this meeting will pay specific attention to sound as a possible source of meaningful spatial information.

Mental map - S.C.



Figure 31 . Mental map made by participant 1 S.C.

The participant's mental map and daily routine was described through the concept of "infinity": something that can stretch, change, or be interrupted, but always returns to her first home. Although her place of living and daily routine have changed, this house remains central. Her mother still looks after it and repairs it when it is damaged during the war.

Several strong memories are connected to this place, especially the cherry trees planted by her grandfather. They grew high enough to be seen from the second-floor window and had a strong, pleasant smell when they bloomed. The surrounding boulevard, used for walks, cycling, and walking dogs, was lined with lime trees and benches. Their flowers also created a distinct scent, despite the passing cars.

She described the neighbourhood as an "academic city", shaped by Soviet planning, with similar housing blocks built around factories and shared infrastructure. Older buildings still have bomb shelters, while newer ones often do not.

Mental map - L.D.



Figure 32. Mental map made by participant 2 L.D.

The participant described many trees throughout the city, as well as playgrounds in the inner courtyards of some blocks. In her shared inner courtyard, there are trees, benches, a playground and space for cars, but it is not accessible to the public. In this way, it is safe to leave children alone at the playground. She also remembered two old buildings from the Second World War. A striking detail was the new church, which she described as blue and gold. According to her, Orthodox churches in Kyiv often have golden roofs.

She described Podil as a highly historical and spatially unique district. In the past, it was an area of traders and markets because of its location next to the Dnipro River, where ships arrived. She also mentioned the presence of a very old synagogue and, more generally, many churches from different religions.

According to the participant, transport in Podil mainly consists of tram, bus and metro. Benches are found everywhere and are important as meeting places. Another appreciated quality of Podil is its proximity to the river, where walking is experienced as calm and peaceful.

Mental map conclusion - S.C.

Spatial carriers	Qualities
Garden	Private green space
Boulevard	Tree-lined, greenery, safety
Benches	Social meeting point
Basement	Bomb shelter
Greenery / Trees	Everywhere in the urban life
Home	Adding colour to the façade

Mental map conclusion L.D.

Spatial carriers	Qualities
Inner courtyards	Safe semi-public collective spaces
Greenery	Everyday identity – parks, streets,...
Historical buildings	Symbolic landmarks
Landmarks	Church, Domino-house, high ugly building
Mobility	Daily urban experience
Benches	Spaces for a pause, social point

Mental conclusion map

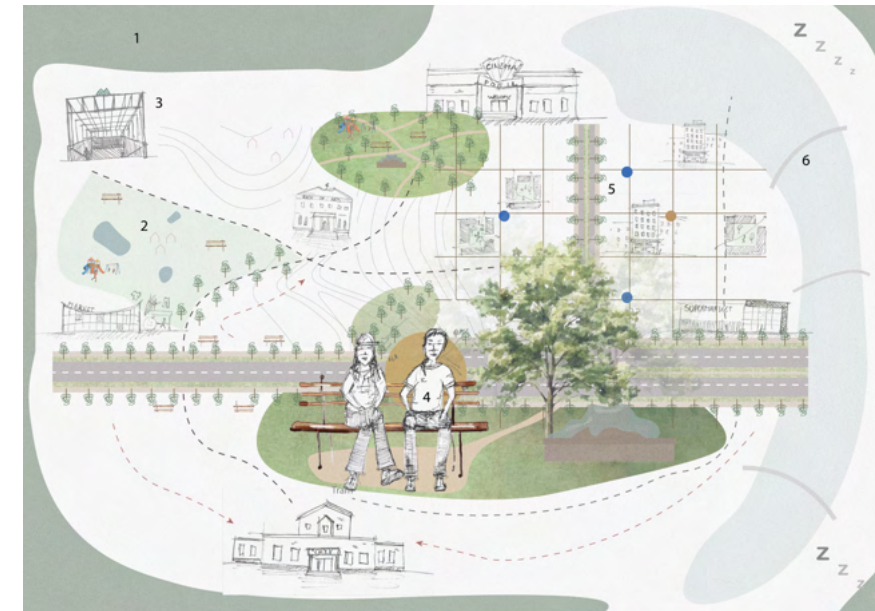


Figure 33. Combined mental map, second version.

The mental conclusion map was refined after the second mental mapping interview. The large green corridors around Kyiv and the greener residential areas were made more explicit, with benches and playgrounds added to the latter. Metro stations were adjusted to appear more as portals than as buildings, while people were added at the benches to show everyday life between the urban elements. An extra road was inserted into the grid to emphasize the role of major streets as connectors, and bridges across the Dnipro were added to indicate the link with the sleeping districts.

Conclusions and findings

Spatial carriers	Qualities
Inner courtyards	Safe semi-public collective spaces
Greenery	Structural identity element - Trees findable in gardens, courtyards, parks and boulevards. - Pollution = ecological function - Sensory element: smell
Small public elements	Benches, playgrounds, shared outside spaces = small nodes for meeting and daily use.
Semi-public residential places	Identity carriers with qualitative elements - Closed off for safety - Playground - Trees - Benches - Paths for shortcuts
Landmarks	Church, Domino-house, high ugly building
Urban historical layered fabric	Old buildings, churches, synagogues, Soviet housing, bomb shelters show that there are lots of historical layers.
Benches	Spaces for a pause, social point

At the left bank there are gigantic areas with sleeping districts.

Around Kyiv there is a big green belt.

Sounds

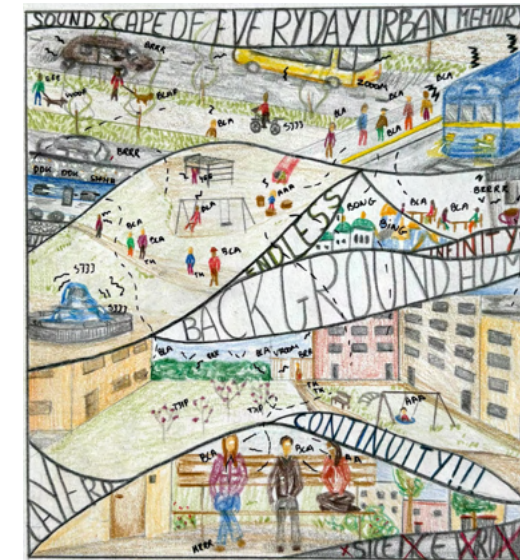


Figure 34. Soundscape of everyday urban memory based on the stories of the participants.

There is no single sound that the participants associate with their city. Instead, the city is remembered as a constant layer of overlapping sounds, both day and night. Silence would feel unusual and wrong. At night, quieter sounds such as trains, people in the street and cars remain audible, while during the day the soundscape becomes louder and denser through transport, children playing, neighbours, shops and other everyday activities. What is remembered is therefore not one sound, but a continuous layering of many sounds. In times of war, the city becomes much quieter, which feels uncomfortable.

Sounds	
Transport	Cars, busses, trams, metros, cyclists
Urban life	People talking, children playing, dogs barking, birds, footsteps, neighbours
Elements	Flowing water from the fountains, wind in the trees
Habits	The coffee machine
LAYERD URBAN SOUNDSCAPE - SILENCE = DISCOMFORT	

DESKTOP RESEARCH

Short history of the urban development of the city, Kyiv.

This desktop-research layer is introduced after the key memory talks and while the research moves towards mapping. Rather than functioning as a separate phase, it serves as a complementary historical reading of Kyiv and Podil. This timing is intentional: the participants' memories were first allowed to emerge without being shaped too early by historical images, archival material or a top-down understanding of how the city functions.

At this stage, the historical reading helps to better understand, clarify and situate the places, structures and spatial elements that appeared in the interviews. Rather than reconstructing the full history of Kyiv, this part focuses only on the historical developments and transformations that are relevant for interpreting the participants' memories.

Kyiv and Podil – Geographical introduction

Kyiv and its district Podil, together with some surrounding areas, are the focus of this research, since these are the places where the participants are from. Kyiv is geographically situated around the Dnipro River and consists of a left and a right bank. The left bank is the lower and flatter part, while the right bank consists of hills rising up to 200 metres above sea level.

Podil is located on the lower part of the right bank, at the foot of the hills near the Dnipro (Volodymyr Kubijovyč et al., 2017). From Kyiv's early development onwards, the city was structured into different parts: the upper city had a more administrative and cultural role, while Podil functioned as the commercial and manufacturing district near the river (Volodymyr Kubijovyč et al., 2017).



Figure 35. Map of Kyiv.

Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

The fire of 1811 and the transformation of Podil's structure

Before the 19th century, Podil consisted of a network of narrow streets that followed the natural topography of the site (figure 37). The buildings were of a farmstead type and consisted of one- and two-storey houses placed along the red line (Linda, 2021). In the 10th–13th centuries, buildings such as Saint Sophia Cathedral (Софійський собор), the Golden Gate of Kyiv (Золоті ворота), the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (Печерський монастир), Saint-Syrillus Church (Кирилівська церква) and the Pyrohoshcha Church (Церква Пирогоща) were constructed.

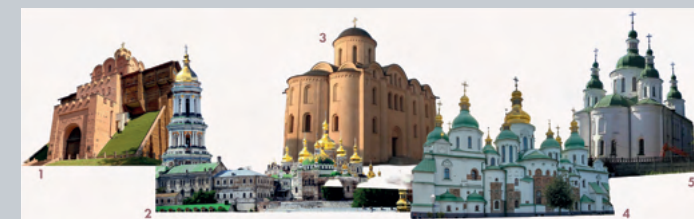


Figure 36. The six first landmarks from Kyiv.

A fire in 1811 caused a major transformation of Podil. After the wooden houses burned down, the district was reorganised with new axes and broader streets (Volodymyr Kubijovyč, 2017). William Heste introduced a new urban plan based on classicist ideals, from which the grid structure emerged. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, new housing followed this structure, with two- to four-storey brick buildings finished with coloured plaster, forming a perimeter block system described as a “collage” (Linda, 2021). During this period, Podil also developed further as the commercial and financial centre of the city (Volodymyr Kubijovyč, 2017).



Figure 37. Reconstruction map of Kyiv 10-13th century. (source: (Стародавній Київ X–XIII ст. Карта-реконструкція, z.d.))

Soviet period

During the Soviet period, many historical churches and monuments were destroyed, while Kyiv expanded strongly towards the left bank of the Dnipro (Volodymyr Kubijovyč et al., 2017). Before 1934, the left bank was largely undeveloped, which gave Soviet planners the opportunity to build large-scale projects. In 1936, they aimed to transform Kyiv into a socialist city with a strong focus on industry (Ponomaryova & Ryan, 2021).



Figure 38. Historical district Podil, geography of participants area and new street typology after the fire in 1811. Note. Base map adapted from “Kyiv urban map; Ukraine” (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

The masterplan also responded to shortcomings such as green spaces and parks in poor condition. Greenery was introduced into residential areas and industrial complexes and became an ideological symbol. Residential areas were developed as “a city in a city,” providing all the basic facilities. A clear structure with broad streets, tree-lined allées and pedestrian paths was introduced, and these streets have survived until today (Ponomaryova & Ryan, 2021).

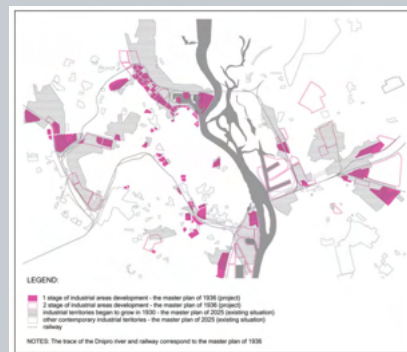


Figure 39. A comparison of industrial zones as designated in Kyiv's general plans of 1936 and 2025 and status of implementation. [Source: Volodymyr Kubijovyč et al., 2017].

Today, there are 143 parks in Kyiv with a total area of 4722 hectares. Even though there are many parks, 71 percent of the inhabitants report that they do not have good access to parks because of their uneven distribution across the districts (Pleshkanovska, 2021).

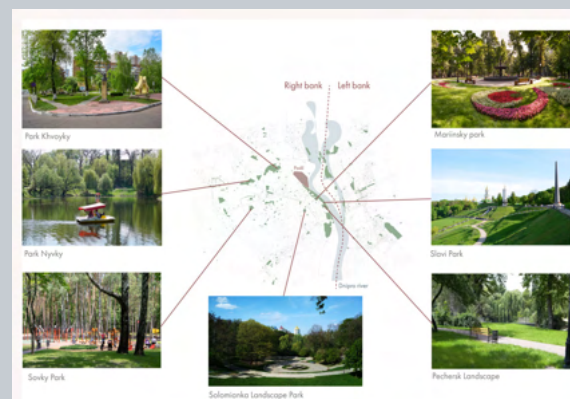


Figure 40. Historical district Podil, geography of participants' area and new street typology after the fire in 1811.
Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Postwar transformation

After the Second World War, large residential areas and industrial zones were developed (Volodymyr Kubijovyč et al., 2017). This expansion of the city is also called the "socialist scaffold," immediately recognised as "Soviet." Large areas with monofunctional prefabricated high-rise apartments were built in the suburbs, while ceremonial boulevards were used for parades (Vlasenko & Ryan, 2024).

The postwar masterplans also affected Podil. In the 1960s, the district was approached as a reserve area for new housing and infrastructure, such as the metro. At that time, Podil was considered chaotic and unregulated (Linda, 2021). Mass housing was constructed on both the right and left banks, and over time the buildings became higher. In the 1970s and 1980s, "microrayons" were created with their own infrastructure and building heights of up to 9 storeys. Because of the housing shortage, this development happened quickly, and connections with the city were often weak. Until 2010, panel buildings continued to be built with heights ranging from 16 to 25 storeys (Gnatiuk et al., 2023).

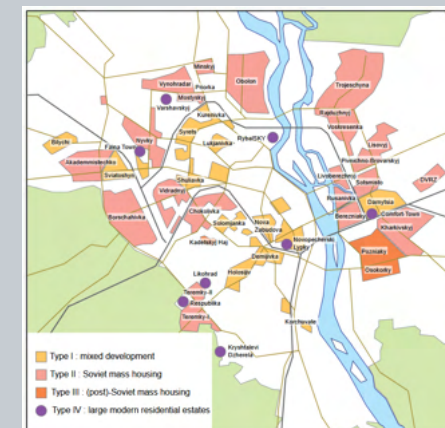


Figure 41. After the Second World War, large residential areas and industrial zones were developed. [Source: Volodymyr Kubijovyč et al., 2017].

Podil – case of preservation

Podil was designated as a protected zone in 1977, with the aim of conserving its historical appearance as much as possible. A new plan for Podil was developed by the team led by J. Szalacki, differing from the dominant Soviet modernism. Their aim was to create new housing in dialogue with the historical district through the preservation of existing structures, the use of courtyards, varied heights from 4 to 7 storeys, arches, brickwork and colour accents. The ground floors of the building blocks included small stores and cafés in order to support social interaction.

The courtyards were also given a social role to support neighbourly contact. Their approach departed from the automobile-centric way of working, and access to the inner yards was closed to transport, except for guest parking (Linda, 2021).

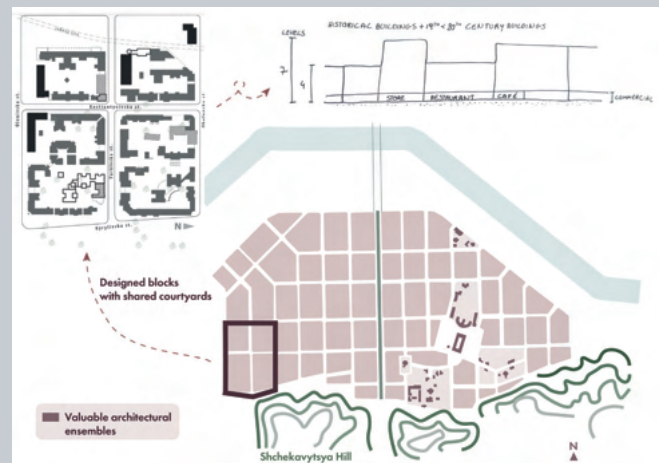


Figure 42. Site plan of the historical district of Podil in Kyiv with the indication of the designed block. Note: Adapted by author from S. Linda, 2021.

Decommunization campaign

After 2014, the decommunization campaign accelerated. Ukraine wanted to free itself from Russian influence and move towards the European Union. Soviet-era monuments were reinterpreted or adorned with Western symbols, such as the poppy. The process of decommunization was reflected in the renaming of streets and the removal of Lenin statues, also known as the “fall of Lenin.” At the same time, much of the cityscape remained unchanged, which shows how difficult it was to distance the city from its Soviet past.

The Mother Motherland Monument is an example of how Soviet meaning is reinterpreted through Western-European symbolism by decorating the monument with poppies every year in May. This is linked to the 8th of May, the “Day of Memory and Reconciliation,” which replaced the 9th of May, the traditional Soviet Victory Day (Vlasenko & Ryan, 2024).



Figure 43. Mother Motherland.
<https://depositphotos.com/editorial/kyiv-ukraine-may-09-the-motherland-monument-also-known-as-rodina-mat-decorated-with-red-111179022.html>

The historical reading makes it possible to understand the participants' memories not as isolated impressions, but as part of a larger urban logic. Many of the elements that returned in the interviews, such as the grid of Podil, the contrast between the historic centre and the sleeping districts, the importance of broad green streets, parks and courtyards, can be better understood through the historical development of Kyiv.

At the same time, the participants' narratives show that these structures are not remembered in an abstract way, but through everyday use, attachment and lived experience. What becomes clear is that urban identity is shaped both by historical transformation and by the ways in which inhabitants continue to recognise, use and value these spatial layers in daily life.

25th of March 2026 – Collective and representative mapping

At 18:00, I visited my participants at their home again. They had baked Paska, Ukrainian Easter bread, and offered me a Turkish coffee. I brought the soundscape drawing, and we first talked about the drawing I had made. They liked how I had made it as a collage and how all the sounds came together.

After that, I introduced the next co-creative mapping activity, which also formed a step towards a more representative mapping of their lived environment. I brought a large map of Podil and its surroundings, an area that had already been discussed in earlier meetings. I asked them to draw on the map and to talk again about the elements they had mentioned before, such as roads, places, benches and parks. I had expected this step to be more difficult, because until then we had mainly worked through memories, and these did not automatically need to be placed on one larger map. I was afraid that the shift in scale would become too chaotic. In practice, however, a few prepared questions helped to guide the conversation and made it possible to gradually connect the remembered elements to the wider area. The meeting therefore went more smoothly and naturally than I had expected.



Figure 44. Set up of the meeting with the author and participants.



Figure 45. Paska/ Ukrainian bread made by the participants.

Phase 4. Representative map (The identity map)

Representative mapping – Co-creative activity 3

In this phase, a representative map is developed through collective mapping with the participants. Collective mapping is not used to produce an objective map of their area in the city, but to reveal which places, routes, nodes, urban structures and everyday spaces carry shared meaning. It brings together individual and collective memories in order to show which places carry identity. The collective map is therefore not a final product, but an analytical instrument that translates collective meaning into scale.

In contrast to the previous phases, which focused on identifying meaningful places, nodes and routes directly from memory, this phase contributes by integrating these findings into a collective spatial structure. In this way, the memories gain scale and a clearer position within the lived urban fabric.

Results of the map after the representative mapping.



Figure 46. Representative map made during the interview session with the participants.
Note: Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Inspired by Debord's fragmented psychogeographical mapping (Debord, 1955), this map isolates the urban areas that were activated during the collective mapping session. Rather than presenting a continuous and objective image of the city, it represents a network of remembered places, daily routes, residential anchors and historical spaces, while also indicating the strength of their connections and their accessibility for the participants.

The representative map is further developed into a memory atlas, in which the identified fragments are zoomed in on and explored in greater detail through the information gathered during the collective mapping interview. In this way, the atlas provides an overview of the identity-carrying elements that emerged from the participants' memories.

Digitalised representative identity map.

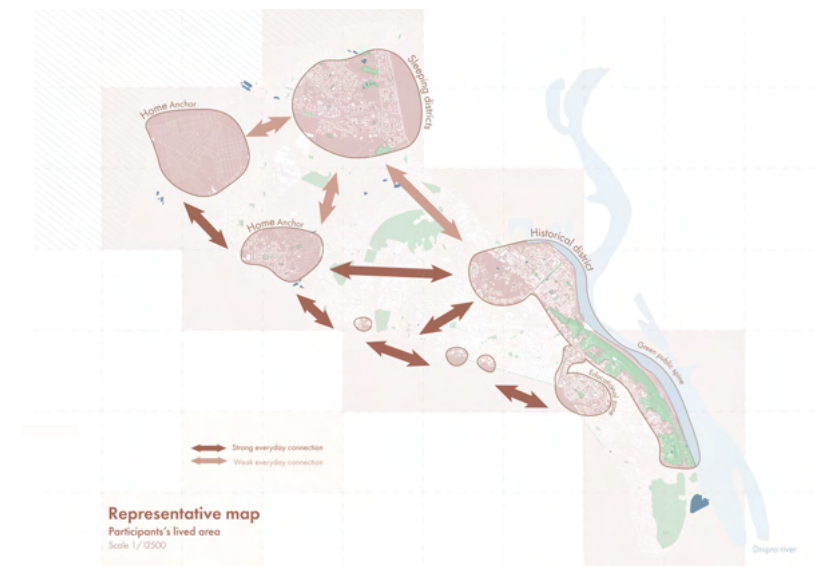


Figure 47. Representative identity map.
Note: Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Zoom-ins

The representative map is further developed through a series of zoom-ins, each based on one of the fragments identified in the map. These zoom-ins allow the identity-carrying elements to be explored in greater spatial detail.



Figure 48. Zoom-in from the participant's told spatial elements (Home anchors).

This fragment shows how home is not remembered as an isolated house, but as part of a wider everyday environment. Low-rise housing, greenery, playgrounds and benches together create a sense of safety and familiarity. The repeated presence of lime trees and open residential streets suggests that memory is anchored here through daily use rather than through monumental reference points. In this fragment, identity is carried by the ordinary spatial elements surrounding home.

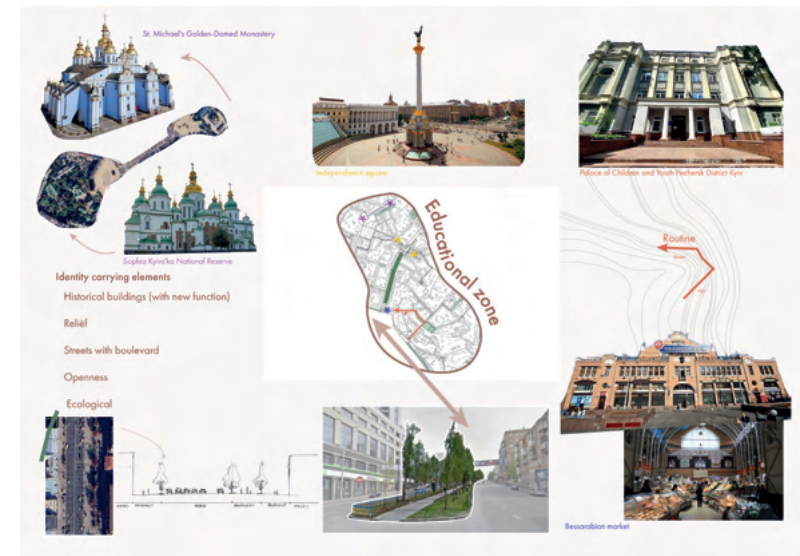


Figure 49. Zoom-in from the participant's told spatial elements (Educational zone).

This fragment combines educational routines with historical and civic landmarks. The route structure, the boulevard and the topographic slope connect everyday movement to a wider monumental setting. Educational life is therefore not separated from the city, but embedded within a layered urban environment of institutions, heritage and daily passages. The fragment shows how routine and public identity overlap.



Figure 50. Zoom-in from the participant's told spatial elements (Green public space).

This fragment reveals green public space as more than a park alone. It combines openness, accessibility, greenery, benches and fountains with a strong concentration of historical and national landmarks. The result is a collective landscape in which leisure, memory and representation come together. This area carries identity both through everyday use and through its symbolic public presence.

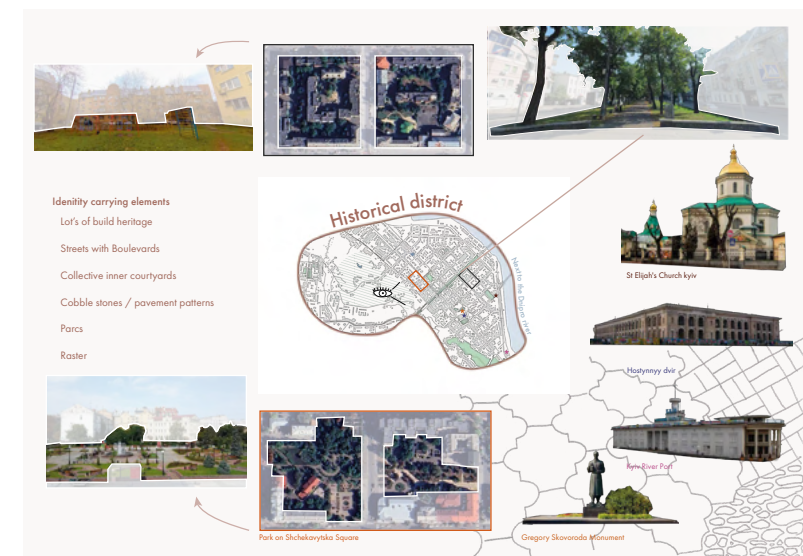


Figure 51. Zoom-in from the participant's told spatial elements (Historical district).

This fragment presents the historical district as a dense and layered urban fabric. Its identity is carried not only by individual heritage buildings, but also by the raster structure, collective inner courtyards, boulevard streets and pavement patterns. The proximity to the Dnipro adds another important spatial condition. What emerges is a fragment in which continuity is held as much by everyday urban form as by monumental landmarks.

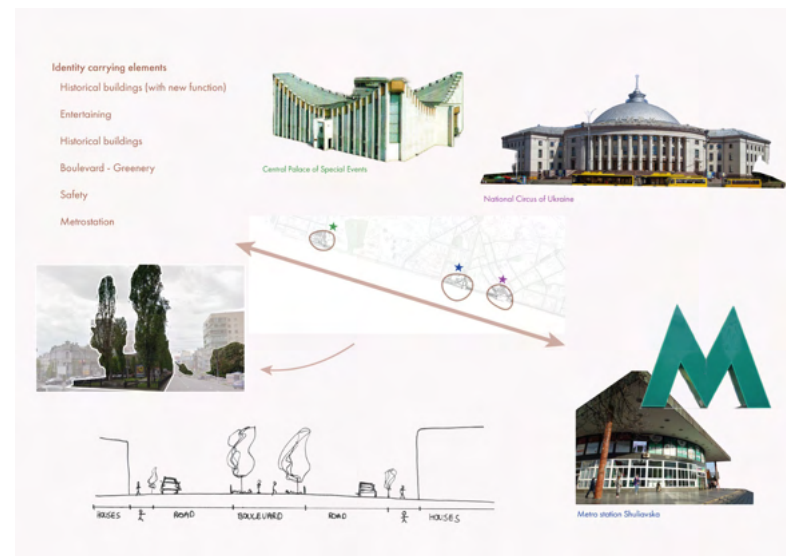


Figure 52. Zoom-in from the participant's told spatial elements (Three separate places).

This fragment is structured by a series of recognizable large buildings, transport infrastructure and a broad tree-lined boulevard that connects the different places. Identity is carried here through a combination of movement, visibility, entertainment and everyday accessibility. The metro station acts as an anchor of daily life, while the boulevard introduces greenery, openness and safety within a larger infrastructural setting. In this way, the fragment shows how mobility, public life and spatial continuity are closely intertwined.



Figure 53. Zoom-in from the participant's told spatial elements (Sleeping districts).

This fragment presents the sleeping districts through an older and a newer residential version. Both are shaped by mass housing, high-rise apartment blocks and green in-between spaces, but they differ in atmosphere and quality. While the older fabric was described as basic, chaotic and less attractive to live in, the newer developments introduce more colour and more qualitative shared courtyards with trees and playgrounds. The fragment therefore reveals an ambivalent identity, combining monotony with qualities of greenery, openness and communal outdoor space.

What becomes visible through this phase is that the participants' memories are not isolated fragments, but form a recognisable spatial pattern. When brought together on one representative map, recurring concentrations appear around home environments, historical fragments, green public spaces, major connecting routes and everyday meeting places. The findings show that collective spatial memory is structured not by single landmarks alone, but by the relation between everyday spaces, urban structure, historical layers and repeated use. The representative mapping phase therefore makes visible where identity becomes spatially legible in Podil and its surroundings.

Framework – Identity carrying elements

Framework – Identity carrying elements

Based on the memory talks, mental maps and collective mapping, five identity-carrying elements were identified: Daily routine, green breathing, connectivity, historical continuity and sensory richness. These elements describe the spatial principles through which memory is embedded in the participants' lived urban environment.

In this final phase, these findings are translated into an identity-based reconstruction framework. The framework indicates which spatial qualities should be preserved, continued, strengthened, reintroduced or reinterpreted in post-war reconstruction. It therefore transforms the findings of the research into a design strategy grounded in memory and lived urban identity.



Figure 54. Star of Preserving Urban Identity.

DAILY ROUTINE

Daily routine refers to the memory of movements patterns which inhabitant experience and remembers of their city.

KEY WORDS:

Accessibility, Routine, Connection

Preserve + integrate greenery, benches

Improve accessibility without erasing spatial identity

Separating pedestrians from cars

Integrating greenery, benches and small pausing-points along the routes

Spatial carriers: Daily routes, tram lines, metro, riverside walks, routes to work, parks, coffee places



Figure 55. Daily routine collage.

GREEN BREATHING

Green breathing refers to the green and open structures that brings comfort, peace, shadow, openness, smells and cooling within the city.

KEY WORDS:

Comfort, Openness, Atmosphere

- Keep green space as identity infrastructure
- Replant meaningful tree structures
- Use greenery as a buffer, atmosphere, shade
- Preserve openness and breathable public spaces
- Strengthen the relationship between public space, greenery and daily use
- Including the climate effort into the identity reconstruction

Spatial carriers:

Parks, tree-lined boulevards, lime trees, chestnut trees, cherry trees, gardens, flower-beds, river edge, fountains, open public spaces, visual corridors, wide streets



Figure 56. Green breathing collage.

CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity refers the shared social everyday spaces of urban life where people can stop, wait, meet or gather.

KEY WORDS:

Meeting, Gathering, Everyday social life

Preserve places to pause and meet

Design small-scale public meeting places such as benches, fountains, playgrounds

Support everyday collectively

Protect semi-public collective spaces

Spatial carriers:

Benches, playgrounds, parks, squares, fountains, coffee corners, waiting areas,



Figure 57. Connectivity collage.

HISTORICAL CONTINUITY

Continuity refers to the legibility of the historical layers, such as churches, squares, old buildings, Soviet housing and so on.

KEY WORDS:

Time

Preserve legibility of historical layers

Don't erase uncomfortable histories too quickly

Frame monuments in relation to everyday urban fabric

Allow new interventions to reveal instead of replacing it

Protect not only official heritage, but also lived and everyday heritage.

Spatial carriers:

Churches, cobblestones, historical monuments, renovated transformed buildings, religious diversity, old street typologies, industrial district traces

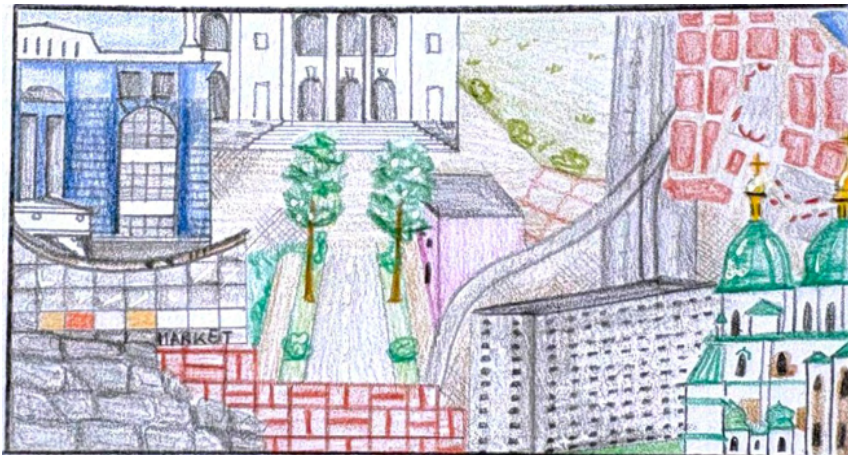


Figure 58. Historical continuity collage.

SENSORY RICHNESS

Recognitions by smells, colour, material, noises, textures, mosaics, murals, coffee, flowers, metro smell, cobblestones, fountains, art...

KEY WORDS:

Memory, Senses

Reintroduce atmosphere through material, planting, small programs to trigger recognition

Use colours, smell and sounds as a design tool

Bring importance to the smaller elements such as fountains, benches, pavement and flowers

Treat small everyday details as memory carriers

Spatial carriers:

Smells (coffee, lime trees, cherry blossoms, flowers), flowerbeds, fountains, cobblestones, coloured pavements, asphalt, colourful facades, infinity sounds, murals, mosaics in the metro stations

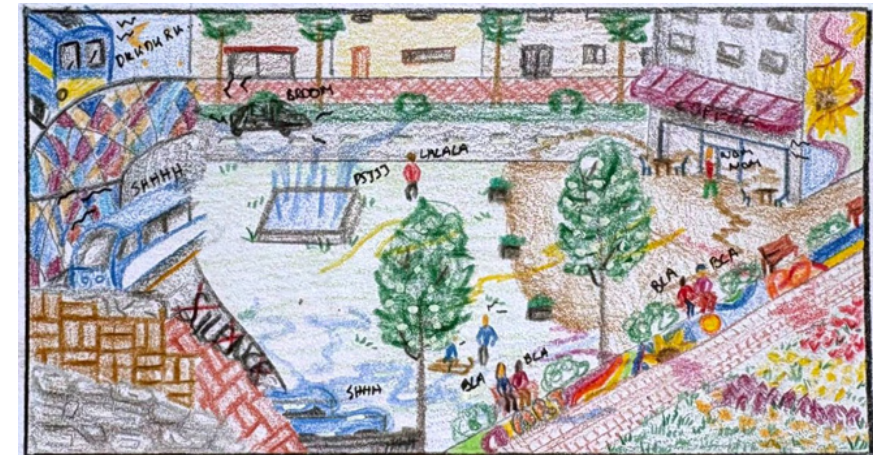


Figure 59. Sensory richness collage.

Framework – Case application

25th of March 2026 – Collective and representative mapping

During the meeting, the participants also started talking about Hostynyi Dvir. They described it as a large and important monument in Podil, but at the same time as an abandoned and unresolved place. In their memories, it stands as a major historical building, yet today it is experienced as a kind of ruin: a large structure that is still present, but in which nothing meaningful is happening.

What struck me was that they did not speak about it only as a monument, but also as a place that should be reactivated. They were curious about what could happen there in the future and what kind of new use it could receive. This made me realise that, for them, heritage is not only about preservation, but also about the question of how important buildings can become part of everyday urban life again.

Framework – Case application

Analyses per Identity element

With the framework established, the five identity-carrying elements are applied to a selected area of the participants' area centred around Hostynyi Dvir and its surrounding public spaces in Podil to demonstrate how the framework can inform reconstruction at the scale of a specific urban intervention.



Figure 60. Selected area of the participants' memories.
Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the

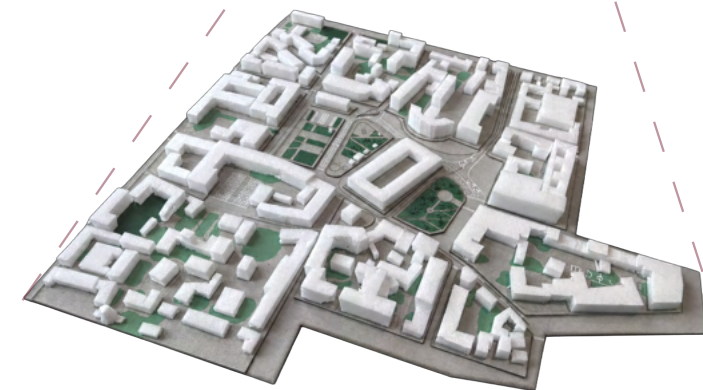


Figure 61. Model from the chosen case, Hostynyi Dvir and surrounded area.

CONTINUITY

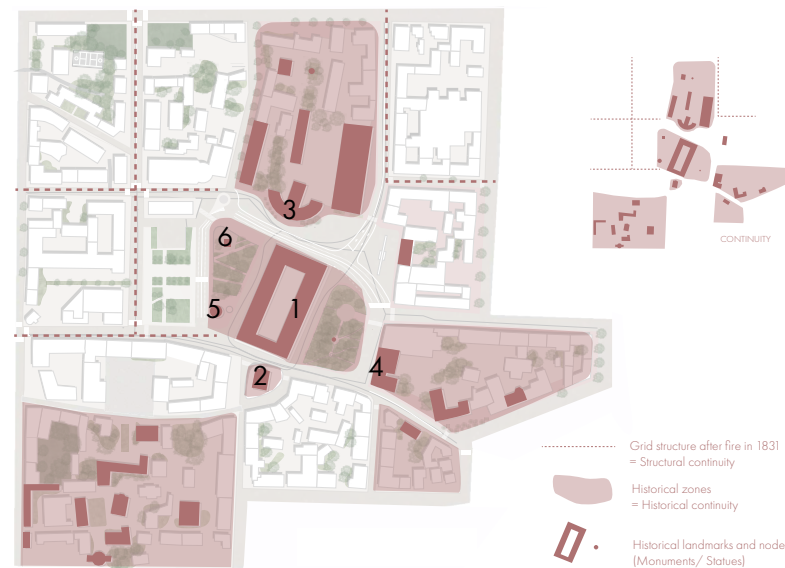


Figure 62. Continuity analyse map.
Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Findings

Continuity in this district is not carried by Hostynyi Dvir alone, but by the wider relation between the square, monuments, surrounding blocks and historical urban structure. The analysis shows that the historical layer remains legible, although not all historical buildings are equally activated in public life. Continuity should therefore be preserved not only as a heritage object, but as a wider urban relation.

Reading of the site

Old street typologies

The district remains readable as a layered historical urban fragment

Weaknesses

Hostynyi Dvir functions primarily as a historical poor presence rather than as an actively integrated part of everyday urban life. Its connection to the surrounding square and public space is not fully activated. The continuity of the district is therefore readable, but not fully embodied through this central anchor.

Continuity carriers (selection)



1. Hostynyi Dvir



2. Pyrohoshcha Church



3. Nationale Universiteit Kyiv-Mohyla Academy



4. Palace of Children and Youth, Podildistrict, Kyiv



5. Samson and the Lion fountain



6. Gregory Skovoroda Monument

Note. Reference images from Google Maps / Google Street View / Google, Satellite, edited by author.

Possible preservation pathways:

Preserve historical legibility

Reconnect heritage anchors to public space

Let new interventions reveal rather than replace existing layers

Protect everyday historical urban fabric

GREEN BREATHING

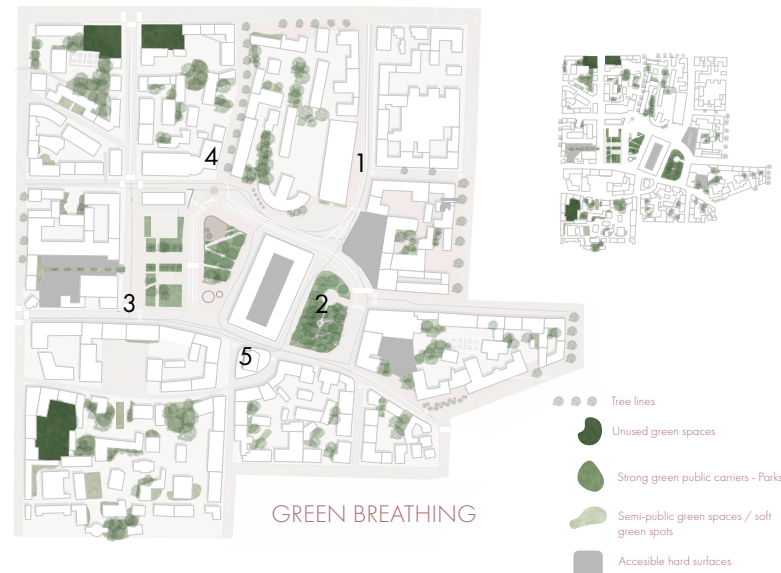


Figure 63. Green breathing, analyse map.

Findings

Green breathing in this district is carried by the relation between larger green public spaces, tree-lined streets, smaller green pockets and semi-public planted areas. The analysis shows that the district contains several fragments of softness, shade and openness, yet their climatic and atmospheric qualities are unevenly distributed and not always easily accessible. Green breathing should therefore be understood not as isolated greenery, but as a wider urban condition of relief, cooling and comfort.

Reading of the site

The district contains several strong green carriers and smaller green pockets
Tree-lined streets provide shade, structure and orientation
Semi-public planted areas contribute to everyday softness and relief

Weaknesses

Although the district contains several green fragments, they are not always continuous or equally accessible. Certain parts of the public realm remain dominated by hard surfaces and lack sufficient shade or cooling. As a result, green breathing is present, but not yet fully operative as a continuous climatic and atmospheric layer.

Green breathing carriers (selection)



1. Tree lined street



2. Park



3. Exposed pavement to the street



4. Inner courtyard



5. Pocket green space

Note. 1,3-5. Reference images from Google Maps / Google Street View / Google, Satellite, edited by author.
2. Park
Note. Park image (2) from Podil District, by Nomadic Niko, 2013, <https://nomadicniko.com/2013/05/06/kyiv-po->

Possible preservation path-

Preserve green space as identity infrastructure
Strengthen tree lines and planted public edges
Improve shade and cooling in exposed public areas
Connect green fragments into a more continuous breathing structure
Maintain openness and environmental comfort as part of the district identity

CONNECTIVITY

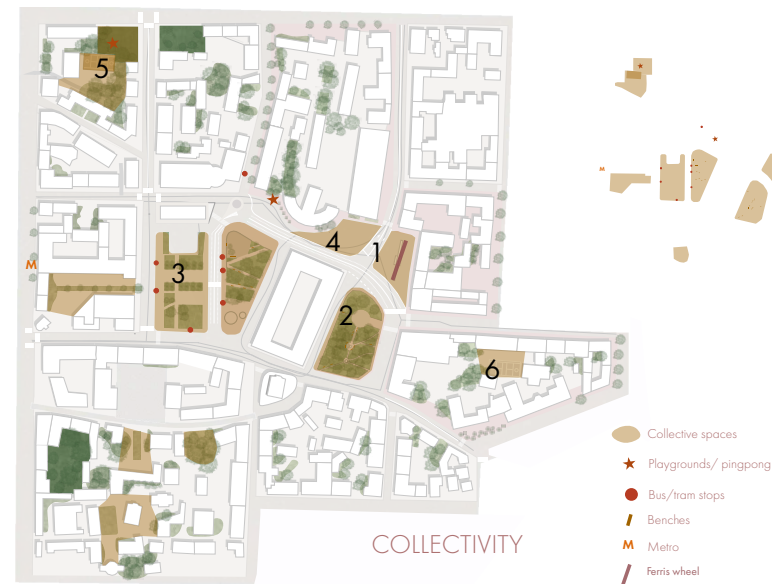


Figure 64. Connectivity, analyse map.

Findings

Connectivity in this district is carried by a dispersed network of public spaces, waiting nodes, playgrounds and smaller everyday meeting points. The analysis shows that collective life is not limited to one central square, but also appears through benches, transport stops and semi-public spaces. Connectivity should therefore be understood as an everyday urban condition of meeting, waiting and shared presence.

Reading of the site

Collective life is concentrated around the square and its public edges

Waiting nodes such as metro and bus stops act as everyday meeting points

Smaller elements such as benches and playgrounds support informal social interaction

Connectivity is carried by both public and semi-public spaces across the district fragment

Weaknesses

Some collective spaces function mainly as transit rather than places to stay

Benches and pause points are present, but unevenly distributed

Certain public edges remain weakly activated

The connection between larger collective spaces and smaller everyday meeting points could be stronger

Connectivity carriers (selection)



1. Kontraktova square - Christmasmarket



3. Market with small shops



5. Ping pong tables



2. Benches



4. Empty public square



6. Semi public sport area

Note. Christmas market image (1) from Новогодняя ёлка 2019 на Подоле, by Kiev Foto, 2018, <https://kiev-foto.info/ru/statii/statii/2190-novogodnyaya-jolka-2019-na-podole>. Reference images (2-6) from Google Maps / Google Street View / Google Satellite View, used for academic site analysis and edited by author.

Possible preservation pathways:

Preserve places to pause, wait and meet

Strengthen collective use along public edges

Support informal everyday gathering through small public elements

Connect larger collective spaces with smaller meeting points across the district

Protect semi-public collective spaces as part of the lived urban fabric

DAILY ROUTINE

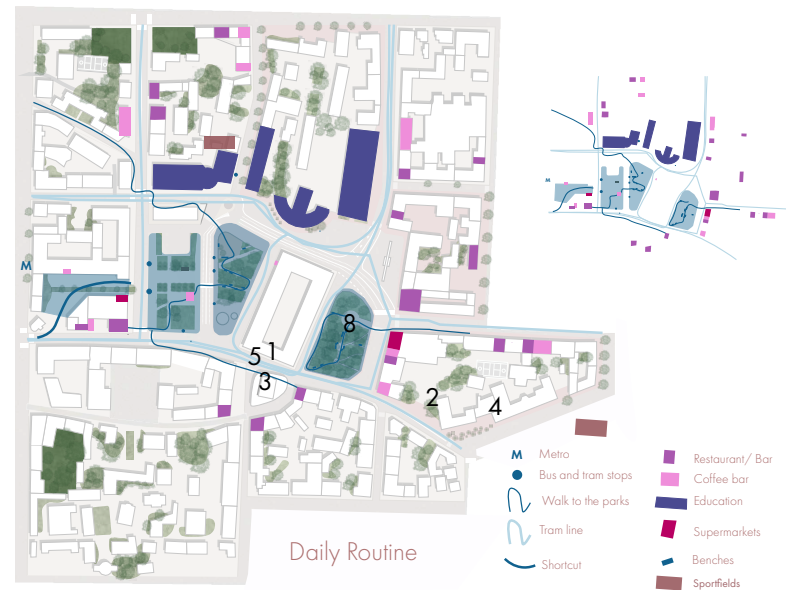


Figure 65. Daily routine, analyse map.

Findings

Daily routine in this area is carried by a network of recurring routes rather than by isolated places. Broad streets, tram lines and metro connections structure the main movement through the area, while parks, coffee places, supermarkets, educational buildings and benches act as recurring destinations or stopping points. The map shows that everyday life is organised through repeated movement between transport, daily services, leisure and pause points.

Reading of the site

The site is structured by a few strong daily connectors, especially the large east-west street, the metro and the tram line. Around these, smaller shortcuts, parks, coffee bars, supermarkets and educational buildings form a network of repeated everyday movement.

Weaknesses

This element asks for the strengthening of the existing daily movement structure rather than its replacement. Main routes should be supported through greenery, benches and safer pedestrian conditions, while shortcuts that connect everyday destinations should be preserved. In this way, transport, parks, education and daily services remain part of a legible everyday rhythm.

Daily routine carriers (selection)



1. take-away coffee place



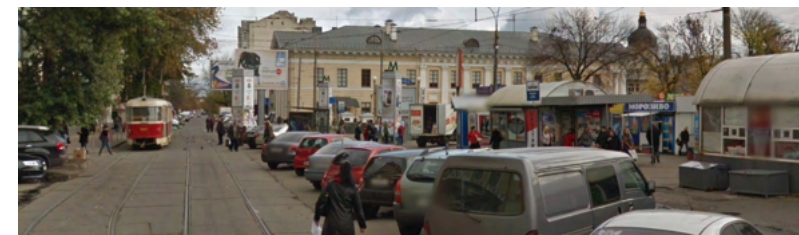
2. Benches along the pavement



3. Tram



4. Supermarket and bakery



5. Tram, pavement and market together

1-5. Reference images from Google Maps / Google Street View / Google Satellite View, used for academic site analysis and edited by author.

Possible preservation pathways:

Preservation of daily routes and for the integration of greenery, benches and small pausing points along them.

Accessibility should be improved without erasing spatial identity.

Pedestrian movement should be more clearly separated from cars..

SENSORY RICHNESS

Smell, material and colour

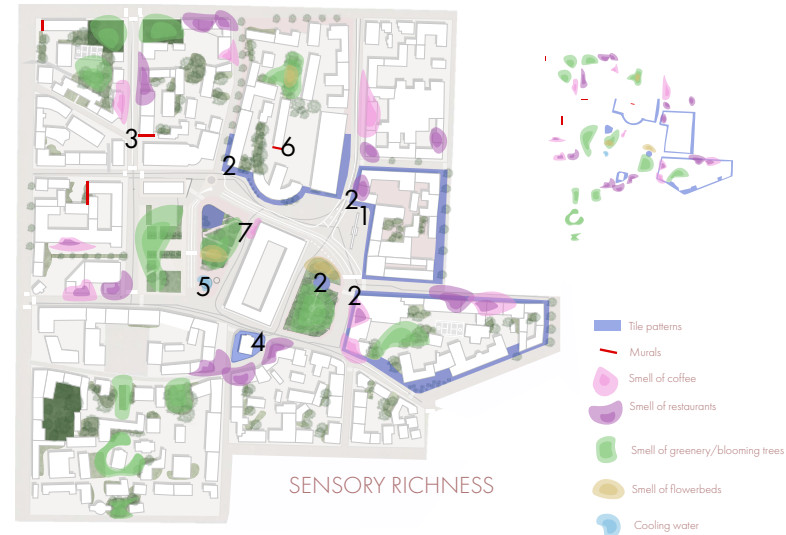


Figure 66. Smell, material and colour, analyse map.

Soundscape



Figure 67. Soundscape map.

Sensory richness carriers (selection)



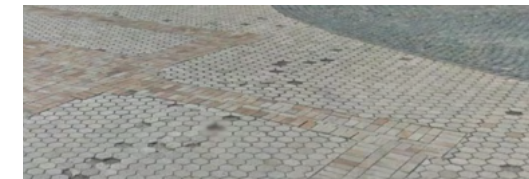
1. Pavement pattern



2. Park pattern



5. Colourful fountain



4. Pattern around historical building



6. Flowers



3. Mural



7. Coffee place



8. Greenery in the park

Note. Photograph of Samson and the Lion fountain (5), Kontraktova Square, Kyiv, by Юлия, retrieved from Google Maps. Park image (8) from Podil District, by Nomadic Niko, 2013, <https://nomadicniko.com/2013/05/06/kyiv-podil-district/>.

Findings

Sensory richness in this area is carried by a combination of smell, material, colour and sound. The area is recognised through coffee and restaurant smells, flowering trees, fountains, cobblestones, patterned pavements, murals, but also through the continuous overlap of transport, social activity and park sounds. What becomes clear is that memory is not only attached to places themselves, but also to the sensory details through which these places are experienced and recognised in everyday life.

Reading of the site

The site reveals a fragmented sensory structure: smells and material qualities appear as localised points along routes and public spaces, while sound forms a broader atmospheric layer across the district.

Weaknesses

Many of these sensory qualities are small-scale, diffuse and fragmented across the area. Because they are weakly connected and embedded in everyday details rather than in major urban structures, they are easy to overlook. Sensory richness is therefore present, but not spatially reinforced as an identity-carrying layer.

Possible preservation pathways:

Reintroduce atmosphere through material, planting, small programs to trigger recognition

Use colours, smell and sounds as a design tool

Bring importance to smaller elements such as fountains, benches, pavement and flowers

Treat small everyday details as memory carriers

Intervention zone

INTERVENTION ZONE

After analysing the area through the identity-carrying elements, a more focused test fragment is selected around Hostynyi Dvir and its immediate surroundings. This fragment is chosen because several identity-carrying elements overlap here: historical continuity, connectivity, daily routine, green breathing and sensory richness. At the same time, the area also reveals clear weaknesses, such as underused heritage, fragmented public space and missed relations between monument, parks and everyday urban life. The fragment therefore offers a relevant site to test how the framework can be applied spatially within the district.



Figure 68. Zoom-in on the model of the case-study.

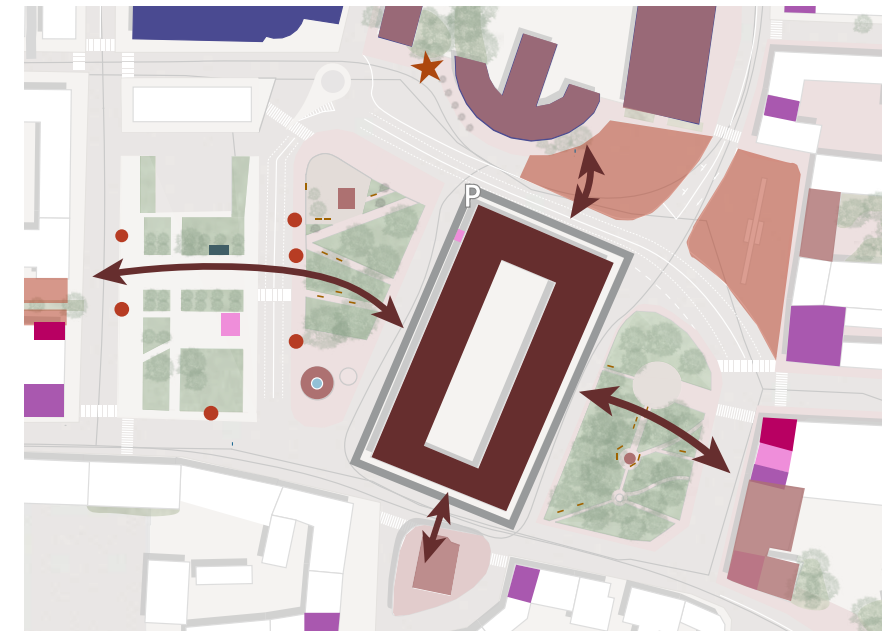


Figure 69. Summary map of the analyses from the intervention zone.

Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| Supermarket | Restaurant | Ping pong tables |
| Hostynyi Dvir | Bus stops | University |
| Empty square | Bakery | Historical buildings |

After analysing the district through the identity-carrying elements, a strategic fragment is selected around Hostynyi Dvir and its surrounding public spaces. This area is chosen because several elements overlap here, including historical continuity, connectivity, daily routine and green public space. At the same time, the fragment reveals clear weaknesses: Hostynyi Dvir remains underused, the surrounding public spaces are fragmented, and the relations between monument, parks and urban edges are not fully activated. The map therefore identifies the area as a relevant site to test how the framework can guide a spatial intervention.

DESKTOP RESEARCH

Kontraktova Square

Kontraktova Square is located in the heart of Kyiv's historic Podil district, in the very centre of the capital. The site is characterised as a large 11,000 m² surface of post-Soviet asphalt, which already suggests the tension between historical urban context and a hard, underused public surface. The article also frames the square within the reality of a city under siege, showing that this public space is not only historically situated, but also shaped by the current wartime condition of Kyiv (Mikael Colville-Andersen, 2025).



Figure 70. Historical illustration of trade activity at Kontraktova Square, showing the courtyard typology and marketplace character of Hostynyi Dvir.
Note. From *The unexpected story of the world's largest tactical urbanism project in a warzone*, by M. Colville-Andersen, 2025, Medium.

Site of TORV

In 2025, Kontraktova Square in Kyiv became the site of TORV, a temporary pop-up urban space on the newly revitalized square. The project officially opened on 5 July 2025 and is described as a place for "sports, community gatherings, physical activities and mental peace" (Embassy of Denmark in Ukraine, 2025). The name TORV comes from Danish and TORG from Old Slavonic; both refer to a marketplace, reflecting the historical role of the square as a meeting point between Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (Embassy of Denmark in Ukraine, 2025).

The project was designed by Danish urbanist Mikael Colville-Andersen and applies principles of tactical urbanism: low-cost, fast and flexible interventions that bring urban spaces to life (Embassy of Denmark in Ukraine, 2025). Colville-Andersen describes the project as being located on an 11,000 m² asphalt surface in the historic Podil district and calls it likely the world's largest tactical urbanism project, created during wartime (Colville-Andersen, 2025).



Figure 71. Temporary tactical urbanism intervention on Kontraktova Square, showing painted ground markings, movable planters and seating elements used to activate the asphalt surface.
Note. From *The unexpected story of the world's largest tactical urbanism project in a warzone*, by M. Colville-Andersen, 2025, Medium.

For research on Hostynyi Dvir, this is relevant because it shows that Kontraktova Square is still being reimagined as an active public space for gathering, movement, rest and public life.



Figure 72. New traffic pattern in Podil.
Note. From Проїхати Подолом і не заробити штраф: як працює нова схема руху, by A. Bashovyi, 2018, The Village Україна. Photograph by Nati Avdieieva.

In recent years, the traffic circulation in Podil has been reorganised, which has had an important impact on Kontraktova Square. By redirecting car traffic and expanding the pedestrian zone, the square became safer and more accessible for pedestrians. Instead of functioning mainly as a traffic space, Kontraktova Square has increasingly been transformed into a public urban space where people can walk, meet and spend time (Bashovyi, 2018). This

Historical Development - Hostynyi Dvir

From 1798 onwards, contract fairs were held on Kontraktova Square. As these trading activities grew, there was a need for a larger building to accommodate them, which led to the creation of Hostynyi Dvir. In 1806, the architect Luigi Rusca was commissioned to design the building. His design was made in a classical style and consisted of a closed rectangular volume surrounding an inner courtyard, with two levels and six entrance gates. The building was therefore intended as an urban trading complex, rather than as a monument standing independently as an object (Urbanyna, 2021).



Figure 73. Historical view of Hostynyi Dvir on Kontraktova Square.
Note. From Hostynyi Dvir, by N. Marinokha, 2013, Stezhkamy Ukrainy. Copyright/source: Stezhkamy Ukrainy

By 1811, the foundations and the walls of the first floor had been built. However, the great fire of Podil in July 1811 destroyed a large part of the district. As a result, the money intended for the construction of Hostynyi Dvir had to be used to repair the damage caused by the fire. The following year, the French invasion of Russia made further financing impossible. Because of this, the first floor was temporarily covered with a roof, and the building remained only one storey high, although the original design had planned two levels (Urbanyna, 2021).

In 1828, a reconstruction of Hostynyi Dvir started according to the project of architect Andriy Melenskyi. By 1833, construction work was completed, including the addition of a cornice, an attic level and a new iron roof. These interventions gave the building a more finished architectural character. Between 1843 and 1854, the city council rented out parts of the building as shops. The tenants then began to make their own changes to the structure, for example by rebuilding the facades and walling up the arched galleries. These changes altered the original open character of the building (Urbanyna, 2021).

Reconstruction and Heritage

In 1976, the decision was made to demolish the old Hostynyi Dvir and rebuild it according to Rusca's original design. Architect Valentyna Shevchenko carried out the research and developed the reconstruction project. Measurements and construction works lasted for many years, from 1971 until 1993. This means that the building we see today is not simply the original nineteenth-century structure, but also a later reconstruction based on Rusca's historical design (Urbanyna, 2021).

In 2011, Hostynyi Dvir was removed from the list of protected monuments. In 2012, the Kyiv City Council leased the building to PC "Ukrrestavratsiya", which planned to reconstruct it into a shopping centre. This caused public protests, as many people wanted the building to remain accessible and to become a public cultural space instead of a commercial mall (Urbanyna, 2021).



Figure 74. View of Hostynyi Dvir on Kontraktova Square in the Podil neighbourhood of Kyiv.
Note. From Hostynyi Dvir Podil.jpg, by S. Klymenko, 2005, Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 75. Aerial view of Hostynyi Dvir in downtown Kyiv, showing the deteriorated condition of the building and its position within the historical urban fabric of Podil.
Note. From Kyiv activists accuse Zelensky of inaction to protect cultural heritage, by Interfax-Ukraine, 2021, Kyiv Post. Photograph by Volodymyr Petrov.



Figure 76. Former inner courtyard of Hostynyi Dvir, showing the open central space before later deterioration and redevelopment debates.
Note. From Gostynnyi Dvir was returned to the state, by Novynarnia, 2018.

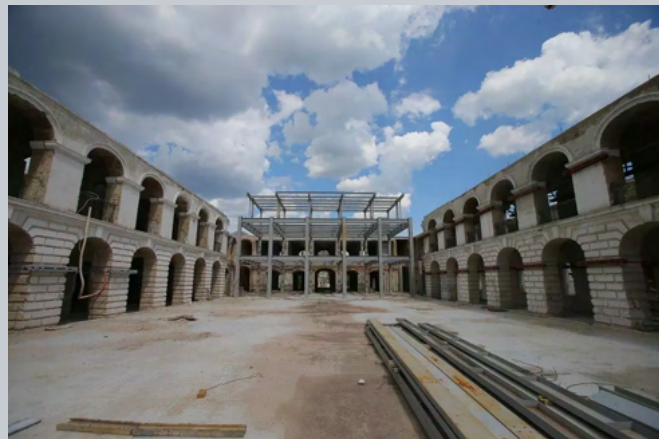


Figure 77. Hostynyi Dvir on Kontraktova Square, which was granted the status of a monument of national significance in 2021.
Note. From Hostynyi Dvir became a monument of national significance. What will this change?, by T. Senenko, 2021, Big Kyiv.

Public Protest and Hostyna Respublika

From 26 May 2012 onwards, activists gathered in the courtyard to prevent the reconstruction of Hostynyi Dvir into a shopping centre. During this period, the courtyard became known as “Hostyna Respublika”, a free civic and cultural space where concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, lectures and public gatherings took place (Savvatieiev, 2012). One student who stayed there described the movement by saying: *“We are sometimes associated with the Occupy movement... But we are not protesting here, we are protecting”* (Savvateyev, 2012). This shows that the protest was not only against development, but also about defending the building as a public and cultural place.

The proposed shopping centre project would not only have changed the function of the building, but also its architecture. According to the developers, the exterior would remain almost unchanged, while a third floor and a glass roof would be added. They argued that this would restore the historical trading function of the building through “modern trading rows” (Savvatieiev, 2012). However, Valentyna Shevchenko strongly disagreed with this interpretation. She argued that although Hostynyi Dvir was originally connected to trade, a twenty-first-century shopping centre would have a very different impact on the building and the city. She stated: *“What Myrgorodskyi proposes will distort this building”* (Savvatieiev, 2012).

Heritage Debate

The debate was also strongly connected to heritage. Developers argued that Hostynyi Dvir was not truly historical, because the current building had been reconstructed in the 1980s. However, heritage experts disagreed. Mykola Parkhomenko, from the Ukrainian Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments, argued that although the building had legally lost its monument status, it remained a monument in reality. He stated: *“De jure Hostynyi Dvir ceased to be a monument, but de facto it certainly remained one”*. **According to him, Hostynyi Dvir should be understood not only as an architectural object, but also as an important element in the historical urban structure of Podil and Kontraktova Square** (Savvatiiev, 2012).

Fire and Current Question

In 2013, a fire broke out on the roof of Hostynyi Dvir. At that time, the building housed, among other functions, a library and the Institute of Restoration, which had to move out after the fire. In the same year, the protesters were dispersed by “Berkut” (Urbanyna, 2021). Since then, the main question has remained whether Hostynyi Dvir should become a commercial shopping centre or a public cultural place.

Current situation

Even in wartime, everyday life in Kyiv continues to a remarkable extent. Shops, restaurants, bars, museums, parks and galleries remain in use, and Podil is still described as a busy and active part of the city. (Oleh Tymoshenko, 2024) At the same time, recent attacks have shown how vulnerable this historical urban landscape remains. During the large Russian attack on Kyiv of 24 May 2026, several cultural and architectural landmarks in the wider historical area were damaged, including the Chernobyl National Museum, the Contract House, the Postal Station and the Church of the Nativity. Multiple public and commercial spaces were also affected. (Marina Buzovska, 2026).

Overall, the history of Hostynyi Dvir shows that it is more than a former trading building. It has become a contested urban and heritage space where questions of public access, culture, commerce and historical continuity come together. This makes its future use particularly relevant for this thesis, as any intervention must respond not only to the architectural value of the building, but also to its role within the urban life and collective memory of Podil. In this sense, the case is made even more urgent by the ongoing war, which continues to expose the vulnerability of both monumental and lived urban heritage. At the same time, the present condition of the building and its surroundings may still change at any moment. The design proposal therefore takes the current situation of the site as its point of departure and explores how the framework could be applied if Hostynyi Dvir and Kontraktova Square were to remain in their current state after the war.



Case application

8th of May 2026 - Seventh meeting - Design feedback session

At 18:30, I visited my participants again after about a month. As always, they welcomed me warmly with a drink and some cookies. In the meantime, I had further analysed the selected site and made a first design proposal for Hostynyi Dvir and Kontraktova Square. During this meeting, I presented the design to hear their opinion and to see whether the proposal still felt recognisable and meaningful to them. For me, this was an important moment, because it allowed me to check whether I had understood their memories and earlier stories correctly, and whether the framework had been translated in a way that still made sense from their perspective. The session lasted around two hours and gave me confidence. It was reassuring to hear that they understood and appreciated the proposal, and that they could still recognise the identity of the place in the design.

It is important to acknowledge that the current condition of both the building and its surroundings may change at any moment during the war. This design proposal is therefore based on the present situation of the site and explores how the framework could be applied if Hostynyi Dvir and Kontraktova Square were to remain in their current state after the war.

Identity-based site plan

Green Breathing

The old layout of the courtyard is reused, with a central place for art and two fountains. On Kontraktova square and the surrounding area the parks are strengthened and expanded. Trees are planted along the movement lines. In the area where cars are still allowed, the street typology is introduced to add greenery in the middle of the pavement to make it greener, and safer away from the pedestrians. In this way greenery is a source of shade, softness, cooling and openness.

Connectivity

Connectivity is reinforced by creating open spaces where people can sit down, and meet, and participate in the public life. This is achieved through benches, open paths, fountains, spaces for art, table tennis tables, playgrounds, and more sport facilities which makes gathering possible in the everyday life. In the building, collective use is supported through the cafés on the corners, open paths, benches, theatre club, art classes, restaurants, and other shared cultural functions.

Historical continuity

Historical continuity is addressed by reviving Hostynyi Dvir as a public building. The proposal keeps the courtyard open to the public and reinterprets the former garden and path structure. On Kontraktova Square, continuity is also present through the transformation of the earlier paths, such as the former tram lines that crossed the square into new public uses like local art, benches, greenery, and flowerpatches. The base of the former parks were used to extend them to create a more active and interesting public area.

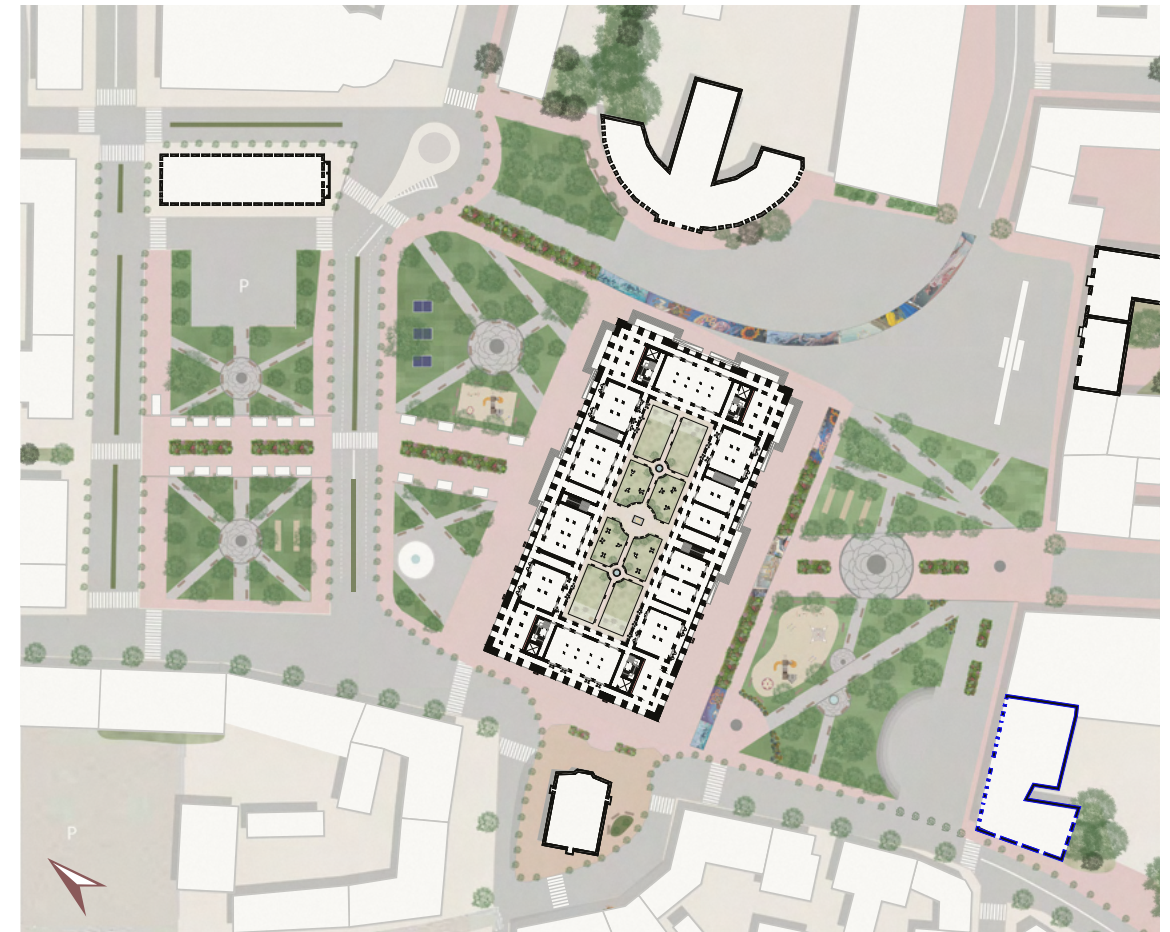


Figure 78: Identity-based site plan
Note: Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Sensory richness

Sensory richness is introduced through fountains, greenery, art, atmosphere, and public use. In the courtyard, the fountains, planted areas and open space for art, and walking create a multi layered calm, sensory environment. On the square, floor based-local art, green areas with trees and flowers and different tile patterns on the pavements enriches the area. By adding the coffee shops at the corners of Hostynyi Dvir the coffee smell mixes into the environment, and the different public activities create a variety noises during different times of the day.

Daily Routine

Daily routine is supported through the organisation of sport events/workshops/workouts and the reintroduction of the everyday public functions. For the Kontraktova Square this is managed/enabled by the diagonal paths that goes through the parks and connect the different historical buildings with each other. The paths guide pedestrians and bikers to the six main entrances of Hostynyi Dvir. In Hostynyi Dvir, daily use is supported through the café, restaurant, shops and restaurant that connects the building to the university and art/ theatre classes. The courtyard path also contributes to reconnecting the galleries and makes the inner courtyard part of everyday movement, by being used as a shortcut.

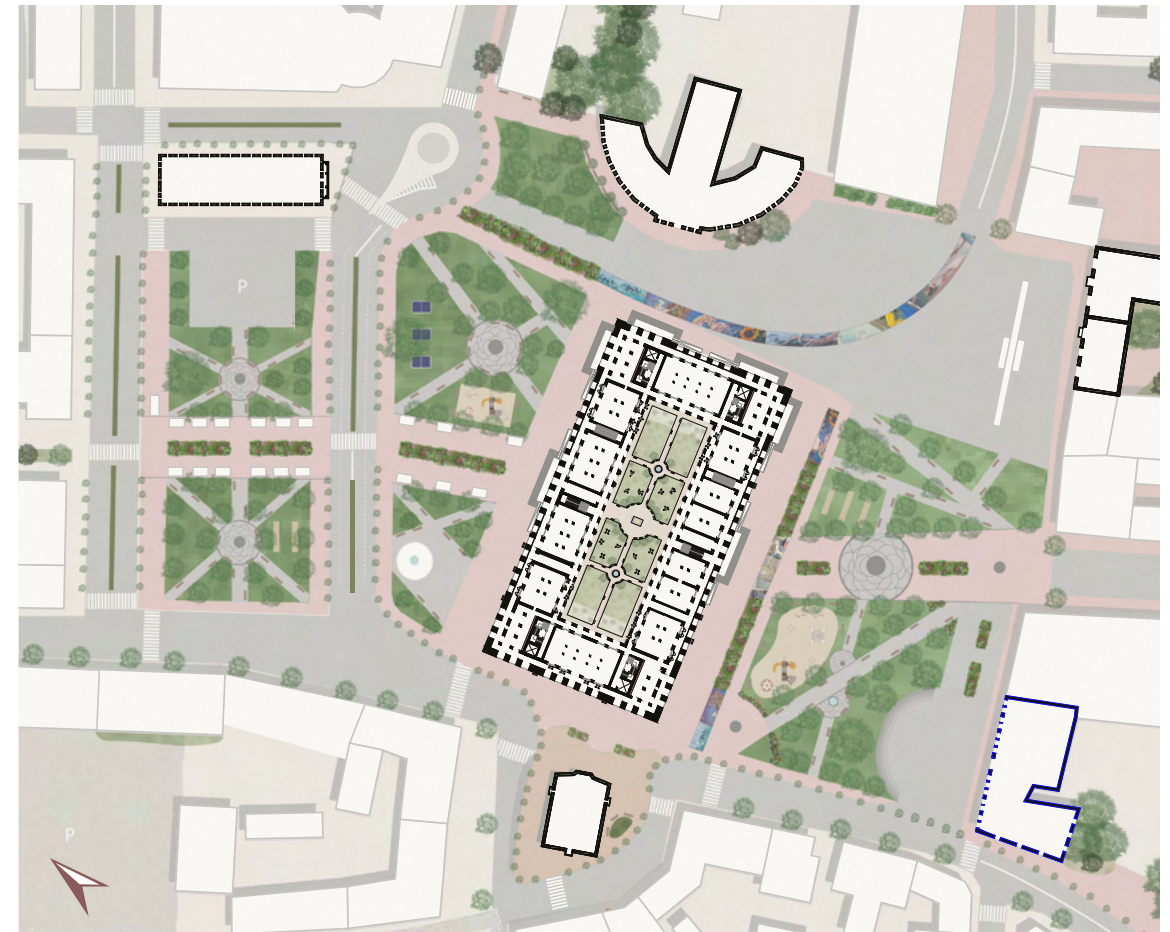


Figure 79. Identity-based site plan.
Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Movement

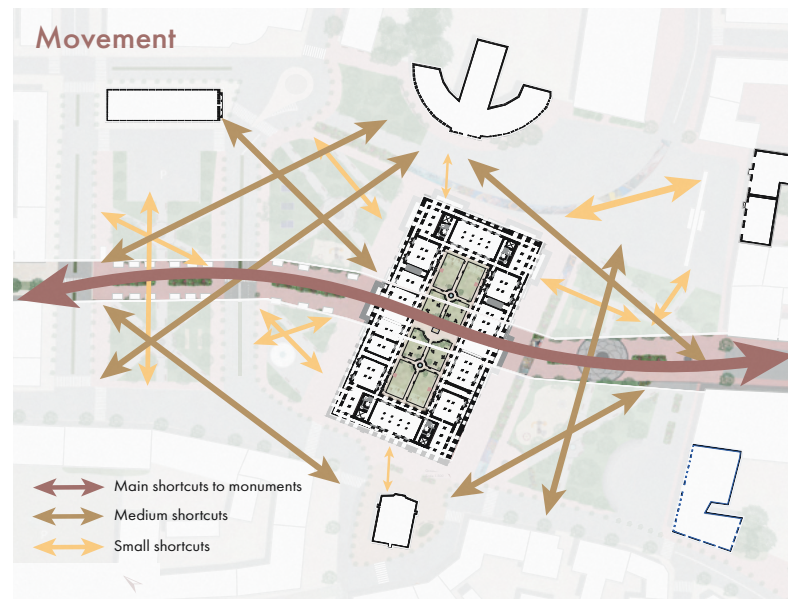


Figure 80. Movement map.
Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Added programs

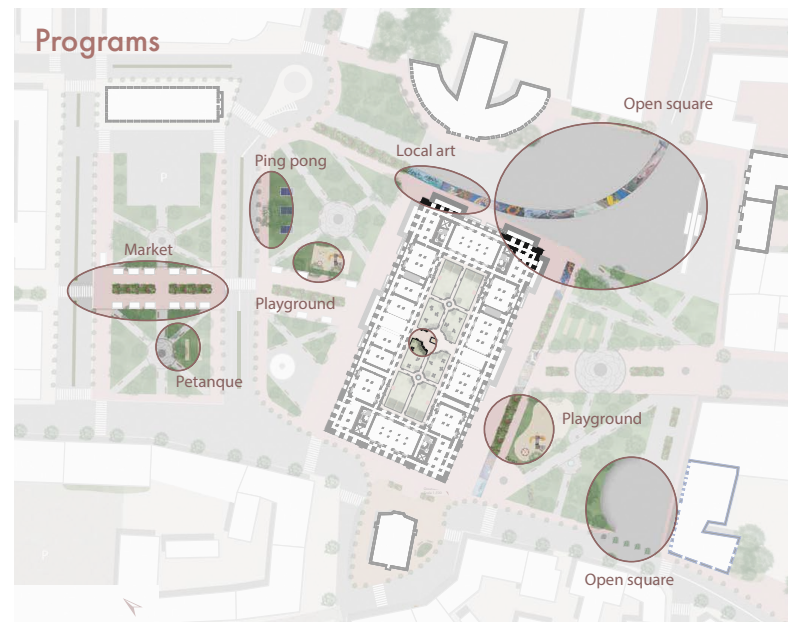


Figure 81. Programs map.
Note. Base map adapted from "Kyiv urban map; Ukraine" (Bibliocad). Edited and annotated by the author.

Materiality

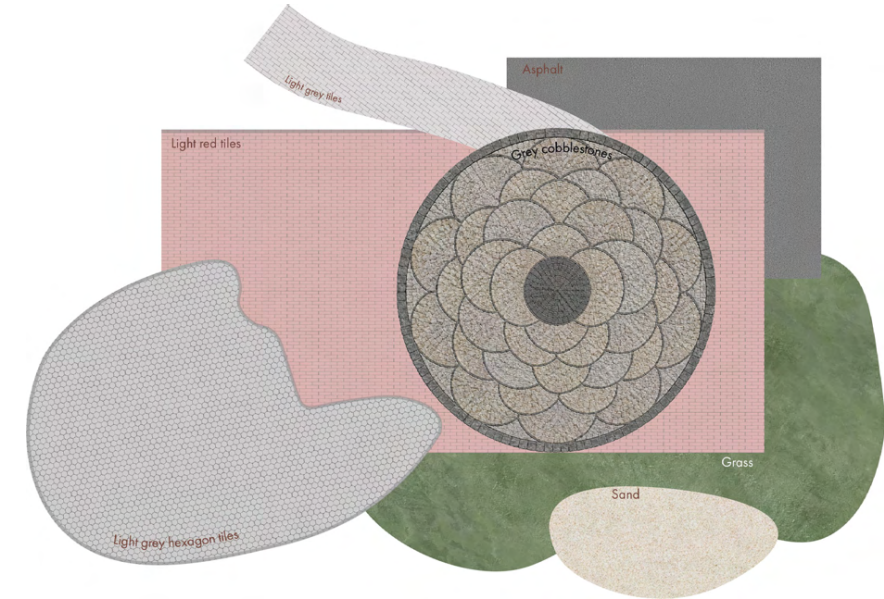


Figure 82. Collage of materials.
Note: Collage composed by the author using texture samples from Architectures. The grey cobblestones image is generated with GenAI based on the author's own drawing and design input to make it more realistic.

The existing material palette is extended and reused throughout the new site plan. Brick typologies, stone pavements and tile patterns already present in the surrounding area are continued and reinterpreted, connecting the new intervention to the existing urban fabric and strengthening the overall coherence of the site.

Section



Figure 83. Sectional Reading of the Identity Framework.

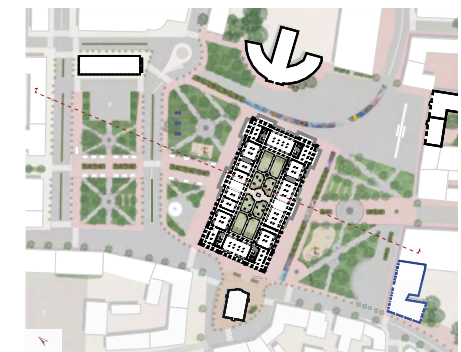


Figure 84. Section line on the site plan.

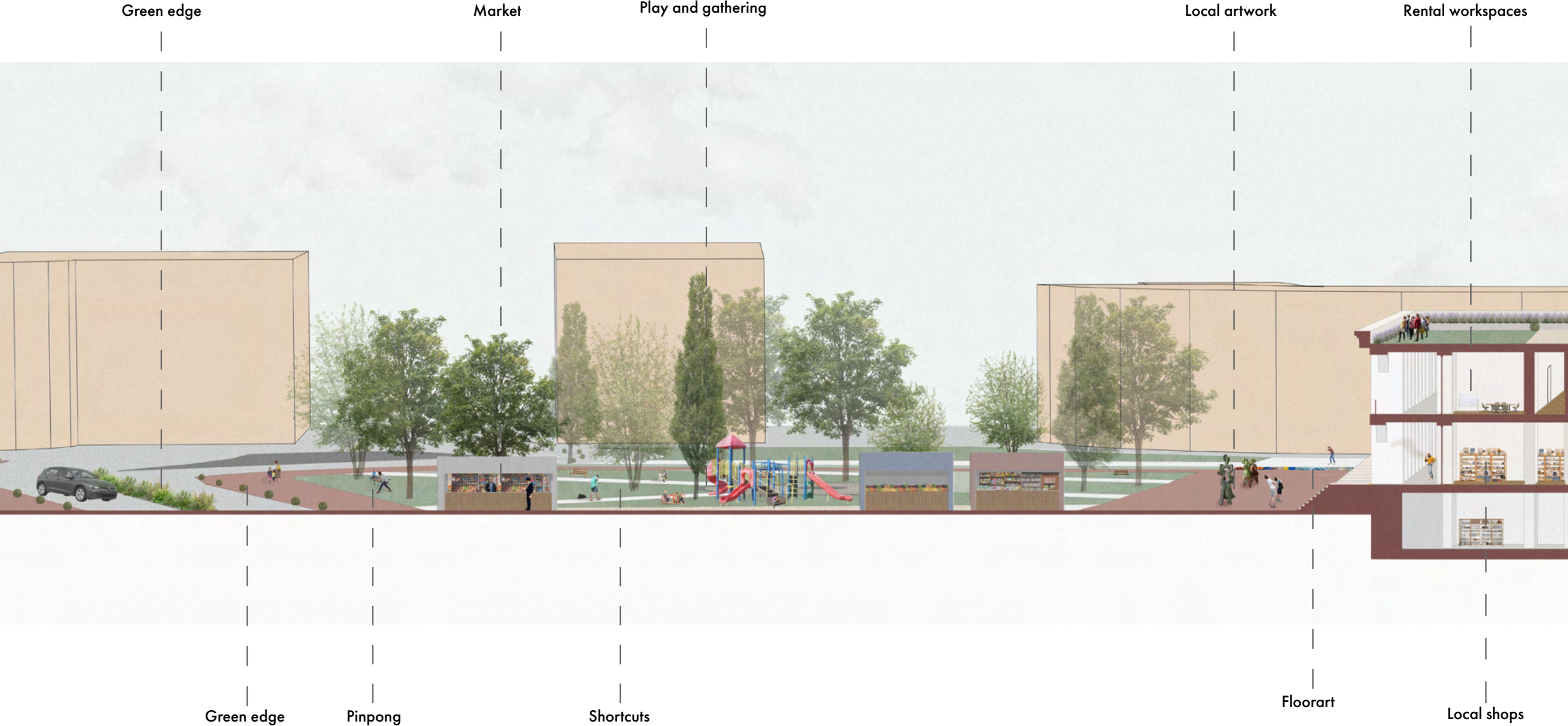


Figure 85. Section zoom-in 1/3.

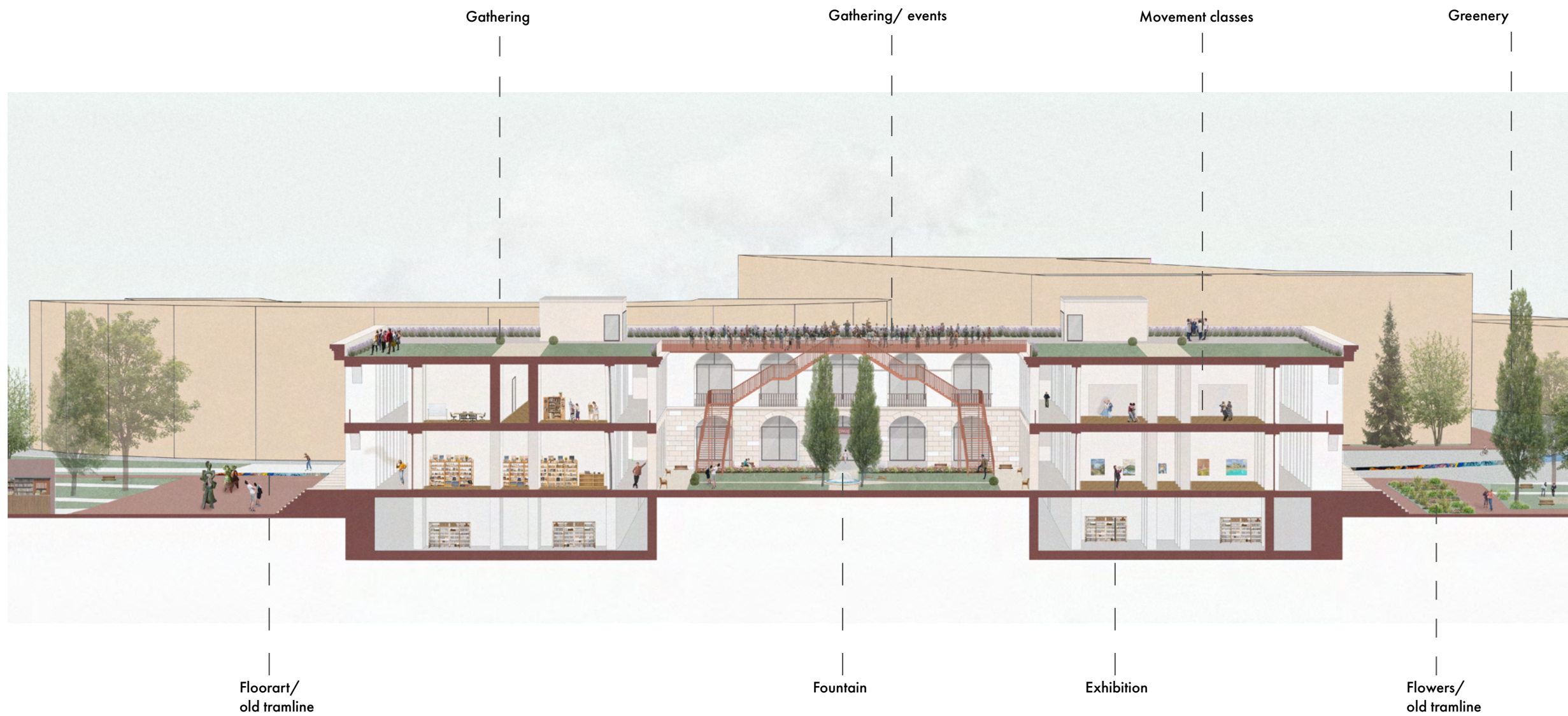


Figure 86. Section zoom-in 2/3.

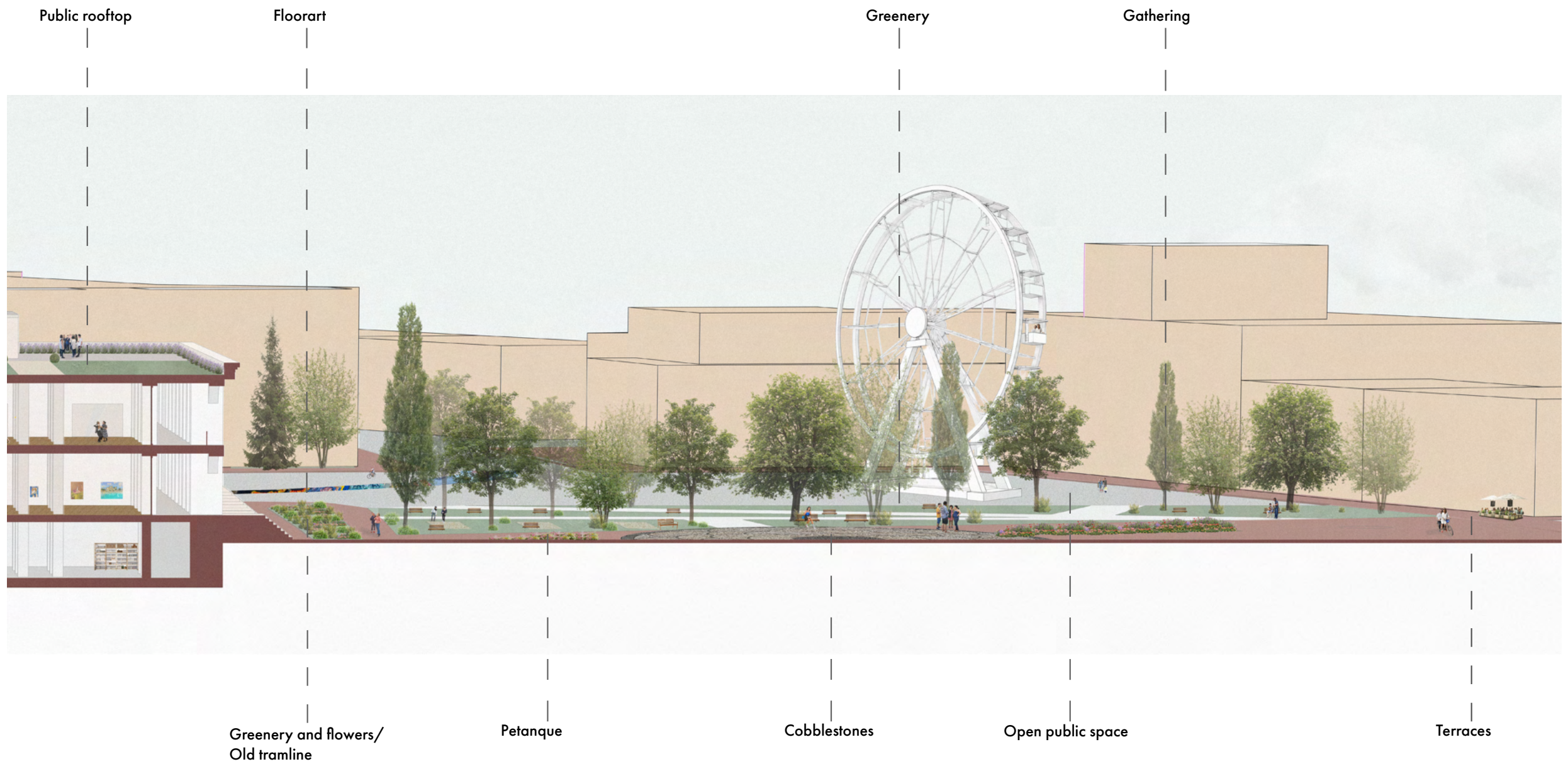


Figure 87. Section zoom-in 3/3.

Note: The ferris wheel is generated with GenAI based on the author's own drawing and design input to make it in the right perspective of the section made by the author.

Programs for Hostynyi Dvir

Descriptions of the floorplans

In the basement, the four corners contain public toilets, while storage spaces are placed along the left and right sides. Along the short sides of the building, shelter spaces are provided.

On the ground floor, a café or “coffee place” is positioned at each corner of the building. This helps to activate all four sides of Hostynyi Dvir and leads to coffee being an important part in the participants everyday (urban) life and it being engrained in their memory. Along the side facing the market, small local shops are introduced in order to strengthen the existing commercial activity in the area. These spaces are conceived for souvenir shops, local artisans, and small-scale retail connected to the cultural identity of Podil. Along the side facing the Palace of Children and Youth of the Podil district, exhibition spaces for local artists create a more cultural public edge. Along the side facing the university, a supermarket is placed to support daily use by students, and pedestrians. On the quieter side facing the church, a restaurant is introduced, as this side is more suitable for a calmer and more relaxed atmosphere.

On the first floor, the focus is placed on craftsmanship, movement and cultural use. Along the side facing the market, flexible studios that can be rented out are combined with spaces for artistic production. Along the side facing the Palace of Children and Youth, and the side facing the university, dance and movement studios are placed, creating an environment to further the health and well being of students in the area. On the side facing the church, a larger space is reserved for a theatre club, allowing for a more enclosed and dedicated cultural programme.

Finally, **the roof** is conceived as an open public surface that can host open-air events, performances, and theatre activities. In this way, the building remains active on multiple levels and supports a combination of everyday use, cultural production, and public gathering.

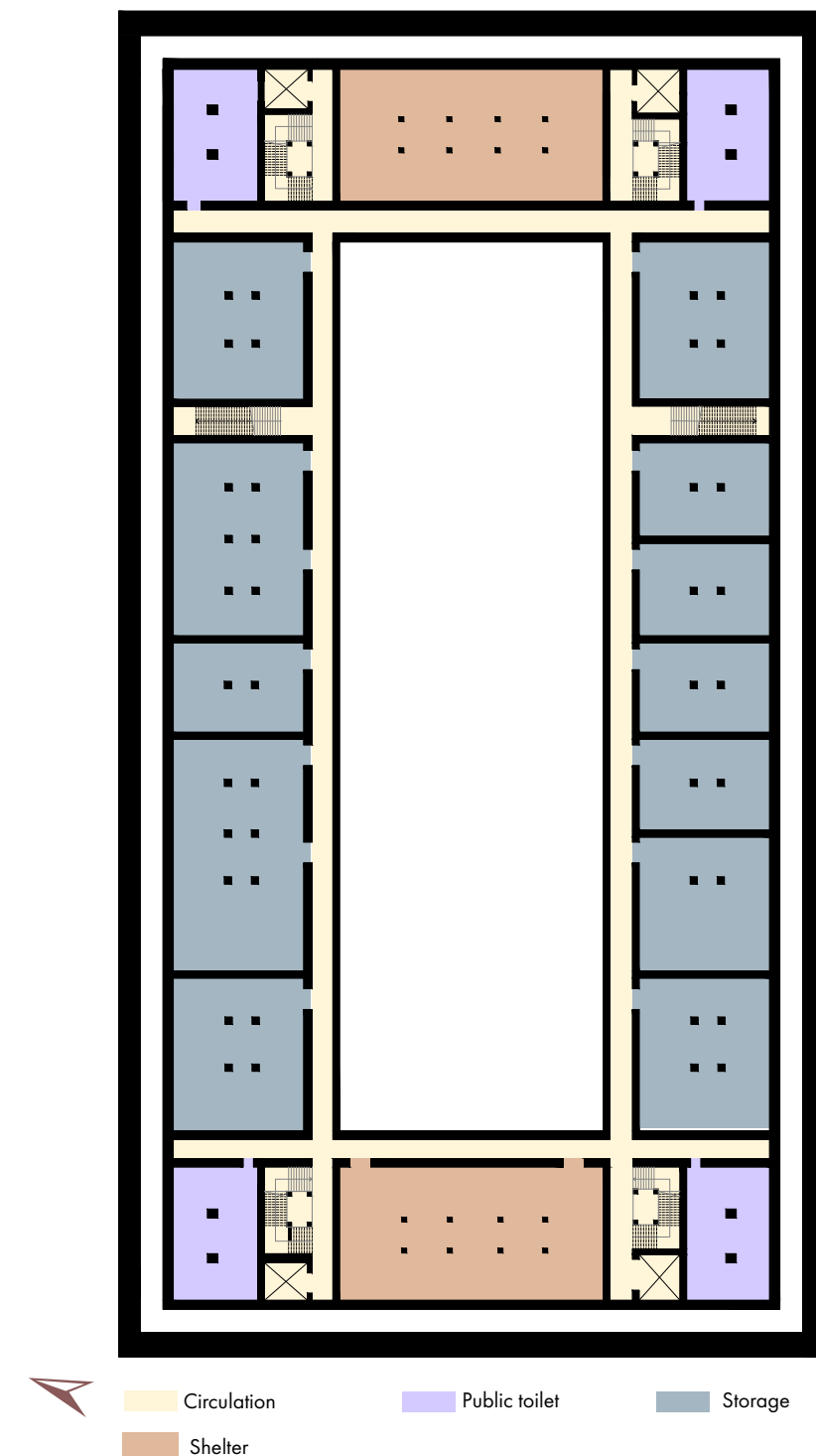


Figure 88. Basement, floorplan.

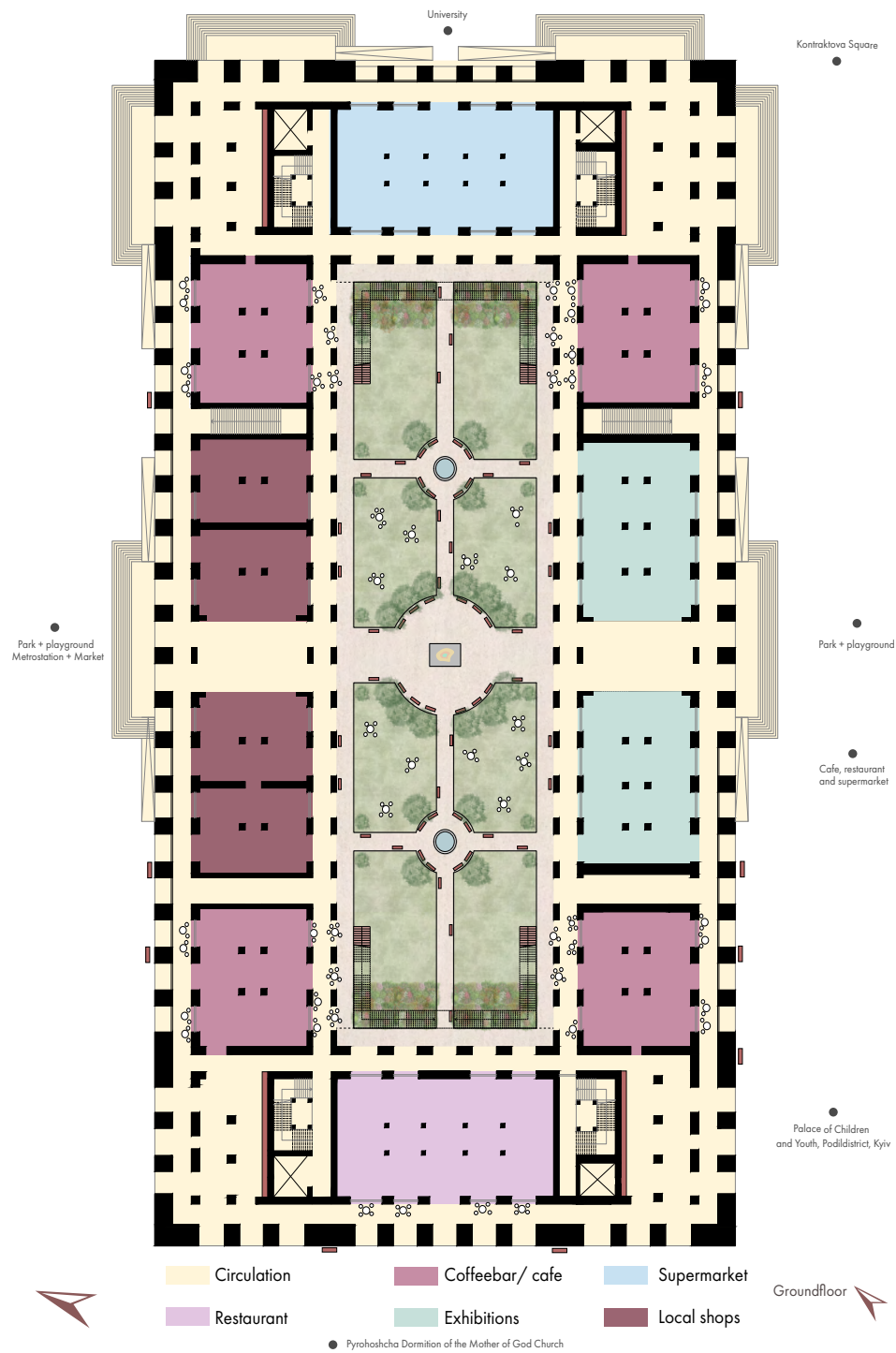


Figure 89. Ground floor, floorplan.

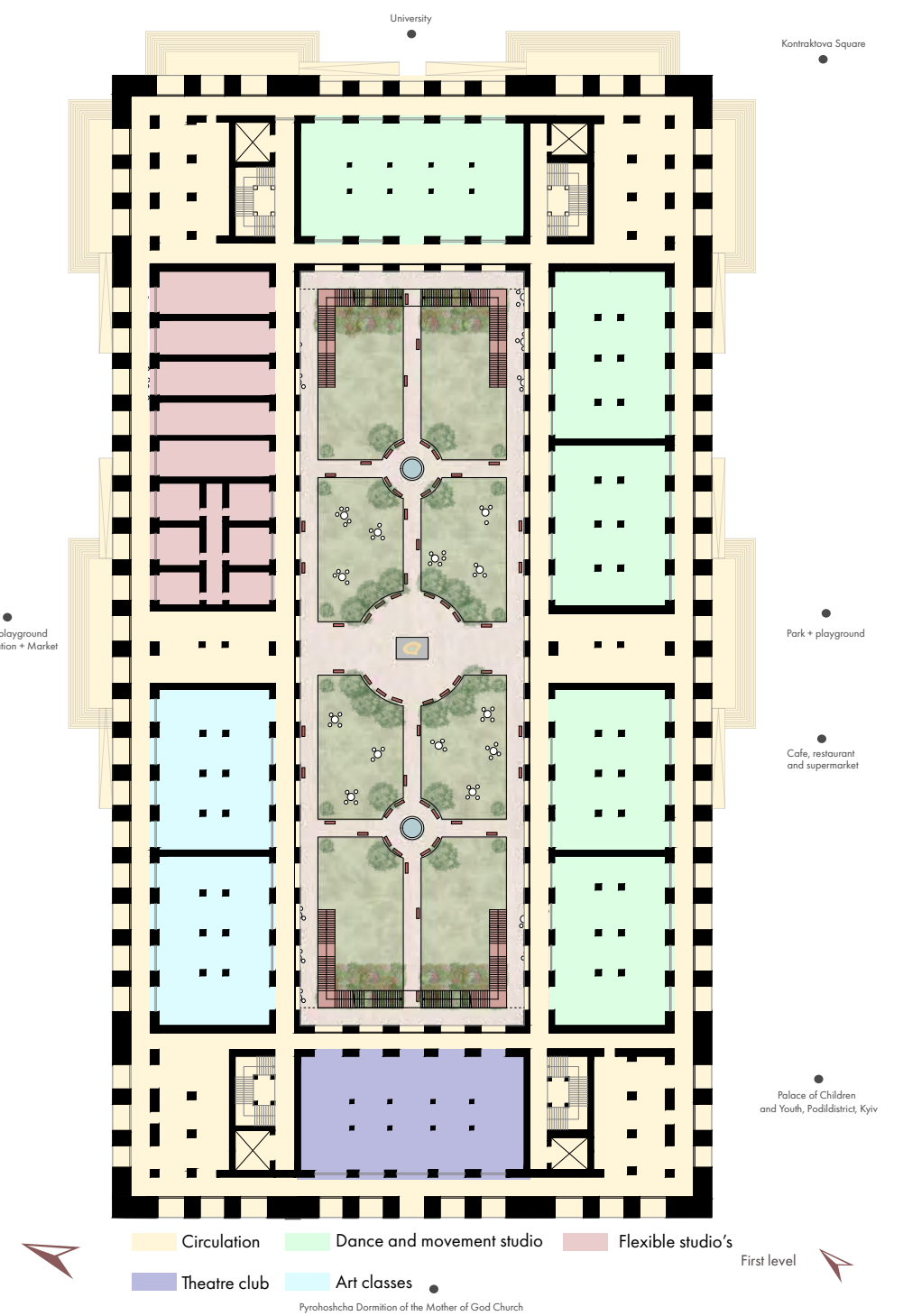


Figure 90. First floor, floorplan.

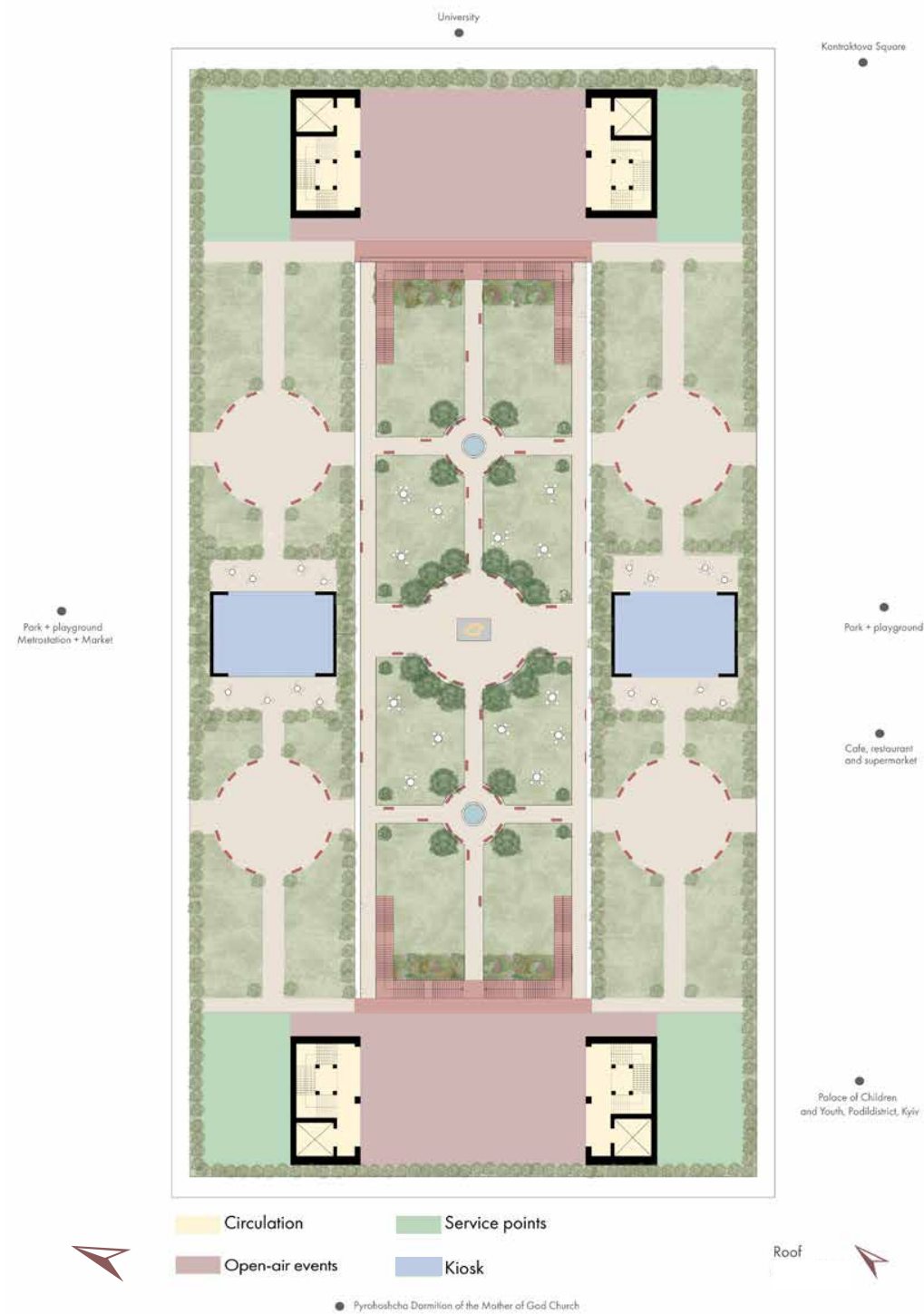


Figure 91. Accessible roof, floorplan.

Conclusion

Conclusion

This thesis investigated how spatial memory can inform the transformation of both recognised and lived heritage in post-conflict urban reconstruction. The research argues that this question cannot be answered through a single instrument or a specific list of elements to preserve. Instead, a shift in how reconstruction is understood is required. The focus should be placed on the restoration of the spatial conditions through which people recognise, inhabit and identify with their city.

The memory talks and mapping sessions with the Ukrainian participants revealed that spatial memory does not operate as a neutral inventory. From the first conversation, the participants made distinctions between elements they associated with belonging, comfort, everyday identity, and elements they considered to be of poor quality or even unwanted, such as large-scale mass housing and Soviet-era statues. This selectivity is precisely what makes spatial memory useful as a planning instrument. It does not say “preserve everything,” but rather identifies which spatial qualities carry collective, emotional and identity-forming value. In this sense, spatial memory acts as a filter that can guide prioritisation.

By allowing participants to articulate their memories before introducing any map, heritage list, or institutional framework, the research ensured that lived experience came first in the analysis. The iterative structure of memory talks as well as mental and representative mapping demonstrated that memories can be spatialised progressively. Together, these findings support the following position: spatial memory informs post-conflict reconstruction not by prescribing what must be preserved, but by clarifying which spatial qualities make a place identity-carrying in the first place. That distinction makes it possible to reconcile transformation and continuity. A city does not need to be frozen in its pre-war state to remain recognisable. It needs to retain the everyday structures, sensory layers, collective spaces, and historical traces through which its inhabitants continue to find themselves.

The identity-based framework developed in this thesis is structured around Daily Routine, Green Breathing, Connectivity, Historical Continuity, and Sensory Richness, which offers a transferable tool for reconstruction. It is not a blueprint, but a set of analytical and design lenses that can be applied to different sites, scales, and contexts. Being based mainly on the memories of two of the participants, from the same district in Kyiv, the described approach is a qualitative proof of concept rather than a ready-made planning tool. Its value lies in demonstrating that memory-based reconstruction is spatially translatable. People’s memories can be drawn, mapped, and analysed, to be used as a basis for design.

The case of Hostynyi Dvir illustrates how spatial memory can be maintained through the created identity-framework for post-war reconstruction. The building had formally lost its monument status, was nearly converted into a shopping centre, and has been left in a deteriorated state for decades. Yet the participants described it not primarily as an architectural object to be preserved, but as a place that should become part of public life again. What they valued was not the building in isolation, but its relationship to the square, the surrounding urban fabric, and its potential as an everyday destination.

When continuity and post-war reconstruction come into conflict, spatial memory provides a criterion for judgement: an intervention is acceptable when the identity-carrying qualities of a place, its connectivity, its role in daily routine, its sensory richness, and its historical continuity are not erased but reinterpreted. While the function may change the identity should be kept intact. Applied to Hostynyi Dvir, this means that transforming the building into a cultural and public hub is not a departure from its identity, but a continuation of it, as long as the courtyard remains open, the corners remain active, and the building re-enters the everyday rhythm of the district.

What this thesis has argued is that post-war reconstruction should not only rely on official heritage data, but also take into account the spatial memories and everyday experiences of the inhabitants themselves. Spatial memory, when carefully collected and spatially translated, can bridge that gap and contribute to a form of reconstruction that restores not only buildings, but the conditions for collective life to continue. At the same time, the approach developed in this thesis opens up possibilities for further research, as it can be applied, expanded and refined in other war-affected contexts, in contexts shaped by modernisation, and with broader groups of participants. In that way, future reconstruction may move towards a more bottom-up practice, rooted in the memories, experiences and everyday realities of those who inhabit the city.

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Code of conduct

Generative AI was used in a limited and supportive way during the thesis process. It was mainly used for language support, including checking spelling and grammar, improving the clarity and structure of sentences, and shortening or reformulating texts.

In addition, GenAI was used twice to generate visual material based on my own drawings and design ideas. These images were used to clarify or strengthen my own visual representations. Their use is indicated in the notes accompanying the relevant figures. The underlying concepts, design decisions and original input remained my own.

All research, analysis, interpretation, framework development and design choices were carried out by the author.

GenAI assistance used as/for:	Name of the GenAI tool(s) used.	Description
As a language assistant for reviewing or improving texts I wrote myself	ChatGPT	Used to make texts more fluent.
As a paraphrasing tool	ChatGPT	GenAI was used as a language and paraphrasing tool to improve grammar, clarity and conciseness.
For translation aid to improve texts I wrote myself or to better understand text from others.	DeepL	Texts were translated when the original English was not clear enough due to grammatical complex phrasing.
For generating visuals, video or audio	ChatGPT	Two images, originally created by the author, were made more detailed or adjusted to the desired perspective using ChatGPT.

Appendix

In the appendix you can find the prepared questions for each meeting with the participants, notes I took during the sessions, notes from the participants and schemes I made after the sessions.

Interview one

Who? Three Ukrainian women

District: S.C. lived Irpin in her youth but lived in Podil
L.D. and A.P. are coming from Podil

How:

To start the conversation, they said already that it would be not the easiest to go back in their memories since this is something they avoid now to think about since it hurts in these times. We started slow with writing down the first two questions. In this way they had a base to start talking and out of that they kept talking.

Interview questions (used for as foundation)

Part 1

When you think about your hometown, which places, buildings or spaces first come to mind?

Which of these feels the most representative to you of your city?

Part 2

Can you describe a place where you felt most connected to your city?

Can you describe how that place looked and felt?

Open or closed

Large of intimate

What was happening there?

High buildings?

How did you move through the city in your daily life?

Which routes did you use often?

Where there places you always passed by and felt connected to?

Part 3

Are there places that or not officially monuments but feel important to you?

Part 4

If the city changed completely, what would need to exist again for it to still feel like your city?

What makes a place feel like “your city”?

Notes – Interview 1

Participant 1: S.C.

The district is a place I grew up and spent my whole life. Something very memorable for me was the everyday big road I needed to take. The road had a lot of trees and when they were blooming it was so magical. In my district there are also a lot of parks of very big hectares with lots of big trees. It was nice to walk in, go running and there were lots of playgrounds. Greenery and most of all open space is something very important. In my district there were not a lot of big buildings everyone has a small garden there. We call it a sleeping district without big factories or commercial spaces. But stores are everywhere in every district and open until late.

Participant 2: L.D.

Podil is the oldest part of the city, it's the lower part of a hill and near the river. The district is full of important monuments and historical buildings. There are already rules about the height so the buildings are never too high next to the monuments. Before there were a lot of statues and monuments of the Soviet Union. They are about WWII but there was a movement, and the monument of Lenin is gone everywhere and replaced with art. A favourite place of mine is a park on the hill with the monument of Vladimir. It's a very nice place with a view over the whole city and the Dnipro river.

Participant 3: A.P

I lived in Podil and for me the thing I really like and remember is the very long walking area along the river of twenty kilometres. I like that it's so green. There is also a street where they sell everything handmade and the street is made from old stones it's called “Andriivskyi uzviz”. I love to walk there and it's an important part of the history with cobblestones.

Mixed

We miss the parks where we could go sit on a bench and talk. In the parks there are so many fountains that you can even go with a guide to all of them on a tour. Children go to the park to play, people go to sport there, gather and so on. It's all about the open spaces. Even for the streets. Here in Belgium the pavements are so small and in Ukraine it's street, trees, pavement and the pavement is as wide as the street. The trees are not only a symbol but also an ecological strategy next to the pavement. This is something we really miss. We know that parks are logical in a big city, so we are still connected to nature, but in Kyiv the focus on parks is big. There are chestnut trees everywhere and it's also the symbol of the city. People try to protect the trees. All the districts have a central space like big parks where they hold big festivals. There are a lot of theatres you can go to, a circus, a zoo, an opera. It is part of our routine to go to all these places. We also have the routine to go to the park on weekends or to the botanic garden where the flowers change seasonally. It's cheap and easy to go there. The big trees are something especially important for us.

Monuments:

After independence, they learned a lot about what had happened and Lenin was cancelled. All the statues were taken down, and the Soviet buildings can all go away if they are bombed. There don't need to be statues of those political figures change them to art, or make a new place of gathering from them. The nice, beautiful buildings should be renovated and reconstructed because this is something I want to see for the rest of my life. We are not very religious but it's our cultural heritage and it should be kept. It's full of emotions for us and it connects the people of the city no matter which district you come from.

Material (produced during the session)

Kyiv, Ukraine

1. My native district - Podol, it is the oldest part of my city, Kyiv. And it is the place where I live all my life before the war begins. My district full of historical monuments, churches, and, of course, river Dnipro.
2. My lovely place, park on the hill. It is the most beautiful place for me in Kyiv. So many interesting points there, and a beautiful view on the river Dnipro and a big part of city.

Figure A 1. Notes from the first two questions participant nr. 1.

I part

1. District where all my childhood was. Where I went to school, the road that I follow to get to school. It is a very long street, crossing the river. So, here, you have a lot of trees.
2. Most representative: a lot of green, it's really a lot of trees, big open places, like big park with lake, or stadium with sport area.

Figure A 2. Notes from the first two questions, participant nr 2.

Ukraine, Kyiv. Podil, footbridge across the river, Lunicular, Andriivsky Descent, Pecherskaya str. the street where I grew up, Holovna str. Obolonskaya embankment

Figure A 3. Notes from the first two questions, participant nr 3.

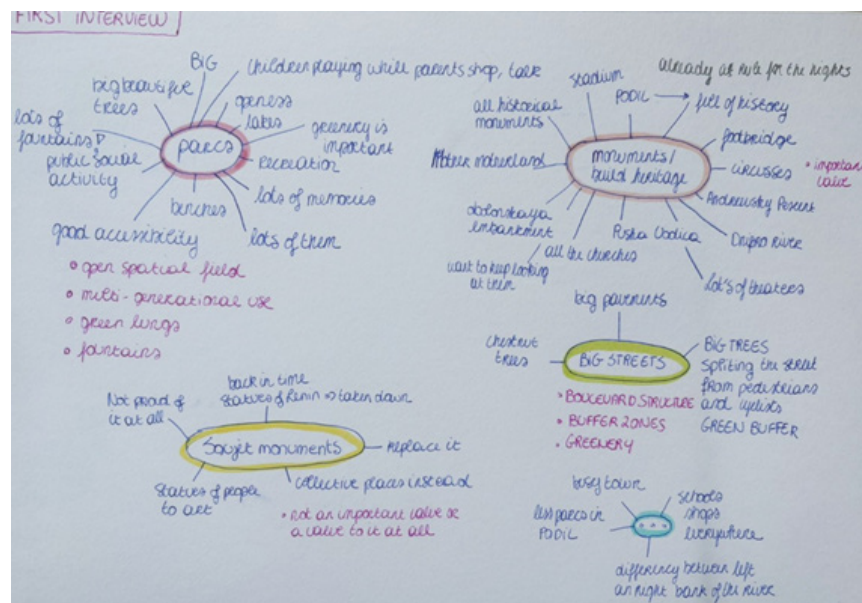


Figure A 4. Diagrams of the information from the first interview, made after the session.

Meeting two

Goal:

Delve into the previous memories and understand spatial qualities through colours, noises, textures, smells...

Part 1

Showing the models who were a result out of interview one. Let them correct and talk about it.

(Does this represent the place you were describing? Is something incorrect or missing?)

Activities in the parks?

What is the reason that some districts are called "sleeping districts"?

Were there activities going on, doing laundry, BBQ places, gathering places etc?

How did all the typologies of the parts of the district come together?

Part 2

What were typical colours, textures and materials you remember were typical for the streets, parks, squares.

How were the seasonal changes? Do you remember typical smells?

Part 3

Zoning an area where the research will be mostly focussed on. Give the participants homework to create their mental map.

Explanation: Draw the area how it comes to mind for you. Include important roads, buildings, square, parks, areas and other things. on this map. This map doesn't need to be accurate with reality.

It is almost impossible to imagine a street without trees.

Smells:

Coffee and flowers are important sensory elements. A place needs to feel unique, for example through cafés, shops, and other recognizable everyday functions. This is also how even less attractive buildings can become pleasant places again. In Ukraine, people appreciate change, variety, and options. There are many murals. Grey buildings often have large empty walls, which are transformed into colourful large-scale artworks. This is known as Kyiv murals. Similar examples can also be found in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In the centre, especially in Podil, cobblestones are typical. In other areas, asphalt is the most common material, so the materials themselves are often not very special. Walking paths are often made of small grey and red tiles, sometimes also yellow. Different patterns are used, and these create many memories. Benches are also often included. In some parks, mosaics and ceramics can be found, such as the Alice in Wonderland park. The landscape itself is also important: stairs, slopes and expositions contribute to the character of the place. There is also a lot of street art, but not in the sense of graffiti. Some districts are colourful. Although this is sometimes only done for temporary reasons, for example because the walls get damp, it still makes the area much more beautiful.

Parks

There are many different kinds of trees. Sometimes there are no trees in the middle, but bushes around the edges. Landscape design plays an important role. Flower carpets are common: flowers are planted in patterns, figures, or even names. In the central parks, this is often more visible because these are historical places. In more modern areas, the fountains are usually also more modern. Because it is a warm country, water is very important. Trees are also important for pollution, especially along roads. There are many lime trees, which smell very good. Trees with a lot of pollen are often avoided. In spring, small white flowers bloom in the trees and can be seen everywhere.

Roads

Many roads are also damaged because of the climate. The central streets are the ones with the chestnut trees. Often there is a structure of two housing blocks, then a playground, then two housing blocks again. Sometimes there is also a small square with houses around it.

Seasonal changes

In winter, when it snows, the parks and hills are used for sledging. Every park has coffee spots. There are many places to sit, talk, and stay. There are also places with views. Kiosks are often placed at points where people can sit. Pine trees help keep the parks green in winter. Parks often also have tiled surfaces, while outside the city the landscape becomes wilder. Lavender fields are also remembered as part of the landscape.

Colours

Wall paintings can be found everywhere. They bring brightness to the grey parts of the city.

Model 1:

It reminded them of Mariinsky Park. The official house of the president is located there, in Baroque style. It is possible to make a very long walk there, passing different fountains. The park is situated on a hill. There are also more modern parks, but they almost always include a fountain, often in a more modern form, such as water streams. Because summers can be very hot, water helps to cool the environment.

Layers of the city:

There are canals underneath the ground. The metro stations are also underground and often include shops and coffee places, almost like a small underground city.

Model 2:

In the areas with smaller open houses, there are many more trees.

Sleeping districts

There is not much to do there. They contain the basic functions, but little more. These districts are very grey, with broad roads and large Soviet apartment buildings, which can make people feel lost. They are found more on the left side of Ukraine, but also on the right side. People often need to drive in order to get to work.

Districts

The different districts gradually blend into one another.

Pavements

There are different kinds of tiles, but most of the time the roads and pavements are made of asphalt.

Material (produced during the session)

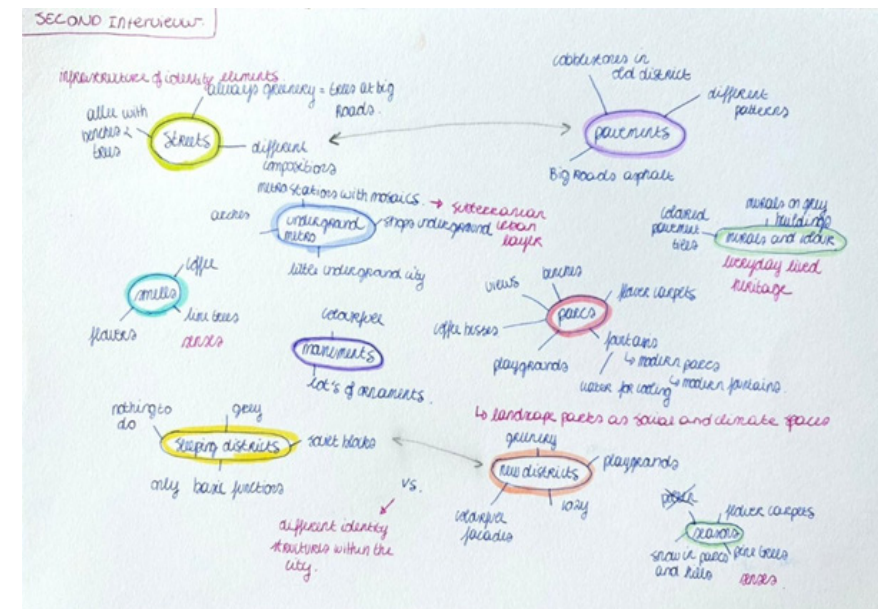


Figure A 5. Diagrams of the information from the second interview, made after the session.

Meeting Three

Goal:

Delve into the previous memories and ask some more specific details.

Part 1

Asking about age, how long they have been in Belgium, whether they want to go back, whether they have a husband, who is currently in Belgium, and whether they have children and how old they are.

Asking whether they knew each other in Kyiv and whether they met up often there.

Showing the spatialised memory models.

Asking what activities took place in those streets.

Asking, in relation to the historical part, what happened in the middle of the gardens.

Asking whether the paintings are culture-bound and/or function as orientation tools.

Asking whether there are monuments at the end of the large roads.

Part 2

Let them explain their mental map that they have made.

Notes – Interview three

Part 1

Asking for age, how long in Belgium, wanting to go back? husband? who is in Belgium right now? children + ages,

S.: 35 years

35 years old. Has a Belgian boyfriend now. In Belgium for almost four years; on 23 March it will be four years. Came with her mother and daughter, who was 9 at the time. Happily divorced before the war. Her mother is 60 and wants to return; S. first stayed with a host family. Her mother and grandmother are now back in Ukraine. She feels a bit stuck here, because her daughter is very integrated in Belgium, has friends here, studies here, and sees her future here. She will stay as long as necessary to support her daughter. At the moment, distance is the hardest part.

Work in Belgium: administrative employee in the IT department of the city services in Veurne. Back home: she was close to becoming a chief economist/planner in a large company; her exam. was supposed to take place in March, but then the war started. She first worked online from Belgium for half a year. In Ukraine, she worked for the Ukrainian state centre of radio frequencies and had worked there for ten years.

L.: 42 years

42 years old. In Belgium for three and a half years. Came with her daughter and the niece of her ex-husband. Her daughter was 13 at the time and is now 17. Divorced ten years ago and currently single. Her stepfather did not want to move to Belgium; he visited once. She gave two answers when asked about returning to Ukraine.

Rationally: She does not want to go back to Ukraine. For her daughter, the political and economic situation is too unstable. She thinks it may take 10 to 15 years before the situation is developed enough again. She does not believe life can return to the same level as before.

Emotionally: After four years, it is still hard to accept the rational position. She tells herself she does not want to finish her life here. At the same time, she does not want to leave her daughter alone. She would want to go back if the situation became as it was before the war, but she knows that this is impossible. Therefore, she is staying in Belgium.

In 2022, when she came to Belgium and had to learn Dutch, she had to decide within two months whether she would stay or not. Work in Belgium: administrative assistant in a law office. Work in Ukraine: worked in a private law practice / prosecutor's office

Language, events, and social life

Sometimes they speak Dutch, as they understand it better than they speak it. They often go to Ukrainian events such as concerts, in Belgium and abroad, for example in the Netherlands, Brussels, Antwerp, Paris and Amsterdam. These events give them positive energy and reconnect them with the lifestyle they had in Ukraine. Life can change very quickly, and it is never certain whether this will be in a positive or negative way. That is why it is important to enjoy life and make use of the possibilities that are available.

Relationships and friendships

Many couples broke up because of the distance. S. and L. knew each other through the friends of S.'s ex-husband. S. and A. had known each other even longer than L. and S. had.

L.: Her friends are spread all over the world, but she still keeps in touch with them, including those in Ukraine. They can still call each other and maintain contact.

S.: Distance has affected her friendships more strongly. She does not have as much contact anymore, and there is sometimes tension because people now live in very different situations. Her closest friend is still someone from work, although this friend also moved away and later returned because she was alone with three children. Her closest family remains the most important support.

Part 2

What were the activities in those different street typologies?

This differed from one area to another. The description mainly referred to the sleeping district. There is no single central square there; everything is more mixed.

Are there monuments at the end of the big roads?

Not really. Kyiv grew very quickly. The ring roads are not real borders of the city; there are several of them. In some cases there used to be monuments from the Soviet Union, often related to war. Today, there is an effort to remove names and references linked to Russia, and many places now have new names.

About the historical part: what is happening in the middle of the gardens?

Between the houses there can be walking paths, trees, and green squares where people walk their dogs. The historical part feels more old-school. Streets changed over time, which makes some parts feel illogical. For example, buildings such as the Museum of Hetmans date from the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century. After the Second World War, many buildings were destroyed, and the city was rebuilt in a more logical grid. As a result, much older buildings now sometimes stand in ways that feel spatially illogical within the later urban structure.

Are the murals culture-bound and/or do they function as orientation tools?

Not really as orientation tools in a general sense. However, if people have lived in the same area for a long time, they may use them to identify places and orient themselves. In another district, such paintings can also help as a point of reference. In general, they orient themselves more through small details. For example, not through the official name of a shop, but through the name of the store owner from twenty years ago.

Parks

The elements in parks are often quite similar.

Districts

Around metro buildings, each district has its own recognisable set of facilities, such as a square, buildings with integrated functions, monuments, government buildings, police offices, music houses, fire stations, hospitals, maternity houses, churches, and marketplaces. A marketplace was described as a large covered building where many people permanently sell products.

District structure and facilities

Each district has around three to five schools. Every district also has a House of Art, where activities such as dancing, painting, and other cultural classes take place. This is something that has been kept from the Soviet period.

Building types

Buildings from before the Second World War often had two storeys and fireplaces. Later, extra storeys were added. Before the war, ceilings were often around 3.5 metres high. In general, the higher the ceiling, the older the building. In Podil, the ceilings are often very high.

Smell of the metro

Near the filter buildings, there is sometimes a smell that recalls the underground metro. This is not present everywhere, but occasionally it can be noticed near metro buildings. It is not an unpleasant smell. They said they spend half of their lives underground because the metro is the fastest form of transport. The stations are very large, not small tubes like in Paris. Right now, they also function as very good shelters. They feel safe, have air, and were originally designed for protection. Some metro stations also continue above ground.

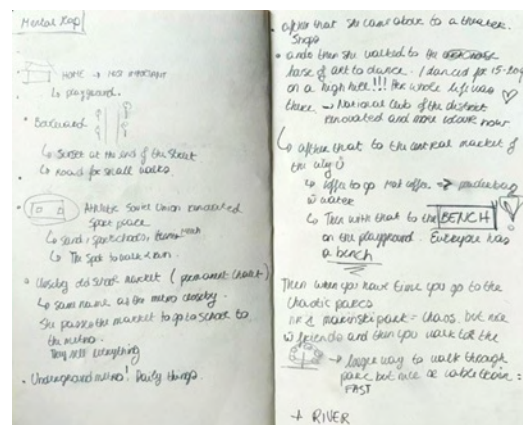


Figure A 6. Notes taken from the mental map from the first participant.

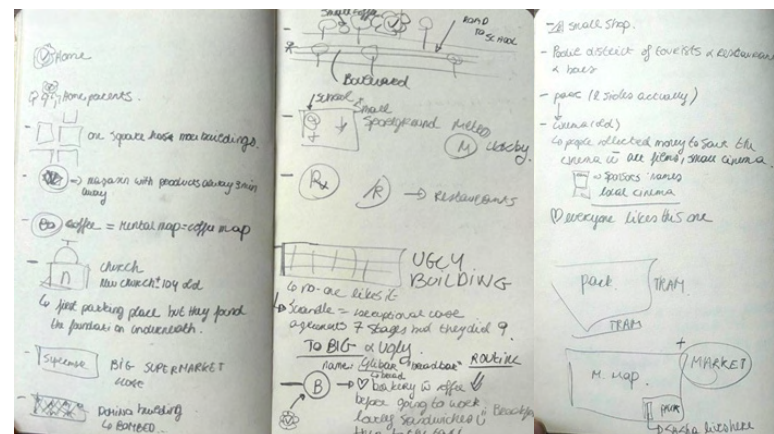


Figure A 7. Notes taken from the mental map from the second participant.

Material (produced during the session)

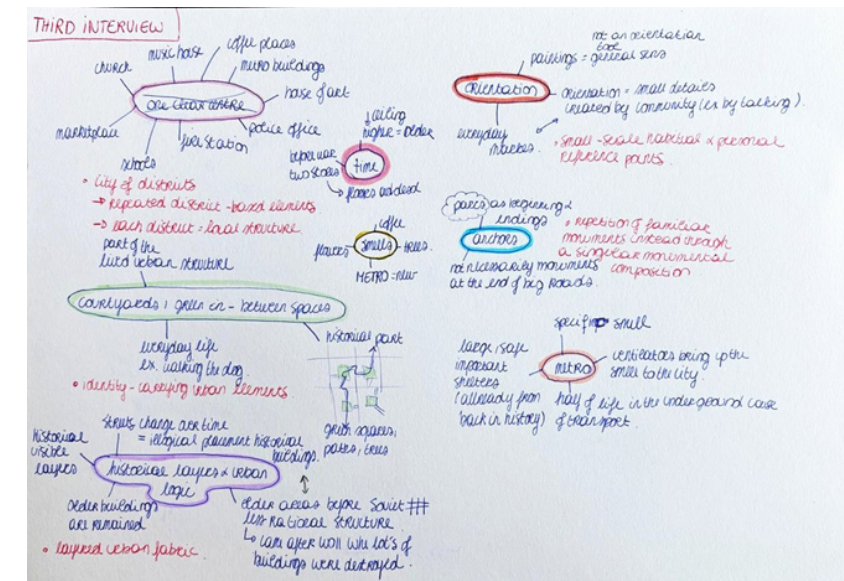


Figure A 8. Diagrams of the information from the third interview, made after the session.

Meeting four

Story for participant 1 S.C.

I start at home, because that is the most important place for me. It is where everything begins. Around my home there were many trees, a lot of greenery, lakes, and playgrounds. It was a place full of life, and that is how I remember it. From there, I go to the boulevard, a long and wide street with big trees. I rode my bike there every day on my way to school. What made this street so special for me was the sunset at the end of it. I also often walked there with friends and family, so it was not only a road to pass through, but also a place to be. Then I arrive at the athletic field, which had been renovated during Soviet times. I went there for sports school, but also to walk and run. It was part of my everyday life. Close to it was the old market, which I passed on my way to the metro. The market had the same name as the metro station, and it was one of those places where you could find everything you needed. Markets like that existed in every district, and for me it was a very familiar part of the city. The metro was a very important part of my life. I often feel like I spent a big part of my life there, underground. It connected all these different places in my daily routine.

When I came out of the metro, I arrived near the theatre, and from there I walked to the house of art, where I went dancing. That place was very important to me. I also remember that the art school was later renovated, and that more colours were added to the façade. After dance class, I often went to the central market in the city to get a coffee to go. Then we would go to the bench, a specific place where people met and spent time together with friends. It was a simple place, but for me it was part of the rhythm of daily life. When I had more time, I went to the parks. My favourite was Mariinsky Park. I remember it as a place full of flowerbeds, big trees, fountains, and benches. It was surrounded by beautiful monumental buildings and stretched along the Dnipro River. For me, it was one of the most beautiful places in the city, and it brought together many of the things I loved most: nature, space, beauty, and calm.

Story for participant 2 L.D.

I start at home, because that is where everything begins for me. I live in Podil, and in my mind I see it almost like a grid. The area is made up of blocks, and each block contains several houses. That structure is very present in the way I remember the neighbourhood. Close to my home, there was a small shop where we could buy almost anything we needed. Not far from it, there was also a big supermarket. These places were part of daily life, the kind of places you pass by without even thinking, but that become very important in memory.

My map could almost be called a map of coffee places, because I marked so many of them. Coffee places were an important part of my everyday life, and the ones with a heart were my favourites. Podil was full of places where you could drink coffee, eat something, or stop for a moment. There were also many good restaurants and bakeries. I always went to the bakery before going to work, so that too became part of my routine and of how I remember the district. Near my house there is also a beautiful new church. What makes it special is that it was built on the remains of an old church. Before that, there had only been a parking place there, but during the works they found the remains underneath. That gives the place a sense of continuity, as if different layers of time are still present in the same spot. Another building that stayed in my memory is the Domino building. It has now been bombed, but even before that it stood out in the city. I also remember another apartment building that many inhabitants disliked because it was too ugly and too big. It was supposed to be seven floors, but in the end they built nine. So even buildings people did not love became part of how the place is remembered. The road to my school was a large road, with a boulevard in the middle and big trees. That road is part of my mental image of the city, not only because it led somewhere important, but because of the atmosphere it created.

The last place I drew was the park, a place that everyone loves. In that park there is an old cinema where they show artistic films. People cared so much about it that they collected money to save it. Now every seat in the cinema carries the name of one of the local sponsors. That makes it feel like a place that truly belongs to the people. The park itself is divided into two parts by a road and surrounded by two tramlines, which also gives it a very specific character in my memory. I also drew the apartment building of S.C. in the park, because she lived there before moving to Belgium. In that way, the map is not only about places, but also about people and the connections between them.

Meeting five

Questions:

We haven't talked about noises yet. We talked about smells, colours, feelings etc but what are familiar noises you have from your memories?

I made a new model of a block in the Podil district. Are there any elements missing?

What did this place sound like?

Was it quiet, lively, echoing, noisy?

Did you hear traffic, birds, water, the metro, voices?

Were there places that felt calm or safe because of sound?

Were there sounds you immediately associate with Kyiv?

metro

parks

boulevards

markets

tramlines

courtyards

Spatial model of the historical centre block

The spatial model is a recreation of a block in the historical centre with five-storey buildings. These blocks were designed by a Czech architect. Newer districts also contain this type of block, but it is especially typical of the historical centre and less common elsewhere. In some cases, buildings are also placed in the middle of the block, creating multiple inner courtyards. Some of these courtyards are closed off, with a park inside that is not accessible to the public. However, for residents it feels safe to leave their children there to play if they live in the surrounding apartments.

Urban growth and development

Kyiv is expanding very quickly, and much of this development is driven by money. New buildings keep appearing, which leads to the creation of new districts. Sometimes districts are changed so drastically in the process of modernisation that they are no longer recognisable. There is also a tendency to buy up single-family houses, demolish them, and replace them with larger apartment buildings. According to the participants, the main problem is that development in Kyiv is often too strongly driven by economic interests.

Landmark overshadowed by new development

Large new buildings are often constructed around important urban nodes. One example is a colourful and striking triangular building used for weddings. It is well known in the city and used to be visible from many surrounding areas. Today, large and unattractive modern glass apartment buildings have been built on both sides of it, which causes the original landmark to lose much of its presence and importance.

New districts

New districts with high-rise buildings can have good qualities and may look attractive, but they should remain separated from the lower and older urban fabric.

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Output participant 1 S.C.

The mental map and daily routine could be described through the concept of “infinity,” something that sometimes stretches but always returns to the first home. Daily routines can be extended or changed, and the place of living can also change, but in her memory everything always leads back to her original home. Her mother still keeps an eye on the house and repairs it whenever something happens to it during the war. This house remains very important to them. Benches can be found everywhere, except near her own house, where they were removed because people used them for drinking and smoking.

A very memorable element are the cherry trees planted in the garden. They had grown high enough to be visible from the second-floor window. When they bloomed, they had beautiful small flowers and a strong pleasant smell. These trees were planted by the father of the participant's mother. The boulevard with the trees, where she often cycled and went for walks, also had many benches, and people frequently came there to walk their dogs. The trees were lime trees. When they bloomed, they carried small yellow and white flowers with a very strong and pleasant smell, even though many cars were passing by. Her area was called the academic city, because many scientists had lived there at the beginning of the district. Most of the houses looked the same, which was part of the Soviet idea. Often there was a factory first, and then the entire district was built around it. Her old house, like all the other buildings there, also had a bomb shelter. Newer houses do not have one, because they were built in a time when people no longer thought about war in that way.

An interesting thing they mentioned was that this way of working felt like a form of art therapy for them: doing something enjoyable while still triggering memories, but without making them feel bad.

Story for participant 2 L.D.

I start at home, because that is where everything begins for me. I live in Podil, and in my mind I see it almost like a grid. The area is made up of blocks, and each block contains several houses. That structure is very present in the way I remember the neighbourhood. Close to my home, there was a small shop where we could buy almost anything we needed. Not far from it, there was also a big supermarket. These places were part of daily life, the kind of places you pass by without even thinking, but that become very important in memory. My map could almost be called a map of coffee places, because I marked so many of them. Coffee places were an important part of my everyday life, and the ones with a heart were my favourites. Podil was full of places where you could drink coffee, eat something, or stop for a moment. There were also many good restaurants and bakeries. I always went to the bakery before going to work, so that too became part of my routine and of how I remember the district. Near my house there is also a beautiful new church. What makes it special is that it was built on the remains of an old church. Before that, there had only been a parking place there, but during the works they found the remains underneath. That gives the place a sense of continuity, as if different layers of time are still present in the same spot.

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Output participant 2 L.D.

I added many green trees throughout the city, as well as playgrounds located in the inner courtyards of some blocks. In her shared inner courtyard there are trees, benches, a playground, and space for cars, but it is not accessible to the public. In this way, it feels safe to leave children playing there alone. Two old buildings from the Second World War were also mentioned as memorable. A very noticeable element is that the new church is blue and gold. In Kyiv, Orthodox churches almost always have golden roofs. Podil is a very historical and spatially unique district. In the past, it was the area of traders and sellers. There was a large market there because it lies next to the Dnipro River, where ships used to arrive. There is also a very old synagogue, around which Jewish people live, go to school, and organise everyday life.

More generally, there are many churches in the district belonging to different religions. Transport in Podil mainly consists of the tram, bus and metro. Benches are everywhere and are very important, as they function as meeting places. Another valued quality of Podil is its proximity to the river, where people can go for a walk, which is experienced as very calming.

Cobblestones are mainly found in the government part of the city, while in the area where she lives, asphalt is more common. The metro is remembered more as a sign or access point than as a building in itself. Cars are parked along the streets, so people often have to search for a parking place. A small car is therefore considered more practical in the city. There are not many parking buildings or underground parking structures, and many people use public transport instead.

Collective mapping

Interview 1

Model 1.

Questions (referring to previous sessions):

- Where is “home” situated?
- Where are those important routes? (Boulevard, trees etc)
- What are those important nodes? (Buildings they were talking about previous times)
- Where are those important landmarks
- Where were the important meeting places?
- Where are the metro stations based?
- Where are the memories/ experiences based where you talked about?
- Where are the parks?
- Are there sleeping districts (in the selected map)?
- Where are the more modern, qualitative areas where you talked about?
- Which areas are not that qualitative?
- While they are telling and pointing out, zoom-ins of the map will be showed for indicating more precisely the identity carrying elements.

War not only destroys buildings, but also the memories, routines, and public spaces through which people recognise and inhabit their city. This thesis explores how pre-war spatial memories can inform post-war urban reconstruction beyond the preservation of monuments alone.

Through memory talks, mapping, models, and desktop research with Ukrainian participants from Podil, Kyiv, the research identifies the spatial elements that carry urban identity in everyday life. These findings are translated into an identity-based framework and applied to a strategic urban fragment around Hostynyi Dvir, and Kontraktova Square.

The thesis argues that reconstruction should not only rebuild physical fabric, but also restore continuity, public life and the spatial conditions through which collective memory remains alive.



"urban identity is not only carried by monuments, but includes the everyday spaces, routines, and atmospheres through which people remember and express a sense of belonging."